Socio-Political Influence and Youth's Leadership Participation in Malaysia: A Conceptual Model Extending TPB

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Abstract

The study seeks to investigate the possible reasons why most Malaysian youths have low participation in leadership activities in their communities. Could it be socio-cultural influence or political-legal factors? In doing this, the study aims to extend the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) to accommodate these factors noticed in Malaysian context. To seek answers to the above question, this study intends to adopt a survey (questionnaire) and a proportionate stratified random sampling method to collect data from youths in universities, polytechnics, secondary (cluster/special) schools in Malaysia peninsula. Data would be analyzed using descriptive statistics, multiple and hierarchical regression methods. Conclusion and recommendation are to be drawn from the findings for use by policy-makers and the various stakeholders in youth development in order to engender greater leadership participation among Malaysian youths.

Keywords: Socio-political influence, youth leadership, TPB extension, Malaysia

1. Introduction

Generally, youths have limited opportunities for effective leadership participation in their communities in many developing countries due to lack of trust between the youths and government institutions, and limited capacity development for youths and youth institutions (C.E.C, 2009). Government's delay in addressing these issues could multiply social vices in the country (C.E.C, 2009). Also, due to multi-racial and multi-ethnic cultures in Malaysia, collaborative and participatory leadership has been advocated for the country by previous studies (Silong et al., 2008; Mohamad et al., 2009; Tam, 2008). Participatory leadership is a tool to increase youths' involvement in social activities because it creates new opportunities for youth's participation in leadership (Powers & Allaman, 2012). Research evidence showed that youth's attitude towards family formation and parenting, work and preparation for work, and community service involvement influenced their participation in leadership (Aminu, 2012; Brown, 2001). Again, collaborating with current leaders in collective decisions, leadership participation among the youths could results in self-sustained community development which is vital to the economic and social development of a nation (Gray et al., 2010; Kuponiyi, 2008), Malaysia inclusive. This is more particular in rural communities where most of the populace reside and contribute through agriculture (Ozor & Nwankwo, 2008). Therefore more community development programs are needed to create awareness, provide information and resources for effective participation of the citizenry in the activities of their communities. Studies have stated that most community leaders are democratically elected by the masses, yet most of them do not fulfill their electioneering campaign promises to the people; some are not transparent in their leadership roles, while others do not welcome criticisms concerning their inefficiencies (Ozor & Nwankwo, 2008). Such autocracy inhibits youths' desire to participate in leadership as they always resist commands from adults. Issues such as social vices abound in developing countries (C.E.C., 2009), Malaysia inclusive. Involving the youths in leadership activities could possibly reduce such vices. This could be done through social media, social networks, extracurricular activities and community volunteer works (Ahmad et al., 2012). However, it is discovered that most youths in developing countries, Malaysia inclusive, do not

actively participate in community development activities (Aminu, 2012). For example, a research found that most youths in Malaysia do not participate or practice their rights and duties towards a better environment (Ahmad et al., 2012). What could be the reason for this low leadership participation among the youths particularly in Malaysia?

