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Research paper

Social Integration as Catalyst for People's Prosperity

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Abstract

In a nation-state, the aspect of unity among the people is important. Unity can define the political, economic and social stability. As a multi-racial country, Malaysia is a unique and special nation. Malaysia is regarded as an ideal country, a peaceful and happy country inhabited by various races and religions by other countries in the world. Due to its multi-racial status, it can't be denied that Malaysia faces some problems in sustaining the harmonious people. Various policies were formulated by the Federal Government and the State Government to address racial issues in Malaysia. In this regard, the article seeks to identify the level of social integration of the community in Johor. The findings show that the state of Johorian integrity is at a good level that is projected to an excellent level. In addition, the findings show that some elements need to be emphasized in empowering social integration in the state of Johor to avoid inter-racial tensions, especially in relation to the Rukun Negara that is not understood and practiced in a day-to-day life. The implication of this study is that social integration between the peoples is actually a catalyst for the welfare and at the same time improve the quality of life of the people of Johor. Hence, it is proposed that the Federal Government in collaboration with the State Government of Johor formulate various inclusive policies and have a close relationship with the people.

Keywords: *Social Integration; People's Prosperity; Unity*

1. Introduction

Unity is the pillar for the stability and prosperity of a nation. It is an important element especially for a country like Malaysia with a multiracial and multi religion population. The government needs to develop ideology in building the nation identity, value, and sense of belonging among its people. According to the Malaysian Information Department, various policies were developed, including education policies, national language policies, national cultural policies and sports as a tool of unity, have been carried out by the government towards ensuring unity among Malaysians is not only achievable, but sustainable.

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development has defined that prosperity can be measured through two things, namely through quality of life and material. Quality of life is measured through several components; health, work balance, social relations, education, civic engagement and governance, environment, personal safety and personal well-being. While component for material well-being include income, employment and housing.

According to the Malaysian Well-being Report [1], the people prosperity or well-being is measured through two sub-composite indices, namely economic prosperity and social well-being. The economic prosperity is divided into five components namely communication, education, income and distribution, transportation and working environment. While social well-being comprises of nine components, namely culture, environment, family, governance, health, housing, vacation, public safety, and social participation.

During the period of 2000 to 2012, The Malaysian People's Welfare Index showed an improvement in the level of people well-being. The implementation of various policies and strategies by the Government has contributed to the improvement in the quality of life and the well-being of the people. Other than that, the Government, the private sectors, and the societies also strive to increase the public awareness on social participation. The Malaysian Well-being Report [1], shows that the social participation refers to the involvement and interaction of the public with the community, such as volunteerism, donation and involvement in sports and recreational activities. Social participation also includes participation in political and social activities influenced by factors such as social networks, the spirit of belonging and the level of trust. This effort is to ensure the society is more responsible in promoting unity and harmony among the people.

As indicated in the 10th Malaysia Plan [2011-2015], the government has invested heavily in improving the people prosperity and well-being. The social interaction programs involved government agencies, non-governmental organizations [NGOs] and communities have increased significantly. It is found that these programs have created experiences and value sharing among the people and has successfully foster social integration and strengthens national unity. In addition, the 11th Malaysia Plan proposed by the government through the National Unity and Integration Department were carried out involving more than 875,590 social interaction activities between government agencies, the private sectors and NGOs. Additionally, the government also strives to foster a spirit of volunteerism among youths by setting up 1Malaysia for Youth [iM4U] and Bridged Volunteers of National Service, and many others.

In order to further strengthen the social integration and national unity, the Government has also established the National Unity Consultative Council [MKPN] in 2013. The council is responsi-

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ble for preparing a national development plan for social integration and national unity. The council has been mandated to provide a national development plan for social integration and national unity that is expected to be completed by 2015. The development plan focuses on the consolidation efforts through five key areas, namely policy and legislation, culture, youth, national integration, and inclusive development.

However, the 11th Malaysia Plan [2016-2020] aims to nurture and cultivate the spirit of 1Malaysia to strengthen social integration and national unity. A total of 6800 schools have set up a Rukun Negara Club to embark on the spirit of the 1Malaysia slogan. The government also intends to create a safer environment for a viable and prosperous society. As reported in the People's Well-being Index [2013] study, people's perceptions on "a safe environment", increased by 60% with a 5% reduction in crime index annually. The government seems to belief that social integration can be achieved through the promotion of social and ethical integration. The integration will also foster a united and moral society as well as intensify stakeholder engagement to build a sense of shared responsibility and enhance the Malaysian well-being.

