Developing Undergraduates' Multicultural Skills for Career Success and National Integration

Yen Wan Chong[1]*, Maria Abdul Rahman[2]

[1]Department of Psychology and Counseling, School of Business Management, Universiti Utara Malaysia, Malaysia, [2]School of Business Management, College of Business, Universiti Utara Malaysia, Malaysia. *Email: maria@uum.edu.my

ABSTRACT

In today's global work environment characterised by workplace diversity, multicultural skills or cultural intelligence are essential soft skills for managerial success. In a multi-cultural country like Malaysia, the development of multicultural sensitivity is also important so that its citizens will learn to live in harmony. This paper reports on a study which reviews the effectiveness of a campus wide program that was implemented by a Malaysian public university which specializes in management education from 2011 to 2013 that aimed to facilitate the development of multicultural skills in undergraduates. This study has provided some insights on areas for improvement of future programs. The findings of the study also indicated that there is a need to promote higher interaction between the university's local and international students. One of the best ways to develop multi-cultural skills among Malaysian undergraduates is to promote greater interactions between Malaysian and non-Malaysian students as well interactions between Malaysian students of various races in campus.

Keywords: Graduate Employability Skills, Cultural Intelligence, Management Education
JEL Classifications: J61, M16, I25

1. INTRODUCTION

In 2011-2013, Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM) implemented its Employability and Enhancement Programme (EEP) which comprises two modules, namely EEP 1032 which is entitled "Personal Development and Character Building" and EEP 2032 which is entitled "Living in the Multi-Cultural Society." Both the EEP 1032 and EEP 2032 are aimed at cultivating various soft skills. Unfortunately, both the EEP 1032 and EEP 2032 were not well received by both UUM students and lecturers. The objective of this paper is report on the results of a study on the effectiveness of EEP 2032 in achieving its course objectives in assisting undergraduates develop the skills to live in a multi-cultural society with the aim to provide inputs on how such programs can be improved in the future.

2. METHODOLOGY

The sample used to assess EEP 2032 comprises 476 students. The profile of the 476 students used for analysis of EEP 2032 effectiveness is presented in Table 1.

3. FINDINGS

The effectiveness of EEP 2032 is measured by items which reflect the course learning objectives as stated in the syllabus and teaching module of EEP 2032 (Module on Living in the Multi-Cultural Society [EEP 2032], n.d). The 18 items on the effectiveness of EEP 2032 are listed in the left most column of Table 2 as variables B1 to B18. Respondents were asked to state their level of agreement on the effectiveness of EEP 2032 in achieving each of the 18 CLOs on a five point scale ranging from 1 = strongly agree to 5 = strongly disagree. Therefore, a lower attribute value indicates a higher level of agreement on the effectiveness of EEP 2032 in achieving the stated CLO. Table 3 presents the descriptive of the variables B1 to B18. As shown in Table 1, the value of skew-ness and kurtosis for all the variables B1 to B18 conforms to the rule of thumb that considers a variable as reasonably close to normal if its skew-ness and kurtosis values are between −1.0 and +1.0. Thus, the data are suited for parametric statistical analyses.

The sample mean scores for all the items B1 to B18 are <3 indicating that students in the sample agree that EEP 2032 has

achieved each of the 18 CLOs. A one sample t-test was conducted on each of the variables B1 to B18 to evaluate whether the sample mean scores for each EEP 2032 learning objective represented by variables B1 to B18 are statistically significant.

H0: Effectiveness of EEP 2032 learning/lesson objective B(n) ≥3 (interpretation: EEP 2032 learning objective B(n) is not achieved, n = 1, 2, 3…., 18).

H1: Effectiveness of EEP 2032 learning/lesson objective B(n) <3 (interpretation: EEP 2032 learning objective B(n) is achieved, n = 1, 2, 3…., 18).

