

ABSTRACT

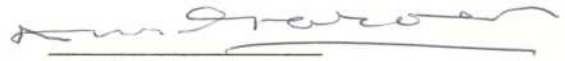
The research aims at exploring the phenomenon of social integration among IIUM Muslim undergraduate students. The sample of the study consisted of three hundred and fifty students. Three hundred local and foreign students from various countries and faculties completed a nine page questionnaire, and fifty were interviewed. The questionnaire included religiosity, social integration, cultural differences, collective activities and English proficiency measures. Information regarding gender, age, nationality, length of stay and academic levels was also collected. In addition four hypotheses were tested. It was hypothesized that collective activities, cultural differences, English proficiency, and religiosity affected social integration. Results indicated that inter-group social integration between local and foreign students was low compare to the intra-group social integration among foreign students as well as local students. Collective activities were found to be significantly related with social integration. There were also significant relationships of cultural differences and English proficiency with social integration. However, relationship of religiosity with social integration was not significant. Overall, most of the results are consistent with the expectations. The study finally discusses the need for broader and more comprehensive researches in this area.

ملخص البحث

يهدف هذا البحث إلى دراسة ظاهرة الإندماج الإجتماعي بين طلبة دراسات المرحلة الجامعية بالجامعة الإسلامية العالمية بماليزيا. عبر عينة شملت ٣٥٠ طالباً. وزع استبيان من ٩ صفحات على ٣٠٠ طالب من دول وتخصصات مختلفة، وأما الخمسون الباقون فتمّ استجوابهم في مقابلات مباشرة. وقد ركز الاستبيان على عوامل التدين والإندماج الإجتماعي والفوارق الثقافية ومستوى اللغة الإنجليزية. كما تم رصد كل البيانات المتعلقة بأجناس المشاركين على إختلاف أعمارهم وجنسياتهم والفترة التي قضوها في الجامعة وكذلك مستوياتهم الأكاديمية. وقد وضعت الدراسة أربع فرضيات تقضي بأن أوجه النشاط الجماعي والفوارق الثقافية ومستوى اللغة الإنجليزية والتدين لهم الأثر في مستوى الإندماج بين الطلبة. وأظهرت نتائج التحليل أن مستوى الانسجام في داخل مجموعتي الطلبة الأجانب والمحليين يفوق مستوى الإندماج بين تلك المجموعتان. وأكدت الدراسة على وجود ترابط وثيق جداً بين أوجه النشاط الجماعي ومستوى الإندماج بين الطلبة. كما كشف التحليل تأثيراً مهماً للفوارق الثقافية ومستوى اللغة الإنجليزية على الإندماج الإجتماعي بين الطلبة. إلا أن علاقة التدين بالإندماج الاجتماعي لم تكن مهمة. وبدأت نتائج التحليل في عمومها مطابقة لتوقعات الباحثة. وخلصت الدراسة إلى ضرورة إجراء دراسات أوسع مجالاً وأكثر شمولاً في هذا الميدان.

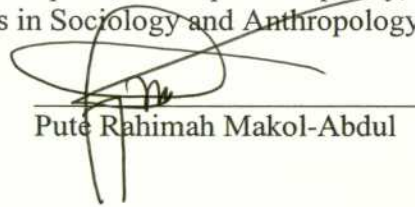
APPROVAL PAGE

I certify that I have supervised and read this study and that in my opinion; it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Human Sciences in Sociology and Anthropology.



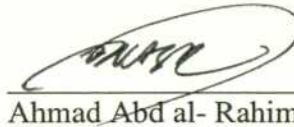
Jamil Farooqui
Supervisor

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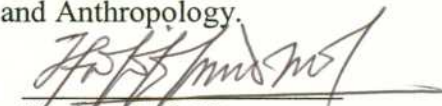
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This thesis was submitted to the department of Sociology and Anthropology and is acceptable as a partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Human Sciences in Sociology and Anthropology.



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Hazizan Md. Noon
Dean, Kulliyyah of Islamic
Revealed Knowledge and
Human Sciences

DECLARATION PAGE

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. Other sources are acknowledged by footnotes giving explicit references and a bibliography is appended.

