



Level of Attachment of Malaysian TESL Students Towards Their Cultural Identity

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Abstract

Although it is encouraged for students to explore other cultures and be equipped with world knowledge, the basis of patriotism and love for the country must be embedded to ensure the nation has a sense of pride and belonging. This paper attempts to provide a preliminary investigation for the components of the cultural identity from a Malaysian standpoint, the level of attachment of Malaysian Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) students to their cultural identity as well as factors affecting this relationship. Thus, quantitative method was adopted for this study to identify the level of attachment of Malaysian TESL students to their cultural identity. A questionnaire was distributed online to the participants from all three main races in Malaysia with TESL background and the data was analysed using SPSS. The findings of this study have shown that despite the extensive exposure to and involvement with the English language and culture, the level of attachment of Malaysian TESL students towards their cultural identity is high with regards to all three major components: national language, food and cultural spaces.

1. INTRODUCTION

As future English teachers, it is important to observe the current Malaysian TESL students of their attachment to cultural identity. Culture is a concept of understanding the connection between collective, customs and beliefs of an individual as culture is meaningful with the references of a society (Ferdman, 1990). Ferdman (1990) has also mentioned that cultural identity conceptualizes the connection between mutual influence of an individual with their social environment. Apart from that, Wexler (2009) stated that cultural memory

assists individuals find their place in the society and prepares them to be responsible global citizens. This roots the importance of cultural identity in a person; especially in teachers as it could affect the way they teach (Rashidi & Meihami, 2017; Yassin, Abdul Razak, Qasem, & Saeed, 2020). Thus, the authors emphasized on the importance of cultural identity for a sustainable teacher education.

Besides, it is also vital for class content and materials used to be associated with Malaysia's history, culture and heritage. Although it is encouraged for students to explore other cultures and be equipped with world knowledge, the basis of patriotism and love for the country must be embedded to ensure the nation has a sense of pride and belonging. Moreover, considering Malaysia is a multiracial country, an individual's level of attachment to their cultural identity holds a strong post for the community's peace and harmony. Tunku Abdul Rahman, Malaysia's former Prime Minister once said, "We are all Malaysians. This is the bond that unites us. Let us always remember that unity is our fundamental strength as a people and as a nation" (Xavier, 2019).

Malaysia is a homogeneous country situated in the Southeast of Asia and encompasses multitudinous group of people. The sociocultural landscape of Malaysia is bound by the unified diversity of the Malay/Bumiputera, Indian, Chinese, indigenous groups of people in Sabah and Sarawak and many more. By embracing and accepting the diversified plurality within a community, it has resulted in the establishment of a multicultural society among Malaysians in particular. According to Changsong & Yiming (2017), ethnic pluralism within the context of a Malaysian society has been greatly accentuated as a necessary social cultural practice. Parekh (1995) consolidated that ethnic pluralism and multiculturalism emancipate people free from such prejudiced communities and ensures their personal individualism and autonomy, justice and fairness, common citizenship and guarantees unanimously harmonious shared way of life. Ibrahim (2007) mentioned that people often describe multicultural society through pictures of different costumes, celebrations, food, attire, as well as language. It is often overlooked that locations or 'cultural spaces' also carries a significant value to one's cultural identity.

There are myriad components of cultural identity such as sports, traditional attires, arts and crafts and many more. However, the major components of cultural identity addressed in this paper are language, food and cultural spaces due to the fact that these components play a pivotal role in one's cultural identity towards the nation. Ultimately, this research is an important prospect for the peace and harmony of a country in the long run. As globalisation inevitably takes place, neglection of cultural identity will not only gradually lose the country's pride but affect the future generation of the nation. Hence, this paper consists of four main objectives: to identify the major components of Malaysians' cultural identity, to determine the general level of attachment of Malaysian TESL students to their cultural identity, to identify the significant difference of age, gender, ethnicity and educational background in the level of attachment of Malaysian TESL students to their cultural identity and to examine the level of attachment of Malaysian TESL students to their cultural identity in terms of language, food and cultural spaces.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section starts with an overview of the language context in Malaysia and cultural identity, where details of the wide range of languages, followed by the status of the national language of Malaysia (Bahasa Malaysia).

Language and Malaysian Cultural Identity

When looking into one of the most common situations that portrays multicultural values, it is when the Malays speak fluent English language, the Chinese speak fluent Malay

language and the Indian speak fluent Mandarin (Ibrahim, 2007). This shows a strong correlation between language and a Malaysian's cultural identity. By definition, a language is a form of communication used in transferring information in the form of spoken and written. As it holds values and function, it interrelates itself with an identity; different language consists of different structure and complexity. This discussion regarding language evolving and representing identity has been going on for decades among many sociologists and linguists (Aman, Jaafar, & Mat Awal, 2019).

Aman, Jaafar and Mat Awal (2019) have also mentioned that various researchers emphasized the interrelation of language and identity and language is known as one of the best markers to pinpoint the identity of a society or an individual. The bond of language and identity is strong as the linguistic features of the language used can demonstrate the participation of an individual in society (Aman, Jaafar, & Mat Awal, 2019). This is because social identity and an individual's identity are characterised from the criteria of the language used such as phonetics features, lexical as well as syntax structure of language.

Malay Language (Bahasa Malaysia)

Malay language (Bahasa Malaysia) is the national language of Malaysia in which is used the sole medium of instruction in the country. National language policy was developed to nurture national consciousness among diverse ethnic groups in Malaysia (David & Yee, 2008). Besides that, it promotes prevalent curriculum as well as a standard language for all the ethnic groups particularly in schools to cultivate the national identity and unity of the country. Therefore, Bahasa Malaysia has been used as the medium of instruction in national schools and taught as a compulsory subject for vernacular schools (David & Yee, 2008). This helps to preserve Bahasa Malaysia as a national language that defines the identity of Malaysia. Moreover, as mentioned by David & Yee (2008), the study of the national language or Bahasa Malaysia is important as it holds its own values in nurturing the attitudes and images of national identity which should be instilled in younger generations for them to apply and carry forward as they age.

The Malay language also consists of numerous dialects and pronunciations depending on the states of the country. For instance, in the Malaysian Peninsula, the Malay language that is spoken in Negeri Sembilan is unique and different from other states as it has half-low back vowel of /ɔ/ (boto) (Aman, Jaafar, & Mat Awal, 2019). The unique language spoken in Negeri Sembilan is inhabited and influenced by different cultures in Melaka, Johor and Minangkabau. Conclusively, the study conducted by Aman, Jaafar, & Mat Awal (2019) revealed that Negeri Sembilan's Malay language phonology defines the identification of the state as both language and identity are interconnected. Thus, it is fair to say that language and identity walks hand in hand and can be seen through the attitudes and behaviour of individuals who practice the language on a daily basis. Regardless of different ethnics and cultures, Bahasa Malaysia or the Malay language is the shared language of all Malaysians and undeniably a substantial part of a Malaysian's cultural identity.

Food and Cultural Identity

In this case, the rich, multifaceted and varying culture of Malaysia is often manifested through the Malaysian food that is interrelated to the cultural heritage of one another. Malaysia's heritage food plays an integral part as it serves as a national identity of Malaysia that unifies everyone together. As a result of the assimilation of diverse cultures and history of different ethnic groups in Malaysia, Malaysia's tapestry of gastronomical delights is rich, vibrant and delicate. As encapsulated by Khajeh, Abdullah and Tan (2013) "investigating what and how a nation eats, as well as the choice of their food ingredients, qualities, production, and the process of ingestion can provide us with a prominent perspective into

varying aspects of their personal and cultural identities”. The heritage food of Malaysia is often associated with the integration of multiple spices and the incorporation of rice as the staple food of Malaysians daily. Heritage, in this context, epitomizes the legacy of aspects or things that are of great value and are hereditary from one particular generation to the other (Prentice, 1994).

