

# RUBRIX

TAKING A NEW WAY FORWARD  
A Newsletter by Research and Policy Department  
Yayasan Mendaki



ISSUE 03  
2014

# CONTENTS



03 Facilitating Progression through Deepening of Skills and Mastery

09 Yayasan MENDAKI-REACH Post-National Day Rally 2014 'Live' Facebook Chat: "Forging a New Social Compact."

12 A Snap Poll on the 2014 MClub Graduates Tea

16 Singapore Malays and Religiosity

19 The Impulse Society: A Book Review



# FACILITATING PROGRESSION THROUGH DEEPENING OF SKILLS AND MASTERY



APPLIED STUDY IN POLYTECHNIC AND ITE REVIEW (ASPIRE)

By : Siti Khadijah Setyo RS



## 01 INTRODUCTION

Like any other education system all over the world, the Singapore's education system is carefully designed to develop an efficient and relevant pool of human capital that is able to contribute to the country's economy. This is especially so when knowledge is regarded as the most important factor contributing to the unprecedented and rapid pace of economic growth and development. In order to remain competitive and ahead in the volatile world economy, it is thus crucial for the Singapore's government to invest in the development of well-educated and innovative workers through the provision of world-class education and training.

## 02 EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Education and training, which is considered a core element in facilitating economic growth and development, is a key driver for improving the educational qualifications and skill levels of the workforce. The emphasis on excellent education and training is necessary so as to maintain the competitive edge of Singapore's economy in a fiercely competitive global market. Over the decades, the Government has built a strong and well-resourced education system – from preschool to secondary education, and it now turning to position and strengthen the post-secondary education system, in particular the applied education pathway. Since the 1980s, Singapore has witnessed rapid development of Singapore post-secondary institutions, such as the polytechnics and universities, and Singapore's sub-degree institutions – polytechnics and Institute of Technical Education (ITEs), are credible and well-resourced institutions that attract a healthy share of students seeking relevant post-secondary education (Gopinathan and Lee, 2011). As the nation approaches its landmark 50th year of independence, it is timely that the country's education and training framework is strengthened to provide Singapore's with the competitive edge in the global economy for the next 50 more years.

## 03 APPLIED STUDY IN POLYTECHNIC AND ITE REVIEW (ASPIRE)

The ASPIRE Committee was chaired by Senior Minister of State for Law and Education Ms Indraneel Rajah. The aim of the review was to strengthen the applied education pathways in polytechnics and Institute of Technical Education (ITEs),

in order to better provide graduates with good career and academic progression prospects. Following a nation-wide consultative process with key stakeholders such as school leaders, teachers, students, parents and industry players, the Committee proposed 10 key recommendations that were subsequently accepted by the government. The recommendations by the Committee centre on three key themes - helping students make better education and career choices, creating more opportunities to grow the skills needed to excel in the career they choose to pursue and building more pathways that will allow polytechnics and ITE graduates progress in their career (ASPIRE Report, 2014).

## 04 WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR THE MALAY/MUSLIM COMMUNITY?

### Strengthen academic foundations

While ASPIRE focuses on post-secondary learning, specifically the applied education pathway in polytechnics and ITEs, it remains crucial that the Malay/Muslim community continue to strengthen foundations through academic excellence from young. Strong literacy and numeracy skills should continue to be developed and Malay/Muslim students should maximise their learning experience by leveraging on the opportunities provided in schools. The development of strong foundations will go a long way as it offers Malay/Muslim students a head start in their academic trajectory, and thus preventing them from lagging behind their peers. This in turn has a positive impact on the students' outlook and motivation towards learning; as the ability to cope with the demands of learning accords students the self-confidence and they are more likely to be self-directed learners who are eager to learn.

In tandem with strengthening academic foundations, the cultivation of soft skills and values should also be introduced to students from young. Through holistic education, valuable life skills such as perseverance, creativity, resilience and love for learning could be cultivated. These values will be useful in supporting students' academic pursuits, as they will provide the intrinsic motivation to encourage self-directed learning amongst students. Such holistic education and learning also allow for the cultivation of 21st century skills and dispositions such as the ability to solve problems, be adaptable, civic literacy, global awareness and communication and



collaboration skills that are necessary for the globalised world.

In developing and strengthening academic foundations and cultivating soft skills, it is important that Malay/Muslim parents continue to be empowered with the knowledge and skills so that they are able to create conducive learning environment at home. Parents also play the important role of co-educators and thus should be proactive in supporting their children's learning and development from an early age. Programmes such as *Maju Minda Matematika (Tiga M)* by Yayasan MENDAKI should be further enhanced to continuously meet the needs of Malay/Muslim parents. Learning resources and tools should also be made available in public libraries or community centres for parents' easy reference.