Name: Ramatou Mahamat Houtouin

Signature:..........

Date: 11.05.2005

INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY MALAYSIA

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**A Study of Social Integration among Students at International Islamic University
Malaysia**

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To those dearer to me than myself, to my beloved parents:

My father, Mahamat Houtouin, who passed away!

May Allah bless his soul and engulf him in an everlasting peace!

My mother, Fatime Mayangni Domcreo, who has always believed in me, even when I ceased to believe in myself, I have always regarded her as my role model as well as a continuous source of affection and inspiration

To my dear brothers

Mahamat Zene, Faical, Annouar, Youssouf, Mahamat Nour, and Abd al-Karim
for their love, support and encouragement.

To my dear friends

Al-Shazli Mustapha Ateib and Samah Ousmane Ali Fadel
for their moral and material support.

To my dear grandmother

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

This study is intended to explore the phenomenon of social integration among IIUM students. IIUM is an international and Islamic educational institution, which comprises of 15840 students¹ coming from diverse social background. In effect, the study of social integration at IIUM requires the understanding of the terms social and inter-groups relations.

The term social involves interrelationships between individuals or groups. A social factor is said to exist when the behaviour of even one individual is affected by another person or group, whether that person (or persons) is physically present or not. The term social is distinguished from cultural in that social pertains to relations between persons, whereas cultural pertains to beliefs, standards of behaviour, values, knowledge, and all other aspects of culture.²

Inter-group relations refer to relations between two or more groups and their respective members. Whenever individuals belonging to one group interact, collectively or individually, with another group, or its members in terms of their

¹ Admission and Record Division

² Scott, William P. *Dictionary of Sociology*, Goyl Saab, India, 1988, p.383.

group, we have an instance of inter group behaviour³. The goal of most inter group relations researchers is to learn enough about these relations, to be able to know and perhaps advise how to improve inter group relations and build social harmony. To this end, a prevalent belief is that close and pleasant interpersonal contact between people from different groups is the best way to achieve social harmony⁴.

People live their lives within the boundaries described by their societies. Families have traditions and rituals built around holidays and special events in the life of family members. Towns have traditions and rituals growing out of special events in the historical life of the town and nations have memorial days growing out of their national historical life. Social norms and values are largely taught through participation, example, and injunction. Once learned and accepted, they are not open to questions. Social beliefs, ideologies, and ideas, etc., influence social actions, either, because they are being actively shared, or because they are being passively acknowledged as valid, right, good, or the like⁵. Issues of right and wrong, just and unjust, good and evil, equality and inequality, moral and immoral, integrity, honour, fairness, rules, ideas of “us” and “them” are product of culture through socialization.⁶. Thus, the understanding of social and cultural elements of a society is crucial for a sociological study of a social phenomenon, such as social integration in a multicultural environment-IIUM.

³ Abrahams, Dominic. Hogg, Michael, *Inter group Relations*, Psychology Press, USA, 2001, p.1.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p.12.

⁵ Haferkamp, Hans, *Social Structure and Culture*, Walter de Gruyter, Berlin, New York, 1986, P.236.

⁶ Boswell, John J. *A Conceptual Framework for National Cultural Integration*, Routledge, USA, 1991, p. 45.

An attempt of an Islamic explanation of social integration may be the identification and description of those processes that bind people together in a shared Islamic identity. For the purpose of this research, a most concise definition of social integration is those Islamic based activities that create harmony and reduce conflict among people coming from diverse geographical, social, cultural and ethnic background, yet bound by the ultimate “Islamic culture”.

The goal of this research is to find out if cultural differences among IIUM students hamper the degree of their integration. In other words, do the students of IIUM identifying themselves into different cultural groups limit their relations and social interaction within the groups? Moreover the researcher will try to find out if the goal (integration) of the University has been translated into reality, or not. If there is integration she will be interested to examine the degree, or level of integration. If there is disintegration, her interest will be to find out the cause of disintegration. In other terms, to explain why students stay apart.