Thereupon, *Nasi Lemak* is recognized as one of the classic national identities of Malaysians for it is unanimously featured and advertised as the famous national dish of Malaysia. *Nasi Lemak* (translated literally as “fatty rice”) is a coalescent of rice cooked in coconut milk and pandan leaves that give out an irresistibly aromatic fragrance, along with *sambal*, roasted nuts, eggs and many other optional ingredients. *Nasi Lemak* is also inevitably acknowledged by the National Heritage Department of Malaysia as one of the most well sought-after Malaysian heritage foods among Malaysians (Omar & Omar, 2018). Other dishes in which symbolize national unity and cohesion include *Lemang*, *Rendang*, *Roti Canai*, *Thosai*, *Mee goreng* (fried noodles), *Nasi Ayam* (Chicken Rice), satay and many more.

Ultimately, it is undeniable that cultural food plays a symbolic and crucial role for Malaysians as it serves not only as the ultimate comfort food, but also as one of their national identities. In the broadest sense, the vast spectrum of Malaysian local dishes is certainly an expression of a heterogenous society that creates a unique and distinctive Malaysian identity (Suhaimi & Mohd Zahari, 2014). Besides promoting strong camaraderie and sheer commensality, these national foods also bind people together and reflect the multiculturalism of Malaysia and the sense of pride and belonging that Malaysians possess over their national identities.

Cultural Spaces and Cultural Identity

Apart from that, location or also known as ‘cultural spaces’ is a seldom yet peculiar angle to review on one’s cultural identity. According to Lai, Said and Kubota (2013), cultural space comprises the physical, cultural and perceptual virtues of a place that constitutes social phenomenon and place meaning. The integrity of a cultural space derives from history, uniqueness and nationalism. Without cultural spaces, the country loses a significant value to its cultural identity. In other words, Malaysia would not be ‘Malaysia’ without the existence and acknowledgement of locations that are imperative and meaningful to the country’s heritage. It is important that the nation embraces the country’s history as it provides the people a platform for mutual affinity as well as a sense of collective meaning-making about who they are, where they came from and what future direction they should take (Wexler, The Importance of Identity, History, and Culture in the Wellbeing of Indigenous Youth, 2009). Thus, like every other segments of cultural identity, location is a vital and indispensable part of an individual’s self-conception and self-perception.

In Malaysia, the five heritage cities are Melaka, Georgetown, Kota Bahru, Ipoh and Taiping. Lai, Said and Kubota (2013) stated that these cities hold its own virtue as a cultural space in Malaysia. It is still noted as administration centres and commercial hubs with multiculturalism and religious districts (Mohamed & Badarulzaman, 2001). For instance, Melaka city and Georgetown in Penang are renowned as World Heritage sites by UNESCO for its notable historical cultural spaces (Lai, Said, & Kubota, 2013). Nonetheless, an interesting fact about Melaka is its reputation not only as a tourist market but “a central icon in the construction of a highly contested contemporary Malaysian identity” (Worden, 2003). It was said that Melaka was the place where it all began; the birth of a nation. As for Kota Bahru, the trading activities and cultural values are the key embodiments in which has allowed the location to declare itself as *Kota Budaya* (Cultural City). It was also mentioned in Lai, Said and Kubota (2013) that Kota Bahru is known for its peculiar image and traditional

identity such as Bazaar Buluh Kubu. Similarly, both Ipoh and Taiping also acquire its unique architecture, religious building, festival, food and local lifestyle.

Today, ‘modernisation’ is seen as a concern to the notability and attention to cultural spaces. As the world revolves, building tall and modern architectures have become a worldwide race in which have caused earlier heritage locations to be downplayed or overridden. For instance, Kuala Lumpur’s Petronas Twin Towers, known as one of the tallest buildings in the world, have now become the ‘face’ or the more appropriate emblem to represent Malaysia (Worden, 2003). This has indirectly overshadowed the initial cultural spaces of Malaysia’s cultural identity. Fielden (1994) and Adenirah (2011) as quoted in Lai, Said and Kubota (2013) claimed that conservation is the only means to avoid deterioration of culture and heritage of a cultural space. Nonetheless, National Landscape Department (NLD) aims to lead the quality of landscape development towards excellence and sustainability that is enriched with the Malaysian identity (Zakaria, Dali, & Hussein, 2019). The study also found that the locals today do not appreciate the components that resembles their cultural identity regardless its beauty due to their new preference for external identities.

This occurrence calls for an urgent deliberation. However, another angle to review this matter is with the acceptance of traditional and modern cultural spaces. As the world revolves, it is inevitable to cease change. Thus, to conserve traditional cultural spaces and embrace modern cultural spaces may be the way to go in the 21st century. Nonetheless, this prospect could also cover the conservation of language and food as a safeguard to Malaysians’ cultural identity. Zakaria, Dali and Hussein (2019) suggested rebranding as one of the possible ways to promote positive motives such as internalisation and glocalization. It was mentioned that rebranding will be able to showcase new brands without compromising on the existing identities. In order words, it can help create awareness and promote love and acknowledgement towards the segments of what makes a person a Malaysian and sustaining the integrity of one’s cultural identity. To quote Dawood (2018), “Love emotion to a place creates strong bonding between a man and his place”. All in all, like other aspects of what defines cultural identity, it is evident that language, food and place play amongst the vital parts of an individual’s cultural identity, especially from a Malaysian standpoint.

Other Components of Cultural Identity

Some of the aspects national identities may include are national anthem, costumes, flower, car, museum, monuments, cars, flag, food, arts and crafts and many more in which Malaysians take most pride in as the embodiment of their national identity. For instance, the *Jalur Gemilang* (Stripes of Glory) is deemed as the national flag due to its distinctive representation of Malaysia by using symbols and the depiction of colours. Not only that, the *Tugu Negara* is also known as the national monument to commemorate the freedom of Malaysia. Not to mention, *Proton* and *Perodua* cars are often associated as national cars as they are locally manufactured and preferred by most Malaysians.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This section provides an insight of the method adopted by this research. This chapter explain on the components involved in conducting the research from research design, sampling method which explains on the population and sample of the study including the instruments used to collect the data.

Research Design

This study followed quantitative method to identify the level of attachment of Malaysian TESL students towards their cultural identity. Therefore, frequency count approach is used to analyse the data of this research. Moreover, the questionnaire consists of

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20 items related to cultural identity. The study also aims to identify the major components of Malaysian's cultural identity. Thus, the 20 items were divided based on 4 components including general questions, language, food as well as cultural spaces to identify the attachment of each component with the cultural identity of an individual.

Sample

Purposive sampling method was adopted for the purpose of this preliminary research. This sampling method was chosen as this study particularly aimed to investigate a specific group of participants to achieve the set objectives. A sample of thirty (30) Malaysian TESL students was selected from different universities and colleges with different education level; foundation, diploma, degree including post-graduates as well. These 30 respondents, representing the three major ethnic groups in Malaysia (Malay, Chinese and Indian) were selected based on their age, gender and educational TESL background.