Table 1: Respondents' profile (N = 476)

Classification	Number (%)
Gender	
Female	378 (79.4)
Male	98 (20.6)
College	
CAS	55 (11.6)
COB	279 (58.6)
COLGIS	142 (29.8)
Nationality	
Malaysian	473 (99.4)
Non-Malaysian	3 (0.6)
Ethnicity	
Chinese	179 (37.6)
Indian	18 (3.8)
Malay	257 (54.0)
Others	9 (1.9)
Peribumi Sabah	8 (1.7)
Peribumi Sarawak	4 (0.8)
Peribumi Semenanjung	1 (0.2)
University entry	
Diploma	92 (19.3)
KPM matriculation certificate/UM foundation /UiTM foundation	70 (14.7)
Qualification	
STAM	25 (5.3)
STPM	289 (60.7)

STAM: Sijil Tinggi Agama Malaysia, STPM: Sijil Tinggi Persekolahan Malaysia

The results of the t-tests are presented in Table 3. The t-test results are statistically significant for all tested variables B1 to B18. Thus, the null hypotheses that students perceived EEP 2032 as not effective in achieving the course learning objectives which are represented by B1 to B18 are rejected. The results support the conclusion that students agree that EEP 2032 was somewhat effective in achieving the course learning objectives represented by statements B1 to B18.

Lower scores indicate higher level of agreement by respondents on the attainment of the course learning objective. As such, the lower the mean score, the higher the level of agreement amongst students on the effectiveness of EEP 2032 in achieving that particular course learning objective. Based on the sample mean scores, the EEP 2032 lesson objective ranked as most effectively achieved is B11 (respect Malay cultural practices) and the least effectively achieved is B8 (aware of Malaysia's role and activities in other international organizations such as Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation [APEC], Non-Aligned Movement [NAM], Organization of Islamic Conference [OIC], South-South cooperation). The effectiveness of EEP 2032 in achieving the lesson objectives B1 to B18, ranked from most effective to least effective, is presented in Table 4.

Factor analysis was also used to identify the components or dimensions of the effectiveness of EEP 2032. The first step in factor analysis is to examine the factorability of the 18 items in Table 2. Several well-recognised criteria for the factorability were used. Firstly, the sample size was sufficiently large and the ratio of cases to variables were larger than 5 to 1. Secondly, the correlation matrix for the variables contain two or more correlations of 0.30 or greater. Thirdly, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was 0.964, above the recommended value of 0.6, and Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant (χ^2 [153] = 10557.576, $P < 0.01$). The diagonals of the anti-image correlation matrix were all over 0.5, supporting the inclusion of each item in the factor

Table 2: Descriptive statistics for EEP 2032 variables

EEP 2032 has helped me to …	Mean±SD	Skewness		Kurtosis	
		Statistics	SE	Statistics	SE
B1. Understand history of ethnic relations in Malaysia	2.54±1.119	0.440	0.112	−0.542	0.223
B2. Understand importance of racial unity in Malaysia	2.37±1.150	0.672	0.112	−0.357	0.223
B3. Understand the concept of "Bangsa Malaysia?"	2.39±1.095	0.617	0.112	−0.249	0.223
B4. Understand own role as a Malaysian in preserving national stability	2.35±1.116	0.639	0.112	−0.291	0.223
B5. Understand that ethnic diversity is a source of strength for Malaysia	2.32±1.152	0.706	0.112	−0.312	0.223
B6. Understand Malaysia's relationship with its neighboring countries	2.51±1.089	0.533	0.112	−0.327	0.223
B7. Aware of Malaysia's role and activities in ASEAN	2.69±1.106	0.320	0.112	−0.518	0.223
B8. Aware of Malaysia's role and activities in other international organizations such as APEC, NAM, OIC, South-South Cooperation	2.78±1.110	0.221	0.112	−0.597	0.223
B9. Understand meaning of "Malaysia is truly Asia"	2.63±1.098	0.303	0.112	−0.564	0.223
B10. Understand Malay social etiquette	2.46±1.098	0.481	0.112	−0.435	0.223
B11. Respect Malay cultural practices	2.31±1.116	0.664	0.112	−0.289	0.223
B12. Understand Malaysian Chinese social etiquette	2.47±1.081	0.559	0.112	−0.185	0.223
B13. Respect Malaysian Chinese cultural practices	2.38±1.088	0.616	0.112	−0.217	0.223
B14. Understand Malaysian Indian social etiquette	2.53±1.059	0.462	0.112	−0.367	0.223
B15. Respect Malaysian Indian culture	2.43±1.055	0.496	0.112	−0.272	0.223
B16. Understand the social etiquette of the indigenous people in Malaysia	2.61±1.043	0.327	0.112	−0.366	0.223
B17. Respect the cultural practices of the indigenous people in Malaysia	2.53±1.059	0.387	0.112	−0.372	0.223
B18. Understand concept of 1 Malaysia	2.34±1.155	0.675	0.112	−0.346	0.223

