

## Constructing Social Mobility and Social Cohesion within a Business Community in Malaysia

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### Abstract

This paper discusses the social mobility within Malaysian business community, particularly in terms of the inter-generational social economic achievement, and its relationship with social cohesion. The survey was conducted on 554 business community and hawkers from various ethnics in Malaysia. The findings of the research showed that the intergenerational (father and children) education mobility is the upward mobility. The findings show that the level of social cohesion among business community is good due to the positive and moderate responds towards 18 social cohesion indicators based on 6 dimensions of social cohesion, namely self-belonging, recognition, inclusiveness, equality, participation and legitimacy. Study on social mobility and social cohesion is very significant because the social cohesion can only be succeeding when individuals in the community believe that they are able to improve their quality of life and their children will enjoy the happiness through their own abilities, talents and efforts. Thus, when a society enjoyed a convenience life, not separated in any social economic matters, have the same rights to change their lives and acquire the equal rewards, then the society can be considered to be stated at the level of social cohesion.

**Keywords:** Business Community, Ethnicity at Workplace, Social Mobility, Social Cohesion, Sociology

### Introduction

Malaysia is one of the successful countries among developing countries that have demonstrated a great achievement in economic growth and distribution as well as political

stability and harmonious ethnic relations. Since 60 years of independence, Malaysia has not only experienced the economic, political and social transformation in its structure, relationships and institutions, but the traditional and village society also has changed to a modern and urban society with more than two-thirds of the whole population living in urban areas. Today, Malaysia is known a country that composed of multi ethnic cultures, languages and religions which are living together and maintaining their own ethnic identity peacefully (Abdullah et al. 2016). In fact, as a multi ethnic country, Malaysia is able to establish and maintain a harmonious and strong ethnic relation between various ethnics and religions.

The stability and harmonious in Malaysia has been recognized by the Global Peace Index which ranked Malaysia in the 19<sup>th</sup> as one of the most stable and safe country in the year 2011. Economy, politic and social are the important factors which led to a plural society in Malaysia today. Social change and transformation in Malaysia after the year 1990s gave this multi ethnic and multi religious society a new physical and social change and mobility to a new development area (Mohd Noor 2012). Changes in social stratification, physical and mobility of various ethnics gave a social impact on the frequency, form intensity of ethnic relations (Mohd Noor 2014).

The statistics on population by the Department of Statistics 2010 showed that the total number of Malaysian population is 27.4 million. This includes 70 ethnic groups with more than 200 sub ethnics, languages and dialects. The Malays, Chinese, Indians, Aborigines, Sikhs, Chettis, Siamese and Baba Nyonya are located in Peninsular Malaysia whereas the Ibans, Bidayuhs, Kadazans, Dusuns, Samah-Bajau and other Bumiputera stay in Sabah and Sarawak. The prosperity and composition in Malaysian society is melted with foreign workers, particularly from Indonesia, with some of them being permanent residents of the country. Even though Malaysia is a new country with social diversity, it is able to establish and maintain harmonious relationships among various ethnics and religions in order to become a strong and developed nation (Embong 2006)

Social mobility is the movement opportunity among different social groups. This will explain the advantages and disadvantages of social mobility in terms of income, job security, opportunity for progress and so forth. The same opportunity would become an aspiration for a society to change due to less social mobility that would imply an unequal opportunity as well. The economic efficiency depends on how the good skills and talents will be applied in the society. Hence, social mobility is important because social cohesion can only be achieved if a society believed that they can and have the equal opportunity to improve their quality of life and the skills, efforts and talents will be enjoyed by their children as well.

Social cohesion is a set of processes and actions that can inspire the spirit of belongings among every members of a society until them feel as a part of the community. This suggests that social cohesion is a process and urges ongoing efforts to form a shared value so that they will face their life and challenges together as well as seek solutions that will benefit them (Jenson 1998). Social cohesion is a peaceful, stable and prosperous situation in a multi ethnic society due to a strong social bonding among various ethnic long time ago (Shamsul 2014). The social cohesion emerged based on five prerequisites, namely, first is quality of materials such as possessing a medium quality of life to high quality of life index; second is access to the facilities that can guarantee and sustain the quality of life and social mobility; third is a stable, harmonious and safe social life; forth is an active interaction with positive social network and exchanges; and fifth is a positive effort among all parties towards the involvement in the mainstream activities. Malaysia is a solid economical developmental state but continuously working hard for a nation building and successfully moved from

backward economy to a developing country with high income (Shamsul 2012). The eradication of poverty, the construction of a good infrastructure as well as various social facility and safety had ensured the life of the Malaysian community. The strong economic system is the basis for the Malaysians' social wellbeing today.