1.1. Research Objectives

1. Identify the level of social integration of the Malaysian people.
2. Assess the elements of integration that bring the well-being of the Malaysian people.

1.2. Problem Statement

It is common to knowledge among Malaysian that Malaysia is a country that has many different communities, races and ethnic groups living under the same government. Malaysia as a country openly recognized the different communities and races under the principle of unity in diversity. The acceptance of this concept is based on the assumption that diversity is at the same time as a threat to unity, particularly after the 13th May 1969 bloody tragedy. [2]. This tragedy occurred was due to the diversity in the economy among different communities, namely among the Chinese and the Malays. A huge disparity in the economic activities among the Malays and Chinese [Malay farmers, Chinese traders, Indian farm workers] has led to the development of tensions and distrust leading to the open conflict in 1969.

The government realized the need for Malaysia to unite these different ethnicity in order for the country to prosper, hence help build a harmonious life among all races and ethnicities in Malaysia while developing this country to a better future. This refers to the need for a social integration among the communities in this country. This has led us to explore and identify the relationship between social integration and quality of life for the people of Malaysia.

2. Literature Review

Social integration refers to a situation where the people living peacefully, stable and peacefully in a community particularly in a society with multi-ethnic, because of the existence of a strong social bonding. This bonding existed since a long time following the basic five preconditions namely;

- Quality level of materials, such as having a quality of life index from average to high.
- Access to facilities that can guarantee and sustain the quality of life and social mobility.
- Stable, secure and secure social orders.
- Interactive actively based on network and positive exchanges in relationship.
- Has positive effort towards the involvement of all communities in mainstream activities.

In Malaysia, there are more than 70 ethnic groups and further subdivide into smaller groups that represent sub-ethnicity, language groups and dialects thus adding a total exceeding 200 different ethnic groups. Despite being in very complex ethnic communities, the different cultural and language composition, Malaysia has so far managed to maintain harmony in the social life and has successfully achieved the national development [3]. Hence, the uniqueness of the country's governance in the cultivation of unity in diversity among different ethnic groups is extremely important. This is because the governance aspect in this diversity has brought forward the understanding of the process of social integration living in a community [2].

Markus and Kirpitchenko [4] explain that the social integration is when the community able to share the same vision. Therefore, social integration requires universal values, common aspirations or shared identities with each individual in the community. Social integration also reflects a community or a group that shares the goals and responsibilities and cooperation between members of the community.

Studies on social integration have become popular among policy makers since early 1990 [5]. This is due to the diversity of cultures, ethnicities in society, the challenges of globalization, the widening of the rich-poor gap, the political and social threats that cause policymakers to take into account the issues related to social integration that can undermine the governance of a country. While social integration has a very subjective definition, however, it can be referred to the goals of the society. This social integration concept is an ongoing process that can create cohesion among communities in a society.

A study by Chan and Chan [5] suggests that the social integration is a solution to social conditions with political goals, instability of democracy and intolerance for some conditions or situations. This is where social integration will reflect the state of minds of the people who are exposed to certain behaviour or treatment. In addition, community members are said to be bounded to one another if three criteria are satisfied:

- They can trust each other, help and cooperate with other citizens in in a community,
- They share one similar identity or the same feeling within a community, and
- The subjective feelings in [1] and [2] above existed among objective behaviours [5].

Furthermore, a study by Halipah Hamzah, explained that social integration and the assurance of the harmony of multiracial and ethnical people in Malaysia was formed as a result of the implementation of the concept of power sharing, equitable and fair distribution of the nation's wealth, equal opportunity of education and employment between races, religious freedom guaranteed by national constitution, protection against minority rights and governmental public policies relating to social, economic and education. This is the key to maintaining harmony in a country with ethnic diversity.

In addition, Cramm, Van Dijk et al.[6] highlighted the importance of social capital and social integration in society for the well-being of its people especially for the senior citizens. The well-being of these seniors has been a measure of a good quality of life in a better society. These social capital and social integration represent the resources of individuals available in the membership of a society. These resources comprise civic participation; trust in each other and membership benefits [7].

3. Methodology

Population	Sample	Respondent
3,553.60	347	322

Source: Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2013

A population is defined as a set of groups of individuals and certain elements whose properties will be studied in the research conducted [8]. In other words, a population is every element in the set with the same properties under study. Sample is a subset chosen from the population [5] where each element in the subset must have the properties as in the population. In this study, random sampling is chosen. In simple random sampling techniques, each of the population has the same opportunity to be chosen [9].

