



## The Dynamic Nature of the Nigeria-Malaysia Socio-Cultural Relation

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### Publication Process

### Date

Accepted

October 9th, 2021

Published

October 31st, 2021

### ABSTRACT

*Ever since the relations between Nigeria and Malaysia which has been growing from one level to the other. Hence, one can say the relationship between the two nations can be traced as far back of 1965 that was initiated by these two great pioneers and visionary leaders –Tafawa Balewa of Nigeria and Tunku Abdulrahman of Malaysia. Nevertheless, the initial relationship was based on trade relations that involve the volumes of trade that flows between the two countries. Recent studies have diverted it's attention from the economic aspects but looking at the socio-cultural aspect due to the Global trends seeing the world as a global village where everyone connect to make the society a better place. However, there are limited studies on the socio-cultural ties between Nigeria and the South East Asian region in general and Nigeria-Malaysia in particular in order to push for the bilateral relations between the countries. The study tends to investigate the trending changes of the Nigeria Malaysia socio-cultural relations on the concerned sectors (Education, Sports & Religion) have move from stage to the other. The methodology used is secondary source of data collection where several literatures that pertains to the subject matter were used to build the work. The work is divided into two (2) broad categories that entail the historical account of Nigeria-Malaysia relations on how the journey began and the socio-cultural ties between Nigeria and Malaysia. The study concludes on the facts that the socio-cultural ties have been a binding factor between Nigeria and Malaysia which has really brought the nation to a greater height. Nevertheless, there is always room for improvement on the following areas: on education-The Nigeria students need to utilize the Malaysia educational sector in a positive way to the fullest on sports, Malaysia can still take advantage of the Nigerians raw talent to build her sports industry to the fullest, and while on the area of religion both nations can still learn from each other based on the spirit of religion tolerance as a uniting factor among people of various faiths.*

**Keywords:** *Dynamic Nature; Nigeria-Malaysia, Socio-cultural relations*

## 1. Introduction

The dynamism in societal transformation has made the world a global village that is close to our doorsteps which cut across all facets of human endeavour. Nevertheless, change is inevitable where countries of the world have experienced such changes especially in the following areas: The societal norms and values, economic revolution, the active role of the media network, the population growth, and the educational systems. The tradition of the people, their value system, and their way of life play a huge role in the stability of the state. While the culture of a particular group or individuals reflects on their education, aesthetic beauty, language (as a medium of communication), political affiliation, the legal system, and many more. To this end, the social life of the people on the other hand, concerns the family, the peer group, one's position in the society, the availability of time and resources, and so on. The whole idea of Bilateralism in the global arena encompasses the political, economic, and social-cultural collaborations between two nation-states that are based on mutual interest. Invariably, the recognition of the sovereignty and autonomy of a particular state guarantees the development of her diplomatic or bilateral relationships with other states.

The Bilateral relations between Nigeria and Malaysia have been warm and cordial. The establishment of a resident mission in Lagos then was the first Malaysian mission in the sub-Saharan region before it was relocated to Abuja in 2006. Since then, both countries have been cooperating closely in both bilateral and multilateral levels. However, Nigeria and Malaysia are two nations, which are distinct in their ideology & philosophy in terms of ethnicity, race, traditions, values, and belief system. Hence, we can say that both countries are seen as strategic partners, due to the following characteristics applicable to both nations, such as multi-ethnic society, diverse cultural group, multi-religious society, and similar atmospheric condition, etc. Although, limited studies have been done on the area of the socio-cultural ties between Nigeria and the Asian region in general and Malaysia in particular, as both countries are quite different in terms of culture, the value system of government, and cultural heritage. Notably, seeing the world as a global hub that brings people from various works of life, this scenario is quite applicable in the following areas: the family or the community and the working environment. This can simply be achieved through proper communication and consistent social networking.