### Empower Malay/Muslim families with knowledge and information on existing resources

A plethora of resources and initiatives are readily available at the national level and Malay/Muslim parents and students should leverage on them. Online portals such as MOE's Parents in Education (<http://parents-in-education.moe.gov.sg/>) and ECDA's Grow @ Beanstalk (<http://www.ecda.gov.sg/growatbeanstalk/pages/home.aspx>)

provide valuable resources for parents with children from all ages – from pre-school all the way to post-secondary education, where they have easy access to tips and advices on how to support their children's development and learning. Newsletters and magazines containing latest events, seminars and additional resources are also readily available for parents' reference.

One of the recommendations put forth by the ASPIRE committee is to strengthen and coordinate education and career guidance (ECG) efforts as part of an integrated national ECG framework. The Committee proposed that an integrated national ECG framework should be made available for all across their entire lives; starting in school and continuing beyond graduation (ASPIRE Report, 2014: 19). Support will also be rendered through a one-stop online portal for students, educators and parents to access important information on the conditions of and opportunities available in the labour market. This seamless guidance and career support would be useful in equipping students with the necessary knowledge and skills in navigating through the education-to-employment path and avoid transitional roadblocks. Parents would also have easy access to information to provide



▶▶ ASPIRE IS ABOUT RECOGNISING VARIOUS TALENTS AND MULTIPLE EDUCATIONAL AND CAREER PATHWAYS AND MORE IMPORTANTLY, IT IS ABOUT HAVING AND REALISING HIGHER ASPIRATIONS. ◀◀

the needed support in realising their children's aspirations. Malay Muslim organisations (MMOs), in collaboration with schools, play crucial role in disseminating these information to the community. Outreach should be strengthened so that knowledge and information are accurately transmitted to the ground, and thus allowing the community to leverage on and benefit from existing national resources.

#### **Wider opportunities for education and career progression**

At the core of ASPIRE is the recognition of diverse talents and the widening of opportunities for education and career progressions. The Committee recommended that new programmes that integrate study and work, such as place-and-train programmes, are launched to deepen skills and facilitate career progressions for polytechnic and ITE graduates. This is similar to the Swiss and German apprenticeships where further skills training take place in a structured manner at the workplace through an integration of knowledge learning in the classroom and its real-world application.

Such programmes allow graduates to attain employer-recognised skill certifications through structured job training in the workplace, which will be complemented with classes at the polytechnics and ITE. Such place-and-train programmes will also open up opportunities for graduates to take new or larger job scopes and progress in their careers as they are constantly learning and training, and thus equipped with up-to-date skills that are relevant and needed by the industries. Census in 2010 indicated that the educational profile of the

Malay workforce has improved as close to 87% of resident workforce in 2010 attained secondary and higher qualifications (Department of Statistics, 2010). With new programmes, such as the place-and-train programme under the banner of ASPIRE, the educational profile of the Malay workforce will continue to improve as fresh polytechnic and ITE graduates will be given the opportunities to deepen and master their skills, which in turn will open up opportunities for them to take on larger work responsibilities and progress in their careers.

Overarching the ASPIRE recommendations is the importance of instilling a culture of lifelong learning. The quest for knowledge should not be confined to the walls of the classroom and it should not cease upon graduation. Instead, each of us as individuals should take ownership and take charge of our learning and development. One of the Committee's recommendations is to increase post-diploma Continuing Education and Training (CET) opportunities at our polytechnics. This allows polytechnic graduates to have more skills-refresher and skills-deepening opportunities and thus it ensures that our graduates' skills are maintained and continuously enhanced. Continuous deepening of skills and experience while being on the job allows the development of master craftsmen within our workforce. Through the culture of lifelong learning, these master craftsmen, unlike the average worker, will have niched and deep knowledge and skills of their respective professions, and thus allowing them to perform their trade at a higher level and even pass on their valuable expertise to potential apprentices.

Rapid advancements in technology also suggest that learning and development can take place anytime and anywhere, regardless of spatial or temporal boundaries. The Committee also recommended for the expansion of online learning opportunities in polytechnics and ITEs to make it easier for students to learn at their own time and pace. Apart from resources provided by educational institutions, there are various massive open online course (MOOC) platforms that the community can tap on, such as Coursera and Udacity, which provide learning opportunities through the Web.

