

**Measuring youth civic development in Malaysia: Conceptualization, instrument
development using the Rasch measurement model,
and substantive outcomes**

By

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Declaration

I declare that this dissertation is my own account of my research and contains, as its main content, work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary institution.

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Abstract

This study concerned the development of measures for youth civic development in Malaysia with four major goals in mind, namely conceptual, measurement, baseline/pragmatic, and predictive goals. It was a preliminary study of its kind in Malaysia as Malaysia did not participate in any international or regional study such as the IEA Civic Study. The central intention of the study was to establish a conceptually valid assessment framework and psychometrically sound instruments for the measurement of youth civic development in Malaysia. This would, in turn, provide some baseline information upon which future research on youth civic development in Malaysia could build.

Civics as a subject was removed from the Malaysian school curriculum in the early 1980s and Civic and Citizenship Education as a specific subject, with an explicit structure and curriculum framework, was reintroduced only in 2005. It was not feasible at the time when this study was conducted to conduct a specific assessment on the outcomes for school-aged students as explicated and expected in the curriculum framework. Therefore, the post-school-aged group of young undergraduates in public universities within the age range of 17-28 was selected as the target population.

Firstly, a conceptualisation of youth civic development was synthesized by identifying current views on citizenship, as set out in the international literature and, specifically, in Malaysia in two major documents – the Rukunegara and Vision2020. Civic development consists of three variables of Civic Knowledge (CK) (knowledge

about the legal status and associated rights and responsibilities of citizens); Civic Disposition (CD) (views on identity and attitudes as a citizen); and Civic Engagement (CE) (participation as a citizen). The relationship between civic development variables was explicated through a Neo-Vygotskian cultural-historical theory of human development. In addition, Bronfenbrenner's Socio-Ecological Theory of human development was adopted for the selection of contextual and individual factors (the independent variables) for the conceptual model. To help ensure cross-cultural validity for use within the Malaysian socio-cultural context, the three dependent variables of CK, CD and CE, and the independent variables were appraised for their suitability for use within the Malaysian socio-cultural context before they were operationalized into observable indicators.

Secondly, the Rasch measurement paradigm, framework and model were adopted as the foundation for instrument development and validation. The procedures for instrument development followed Wilson's model of four building blocks of instrument development (Wilson, 2005). Three instruments were developed for this study, namely The Malaysian Civic Knowledge Inventory (MCKI), The Malaysian Civic Disposition Inventory (MCDI), and the Malaysian Civic Engagement Inventory (MCEI). Items from existing instruments in international literature were adopted or adapted for the three instruments, especially the MCEI, if there was construct equivalence in Rukunegara and Vision 2020. This was to ensure a cumulative tradition in research on youth civic development. Most of the items in the MCKI and the MCDI however were developed specifically for this study to capture the specificity of the civic culture of Malaysia.

The target population for the study was undergraduate students enrolled in Malaysian public universities. Students at one public university were chosen as the accessible population. Data were collected in February 2006 (pilot study) and from July to August 2006 (main study). The sample for this study (N=1391) was drawn through multistage cluster sampling by study concentration, level of study, and clusters based on lecture/tutorial group. The sample also, by default, included major inherent characteristics of the target population, particularly gender (Male and Female) and ethnicity (Malay, Chinese, Indian and other ethnic groups).

Rasch analyses confirmed the three-dimensional structure of youth civic development. Three measurement scales with acceptable psychometric properties were established to provide measures for the three dependent variables of CK, CD and CE. The hypotheses about civic development (in terms of CK, CD and CE) as a 'tool and result' activity were tested through path analyses of mediational relationships based on Baron and Kenny's criteria (1986) using the Rasch-derived linearized scores from the main study. Analyses provided statistical support for a bidirectional association between each pair of CK, CD and CE, despite the low inter-correlations between them.

This study revealed that, on average, youth in this study demonstrated a moderately high level of CK (Mean =1.11, SD = 0.77), a positive CD (Mean = 1.25; SD = 0.63) but a moderately low CE (Mean = -0.44; SD = 0.92). The Malay sub-sample scored, on average, higher on all three dimensions of civic development. The results of hierarchical multiple regressions however showed the effect of ethnicity (Malay or Non-Malay) was statistically non-significant when other contextual (home, curricular and co-curricular) variables were entered into the regression equation. This indicates it is not ethnicity that predicts levels of civic development, but rather it is the differences in other socio-political entitlements and status associated with ethnic status. Three selected collective social-contextual factors of home, curriculum and co-curriculum explained only a fairly modest but statistically significant amount of variance (10 to 20%) in the dependent variables.

Finally, the findings were discussed in relation to the theoretical perspectives undergirding this study. Pragmatic implications for policy planning as well as other relevant stakeholders involved in youth civic development are also discussed.

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List of Publications

Aspects of this dissertation have been published in the following documents:

Tor, G. H. (2008). *Construction of a civic disposition inventory using a Rasch model analysis*. Third International Rasch Measurement Conference 2008, 22 – 24 January 2008, University of Western Australia.

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Tor, G. H. (2007). *Psychometric properties of Schwartz's Portrait Value Questionnaire: Rasch perspective*. 22nd Annual Research Forum of Western Australian Institute for Educational Research, 7 August 2007, Edith Cowan University, Western Australia.

Perry, L. & Tor, Geok Hwa. (2009). The study of educational transfer: A synthesis of analytical frameworks and conceptualization. *Prospects*, 38(4),509–526.