Higher Education and Social Cohesion
Experience in Sabah and Sarawak

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Preface

This publication documents a research entitled "Higher Education and Social Cohesion in Sabah and Sarawak" which was funded by the Ministry of Higher Education through the National Higher Education Research Institute (IPPTN). The authors and researchers record their sincere appreciation to the Ministry and Institute for the sponsorship.

Social cohesion is a highly valued and essential societal condition for countries with a diverse ethnic, cultural and religious demography. It is a key concern in view of its significance in fostering political stability and sustaining economic development under such a pluralistic and potentially volatile social milieu. Social cohesion in multicultural societies requires not only continuous effort and effective governmental policies and strategies, but equally strong support, cooperation and participation from their heterogeneous citizenries. In multi-ethnic Malaysia, social cohesion and national unity have always been a primary concern for all parties. Indeed, efforts to promote better understanding across various ethnic groups and a high level of tolerance for ethnic differences have been a national agenda since independence, manifesting in the nation's economic, political, cultural, educational and other social policies. This includes the "1Malaysia" concept currently advocated by the administration of Datuk Seri Mohd Najib Tun Abdul Razak.

However, most observers share the opinion that national unity among the Malaysian people has yet to reach its ideal state, despite the multitude of state policies and programmes implemented during the last five decades to facilitate greater levels of social cohesion. Malaysia today still faces a compendium of issues and challenges related to ethnic relations, where 'narrow' policies of "positive discrimination", be they real or perceived, have continued to undermine the broader national vision of realising genuine social cohesion and national unity. In fact, some observers tend to perceive the situation as worsening with greater polarisation across societal groups due to the "politicisation" and "sensitisation" of ethno-religious issues by certain quarters for narrow domestic political expediencies. The pessimistic view has likewise been reinforced by the lack of effective public policies to promote awareness, skills and ability, especially among the younger generations to appreciate and value the strength of ethnic diversity and tolerance. In recent years, the mobilisation of younger people to participate in street demonstrations and the "ethnicisation" of various issues and events, have created a "tinderbox of irritation" that threatens to unravel the very social fabric that has held the somewhat fragile cohesion and unity of the Malaysian society together, thus far. One possible effect of this is the outcome of the thirteen General Elections.

Given the societal changes, and the issues and events that have transpired in the contemporary Malaysian context, there is a necessity for social cohesion to be measured and monitored constantly. More importantly, there is an urgent need to understand the degree of social cohesion among the younger generation, since the success or failure of the nation building agenda in Malaysia would very much depend on this cohort of citizenry. It was due to such awareness which led to the pursuit of a year-long IPPTN-funded research project in 2009 that looked into the role of higher education in fostering social cohesion and national unity in Malaysia, from which this book is derived.

The role of higher education as a vehicle towards inculcating social cohesion has been generally acknowledged and widely researched. It is, indeed, conventional wisdom that education in general, and higher education, specifically, plays a crucial role in moulding the younger generation for their meaningful participation in society. As such, higher education is an important conduit for the cultivation of norms, values, attitudes and ethics which are requisites for the foundation of social capital necessary for promoting national social cohesion and civic solidarity in multicultural societies.

In the Malaysian context, the importance of higher education in engendering national unity is undeniable. It has been underlined by national leaders, politicians, educators and informed citizens alike, who commonly see tertiary students as "leaders-in-waiting" bound toward becoming the creators of not only a united Malaysia, but also *"bangsa Malaysia"* (Malaysian nation), whose shared [national] identity transcends the traditional social divides of this country. Such a view is expected since the values associated with the inculcation of national social cohesion are systematically and consciously delivered and infused through three major components of the Malaysian higher education system, namely curriculum, co-curriculum, and extra-curriculum. Given these efforts, it is almost inevitable for students, especially those in public institutions of higher learning (IHL) to be commonly perceived as racially tolerant and more open or adept to inter-racial interactions. Such perceptions may even be more pronounced, when it comes to students at public IHL located in Sabah and Sarawak, since both states are generally believed to enjoy high levels of social cohesion amid their diverse socio-cultural settings.

As an extension of a previous study by Pang, Ho, and Amran Ahmed (2008) on social cohesion in a public IHL in Malaysia, this book aims to see whether similar findings are prevalent in IHL in Sabah and Sarawak. A key objective of this book is therefore to assess the strength of social cohesion among students

of higher education in Sabah and Sarawak. This is carried out by focusing the investigation on students from two public IHL, namely Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS), and Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS). This work also seeks to examine the contribution of the mentioned components of higher education towards promoting social cohesion, and the perceptions of tertiary students in these two public universities on issues related to the much desired societal condition. Based on the findings, it makes a number of suggestions that could contribute to the formulation and implementation of unity programme policies in IHL.

We believe that this volume is both important and timely, as Malaysia strives towards realising its nation building agenda. It should be of interest to scholars, researchers, and practitioners who are seeking to comprehend the correlations between higher education and social cohesion in the Malaysian context. The book should also appeal to informed readers interested in the current state of affairs on ethnic relations in Malaysia.

1

Introduction

The nature of ethnic relations varies greatly among multi-ethnic societies. Many such societies have made serious efforts to promote social cohesion among their citizens as it is realised that the political stability and economic development of the state depends on, or requires strong support, cooperation and participation from, their various ethnic citizens (Fukuda-Parr, 2004; Kivisto, 2005). While social cohesion across ethnic groups is inevitably needed for the purpose of political stability and economic development, and vice versa, social cohesion is in itself a social condition that depends strongly on the political and economic policies and strategies of a nation. It is an indicator of the progress and the effectiveness of public policies. As a social condition that is highly valued, social cohesion is seen as an essential enhancement of the promotion of the human rights, dignity and welfare of all citizens through minimising disparities and polarisation among them.

Social cohesion is a societal condition that can only be achieved by continuous effort, and a fair and practical approach. Modern approaches towards achieving unity among citizens of

multi-ethnic states indicate a clear shift from conservative, 'traditional' assimilative and 'melting pot' strategies towards integrative approaches that see pluralism and multiculturalism as a more meaningful, practical and democratic way of promoting better social unity among ethnic groups.

The Malaysian Constitution undeniably has given society a strong foundation for promoting the idea of pluralism and multiculturalism and has enabled Malaysia to avoid serious ethnic conflicts compared to many other nations (Horowitz, 1989). Ever since Independence, Malaysia has constantly struggled to promote better understanding among various ethnic groups and to encourage a high level of tolerance for ethnic differences (Zawawi, 2004). The importance of this has been fully appreciated by the government and has remained on the national agenda of the nation's economic, political, cultural, educational and other social policies.