It is vital that culture of lifelong learning and the constant thirst for knowledge is cultivated from young. Given the

availability of such open and massive learning infrastructures and resources, it is hoped that the community tap on them and embrace learning as a continuous developmental process.

## 05 CONCLUDING REMARKS

In our zeal to deepen technical skills and competencies, it is important that we do not inadvertently discourage individuals from pursuing higher academic qualifications. Such is antithesis to the spirit and culture of lifelong learning. The Malay/Muslim community should pursue excellence and success to the highest level possible. It is thus crucial that key messages on ASPIRE are clearly articulated to the Malay/Muslim community. ASPIRE is about recognising various talents and multiple educational and career pathways and more importantly, it is about having and realising higher aspirations. The applied education pathway is one, of the many pathways to success, and the Malay/Muslim community should leverage on the learning and development opportunities provided in polytechnics and ITEs to continuously uplift the community's educational achievements. Apart from the students themselves, Malay/Muslim parents and organisations have pivotal roles to play in supporting the younger generations to maximise their potential and realise their aspirations.

## References

Department of Statistics (DOS). (2010). *Census of Population 2010 Statistical Release 2: Households and Housings*. Singapore: Ministry of Trade and Industry.

Gopinathan, S., & Lee, M. H. (2011). Challenging and co-opting globalization: Singapore's strategies in higher education. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 33 (3), 37-41.

Ministry of Education (MOE). (2014). *ASPIRE Report*. Singapore: Ministry of Education.

# YAYASAN MENDAKI-REACH POST-NATIONAL DAY RALLY 2014

'LIVE' FACEBOOK CHAT:  
"FORGING A NEW SOCIAL COMPACT."

By: Muhammad Farouq Osman

On 3 September 2014, Yayasan MENDAKI, in collaboration with REACH, organised an online post-National Day Rally policy forum in the form of a 'live' Facebook chat. It was a platform to engage netizens in a discussion focused on the topics broached in the Prime Minister's National Day Rally 2014. The online chat, which was hosted on the REACH Facebook page, centred on the theme of 'Forging a New Social Compact' and was led by three panellists: Minister for Communications and Information and Minister-in-charge of Muslim Affairs, Dr Yaacob Ibrahim; Yayasan MENDAKI CEO, Mdm Tuminah Sapawi; and Parliamentary Secretary for Health and Transport and Vice-Chairman, REACH Supervisory Panel, Dr Muhammad Faishal Ibrahim. Held at the Ministry of Communications and Information's building at Hill Street, this event marked MENDAKI's second collaboration with REACH, the first one being an online chat to discuss the implications of the 2013 Singapore Budget.



~ The three panellists at the start of the 'live' Facebook chat session.

The event witnessed a vibrant and lively dialogue with about 100 participants who shot a range of questions based on the three sub-themes: 'Improving educational pathways and career opportunities', 'Ensuring retirement adequacy for all' and 'Opportunities and challenges for the Malay/Muslim community.' First on the agenda was the recommendations of the Applied Study in Polytechnics and Institute of Technical Education Review (ASPIRE) Committee which were aimed at improving the educational and career prospects of Singaporeans. In his Rally speech, PM Lee Hsien Loong exhorted Singaporeans to master deep, relevant skills and eschew the chasing of paper qualifications for the sake of it, while underlining his government's commitment to improving opportunities for polytechnic and ITE graduates. Responding to a question from an online participant on how the ASPIRE recommendations would benefit the Malay/Muslim community, Minister Dr Yaacob explained that ASPIRE provides alternative pathways for "students who may not be inclined to pursue a degree, but want to climb the employment ladder." There was broad consensus among the panellists and participants that there is a need for a "culture shift" in terms of valuing contributions from all workers regardless of educational qualification, and getting employers to reduce emphasis on the latter for hiring and promotion and place more weight on job performance instead. Nevertheless, in Dr Faishal's words, the culture shift may take years to be realised, even as Dr Yaacob assured another participant that ASPIRE does not seek to diminish the significance of academic excellence.