Instrument

A survey of 20 items consisting of both general and specific items of the three major components of Malaysian cultural identity has been developed by the researchers for the purpose of this research. The first draft of the survey has been reviewed and verified by two experts in the field of language and culture from School of Education and Social Sciences, Management & Science University, Malaysia. After it had been reviewed and verified, the finalised survey was tested for reliability, and the result was 0.805 of Cronbach alpha. Then, it has been distributed online to the participants. This questionnaire required the participants to answer 20 Likert scale items where the respondents are asked to choose between the scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The items provided were based on the selected components of cultural identity such as language, food and cultural spaces. The first part of the questionnaire (five items) sheds light on the level of attachment of Malaysian TESL students towards their cultural identity in general. The second five (5) items make the second part of the questionnaire with the aim of finding out the extent to which Malaysian TESL students are attached to their national language. The third part also consists of five (5) items targeting the level of attachment of Malaysian TESL students towards their local food as part of their cultural identity. The last part has another five (5) items.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section provides an account of the data analysed and the findings of the research. It begins with presenting the overall results of the general questions related to the level of attachment of Malaysia students to their cultural identity in general. Then, it reveals the findings of the analysis of the participants' answers to the more specific components related to the level of attachment of Malaysia students to their national language, local food, and Malaysian cultural spaces.

4.1 The level of attachment of Malaysian students to their cultural identity in general.

This section consisted of 5 items sought to identify the extent to which Malaysian students take pride in their cultural identity in general and their acceptance their nation.

Table 1. The level of attachment of Malaysian TESL students to their cultural identity in general

Items	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
I feel good about the nation I belong to.	30	3	5	4.53	.571
The nation I belong to is an important reflection of who I am.	30	2	5	4.47	.730

I have spent time trying to find out more about my history, traditions and customs.	30	2	5	4.10	.960
I have a clear sense of my ethnic background and what it means for me.	30	2	5	4.07	.868
I believe it is important for people to protect and conserve the important legacies of Malaysia. (For example: National language, National food, Historic Sites)	30	4	5	4.80	.407

The first 5 items of the questionnaire encompassed of general questions regarding the level of attachment and belonging of Malaysian TESL students towards their nation, sense of belonging and cultural identity. These 5 items play a prominent role in finding out the extent to which Malaysian TESL students are attached to their cultural identity in general. The detailed findings are as follow:

4.1.1 Item 1: I feel good about the nation I belong to.

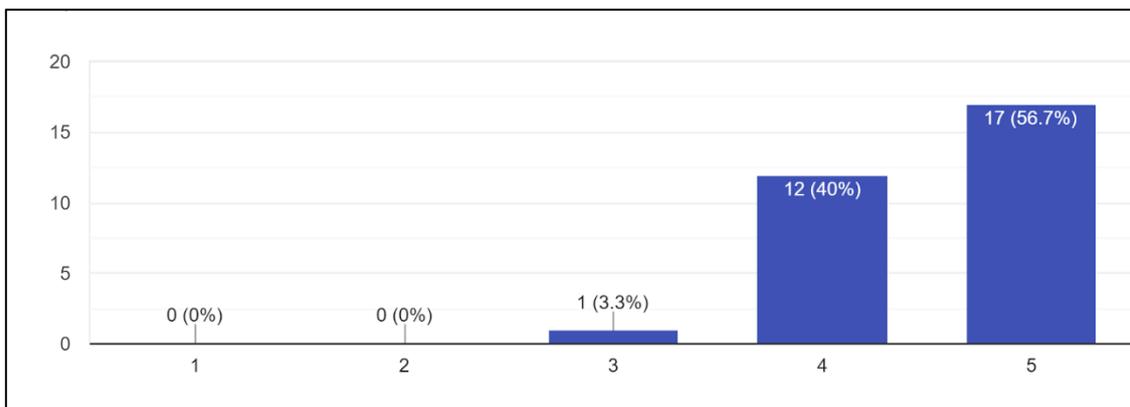


Figure 1. shows the result of item 1

From item 1, a total of 17 respondents (56.7%) strongly agree with the fact that they feel good about the nation that they belong to, while 12 (40%) of the respondents agree with the statement and 1 (3.3%) of the respondents felt neutral regarding the statement. This proves that most of the respondent of Malaysian TESL students feel good about the nation that they belong to, which is Malaysia.

4.1.2 Item 2: The nation I belong to is an important reflection of who I am.

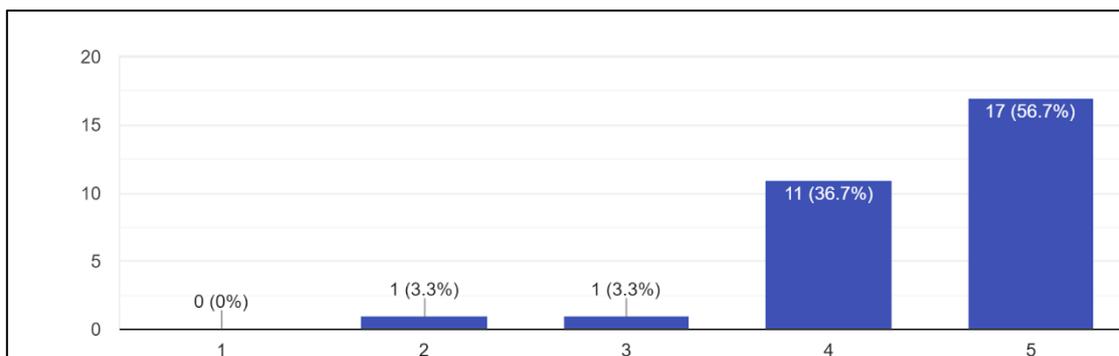


Figure 2. shows the result of item 2

While 1 (3.3%) of the respondents disagree and another 1 (3.3%) felt neutral about the statement, a total of 11 respondents (36.7%) agree, meanwhile 17 (56.7%) of the respondents strongly agree that the nation that they belong to is a crucial reflection of who they are as a person.

4.1.3 Item 3: I have spent time trying to find out more about my history, traditions and customs.

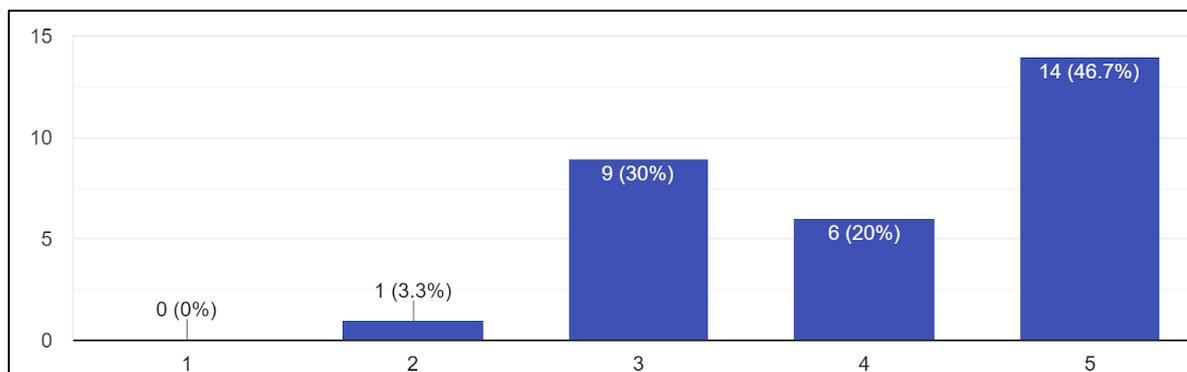


Figure 3. shows the result of item 3

From item 3, a majority total of the respondents which consist of 14 (46.7%) respondents deemed that they strongly agree that they have spent time trying to find out more pertaining to their history, traditions and customs, while a total of 6 (20%) agree. While 9 (30%) of the respondents felt neutral about it, 1 (3.3%) of the respondents disagree with the statement and portray that they might not have spent time learning about their history, traditions and customs.

