

THOUGHTS ON EDUCATION AND CULTURE IN THE WORKS OF AWANG HAD SALLEH

REFLEXÕES SOBRE EDUCAÇÃO E CULTURA NAS OBRAS DE AWANG HAD SALLEH

REFLEXIONES SOBRE LA EDUCACIÓN Y LA CULTURA EN LAS OBRAS DE AWANG HAD SALLEH



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ABSTRACT: Education and culture play a significant role in shaping national identity in Malaysia. Policies such as the Razak Report (1956) and the Rahman Talib Report (1960) paved the way for the establishment of a national education system based on the principles of unity, knowledge, and human advancement. The works of Awang Had Salleh are seen as contributing to the development of educational and cultural thought in Malaysia. This study employed textual analysis to explore recurring themes in Salleh's *Biru Warna* (1974) and *Antara Dua Dunia* (2005), such as value-based education, the importance of the Malay language and culture in shaping national identity. The findings revealed that Salleh's thoughts remain highly relevant in modern Malaysia, which faces various challenges posed by globalization and shifting societal values. The study also highlights the importance of strengthening national identity through holistic education grounded in cultural values.

KEYWORDS: Awang Had Salleh. Culture. Education. Identity. National development.

RESUMO: *A educação e a cultura desempenham um papel significativo na formação da identidade nacional na Malásia. Políticas como o Relatório Razak (1956) e o Relatório Rahman Talib (1960) abriram caminho para o estabelecimento de um sistema nacional de educação baseado nos princípios de unidade, conhecimento e desenvolvimento humano. As obras de Awang Had Salleh são consideradas contribuições relevantes para o desenvolvimento do pensamento educacional e cultural na Malásia. Este estudo utilizou a análise textual para explorar temas recorrentes nas obras *Biru Warna* (1974) e *Antara Dua Dunia* (2005), como a educação baseada em valores e a importância da língua e da cultura malaias na formação da identidade nacional. Os resultados revelaram que o pensamento de Salleh permanece altamente relevante na Malásia contemporânea, que enfrenta diversos desafios decorrentes da globalização e das mudanças nos valores sociais. O estudo também destaca a importância de fortalecer a identidade nacional por meio de uma educação holística fundamentada em valores culturais.*

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Awang Had Salleh. Cultura. Educação. Identidade. Desenvolvimento nacional.

RESUMEN: *La educación y la cultura desempeñan un papel significativo en la formación de la identidad nacional en Malasia. Políticas como el Informe Razak (1956) y el Informe Rahman Talib (1960) allanaron el camino para el establecimiento de un sistema nacional de educación basado en los principios de unidad, conocimiento y desarrollo humano. Las obras de Awang Had Salleh se consideran contribuciones relevantes para el desarrollo del pensamiento educativo y cultural en Malasia. Este estudio empleó el análisis textual para explorar temas recurrentes en las obras *Biru Warna* (1974) y *Antara Dua Dunia* (2005), tales como la educación basada en valores y la importancia de la lengua y la cultura malayas en la formación de la identidad nacional. Los resultados revelaron que el pensamiento de Salleh sigue siendo altamente relevante en la Malasia contemporánea, que enfrenta diversos desafíos derivados de la globalización y de los cambios en los valores sociales. El estudio también destaca la importancia de fortalecer la identidad nacional mediante una educación holística fundamentada en valores culturales.*

PALABRAS CLAVE: Awang Had Salleh. Cultura. Educación. Identidad. Desarrollo nacional.

INTRODUCTION

Since achieving independence, Malaysia's education system has undergone various phases of policy reform and pedagogical transformation to meet the demands of national development and the diversity of its society. These changes represent the government's continuous efforts to build a comprehensive, sustainable, and inclusive education system. The Razak Report of 1956 and the Rahman Talib Report of 1960 served as foundational pillars in the establishment of a national education system grounded on the principles of *racial unity, knowledge mastery, and human development*. Both policies emphasized the importance of using Malay as the main medium of instruction, while also highlighting the role of education in nurturing *national spirit and shared identity*. As time progressed, Malaysia's education system continued to evolve to ensure that its citizens were equipped to face the challenges of globalization, technological advancement, and changing societal values. Education is no longer seen merely as a means of securing employment, but rather as a crucial instrument in shaping citizens who are knowledgeable, virtuous, and responsible. In this regard, *culture also plays a vital role* as the foundation for building identity and preserving the nation's heritage, which must be strengthened through education.