The online chat also saw participants discussing CPF lump-sum withdrawals, and the Silver Support and Lease Buyback schemes. Dr Yaacob brought the participants' attention to PM Lee's announcement at the Rally that Singaporeans will have the option of making lump sum withdrawals from their CPF account after they retire at 65 and that the CPF Minimum Sum will be raised from \$155,000 to \$161,000 for those turning 55 next July. Commenting on a remark made by one of the netizens that the cap on withdrawals would mean insufficient funds for a Muslim to go on a Haj pilgrimage, Dr Yaacob reminded everyone that the "CPF is meant for retirement" and that it would be "useful" for one to "start planning early" where Haj is concerned. On the Lease Buyback scheme, Dr Faishal emphasised the

►► DRYACOBB STRUCK A NOTE OF OPTIMISM, ADDING THAT HE HAS SEEN SINGAPORE MALAYS "DOING WELL OVERSEAS" IN PLACES LIKE "INDONESIA, MALAYSIA (AND) DUBAI." ◀◀

government's stance that it exists as a monetisation option for the elderly and that the latter need not sign up for the scheme if they feel they do not need it. Another participant expressed approval for the Silver Support scheme, which is a proposed annual CPF bonus for low-income elderly Singaporeans aged 65 years and above. Overall, there was a sense that the netizens accepted the imperative of individual responsibility in ensuring that one has enough for retirement. As one of the online participants put it: "...the key point here is for all of us to plan our lives very carefully...we do have expenses beyond ages 55 and 65...so that we do not become a burden to ourselves and our family."

The final segment of the online chat gave the opportunity for participants to discuss any issue of relevance to the progress of the Malay/Muslim community. One of the participants noted that PM Lee highlighted in his Rally speech the need for government agencies to work effectively together in dealing with municipal issues. Linking this to MENDAKI and community upliftment, the participant enquired if the self-help group has plans to work with government agencies such as the Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF) in devising programmes to help Malay families. In response, Mdm Tuminah clarified that MENDAKI has been collaborating with MSF on several family and youth programmes. Indicative of the concern on the part of the

community about the job prospects of Malay ITE students, another participant wondered if the preponderance of such graduates in the security industry meant that more should be done career guidance-wise. In her reply, Mdm Tuminah pointed to the vital role played by ITE career counsellors whose expertise should be taken advantage of, as the Malay ITE students prepare to enter the working world. Another netizen raised the broader issue of the Malay community's competitiveness against the backdrop of a rapidly globalising world. Responding to the former's comment, Dr Yaacob struck a note of optimism, adding that he has seen Singapore Malays "doing well overseas" in places like "Indonesia, Malaysia (and) Dubai." Refocusing back on the local landscape, Dr Yaacob highlighted the setting up of Nadi Khidmat branches in our mosques by MENDAKI and the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore (MUIS) as evidence of ongoing efforts to improve the accessibility of social services to disadvantaged Malay/Muslim families. Participants generally agreed on the importance of boosting financial literacy among Malays too.

Minister Dr Yaacob aptly assessed the socioeconomic situation of the community when he surmised that "the broad statistics for educational achievement (for Malay/Muslims) are clear - the trend is upwards. The question is the gradient. I still believe we can do better." Indeed, it is this positive spirit, coupled with a never-say-die attitude that will ensure the community's progress in decades to come.



~ Minister Dr Yaacob Ibrahim hard at work, responding to netizens' comments.



# MCLUB GRADUATES TEA SNAP POLL

By : Norshahira Abdul Aziz

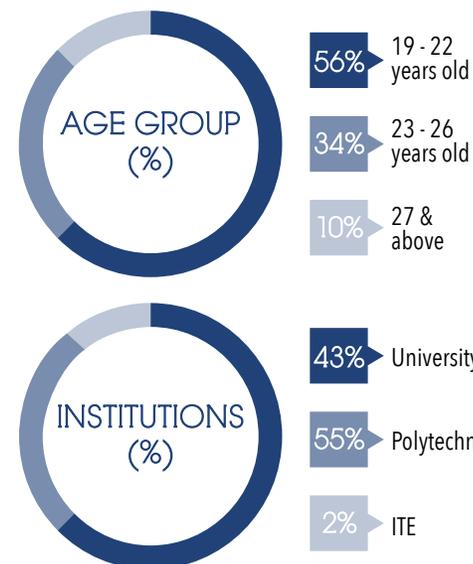
The 2014 MENDAKI Club (MClub) Graduates Tea was held on Saturday, 6 September at Hilton Singapore. The event saw approximately 270 participants, consisting largely of fresh graduates from the various local and overseas tertiary institutions. The MClub Graduates Tea hopes to serve as a platform to celebrate the achievements of Malay Muslim graduates, providing insights to guide them through their next phase in life.