4.1.4 Item 4: I have a clear sense of my ethnic background and what it means to me.

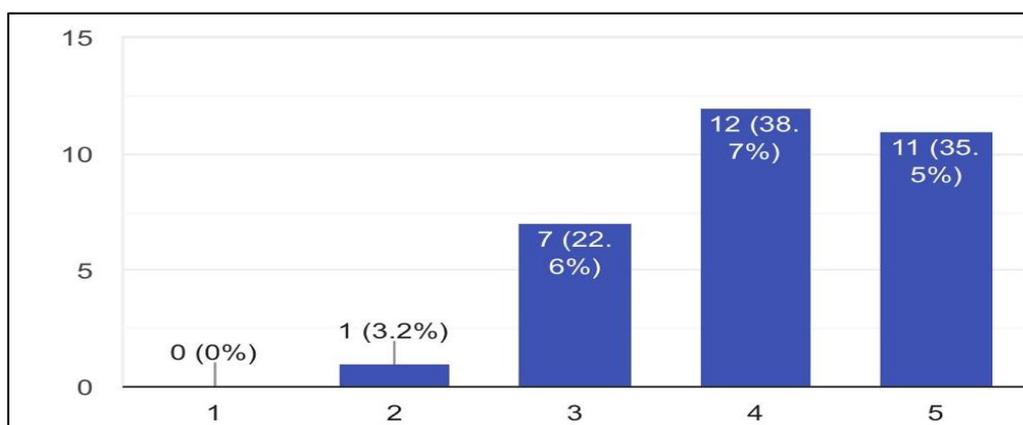


Figure 4. shows the result of item 4

From item 4, a total of 11 (35.5%) respondents strongly agree that they have a clear sense of their ethnic background and what it means to them, and another 12 (38.7%) of them agree with the statement. However, 7 (23.6%) of the respondents feel neutral and 1 (3.2%) of them disagree with the statement. This shows that while a majority of them may possess a clear sense of their ethnic background and what it means to them, some of them may not necessarily feel the same way.

4.1.5 Item 5: I believe it is important for people to protect the important legacies of Malaysia (E.g.: National language, National food, Historic sites).

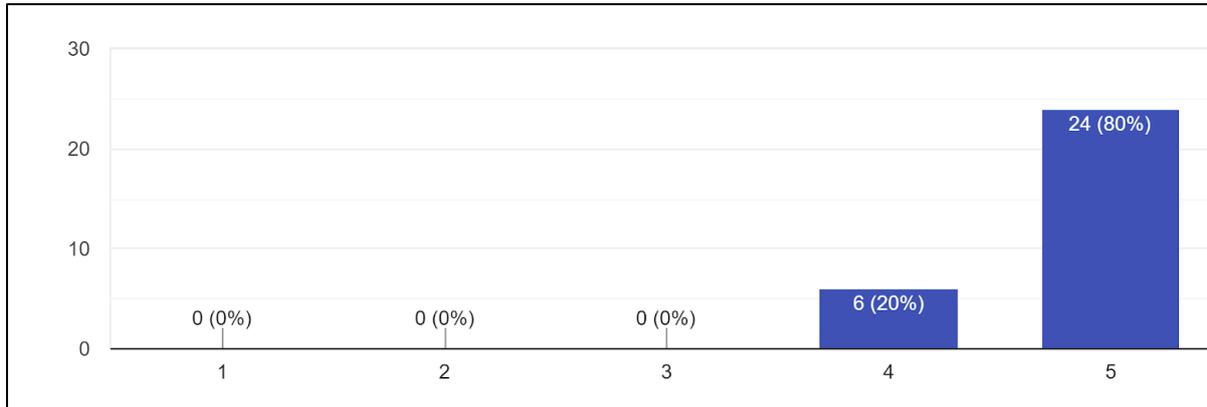


Figure 5. shows the result of item 5

From the results accumulated above, a solid total of 24 (80%) of the respondents strongly agree that they believe in the importance of people to protect and preserve the crucial legacies in Malaysia, such as the national language, food and historical places. Another 6 (20%) of the respondents also agree with the statement. Thus, it has come to prove that Malaysians indeed possess the awareness on the importance of protecting and preserving national legacies for the upcoming generations.

4.2 The level of attachment of Malaysian TESL students towards their national language.

This part of the questionnaire sought to shed light on the level of attachment of Malaysian TESL students towards their national language. These 5 items play a prominent in finding out the extent to which Malaysian TESL students are attached to their national language. The detailed analysis is as follow:

Table 2. The level of attachment of Malaysian TESL students towards their national language

Items	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
I am proficient in Bahasa Malaysia.	30	3	5	4.43	.626
I speak English (or any other language) more often than Bahasa Malaysia.	30	1	5	3.73	1.048
I believe that Bahasa Malaysia should continue as the medium of instruction in Malaysia.	30	1	5	4.20	1.126
I prefer to use Bahasa Malaysia in my daily conversations.	30	2	5	3.70	1.119
I believe it is important for every Malaysian to know and learn Bahasa Malaysia.	30	3	5	4.67	.547

4.2.1 Item 6: I am proficient in Bahasa Malaysia.

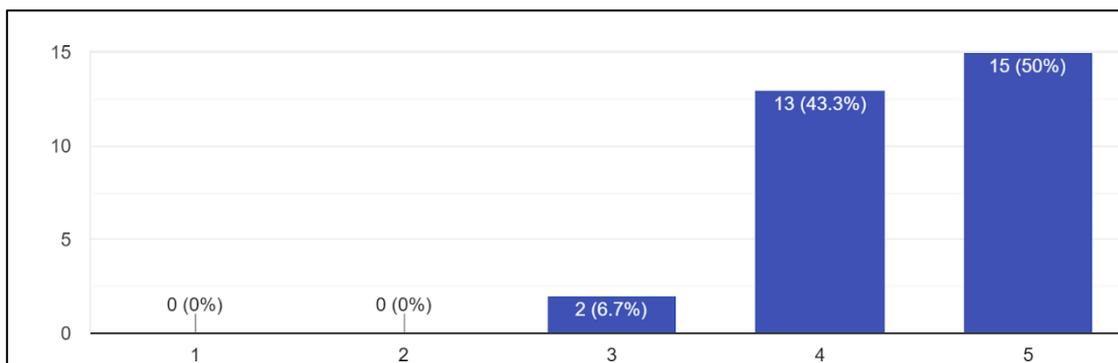


Figure 6. shows the result of item 6

A total of 15 (50%) of the respondents strongly agree that they are proficient in Bahasa Malaysia, while 13 (43.3%) of them agree with the statement albeit 2 (6.7%) of the respondent are fairly neutral. This shows that a majority of the Malaysian TESL students are highly proficient in Bahasa Malaysia, which is the national language of Malaysia.

4.2.2 Item 7: I speak English (or any other language) more often than Bahasa Malaysia.

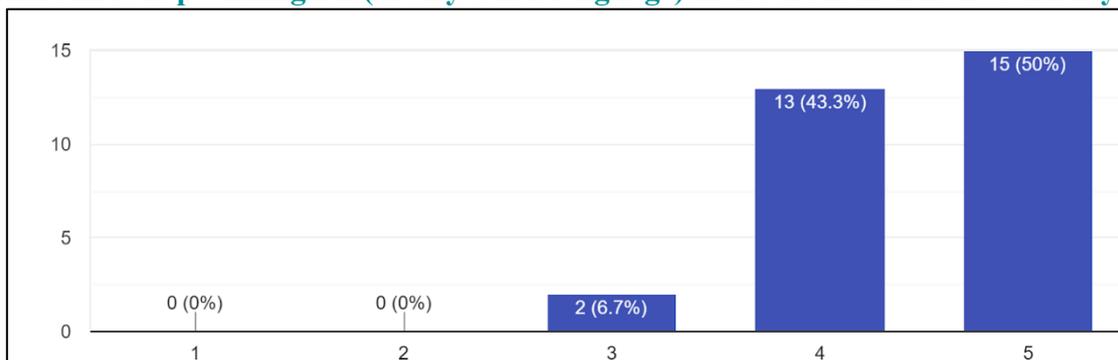


Figure 7. shows the result of item 7

This particular item in the questionnaire received quite a number of mixed responses. A total of 9 (30%) respondents strongly agree that they speak English or any other languages other than Bahasa Malaysia. 7 (23.3%) of the respondents agree to the statement, 1 (3.3%) disagree while 1 (3.3%) of them strongly disagree that they speak English or any other language other than Bahasa Malaysia. Meanwhile, majority of the respondents with a total of 12 (40%) respondents prefer to be neutral. Thus, it can be inferred that as much as Malaysians value their national language, they still utilize the use of other languages as their L2, which is a common occurrence particularly in the context of a multicultural society, Malaysia.

