



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

***MODERATING ROLE OF MEANINGFUL INTERACTION ON THE
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PARTICIPATION OF DIVERSITY
ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES AND CAMPUS CLIMATE WITH CIVIC
RESPONSIBILITY***

LOH YIT PHING

FBMK 2021 60



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By

LOH YIT PHING

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia,
in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

November 2020

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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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November 2020

Chairman : Associate Professor Jusang Bolong, PhD
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Due to changing demographics in higher education and increasing demands of the educative value of diversity in need, "twenty-first-century college student diversity outcomes" is a term used to describe the skills necessary for college graduates to function in the diverse world. University level is an excellent platform to cultivate diversity engagement among undergraduate students. There are many studies suggested that through diversity engagement, it will enhance various learning outcome, including a sense of civic responsibility.

This study analyzes the relationship between the level of participation in curricular diversity engagement activity, co-curricular diversity engagement activity, level of campus climate, level of participation in meaningful interaction with a sense of civic responsibility. Finally, it tested the level of meaningful interaction as a moderator between the relationship of level of participation in curricular, co-curricular and civic responsibility among students of different ethnicities at six Malaysia universities. By adopting purposive sampling, 1420 respondents were involved in this study.

Survey through self-administered questionnaires was used in this study. Social Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and Structured Equation Modelling (SEM) with Partial Least Squares (PLS) was used to test the relationship between constructs in this study.

The study found that less than 25 per cent of students have a high level of participation in curricular and co-curricular diversity engagement activity. More than 80 per cent of students agreed that a sense of civic responsibility is important to them. This study also found that co-curricular diversity engagement activity, campus climate and meaningful

interaction have significant relationship with civic responsibility. However, curricular diversity engagement activity did not have relationship with civic responsibility. Meaningful interaction did not moderate the relationship between co-curricular diversity engagement activities with civic responsibility. However, it did moderate the relationship between curricular diversity engagement activities with civic responsibility. The findings provided useful information to better understanding regarding the level of participation of students in diversity engagement activity and their sense of civic responsibility. This finding also could be used by the university to develop better curricular and co-curricular diversity engagement activity and enhance campus climate that supports diversity.



Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Doktor Falsafah

PERANAN INTERAKSI BERMAKNA SEBAGAI MODERATOR DALAM HUBUNGAN ANTARA TERHADAP PENGLIBATAN AKTIVITI KEPELBAGAIAN DAN IKLIM KAMPUS DENGAN TANGGUNGJAWAB SIVIK

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Perubahan demografi dalam pendidikan tinggi dan peningkatkan kepentingan nilai kepelbagaian semakin dihargai. "hasil pembelajaran kepelbagaian pelajar kolej abad ke-21" adalah istilah yang baru yang digunakan untuk menggambarkan kemahiran yang diperlukan oleh siswazah kolej untuk berfungsi di dunia yang kepelbagaian. Pendidikan di tahap universiti adalah platform yang sangat baik untuk memupuk penglibatan kepelbagaian di kalangan pelajar siswazah. Terdapat banyak kajian mencadangkan bahawa melalui penglibatan dalam kepelbagaian, ia akan meningkatkan pelbagai hasil pembelajaran, termasuk rasa tanggungjawab sivik.

Kajian ini menganalisis hubungan antara tahap penyertaan dalam aktiviti kepelbagaian kurikulum, aktiviti kokurikulum, tahap iklim kampus, tahap penyertaan dalam interaksi bermakna dengan tanggungjawab sivik. Akhirnya, ia menguji tahap interaksi bermakna sebagai moderator antara hubungan tahap penyertaan dalam kurikulum, kokurikulum dan tanggungjawab sivik di kalangan pelajar yang berbeza etnik di enam universiti di Malaysia. Dengan menggunakan pensampelan secara purposive, 1420 responden terlibat dalam kajian ini. Kajian melalui soal selidik digunakan dalam kajian ini.

Konsep Pemodelan Persamaan Struktural (SEM) dengan menggunakan perisian "Partial Least Square (PLS) dan SPSS digunakan untuk menguji hubungan antara konstruk dalam kajian ini.

