

## **LEVEL OF SOCIAL COHESION OF MALAYSIAN YOUTHS AS A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE IN A YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This paper describes the level of social cohesion of Malaysian youths as a community of practice based on the perspective of social learning theory. Youths' social environment was examined as the medium of interactions to measure their levels of social cohesion. . Community of practice of youths focused on the major domains of development, and their practice through active participation in a youth development program. The application of the framework of community of practice was measured to ascertain the level of social cohesion among youths in Malaysia. This study employed both quantitative and qualitative approaches. A total of 265 respondents consist of youths who were actively participating in the Duke of Edinburgh International Award. The level of social cohesion among the youths was 63.4%.The findings indicate that the more community program conducted, the higher the level of social cohesion among youth. The parameters of social cohesion were also examined by analyzing youths' participation and engagement in the award development program. Sustainability of youth development program in Malaysia is found to dependent on levels of youths' social cohesion.

**Keywords:** community of practice, youth, award development program, social cohesion, social learning theory

### **INTRODUCTION**

Studies had shown that youth is an important national development asset to meet the challenges of a developed nation. The active and on going role of youth is crucial to achieve the aspirations of any country. This can be achieved by preparing youths to have a quality and effective role as a partner in nation building The process of youth socialization involve participation from various level requires active interaction and sharing of common goals. By adopting Malaysian Youth Policy (Ministry of Youth and Sports, 2015) as a framework for youth development program, it is expected that youth will be facing critical challenges.

Youths in Malaysia have high potential, they are creative and innovative and youth is regarded as the catalyst for the development of a country. Currently there are 15.1 million of youths in Malaysia, which constitute of 46.6 percents of the Malaysian population's 32.4 million (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2019)

According to Wenger (1991), Community of Practice (CoP) can be viewed using social learning perspective. By applying this perspective, CoP occurs when people have a common interest in a subject collaborate over an extended period of time, sharing ideas and strategies,

determine solutions, and build innovation together. In this study, the CoP will be measured to ascertain the level of social cohesion of youth in Malaysia.

There are three concepts that the youth need to understand in order to represent the whole of Malaysian society which are unity, cohesion and reconciliation. Youth play as a significant role as an agent of changes. When engaging all members in the community collectively. According to Shamsul & Yusoff (2014), Malaysian has enjoyed so far has not been unity but social cohesion. Social cohesion was define as a peaceful, stable, prosperous society that exist in a multi ethnic society because it is a social bonding sytem that has been built. In line with CoP, ethnic and youth groups, sharing activities together will ensure Malaysian community live in harmony.

Community of practice of youth within the framework of youth development program is a process of preparing youth to meet the challenges of adolescence and adulthood to achieve their full potential. This effort can be realized through their participation in active participation in community. According to Malaysian Youth Policy (Ministry of Youth and Sports, 2015), youth empowerment can be used as a guideline to strengthen the potential of youth. It is very important to exposed youth with a wide range of skills to prepare for the challenges especially to meet the demands of the workforce and build a progressive society in all aspect. Social psychology and human development such as leadership, volunteerism, entrepreneurship and identity need to be applied to all youth to ensure talent and potential can be polished holistically because this aspect is strongly linked between youth and community (Grant et al., 2020).

In addition, there are four (4) key areas that have been identified to transform youth development:

- i. Strengthen citizenship and membership literacy among Malaysian youth;
- ii. Promote the development of the first class quality of life for the entire younger generation across cultural, racial and religious differences and geography;
- iii. Emphasize Malaysia's competitive spirit and youth in the face of the challenges of national development transformation; and
- iv. Implementation positive culture in the development of Malaysia's youth personality.

The Duke of Edinburgh International Award is a youth development program that provides adolescent learners (ranging from 14 to 25 years of age) with drive and opportunity to character building while becoming an active and responsible citizen to achieve social cohesion as an ultimate goal. The award program emphasizes teamwork and group cohesion which are promoted through activities and experiences that help youth to develop social ethical, emotional, physical & cognitive competencies. In this study, the Community of Practice (CoP) framework was applied by the youth during the community-level acitivities of various ethnicities. Social interaction that involves the sharing of skills and knowledge as well as common interests in the community will form a structured framework to develop a good youth development program (Van Baren et al., 2015).