### **Method**

This study discusses the social mobility among Malaysian business community, particularly in terms of the inter-generational social economic achievement, and its relationship with social cohesion. Survey was conducted on 554 business community and hawkers of various ethnics in Malaysia by using a purposive sampling method. The data collection was conducted on 2015. The discussion will start with showing the previous empirical studies of local scholars on social mobility in Malaysia.

### **Previous Studies on Social Mobility in Malaysia**

Many scholars emphasized that education is the key success to social mobility. Education is able to improve those who are in need or living in poverty during their early childhood. Individual can have a good economic status if they are willing to put effort and take the opportunity to change their economic status. The selection of students in Malaysia to study in abroad, premium classes, boarding schools, universities, as well as for scholarship and employment is based on academic achievement. The Malaysian government successfully created a good social mobility through a better educational system thus enables the children to enjoy a better life than their parents.

Recent study on 331 students from 9 primary schools and 297 students from 8 secondary schools in Selangor, Kelantan, Sabah and Sarawak revealed that there was a significant difference between rural and urban schools in terms of educational role in increasing knowledge, expanding potential, job attainment and ambition achievement (Tee et al. 2017). This significant difference in education can be seen in the comparison between Sabah and Sarawak and Peninsular Malaysia. Interestingly, the comparison between primary and secondary schools showed that there are differences in educational and knowledge attainment, potential awareness, higher earnings, convenience home, good ambition, loved by the family, teachers and friends. The primary schools scored higher means in all these items.

Khazanah Research Institute (2016) studied a research to identify whether the children are better than their parents in terms of income, education and employment, and whether the socioeconomic status of the children was determined by the status of the parents. This research examined that intergenerational social mobility in Malaysia was not focused on income mobility alone but also educational mobility and intergenerational occupation. The research also examined the impact of gender, ethnicity, rural, urban and other factors on socio economic mobility as well as to identify the policy which can improve any weaknesses in a society. The findings showed that almost two-thirds of the population was highly educated children from various ethnics than their parents, 85% of children have higher or equal employment skills than their parents, and half of the total number of the children earns higher income than their parents. Majority of the children from low income parents experienced upward mobility. The research concluded that upward mobility was higher among those born in low income families whereas the majority of middle class families experienced downward mobility.

Research done by Idris (2004) identified social mobility which occurred among 100 second generation of Felda community in Felda Jempol Negeri Sembilan. The research highlighted two educational issues related with its role from the perspective of human development and the effectiveness of Felda in improving the socioeconomic status of second generation of Felda community. Education is a foundation for the improvement of the quality of human life as well as an important factor in determining the economic and social development of a society or nation. Besides marriage, the research found that education was the factor which influenced the migration of Felda community from Felda area. The second generation of Felda community who are highly educated have the opportunity to experience social mobility vertically upwards as well as show the ability to attain a better life.

The other research was conducted by Sa'at et al. (2010) study on the social mobility among the coastal community in Kuala Terengganu focused on the changing pattern and social mobility among 300 fishermen in Kuala Terengganu. The study found that a huge transformation has taken place among this coastal community based on the comparison of four generations of fishermen, namely, grandfather, father, respondent and the children. Then Amir Zal (2016) studied on cultural capital and its impact on the fishermen's community dependency. This research which was conducted among 100 fishermen in Kuala Terengganu explained the influence and effects of cultural capital that embodied the elements of values, norms and behavior of others in fishermen's life. The influence of cultural elements among fishermen involves aspects of leisure time usage, values, working culture and dependence on fishing activity. The element of cultural capital demonstrated an important and influential role for the survival of the fishermen community.