4.2.3 Item 8: I believe that Bahasa Malaysia should continue as the medium of instruction in Malaysia.

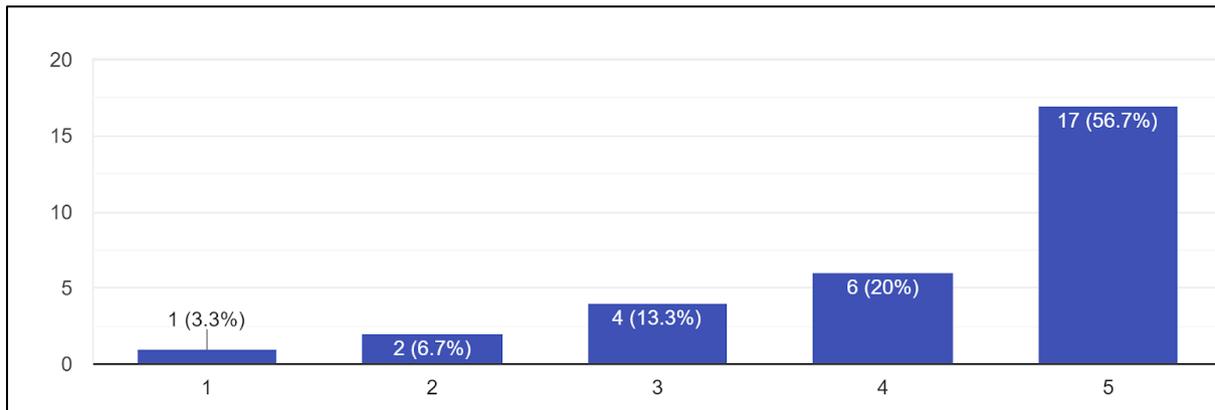


Figure 8. shows the result of item 8

17 (56.7%) of the respondents agree that Bahasa Malaysia, the national language should continue to be used as a medium of instruction in Malaysia, while 5 (20%) of them agree and a total of 4 (13.3%) feel neutral regarding the statement. However, it is worth mentioning that a total of 2 (6.7%) respondents disagree while 1 (3.3%) of the respondents strongly disagrees. This shows that majority of Malaysian TESL students appreciate and value the importance of using Bahasa Malaysia as the medium of instruction.

4.2.4 Item 9: I prefer to use Bahasa Malaysia in my daily conversations.

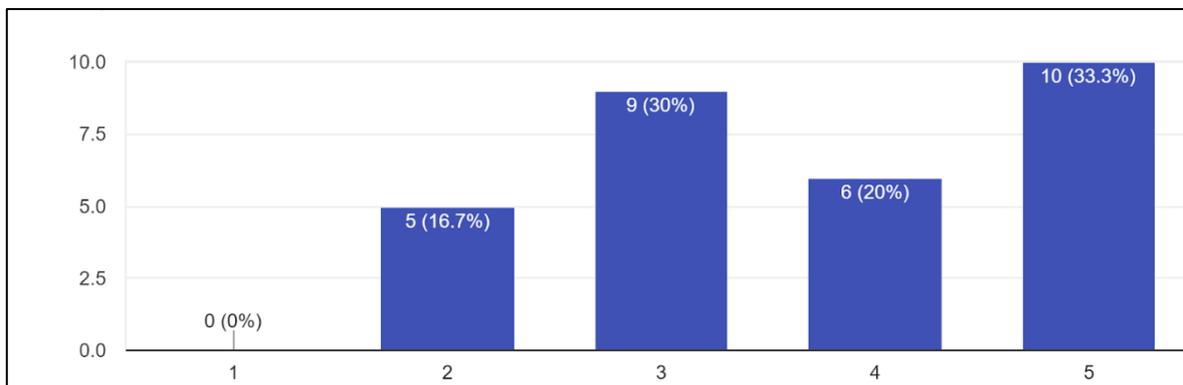


Figure 9. shows the result of item 9

10 (33.3%) of the respondents strongly agree that they prefer to use Bahasa Malaysia in their daily conversation, while 6 of the respondents (20%) agree. However, a total of 9 (30%) of the respondents feel neutral and 5 (16.7%) of them disagree. Thus, it has come to show that in spite of the fact that some of the respondents may not prefer to use Bahasa Malaysia in their daily conversation, a majority of them still prefer to use their national language, which significantly shows their level of attachment towards their national identity.

4.2.5 Item 10: I believe it is important for every Malaysian to know and learn Bahasa Malaysia.

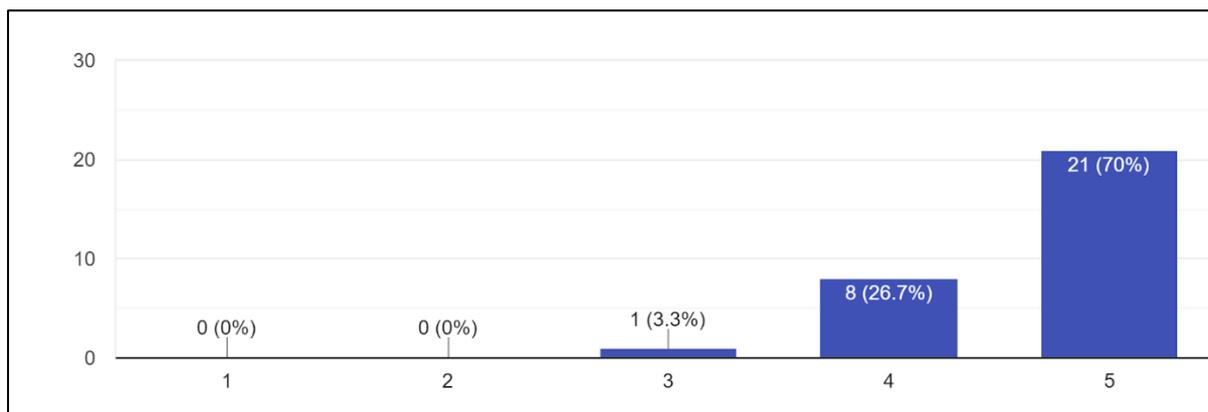


Figure 10. shows the result of item 10

A majority (70%) of the respondents strongly agree that it is pivotal for all Malaysians to know and learn Bahasa Malaysia while 8 (26.7%) of them agree, and only 1 (3.3%) of the respondents feels neutral about the statement. This shows that almost all Malaysian TESL students acknowledge the fact that it is indeed important for Malaysian to know and learn Bahasa Malaysia. This ascertains the fact that they are indeed attached to their national identity.