In the present era, education in Malaysia is not only regarded as a vehicle for knowledge dissemination but also as a tool for *nation-building and the cultivation of noble values* inherited from past civilizations. The Malay language, as the national and intellectual language, lies at the heart of educational and cultural discourse, serving as the primary medium to strengthen national identity. Meanwhile, Malaysia's diverse cultural heritage, rich in the arts, customs, and traditional practices, reflects the depth of the nation's soul, which is rooted in universal human values. The Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Culture often work hand in hand to elevate the nation's cultural prestige through curricula, co-curricular activities, and various student character development programs. Therefore, the educational and cultural landscape in Malaysia cannot be separated from the broader mission of nurturing an *educated, ethical, and culturally refined society*. Within this context, the ideas of prominent scholars such as Professor Emeritus Tan Sri Dr. Awang Had Salleh are significant references in exploring the synergy between knowledge and culture for the continuity of national civilization.

Awang Had Salleh was a notable scholar in the fields of education, language, and culture in Malaysia. He was born on 24 June 1934 in Kampung Bagan, Pulau Betung, Balik Pulau, Penang. His early education began at Sekolah Melayu Pulau Betung, followed by Sekolah Melayu Seberang Perak. In 1949, while in Standard Six, he was named the best student in the

state of Kedah, a remarkable achievement that foreshadowed his intellectual excellence. Awang Had Salleh pursued higher education at the University of Malaya, earning a Bachelor of Arts with Honours in Malay Studies in 1964. He later continued his studies and obtained a Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) in Education from Stanford University, United States, in 1972, and also received advanced training in Academic Management and Development at Lancaster University, United Kingdom.

Awang Had Salleh's career began as a trainee teacher at Sekolah Melayu Gunung, Alor Setar, in 1950, followed by studies at Sultan Idris Teachers' College (1951–1954). He later returned to serve as a teacher at several schools, including Sekolah Melayu Derga and Sultan Abdul Hamid College. He also held a position as a lecturer at the Language Institute, Kuala Lumpur, before joining the University of Malaya as an Assistant Lecturer at the Faculty of Education in 1967, eventually being appointed as a professor.

His leadership in higher education was notable; he served as Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Student Affairs) at the University of Malaya (1975), Director of MARA Institute of Technology (1978–1980), and Vice-Chancellor of the National University of Malaysia (1980–1984). He was also the founding Vice-Chancellor of Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM) and, since 1996, has served as the Pro-Chancellor of Sultan Idris Education University (UPSI).

His contributions extended beyond the academic sphere when he was appointed as a Special Adviser to the Ministry of Education until 1990, in addition to holding several prominent positions, such as Distinguished Fellow at the Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS), and Chairman of several organizations, including Sultan Idris Education University, Anakku Corporation Bhd., and FOMEMA Sdn. Bhd., and Kumpulan Ikram Sdn. Bhd.

Apart from being an academic figure, Awang Had Salleh was also known as a prolific writer, actively producing creative works in the form of short stories, novels, dramas, poems, as well as numerous scholarly writings on education, language, and culture. The year 1966 marked an important milestone in his literary career with the publication of two major works: the short story collection *Merah Kuning Biru* and the novel *Biru Warna*. His stage play *Buat Menyapu Si Air Mata* was later published in 1975. In addition, he also wrote textbooks for various levels of schooling, reflecting his dedication to educational development.

Awang Had Salleh's engagement in academic writing continued throughout his career, including during his tenure as a Guest Writer at the Institute of the Malay World and Civilization (ATMA), Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) in 1994. In recognition of his outstanding service and contributions, he was awarded the Commander of the Order of Loyalty to the Crown

of Malaysia (P.S.M.) in 1982, which carries the title Tan Sri, along with various other honours such as the ABE Honorary Award from the United Kingdom, and Honorary Degrees from Brock University, Canada, and UKM.

Awang Had Salleh passed away on 1 July 2013 at Putrajaya Hospital due to lung complications at the age of 79. He was survived by his wife, Puan Sri Salmah Abu Bakar, and seven children. His remains were laid to rest at the Taman Selatan Cemetery, Precinct 20, Putrajaya.

The legacy of his intellectual thought and educational ideals continues to remain relevant in strengthening Malaysia's education system and cultivating national culture to this day. His contributions in empowering national education, particularly in the areas of identity formation and cultural values, have made him a highly respected figure among both academics and the wider community.