Social cohesion is a fundamental quality in helping youth to interact with society. Learning through social interaction with society is an important element in CoP which also influences knowledge development support (Wenger, 2002) and expertise through the socialization process (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Singh Hawins & Whymark, 2009;Arshad, 2015). This gives youth a better idea of what social cohesion in communities and what competencies stakeholders needed most. Building a sustainable CoP can be a challenging task for youth, but they are very important forces

for social change. For joint learning and fieldwork, youth learned about the Youth Development Program in the award program, where youth from all regions form a CoP that works to ensure youth shared the vision. This CoP has sustained by building a network of youth leaders in Malaysia. It shows diversity, strong relationship, and ease of communication are key elements of a successful CoP. The process of youth learning is closely related to the context of the social environment. It refers to several social environmental factors that can have a reciprocal effect on the process of behavior formation. Social learning patterns are heavily influenced by parents, peers, and the community environment (Azizan & Mohd Yusoff, 2018).

Social interaction with peers is an important factor in the formation of youth identity (Deutsch & Theodorou, 2010). The process of learning is closely related to the context of the social environment. It refers to a social environmental factors that may have a reciprocal effect on the process formation behaviour. Social learning patterns are strongly influenced by parents, peers and community (Kalam, 2016). Therefore, social interaction is often discussed in the development of youth identity and behaviour. The social psychology model, which is based on the Community of Practice (CoP), provides the analytical scope of social interaction issues among youth in the community.

Through the context of social interaction it has been described that youth interaction in community is a function of the components of subjective norms and relationship with intention in behaviour (Armitage & Conner, 2001; Conner & Armitage, 1998; Chatzisarantis et al., 2006; Terry & Hogg, 1996). Whereas the CoP focus on learning through frequent interaction in the community (Hart et al., 2013). According to Mullen & Suls, 1982; Pasupathi, 1999; Pasupathi & Weeks, 2011, a study conducted on youth had a high sensitivity to influence of social interaction. So, this study is aimed to assess the level of social cohesion through participation of youth in the community program.

Youth are often associated with an identity crisis that is a common experience during adulthood process. The identity crisis during youth age, experienced during the process of behavioral change that is influenced by the process of social learning process (Yusoff et al., 2010) Social cohesion will be important factor in helping youth to interact with the community. Learning through social interaction in the community is an important element of CoP which also influenced support for knowledge development (Wenger, 2010) and expertise through the process of socialization (Lave & Wenger, 1991); Singh et al., 2009; Arshad, 2015). Therefore, this study will explore and discuss systematic evaluation based on social psychology perspectives especially on youth behaviour and social cohesion. However, the context of the study is limited to the perception and expectation of youth in the Duke of Edinburgh International Award which refers to the behaviour during the participation in social activities.

The main objective of this study is to explore the level of social cohesion of youth in the Duke of Edinburgh International Award in Malaysia. This study serves a unique purpose because it investigates the relationship between the levels of social cohesion and Community of Practice (CoP) of youths. This is significant because it has identified the level of social cohesion of youth and best practice among CoP on the award program to achieve the goal of social cohesion.

Furthermore, this study measured the levels of engagement of community in the award program. This is in line with the recognition of youth which is emphasizing the contribution of youth in the development without compromising the contribution of others. Researcher will focus on the level of social cohesion and identify impact of interaction between individual and social

relationships through the active participation of youth in the community. These structured self development activities will involve youth in assessment, planning and implementation areas. Their active involvement is reflected in their constructive behaviours of participation as planner and volunteer. The exploration of social relation is concentrate at various level in the community. It is hoped that this study will set the benchmark in making youth a generation of leaders.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

According to Wenger (2010) & Morley (2016), Community of Practice (CoP) is defined as a community of people who have similar interest and share a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly. There are three elements in the CoP which is domain, community and practice (Cox, 2004; Skalicky & West, 2006; Wenger, 2006; & Ataizi, 2012).

- i. **Domain:** it is defined by a shared domain of interest. Members in the community will inspire other members to participate in the community. Membership therefore implies a commitment to the domain and shared competence that distinguishes members from other people.
- ii. **Community:** to pursue their interest in their domain, each of members require to interact, discuss together, help each other and share information. It aims to build relationships that enable them to learn from each other.
- iii. **Practice:** The combination of the three elements that constitutes a CoP refers to each member of the community is a practitioner of the knowledge and gathers resources, experiences, ideas, stories, tools and also give feedback to the community members (Della Líbera & Jurberg, 2020; ; Wenger 2006).

According to Farnsworth et al. (2016), CoP is the most recent learning that involves in-depth processes that require community participation. It is an important focus in organizational development and provides great value when working in a team. Participation in this community includes at work, school, and home and with similar recreational interests and activities. Members of the CoP will engage in community relations and help develop members' issues or needs (Wenger, 1998). These activities are often framed together based on the needs and knowledge available to the individual. Interactions that occur in the community have encouraged the implementation of more effective activities as each member has a cooperative nature and helps one team.