4.3 The level of attachment of Malaysian TESL students towards their cultural food.

These items in the questionnaire sought to elucidate the level of attachment of Malaysian TESL students towards their cultural food. The findings are as follow:

Table 3. The level of attachment of Malaysian TESL students towards their cultural food

Items	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
I enjoy eating local dishes at any time of the day. (For example: Nasi Lemak, Lemang, Rendang, Roti Canai, etc.)	30	2	5	4.67	.661
I prefer eating fast food than local dishes. (For example: McDonald's, KFC, Burger King, etc.)	30	1	5	2.83	1.117
I only eat Malaysian food during special occasions. (For example: Hari Raya Aidilfitri, Chinese New Year, Deepavali)	30	1	5	3.07	1.552
I believe it is equally important to learn how to make or prepare local dishes.	30	3	5	4.43	.626
I believe it is important to embrace and be proud of our local dishes.	30	4	5	4.77	.430

4.3.1 Item 11: I enjoy eating local dishes at any time of the day. (For example: Nasi Lemak, Lemang, Rendang, Roti Canai, etc.)

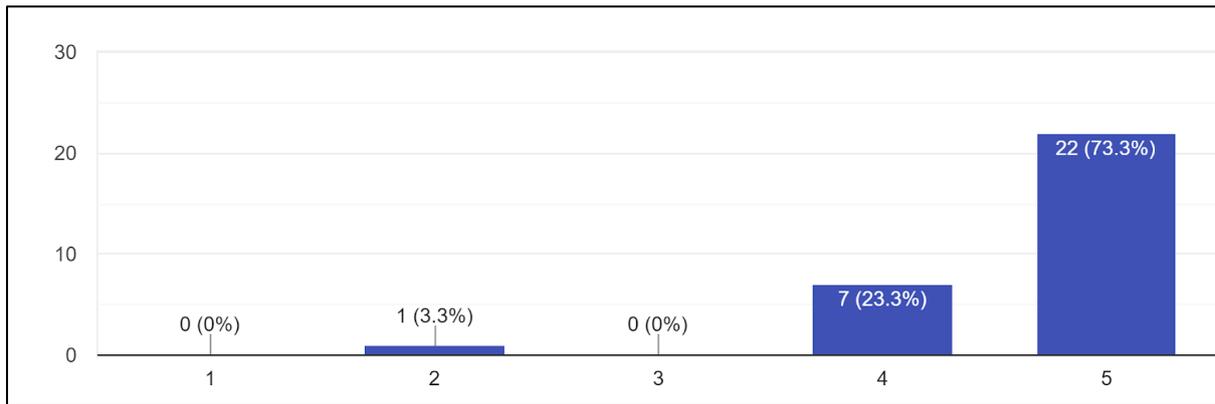


Figure 11. shows the result of item 11

A total of 22 respondents (73.3%) strongly agree that they enjoy eating local dishes at any time of the day, while 7 (23.3) of them agree on the statement, and only 1 (3.3%) respondent disagrees. This greatly shows the level of attachment of Malaysian TESL students towards their cultural food, such as Nasi Lemak, Lemang, Rendang, Roti Canai, etc to the extent that they would not mind eating it at any time of the day, even for breakfast, lunch, dinner or supper.

4.3.2 Item 12: I prefer eating fast food than local dishes. (For example: McDonald’s, KFC, Burger King, etc.)

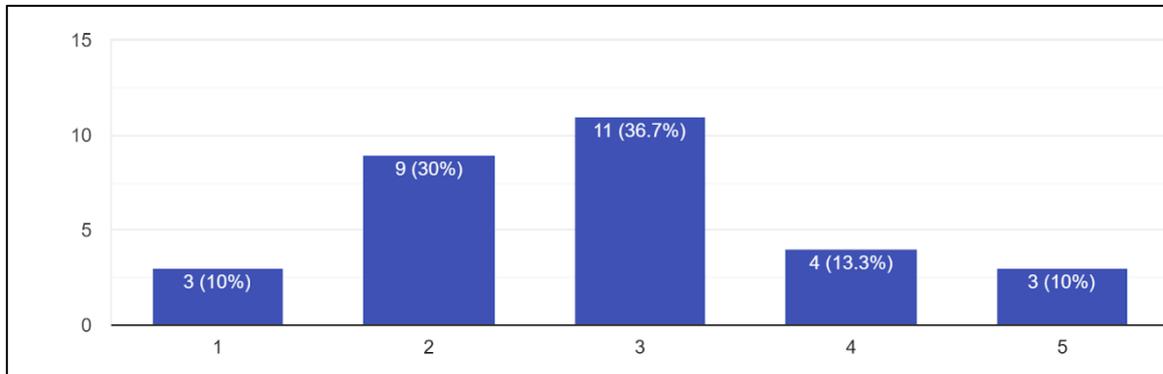


Figure 12. shows the result of item 12

This item interestingly depicts how Malaysians may or may not prefer eating fast food than local dishes. A total of 3 (10%) respondents strongly disagree, 9 (30%) disagree, while 11 (36.7%) of them are neutral. Only 4 (13.3%) agree and 3 (10%) respondents agree that they prefer eating fast food than local dishes. While others may opt for fast food than local food due to the context of its practicality, convenience and personal preferences, a large number of the respondents still prefer local dishes. This proves that Malaysians are truly attached to their cultural food.

4.3.3 Item 13: I only eat Malaysian food during special occasions. (For example: Hari Raya Aidilfitri, Chinese New Year, Deepavali)

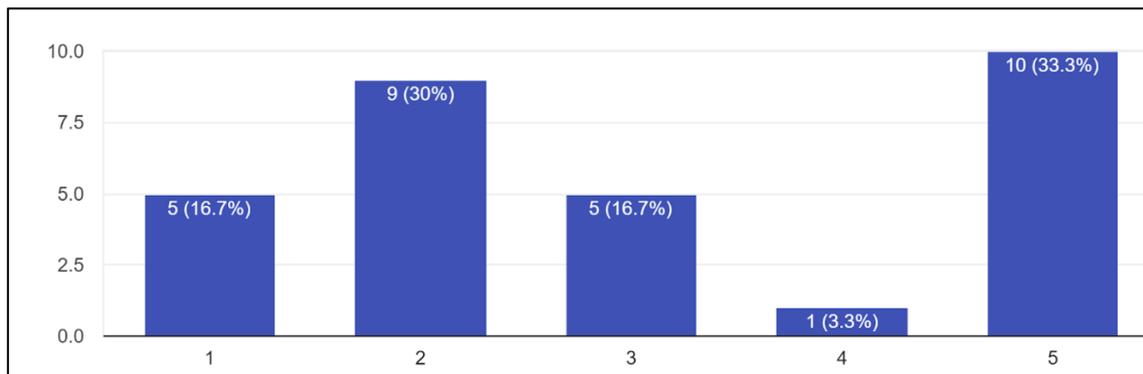


Figure 13. shows the result of item 13

10 respondents (33.3%) strongly agree that they only eat local dishes on special celebratory occasions such as Hari Raya, Deepavali, Chinese New Year while 1 (3.3%) agree and 5 (16.7%) are neutral. However, a total of 9 (30%) respondents disagree and 5 (16.7%) strongly disagree that they only eat local dishes on special occasion. This has come to prove that Malaysians do not necessarily have to wait for special occasions to enjoy local dishes and cuisines.