Therefore, this study focuses on his intellectual contributions, recurring themes, and the relevance of Awang Had Salleh's educational and cultural philosophy within the context of Malaysia's educational and cultural challenges in an increasingly globalized era.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative approach using content analysis and thematic analysis as the main techniques to examine and interpret Awang Had Salleh's thoughts on education and culture. This approach was chosen because it focuses on the interpretation of meaning and in-depth understanding of the analyzed texts, particularly Awang Had Salleh's scholarly and creative works, which contain complex ideas, values, and philosophies. The primary data of this study consist of Awang Had Salleh's written works, including short stories and novels that highlight issues related to education, language, culture, and national identity. Among the works analyzed are *Biru Warna* (1966) and *Kumpulan Cerpen Antara Dua Dunia* (2005). The selection of these works was made through purposive sampling, based on their relevance to the research objectives, specifically, works that explicitly or implicitly reflect his educational and cultural philosophy.

Secondary data were obtained from other reference sources that discuss the background, biography, and evaluations of Awang Had Salleh's contributions in education and culture. These include biographical books, journal articles, academic reports, and relevant archival materials. The data were analysed through thematic analysis, which involves identifying, categorizing,

and interpreting the main themes present in Awang Had Salleh's works. The process included intensive reading of the texts to identify educational and cultural elements, manual coding of text excerpts that reflect consistent values, principles, or perspectives, grouping of themes based on shared ideas, and thematic interpretation guided by the conceptual framework of national education, Malay cultural discourse, and nation-building ideals.

Cultural integration and the dignification of knowledge

Malay literature serves as a crucial medium for expressing the thought systems, values, and worldview of the Malay community. Through both traditional and modern literary texts, the significance of literature in conveying educational and cultural elements becomes evident. From Malay tales and classical rhymed poems to modern novels and dramas, literature functions not only as a reflection of social realities but also as an educational medium that instils moral, religious, and humanitarian values. This paper elaborates on how educational and cultural elements are portrayed in both traditional and modern Malay literary texts, and compares the approaches of these two eras in educating society and preserving national identity.

Traditional Malay literature was greatly influenced by oral culture, Islamic values, and the feudal social system, which emphasized loyalty and decorum. Texts such as *Hikayat Hang Tuah*, *Hikayat Raja Pasai*, and *Syair Siti Zubaidah* exemplify the implicit transmission of educational values. In *Hikayat Hang Tuah*, values of loyalty to the ruler, courage, and perseverance serve as the foundation for moral and political education. The famous phrase "Takkan Melayu hilang di dunia" ("The Malays will never perish from the earth") continues to strengthen the spirit of nationalism to this day. Similarly, *syair* and *gurindam* were used to convey religious teachings and moral advice. *Gurindam Dua Belas* by Raja Ali Haji contains philosophical reflections on life rooted in Islamic values and good manners. Malay proverbs, which are also part of oral literature, are rich in cultural education, emphasizing respect, moderation, and adherence to social norms. Through folktales such as *Si Tanggang*, *Pak Kaduk*, and *Sang Kancil*, the community was taught about the importance of obedience to parents, the dangers of arrogance, and the value of intelligence. Overall, traditional literature functioned as an effective informal education system, transmitting Malay-Islamic moral and cultural values across generations. Modern Malay literature, which developed during the colonial and post-independence periods, became more critical and realistic. Education in this context was no longer limited to moral or religious instruction but extended to social awareness, justice, and human rights. Writers such as A. Samad Said, Usman Awang, and Shahnon Ahmad used

literature as a tool to raise awareness about the need for educational reform, social inequality, and cultural crises.

Modern Malay literature, which developed after the arrival of colonial powers and continued into the post-independence era, became more critical and realistic in nature. Education in this context was no longer confined to matters of morality and religion but extended to encompass social awareness, justice, and human rights. Writers such as A. Samad Said, Usman Awang, and Shahnnon Ahmad used literature as a medium to awaken society to the need for educational reform, social equality, and cultural renewal. The novel *Salina* (1961) by A. Samad Said portrays a marginalized woman who, despite her struggles, maintains her dignity and humanity. The story encourages readers to educate themselves not to judge others hastily based on appearance or social status. Meanwhile, the poem “Guru O Guru” by Usman Awang depicts teachers as the pillars of nation-building and agents of change. Here, education is no longer portrayed as passive, but as active, dynamic, and critical.

From a cultural perspective, modern writers often portray the conflict between traditional values and modern challenges. In *Ranjau Sepanjang Jalan* (1966) by Shahnnon Ahmad, the life of farmers struggling with poverty and traditional beliefs is portrayed realistically, serving as a critique of a social system that neglects the lower class. Female writers such as Fatimah Busu and Zurinah Hassan contribute perspectives from women’s experiences, illustrating how education and culture shape feminine identity within the complex context of Malay-Islamic society. Compared to traditional literature, which was more allegorical and rooted in feudal structures and religious values, modern literature is more open and expressive in voicing social concerns and cultural conflicts. Nevertheless, both forms continue to play vital roles in educating society, preserving culture, and shaping the national identity.