National unity is defined by the National Unity and Advisory Panel as the state where individuals of all ethnic, religious, and regional groups live peacefully as a united race that commits fully to the national identity based on the Federal Constitution and the *Rukun Negara,* the national ideology (Anuar Rafie & Salehan Abdull Hak, 2005). However, despite the enormous numbers of unity programmes implemented for more than fifty years since Independence, national unity among the citizens may not have reached its ideal state (Ng & Sonia, 2006). Malaysia still faces many issues and challenges in fostering national unity among the people.

The community which makes up the Malaysian multiracial society consists, in Peninsular Malaysia, of the indigenous Malays or *bumiputera* (sons of the land), Chinese, and Indians; while additionally in Sabah and Sarawak, there are many other *bumiputera* groups such as the Kadazandusun, Murut, Iban and Bidayuh. No doubt the efforts of the government in assisting the economy of the *bumiputera* (Malays in particular) is perceived by some quarters of the non-*bumiputera* - or, in East Malaysia, non-Malay - populace as a policy of ethnic discrimination that endangers the vision of national unity (see Maznah Mohamad, 2009; Gomez, 2009). Others may also see the situation as worsening, with greater polarisation across social groups due to the lack of an effective public policy to promote, among new and younger generations, an appreciation of the value of ethnic diversity and of tolerance among people (Gomes, 2009).

In recent years, the mobilisation of younger people to participate in street demonstrations and the 'ethnicisation' of various issues and events among these groups has had to be taken seriously. Thus, as society changes and new events take place, social cohesion needs to be measured and monitored constantly. More importantly, we need to understand the strength or level of social cohesion among the younger Malaysian generation. Do they actually demonstrate attitudes of tolerance for ethnic differences in their day-to-day interactions?

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Mohd. Najib Tun Razak's drive since September 2010 for a united Malaysia through the "1Malaysia" concept can be seen as a catalyst for the growing interest in identifying the real values shared by the younger generations, especially those in public institutions of higher learning (IHLs). No doubt, the general perception towards students of public IHLs is that they should be racially tolerant and open to inter-racial interaction in their daily activities throughout their tertiary education. Nevertheless, there are concerns about the emergence of racial-based 'groups' within public IHLs, with students 'fighting' for equal opportunities against the *bumiputeras*. Has the continuous implementation of the New Economic Policy (NEP) jeopardised the efforts made to create a cohesive community, so much so that it affects the younger generation's perception of a multi-racial Malaysia?

Educational institutions, as organisations, consist of groups of individuals bound together for a common purpose. In a multi-ethnic society like Malaysia, ideally every public and private organisation must contribute to social cohesion and, inadvertently, national unity. The World Bank Group describes the role of IHLs as follows:

> ..... the norms, values, attitudes and ethics that tertiary institutions impart to students are the foundation of the social capital necessary for constructing healthy civil societies and cohesive cultures... Through the transmission of democratic values and cultural norms, tertiary education contributes to the promotion of civic behaviours, nation building and society.

(World Bank, 2001, pp. 23, 31; quoted in Heuser, 2007)

Our present study considers educational organisations as having a crucial role in moulding the younger generation for their meaningful future participation in society. Accordingly, we propose to investigate the level of social cohesion among young Malaysians in two public IHLs in Sabah and Sarawak. This will also determine the social health of the IHLs involved and, to a large extent, whether they fulfil the government's prescribed objectives in terms of "raising a generation of students with a capacity for knowledge and first class mentality" (9th Malaysia Plan 2006-2010).

The research problem and objectives

The importance of education for national unity in Malaysia has been underlined by national leaders, politicians, educators and other prominent citizens. For example, a former Education director-general, Abdul Rafie Mahat (2003, p.30) said that "Malaysia sees education as an indispensable asset in its attempt to foster unity, peace and prosperity". The values needed for national unity are delivered and infused through three major components of higher education: curriculum, co-curriculum, and extra-curriculum. But how effective are they in creating social cohesion among the students? IHL students are, after all, "leaders-in-waiting" who will ultimately face the task of creating a united Malaysia.

The mainspring of this book is the study conducted by Pang, Ho and Amran Ahmed (2008) in a Malaysian public IHL into the role of higher education in the inculcation of national unity. They found that the main contributors to the inculcation of national unity in the campus were university core courses, cultural activities, interaction with other students, and sports activities. Their statistical analysis showed a moderate correlation between university activities and national unity, with small but significant correlations between each of the activities and national unity. The correlation between residential hall activities and sports activities with national unity was significantly moderate. It was also found from linear regression analysis that the predictors of national unity among students were the university core courses, sports activities, faculty core courses, and student union activities.

This book reports a study that extends the study of Pang, Ho, and Amran Ahmed's (2008) to a wider population. The study aims to see whether similar findings are prevalent in all public IHLs in Sabah and Sarawak. Since the study by the trio only covered a public IHL and because of this study's presupposition that social cohesion is high in Sabah and Sarawak, our research extends the scope of the 2008 study to cover all public IHLs in both states.

Indeed, as Sabah and Sarawak are commonly perceived to enjoy a relatively high degree of social cohesion in view of its multi-culturally diverse societies, this study aims to firstly, investigate the level of social cohesion among students of higher education in both states. In doing so, the study also positions itself to investigate

how higher education contributes to promoting social cohesion in Sabah and Sarawak. Thirdly, it seeks to investigate the perceptions of students on issues related to social cohesion, which have a bearing on their inclination toward the idea of national unity and the practice of living harmoniously in a multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-cultural setting. Last but not least, it is hoped that the findings of this study would contribute to the formulation and implementation of unity programme policies in IHLs.

In line with the aims stated above, this book strives to address the following questions:

(1)   What is the level of social cohesion among students of higher education in Sabah and Sarawak?

(2)   Is there a significant difference in social cohesion between students of different disciplines (Arts, Management, and Social Sciences versus Sciences)?

(3)   Is there a significant difference in social cohesion between students of different levels of study (Semester 1-3 versus Semester 4 and above)?

(4)   Is there a significant difference in social cohesion between Peninsular and Sabah/Sarawak students who are pursuing higher education programmes in Sabah and Sarawak?

(5)   What is the perception of students on issues related to social cohesion?

(6)   What is the extent to which curriculum, co-curriculum, extra-curriculum, and residential activities in Sabah and Sarawak contribute to social cohesion?

Operational definitions and scope of research

For the purpose of this book, the inter-subjective concepts of 'social cohesion' and 'higher education are specifically limited to the following meanings and scope:

Social cohesion – defined as the strength of commonality among citizens of various ethnic backgrounds. It is a societal condition that needs continuous effort and an informed and practical approach to achieve it. In the Malaysian context, the terms 'social cohesion', 'national unity' and 'national solidarity' are used interchangeably. They cover various forms of commitment to, and perceptions of, issues such as national ideology, constitution, multiculturalism, usage of language, and policies. In this study, social cohesion is measured by the instrument used by Pang, Ho and Amran (2008) which was modified from Mansor and Morshidi (2005).