Kajian mendapati bahawa kurang daripada 25 peratus pelajar mempunyai tahap penyertaan yang tinggi dalam aktiviti kurikulum dan kokurikulum. Lebih daripada 80 peratus pelajar bersetuju bahawa rasa tanggungjawab sivik adalah penting kepada

mereka. Kajian ini juga mendapati aktiviti penglibatan kepelbagaian kokurikulum, iklim kampus dan interaksi bermakna mempunyai hubungan yang signifikan dengan tanggungjawab sivik. Walau bagaimanapun, aktiviti penglibatan kepelbagaian kurikulum tidak mempunyai hubungan dengan tanggungjawab sivik. Interaksi bermakna tidak mempunyai kesan penyerderhanaan terhadap hubungan antara aktiviti penglibatan kepelbagaian kokurikulum dengan tanggungjawab sivik. Walau bagaimanapun, ia mempunyai kesan penyerderhanaan terhadap aktiviti penglibatan kepelbagaian kurikulum dengan tanggungjawab sivik. Kajian ini memberikan maklumat yang berguna untuk memahami lebih lanjut mengenai tahap penyertaan pelajar dalam aktiviti penglibatan kepelbagaian dan persepsi mereka terhadap tanggungjawab sivik. Kajian ini juga boleh digunakan oleh universiti untuk membangunkan aktiviti penglibatan dalam kurikulum dan kokurikulum yang lebih sesuai dan meningkatkan iklim kampus yang menyokong kepelbagaian.

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This dissertation is dedicated to friends on the path of education, who are looking for the betterment of humanity through education and communication.

This thesis was submitted to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. The members of the Supervisory Committee were as follows:

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CDEA	Curricular Diversity Engagement Activity
CCDEA	Co-curricular Diversity Engagement Activity
CC	Campus Climate
MI	Meaningful Interaction
DE	Diversity Engagement
UKM	Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia
UPM	Universiti Putra Malaysia
UM	Universiti Malaya
UNITEN	University Tenaga Nasional
USM	Universiti Sains Malaysia
UTM	Universiti Teknologi Malaysia

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In the 21st century, ethnic and racial diversity has become an essential focus in higher education in tandem with increased registration of multicultural students. Higher education continues to have more racially and ethnically diverse set of individuals' enrolments. It has the responsibility to prepare graduates to contribute to society (Bowen, 1977). At the same time, to produce competent graduates to fulfil workforce needs (Engberg, 2007).

Programs and initiatives are needed to respond to multi-ethnicity needs in curriculum and co-curriculum. Institutions need to design a program that helps students increase their multicultural competencies and acquire skills they need as leaders in diverse societies (Banks, 1993; Bank et al., 2005).

There is a need for higher education to improve campus climates and outcomes for students. Previous research has identified factors such as campus environment, type of institution and organizational characteristics influencing outcomes for college students (Pascarella & Terenzini 1991, 2005). Organizational characteristics such as communication, fairness in application, involving students in decision making.

Research also indicates that students from different ethnicities and races possess different worldviews (Hurtado et al., 1999). The fundamental strategy is to provide mechanisms for academic, social and financial support.

1.1 Background of the Study

Malaysia's universities have a role to play in an ethnic combination of academic, administrative, security, and maintenance staff as it is a multiracial country. It is therefore important for the campus to be conducive to fostering diversity, thereby enhancing students' critical thinking and intellectualism.

In Malaysia Education Development Plan 2015-2025 (Higher Education) Malaysia universities are being reformed to be in accord with the national policy. In order to cultivate an environment within universities that is in line with diversity, liberty of expression, critical thinking, creative mentality, organizational culture and environment is crucial.

Generally, there are two types of universities in Malaysia which are public and private universities. It comprised of domestic private universities and Malaysia branches of foreign universities. Both types of universities have different philosophies, structure and culture in pursuit of meritocracy.

The universities' general mission statements always focus on producing graduates who will be skilled and highly sought after by the industry. It brings together a diverse intellectual community and demands knowledge and education for improvement — the holistic path of the individual and society.

Both private and public universities are under the university ranking scrutiny. There are World University Ranking, QS International University Rankings and Domestic ranking system SETAR by Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA). Both private and public universities are striving to achieve their full potential to produce undergraduates that fulfil the requirements of the 21st-century workforce.

In an educational context, the university has a role to play to prepare the undergraduates to be a well-rounded citizen. There are many studies showings that diversity engagement in university brings many positive outcomes.