SD: Standard deviation, SE: Standard error

Table 3: One sample t-test of EEP 2032 learning objectives (N = 476)

EEP 2032 has helped me to …	Mean±SD	One sample t-test (test value=3)	
		t (475)	P
B1. Understand history of ethnic relations in Malaysia	2.54 (1.119)	−9.015	0.00
B2. Understand importance of racial unity in Malaysia	2.37 (1.15)	−11.992	0.00
B3. Understand the concept of "Bangsa Malaysia?"	2.39 (1.095)	−12.053	0.00
B4. Understand own role as a Malaysian in preserving national stability	2.35 (1.116)	−12.726	0.00
B5. Understand that ethnic diversity is a source of strength for Malaysia	2.32 (1.152)	−12.814	0.00
B6. Understand Malaysia's relationship with its neighboring countries	2.51 (1.089)	−9.81	0.00
B7. Aware of Malaysia's role and activities in ASEAN	2.69 (1.106)	−6.05	0.00
B8. Aware of Malaysia's role and activities in other international organizations such as APEC, NAM, OIC, South-South Cooperation	2.78 (1.11)	−4.419	0.00
B9. Understand meaning of "Malaysia is truly Asia"	2.63 (1.098)	−7.345	0.00
B10. Understand Malay social etiquette	2.46 (1.098)	−10.732	0.00
B11. Respect Malay cultural practices	2.31 (1.116)	−13.512	0.00
B12. Understand Malaysian Chinese social etiquette	2.47 (1.081)	−10.69	0.00
B13. Respect Malaysian Chinese cultural practices	2.38 (1.088)	−12.474	0.00
B14. Understand Malaysian Indian social etiquette	2.53 (1.059)	−9.782	0.00
B15. Respect Malaysian Indian culture	2.43 (1.055)	−11.684	0.00
B16. Understand the social etiquette of the indigenous people in Malaysia	2.61 (1.043)	−8.127	0.00
B17. Respect the cultural practices of the indigenous people in Malaysia	2.53 (1.059)	−9.611	0.00
B18. Understand concept of 1 Malaysia	2.34 (1.155)	−12.383	0.00

APEC: Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation, NAM: Non-Aligned Movement, OIC: Organization of Islamic Conference, EEP: Employability and Enhancement Programme, SD: Standard deviation

Table 4: Effectiveness ranking of EEP 2032 lesson objectives (N = 476)

Ranking	EEP 2032 has helped me to …	Mean score
1. (Most effective)	B11. Respect Malay cultural practices	2.31
2.	B5. Understand that ethnic diversity is a source of strength for Malaysia	2.32
3.	B18. Understand concept of 1 Malaysia	2.34
4.	B4. Understand own role as a Malaysian in preserving national stability	2.35
5.	B2. Understand importance of racial unity in Malaysia	2.37
6.	B13. Respect Malaysian Chinese cultural practices	2.38
7.	B3. Understand the concept of "Bangsa Malaysia?"	2.39
8.	B15. Respect Malaysian Indian culture	2.43
9.	B10. Understand Malay social etiquette	2.46
10.	B12. Understand Malaysian Chinese social etiquette	2.47
11.	B6. Understand Malaysia's relationship with its neighboring countries	2.51
12.	B14. Understand Malaysian Indian social etiquette	2.53
13.	B17. Respect the cultural practices of the indigenous people in Malaysia	2.53
14.	B1. Understand history of ethnic relations in Malaysia	2.54
15.	B16. Understand the social etiquette of the indigenous people in Malaysia	2.61
16.	B9. Understand meaning of "Malaysia is truly Asia"	2.63
17.	B7. Aware of Malaysia's role and activities in ASEAN	2.69
18. (Least effective)	B8. Aware of Malaysia's role and activities in other international organizations such as APEC, NAM, OIC, South-South cooperation	2.78
	B. Mean (Mean score of B1 to B18)	2.48

analysis. Finally, the communalities were all above 0.3 (Table 5), further confirming that each item shared some common variance with other items.

As the above indicators confirm factorability, factor analysis was conducted with all 18 items. The analysis yielded three components explaining a total of 82.098% of the variance for the entire set of variables. The first component which comprises 8 items related to respect and understanding or Malaysia's racial beliefs and practices is labeled as the Malaysian cultural awareness component. The second component which comprises 6 items related to national stability and unity is labeled as the National Unity component. The third component which comprises 4 items related to Malaysia's role and activities in the region is labeled

as the Malaysia regional relations component. Table 6 lists the rotated and sorted factor loadings for the 18 items based on a three factor extraction.