Thus, Nigeria and Malaysia can be said to have a cordial relation, in the economic aspects back then in the 1970s when Nigeria was experiencing an oil boom. This led to the influx of Malaysia-Chinese personnel to visit Nigeria as a result of trade and business connections to a large extent, Malaysia has a growing economy in the South East Asian region. Where she sees herself as a role model, which the African continent must follow, to attain the path of development and transformation. The African leaders must take cognizance of the fact, that Malaysia has made sway not only in commodity exportation but also in oil exportation on a high scale. On a lighter note, Malaysia has a close-knit relationship with African policymakers as compared to the Chinese Government. Also, the nation has a moderate population size, in the Asian continent and has diversified investment. In addition, the state has a stable political structure, and share similar faith to most African countries, that are predominantly Muslims. Furthermore, Malaysia has been an attractive zone to so many African students as a result of the following: Its relaxed visa policy especially to Muslim member states, multi-ethnic, and multicultural nature of the society, low school fees rate, and high standard of education. To this end, as far back as 2010 PETRONAS, the Malaysian national oil corporation has been at the forefront in the promotion of its educational sector. On this note, we still experience the influx of African students to Malaysia to be enrolled in various institutions of learning in the country.

The objective of the study is to examine the Socio-Cultural ties between Nigeria and Malaysia and the changes that have taken place over time. The paper is divided into two (2) broad sections, to give a comprehensive explanation of the paper. The first part gives the historical analysis of Nigeria Malaysia relations; while the next section takes a close look at the Nigeria and Malaysia socio-cultural ties that have been a great avenue that binds both nations together.

## 2. The Historical Account of Nigeria – Malaysia Relations

The hallmark of Nigeria's foreign relations policy was set up after the British colonial Administration. It is on this note that the First Prime Minister of Nigeria-Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, clearly stated that Nigeria will maintain friendly ties with all nations of the world. In addition, the nation will maintain her stand, not ally with any power bloc since she is a leading figure of the Non-aligned movement. Notwithstanding, the nation has agreed to participate fully to be part of the United Nations and the Commonwealth of nations. In as much, as Nigeria was on the frontier, Malaysia was not left out in this course together to form a building block within the developing nations. The whole idea of bilateral relations is the focal point in international relations, which forms the ties in the aspects

of political, economic, and socio-cultural collaborations. This forms the basis of Nigeria-Malaysia relations during her early days, especially when the agreement started back in 1965 between Tafawa Balewa and Tunku Abdulrahman. Hence, such relations have expanded between both nations in terms of diplomatic relations, economic and trade ties, security agreements, and several other pacts which have extended to different nations of the globe.

The early days of the bilateral ties between Nigeria and Malaysia are greatly reckoned to the historical development of both nations. The relationship between the two countries, cut across the areas of diplomacy, economy, trade, culture, and sports, which have shaped their relations to date. It is very crucial to note, the international interactions and exchanges between different parts of the world are not new. Since the beginning of history, inter-regional movements, trade, and migrations have contributed to these contacts and interactions. Therefore, globalization, which is a decisive factor of the modern age, is as old as history itself and reflects a part of the human drive to seek out new horizons and opportunities. However, Nigeria and Malaysia appear to have enjoyed cordial relations and both share several things in common, this is because we share common memberships in international organizations: the United Nations, Non-Aligned Movement, Organization of Islamic Cooperation, the D8, and of course, the commonwealth. In all these fora, we have shared and adopted many similar positions and are working closely. Nigeria is also Malaysia's natural partner due to our common backgrounds-the diversity, multi-cultural, multi-ethnic social make-up, and more importantly, the similar weather condition. Thus, both countries have been active in the above-mentioned organization as they push for better relations at a glance.

### **3. Nigeria-Malaysia Socio-Cultural Ties**

In modern society, states are bound to relate bilaterally or multilaterally to each other to ensure development. Socially, the Nigeria – Malaysia relations in the area of religion, sports, and education has helped tremendously in improving their social relations as discussed extensively in the paper as follows:

Firstly, in the area of religion, Nigeria and Malaysia have a similar religious setting in terms of their belief system. The northern part of Nigeria is predominantly Muslim while the southern parts have more Christians than Muslims. Malaysia on the other hand is known as a multi-racial society with several religions, Islam is seen as the official religion enshrined in the Malaysia Federal constitution. Nigeria with its diverse nature has about 250 to 300 ethnic groups that project the diversity of the nation due to its cultural heritage. In as much as Islam is seen as the official religion in Malaysia but in reality, no religion tends to hold sway because due to the diverse nature of the society where 50 percent of the population is Malays, 24 percent Chinese, 8 percent Indians, 7percent are non-Malays with other groups. To some extent, there is religious freedom in Malaysia. Likewise, Nigeria people are allowed to practice their religion without fear or favour. Nigeria and Malaysia being Islamic nations, have always cooperated as members of the organization of Islamic cooperation. This body comprises 57 member states with the sole aim to strengthen the solidarity, and cooperation of the universal community of Muslims all over the globe, through political, economic, and social initiatives. Notwithstanding, the two nations is guided on the principle of the Adhari which is viewed as the Islamic model of modernity, to inspire members of a similar faith to create an avenue for progress and development, equity on the Islamic values, that is devoid of materialism but rather on human capital development.