There is a wealth of research on how diversity affects undergraduate students. Research used theoretical frameworks grounded in psychology to explain the process where students from racially and socially homogenous pre-college environment interact with diverse others. Gurin, Dey, Hurtado and Gurin (2002) have claimed this challenges students' notions of their diverse peers.

Twenty-first century college student diversity outcomes is a term used to describe the skills necessary for undergraduates to function in an increasingly diverse and interdependent global community, including being able to interact with diverse others and democratic and civic involvement abilities (Gurin et al., 2002, 2003; Chang, Astin, and Kim, 2004; Chang, Denson, Saenz, & Misa; 2006; Hurtado, 2003). Gurin et al. (2002), Chang (1996), and others (Nelson-Laird, Engberg, & Hurtado, 2005; Saenz, Ngai, Hurtado, 2007) have documented the educational value of diversity for both cognitive and social outcomes.

Research is needed to look into the educative value of diversity due to the changing demographics in higher education and globalization. Research on diversity engagement and educational value of diversity must be context-specific, including institutional type, state, and region. (Angela Mosi Locks, 2008).

Many dimensions shape diversity engagement on campus. Researchers argued that a supportive campus is essential for racial and ethnic diversity. As the campus climate for racial and ethnic diversity has implications for student learning and a number of additional college outcomes (Milem, Chang, and Antonio, 2005).

When campus practices inclusion of diversity, many curriculum, co-curriculum initiatives may be included to foster racial and ethnically inclusive environment. For example, curricular initiatives include instituting a diversity course as a graduation requirement, for co-curricular may include living-learning programs, intergroup relation program, which may lead to the developing of civic responsibility.

As such, campus demonstrated commitment in all these commitment in concrete ways with initiatives to support intergroup relations programs, culturally related residence halls, and co-curricular activities. Each of these initiatives will bring implications to undergraduates in the way how they deal with diverse others. Students' tolerance of diverse others and willingness to work collectively with diverse others will develop a sense of empathy and make them more likely to develop civic responsibility on campus, one of the democratic skills.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Globalization is happening in the 21st century. With the advancement of AI and workforce flow from one country to another, it also means international competition is unavoidable for future graduate. Higher education has the responsibility to prepare graduates to contribute to society (Bowen, 1977). At the same time, to produce competent graduates to fulfil workforce needs (Engberg, 2007).

Besides, Malaysia is a multiethnic, multicultural society with a population of 32 million. The Malays are the largest ethnic group, followed by Chinese, Indians and others. Malay is the official language. Other major languages include Chinese, English, Tamil, Iban in Sarawak and Banjar in Sabah. There are about 140 languages spoken in Malaysia, 40 of them are found in peninsular Malaysia, 54 in Sabah and 46 in Sarawak. (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2018)

Worth mentioning is that nearly fifty years after the unfortunate May 13 incident in Malaysia, little effort was made by the authorities to unveil the truth and to work toward national reconciliation. Since then, the political leaders on a regular basis used the May 13 incident as a threat to opposition whom trying to disputing civil rights. In recent years it has become increasingly clear that racial imbalance, inequality and tension are in urgent need of change (Kua, 2005). As undergraduates are the future of Malaysia, it is important to understand the level of diversity engagement among different ethnicity and their level of civic responsibility.

According to Tamam and Abdullah (2012), in their study which studies the relationship between ethnic interactions and educational outcome among undergraduate students, the findings showed a significant positive association. More research needs to be carried out to examine the relationship between ethnic interaction and educational outcomes among undergraduate students.

Studies have shown positive effects on diversity experiences of students' educational outcomes. Nevertheless, lack of research has examined the influence moderating variables to understanding the implication of diversity experiences for racial and ethnic diversity. Higher education is the one of the suitable locations for the students to be connected with diverse activities and develop better civic responsibility. University is a final stop to inspire student to become responsible citizen.

A number of studies in western have found that the nature of university engagements such as curricular diversity engagement, co-curricular diversity engagement, campus climate enhances civic responsibility. However, there are limited studies done on this relationship in the Malaysia context. Therefore, this study intended to fill this gap by examining the relationship of civic responsibility, particularly with curricular diversity engagement, co-curricular diversity engagement, and campus climate.

Studies on diversity experience suggested that it is not a straightforward process. It can be influenced by other factors which can be moderating or mediating the process. As such, it might overestimate the effects of diversity experience on education outcomes (Bowman, 2011; Pettigrew and Tropp 2008).