Composite scores were created for each of the three factors, based on the mean of the items which had their primary loadings on each factor. Lower scores indicated higher level of agreement by respondents on the effectiveness of EEP 2032 in achieving the course learning objectives in that component. Descriptive statistics for the three components of EEP 2032 are presented in Table 7.

Overall, these analyses indicated that three distinct dimensions underlie student responses on B1 to B18 and that these factors were

Table 5: Communality of EEP 2032 learning/lesson objectives (N = 476)

EP 2032 has helped me to …	Communality
B1. Understand history of ethnic relations in Malaysia	0.762
B2. Understand importance of racial unity in Malaysia	0.884
B3. Understand the concept of "Bangsa Malaysia?"	0.872
B4. Understand own role as a Malaysian in preserving national stability	0.855
B5. Understand that ethnic diversity is a source of strength for Malaysia	0.832
B6. Understand Malaysia's relationship with its neighboring countries	0.78
B7. Aware of Malaysia's role and activities in ASEAN	0.854
B8. Aware of Malaysia's role and activities in other international organizations such as APEC, NAM, OIC, South-South Cooperation	0.889
B9. Understand meaning of "Malaysia is truly Asia"	0.795
B10. Understand Malay social etiquette	0.758
B11. Respect Malay cultural practices	0.807
B12. Understand Malaysian Chinese social etiquette	0.793
B13. Respect Malaysian Chinese cultural practices	0.847
B14. Understand Malaysian Indian social etiquette	0.864
B15. Respect Malaysian Indian culture	0.873
B16. Understand the social etiquette of the indigenous people in Malaysia	0.825
B17. Respect the cultural practices of the indigenous people in Malaysia	0.834
B18. Understand concept of 1 Malaysia	0.651

APEC: Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation, NAM: Non-Aligned Movement, OIC: Organization of Islamic Conference, EEP: Employability and Enhancement Programme

Table 6: Identification of factor components

EEP 2032 has helped me to …	Factor 1 Malaysian cultural awareness	Factor 2 National unity	Factor 2 Malaysia's regional relations
B17. Respect the cultural practices, beliefs, taboos and folklores of the indigenous people in Malaysia	0.809		0.323
B15. Respect the cultural practices, beliefs, taboos and folklores of the Indians in Malaysia	0.796	0.382	0.308
B14. Understand the social etiquette of the Indians in Malaysia	0.787	0.349	0.350
B16. Understand the social etiquette of the indigenous people in Malaysia	0.754		0.445
B13. Respect the cultural practices, beliefs, taboos and folklores of the Chinese in Malaysia	0.748	0.486	
B12. Understand the social etiquette of the Chinese in Malaysia	0.706	0.481	
B11. Respect the cultural practices, beliefs, taboos and folklores of the Malays	0.626	0.588	
B10. Understand the social etiquette of the Malays	0.501	0.541	0.463
B4. Understand my role as a Malaysian in preserving national stability		0.799	0.362
B1. Understand the history of ethnic relations in Malaysia		0.737	0.367
B18. Understand the concept of 1 Malaysia	0.536	0.535	
B5. Understand that ethnic diversity is a source of strength for Malaysia	0.406	0.760	
B2. Understand the importance of racial unity in Malaysia	0.382	0.819	
B3. Understand the concept of "Bangsa Malaysia"	0.382	0.797	0.302
B6. Understand Malaysia's relationship with its neighboring countries	0.399	0.578	0.536
B9. Understand the meaning of "Malaysia is truly Asia"	0.377	0.399	0.703
B7. Aware of Malaysia's role and activities in ASEAN	0.346	0.400	0.758
B8. Aware of Malaysia's role and activities in other international organizations such as APEC, NAM, OIC, South-South Cooperation	0.326		0.837

APEC: Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation, NAM: Non-Aligned Movement, OIC: Organization of Islamic Conference, EEP: Employability and Enhancement Programme

highly internally consistent as reflected by the values of Cronbach alpha. The skewness and kurtosis of all three factors were well within a tolerable range for assuming a normal distribution. The one sample t-test was conducted on the composite scores of the three dimensions of EEP effectiveness and the results are presented in Table 8.