Higher education – defined as formal teaching and learning programmes as well as the informal experiences of students at tertiary level, with the aims of producing knowledgeable, skilful, and committed citizens for the development of the nation. It covers curriculum, co-curriculum and extra-curriculum. Curriculum involves formal and credited academic courses which are usually conducted in lecture halls, tutorial rooms, laboratories, workshops, studios etc. Co-curriculum involves compulsory student activities for character development which are given credit hours. Extra-curriculum involves student activities which are not compulsory and not credited, which are usually taken by students out of interest and talent. Apart from these elements, the study also scrutinises the residential life of the students and other forms of informal and/or private activities in the IHLs which they partake daily. In this study, two major public institutions for higher learning in Sabah and Sarawak are covered. These IHLs are Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS), covering Kota Kinabalu main campus as

well as Labuan International Campus, and Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS). Meanwhile, to enhance validity of the data, the subjects of the research are primarily fulltime undergraduates pursuing their second year studies and above.

The significance of the study

The relationship between social cohesion and higher education has always been an area of interest for many stakeholders in Malaysia. Its importance can be seen in the case of the Ethnic Relations Module for IHLs, which attracted so much attention and controversy that it had to be scrutinised and approved by the Malaysian Cabinet prior to its implementation (see Syed Husin Ali, 2009).

In view of the significance of the subject matter involved, the findings of this scholarly investigation are expected to address crucial enquiries pertaining to the propensity of higher education in promoting (or constraining) social cohesion, especially in the case of Sabah and Sarawak. More importantly, the results would provide the necessary information to facilitate policy planning and formulation pertaining to the relationship between higher education and social cohesion for major Malaysian stakeholders in the likes of the Ministry of Education (MoE), public Institutions of Higher Learning (IHLs), and future researchers in the area of higher education and social cohesion.

To be more specific, three major benefits could derive from this study. Firstly, the identification of the difference in the strength of social cohesion according to demographic factors would enable the MoE to plan policies to address the imbalance in social cohesion among students in IHLs. Secondly, the identification of the extent to which curriculum, co-curriculum, extra-curriculum, and residential activities influence social cohesion would allow higher education policy planners and implementers in the MoE and universities

to prioritise, or focus on, areas of higher education that require further enhancement. Last but not least, the identification of the perceptions of IHL students on issues related to social cohesion would enable higher education administrators to align higher education activities to optimise the enculturation of social cohesion.

Research design and method

This is essentially a quantitative study in the related fields of education, sociology and political science. Specifically, this book employs a quantitative methodology to measure social cohesion among the students of public IHLs within Sabah and Sarawak. Quantitative data was collected using fixed-response items in a questionnaire.

The instrument

The instrument was modified from the questionnaire used by Pang, Ho and Amran Ahmed (2008), which was adopted from Mansor Mohd. Noor and Morshidi Sirat (2005). The instrument of Pang, Ho and Amran Ahmed (2008) consists of 28 statements measuring the degree of social cohesion of the subjects. In this study, the original version for all items was reviewed and modified so as to increase the breadth and the depth of the variables measured. These statements reflect the norms and values needed in the specific political and social context of the multicultural society of Malaysia to promote the sense of national community, identity and unity.

The revised questionnaire consists of three parts. Part I comprises nine items on demographic characteristics of the subjects. They are Name of Programme, Stream, Faculty/School, Age, Gender, Place of Origin, Ethnicity, Religion, and Number of

Semesters attended. The *ethnic* status of the subjects was based on their perception of this inter-subjective identity marker. Part II consists of 39 statements on social cohesion. Five of the items (Items 2, 5, 14, 15, and 25) were used to measure the respondents' perception of issues related to social cohesion, while the other 33 items were used for the measurement of the magnitude of social cohesion. Meanwhile, Part III is made up of eight sets of items to capture data on academic courses, and co-curricular and extra-curricular activities that facilitate the inculcation of social cohesion. These items were also utilised to gauge the extent of involvement of the respondents in the stipulated activities.

For academic courses, the respondents were asked to indicate their level of participation in taught courses, such as Ethnic Relations, Islamic and Asian Civilisation, languages, and Basic Entrepreneurship. Conversely, co-curriculum activities range from sports to culture-based activities, for which students are required to participate in accordance to their own preference. All co-curricular activities are given credit hours. Meanwhile, extra-curricular activities are those in which students involve themselves according to their own interest, such as recreational, sports, cultural and student body activities. These activities do not carry credit hours. The items in Parts II and III were given responses based on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5, with 1 being 'Strongly Disagree' and 5 being 'Strongly Agree.'

Samples and data collection

The samples for this study were taken from two public IHLs in Sabah and Sarawak: a simple random sampling method was employed to select undergraduate student subjects from Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) (Kota Kinabalu and Labuan campuses) and Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS). A self-completing questionnaire survey was administered to a total of 1,508 subjects (999 from UMS and 509 from UNIMAS) out of the estimated 22,000 student population in 2009 enrolled in the two universities. Based on Krejcie and Morgan (1970), the minimum sample required for a population of 22,000 should be between 377 and 379. The number of 1,508 samples collected in this study reflects a better representation of the student population from these universities. The questionnaire survey was carried out simultaneously in the three campuses over a period of three months.

Since the purpose of the study is to understand the contribution of higher education learning and experiences of students to social cohesion, the subjects were selected from among fulltime undergraduate students in their second year and above to ensure that they had sufficient experience and exposure to campus life, particularly in the academic curriculum, co-curriculum and extra-curricular activities.

The actual data collection was carried out following a pilot study involving 79 students at the UMS Kota Kinabalu campus. Reliability of items was measured using Cronbach's Alpha, which indicated a high index of internal consistency of 0.859. The items were also analysed by using QUEST (Adams & Khoo, 1996), an interactive item analysis programme based on Item-Response Theory (Hambleton & Swaminathan, 1985). Items with infit mean square of more than 1.7 were reworded to improve clarity for the use in the final instrument.