Past studies included control variables such as demographic details, college experiences and other variables to accurately measure the implications of diversity engagement on educational outcomes. Some included mediating and moderating variables on the relationship of diversity engagements with educational outcomes.

In this study, it integrated meaningful interaction as a moderating variable into the relationship. This is to understand the relationship between diversity engagement and civic responsibility. Specifically, the relationship between curricular diversity engagement activities, co-curricular diversity engagement activity with civic responsibility.

Meaningful interactions with diverse others refer to interaction that goes beyond students merely interacting with one another across racial and ethnic groups. These interactions must be substantive and meaningful if they are to mediate perceived racial tensions on campus and anxiety with diverse peers (Angela Mosi Locks, 2008).

If a relationship between meaningful interaction with peers and diverse participation in curricular and co-curricular diversity programs could be established, it would serve as further proof in support of the educational benefits of diversity engagement.

Therefore, this study aims to fill the gap by examining the relationship of the level of participation of curricular diversity engagement activity, co-curricular diversity engagement activity, level of campus climate, and level of participation in meaningful interaction with civic responsibility.

To further understand the relationship, an assumed moderating variable, which is meaningful interaction is integrated into this study. Past studies have indicated that the relationship of diversity engagement and civic responsibility as an educational outcome is not a straight forward process, as often it is complicated. Therefore, this study is intended to empirically test the moderating variable in the relationship of diversity engagement with civic responsibility. In response to the problems discussed above, the following research objectives guide this study.

1.3 Research Questions

In summary, the research questions that will be answered in this study are;

1. What is the level of participation of curricular diversity engagement activities among local undergraduate students?
2. What is the level of participation of co-curricular diversity engagement activities among local undergraduate students?
3. What is the level of perceived campus climate among local undergraduate students?
4. What is the level of perceived civic responsibility among local undergraduate students?
5. What is the level of participation in meaningful interaction among local undergraduate students?
6. What is the relationship between variables level of participation in curricular diversity engagement activities, level of participation in co-curricular diversity engagement activities, level of campus climate, and level of participation in meaningful interaction with civic responsibility?
7. Do the variable meaningful interaction moderate the relationship between the level of participation in curricular diversity engagement activity and level of participation in co-curricular diversity engagement activity with the level of civic responsibility among undergraduates?
8. How much does the level of participation in curricular diversity engagement activity, level of participation in co-curricular diversity engagement activity, level of campus climate, and level of participation in meaningful interaction contribute towards civic responsibility?

1.4 Research Objectives

This research is to examine the moderating role of meaningful interaction on the relationship of civic responsibility with participation of diversity engagement activities and campus climate. Below are the objectives of this research:

1. To determine the level of participation of curricular diversity engagement activity among local undergraduate students.
2. To determine the level of participation of co-curricular diversity engagement activity among local undergraduate students.
3. To determine the level of perceived campus climate among local undergraduate students.
4. To determine the level of civic responsibility among local undergraduate students.
5. To determine the level of participation in meaningful interaction among local undergraduate students.
6. To determine the relationship of level of participation in curricular diversity engagement activities, level of participation in co-curricular diversity engagement activities, level of campus climate, and level of participation in meaningful interaction with civic responsibility.
7. To determine the moderating effect of the level of participation of meaningful interaction on the relationship of level of participation in curricular diversity engagement activity and level of participation in co-curricular diversity engagement activity with level of civic responsibility.
8. To determine the contribution of level of participation in curricular diversity engagement activity, level of participation in co-curricular diversity engagement activity, level of campus climate, and level of participation in meaningful interaction towards civic responsibility.

1.5 Significance of Study

This study is very important because it is examining the relationship between civic responsibility and diversity engagement which focus on multiethnic Malaysians in the context of education.

In the past, there are some studies that investigated civic outcomes from an educational perspective. The concept of examining diversity engagement's influence on civic outcomes was rarely used in Malaysia context (Ong et al., 2016; Seyedali et al., 2016). Ezhar Tamam et al. (2016) did a study on predict civic responsibility from the involvement of culturally related diversity and peer civic talks among final year students. However, in the study the scholar did not use meaningful interaction as a moderator. Instead it was used as a variable to test direct relationship with civic responsibility. Besides, campus climate was not included as variable in the study.