A study on the mobility among Indian community in Malaysia was carried out by Mohd Noor et al. (2015) to identify the patterns of ethnic diversity and socioeconomy, level of social mobility as well as to analyse the influence of dynamic social mobility among Indian community. The study provided initial recommendation to manage a social and low income imbalance among Indian community. The Indian community was found to move from the poverty line and living with the middle and upper class community due to the strong institutions and infrastructures in the country. However, the study also showed that there is still an Indian community who are living in poverty due to the difficulties in obtaining the public facilities and institutions for the development of human and social capital. Thus, the findings showed that the majority of Indian community experienced the objective and subjective social mobility even though the level of mobility is stated at different levels. The result indicated that social and human capital have a positive contribution towards the dynamic of social mobility among Indian community.

## **Findings and Discussion**

### ***Social Cohesion and Social Mobility Within a Business Community***

Research on social cohesion at workplace was conducted on 554 respondents with 57% males and 43% females. There was 67% of the respondents were Malays, 11% were Chinese, 4% were Indians and 17% were Bumiputera. About 57% of the respondents were in the age group of 15 years to 35 years, 37% were from middle age of 36 years to 55 years, and 6% were from the age group over 56 years. The Malaysian population has reached 31.7 million as reported by Department of Statistics, Malaysia (2016) with 46.6% was dominated by the young people aged 24 years and 41% were the population aged between 25 and 54 years old. The trend of young and educated Malaysian population will be increased till the year 2020. This situation shows that the role of young generation in a social change is very significant in developing the

nation's future (Embong 2016). Moreover, the access and skills of the young people towards information technology with the openness of cyberspace enable them to benefit the knowledge for social empowerment.

The level of social cohesion among business community is good due to the positive and moderate responds towards 18 social cohesion indicators based on 6 dimensions of social cohesion, namely self-belonging, recognition, inclusiveness, equality, participation and legitimacy. The respondents were found to be very positive in 12 statements with mean 3.70 to 4.23 (Table 1). The business community in Malaysia admitted and accepted that the nature of their daily life involve various ethnic groups including business competition. In fact, they also would tolerate and care on each other even though they are trying to gain profits in their own business field.

Table 1  
*Social Cohesion*

Item	Percentage	Mean
1. I'm proud that Malaysian is comprising of various religions, languages, cultures and ethnicities	87.7	4.23
2. I feel sympathy with his family if my business friends die.	92.7	4.22
3. I will help my business friends from other ethnics if they face difficulties	90.5	4.10
4. Business opportunities are open to various ethnic groups in this country.	32.7	4.08
5. I admit there is different religious laws at state level in the country.	84.7	4.05
6. I feel free to vote for any leaders and political parties that I wish.	81.9	4.00
7. I can freely participate in any associations and charity activities in the business area.	83.8	4.00
8. I am very proud to be together in the other ethnic celebrations.	79.0	3.98
9. Education liberalization benefits every single ethnic in this country.	76.4	3.90
10. SUHAKAM is free to criticize the Government if the people's rights are violated.	69.1	3.83
11. From business point of view, liberalization of the financial sector benefits every ethnic in the country.	71.0	3.78
12. I am free to talk about politics with my business partners.	68.8	3.70

Malaysian children enjoying social mobility seems higher than their parents due to the economic and social changes that have improved employment opportunity among professionals including business field. This study on business community showed that the intergenerational (father and children) education mobility is the upward mobility. Referring to Table 2, the results show that 83% of the respondents' father is in the low, medium and none at all at mobility level, and 76% of the respondents are in the medium and high mobility

level. More than 40% of the respondents' children are in medium mobility level and climbing up the mobility ladder.

Table 2

*Inter generation of education level*

	None	Low	Medium	High
Father	30.2	30.2	36.3	10.2
Respondent	10.2	13.5	59.7	16.6
Spouse	5.8	18.5	60.0	19.7
Children 1	11.4	5.4	51.7	31.5
Children 2	15.1	5.3	48.0	31.6
Children 3	20.8	28.6	45.5	33.8

The previous studies on the poor group in Malaysia showed the emergence of vertical mobility and social class in every community group. Intergenerational mobility and new middle class community also emerged in the society. However, there is still the community who is remain poor and will reproduce the poor class structure among the same ethnic groups (Shamsul 2012). The significant difference mobility was among the current generations of the implementation of NEP as proved by data statistics on household income in the country.