4.3.4 Item 14: I believe it is equally important to learn how to make or prepare local dishes.

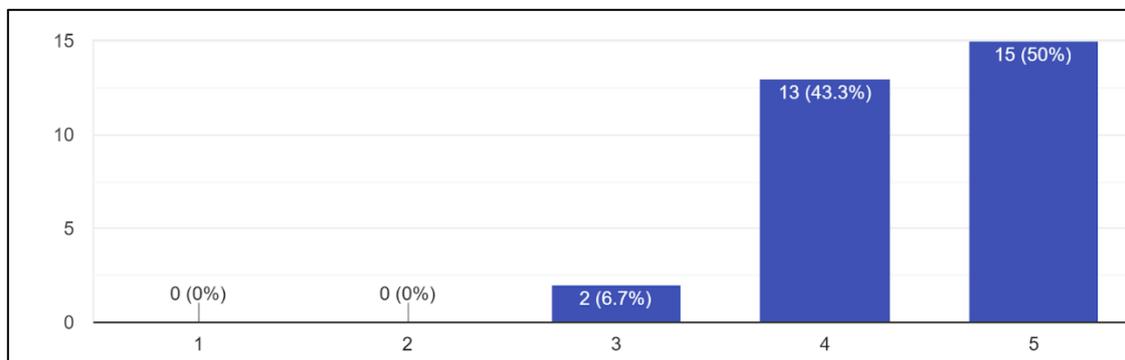


Figure 14. shows the result of item 14

15 respondents (50%) strongly agree that it is crucial to learn how to prepare local dishes, and 13 (43.3%) other respondents agree to the statement too, while only 2 respondents (6.7%) of them are neutral which significantly depicts the level of attachment of Malaysian TESL students towards their cultural food.

4.3.5 Item 15: I believe it is important to embrace and be proud of our local dishes.

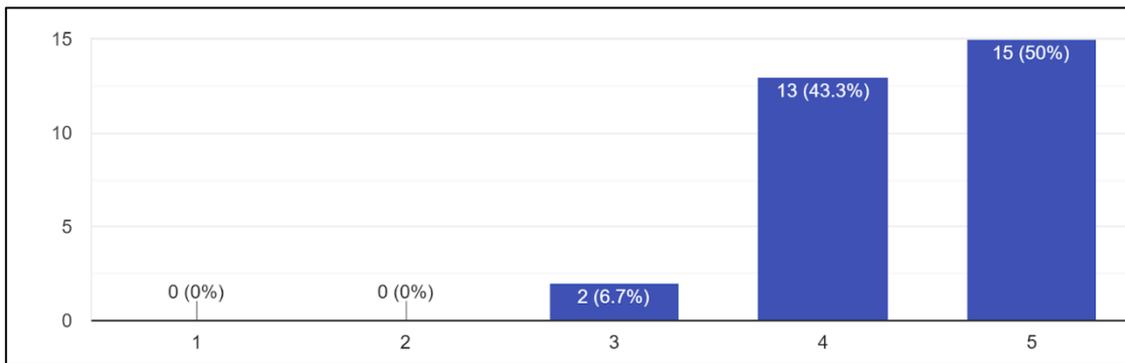


Figure 15. shows the result of item 15

A total of 23 respondents (76.7%) strongly agree, while 7 of the respondents (23.3%) agree that it is important to embrace and be proud of their local dishes. This further consolidates the significant extent to which Malaysian TESL students are attached to their local food as their cultural identity and that they indeed take pride in their local dishes regardless of the differences in ethnicity, religion and mother-tongues.

4.4 The level of attachment of Malaysian TESL students towards Malaysia’s cultural spaces.

These items in the questionnaire sought to elucidate the level of attachment of Malaysian TESL students towards their cultural spaces. The findings are as follow:

Table 4. The level of attachment of Malaysian TESL students towards Malaysia’s cultural spaces.

Items	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
I prefer to visit local historic and cultural sites than shopping malls.	30	2	5	3.83	1.117
I enjoy going to local tourist attractions than overseas.	30	2	5	3.93	.944
I believe it is important to embrace and be proud of our local dishes.	30	4	5	4.77	.430
I have an adequate knowledge about the cultural spaces in Malaysia.	30	2	5	3.80	1.031
I treasure the historical values of the cultural places in Malaysia.	30	2	5	4.37	.809

4.4.1 Item 16: I prefer to visit local historic and cultural sites than shopping malls.

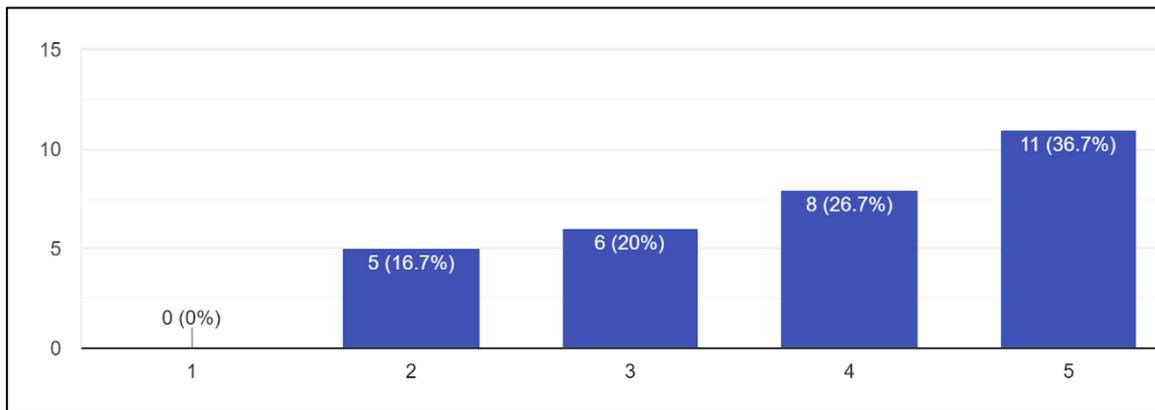


Figure 16. shows the result of item 16

11 respondents (36.7%) strongly agree, while 8 (26.7) of the respondents agree that they prefer to visit local historic and cultural sites than going to shopping malls, while 6 respondents (20%) are neutral and only 5 respondents (16.7%) disagree. This shows that these respondents enjoy going to local historic and cultural sites than going to shopping malls because of their level of attachment towards cultural places.

4.4.2 Item 17: I enjoy going to local tourist attractions than overseas.

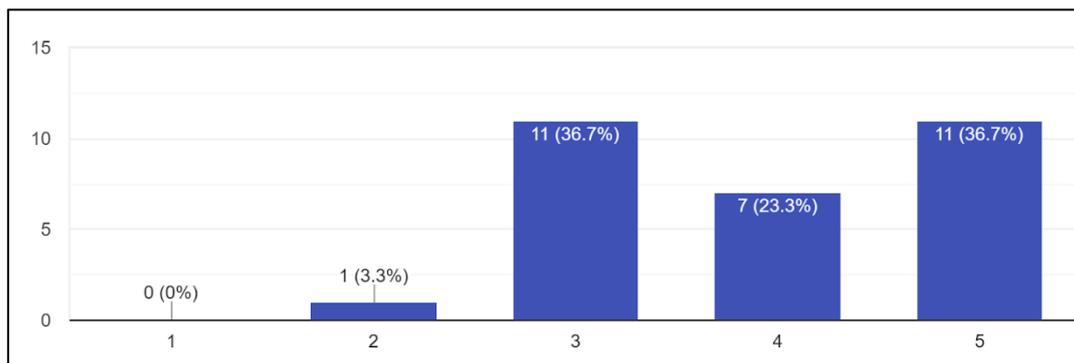


Figure 17. shows the result of item 17

A total of 11 respondents (36.7%) strongly agree and 7 (23.3%) of them agree that they prefer going to local tourist attractions than going overseas. While 11 (36.7%) of them are neutral, only 1 of the respondents (3.3%) disagrees. This further supports the degree to which Malaysian TESL students values cultural and historical places in Malaysia.

4.4.3 Item 18: I believe it is important to conserve the cultural spaces of Malaysia. (For example: Melaka, Georgetown, Kota Bahru, Ipoh, Taiping, etc.)