Using simple random method, this means that every single person has equal chance of been chosen as a sample in this study.

The instrument used in this study is a set of questionnaires. Data are collected using this questionnaire forms and information gathered will be appropriate to measure the behaviour, attitude and trust of respondents to answer the questionnaire [10]. In this study, we distributed 347 questionnaires. The return questionnaire was 322 [85.72%]. Questionnaires distributed are divided into two parts which are to be evaluated namely Part A [demographics] and Part B [social integration elements].

Before conducting the actual survey, a pilot study was conducted to determine the characteristics of the questions that need to be modified or maintained [8]. This was also carried out to test the respondents' understanding of the sentences and the items asked in the questionnaire, as well as identifying any problems that may arise before the actual survey is conducted [8]. Reliability is an assessment and measurement of the stability and accuracy of the items in the questionnaire [10].

The results from the pilot tests explain the reliability of the social integration variables is 0.853 which shows a significant level of reliability. This explains the instruments used in this study are relevant and appropriate to use. Data collected were analysed using Statistical Package for Social Science [SPSS] Version 22. In this study, descriptive statistics were used to analyse Part A, which is related to demographic aspects. In addition, this analysis is used to answer the first objective, and secondly in this study. The analysis used are the frequency, percentage and mean score.

4. Results and Findings

Table 1: Respondents' Profiles

Category	Frequency	Percentage [%]
Gender		
Male	144	44.7
Female	178	55.2
Descendant		
Malay	154	47.8
Chinese	15	4.7
Indian	18	5.6
Sabah Bumiputera	78	24.2
SarawakBumiputera	54	16.8
Not Answering	3	0.9
Age		
21-30 years old	122	37.9
31-40 years old	98	30.4
41-50 years old	60	18.6
51-60 years old	29	9.0
61 years old and above	11	3.4
Not Answering	2	0.6
Education Level		
Primary School	22	6.8
Secondary School	76	23.6
Certificate/Diploma	109	33.9
Bachelor Degree	97	30.1
Degree/PhD	17	5.3
Not Answering	1	0.3
Employement Sector		
Government	77	23.9
Private	116	36.0
Self-Employment	50	15.5
Retiree	4	1.2
Housewife	21	6.5
Unemployed	14	4.3
Student / Trainee	36	11.2
Not Answering	4	1.2
Income		
No Income	34	10.6
Below RM1000	25	7.8
RM 1,001 - RM 3,000	132	41.0
RM 3,001 - RM 5,000	109	33.9
RM 5,001 - RM 7,000	15	4.7
RM 7,000 - RM 9,000	7	2.2
Marital Status		
Single	157	48.8
Married	124	38.5
Widow/widowers	23	7.1
Not Answering	18	5.6
Residential Status		
Rented	89	27.6
Permanent	233	72.4

Referring to Table 1 on respondent background, there are 322 respondents, with 144 respondents [44.7%] are male and 178 respondents [55.2%] are women. Respondents are comprised of five [5] descendants namely Malays, Chinese, Indians, Sabah Bumiputera and Sarawak Bumiputera. Nearly half of the respondents were Malays with 154 respondents [47.8%] followed by 78 [24.2%] Sabah Bumiputera respondents, 54[16.8%] respondents of Sarawak Bumiputera, 18 [5.6%] respondents in India and only 15 [4.7%] respondents were Chinese. In addition, the findings show that most respondents with 122 [37.9%] were in 21 to 30 years old group, 98 [16.8%] respondents aged 31-40 years old, and 60 [18.6%] respondents aged 41-50 years old. Less than 30 respondents were from the age 51-60 years old and 61 years old and above. In addition, the highest number of respondents had education level for certificates / diplomas with a total of 109 [33.9%] respondents, 97 [30.1%] respondents with a bachelor degree, 76 [23.6%] respondents in secondary school level, [6.8%] respondents only up to primary schools, and 17[5.3%] respondents have a degree / PhD. In the employment sector, only four [1.2%] respondents were retirees representing the least respondents while the most were 116 [36.0%] respondents working in the private sectors. In addition, there are 132 [41.0%] respondents has income ranging from RM1001 to RM3000, 109 [33.9%] respondents earned RM3001 to RM5000, 34 respondents [10.6%] respondents did not earn income, 25 respondents [7.8%] earn RM1000 and only 7 [2.2%] of respondents earn RM7000 to RM9000. Looking at the respondents' status, almost half of the respondents with 157 [48.8%] respondents were married while 23 [7.1%] respondents were widows/widowers representing the lowest number of respondents. Finally, over half of the total respondents of 233 [72.4%] respondents had permanent residences, while only 89 [27.6%] of respondents staying in rented accommodations.