At this year's event, the Research & Policy Department (RPD) of Yayasan MENDAKI took the opportunity to conduct a snap poll to capture the career aspirations and preparation efforts of our youth. As the Applied Polytechnic and ITE Review (ASPIRE) Committee had also released their report shortly before the event, participants were also asked for their thoughts on some of the recommendations made. RPD's snap poll comprised of only six questions, and successfully garnered 148 responses, giving it a 55% response rate. The findings of the snap poll are summarized in the following sections.

## PROFILE OF PARTICIPANTS

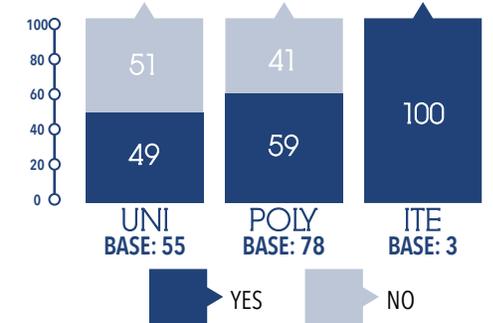
To better interpret the findings, the first few questions explored the profile of participants at the event. It was found that:

- (A) The number of female participants greatly outnumbered the number of male participants, with the ratio being 2:1.
- (B) There was a varied age group, with the majority of participants falling between 19-22 years of age.
- (C) The Graduates Tea was also slightly more popular among students from polytechnics than universities.



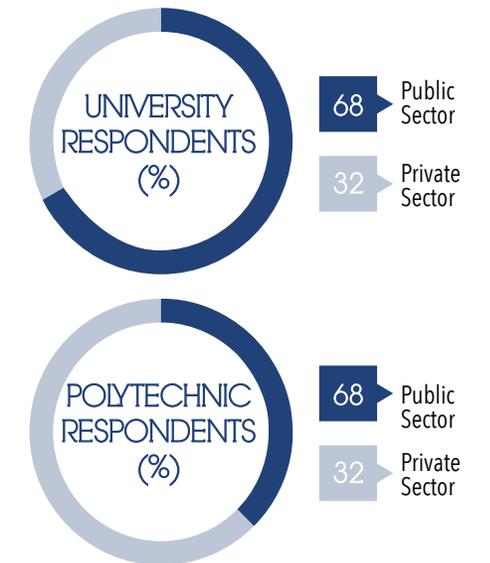
## FINDINGS

(1A) Did you manage to secure a good job within six months of your graduation? (% responses)



Approximately half of all university respondents (51%) had not managed to secure a good job six months post-graduation.

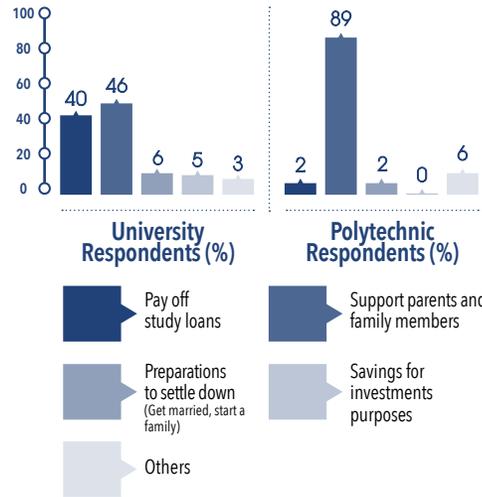
(1B) If yes, please state whether it is in the public or private sector.



Among those in employment, we then asked whether their careers were in the public or private sector:

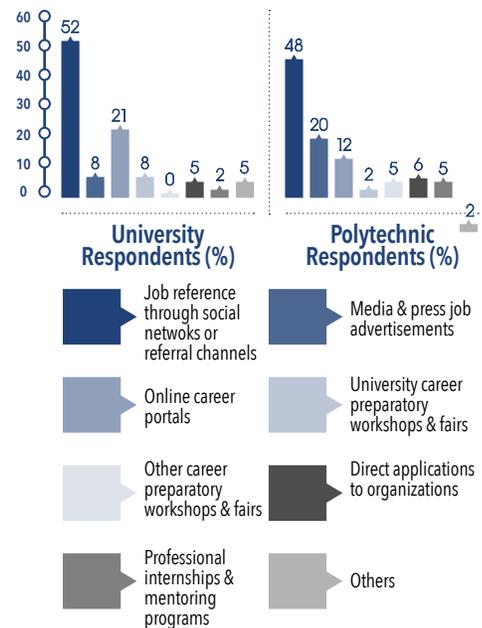
- ▶ Among university respondents, the percentage of respondents employed within the public sector was more than double that in the private sector.
- ▶ This was not observed among polytechnic respondents, in which slightly more respondents were employed within the private sector.