Eys & Brawley (2018) have defined cohesion as a dynamic process that's reflected the tendency for a group to remain together to achieve the objective and needs of community. According to Markus and Kirpitchenko (2007), sharing the same vision is social cohesion. Thus, researchers have explained that social cohesion requires universal values, common aspiration or shared identities of each member, reflecting a community or group that share goals, responsibilities and cooperation.

According to Sociologist Emile Durkheim (1858-1918), social cohesion is a feature where each member in the community depended on each other, loyal and cohesive. A united society and sharing its loyalty to the country will depend on each other as well as the state in which they stand. Based to the analysis, social cohesion has been recognized throughout the world as an essential element of social structure of society which Shamsul & Athi (2014) acknowledges where the essential essence of achieving unity in society is to emphasize cohesion in diversity.

**METHODOLOGY**

This study utilized quantitative approach with descriptive design as main research. A survey was conducted by utilizing a self-administered questionnaire, which was adapted according to the Physical Activity Group Questionnaire (PAGEQ) by Estabrooks & Carron (2000) and The Development of a Cohesion Questionnaire for Youth: The Youth Sport Environment Questionnaire (M. Eys et al., 2009). Purposive sampling of 265 respondents aged 18 to 25 years for this study referred to youth who are Gold recipients The Duke of Edinburgh International Award throughout Malaysia. Later, data were analyzed using SPSS software version 24.0. Descriptive statistical analysis is used to obtain the values of frequency, percentage and mean is described descriptively.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**Profile of Respondents**

The findings of the study depict the full view of analysis on impact of Community of practice towards youth. Descriptive analysis was the first analysis conducted to collect demography profile of respondents. Then the extent of impact CoP to achieve social cohesion analysis was investigated to answer the research objectives. Descriptive analysis examines general statistical description of variable in the study. A descriptive analysis use frequency distribution, percentage, mean and standard deviation to describe the demographic of the respondents. The findings of the research show that 101 of the respondents are male and 164 are female.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents (N=265)

<b>Nominal / Ordinal Variables</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	101	38.1
Female	164	61.9
<b>Race</b>		
Malay	215	81.1
Indian	13	4.9
Chinese	35	13.2
Other	2	0.8
<b>Age</b>		
Less than 20 years	183	69.1

<b>Nominal / Ordinal Variables</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>%</b>
21-30 years	82	31
Mean of Age : 19.79		
S.D of Age: 4.154		
<b>Education</b>		
Master/PhD	6	2.3
Degree	57	21.5
Diploma	38	14.3
STPM	22	8.3
SPM	119	44.9
PMR	23	8.7
<b>Occupation</b>		
Government	21	7.9
Private	26	9.8
Self-employed	12	4.5
Unemployed	5	1.9
Students	198	74.7
Others	3	1.1

### **Analysis of Impact Social Cohesion for youth**

The instrument of this research was developed based on PAGEQ to analyses the level of social cohesion and impact to the youth. Table 2 and 3 shows overall analysis about the level of social cohesion among youth. Findings shows positive indicator of the level social cohesion is high specifically 63.4% or 168 of the respondents compared to 88 (33.2%) of the respondents in moderate and 9(3.4%) of the respondents have a low of social cohesion level.

Table 2: Level of Social Cohesion

Level of social cohesion	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
High	168	63.4
Moderate	88	33.2
Low	9	3.4
Total	265	100

Note:Mean: 5.18, S.D.: 0.71

Cohesion was identified as a dynamic process that is reflected in the tendency for a group to stick together and remain united in the pursuit of its instrumental objective and/or for the satisfaction of member affective needs Carron et al., 2002; Carron & Brawley, 2000; Estabrooks & Carron, 2000). Social cohesion is very important to be considered and shared in various social contexts (Eys et al 2009), business (Tekleab et al., 2016), military (McGuire et al., 2016, Kanesarajah et al., 2016) and music (Dobson & Gaunt, 2015).