The final social cohesion instrument was again tested for reliability. The overall Cronbach's index of internal consistency for the instrument was 0.927, which is considered very high. The items were also given factor analysis, which resulted in four factors:

1. Acceptance of government and appreciation of political stability.

2. Commitment towards nation building and patriotism.

3. Appreciation of law and civility.

4. Appreciation of multi-culturalism and harmony.

These factors are consistent with the theories discussed in Chapter 2. The factors with the respective items and indices of consistency of the factors are shown in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1: Items and Indices of Consistency for the Social Cohesion Factors

Acceptance of government and appreciation of political stability (α = 0.844)	1. Government policies benefit everyone at every level of society.
	2. Government policies benefit everyone regardless of race and religion.
	3. I feel secure with the Judiciary system of this country.
	4. The racial harmony enjoyed by Malaysians today will ensure racial tensions in the past will not be repeated.
	5. The political stability in this country is due to equal power sharing between races.
	6. I accept the democratic system of this country.
	7. I am confident that this country will always ensure the well being of my family and I.
	8. I feel proud to be in the presence of the King and Heads of States.
Commitment towards nation building and patriotism (α = 0.847)	1. I accept the concept of 1Malaysia entirely.
	2. I believe the government can achieve the concept of 1Malaysia.
	3. The National Training Service should be mandatory.
	4. I accept Vision 2020 entirely.
	5. Malaysians should be proud of their domestic products.
	6. I am proud to defend my country.
	7. I will remain a citizen no matter what happens in my country.
	8. I feel hurt when my country is ridiculed.
	9. I feel proud when Malaysia achieves international recognition.
	10. Schools should display the national flag.
	11. Malaysians ought to be proud of this country.
Appreciation of law and civility (α = 0.699)	1. Malaysians should be law abiding.
	2. I feel all Malaysians should practice courtesy and civility.
	3. Malaysians should adhere to the National Constitution.
	4. One should always stand to attention when the national anthem is being played
	5. It is the responsibility of every citizen to provide constructive feedback on government policies
	6. Dialogues between different faiths should be encouraged to promote understanding
	7. Every race in this country contributes to the development of this nation.
Appreciation of multi-culturalism and harmony (α = 0.735)	1. I agree that Islam is the national religion in this country.
	2. I agree that Bahasa Malaysia is the national language of this country.
	3. Bahasa Malaysia should be used as the language medium on signboards.
	4. I am proud that this country is made up of different races, cultures and religions.
	5. The incident of May 13, 1969 must not be repeated.
	6. Malaysia belongs to every one of its multi racial citizens.
	7. The national culture should consist of all the many cultures in Malaysia.

Description of Subjects

Table 1.2 below describes the demographic characteristics of subjects involved in this study. Some of the figures indicated in the table may not total up to the whole population of the sample due to instances of no information being given. The majority of the subjects fall under these categories – female, arts-based, East Malaysian, and students studying in second year.

Table 1.2: Demographic Information

Item	Demographic Information		Frequency	%
1	Programme Stream	Science-based courses	641	42.5
		Arts-based	866	57.4
2	Gender	Female	1032	68.4
		Male	472	31.3
3	Place of Origin (in Malaysia)	Peninsular Malaysia	616	40.8
		Sabah	483	32.0
		Sarawak	487	27.0
4	Ethnicity	Peninsular *bumiputera* 3	92	26.0
		Sabah *bumiputera*	409	27.1
		Sarawak *bumiputera*	249	16.5
		Chinese	361	23.9
		Indian 6	7	4.4
		Others 3	0	2.0
5	Duration of Studies	1- 4 semesters	970	64.4
		5 semesters or more	538	35.5

Method of data analysis

The Statistical Package for Social Sciences Programme (SPSS) Version 16 was used for data analysis. Descriptive statistics involving frequencies, means and standard deviations was used. The level of social cohesion of the subjects was assessed based on the division of the possible mean value of 1.00 to 5.00 to three equal parts as illustrated in Table 1.3. Based on these ranges, the means of social cohesion of the subjects were re-coded into one of the three levels.

Table 1.3   Interpretation of the Level of Social Cohesion

Mean	Level of Social Cohesion
1.00-2.33	Low
2.34-3.66	Medium
3.67-5.00	High

The test of normality using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov Method showed that the data were not normally distributed. This implied that non-parametric tests needed to be used for inferential statistics. Therefore, for the comparison of means between two groups, the Mann-Whitney U Test was used. These statistical analysis methods were applied in extracting findings which will be further presented and discussed in Chapter 3.

The structure of the book

This book is divided into four parts. The first part serves as the introductory chapter, which elaborates on the subject matter, the research problem and objectives, the research design involved, and the significance of the book. The second chapter offers a general background and review of previous studies on higher education and social cohesion, albeit with a special focus on the Malaysian context. Chapter three is dedicated to the analysis and discussion of the findings of the research from which this book is derived. The fourth and concluding chapter deals with the generalisation of the main findings, followed by recommendations and policy guidelines for stakeholders to expedite measures to enhance social cohesion in public IHLs in Malaysia.

2

Social Cohesion and National Unity

Introduction

The most consistent characteristic about social cohesion is that it is consistently evolving in keeping with the political, social and economic climate. To a large extent, these variations reflect the objectives and underlying social agenda of the powers that be. Studies from America, Europe, Africa and Asia will be discussed extensively, though not exhaustively. The literature review will focus on the role of education in studies conducted in several institutions in these continents, as a vehicle to identify the myriad of relationships that either promote or hinder social cohesion. Special emphasis is placed on reviewing and discussing the history and growth of the Malaysian education system as a factor in national unity and social cohesion.

Social cohesion can be described as the ability of members of a society to find mutually agreeable solutions to the problems they face (Kraince, 2007). As Maxwell (2001) points out, a cohesive society is "not a utopia where all is peace and tranquillity. Instead,

it describes a society that accepts diversity and manages conflicts before they become fights." In the Southeast Asian context, social cohesion is generally regarded as a function of stakeholder commitment to a given social order (Siddique, 2001). It is the term commonly used in social policy, sociology, and political science to describe the bond that brings people together in society, particularly in the context of ethno-cultural and religious diversity. In other words, it is the strength of commonality among citizens of various ethnic backgrounds.

Social cohesion is a multifaceted notion covering many different kinds of causally interrelated social phenomena that affect individual attitudes and behaviours (Friedkin,2004). Green *et al.* (2006) stated that social cohesion should not be taken as a single, unitary property: there are different types of social cohesion, which combine different constituent elements in different configurations. Also, it should be separated into both the public and private spaces/realms, where the level of social cohesion achieved in one may not necessarily reflect or be consistent with the other.

Furthermore, it must be stressed that social cohesion objectives and concerns are not uniform around the world. As Heyneman and Todoric-Bebic (2000) point out, there are countries in some regions that are concerned primarily with ethnic identity, while countries in other regions are concerned primarily with public corruption, illegal behaviour and national unity. For instance, within the Asia region there is a wide range of different societies, ranging from Islamic and socialist countries to capitalist democracies, many of which are also characterised by multiculturalism. These circumstances make ethnicity, language, and religion central concerns in the context of nation-building and social cohesion. Diverse societies, such as India, Indonesia, and Malaysia, put more emphasis on the role of education in forging and maintaining national unity. On the other hand, more homogenous countries like Japan have stressed the contribution of education to workforce formation in their educational planning. Meanwhile, countries such as China and Singapore place both social cohesion and economic growth at the centre of educational policy (Heyneman & Todoric-Bebic, 2000, p.152).