Secondly, in the areas of Sports development, Sports has always been a unifying factor that binds people and nations together. Nigeria and Malaysia have featured in most sporting events be it locally, intercontinental, or at the international level. Eventually, sports have always been a tool that draws countries together regardless of race, religion, ethnic cleavages, philosophy, and so on. For instance, The Federation of International Football Association (FIFA) admitted Nigeria on 6th September 1960. Ever since then, Nigeria has featured in most World cups appearances totaling up to 6 times and other competitions staged by the football governing body. Malaysia on the other hand joined FIFA in 1953. Although, the South-East nation has not qualified for the FIFA World cup, in 1997 Malaysia hosted the FIFA under-20 youth championship which was won by Argentina. The relationship in terms of grass root football can always be put into consideration where some Nigerian players play in Malaysia's top and social league clubs as a way of transferring knowledge and skills amongst each other.

**Table 1.1 List of Former and Present Nigeria Footballers in Malaysia League**

S/N	Name	Position	League(s)	Club (s)	Year joined
1.	Peter Niekietien	Midfielder	Super League	Kedah and Terengannu FA	1992-1995
2.	Late Stephen Keshi	Defender	Third Division	Perlis FA	1997- 1998
3	Nduka Ugbade	Defender	Super League	Perak FC	1999-2002
4.	Binawari Williams Ajuwa	Midfielder	Super League	Pahang FC	2005-2006
5.	Obinna Nwaneri	Central defender	Third division and Super league	Kelantan,ATM and Perlic FC	2012-2016
6.	Dickson Nwakaeme	Forward	Super League	Kelantan and Pahang FC	2013-2015
7.	Obi Ikechukwu Charles	Striker	Premier League	UITM and Sime darby FC	2014-2016
8.	Abdulafees Abdulsalam	Forward	Super League and Third Division	Perak and ATM FA	2014-2016
9.	Austin Amutu	Defender	Super League	Kelantan and Pahang FC.	2015-Till date
10.	Onorionde Kughegbe	Attacker	Premier League	PDRM and UITM	2015-Till date.
11.	Ugo Ukah	Defender	Premier League	Selangor and Pulau Pinang FC.	2016- Till date.
12.	Akanni Wasiu	Attacker	Premier and Super League	UITM and Terengganu FC	2017-Till date.
13	Ifedayo Olusegun	Attacker	Premier and Super League	Felda and Melaka United	2017- Till date.
14.	Ijezie Chukwubunna	Attacker	Premier League	MIFA	2017- Till date.
15	Waheed Oseni	Midfielder	Premier League	UKM	2018 –Till date.

**Source: *Players abroad - Nigeria - Players – Soccerway*. Available at [https://us.soccerway.com/players/players\\_abroad/Nigeria](https://us.soccerway.com/players/players_abroad/Nigeria)**

As illustrated in the table above, it shows the names, positions, types of leagues, years, and club sides of various Nigerian players who played and still playing in Malaysia's top Leagues. Football is seen as a sporting activity that creates ties between people of various nations. The Super League in Malaysia is known as the highest league followed by the premier league. Peter Niekietien –The great Midfielder and Late Stephen Keshi are the earliest Nigerian players in Malaysia various leagues while the likes of Ugo Ukah, Akanni Wasiu, Ifedayo Olusegun, Ijezie Chukwubunna, and Waheed Oseni are recent Nigeria players in Malaysia various League.