The results of the t-tests are presented in Table 8. The t-test results were statistically significant for all three tested composite variables which represents three dimensions of EEP 2032 effectiveness as perceived by the respondents. In view of the t-test results in Table 9, the null hypotheses that students perceived EEP 2032

learning objectives to inculcate Malaysian racial sensitivity (component 1), 1 Malaysia concept understanding (component 2) and knowledge on Malaysia regional relations (component 3) as not achieved are rejected. The effectiveness ranking of the three dimensions of EEP 2032 based on the sample mean score is presented in Table 9.

Respondents were also asked to rate the level of interaction between Malaysian students from different races in UUM. The results to this item are shown in the following bar chart. Less than half of the respondents, i.e., 45.5% of the respondents indicated that the level of interaction between Malaysian students from

Table 7: Descriptive statistics for the three dimensions of EEP effectiveness (N = 476)

EEP 2032 learning/lesson objectives	Mean±SD	Reliability	
		Alpha	Number of items
Factor 1 - Malaysian racial sensitivity	2.4653±0.96101	0.964	8
Factor 2 - 1 Malaysia concept	2.3862±1.01357	0.951	6
Factor 2 - Malaysia regional relations	2.6523±0.99428	0.925	4

EEP: Employability and Enhancement Programme, SD: Standard deviation

Table 8: One sample t-test results of EEP 2032 factors or components

EEP 2032 learning/lesson objectives	Mean±SD	One sample t-test (test value=3)	
		t statistics	P
Factor 1 - Malaysian racial sensitivity	2.4653±0.96101	−12.138	0.000
Factor 2 - 1 Malaysia concept	2.3862±1.01357	−13.212	0.000
Factor 3 - Malaysia regional relations	2.6523±0.99428	−7.629	0.000

EEP: Employability and Enhancement Programme, SD: Standard deviation

Table 9: Ranking of effectiveness of EEP 2032 dimensions

Ranking	Dimensions of EEP 2032 CLOs	Mean score
1. (Most effective)	Factor 2 - 1 Malaysia concept component	2.3862
2.	Factor 1 - Malaysian racial sensitivity	2.4653
3 (Least effective)	Factor 3 - Malaysia regional relations	2.6523

EEP: Employability and Enhancement Programme

different races in UUM was satisfactory i.e. ranked high or very high. The result on this research item is presented in Figure 1.

Respondents were also asked to rate the level of interaction between Malaysian and non-Malaysian students in UUM. The result to this item is shown in the following bar chart. Less than one-third of the respondents, i.e., 31.9% of the respondents indicated that the level of interaction between Malaysian and non-Malaysian in UUM was satisfactory i.e., ranked high or very high. The result on this research item is presented in Figure 2.

4. DISCUSSION

In line with the findings of this study, we put forward the following recommendations to improve future programs such as the EEP 2032 which aimed to develop multicultural skills in university students. With regard to individual CLOs, the results of the t-test analyses revealed that the following CLOs were perceived by students as least effectively achieved:

• B7. Awareness of Malaysia's role and activities in ASEAN
• B8. Awareness of Malaysia's role and activities in other international organizations such as APEC, NAM, OIC, South-South cooperation.

Figure 1: Students' perception on level of interaction between Malaysian students from different races at university
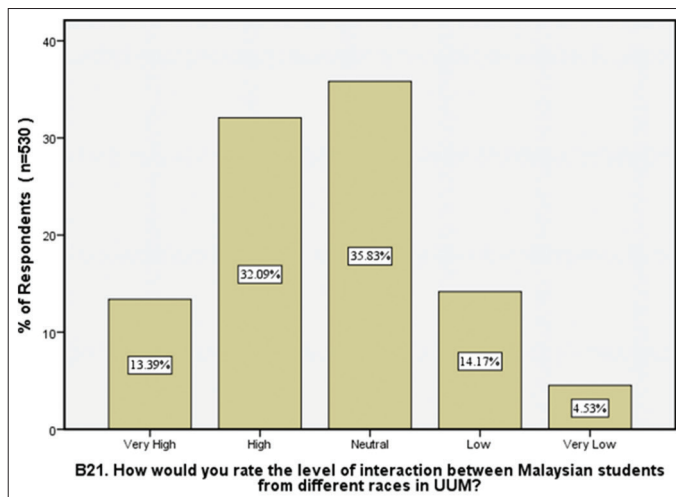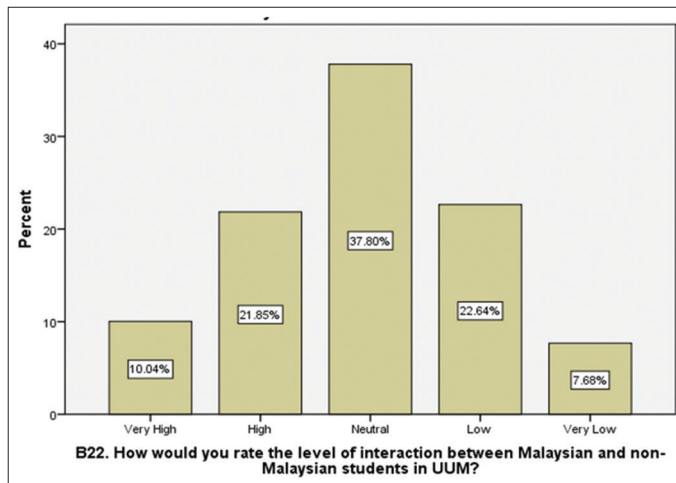