In the hands of Awang Had Salleh, these two central issues, education and culture, were also given significant emphasis. He employed a poetic and reflective writing style, enriched with meaningful dialogues and introspective narratives. This style strengthens the main themes of his novels and allows readers to reflect deeply on the issues he raises, as seen in his works *Biru Warna* (1974) and *Kumpulan Cerpen Antara Dua Dunia* (2005). *Biru Warna* is a novel centered on love, tested and complicated by conflicts of values, generational gaps, and racial prejudice. The story presents both Malay and non-Malay characters, portraying life in the 1960s, a period filled with familial tensions, generational differences, racial stereotypes, and the clash between modern and traditional values. The main characters come from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds and are depicted in depth, revealing their personal struggles in facing

social and family pressures. These characters serve as a mirror of society, reflecting the collective effort to find balance between traditional values and modern demands.

On the other hand, *Kumpulan Cerpen Antara Dua Dunia* (Collection of Short Stories: Between Two Worlds) contains 14 short stories, each depicting the individual's dilemma in confronting social and cultural changes, especially within a rapidly developing post-independence Malaysia. In these stories, Awang Had Salleh frequently highlights the conflict between two worlds: the old world grounded in tradition and inherited values, and the new world shaped by modern and global influences. He portrays characters trapped between these two worlds, torn between preserving tradition and embracing modernity. These characters face numerous challenges that compel them to make choices about their life direction, whether to continue upholding traditional values or to adapt to the evolving modern world. The stories in *Antara Dua Dunia* also contain social critiques that address various issues faced by Malaysian society, particularly those related to racial tensions, the clash between modern and traditional values, and the search for national identity.

Through his literary works, Awang Had Salleh invites readers to reflect on how Malaysia's multicultural society, composed of people of different races and cultures, can adapt to the changes of the modern era while preserving their original identity and cultural roots.

Value-Based Education and Identity Formation

Education is the most fundamental foundation in building a civilization that is strong and dignified. However, an education system that focuses solely on intellectual achievement without grounding itself in solid moral values and identity will produce a fragile society, even if it appears excellent on the surface. Therefore, value-based education rooted in identity must not only be systematically incorporated into the curriculum and co-curriculum, but also reflected in the relationship between teachers and students, as exemplified throughout history by great figures of knowledge. Through this relationship, we can see how manners, wisdom, and the appreciation of values become the essence of true education.

In Islamic tradition, the relationship between Imam al-Shafi'i and his student Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal serves as a noble example of how education based on values and identity shapes great scholars. Imam Ahmad was a jurist (faqih), a scholar of hadith (muhaddith), and the founder of the Hanbali School of Thought. His full name was Ahmad bin Muhammad bin Hanbal bin Hilal bin Asad bin Idris bin Abdullah bin Hayyain bin Abdullah bin Anas bin Auf bin Qasit bin Syaiban. The etiquette between teacher and student was first demonstrated by

Imam al-Shafi‘i himself towards his own teacher. Imam al-Shafi‘i once said, “I would turn the pages of a book in front of my teacher very slowly out of respect and reverence for him.”

Imam Ahmad also deeply respected his teacher to the point that it was said he never took notes in front of Imam al-Shafi‘i out of utmost respect. He even described his teacher by saying, “Imam al-Shafi‘i is like the sun to the world and health to the body.” This relationship demonstrates that respect for teachers and dedication to learning form the essential foundation in shaping the true scholar’s character. Values such as humility, patience, and love for knowledge have proven to be a strong basis in developing a student’s personality.

Similarly, in Greek philosophy, the relationships between Plato and his teacher Socrates, and between Aristotle and his teacher Plato, illustrate the continuity of intellectual and moral values passed down from one generation to the next. Aristotle not only learned logic and metaphysics from Plato but also refined and expanded those ideas critically and creatively. This shows that a student’s identity is not merely about imitation, but about forming one’s own individual intellectual character based on inherited wisdom.

Hence, effective education should provide students with the space to think independently, critique respectfully, and develop their own stance without dismantling the moral and intellectual values inherited from tradition.