1.2. Statement of Problem

This study is a result of experiences that the researcher has been encountering since her arrival at IIUM. In fact during interaction with the fellow students of IIUM the researcher has observed attitudes of rejection, discrimination, prejudice, lack of trust and non-acceptance of others. These negative perceptions and ways of approaching each other within an international university which bases its teaching on the Islamic principles and has among its mission the concept of integration led her to ask some questions:

- Why most of the students belonging to the same country at IIUM like to speak their language even in the presence of other students who come from other parts of the world and who do not understand their language?
- Why students at IIUM, generally cluster around their own cultural groups?
- What are the attitudes of IIUM students towards their counterparts from different cultures?
- Do IIUM students translate the mission and vision of the University, which is hung on the walls of each class into their actions?

Thus starting from the subjective point of view, the researcher wanted to find answers to these questions. This proposal was developed because of a concern to find a scientific or adequate explanation to these issues. This study is exploratory in nature. In fact, this attempt to move from subjective to an objective study is to find out the reasons behind the seemingly lack of integration among IIUM students.

There are three major reasons for constructing the research. Firstly as a Muslim the researcher does believe in the Islamic principle, which emphasizes the unity of the *Ummah*. Therefore, since IIUM is an Islamic institution, unity is expected to be the basis of relationships among its students. And she assumes that the expression of this principle of unity in such institution as IIUM should be through the integration of its students socially. Secondly, it has been realized that the study of this issue is relevant if it is intended to contribute to the realization of the mission of the University, which is enhancing integration among its students. Thirdly, the researcher has been inspired by the Malaysian society, which is a plural society. “The mixture of Malay, Chinese and Indians is of long standing from the years of British rule and colonial exploitation, an ethnic pattern which continues today and has to be managed. In fact, there is an

absence of ethnic unrest and the population of mixed origins intermingles without fear of violence within a firmly controlled federation. However, “Malaysia’s success in managing its plural society relatively well did not solve the problem of integration of its three major communities”⁷. Therefore, since, there are many factors (time, materials, language...) which might not facilitate to conduct a study on social integration at a macro level, i.e. Malaysian society, the researcher finds it more realistic to achieve her goal at a micro level which is IIUM students.

The researcher’s expectation of the existence of integration among students in the International Islamic University, Malaysia, is based on the belief that Muslims are an ideological, rather than ethnic and cultural group. Islam encourages social and cross-cultural integration. Allah (S.W.T.) creates men of different ethnic groups, cultures and languages, so that they can know each other and appreciate His diverse creation in this whole universe. The Quran states that:

“O mankind! We created you from a single pair of a male and female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know each other.”⁸

Using functionalists’ expression, one may affirm that Muslims represent an organic whole, and their organization into one community is necessary if they are to achieve the purpose of their creation. Islam strongly emphasizes the unity and brotherhood of humanity. Human brotherhood in Islam is based on an unshakable belief in the Oneness and Universality of God, the unity of mankind, and the unity of religion. Muslims believe that social status, national supermanship, and racial origin have no significance to God. To Him, all humans are equal and brothers of one another⁹. Their

⁷Seah, David, Malaysia: Dilemmas of Integration, *Parliamentary Affairs*, Jan 2000, 53: 1. pp. 189.

⁸ Al-Qur’an: 49-13.

⁹ Hammudah Abdul Ati, *Islam in Focus*, Amana Publications, Maryland, 1998, p.37.

only point of difference is their degree of worship. Muslims are therefore expected to base their relationships on care, friendliness, kindness, and fraternity.

Thus, the present research is an attempt to explore the phenomenon of social integration among IIUM students. It will be an endeavour of understanding the factors that may limit or enhance integration between IIUM students. The operational construct for social integration measures interpersonal relationships and interaction between members of different cultural groups, precisely between classmates, roommates, and *halaqa* mates at IIUM. Examination of the degree of integration between foreign and local students, as well as between different groups of foreign students seems important.

1.3. Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the research is to study social integration among the students of IIUM, but for the purpose of operationalization the study aims at achieving the following objectives:

1. To identify the factors that enhance and hamper social integration.
2. To determine the impact of cultural differences on social integration.
3. To find out the impact of English proficiency on the degree of integration among students at IIUM.
4. To determine the impact of religiosity on social integration.