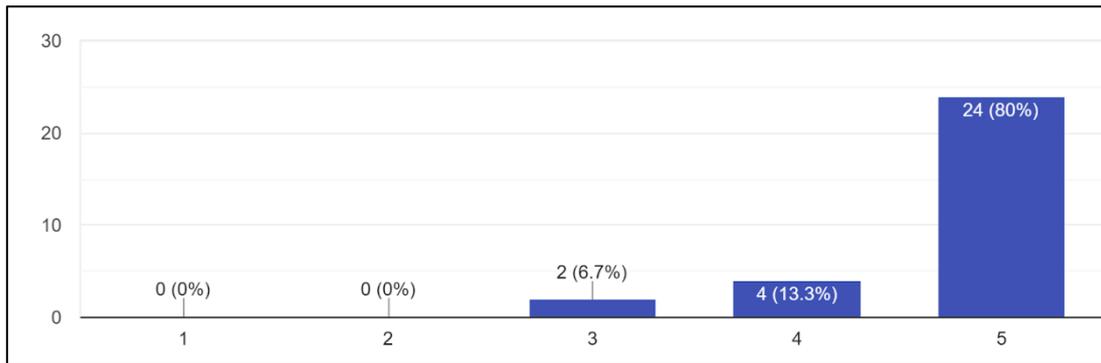


Figure 18. shows the result of item 18

A total of 24 respondents (80%) strongly agree on the importance of preserving the cultural spaces of Malaysia. Meanwhile 4 (13.3%) of them agree and only 2 (6.7%) are neutral. This undoubtedly reflects the level of attachment of Malaysian TESL students toward their cultural places.

4.4.4 Item 19: I have an adequate knowledge about the cultural spaces in Malaysia.

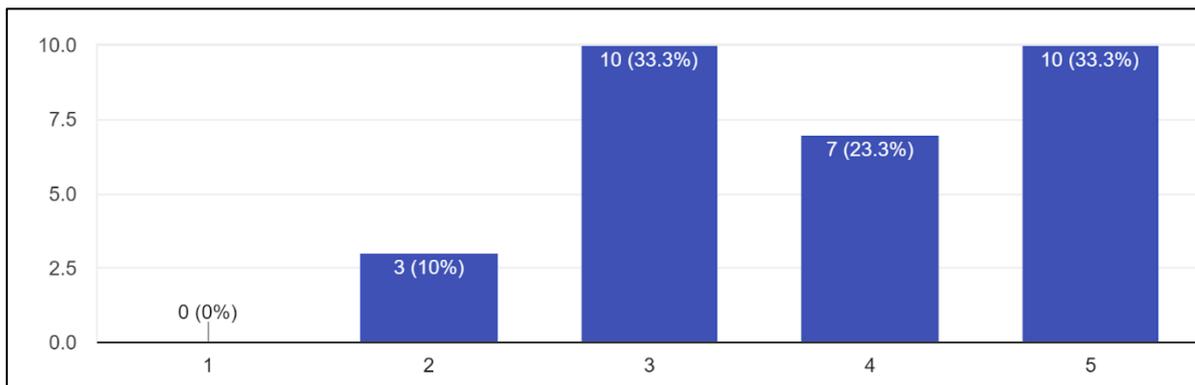


Figure 19. shows the result of item 19

Interestingly, while a total of 10 (33.3%) strongly agree and 7 (23.3%) of them agree that they have an adequate knowledge pertaining to cultural spaces in Malaysia, 10 (33.3%) of them are neutral while 3(10%) of the respondents disagree. This has come to show that while others have profound knowledge regarding cultural spaces in Malaysia, some Malaysians may not have adequate exposure to the cultural spaces in Malaysia.

4.4.5 Item 20: I treasure the historical values of the cultural places in Malaysia.

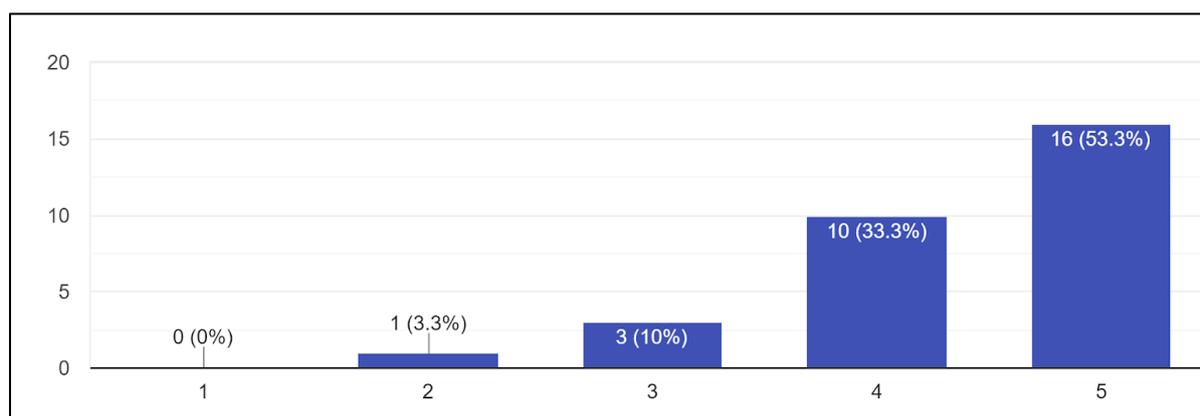


Figure 20. shows the result of item 20

Most of the respondents undoubtedly treasure the historical values of the cultural places in Malaysia. With a total of 16 (53.3%) respondents who answered strongly agree, 10 (33.3%) of them agree and only 3 (10%) of them are neutral and 1 (3.3%). Thus, it is safe to say that a majority of the Malaysian TESL students value the historical values of cultural places in Malaysia, which depicts their level of attachment towards their cultural places.

5. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The research was designed to identify the major components of Malaysians' cultural identity through a questionnaire. It was conducted online in which 30 respondents were gathered from people with Teaching English as Second Language (TESL) background. They were to answer 20 items related to cultural identity. Out of 30 respondents who took part in the questionnaire, 22 were female leaving the amount of male to 8 respondents. Furthermore, in term of ethnicity, all three major races in Malaysia; Malay, Chinese and Indian have participated in answering questions related to their cultural identity. Next, most of the respondents were in the range of 22 years old to 30 years old among diploma to post-graduate students. This research was also able to cover one of the main objectives in which is to identify the significant different of age, gender, ethnicity, and educational background in the level of attachment of Malaysian TESL students to their cultural identity.

Ultimately, the findings of the research showed that the level of attachment of Malaysian TESL students towards their cultural identity is high. It was found that 50% of the individuals strongly agree that they are proficient in the national language or known as Bahasa Malaysia. As such, majority of the TESL students agreed that Bahasa Malaysia should be continued as the medium of instruction in Malaysia. Besides that, a total of 76.7% agreed that they are proud of the local dishes in Malaysia in which proves that they are attached towards their cultural identity. However, it is stated that 33.3% of the respondents only consume local dishes during special occasions such as Hari Raya, Deepavali as well as Chinese New Year. These findings that revealed Malaysians' preferences towards their cultural food elucidate that the vast spectrum of Malaysian local dishes is certainly an expression of a heterogenous society that creates a unique and distinctive Malaysian identity, as ascertained by Suhaimi & Mohd Zahari (2014).

As for their attachment towards cultural spaces in Malaysia, 80% of the respondents agreed that the cultural spaces of Malaysia such as Malacca, Ipoh and Kota Bharu should be preserved for the values it holds in Malaysia. Therefore, this answers the last objective of the research which is to examine the level of attachment of Malaysian TESL students to their

cultural identity in terms of language, food, and cultural spaces. All in all, the purpose of this research which is to find the level of attachment of Malaysian TESL students towards their cultural identity is crucial for the betterment of the country in the future. Younger generations should be exposed to cultural values to preserve the importance of Malaysians' cultural identity. As the saying goes, "Cultural differences should not separate us from each other but rather cultural diversity brings a collective strength that can benefit all of humanity".

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