Social cohesion and national unity in Malaysia

As mentioned earlier, in the Malaysian context the terms 'social cohesion', 'national unity' and 'national solidarity' are used interchangeably. They cover such matters as national ideology, the constitution, multiculturalism, and language policies. Since Independence, the importance of national unity has been the key target of Malaysia's national agenda underpinning the nation's economic, political, cultural, educational, and social policies. Modern approaches towards promoting unity among citizens of multi-ethnic societies show a shift from assimilative, melting pot strategies towards more integrative approaches that see pluralism and multiculturalism as a more practical, democratic way of enhancing social cohesion between ethnic groups.

Since 2010, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak has promoted the concept of "1Malaysia" to enhance national unity among Malaysian citizens. According to him, "1Malaysia" is not a new concept or formula. Its ultimate objective of engendering national unity amidst diversity reflected the vision, promoted in various forms and policies, of past leaders of the country. In other words, "1Malaysia" is a relatively familiar concept relating to fostering national unity among Malaysians from all ethnic backgrounds and is based on several important values which should underpin the behaviour of every citizen. The Prime Minister also explained that it is a concept to further strengthen unity, and ensure stability towards achieving greater progress and development for the country and its people. It emphasises acceptance among the people of various races, whereby any one

race accepts the uniqueness of the others, so as to enable everyone to live together in harmony, based on mutual respect as members of one nation (1Malaysia website/blog). Indeed, in his speech in 2010 at a Chinese New Year 'open house' celebration, Datuk Seri Najib Razak reiterated the vision of "1Malaysia", which is to realise 'bangsa Malaysia' (Malaysian nation) by transforming the mindset of all Malaysians from being tolerant, to totally accepting and, ultimately, celebrating our diversity (Kong, 2010).

In addition, the propagation of this latest concept of national unity also encompasses the promotion of regional integration, especially between Peninsular Malaysia and the Bornean states of Sabah and Sarawak. Indeed, one of the nascent achievements of "1Malaysia" has been the long-awaited recognition given to the formation of Malaysia, which saw the federal government finally declaring in 2009 that, as from 2010, September 16 was to be a national holiday to commemorate the auspicious event (originally the "Malaysia Day", held on 16 September to commemorate the formation of Malaysia in 1963, took place only in East Malaysia, but since 2010 it has become a full nationwide holiday).[1] This move was deemed by some commentators to be an earnest attempt to promote national solidarity.

The Department of National Unity and Integration defines national unity as a situation in which all citizens from various ethnic groups, religions, and states live in peace as one united nationality, giving full commitment to their national identity based upon the Federal Constitution and the Rukun Negara (the national ideology) (Anuar Rafie & Salehan Abdull Hak, 2005). In Malaysia, the major task of the national development plan is to forge a nation that is united through the principles of Rukun Negara and the New Economic Policy (NEP). The aim of the Rukun Negara is a united pluralistic, democratic, multicultural, progressive nation

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[1] The formation of the Federation of Malaysia took place on 16 September 1963 following the merger between the Federation of Malaya and the Bornean states of Sabah and Sarawak, as well as Singapore into a single, united national entity. Singapore, however, left the union two years later, on 9 August 1965.

with minimum economic disparity between the masses, while the NEP's objective is the realisation of a 'just society' (Masyarakat Adil) through the eradication of poverty and the restructuring of society to eliminate the identification of race with economic function and geographical location (Lai, 1999). However, despite the enormous numbers of unity programmes implemented for more than fifty years since Independence, national unity among the citizens has yet to reach its ideal state (Ng & Sonia, 2006). Realistically, Malaysia still faces many issues and challenges in fostering national unity among its people.

As highlighted in Chapter 1, the efforts of the Malaysian government in assisting the economic emancipation of the bumiputeras are being perceived by some quarters of the non-bumiputera community as a policy of (positive) ethnic discrimination that jeopardises the vision of national unity. Others also see the situation as worsening, with greater polarisation across social groups due to the lack of effective public policies to promote skills and ability among new and younger generations, to appreciate and value the strength of ethnic diversity and tolerance among the people (see Lim, Gomes, & Rahman, 2009). The mobilisation in recent years of younger Malaysians to participate in street demonstrations, and the 'ethnicisation' of various issues and events among these groups must be taken seriously. Thus, as society changes and new events take place, social cohesion needs to be measured and monitored constantly. More importantly, there is need to understand the strength or level of social cohesion among the younger generation because it sets the direction and social climate that this country is heading for.

Ethnicity

Malaysia is one of the most plural and heterogeneous countries in the world. It comprises three major ethnic groups, namely the Malay, Chinese and Indian, as well as a plethora of other indigenous

tribes (mainly in Malaysian Borneo). In numerous ethnically heterogeneous countries, ethnic rivalry has often prevented the use of a single indigenous language, thus leading those countries to adopt English, French, Portuguese, or Spanish as the language of instruction (Heyneman & Todoric-Bebic, 2000). In Malaysia, the official language is *Bahasa Malaysia* while other languages such as Mandarin, Tamil, and English are used in daily life and education (e.g. Mandarin and English classes).

In this modern era, it is inevitable for a country as ethnically and culturally diverse as Malaysia to face tensions arising from such diversity and the prevalence of the politics of race and religion. The *Rukun Negara* has provided a strong base for nurturing the concepts of pluralism and multiculturalism; this has helped Malaysia to fare comparatively better in terms of avoiding ethnic conflicts than other nations with similar demographics. That said, Malaysia still struggles to continue educating its people in the hopes of achieving even better integration and gaining their acceptance of the uniqueness of their ethnic pluralism. This has been an ongoing process since Independence, with education being one of the most important channels of delivery. Indeed, "[as] Malaysia enters the next phase of its evolution and as technological changes affect national consciousness", Azly Rahman (2009, p.201) is of the opinion that "the questions of how education can or cannot shape multiculturalism [and national unity] have become more important".

Education and its roles

Education in Malaysia, as a whole, falls under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education (MoE). All sectors of the education system in Malaysia are governed by the Education Act 1961. Malaysian education, including higher education, is guided by the National Philosophy of Education, which states: "Education in Malaysia is an on-going effort to further develop the potential of individuals in a holistic and integrated manner, so as to produce individuals who are intellectually, spiritually, emotionally, and physically balanced, and harmonious, based on a firm belief in, and devotion to, God. Such effort is designed to produce Malaysian citizens of high moral standards, knowledgeable and competent, and who are responsible and capable of achieving a high level of personal well-being, as well as being able to contribute to the harmony and betterment of the family, the society, and the nation, at large (Ministry of Education, Malaysia, 2001, p.16). This implies that education in Malaysia inculcates and nurtures national consciousness through fostering common values and aspirations that contribute to national unity and national identity.

Essentially, the Malaysian education system is two-pronged under the National Development Plan. First, education is used as a channel to promote national unity. Education policies are formulated and geared towards achieving racial equity and equality of distribution of access to higher education. Second, education is a vocational tool to produce skilled citizens, thereby ensuring a strong labour force which will contribute to a strong economy and continued development. Malaysia has pursued an approach to education policy typical of a multiracial society, aiming at creating a unified identity by developing a national culture based on the cultures of the ethnic groups of the region, incorporating suitable and appropriate elements from other cultures, and with Islam as an important element in its formulation (Heyneman & Todoric-Bebic, 2000).