1.1 The Research Gap

A stream of researchers has established that social environment has positive impact on individual's behavior (Ajzen, 1991; Ekpe & Mat, 2012; Shastri & Sinha, 2010; Yun & Yuan-qiong, 2010). Therefore, this study examines the possible effect of social influence and political-legal influence on youth's leadership participation. Previous studies are available that investigated youth's development generally (Ahmad et al., 2012; Powers & Allaman, 2012). Though limited studies have looked at youth's political involvement (Aminu, 2012; Ozor & Nwankwo, 2008); however, there exists scarcity of studies that examined socio-political factors and youth's leadership participation especially in Malaysia. The closest study is that of Mohamad et al. (2009) which examined participative leadership style as effective community leadership practice in Malaysia, and Pandian (2014) which investigated university students' voting behavior in general elections in Malaysia. More studies are needed in this area to strengthen the literature base. Therefore, the study examines socio-political influence and youth's leadership participation in Malaysia. To contribute further, this study intends to improve the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) by modifying the independent variables in its model to include political-legal factors; aside social influence and attitude. TPB places more emphasis on individual's personality and the influence of social groups on individual's intention to behave and actual behavior. In the words of Ajzen (1991 pp. 179), "social attitude and personality trait have played an important role in these attempts to predict and explain human behavior". The theory also stated that availability of opportunities and resources such as time, money, skills and cooperation of other people could influence a person's intention or behavior (Ajzen, 1991). Less emphasis was placed on other environmental factors such as government policies and laws that could influence individual's decisions. However, it was suggested that a person's intended behavior is influenced by past experience, information about the behavior, experience of friends and relatives, and by other factors (Ajzen, 1991). These other factors could be political-legal force, which signifies a literature gap for this study. That is, if the youths perceive that opportunity to participate in leadership activities and expectation to succeed is guaranteed, they would be motivated to do so. On the contrary, if they perceive that their intended behavior or participation would be mostly hampered by government policies and political ideology, they would not be motivated to participate in leadership activities. This is to extend the TPB further to include the impact of political and legal environmental factors on individual behavioral intentions. Some behavioral studies exist that used TPB to support their works on leadership participation (e.g Kahne & Middaugh, 2012; Koe & Majid, 2014). However, there exists scarcity of studies that used TPB to support their works by adding and measuring political-legal factors to the model. Closest to this is Mohamad et al. (2009) and Pandian (2014), though measured leadership participation but used Lewin Leadership, and Ohio and Michigan Leadership, theories. Therefore, this study fills this gap and makes theoretical contribution to improve TPB by adding and measuring political-legal factors to perceived behavioral control (PBC) in the model of the TPB.

1.2 Objective and Justification of the Study

The objective of this study, therefore, is to investigate the possible reasons why most Malaysian youths do not actively participate in leadership activities in their communities (e.g political campaigns) and in their schools (e.g student union leadership). It is also to examine the effect of socio-cultural influence and political-legal factors on youth's leadership participation. Possibly, some family members and friends could discourage the youths from leadership participation (e.g voting for leadership change) because they feel that the present situation could not be changed. They could also encourage youths to migrate from Malaysia through education or work instead of contributing to leadership activities or correcting them. Public policy, ethnicity and democratic ideology could equally discourage youths' participation in leadership in Malaysia. This research aims to examine these issues. It is also discovered that youths mostly rely on the advice of their peer groups and role models in making most crucial decisions, sometimes unknown to their parents or contrary to parental advice (Lawal et al., 2009). This sometimes leads to negative consequences; whereas social influence should have provided positive information for youths' development holistically, if properly managed. It has become a regular report in the mass media that social vices such as drug abuse and sexual assault exist among some Malaysian youths. Others include linkage with global delinquent networks, in recent times. These are part of the sociocultural issues that could hinder youth participation in leadership which needs to be addressed. A research of this nature is timely and justified.

Again, other environmental problems such as political-legal that could also hinder youth participation in leadership

in Malaysia include lack of political freedom, racial or ethnic inequality, and one-party democracy. Yet it is reported that due to multi-racial and multi-ethnic cultures in Malaysia, collaborative and participatory leadership has been advocated by previous studies (Silong et al., 2008; Mohamad et al., 2009; Tam, 2008). For example, the Universities Act of 1971 which was an outcome of the 1969 racial riots in Malaysia banned students from joining or supporting political parties (Kuhn, 2012). Such situation could hinder youth leadership participation in the country as well as personal opinion and critical analysis on issues of national concern. The resultant effect could be poor quality graduates and poor quality future leaders in the country. These issues need to be addressed by a research in order to enhance political stability of Malaysia, forestall possibility of the youths finding succor in developed countries of the world, prevent paucity of quality leaders in the future, and improve the quality of lives of the youths. Therefore, the need for this research is justified.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Studies on Social Influence and Youth Leadership Participation

Prior studies (e.g Shastri & Sinha, 2010; Vob & Muller, 2009) have argued that social environment could hinder a person's intention from maturing into actual behavior. By extension, this implies that social groups could have tremendous influence on youth's leadership behavior. Several empirical studies have also lent credence to the fact that social influence affects youth leadership activities. A look at some of these works would drive home the point.