Finally, on the aspect of Education, which is the bedrock of any nation`s development. Nigeria and Malaysia have a lot in common as far as the educational institution is concerned, due to a large number of Nigerian students in Malaysia exploring its educational sector. As clearly pointed out by the former Ambassador of Malaysia to Nigeria- Datuk Lim Juay Jin, clearly noted that about 13,000 Nigeria students are currently studying in various institutions in Malaysia. The Malaysia Education system is seen as very attractive because the cost is quite affordable and of a high standard. Malaysia has been an Anglophone nation which makes it very easy for Nigerians to adapt in terms of its Lingua Franca which is the English Language. Nigeria Students studying here are most likely to promote bilateral relations with the host country. Nigerians have utilized this opportunity, to enroll in various levels like foundation study, diploma, master or Doctorate programs in various Malaysian schools. Through this avenue, the students can add positive value to themselves and become useful to the society either at home or abroad.

**Table 1.2 The Number of foreign students in Malaysia Public Universities as at 2013**

<i>S/N</i>	<i>Country of origin</i>	<i>Number of students</i>
1.	Iran	5,009
2.	Indonesia	3,942
3.	China	2,382
4.	Iraq	1,854
5.	Yemen	1,726
6.	Nigeria	1,692
7.	Libya	1,226
8.	Bangladesh	1,060
9	Pakistan	867
10	Thailand	799

**Table 1.3 The Number of foreign students in Malaysia Private Universities as at 2013.**

<i>S/N</i>	<i>Country of origin</i>	<i>Number of students</i>
1	China	4,398
2	Nigeria	3,134
3	Indonesia	4,059
4	Iran	3,593
5	Pakistan	2,084
6	Yemen	2,200
7	Bangladesh	1,382
8	Sudan	1,750
9	Sri Lanka	1,271
10	Botswana	1,143

Source: Foreign Students` Countries of Origin: Available: <http://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/nation/2015/02/23/mp-picks-apart-idris-jusohs-world-class-varsity-claim/>

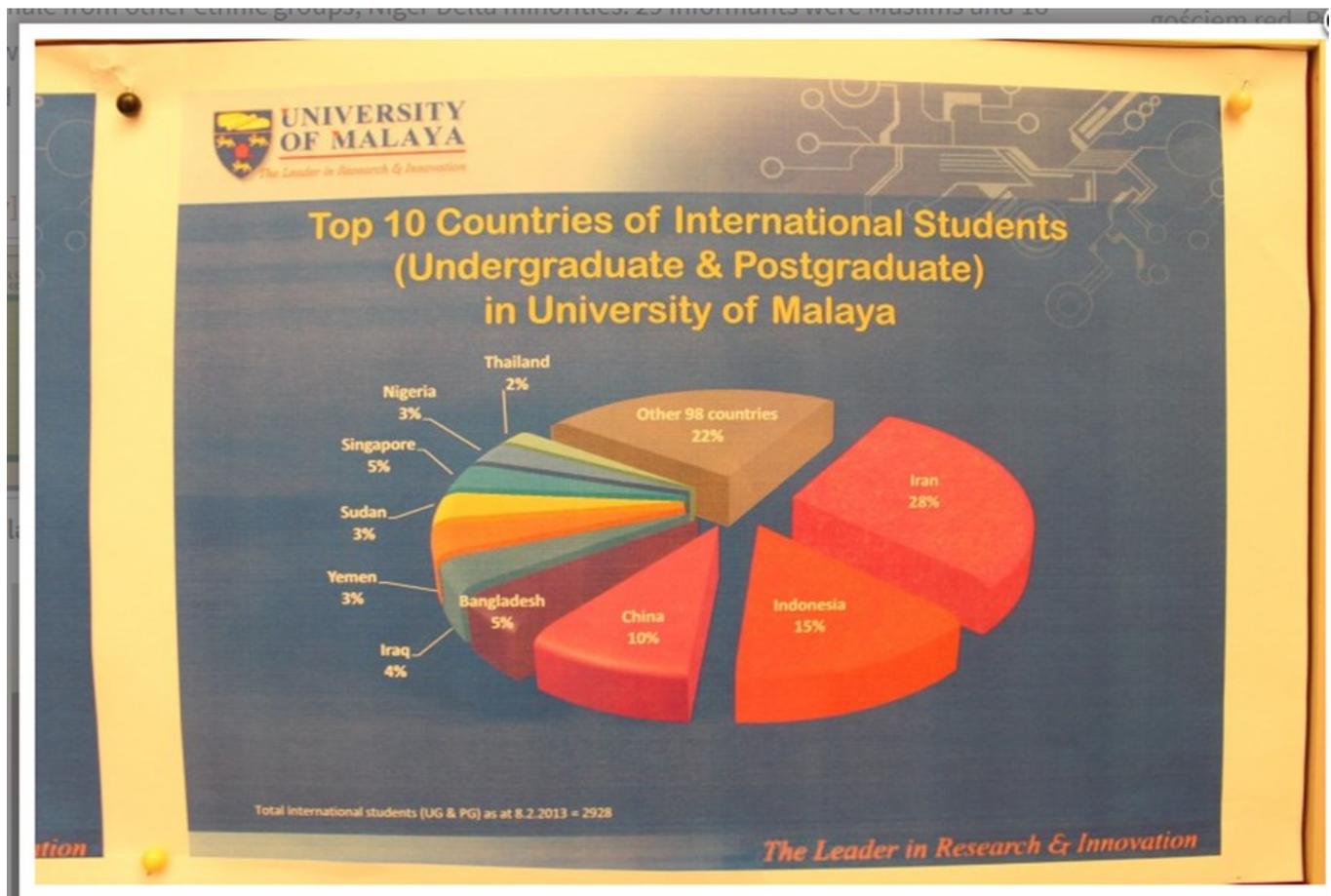
As shown in Tables 1.2 and 1.3 above, this gives us the details of foreign students in public and private Universities in Malaysia. For public Universities, at the top three, we have Iran (5,009), Indonesia (3,942), China (2,382) and Nigeria showed its presence at the sixth position with (1,692) students for the Private University Nigeria maintained the second position with (3,134) students which shows high numbers of Nigeria students' presence in Malaysia.