Table 2.1 Role of Education in Malaysia Plans in accordance with the national goal of "Vision 2020" (promulgated in 1991).

Plan	Period	Role of Education
Sixth Malaysia Plan	1991 – 1995	To expand educational opportunities and to increase access to all levels of education, and to strengthen and improve the quality of education
Seventh Malaysia Plan	1996 – 2000	To produce an adequate number of skilled and quality workers as well as to produce citizens who are disciplined and possess high moral values and good work ethics
Eighth Malaysia Plan	2001 – 2005	To re-orientate education and training systems so workers acquire the knowledge, skills and expertise necessary to support a knowledge-based economy
Ninth Malaysia Plan	2006 – 2010	To raise the capacity for knowledge generation and nurture "first class mentality"
Tenth Malaysia Plan	2011 - 2015	To contribute to nurturing, attracting and retaining top talents

Furthermore, since the pronouncement of the national goal or ideal of "Vision 2020" in 1991, education has been given top priority in the national development goals, and specific and calculated measures have been initiated to make higher education an important agenda in the development of the nation (refer Table 2.1). In Asia, a number of countries – including Malaysia, have included moral education in both the primary and secondary school curricula as a way of promoting cohesiveness and national unity and of developing a sense of national identity by concentrating on shared values rather than on differences.

As is to be expected, many statutes have been enacted to deal with various aspects of higher education in Malaysia. It is specifically governed by the Universities and University Colleges Act 1971 (last amended 2009) which provides for the establishment and regulation of public universities. In regard to private education, the Private Higher Education Institutions Act 1996 was enacted to make provision for the establishment of private universities, university colleges, and branch campuses of foreign universities, and for the upgrading of existing private colleges to universities. In the same year, the National Council on Higher Education Act (1996) was enacted to manage higher education policy, and to coordinate higher education development. Other acts dealt with more specific aspects such as quality assurance and accessibility. For example, the National Accreditation Board Act (1996) set up the National Accreditation Board to ensure that high academic standards and quality are maintained in both public and private higher education institutions; and a decade later this Act was replaced with the more comprehensive Malaysian Qualifications Agency Act 2007. As for making higher education more accessible through student loans, scholarships and other financial assistance, the National Higher Education Fund Board Act (1997) provides, for example, for the establishment of a fund board for the purpose of providing educational loans for students studying in local higher education institutions.

Universities and colleges play an important role in producing quality graduates who will serve as leaders and innovators in the labour market in the next generation. According to Burnett (2007, p.288), universities are "both repositories and disseminators of knowledge, and are thus a precious resource". Universities have long been known to develop the human capital necessary in a knowledge-based economy and have frequently been regarded as key institutions involved in the processes of social change and development. In Malaysia, the roles played by universities in the development period are varied, multiple and contradictory - sometimes reproductive and at other times, transformative (Brennan, King & Lebeau, 2004). The main focus of a traditional university in Malaysia is viewed as having three major aspects,

namely, education, research, and service to the community (Mansor Mohd. Nor & Morshidi Sirat, 2005).

All universities attempt to influence a community's social cohesion through two mechanisms. One mechanism is the development of the curriculum and professionalism in teaching, for instance, history, culture, biology, physics, engineering and ecology. High-quality universities are defined by their openness to world literature and information provided freely to all students on as many topics as feasible. The second mechanism is the manner in which a university models good behaviour and exhibits professional standards. This may include, for example, the degree to which –

(a) a university rewards academic performance fairly and honestly;

(b) the faculty and administration openly advertise and adhere to codes of conduct; and

(c) open discussion is cherished and differing opinions respected.

(Heyneman, 2007a).

The more a university exhibits these characteristics, the more likely it is that high quality students are produced, and this will have a positive impact in terms of contribution to national social cohesion.

Higher education is defined as including formal teaching and learning programmes as well as the informal experiences of students at tertiary level, with the aim of producing knowledgeable, skilful and committed citizens for the development of the nation (Burnett, 2007). It covers curriculum, co-curriculum, and extra-curriculum. This implies that the function of higher education is no longer limited – as in the traditional sense – to providing specific skills. Instead, it also plays a salient role in shaping and modelling the students' attitudes, their awareness towards social issues arising around them, and their participation in society (Burnett, 2007; Pang, Ho & Amran Ahmed, 2008). Nowadays many higher education institutions are not only concentrating on teaching and research but are also embracing new functions and missions, as diverse as nationalisation, democratisation, public service and internationalisation (Scott, 2006, p.4). Some commentators see these wide-ranging functions as vital in laying the foundation necessary for the realisation of the knowledge-based democratic society which is increasingly becoming a common goal in both developed and emerging states (Heuser, 2007, p.294).

As a matter of fact, in the Malaysian context, this emphasis is clearly underlined in the scope and definition of the Education Policy Review Committee, which supported the prescription of the World Bank Report (2001) regarding the need for countries in transition to promote a "knowledge-based economy" (or K-Economy). The transition to a K-Economy has become a catchphrase and driving force in Malaysia's political economy. In this regard, the Malaysian Qualifications Framework (MQF), which underpins the standards, criteria, and processes involved in promoting Quality Assurance (QA) in the Malaysian higher education sector, has identified the importance of the mastery of social skills and responsibilities, as well as commitment to positive values and attitudes, as part of the benchmarked standards for students' learning outcomes (Malaysian Qualifications Agency, 2008). This clearly reflects the increasingly holistic functions – including the fostering of national social cohesion – that Malaysian IHLs are expected to promote.

Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) is a viable example, where academic courses offered to students are divided into three main categories; namely, university core courses, faculty core courses, and programme courses. Curriculum involves the participation of teaching and learning activities in a formal setting. In the

case of UMS, the curriculum involves the teaching and learning of both compulsory university core courses as well as elective courses offered by the Centre for the Promotion of Knowledge and Language Learning (CPKLL). These courses include Ethnic Relations, Islamic and Asian Civilisation, Basic Entrepreneurship, Contemporary Political Thought, Contemporary Islamic Thought, and Introduction to Ethics. Together with offering of a whole range of soft skills, language, and ethics-based courses, the CPKLL indeed plays an active and conscious role in helping UMS promote social cohesion amongst its multi-ethnic student community. In addition to this, the values of national unity are also infused by some lecturers in the teaching and learning of faculty core and programme courses.