(2) In terms of your financial commitments post-graduation, please select the ones most important and relevant to you.



While both groups of respondents were very concerned with supporting parents and family members post-graduation, university educated respondents also seemed to be overwhelmingly concerned with paying off their study loans.

(3) In securing a good job you like, which of the following platforms have you utilized/ plan to utilize?

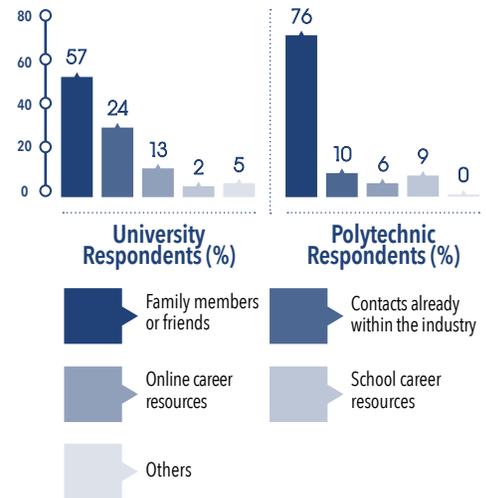


▶ Almost half of both groups of respondents have utilized or plan to utilize job reference through social networks and referrals (52% of university respondents, 48% of polytechnic respondents)

▶ The second most popular platform among university students was online career portals (21%), whereas polytechnic students preferred media and press advertisements (20%).

▶ Professional internships and mentoring programs ranked quite low for both groups (Only 2% of university respondents and 5% of polytechnic respondents have utilized or planned to utilize this platform).

(4) When trying to find out more about the soft of career to have, which of the following avenues would you turn to for more information?



▶ Apart from platforms, RPD was also interested in finding out more about the sources of career information for our youth:

▶ An overwhelming majority of polytechnic respondents (76%) would turn to family members or friends to find out more information on the sort of career to have.

▶ More university respondents (24%) than polytechnic respondents (10%) would turn to contacts already within the industry, which could be a reflection of the different types of social capital between the two groups.

(5) The ASPIRE committee recently made several recommendations and shared insight on enhancing the career and training pathways for ITE and polytechnic graduates.

Which of the following measures do you think would enhance your chances of securing a good job that you like?

KEY LEARNING POINTS	UNI (%)	POLY (%)
Strengthen education and career guidance efforts (via trained career coaches and counsellors)	46	51
Enhance internship opportunities (via a more structured curriculum, clearer learning outcomes)	35	12
Expand online learning opportunities to make it easier for individuals to learn anywhere and anytime	6	2
Increase post-graduate Continuing Education & Training (CET) opportunities to refresh and deepen skills of graduates	2	0
Establish leads for each key industry sector to strengthen linkages with industry and help enhance programme offerings	3	11
Provide more development and support programs for students to help every enrolled student succeed	0	4

▶ Approximately half the respondents from both groups agreed on the need to strengthen education and career guidance efforts in schools (via trained career coaches and counsellors).

▶ More university students than polytechnic students agreed with the recommendation to enhance internship opportunities (35% of university students compared to 12% of polytechnic students).

▶ In Q3, it was found that only 2% of university students had utilized or planned to utilize professional internships and mentoring programs.

▶ Unfortunately, both groups did not seem to see the importance of increasing post-graduate CET opportunities (2% for university and 0% for polytechnic students).

(6) In terms of providing career support, what would you like to see in terms of MClub's future programs or initiatives?

The last question of the snap poll was left open-ended, and respondents were asked what they hoped to see in future MClub programs or initiatives. Among the responses, two key themes emerged:

- (A) Increased awareness of MClub programs and initiatives (via increased outreach efforts etc).
- (B) Request for greater career support (via workshops and more upstream efforts such as engaging with undergraduates and not just graduates etc).

**NEED FOR INCREASED AWARENESS OF MCLUB PROGRAMS AND INITIATIVES:**

- More engagement & outreach to the Malay/Muslim Community.
- Run programs or exhibitions to let the public know of MClub's activities etc.

**OVERWHELMING REQUEST FOR GREATER CAREER SUPPORT:**

- Workshops on career preparatory course to have individuals already working in the industry that i'm interested in.
- Networking sessions with industries key personnel, more sessions to inspire and motivate individuals.
- Provide links or opportunities to find out more about jobs in an industry that they are interested in.
- Provide insight on the careers that we would like to pursue.
- Information on difficulties we might face in our careers.
- Similar events with speakers and discussion panels, perhaps for a specific industry each time.
- Greater engagement with undergraduates and not just graduates.