In the context of modern Malay literature, the intellectual relationship between Mawar Safei, a renowned female literary scholar, and National Laureate Muhammad Haji Salleh also exemplifies the concept of value-based education. Mawar, as the intellectual protégé of Muhammad Haji Salleh, inherited not only the skills of literary criticism and analysis but also a profound sense of academic ethics, cultural appreciation, and commitment to championing the Malay language and national literature. This relationship demonstrates that education grounded in values and identity is not static; rather, it is a living heritage that continues to evolve through dialogue, mentorship, and mutual respect between teacher and student.

The three examples from Islamic scholarship, Western philosophy, and Malay literary tradition collectively affirm that true education, which nurtures identity, is not merely about the transmission of knowledge, but also about instilling manners (*adab*), cultivating intellectual discernment, and fostering awareness of moral and social responsibility. Such an education produces individuals who are not only intellectually capable but also morally upright, respectful of tradition, and ready to inherit and sustain the civilization of their people.

In today’s increasingly complex and challenging world, an education system founded upon values and identity must be strengthened through the active participation of all stakeholders: teachers, students, parents, and society at large. The teacher-student relationship

should no longer be reduced to the mere transfer of information, but should return to the noble tradition of knowledge, as exemplified by great thinkers throughout history. Only by returning to these foundational principles can a nation produce citizens who are not only knowledgeable but also cultured, ethical, and dignified.

One of the key findings of this study highlights Awang Had Salleh's strong advocacy for an education system that does more than deliver technical knowledge or vocational skills it must also shape human character and identity. In many of his lectures and writings, Awang Had Salleh emphasized the importance of education that cultivates moral integrity, responsibility, mutual respect, and patriotism. For instance, in his public lecture at ATMA (1994), he stated: "Education must shape cultured individuals, not merely those who can read and count. Values and virtue are the pillars of a nation's development".

This statement encapsulates his conviction that educational development must be holistic and rooted in the nation's own value system. It aligns seamlessly with the National Philosophy of Education (Falsafah Pendidikan Kebangsaan), which envisions the balanced development of individuals intellectually, spiritually, emotionally, and physically as the foundation for producing well-rounded and responsible citizens.

In the context of *Antara Dua Dunia (Between Two Worlds)*, the excerpt below reveals the inner turmoil of a man named Ramli, who finds himself trapped at the crossroads of two worlds: the old world, steeped in traditional village upbringing and religious teachings, and the new world, which demands adaptation to modern values and different ways of thinking. Ramli is portrayed as a wanderer of the soul, a traveler not only in space but also within himself, struggling with an inner conflict between the past and the present.

His old world is one of purity, where he was nurtured with discipline, manners, and religious guidance. However, when he steps beyond that realm, he is no longer regarded as part of it. In the new world, perhaps the urban world, the world of modern knowledge, or a society guided by different values, he remains an outsider. This sense of alienation reflects a conflict of identity that is not merely external but also profoundly spiritual and psychological in nature.

The subtlety of the narrative touches upon Ramli's deep sense of guilt, as though unseen sins have cloaked his body and soul. All his actions are not judged according to the norms of the new world he inhabits, but rather by the traditional moral standards that remain deeply rooted within him. This portrays an existential conflict of values, in which an individual cannot fully detach himself from the moral heritage that shapes his identity, even in a world that demands change:

But this man, Ramli, since childhood had received village upbringing, and later religious education. He often felt as though he lived between two worlds. In his old world, his friends no longer regarded him as part of their world of religion and order. In his new world, he was still seen as a traveler from a foreign world, his old world. And what made all this confusion worse was the fact that he carried a deep sense of guilt, a feeling of sinfulness, for everything he did. Every act he committed was judged as vile, based on the standards of his old world. (Salleh, 2005, p. 6)

In a broader sense, this passage voices the dilemma of the modern individual who strives to find his place in a post-traditional world without betraying the cultural and religious roots that nurtured him. It implies that such inner turmoil is not merely a matter of choice, but a spiritual struggle, one that often demands personal sacrifice and can sometimes lead to the fragmentation of identity. The character of Ramli represents the individual wounded by the passage of time, crushed between conflicting value systems, and searching for a place to stand without losing himself. This passage does not merely tell the story of one person, but also echoes the collective inner lament of a society in transition, torn between a noble ancestral heritage and the disruptive forces of modernity that threaten to uproot its very identity.

The Malay Language as a Medium of Knowledge and Unity

Language is the soul of a nation. Throughout the history of the Malay Peninsula, the Malay language has not merely been a tool of communication but also the primary vehicle of cultural unity, knowledge transmission, and the formation of national identity. As the national language enshrined in the Federal Constitution, Malay plays a crucial role not only as a medium of knowledge in education but also as the backbone of unity among Malaysia's multi-ethnic population. Therefore, efforts to elevate the status of this language must remain a national priority, not just symbolically but through practical and comprehensive implementation.