Oc and Bashshur (2013) found that followers have direct influence on leader's behavior in terms of individual strength and group cohesion. It was also discovered that youths from wealthier, educated, higher-status families will have resources and experiences to enable them actively participate in politics years later. It was, again, discovered that youth's interactions with their parents on a wide range of political topics enhance their leadership participation in future; and that schools and local communities train youths on leadership participation by bringing them into social network contacts through club meetings and discussions to develop self-esteem (McFarland & Thomas, 2006). This is in line with TPB which states that social attitude (perceived social pressure) and personality trait (perceived behavioral control) predict behavioral intention and actual behavior (Ajzen, 1991). Again, recent studies based on Social Impact Theory (Latane, 1996) and Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) have found that followers have direct influence on leader's behavior in terms of individual strength and group cohesion. Therefore, information acquired from social groups and group social ties could have impact on the youth's leadership participation.

Using statistical datasets available at US Department of Education of 1996, the study of McFarland and Thomas (2006) focused on stratified random sample of eight grade students from 1988-2000 for a sample of 10,827 students in 1476 schools. It was discovered that general involvement in extracurricular activities and youth voluntary associations encourages future political participation, seven to twelve years later. The influence of peers in terms of disposition and skill, motives, and social capital affect future political involvement. Their research found the importance of future success, importance of future independence and future service as the motivations for youth's future political participation. Other studies (Sahri et al., 2013; Ali, 2002) recorded similar results as McFarland and Thomas (2006) that university students' participation in community volunteer activities was very limited in Malaysia due to lack of commitment and self-motivation.

Similarly, in a survey on 600 students, Farooq et al. (2011) found that socio-economic factors in terms of student factors, peer factors, family factors and school factors positively influenced student's academics in Pakistan. Other studies such as Blair et al. (2008) and Asikhia (2010) indicated that good social relationship with parents at home (strong social attachment), peers and adults at school produced better behavior and quest for excellence. We, therefore, hypothesized that:

H1: Social influence is positively related to youth's leadership participation.

2.2 Studies on Political-Legal influence and Youth's Leadership Participation

Negative political-legal influence, such as lack of political freedom, freedom of speech and legal rights, could hinder youth leadership participation in a country (Kuhn, 2012). It has been reported that in a vibrant democracy where there exist multi-party democracy and ethnic equality; youth leadership participation is better than in a one-party system (UNDP, 2012). For example, in Nigeria with a multi-party democracy, youths actively participated in Constitution Review process in 2014 through sending Representatives and submitting memorandum to the committee. They also formed Youth Inter-Party Forum that same year, preparatory to 2015 general election in Nigeria. In Bangladesh, youths formed National Youth Parliament as a forum for direct dialogue with parliament members (UNDP, 2012). Therefore, collaborative and participatory leadership could enhance leadership participation among citizens especially the youths (Silong et al., 2008;

Mohamad et al., 2009; Tam, 2008). A study has confirmed that participatory leadership is a tool for increasing youths' involvement in social activities as it creates new opportunities for youth's participation in community leadership (Powers & Allaman, 2012).

Pandian (2014) studied students' voting behavior in general elections in Malaysia. Using a survey of 614 respondents being Malaysian university students and descriptive statistics, he discovered that majority of the students had never voted due to ethnic minority issue, government policy (ban on student politics), party leadership, electoral process and features of an ideal leader. It was also discovered that the 1Malaysia concept had failed to achieve ethnic unity in diversity. UNDP (2012) found that there was higher level of leadership participation among youths in Africa than in Asia due to different political ideologies. We, therefore, hypothesized that:

H2: Political-legal influence is positively related to youth's leadership participation.

2.3 The Conceptual Framework

This study is underpinned on Ajzen (1991) model which discusses and measures attitude towards behavior, subjective norm, perceived behavioral control, intention and actual behavior. However, this study modifies the perceived behavioral control (PBC) of Ajzen (1991) model, to include the political-legal environment, in line with Malaysian context. This is depicted in Figures 1.