In Malaysia, the Department of National Unity and Integration has introduced *Rukun Negara* clubs in IHLs as one of the co-curricular activities aimed at fostering national unity among students. For instance, in UMS, the co-curriculum programmes related to the inculcation of national unity include Interaction with Community (INTERIM), Reserve Officer Training Unit (PALAPES), Reserve Police Officer Training Unit (SUKSIS), Leadership and Motivation (*Bakti Siswa*), folk dance, choir, theatre, and traditional music. Sports activities such as hockey, basketball, soccer, and volleyball can also contribute to the inculcation of national unity among students. These programmes are designed to mould and produce students with discipline, tolerance, and positive social attitudes (Pang, Ho & Amran Ahmed, 2008).

Extra-curriculum related to national unity takes the form of student outreach programmes, such as student representative council activities, activities at residential colleges, and student activities at faculty and programme levels, as well as campaigns and competitions. National unity is also inculcated through students' interaction with their peers, lecturers, and other members of the university community. It is obvious that the main objective of the higher education programme is not only to produce high quality graduates who excel in their specific fields (science, engineering, social sciences, education, business, arts, etc.), but also to develop their spirit of teamwork and cooperation – which, amongst other things, enables them to work with peers from other fields, respecting and appreciating their cultural differences in the process.

Previous studies on higher education and social cohesion

The social cohesion function of education is at the heart of each nation's education system. Regardless of the emphasis placed on social cohesion in different regions, all countries around the world use public education to reduce the risks of ethical compromises and to promote a national common good. However, it has been pointed out that higher education tends to be at risk of making ethical compromises that jeopardise the overall benefit of its other functions, including the fostering of social cohesion and national unity (Heuser, 2007).

Indeed, specifically in terms of the relationship between higher education and social cohesion, previous studies have found the former playing an important role in either promoting or hindering the latter. For example, a 2001 World Bank report stressed the crucial function of tertiary institutions in imparting to students the norms, values, attitudes, and ethics that form the foundation necessary for the construction of healthy civil societies and cohesive cultures that contribute to the promotion of civic behaviours, nation building and social cohesion (World Bank, 2001, pp.23, 31). Other commentators see both public and private higher education as playing a critical role in helping ensure that citizens live in peace with each other and that graduates are technically able to perform up to expectations in the labour market (Heyneman, 2007a); or, similarly, they view the internal

processes of higher education as having implications for the shape and cohesion of societies and for the quality of life of individuals (Brennan & Naidoo, 2008).

Exemplifying such standpoints is an investigation into the indigenisation of higher education in New Zealand which concluded that "universities have the potential to demonstrate social cohesion and also to prepare graduates for leadership roles in promoting a society that can model inclusiveness without demanding assimilation" (Durie, 2009). Meanwhile, an exploration of the theoretical foundations of social cohesion as it relates to IHLs found the role of higher education particularly vital in cultivating what it deemed as "moral awareness" and in establishing "specific ethical norms and values" as a means of engendering social cohesion (Heuser, 2007).

That said, it has been pointed out that while higher education enhances social capital as an individual or a community good, it may in fact do little to promote collective social cohesion (Green, *et al.,* 2006). Indeed, a number of commentators remind us that IHLs may in various ways impede social cohesion. For example, if the nation's primary social problem is ignored by its universities – if, for example, bribery within the universities is practised in order for students to get higher grades – then these practices would be a sign that universities could not constructively influence the attitudes and behaviour of the society (Heyneman, 2007a). Instead, it may do the opposite, and become the exact model for behaviour that hinders social cohesion. More directly, higher education can be misused. It may function, for instance, as a weapon of cultural repression or a means of promoting segregation in order to maintain social inequality - policies which would indubitably undermine the fostering of social cohesion and national unity (Bush & Saltarelli, 2000).

Moreover, in this competitive era, there are external pressures which actually limit the university's supporting role in fostering national social cohesion. These external pressures may include the financial collapse of the wider economy, corruption of the nation's principal governmental institutions, public ideology, political intolerance, race discrimination issues, and religious conflict (Heyneman 2007a, p.291). Indeed, a bold UNESCO statement in 2006 sums this up by highlighting that -

> ...universities have had to withstand the damaging forces from the external environment. They have been enlisted to promote aggressive definitions of nationalism. They have been reduced to narrow vocational functions. They have been utilised to consolidate the power of specific ethnic nationalities or religious views, enforce indoctrination, repress or deny competing world views. Universities themselves have become models of unprofessional behaviour and misconduct through corruption. In some instances, discussion of social issues is avoided for fear or retribution. In these instances, universities can be said to have hindered social cohesion.

A report of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) also recommended 11 characteristics necessary for universities to cultivate an environment that sufficiently enables them to play their proper social cohesion role; namely:

- Publicly available standards of student and faculty conduct.

- A transparent process of adjudication for misconduct.

- Students and faculty who are broadly representative of the wider population.

- Curriculum which reflects social problems.

- Empirical research particularly on social issues.

- Commitment to forging linkages with the wider community.

- Multiple sources of finance, aside from government.

- Proactive leadership that explains and defends the role of the university.

- Public debate over sensitive issues.

- Academic freedom to ensure open debate and prevent retribution.

- Institutional autonomy so that it takes responsibility for its own policies.

A number of these aspects are also emphasised in Moiseyenko's (2005) study on higher education and social cohesion. She agrees that social cohesion can occur when students attend higher education institutions; but she emphasizes the specific roles played by curriculum content, university culture, academic fairness and integrity, and community involvement. According to her, students go through a process of socialisation in higher education, which makes it vital during this period to ensure that they acquire the core values that underpin social cohesion. As in some of the case studies mentioned below, Moiseyenko (2005) argues that higher education institutions can influence social cohesion through curriculum content and the culture of their institutions, through practising fairness to students and faculty, and through making procedures available for effective adjudication to members of the school community in order to achieve a consensus over what and how to teach.

Apart from the more general observations mentioned above, there are also various regional case studies which examine elements of the relationship between higher education and social cohesion in specific countries. These include studies on related issues, such as the HIV/AIDS dilemma in South African universities, universities' reactions towards the sensitive issues concerning Muslim immigrants in the Netherlands, religious tolerance amongst Islamic universities in Indonesia, the questionable role of missionary schools in fostering social cohesion in Lebanon, and corruption issues involving universities in the former Soviet Union. It is useful to look at these case studies in a little more detail.

In studying corruption and social cohesion in certain former Soviet states, Heyneman (2007a) pointed out there was evidence that the universities were likely to hinder social cohesion, yet simultaneously they were modelling behaviour that was likely to make social cohesion possible. For instance, in selected universities in the former Soviet states of Georgia, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, which experience corruption in education, faculty members think that it is the university's duty to model good behaviour for the students, even in face of social and institutional pressures to participate in corrupt behaviour (Heyneman, 2007b).

