

Соціальний вплив міжконфесійного діалогу на релігійну толерантність серед студентів університету Малайзії

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Життя у багатокультурній та багатоconfесійній країні змушує громадян Малайзії усвідомлювати відмінності й унікальність людей, які їх оточують. Хоча, для деяких людей така різноманітність не становить інтересу, для інших – глобальна зміна релігійного плюралізму мотивує усвідомити його відмінності і стати учасником такого плюралізму. Однак вивчення інших релігій це не лише розуміння вірувань, а й усвідомлення релігійної толерантності і поваги один до одного.

Все ж, для досягнення цього недостатньо самих лише лекцій та обговорень у рамках однієї релігійної громади. Необхідно вести міжрелігійний діалог і таким чином взаємодіяти з іншими релігійними громадами. Мета нашого дослідження полягає у визначенні соціального впливу участі у міжконфесійному діалозі на релігійну толерантність.

Для створення міжконфесійного діалогу у дослідженні була зібрана нерепрезентативна вибірка з 45 студентів мусульман і християн з Національного університету Малайзії. За студентами спостерігали протягом двох годин тривалості програми, щоб дослідити зростання рівня їх толерантності з моменту приєднання до програми. Студенти також отримали анкети для заповнення.

Дослідження підтвердило, що безперервна участь у міжконфесійному діалозі, безумовно, збільшує релігійну толерантність. Після участі респондентів у програмі, їх толерантність до інших релігійних громад зросла. Ми також спостерігали підвищення рівня знань, зниження упередженості і формування певної мотивації. Результати цього дослідження можуть використовуватись для покращення обізнаності студентів і громадськості стосовно переваг міжконфесійного діалогу у процесі підвищення толерантності суспільства й заохочення їх до активної участі у міжконфесійних спільнотах.

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Social Impact of Interfaith Dialogue on Religious Toleration among Malaysian University Students

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Study on other religions is not simply to understand the beliefs but also to create awareness of religious toleration. But to be tolerant, study within a single religious community would not be enough to make it successful. Therefore engagement with other religious community through dialogue is needed. The purpose of this study is to determine if interfaith dialogue has social impact on religious toleration. A group of Muslim and Christian students in National University of Malaysia had been selected to organize an interfaith dialogue where they were all be observed and given questionnaire in order to examine how far they become more tolerant after joining the program. This study finds that continuous participation in interfaith dialogue will definitely increase religious toleration.

Keywords – interfaith dialogue, religious toleration, Islam, Christianity, religion in Malaysia

I. Introduction

Coming to terms with the challenges of religious pluralism has been a major concern for all religious communities. Faced with the reality of the globalization demanding religious tolerance, understanding and acceptance, some contemporary religious scholars have sought to develop new visions and interpretations of religion to respond to the religious pluralism and their demands and concerns.

Malaysia as one of the most religiously diversified countries in the world faces the impact of the globalizing world whether from within or without. As a majority Muslim country, effort to bridging the gap between religious community are indeed belittled. For a long time, the Muslims feel very secured and think that there is no need for such interfaith understanding and it is better to keep silence on talking about other religion as any engagement with other religious community would be considered as a kind of provocation leads to religious conflict and tension. Although other religious communities are free to practice their own beliefs, but as the silence keep going, there are a lot of small or serious religious conflicts still unsolved and normally ended with warning by the authorities. As a result of this exclusive way of thinking, prejudice and skepticism is intrinsically become deep and deeper.

Therefore, mutual understanding is a crucially demanded to encourage toleration among religious communities. Although, to understand other beliefs could be directly done by studying the sacred texts of the religions, but historical and textual way of learning would

be just a half way of the study. The other half is what the believers of the religion believe and practice in their daily lives which could only be accessed through interaction with the religious adherents. Combination of the ideality of the religion and the reality of the practice among it's believers would be the best way to get better understanding and later become more tolerant.

Ninian Smart, the prominent scholar of comparative religion also believes with the effectiveness of this dichotomical methods of studying religion as reflected in his classification of religious dimensions which are labeled para-historical or systemaical, meaning that they transcend the borders of history with a somewhat systematic ethnocentric formulation. These are dogmatic, mythological and ethical dimensions. Then, three historical dimensions follow: ritual, experiential and the social dimensions. He stressed that para-historical dimensions require investigation into the experience or religious people. While the historical can be studied empirically, the para-historical takes into the realm of belief and concepts and requires dialogue and participation; "since the study of man is in an important sense participatory – for one has to enter into men's intentions, beliefs, myths, desires, in order to understand why they act as they do – it is fatal if cultures including our own are described merely externally, without entering into dialogue with them." [1]

Although it has been proven that participation in interfaith dialogue could increase religious toleration, however few have done serious studies to prove it scientifically and none had been done to do research specifically on Malaysian citizen. Therefore this study had been carried out to determine if interfaith dialogue has significant social impact on religious toleration.

II. Methods

A social impact assessment design was used to complete the process of this study in collecting and analyzing data. A social impact assessment is most appropriate for this study because it allows to review the social effects and consequences of interfaith dialogue towards religious toleration.

A convenience sample of 45 undergraduate university students of National University of Malaysia are selected from 24 Muslim students who took coursework PPPH3493 Christianity in Malay Archipelago and 21 Christian students who are the members of University's Christian Fellowship. This study was conducted through convenience sampling because the subjects are conveniently proximate and accesible as one of the researchers of this project is the lecturer of the course and the Christian society are selected as their counterpart as they are closely related to the course.