Figure 2: Students' perception on level of interaction between Malaysian students and non-Malaysian students

With regard to CLO groupings, the results of the factor analysis indicated that there were three groups of CLOs, i.e., the first group which comprises 8 CLOs that are mostly related to the understanding and respect of various ethnic cultures in Malaysia is labeled as the Malaysian cultural awareness component, the second group comprises 6 CLOs which are mostly related to national stability and unity is labeled as the National Unity component and the third group which comprises 4 CLOs related to Malaysia's relations with neighboring countries is labeled as the Malaysia regional relations component. The analysis of the mean scores of the three components indicated that the Malaysia regional relations component was perceived by students as least effectively achieved.

The findings of this study is in line with the results of another study which was conducted to explore the readiness of Malaysian business undergraduates from a public university to compete with their ASEAN peers in an integrated regional job market following the establishment of the ASEAN Economic Community in 2015 (Chong, 2015). In the earlier study by Chong (2015), Malaysian business undergraduates rated their ASEAN cross-cultural skills,

comprising understanding of ASEAN languages, cultures and business etiquettes as their weakest soft skills. The study further found that only 66% of the Malaysian business undergraduates felt they were ready to compete with other ASEAN graduates and that their readiness to compete with other ASEAN undergraduates were found to be positively correlated with their self-perception of their soft skill abilities. In order to support the development of Malaysia as a regional hub in ASEAN, Malaysian youths must have greater awareness of ASEAN.

In line with the above findings, the researcher would like to recommend that Malaysian universities undertake more activities to create student awareness and enhance student cultural intelligence (CQ) on ASEAN such as activating ASEAN clubs at universities, holding more ASEAN talks, providing ASEAN language classes, intensifying ASEAN student exchanges via the ASEAN University Network and creating more ASEAN job internships for Malaysian undergraduates with support from the ASEAN Business Council, ASEAN Secretariat, MITI Malaysia, Malaysian multi-nationals operating in ASEAN countries, universities' career development units and TalentCorp Malaysia. These recommendations are in line with the findings of past research which suggests that an individual's multi-cultural skills can be enhanced via international work experience and learning foreign languages (Ahn and Ettner, 2013).

The findings of the study also indicated that there is a need to promote higher interaction between Malaysian and international students. One of the best ways to develop multi-cultural skills among Malaysian undergraduates is to promote greater interactions between Malaysian and non-Malaysian students as well interactions between Malaysian students of various races in campus. Malaysia's unique competitive advantage in today's global marketplace is the multicultural composition of its population. Tertiary institutions in the country should take advantage of the diverse population and encourage university students to develop their CQ.

5. CONCLUSION

Existing soft skills development programs may have not given sufficient emphasis on the importance of CQ or instilling multi-cultural skills in local undergraduates. The Ministry of Higher Education of Malaysia has listed seven groups of soft skills that graduates must have, namely communication skills; thinking skills and problem solving skills; ability to work in teams; life-long learning and information management; entrepreneurial skill; ethics, moral and professionalism; and leadership skills (Malaysia, 2006; Shakir, 2009). Multicultural skills development seemed to be missing from the aforementioned list of targeted soft skills. In today's global economy, multicultural skills or CQ are essential soft skills for managerial success.

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