Table 2: Social Integration Level

Level	Frequency	Percentage
Weak	22	6.9
Average	97	30.1
Good	155	48.1
Excellent	48	14.9
Total	**322**	**100.0**

The table above shows the level of social integration. Almost half of the total respondents [155 [48.1%]] were in good standing, 97 [30.1%] respondents were moderate, 48 [14.9%] were in excellent level, and only 22 respondents [6.9%] has a weak level of social integration.

Table 3: Mean for Social Integration

Statement	Mean
I think the issue of racism is not a political issue.	4.99
I often participate in programs involving all races. [Eg community services]	6.72
I think that racial tensions are rare in this country.	4.84
I am free to practice my religious beliefs	6.66
The practice of "rukun tetangga" does create social unity	6.48
The government has organised many programs to bring about social unity.	6.75
Total Mean	6.07

If we compare the performance of social integration dimension between the three states of Johor, Malacca and Negeri Sembilan, it can be said that the state of Johor recorded the smallest scoring rate of in only three dimensions, namely Environment, Security and Economic or personal finance capability. However, the two main dimensions that perform very low mean score are the dimensions of Governance and Economics or personal finance capabilities of 3.93% and 40.0% respectively. Reduction in the Environ-

mental and Safety dimensions score is not significant with mean 3.74% and 3.33% respectively. Reduction in the economic dimension from moderate to low position is very significant and should be taken urgently by the authorities. Despite an increase in governance dimensions for Johor, the mean score of 3.93 recorded in the second MPSI recorded a medium to medium category and there are still many things to be done in governance dimensions. Despite an increase in 4.24% of the governance rate for the State of Johor, this issue remains. The main concern of the people on the governance is still at moderate level [3.39%] and should be noted by the authorities.

The value of mean given in Table 3 gives us an indication of the peoples responses to the dimensions measured. This is an instrument used to measure the achievement of leadership and government administration from the perception perspective of the people of Johor. There are three dimensions included in the Second Malaysian People Satisfaction Index [MPSI II] showing a significant increase [more than 10%] namely the dimensions of safety, environment and education. In the Education dimension MPSI recorded the highest increase of 25.91%. This gives us an indication that the people of Johor are satisfied with the development of education in the state as they experienced it. Even though there is an increase, it is still categorized in the category of moderate. Nevertheless, it has the potential to improve and achieve good performance level with some appropriate actions by the government and the administration. The Patriotic Dimensions and Personal Well-being dimension as previously stated has the mean score at medium category.

From the survey conducted, the results shows that the people has placed the state development at a moderate level and it mean is in decline for MPSI II by 12.8%. This decline is in line with the decline in people's satisfaction in the development dimension for most of the findings in other states in Malaysia. This study also shows that two new dimensions of Patriotic and Personal Security are at a good level as compare to the development dimension. We can easily make a simple conclusion that the people of Johor love their state and country and lead a happy and safe in Johor.

5. Conclusion

The stability and the prosperity of a nation depends on the unity of its people. Unity has become an important element especially for a country that has multi-ethnic and multi-religion population such as Malaysia. In achieving the unity among its people, the Malaysian government needs to create an ideology for building the identity, value, and sense of belonging among its people. During the 10th Malaysia Plan [2011-2015], the government has invested heavily in improving the prosperity and well-being of the people. As a result, between 2000 to 2012, the Malaysian People's Welfare Index showed an improvement in the prosperity and well-being of Malaysian people. The implementation of various policies and strategies by the Government has improved the quality of life and the well-being of the people. Therefore, the purpose of the study was to determine the level of social integration and to assess the elements of integration that led to the well-being of the people of Johor. The survey designed through questionnaire distributed to 322 respondents. The instrument considers the diversity of background and geographical distributions of the respondents. The data collected were analyzed using SPSS software to answer descriptive research questions through mean score and ANOVA. This study also examine the significant differences between dimensions. The findings show that the integrity of the people of Johor is in a good level and has the potential to improve to an excellence level. In addition, the findings show that some elements need to be emphasized in empowering social integration in the state to avoid inter-racial tension. This is particularly important to continue improve the day to day living in harmony among communities. Finally, an implication is that social integration between the each individual people in the community act as a catalyst for the prosperity and well-being of the people leading towards a better quality of life.

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