In the realm of scholarship, the Malay language has long served as a language of knowledge since the era of the Malacca Sultanate, through classical works such as Hikayat Hang Tuah, Tuhfat al-Nafis, and numerous religious manuscripts that deepened the people's understanding of Islam. This intellectual tradition continues into the modern era through the use of Malay in the national education system, especially in primary, secondary, and tertiary institutions. However, the challenges of globalization and the dominance of English in science and technology should not be used as an excuse to neglect the role of Malay as a language of

knowledge. Countries such as Japan, Korea, and Germany have proven that their native languages can remain the primary medium of scholarship without rejecting foreign languages.

Moreover, the Malay language possesses adaptive capacity and inclusiveness, allowing it to evolve. Numerous new terminologies have been coined to meet the demands of fields such as science, technology, medicine, and law, largely through the efforts of institutions like Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (DBP). Its use in seminars, academic journals, and educational institutions continues to strengthen its position as a dynamic language of knowledge. However, this effort must be pursued consistently, with support from government policies, scholars, educators, and the general public.

In terms of national unity, the Malay language plays an essential role as a linguistic bridge among Malaysia's diverse communities. In a multicultural society like Malaysia, it serves as a common meeting point, connecting people of different cultural and ethnic backgrounds. In schools, workplaces, and official matters, Malay acts as the intermediary language that enables harmonious interaction and mutual understanding. It is a vehicle of communication that nurtures patriotism, transcends differences, and fosters a sense of shared belonging to the nation.

Yet, the reality today shows that unity through language still faces challenges. There remains a sense of inferiority toward the Malay language, particularly among segments of the urban population who gravitate toward foreign languages for reasons of prestige or progress. Even more concerning is the emergence of younger generations, including native speakers, who lack proficiency in Malay. If this phenomenon continues unchecked, we risk not only losing the linguistic essence of our identity but also hindering the goal of national unity.

Therefore, upholding the Malay language as a medium of knowledge and unity is not solely the responsibility of linguists or educators, but a collective duty of all Malaysians. We must embrace Malay not because it belongs to one ethnic group, but because it is a shared heritage, the foundation of the nation's existence. Promoting its use in official affairs, encouraging writing and research in the language, and instilling a love for the language from early education are vital steps toward building a strong and dignified civilization.

This belief was also held by Awang Had Salleh, who asserted that the Malay language possesses the power to serve as an instrument of civilization and national unity. In many of his essays and articles, including "Education and the Role of Language in Nation Building" (1980), he emphasized that Malay should not only be the language of instruction in education but also an esteemed language of knowledge. He argued: "A nation that does not build its knowledge in its own language is a nation that is not yet fully independent."

This statement reflects Awang Had Salleh's conviction that education development must be holistic and rooted in the nation's own value system. His dedication to strengthening the Malay language in higher education curricula and national policy frameworks underscores his lifelong commitment to this cause.

In a country founded upon the principle of diversity, the Malay language serves as the lifeblood of unity, flowing through the veins of Malaysians of all races and backgrounds. Amid the bustle of markets, in classrooms, offices, and multi-ethnic homes, one can hear Chinese and Indian voices speaking Malay fluently, sometimes with their own accents, yet always with sincerity and meaning. This phenomenon is not merely about communication; it symbolizes acceptance, integration, and love for the homeland we share.

The Malay language does not discriminate against who may speak it. It is the people's language, the language that builds friendships among neighbors, that unites children from diverse backgrounds on the same school benches. When Chinese and Indian Malaysians speak in Malay, it reflects respect for the nation's history and roots, as well as a willingness to coexist in mutual understanding and solidarity.

Furthermore, the use of Malay by non-Malay communities signifies the maturity of the Malaysian nation, a society that no longer sees language as an ethnic boundary but as a national bridge. Here lies the true echo of the first principle of the Rukun Negara: Belief in God, for in sincere speech are reflected the values of mutual respect and humanity.

However, this phenomenon must be nurtured intentionally, not left to develop on its own. The education system, media, national language policies, and societal attitudes must all encourage and elevate the use of the Malay language without suppressing other mother tongues. In essence, we are not asking anyone to abandon their cultural identity, but to embrace a shared language as a symbol of national unity.

Just as a student honors their teacher, so too should citizens revere their national language with respect, humility, and a spirit of learning that celebrates heritage. Just as Plato taught Aristotle in Greek and Imam al-Shafi'i imparted wisdom in Arabic, the Malay language must likewise serve as the language of knowledge, intellect, and progress for all Malaysians, regardless of ethnicity.