As a result of this study, researchers have developed a sense of social cohesion through the process of team building. The findings of this study show that there are three major races dominate the participation, which is Malay, Chinese and Indian. The process of socialization through the practice of social cohesion in the community activities has resulted in the sharing of knowledge and skills. Some group tend to increase interaction to enhance social cohesion (Hedayati Marzbali et al., 2014; Sahharon, 2016). Recently, most of the study of social cohesion focusing on ethnic differences. However, in most countries the level of social integration in multiethnic communities is still low (Costa & Kahn, 2003; Putnam, 2007). The Community of Practice (CoP) by Lave and Wenger (2013) in Smith et al. (2017) have explained the relevancy of social learning process that leads to social cohesion in community. Even tough in different ethnic but they still perform activities together. Active participation from multiethnic group has encouraged the sharing of knowledge, skills and values from experts in self-potential development program (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Therefore, researchers see the importance of interaction in promoting cohesion among community specifically youth (Hedayati Marzbali et al., 2014). Model of Community of Practice (CoP) by Lave and Wenger have suggested that learning process involved members in community. The CoP process can be practice anywhere and generally involved in activities at work, school, home or leisure. According to Wenger (2006:2013), the concept of CoP has taken place in business, organization, government, education, professional associations, project development and life. The gold recipients of the Duke of the Edinburgh International Award also involved in model CoP such as Malaysian Gold Award Association (MAGAA), Operating body or CoP that has been developed by Rakan Muda Development Division for participants in informal education through the development of the award program.

Besides, in the context of social learning, process of learning is based on situated learning which indicates moral values such as active, coherent, engagement, prudence, social and negotiation skills (Lave & Wenger, 1991: 2013, Wenger 1998). While, the practice of social cohesion has to do with the process of socialization of youth in self-development program because it is a transition to knowledge development skills. Community based practice learning will enlighten the process socialization of youth and cope with the daily activities that can be described through the model CoP (Lave & Wenger, 1991; 2013; Wenger, 1998). Model of CoP has been adapted from the social learning theory that explain learning are occurs through observation (Bandura, 1977). Regarding to the model, even though less of experience youth who are actively participate in communities' activities, will be part of the community and slowly get knowledge and skills also moral values from the expert (Lave & Wenger ,1991).

This study focuses on youth who were the participants of The Duke of Edinburgh International Award. The understanding of definition and conceptual of social cohesion, identification the mechanism to evaluate the self-potential development and the previous study has been identified to support the context of study. Recommendations and research protocol have been discussed to encourage a high team spirit in the self-potential development program. Generally, social cohesion is strength for members to be together and increase social bonding in community (Kleinert et al., 2012). While Festinger et.al (1963), argued that social cohesion would bind members in a group, and it is related to the social responsibility of the environment. We can see that each study of social cohesion will give a different definition, but it is still relevant.

Although the analysis of PAGEQ was developed for teams in sports activities but researcher has adapted the analysis based on the suitability of the activity in each operating body in the award. Table 3 below shows respond from the respondents regarding to youth environment and social cohesion. The mean of the analysis is around 4.50 – 5.39. On average, there is a strong social cohesion between team members in the award. It can be seen by them sharing commitments, performing activities, and stay together in a team and always using the same approach between team members. Budman et al., (1993) in Fonseca et al. (2019) relates social cohesion in a group relates with individuals' perception of outcome in the group, and defines the three metrics to quantify social cohesion: (1) individuals acting together towards common goals, (2) positive engagement and (3) a vulnerable and trusting attitude that fosters the sharing of private materials.

Table 3: Result of youth environment and social cohesion

No.	Youth environment and social cohesion	Mean	S.D.
KS1	We share a commitment by supporting the group's goals	4.79	.98
KS2	I invite my friends to do activities together	5.09	1.03
KS3	As a group, we are in the same goals	4.50	.92
KS4	My best friend also in the group	5.23	1.11
KS5	I like the way we work together as a group to develop again the award	5.39	1.16
KS6	I can hang out with my friends.	5.28	1.10
KS7	We spend time together when we have free time	5.26	1.14
KS8	As a group, we always united	5.31	1.09
KS9	I always contact my friends via phone, SMS, whats app, social media	5.26	1.08
KS10	My friends always give a chance to improve myself.	5.24	1.07
KS11	I spend time with my group carry out activities in the awards	5.25	1.09
KS12	Our group always do activities together	5.30	1.07
KS13	I will always keep in touch with my friends even after the activity finish	5.19	1.16
KS14	I'm happy with the effort and enthusiasm of my group in completing activities in the award	5.24	1.11
KS15	We always work together even outside of the program	5.31	1.12
KS16	The approach that our group members use is the same	5.30	1.30
	Total mean	5.18	0.71