# SINGAPORE MALAYS AND RELIGIOSITY

BASED ON IPS WORKING PAPER; RELIGIOSITY AND THE MANAGEMENT OF RELIGIOUS HARMONY

By : Khairun Nisa Yusni

Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) recently published its third report paper in June 2014 by Dr Mathew Mathews, Mohammad Khamsya and Teo Kay Key on inter-ethnic and inter-religion relations and harmony in Singapore based on the responses from their survey on race, religion and language. As attended to one of their focus group discussions, it led the interest to find out how the Malays are performing in the matter of religiosity and their thoughts of other religions.

Malays constitute 12.9 per cent of the over 4,000 respondents who participated in the survey. This percentage is almost similar to the national resident population with slight difference of 0.2 per cent. Respondents with secondary or ITE qualifications composed the largest group at 33.3 per cent while the smallest group at 13.1 per cent were those below secondary education.

## RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION

In identifying race and religious affiliation, Malays were found to display the greatest religious homogeneity in which 97.2 per cent of them claimed were Muslim as depicted in the table below. 98.3 per cent of Malays were born into their religion which indicates that the rest have switched religion at some stage in their lives.

### RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION BY ETHNIC GROUP (%)

	CHINESE	MALAY	INDIAN	OTHERS
<b>Buddhism</b>	34.8	0.8	4.1	16.2
<b>Islam</b>	0.6	97.2	19.2	13.1
<b>Hinduism</b>	0.0	0.3	58.9	4.0
<b>Catholicism</b>	10.9	0.8	9.0	38.4
<b>Protestantism</b>	13.3	0.3	4.4	14.4
<b>Taoism</b>	20.2	0.3	0.3	0
<b>No religion</b>	19.9	0.3	1.5	7.1
<b>Other religion</b>	0.2	0.3	2.6	7.1

Source: IPS Working Papers No.21 (June 2014): 'Religiosity and the Management of Religious Harmony'



Less than a third of Muslims thought that religious groups should have more rights in terms of spreading their teachings in public areas but most of them felt that there is harmony among people with different religion. When comes to whether Singaporeans should report any insensitive or offensive actions to the authorities, Muslims and Protestant Christians saw the highest proportion in agreement to this.

To understand whether the respondents value their religions as important in their lives, the Muslims were the highest (67.7 per cent) to state that their religion Islam was very important to their identity and as their way of life. Reasonably, about three quarters of Muslims adopted the Islamic principles and philosophies to shape their idea and guide their lives.

## RELIGIOUS ENGAGEMENT

In terms of engagement and participation with religious activities, Muslims came in second after the Christians. Around 57.7 per cent of them prayed in places of different settings (outside of mosques) and around the same number read religious scriptures or religious books.

### ENGAGEMENT WITH RELIGIOUS ACTIVITIES AT LEAST ONCE A MONTH BY RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION (%)

	ISLAM	CATHOLIC	PROTESTANT
<b>Attend religious services</b>	48.5	70.2	81.5
<b>Pray in places other than mosque</b>	57.7	54.2	76.2
<b>Read religious scriptures or literatures</b>	57.1	46.8	73.4
<b>Watch or listen to media on religion (songs, video etc.)</b>	60.8	41.2	66.7

Source: IPS Working Papers No.21 (June 2014): 'Religiosity and the Management of Religious Harmony'

Every religion provides a framework of embracing morality to its followers. For Muslims, 77.8 per cent of them believed that Islam actively seek equality for all and 70.9 per cent believed that the morals should be taught to other people.

## RELIGIOUS DISAFFILIATION

Muslims were found to be most affected than followers from other religion when they were asked "how affected are you by friends of the same religious group as you giving up their religious faith?" and "how affected are you by family members of the same religious group as you giving up their religious beliefs?" The Muslims stand at 37.7 per cent and 58.5 per cent respectively. On top of that, Muslims (69.2 per cent) and Protestants (50.3 per cent) were more likely to feel that it was wrong/always wrong when family members give up their religious faith.

The finding for giving up one religion indicated that the religious groups with higher level of religious participation and identity found this more disturbing than other religious adherents as their concerns were also reflected in their disapproval of either their friends or family members to give up the same religion that they believe. In other words, the group with higher level of religious participation and identity were Muslims (69.2 per cent) and Christians (Protestants 50.2 per cent). Not only that, Muslims ranked the highest on the following acts (refer to table below) that were deemed to be almost wrong/always wrong.