When Chinese and Indian Malaysians speak Malay, it shines as a beacon of hope for true national unity. It is no longer merely a language of communication, but a language of emotion, thought, and shared aspiration. We must nurture this spirit with love, so that the Malay language truly becomes the tongue of a united Malaysian nation, rooted deeply in the same soil. In the context of *Antara Dua Dunia*, see page 85:

A feeling of wanting to serve him always arose within me. Thus, I felt that I was also serving his people, the Malay people. But this did not mean that I was betraying my own people, for my devotion to the Malay people, I hoped, would lessen the tension between the two races. I hoped that a lasting mutual understanding would arise between them both. (Salleh, 2005, p. 85)

The above passage reveals the inner voice of a man divided between two worlds, two races, yet who never loses sight of his humanity. These words are not merely personal reflections, but a spiritual monologue born of the sincerity of a soul that perceives both his own people and the Malay people as two sides of the same coin, deserving of mutual respect and understanding.

The desire to serve someone does not signify submission without principle, but rather stems from admiration and profound respect for the person's character and ideals. In this context, "he" represents the Malay people, a community that has touched the narrator's heart so deeply that it inspires a wish to contribute, to unite, and to uphold the shared values of humanity. Yet, most beautifully, this devotion does not imply betrayal of one's own race; instead, it expresses a yearning to reconcile two inherited legacies often separated by unspoken conflict.

Here, we see a pure intention to be a bridge between two races, a noble yet challenging mission, hindered by prejudice, history, and emotional barriers. The narrator hopes that his devotion will catalyze lasting understanding and unity, one free from historical grudges and narrow sentiments.

This passage also represents a voice of conscience imbued with deep humanistic values, elevating the dignity of one nation not by demeaning another, but by striving to build mutual understanding and compassion. It is the voice of one who recognizes that difference is not the enemy, and devotion is not betrayal, for in sincere devotion to the values, culture, and nobility of another lies the hope for a world that is more peaceful and understanding.

Ultimately, the Malay language stands as a symbol of national sovereignty and the heartbeat of patriotism. It is not merely a medium of expression but also a bond of emotion and unity among the people. In Malaysia's pursuit of a progressive and balanced *Madani* society, the Malay language must continue to be championed as the language of knowledge and the foundation of unity, ensuring that this heritage remains alive within every citizen's heart. As the

great language scholar Za'ba once reminded, "A great nation honors its language." Thus, honoring the Malay language is honoring our nation itself.

Culture as the Foundation of National Civilization

The third consistent finding across nearly all of Awang Had Salleh's works is his deep appreciation of culture as the foundation of character and civilization. For him, culture does not merely refer to art forms or traditional heritage, but also encompasses the values, social systems, customs, and collective mindset of a people. In his play *Buat Menyapu Si Air Mata* (1975), for instance, Awang Had Salleh weaves cultural elements and local values into the core of his characters' inner conflicts. This reflects his use of creative writing as a medium to convey cultural ideas rich with moral and philosophical lessons. In one interview, he once remarked: "A nation with a refined culture is a nation of noble character and intellect. Without culture, development may enlarge the body but shrink the soul".

This view remains highly relevant in today's era of globalization, where local cultures are increasingly marginalized by external influences. Thus, Awang Had Salleh's philosophy serves as a reminder that education must be a tool for the preservation and advancement of culture, not its erosion. A great civilization begins with a rooted culture. If Malaysia seeks to stand proudly on the global stage, it must first rediscover the wisdom within its own cultural heritage, nurture it in daily life, and uphold it as the foundation of progress. A civilization that does not know its own culture is like a person who has lost their memory alive, but directionless. Hence, to preserve our culture is to preserve our dignity, strength, and the future of our nation.

Culture is the lifeblood of a nation. It is not limited to tangible heritage such as clothing, cuisine, or dance, but also includes values, manners, language, beliefs, and ways of life that are inherited and refined from generation to generation. In other words, culture is the reflection of a nation's identity and soul, and thus serves as the core of a noble and resilient civilization.

A great civilization does not emerge merely from political will, but from deep cultural roots. The Romans and Greeks, for example, bequeathed to the world not only governance systems and architecture but also philosophy, literature, and ethics. Similarly, Islamic civilization flourished because it was grounded in the culture of knowledge, respect for teachers, justice, and unity. In this sense, culture is the heartbeat of collective existence, giving a nation strength and direction in facing the future with confidence.

