

HIGHER EDUCATION AND SOCIAL COHESION: A STUDY IN SABAH AND SARAWAK

Oleh: Prof. Dr. Vincent Pang



Social cohesion is a societal condition that needs a continuous effort, right and practical approach to achieve it. Approaches towards achieving unity among citizens that consist of various ethnic groups in modern states indicate a clear shift from traditional beliefs in assimilative and melting pot strategies towards approaches that see pluralism and multiculturalism as a more meaningful, practical and democratic way of promoting better social unity between ethnic groups.

This study considers educational organisations as having a crucial role in moulding the younger generation for their meaningful future participation in the society. The samples for this study consist of

1,508 undergraduate students in the two public Institutions of Higher Learning (IHL) in Sabah and Sarawak who were selected by a simple random sampling method. They were administered with a self-completing questionnaire modified from Pang, Amran and Ho (2008).

The study found that social cohesion is highly correlated with curriculum and moderately correlated with co-curriculum, extra-curriculum, and residential activities. It was also found that Ethnic Relations course plays an important role in the inculcation of social cohesion in public IHLs in Sabah and Sarawak compared to the other courses. The result also shows that there are significant

differences in the strength of social cohesion among students from Sabah, Sarawak and the Peninsula. A majority of the subjects agreed with the statement that government subsidy programmes provide opportunities for them to be financially independent, Malaysians should adhere to the Social Contract, Malaysians should develop a strong command of the English language in order to be able to compete in the globalised world, and the use of the English language as a medium of instruction would not affect ethnic cohesion.

Based on the findings, policy recommendations were made to the Ministry of Higher Education and public IHLs. These involved curriculum and student affair management issues related to the enhancement of social cohesion among undergraduates.

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