1.4. Research Questions

The following specific questions guided this study:

1. Is there intra and inter-groups integration among IIUM local and international students?
2. Do cultural differences among IIUM students impact their social interaction and relationship?
3. Is religion a factor of cohesion among IIUM students?
4. Does English proficiency enhance social integration between students?

1.5. Hypotheses of the Study

1. The more the collective activities the closer the social relationships among students.
2. The higher the cultural differences the lower the degree of integration.
3. The more the English proficiency, the greater the degree of integration among students at IIUM.
4. The higher the degree of religiosity, the greater the social integration

1.6. The Setting of the Research

The study will be conducted in the campus of the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM), located on a 288-hectar site in Gombak near Kuala Lumpur, the nation's capital city. Founded in 1983, this institution uses English as its medium of instructions and in daily operation. Arabic, on the other hand, is the major medium of instruction for graduate and postgraduate programs in the division of Islamic Revealed Knowledge. The use of the two languages reflects some of the most important aspects

of the mission of the University, namely Islamization, integration, internalization and comprehensive excellence¹⁰.

IIUM is a university that has a great number of foreign students. According to the data obtained from the Admission and Record Division and Centre of Postgraduate Studies, the total number of students in the university is 15840, and of which 13487 undergraduates and 2353 are postgraduates. In the entire student population of the university 13561 are Malaysians and 2279 Internationals (from 92 different countries). The composition reflects a high geographic cultural diversity. The Waqf Fund, an organization within the University, and the International Students Office cater for the welfare of foreign students and provide services to them.

IIUM provides sufficient facilities for students, such as on-campus housing, on-line library facilities, 24 hours clinic, cafeterias, computer labs, 2 local banks, a travel agency and stores. The university also offers sports facilities such as soccer, rugby, volleyball, basketball, swimming pool, tennis, squash, hockey and a gymnasium.

The educational system in IIUM is unique. It strives towards the development of a balanced integrated knowledge that can prepare Muslim students to face the challenges of the 21st century.

¹⁰ 20th IIUM Convocation: *Konvokeseyen UIAM ke 20, 22-24 August 2004*, International Islamic University Malaysia, p.17.

University Philosophy

The philosophy of the University was inspired by the recommendations of the first World Conference on Muslim Education held in Mecca in A.H. 1398/A.D. 1977. This philosophy is based on the Holy Quran. The knowledge shall be propagated in the spirit of *Tawhīd*, leading towards the recognition of Allah as the Absolute Creator and Master of mankind. The spirit behind this recognition of Allah represents the hierarchy of knowledge, which is a form of trust from Allah to man, who should utilize it according to Allah's will¹¹.

IUM Vision

- a) To revitalize the intellectual vitality of Islam and the *Ummah*.
- b) To integrate Islamic knowledge and values in all academic disciplines and educational activities.
- c) To seek to restore the leading and progressive role of the Muslims in all branches of knowledge.
- d) To contribute to the improvement and advancement of the qualities of human life and civilization¹².

IUM Mission

- a) To carry out task of reforming the contemporary Muslim mentality and integration in positive manner. To produce better quality intellectuals, professionals and scholars, by integrating the qualities of beliefs, knowledge and good character, in order to serve as agents of

¹¹ Ibid., p. 22.

¹² Ibid., p. 23.

comprehensive, balanced progress and sustainable development in the Muslim world.

- b) To promote the concept of Islamization of knowledge in teaching, research, consultancy, the distribution of knowledge and the progress of academic excellence in the university.
- c) To cultivate the quality of holistic excellence that is imbued with Islamic moral-spiritual values in the process of learning, teaching, research, consultancy, publication, administration, and student life.
- d) To exemplify an international community of dedicated intellectuals, professionals, and workers, who are motivated by the Islamic world-view and code of ethics as an integral element of work-culture.
- e) To enhance inter cultural understanding and foster civilizational dialogues among the communities.
- f) To develop an environment that instils a commitment to life-long learning and a deep sense of social responsibility¹³.

¹³ Ibid.