**Table 1.4 The Top 10 Countries of International Students (Undergraduates & Post graduates) in the University of Malaya**

<i>S/N</i>	<i>Countries</i>	<i>International Students</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
1.	Iran	827	28%
2.	Indonesia	430	15%
3.	China	298	10%
4.	Bangladesh	168	5%
5.	Singapore	133	5%
6.	Iraq	118	4%
7.	Yeman	90	3%
8.	Sudan	87	3%
9.	Nigeria	80	3%
10.	Thailand	59	2%
11.	Other 98 Countries	638	22%
	Total	2928	100%

Source: Nigeria Students in Malaysia. Available at: <https://goo.gl/images/B5sPbR>

Diagram 1 The Percentage (%) of International Students in University of Malaya.



Source: Nigeria Students in Malaysia. Available at: <https://goo.gl/images/B5sPbR>

Table 1.4 and diagram 1 show the Top 10 International students from their various countries undergoing Bachelor's degrees and Higher degree programs in the prestigious University of Malaya. Topping the chart is Iran with 827 students at 28 percent, followed by Indonesia with 430 students at 15 percent, China is at the third (3rd) position with 298 students at 10 percent while Nigeria is spotted at the Ninth (9th) position with 80 students at 3 percent which shows the presence of Nigerian students as a way to foster the relations between both nations.

#### 4. Conclusion

The whole idea of Nigeria-Malaysia bilateral relations began in 1965, by the two great leaders- Tafawa Balewa from Nigeria and Tunku Abdulrahman of Malaysia. Ever since then their relations have experienced one change or the other since change is inevitable. Hence, there is always room for improvement in both nations' relations especially in the following areas: The educational sector, Sporting activities, and Arts & Culture. It is a known fact that most Nigerian students come to study in Malaysia as a result of the low cost of tuition fees, diversity in culture and religion, English as a medium of instruction. To some extent, more can still be done, to help foreign students who come to study to be provided with part-time jobs since not all the students are on government sponsorship. The idea of exchange programs must be encouraged between Nigeria and Malaysia, where Malaysian students will be able to visit Nigeria to gain more experience through the transfer of knowledge and cultural appreciation. In terms of sporting activities, it will be a good collaboration for Malaysian sports authorities to utilize the raw talents of Nigerians in their country to build their sports industry since the south-east nation have the available facilities. Nevertheless, both nations (Nigeria-Malaysia) can still learn from each other in terms of religious tolerance as uniting people from various faiths to live in peace and harmony.

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