All respondents with assistant of the researchers organized an interfaith dialogue which held in a seminar room in the university and took about two hours. All respondents was examined through observation and the use of questionnaire. The observation is done by recording the progress of the program and looking at the specific indicators of religious tolerance such as

understanding, emotion and impact on toleration. The questionnaire was designed by the researchers and using Likert Scale for measurement. It is scalled very agree, agree, average, not agree and very not agree. The questionnaire contains two separated sets of question: first is filled before the program and other is after the program. Respondents took 1-2 minutes to complete 15 questions about their understanding, attitude and perception on interfaith dialogue. The submitted questionnaires were then analysed by using Microsoft Excel software and compared with results of the observation.

III. Results

Analysis on the questionnaire shows that in term of understanding all respondents agree that interfaith dialogue is not just improves understanding on their own religion but towards other religion as well as shown in its significant increasement from means 3.88 to means 4.44 after joining the program. They are all agree that dialogue is the best way to improve religious toleration as shown in Tables I and II which jump from means 4.68 to means 4.79 after the discussion.

TABLE I

STUDENT'S PERCEPTION BEFORE ATTENDING INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic
I understand my religious teaching	45	4.6889	.46818	.219
I understand other religious teaching	45	3.8889	.71421	.510
I confidence to my religious truth and goodness	45	4.8889	.31782	.101
I appreciate other religious' truth and goodness	45	4.3556	.74332	.553
Inter religious dialogue is good in improving the understanding and tolerance	45	4.6889	.46818	.219
I try to understand other religion	45	4.5333	.75679	.573
I have a negative perception to other religion	45	2.9111	1.27604	1.628
I open towards other religion	45	4.2889	.62603	.392
I can have an interaction with other fellow religion	45	4.4889	.50553	.256
I like to have a discussion on religious issue with other fellow religion	45	4.4000	.68755	.473

I keen interest to join this programme	45	4.5556	.58603	.343
I respect and recognize other religion	45	4.5556	.50252	.253
I believe that interaction with other religion will bring the goodness and close relationship	45	4.6000	.53936	.291
I believe that dialogue can avoid the religious conflict	45	4.3556	.80214	.643
Understanding is important in avoiding confusion and misunderstanding	45	4.7333	.44721	.200

From our observation, we could trace the improvement of understanding from their active discussion and high curiosity about other religion after couples of minutes. They were all paying attention on each other's explanation on their perspectives and experiences on the topic discussed. Some new information about other religion was gained by most of the participants which they did not know them before. This tendency has reflected in their score whereby before joining the discussion means is 2.91 for the statement "I prejudice towards other religion" compare to means 4.55 after both counterparts have a dialogue. This means that to reduce the prejudice among different adherent religions, there is a need for a regular context among themselves.

While they are all become more interested in interfaith dialogue as reflected in their answers on the emotional part of questions, attitude of tolerance after joining the program shows a big change on the decline of prejudice and the raise of openness. This is show in the data namely means 4.68 compare to means 4.79 after the discussion.

We believe from what we had observed that certain subjects had shown some skeptical feeling and nervousness but later tried to become more comfortable and finally got their chemistry to engage with others. This is based on the question how openness the respondents towards other religion. The answer given show that before joining the discussion means is 4.28 compare to means 4.65 after joining the discussion. While there are some students that are enthusiastic, outspoken and talkative, there are some that are still passive and could not react on the issues raised in the discussion. However, they were at least tried to hear and listen to others opinions. There are also a small number of non serious provocations which maybe motivated by their previous apologetic way of interaction from those who are first time to involve in interfaith event but it was generally under control and did not effect others explicitly.

In term of impact of interfaith dialogue on toleration, they believe that this kind of program could prevent any

misunderstanding and conflict between religion and therefore everyone should respect and tolerate other different faiths. The data has shown that mean before is 4.35 compare to the means after discussion is 4.72. As far as we concern, all subjects had shown their cooperation and mutual understanding during the program and they express their eager interest to participate in future similar occasions.

TABLE II
STUDENT'S PERCEPTION AFTER ATTENDING INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic
I more understand my religious teaching	43	4.8140	.39375	.155
I understand more about other religious teaching	43	4.44186	.665558	.443
I am more confidence to my religious truth and goodness	43	4.8372	.37354	.140
I am more appreciate other religious' truth and goodness	43	4.5814	.66306	.440
I believe that inter religious dialogue is good in improving the understanding and tolerance	43	4.7907	.41163	.169
I will make an effort to understand other religion	43	4.7674	.42746	.183
I have less negative perception to other religion	43	4.5581	.58969	.348
I more openness towards other religion	43	4.6512	.48224	.233
I have a good relationship with other religion	43	4.6744	.47414	.225
I feel more interested to have a discussion on religious issue with other fellow religion	43	4.6512	.48224	.233
I keen interest to join this programme in the future	43	4.7907	.41163	.169
I feel more respect and recognize other religion	43	4.6047	.49471	.245
This dialogue make me more close with other and it bring a benefit	43	4.7907	.41163	.169

I believe that dialogue can avoid the religious conflict	43	4.7209	.50359	.254
This program has elevated my confusion and misunderstanding	43	4.7209	.54883	.301

Conclusion

From this study we could see a significant reflection of the impact of interfaith dialogue on religious toleration from the students who were once afraid to stand up and discussing about religion with other different religious group are later showing interest in interacting rationally with respect. But some people might take a long time to be comfortable and to generate their interest in the interaction with the others. Therefore continuous participation in interfaith dialogue would stimulate and foster religious toleration.

With this empathic methodology, one could understand the basic doctrines of the religions without making mistakes and fallacies in comparing diverse religions. As there are other relative factors that could influence the evaluation and comparison such as diverse views and practices of religion, the usage of *insider's view* through interfaith engagement would reveal rational attitude of the students in understanding the differences between religious doctrines and nurture toleration in interfaith relation.

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References

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