Other regional studies have focussed on educational institutions in certain Islamic countries. In a study of Islamic higher education and social cohesion in Indonesia (Kraince, 2007), it was found that Islamic universities in Indonesia are actually playing a conscious role in promoting dialogue and tolerance, even on controversial issues, such as the role of Islam in public affairs. The universities see the need to conduct discussion with civility and respect to all parties. This demonstrates that Islamic universities in Indonesia are indeed playing an important role in promoting social cohesion. On the other hand, the role of missionary schools in Lebanon in fostering national unity and social cohesion has been seen as questionable, due to the reluctance of Muslim families to send their children to these schools (Frayha, 2003). This suggests

that the role of education and higher education in promoting social cohesion is also dependent, to an extent, on institutional and public perceptions and attitudes.

Some case studies have looked at the potential role of university curriculum – particular courses, programmes, topics, and teaching approaches - in boosting social cohesion. Lesko (2007) carried out a study in South Africa on the relationship between university teaching and social cohesion in the age of HIV/AIDS. Through the observations, she found that university curriculum and teaching went beyond the technical, individualistic, rational, self-interested assumptions, typical of much safe-sex education. The teaching efforts of the South African universities consciously included cultural understandings of health, community responses, and individuals within communal relationships. The study showed that university teaching promoted what was deemed to be critical-edged social cohesion.

Bastedo (2008) on the other hand, found universities in the Netherlands play the opposite role when it came to forging social cohesion. He studied whether special access policies for Muslim students were appropriate and whether the curriculum in universities should incorporate topics related to the integration of Muslims into Dutch society; he also investigated the direct engagement of universities in local communities through support of students and organizations. From his observations, universities in the Netherlands were found to be silent and inactive towards these sensitive issues of Muslim immigration. In fact, most of the interviewees thought that it was not the university's function to play a role in these controversial issues, and were reluctant to accept these propositions. In other words, instead of promoting social cohesion, the universities in the Netherlands are actually hindering social cohesion.

The study by Stabback (2008) on efforts to foster national unity and mobility in post-Dayton Bosnia-Herzegovina emphasised the relative benefits of a common curriculum, a core curriculum, and a curriculum framework in addressing the deficiency of the existing curricula as a means of moving towards forging national social cohesion in a state previously fragmented by inter-ethnic and religious conflict. Nevertheless, the study found that entrenched ethnic-based ideological constraints, compounded by the presence of insensitive and uninformed political leadership, remain the major obstacle to such nation-building efforts.

Indeed, the importance of curriculum development in fostering social cohesion and national unity, especially curriculum that incorporates intercultural understanding, has been implicitly emphasised in another study on post-conflict Bosnia-Herzegovina (Conces, 2002). According to Conces (2002, p.295), education, especially intercultural education, has a potential role in liberating an individual from the sort of opinion that often divides people along certain ethnic, racial and religious lines. He argues that education "allows us to distance ourselves from that opinion, from our interests, so that we can at least recognise that the perspective of the other is as deserving respect as our own". He thus indirectly suggests curriculum development as a vital instrument for engendering what he coined "unified pluralism" and the "harmonization of humanity" in the multi-ethnic state still rife with anti-modern and anti-democratic forces of ethnic nationalism.

Let us turn now to the research that has been conducted in Malaysia on ethnicity and "ethnic nationalism", on the promotion of pluralism, and on the role of IHLs – including their curriculum content and extra-curricular activities – especially in regard to preparing students for society and fostering social cohesion and multicultural values.

Issues relating to ethnicity, ethnic relations and the influence of religion on ethnic tolerance amongst students in a Malaysian public university (in Sabah) were examined by Budi Anto Mohd Tamring (2008). He discusses the question of ethnicity in the East Malaysian state of Sabah in general, and the levels of interaction

and ethnic tolerance among *bumiputera* students of Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) in particular. Using the Borgadus Social Measurement Method, Budi Anto Mohd Tamring (2008) found that the level of religious differences and religiousness was not significant in influencing the level of interaction and ethnic tolerance of his samples. He concluded by arguing that although the focus of the study was at a micro-level, the pattern and types of ethnic relations portrayed were consistent with the wider social structure and interaction of Sabahan society.

Budi Anto Mohd Tamring's work is basically an IHL-focused analysis and representation of the earlier, more comprehensive studies on issues of ethnicity in Malaysia by Mansor Mohd. Noor (1992) and Mariappan (1998) that sought to measure the strength of ethnic loyalty vis-à-vis other interests or values among Malaysians. Mansor Mohd. Noor's study looked into the prevalence of ethnicity in relation to social cohesion and national unity in the Malay community, while Mariappan's work focused on the Chinese. Interestingly, the findings of both studies were mixed, with Mansor Mohd. Noor (1992) providing an optimistic conclusion, by arguing that modernisation and development can bring about class and socioeconomic emancipation that may help reduce the influence of ethnicity, thus facilitating national social cohesion.

Conversely, Mariappan (1998) took a more cautious position, arguing that although Mansor Mohd. Noor's (1992) conclusion was reflective of the Malaysian scenario to a certain extent, the entrenched nature of ethnic preference and structural influence among Malaysians of different ethnic origins remains a potential, if not salient, barrier to the realisation of genuine national social cohesion. Although both studies are macro-level analyses of the Malaysian society, their findings could very well reflect the current trend and pattern found in the more micro-level, yet multi-ethnic communities in Malaysian IHLs.

As with several of the regional case studies mentioned above (regarding the Netherlands and Bosnia-Herzegovina, for example), there are also Malaysian case studies that focused specifically on the relationship between university curriculum and social cohesion. For instance, Pang, Ho, and Amran Ahmed (2008) conducted a small-scale study on the role of higher education in fostering national unity in multi-ethnic Malaysia via the case study of a particular Malaysian public university. They came to the conclusion that particular features of the university's curricular and extra-curricular activities were the main contributors to the inculcation of social cohesion and national unity within the campus. These features were: (a) the offering of core courses related to nation-building, (b) the organisation of socio-cultural and sports activities, and (c) the development of programmes to promote student interaction. This led to their call for the continuation, improvisation, and improvement of such programmes at the university as a means to further enhance national unity amongst students.

However, in the case of Malaysia, the introduction of nation-building-oriented curriculum to foster national unity, such as the government-sanctioned Ethnic Relations module, has been apparently deemed as counter-productive by some 'independent' Malaysian scholars due to its "too selective" and uniform content and views (Syed Husin Ali, 2009). Instead of the alleged uniformity and orthodoxy of the "top-down government-approved version of ethnic studies", contributors to the edited volume entitled *Multiethnic Malaysia: Past, Present and the Future* suggested the need to develop nation-building projects that provide "different insights and perspectives on the country's history and development" as a means to foster deeper understanding, and appreciation of the dynamics involved in shaping the Malaysian nation (see Lim, Gomes & Azly Rahman, 2009).

Finally, another study on the role of Malaysian IHLs by Zailan Morris *et al.* (2010) asserts that IHLs play an important role not only in producing a qualified and trained workforce for the country but also in fostering national unity. According to