In this study, the main factors that influence social cohesion in a group are members' similarity, group size, entry difficulty, group success, and external competition and threats. Often, these factors work through enhancing the identification of individuals with the group they belong to as well as their beliefs of how the group can fulfill their personal needs. The similarity of group members has different influences on group cohesiveness depending on how to define this concept. The similarity in the awards can be referring to when 97.7% of the respondents understand the objective and goal when they participate in the award. While analysis showed that 98% of the respondents participate in the award program to enhance knowledge and passion in the youth development program. Lott and Lott (1965) who refer to the interpersonal attraction as group cohesiveness conducted an extensive review of the literature and found that individuals' similarities in the background (e.g., race, ethnicity, occupation, age), attitudes, values, and personality traits have generally positive association with group cohesiveness. Besides, from the perspective of social attraction as the basis of group cohesiveness, similarity among group members is the cue for individuals to categorize themselves and others in a group. In this study, the more prototypical similarity individuals feel between themselves and other group members, the stronger the group cohesiveness will be.

As a result, a similar background makes it more likely that members in a group share similar views on various issues, including group objectives, communication methods, and the type of activities. In addition, a higher understanding among members of group rules and norms results in greater trust and less dysfunctional conflict. This, in turn, strengthens the cohesiveness.

## **CONCLUSION**

As a conclusion, the finding of the study emphasized that the level of social cohesion was high. In order to ensure the sustainability of youth development program, more programs will be conducted to increase youth involvement. The more community activities conducted, the higher the level of social cohesion among youth. Embedded sites based on youth development activities indicate the process of developing behavior and self-esteem requires internal and external support. These encouragements create a positive between youth and community. Social cohesion also promotes multiracial harmony through activities. The operating body which is Community of Practice (CoP) is a main medium to increase social cohesion among respondents. The same interest and desire in to develop youth has create more interaction among members in the practicing community (Hurst et al., 2013).

According to (Delhey et al., 2018) higher subjective well-being has a positive consequence on a cohesive society. The key argument is that human needs are manifold. Since cohesive societies can be considered more “warm-hearted” and solidary, arguably they cater better for social needs, such as loving respect and friendship. Cohesive societies, hence, induce a flow of positive life experiences and emotions, which should contribute to a high level of subjective well-being. Dragolov et al. (2014) in Delhey & Dragolov (2016) also state that a cohesive society is characterized by resilient social relationships, a positive emotional connectedness between its members and the community, and a focus on the common good. Social relations, in the context of this research, are understood as the network among individuals and groups in the operational body

within a society. Connectedness refers to the vertical ties among individuals, society, and institutions. Youth in the award program also has a high level of confidence in social institutions such as non-government agencies and school. Besides, the focus on the common good is reflected in the actions and attitudes of the members of society that manifest the responsibility for others and the community as a whole.

Social cohesion in Youth Development Program is rarely discussed in any research. Through this study, researcher has emphasized on cohesion aspect in three youth development area which is engagement or participation in community program, recognition and social inclusion. In line with the technological developments, social cohesion has transformed youth into a dynamic level of well-being. Participation from multiethnic has created social cohesion between individuals and community as well as fostering the harmony of the various races through the potential development activities of the youth. It helps to create self-concept and perception through reflection process. Recognition is one of dimension in enhancing cohesion because it will increase the level of self-confidence and responsibility of youth. As a future leader in community or organization, it also a platform to express personalities, positive attitudes and interpersonal relationship.

Youth are a group who like to challenge themselves in community activities. During the activities, we can see that the spirit of patriotism and nationalism to the country. The effort of fostering patriotism and nationalism through involvement in self-potential development program are an important effort by the government to drive the youth to have the spirit in order to form a capable nation. Recently, the challenge of strengthening the spirit of patriotism and nationalism is hindered by ethnocentric attitudes among group in a community. The youth involvements in the award program have been exposed to patriotism, nationalism and values through the implementation of component activities. Patriotism and nationalism in the context of the study are important elements in the formation of youth identity. Overall, this study shows the growth of self-potential through participation in the Duke of Edinburgh International Program. The positive behavior has gained in this program reflected to the positive values of youth. The self-potential development program reinforced with positive behavioral impact and social cohesion are essential to be practiced at all levels of youth aged 14 to 25 as they have successfully met the need of the youth:

- i. Positive social relationships.
- ii. To achieve a balanced between the social needs of the community and the social development of the youth.
- iii. Showcase the creativity.
- iv. Establish interaction in relationship.
- v. To be appreciated.
- vi. The desire to compete.
- vii. The desires to form identity.
- viii. The desire to be independent and lead group.
- ix. Looking for new experiences.
- x. Address social issues of youth.

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