The income mobility can be seen in Figure 1 which displayed that only 22% of the respondents earn salary between RM3,000.00 and RM7,000.00 for 10 years back. Today, 97% of the respondents' salary is in the category of RM3,000.00 and RM9,000.00 per month. This finding clearly indicates there is an increase in the amount of salary received by the respondents.

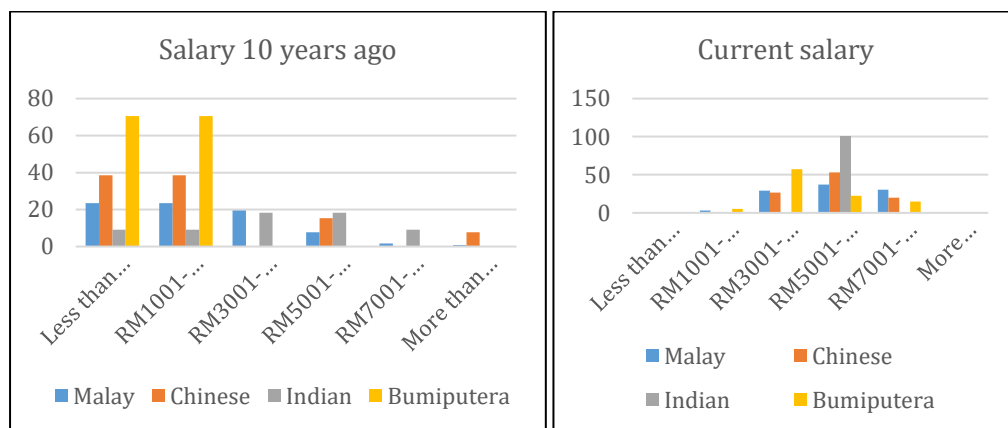


Fig. 1. Income mobility

As a whole, education is a key asset in helping the business community to improve and have a better standard of living. They can pursue and explore the information and knowledge related with business area by having education and information technology. Thus, the movement of education and income upward mobility is not only able to improve the standard of living, shelter basic needs, food and clothing, but also necessary to improve the quality of life of the individuals, families, communities and countries, and their business as well.



## Conclusion

Many scholars emphasized that education is the key success to social mobility. Education is able to improve those who are in need or living in poverty during their early childhood. Individual can have a good economic status if they are willing to put effort and take the opportunity to change their economic status. The selection of students in Malaysia to study in abroad, premium classes, boarding schools, universities, as well as for scholarship and employment is based on academic achievement. The Malaysian government successfully created a good social mobility through a better educational system thus enables the children to enjoy a better life than their parents.

The ethnic groups in Malaysia are always in contact with one another and mix with other social dimensions in gaining the material rewards and social status in the society (Mohd Noor 2012). As a result, the Malaysians condition seems to have a rapid change along with the economic growth and modernization in the society. This creates individuals from different background to have a mutual contact with each other, interdependence and complex. The ethnic loyalty is assumed to be the determinant factor for the formation and intensity of relations among ethnic groups in Malaysia. Thus, the effective way to study ethnic relation is by focusing on the form and intensity of relations at individual level and looking for the influence of other social dimension that form a collective relation, particularly the ethnic, political and economic dimension in their pursuit for good and quality of life.

The intergenerational socio economic status shows the level of existent equality in Malaysian society. A society is said to be living in a social cohesion when they enjoy a successful life in unseparated socio economic circumstance, have the same opportunity to transform their life and attain equal rewards (Mohd Noor 2015). The low level of social mobility indicated that there is unequal opportunity and economic efficiency depends on the well usage of talents in the society. The policy makers are concerned on the environment which enable for social mobility is practiced among the members of the community by outlining various objectives including maintaining and promoting a harmonious society, fair and equal society through dimensions like equal opportunities that allow individuals to improve their capabilities and efforts with regards to status, gender and ethnic. Besides, social justice, social cohesion and inclusiveness provide a safety networking and prospect for those who are less fortunate so that may reduce the inequality of achievement and develop the community. Finally, the implication of social mobility to the policy makers is to promote the positive individual's autonomy in making their own decision.

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