Therefore, this study contributes to the literary body on diversity engagement on campus in a few ways. First, it examined the level of participation in curricular diversity engagement activity, co-curricular diversity engagement activity, level of campus climate, level of participation in meaningful interaction, particularly in undergraduate campus experience, which is under-explored area.

Secondly, it tested a specific dimension of diversity engagement, which is the quality or positive aspect of the engagement. This study has studied the relationship between independent variables and their impact on civic responsibility.

Third, the study attempted to examine roles of meaningful interaction as a moderating variable in the relationship of diversity engagement with civic responsibility. Very few past studies have been consolidated moderating variable into the relationship mentioned above.

Fourth, the result of this study can be theoretically confirming the robustness of the Allport's contact theory and Accentuation theory in a different context. While, Accentuation theory emphasizes on peer's activities among the college student as one of the main factors, this study narrows down to the importance of meaningful interaction. Allport contact theory, which was developed in an individualistic setting, the relationship in predicted to yield positive results which would extend the generalization of the claim within collectivistic setting. This study can, therefore help the dynamism and evolution of these two theories.

Fifth, Using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) method, this study would methodologically help to overcome limitations of other methods of analysis most commonly used in social sciences studies. Therefore, using other methods of analysis would often results in less clear conclusions, and would require several separate analyses.

Through knowing the level of participation in curricular diversity engagement activity and co-curricular diversity engagement activity among undergraduates, the finding is particularly useful for university to enhance curricular and co-curricular aspects. Besides, an understanding of the level of campus climate perceived by students can provide insight for universities to better foster a conducive environment.

All these are the practical aspects that are significant in this study. Finally, this study will also contribute to the theoretical aspects by testing the conceptual framework used in this study.

1.6 Scope and Limitation of Study

First, scope of the research is limited to local undergraduate students at six institutions of higher learning in Malaysia. Second, undergraduate students are appropriate targets in view of the literature by Erikson (1946, 1956) that mentions that "psychosocial moratorium" of an undergraduate is at the developmental stage. Therefore, this study is confined to third- or fourth-year students so that they have sufficient campus experience to answer the survey questions.

This study examines a phenomenon within the institutional context for a particular population of student and focused on five public campuses and one private campus. Hence the findings of the study cannot be generalized to reflect the experiences of the current population.

This study did not include pre-college experiences. According to Gurin et al.(2002),pre-college experiences may reinforce predisposition in students' understanding of specific values and the formation of attitudes.

Also, the conceptualization of campus climate for diversity and assessing institutional devotion to the racial and ethnic diversity model suggests that the ideal data set to evaluate diversity would be both student and institutional survey data (Hurtado et al. 1999). However, for this study, research only used student as respondents. This study based on individuals who completed the survey on behalf of their institution.

This research covers five relevant variables as in the conceptual framework. Other variables could also contribute to the determinants of civic responsibility but not included in this study.

This research uses the questionnaire as an instrument, it might be biased in the way student answer the questions. Finally, this is not a longitude study, and it cannot differentiate the level of diversity engagement before student enrolment to university and after enrolment to university.

1.7 Definition of Terms

To avoid confusion in the conceptual interpretation of variables used, the definitions of terminologies used in this study presented in table 1.1 below. These definitions used as a guide in discussing the findings of tested hypotheses.

Table 1.1 : Operational definitions

No	Variable	Operational definition	Source
1	Curricular diversity	Level of participation in diversity concerning ideas and people through coursework on-campus and off-campus activities.	Gurin et al., 2002
2	Co- curricular diversity	Level of participation in diversity for ideas and people voluntarily through unstructured programmed outside of coursework, on-campus and off-campus activities.	Gurin et al., 2002
3	Campus climate	Students general view of educational experiences and interethnic relations on the campus.	Milem et al., 2005
4	Civic responsibility	Personal belief and feeling that individuals have about their responsibility and duty to society.	Denson & Brown, 2013
5	Meaningful interaction	Frequency of interaction that occurs during the ordinary course of undergraduate life with diverse students (different in ethnicity, nationality, values etc.) in various communicating settings.	Milem et al., 2005

1.8 Summary

This chapter has given the importance of research by presenting the fundamentals background of the study, problem statement, research questions, objectives and significance of the study, scope and limitations. The subsequent chapter will discuss relevant literature that form the research framework.

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