Malaysia, as a multicultural nation, possesses a rich tapestry of cultural heritage Malay, Chinese, Indian, Orang Asli, and various ethnic groups in Sabah and Sarawak. When cultivated

in the spirit of harmony, these diverse traditions can give rise to a unique and balanced Malaysian civilization. Malay culture, as the central pillar, with the Malay language as the medium of unity and adab (proper conduct) as its moral compass, has long played a crucial role in binding the multiracial society together. In addition, values such as cooperation (gotong-royong), courtesy, and tolerance form the cultural foundation for building a civilized, compassionate, and respectful society. See *Biru Warna*, page 206:

Swee Lan took out her food supply, as did Ramli and Ali. ‘What did you bring, Swee Lan?’ Ali asked. ‘Biscuits and coffee.’ ‘Only that?’ Ali asked again. ‘Bananas.’ ‘We brought nasi lemak and coffee.’ ‘If I brought rice, surely you two wouldn’t eat it.’ (Salleh, 1987, p. 206)

This excerpt, depicting an interaction between three characters, Swee Lan, Ramli, and Ali as they share their food, illustrates a social atmosphere highly relevant to Malaysia’s multiracial society. When each takes out their food, Ali questions what Swee Lan has brought. Swee Lan calmly replies that she brought biscuits, coffee, and bananas. Yet, her final line, “If I brought rice, surely you two wouldn’t eat it,” reveals the cultural and religious differences between them.

It is shown that Swee Lan, a Chinese non-Muslim, is highly considerate and sensitive to the religious beliefs of her Muslim friends. She understands that the food she brings might not be halal or appropriate for Ramli and Ali, and thus chooses to bring neutral items, biscuits and bananas that can be shared by everyone regardless of religion. This act demonstrates an admirable example of respect for religious differences, which is essential to maintaining interracial and interfaith harmony in Malaysia.

Swee Lan’s attitude reflects tolerance and mutual understanding, core values among Malaysians. As a non-Muslim, she does not impose her food on her Muslim friends; instead, she adapts herself to avoid offending their sensitivities. This signifies respect for Islamic cultural and religious practices, particularly dietary laws. Such mutual respect should be nurtured among all citizens, regardless of religion, as a foundation for national unity.

In daily life, this spirit of respect can be expressed in many ways by providing halal food during gatherings with Muslim friends, avoiding sensitive religious topics, and respecting prayer times and religious observances. These behaviors not only reflect good manners but also serve as the basis of stability and harmony in a multiracial country like Malaysia.

However, globalization and modernization often erode cultural values, replacing gentle speech with harsh language, traditional customs with foreign habits, and local culture with

imported pop culture. If local culture is not protected, the nation will lose its roots, direction, and identity. History has shown that people detached from their culture are like trees without roots, neither tall nor shady, eventually falling under the winds of change.

Therefore, strengthening cultural values is not a trivial task but a collective responsibility of all citizens. Educational institutions, mass media, and government policies must collaborate to instill love for national culture from a young age. Programs promoting art, language, literature, and heritage must be empowered so that culture does not merely survive in museums or performances, but thrives within the hearts of the younger generation as guidance for life.

It can thus be concluded that these three core themes, value-based education and identity, the Malay language as a medium of knowledge and unity, and culture as the foundation of civilization, complement one another, forming the comprehensive framework of Awang Had Salleh's philosophy on education and culture. He viewed education not as a mechanical or economic system, but as a profound cultural process, one that shapes values, identity, and the direction of society. Within the context of Malaysia's national education policy, his ideas align with the aspirations of the National Education Policy and the Malaysia Education Blueprint, particularly in developing holistic human capital. His contributions as an intellectual architect in both policy formulation and academic writing illustrate the connection between theory and educational practice in Malaysia. Even in today's digital and globalized era, this study reaffirms that Awang Had Salleh's thoughts remain deeply relevant. The values he championed, strong identity, mastery of the mother tongue, and appreciation of local culture, stand as vital pillars for building a resilient nation capable of navigating the tides of change.

CONCLUSION

The intellectual contributions of Awang Had Salleh in the fields of education and culture in Malaysia are profound and undeniable. His thoughts, which intertwine values, language, and culture within the realm of education, have made a significant impact on the development of national educational philosophy. This study found that the key themes emphasized in his works, namely value-based education, the importance of the Malay language, and the role of culture in shaping identity, remain highly relevant and essential to be applied within the context of modern Malaysian education. Therefore, efforts to elevate and re-examine his writings and ideas are crucial to strengthening the direction of national education and ensuring the sustainability of the nation's cultural heritage.

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