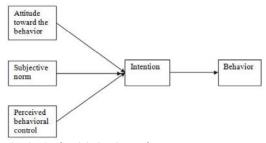


Figure 1: The Theory of Planned Behavior (Model of Reference)

Attitude towards the behavior (ATB) signifies a person's favorable or unfavorable evaluation of the behavior in question. Subjective norm (SN) signifies perceived social pressure to perform or not to perform a given behavior. In this study, SN is represented by social influence. Perceived behavioral control (PBC) or locus of control signifies a person's personality trait such as self-efficacy, self-confidence or beliefs. However, this study argues in line with previous studies (Ekpe et al., 2011; Shastri & Sinha, 2010; Vob & Muller, 2009) that, though someone may have positive self-confidence towards a behavior, an environment could hinder such a behavior. Aggregate of these factors could predict intention (I) and actual behavior (AB) (Ajzen, 1991). Regarding political-legal factor in the Conceptual Framework of the study, this study argues that it is not only social pressure that could affect behavioral intentions. Other factors, as suggested by the Ajzen (1991: 196), could also play a major role. These other factors could possibly be political-legal influence. Therefore, this study intends to improve Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) by introducing political-legal factors and measuring its effect on leadership participation. The conceptual model for this study is as shown in Figure 2.

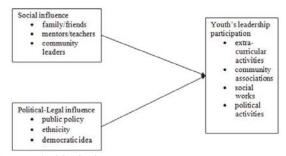


Figure 2: The Conceptual Framework of the Study

3. Methodology

3.1 Survey Procedures

Using structured questionnaire, a survey of Malaysian youths would be employed. The questionnaires would be self-administered to the respondents with the permission of their schools' heads. This is similar to that used by Al-Rahmi and Othman (2013), AbuBakar et al. (2010), Gazzar (2011), Kennedy et al. (2003), Pandian (2014) and Tata and Prasad (2008). Stratified random sampling would be adopted to select the sample members from the research population. The population of this study would be youth groups represented by students, to be determined from the respective school's enrolment records. Therefore, the unit of analysis in this study would be male and female students from the public universities, polytechnics, colleges and secondary (cluster/special) schools in Malaysia peninsula; stratified into three regions. That is youths within age 18-25 where the government's development effort concentrates (Ahmed et al., 2012; MOYS, 1997; MYR, 2007; NYP, 1997) are the focus in this research. Once the population size is determined, a sample size would be determined based on Yamane's formula (Israel, 1992).

3.2 Measures

Social influence occurs when one's emotions, opinions or behaviors are affected by others. It takes many forms and can be seen in conformity, socialization, peer pressure, obedience, leadership and persuasion. It involves the social ties, the influence of friends and family, role models and advisors which could influence one's sustainable behavior (Koe & Majid, 2014; Tata & Prasad, 2008). Social influence was operationally defined as influence of friends, families, role models and advisors (Kennedy et al., 2003).

Political-legal influence involves public policies concerning political freedom or association, ethnic minority tolerance, political ideology, freedom of speech and legal rights (Kuhn, 2012). Political-legal influence was operationally defined as involvement of other parties, freedom to join party, pursuit of fairness and equity (Pandian, 2014).

Community Leadership is the application of skills through involvement in local decision-making and action toward community goals (Langone, 1992). Leadership participation, as used here, implies youth's participation in leadership activities in their communities. It involves organizing extra-curricular activities, community service and community representation, speaking in public forum, voting, campaigns, political parties, community projects and generating communal identity (Burns et al., 2001; Gazzar, 2011; Gray et al., 2010; McFarland & Thomas, 2006). Leadership participation was operationally defined in terms of youth's involvement in political activities such as voting, contesting for membership in student parliament, organizing extracurricular activities in school/community and involvement in volunteer activities (Gazzar, 2011; McFarland & Thomas, 2006; Pandrian, 2014; Sahri et al., 2013; UNDP, 2012).

Questionnaire items concerning social influence would be adapted from Kennedy et al. (2003), while items concerning political-legal influence would be adapted from Pandian (2014) and leadership participation from Gazzar (2011). However, the adapted questionnaire would also include environmental factors reflecting Malaysia's social, political and legal situations. The items would be tapped on a 5-point Likert scale consisting of: strongly disagree, disagree, undecided, agree, and strongly agree (Hair et al., 2007). Data analysis would be done using descriptive statistics, multiple and hierarchical regression methods.

4. Conclusion

From the extensive review of prior studies, it has been established that social groups (e.g families, friends) and political environment (e.g political ideology) have influence on youth leadership activities in other countries. Similarly, this study concludes that social influence and public policy could have profound influence on youth leadership participation in Malaysia. Therefore, there is the need to modify the TPB to include political-legal factors. This is so because a motivated social and political environment is required from parents, teachers and government to engender greater leadership participation among Malaysian youths.

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