### ALMOST WRONG/ALWAYS WRONG ACTS BY RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION (%)

	BUDDHIST	ISLAM (MUSLIMS)	PROTESTANT
Sex before marriage	44.3	84.6	73.8
Sex of the same sex	73.8	93.9	78.7
Divorce	75.0	89.1	89.1
Pregnancy before marriage	65.8	88.1	82.8
Gambling	59.1	90.8	78.4

## LEVEL OF COMFORT WITH DIFFERENT RELIGION

The respondents were asked to rate their level of comfort with members of different religious belief in both private and public domain. In private domain, Muslims were certainly comfortable having brother/sister in law and close friends with the same religion. However, they were less comfortable with member from another religion to be their spouse. Protestant too, placed themselves at the lowest (19 per cent) if to have a Muslim spouse. Much of this discomfort is because of religious restrictions with Islam and Christianity encouraging marriages with those of like faith.

Around 90 per cent of Muslims were comfortable with relationships in public domain such as with neighbours, employee, boss and colleagues. Likewise, Buddhists and Christians are comfortable having public relationship with Muslims. This could be due to government's policies in integrating people with different background and faith towards peaceful coexistence and harmony living Singaporeans.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

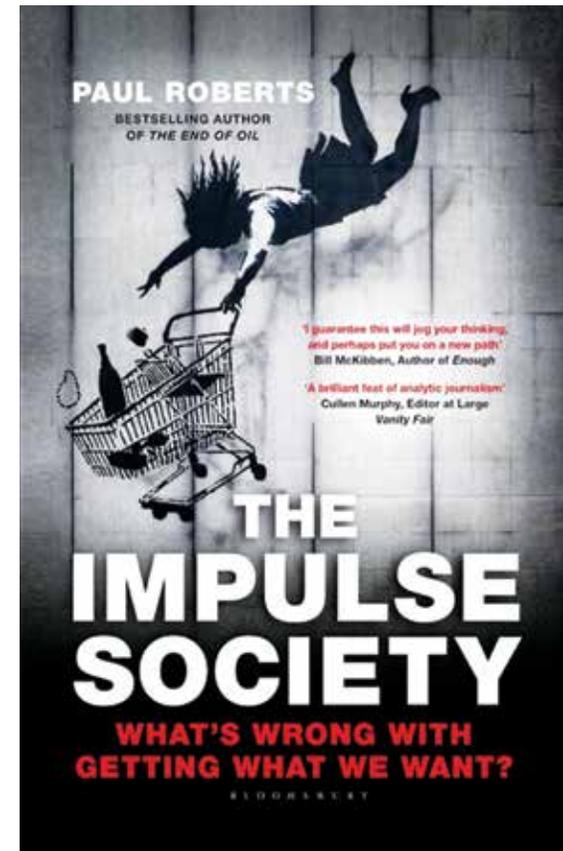
The overall findings of the survey concluded that the respondents felt that the state is to play the role of ensuring the peaceful coexistence of different religions. They also believed that Singapore so far has done well in promoting religious harmony. Although most monotheists believe that religion is important in their lives and that religions help to shape their life values and philosophies, there is diversity in their personal beliefs of religious adherents. Inter-religious relationships and interactions especially in the private domain (having a close relative or spouse of a different faith) learnt that the respondents still feel dubious and less comfortable.

The findings of Malay/Muslim counterparts have revealed that they value religion first and foremost but with religion, they value peace and harmony too. Coexistence of different faith to Malays or Muslims in particular did not hinder their way of living or the withstanding of their religious values. Singapore has made that possible for Malays and of course the rest of the different religions to practice their own choice of holding a particular system of faith as long as the integration and conformity is applicable to all religions in the name of peaceful harmonious Singapore.

Disclaimer: This article is not intended to be an in-depth analysis or act in response to the survey report. Rather, it is a concise account of the Malay/Muslim community in Singapore on religiosity drawn from the findings in the report.

# THE IMPULSE SOCIETY: A BOOK REVIEW

By: Muhammad Nadim Adam



Full Title: *The Impulse Society: What's Wrong With Getting What We Want?*  
 Publisher: Bloomsbury Publishing  
 Place of Publication: London  
 Date of Publication: 2014

The rat-race lifestyle of today is the result of our general society that insist of a life that is increasingly defined by a strong sense of individualism that demands for instant gratification, whereby almost everything hinges on the notion of "me" and "now". Thus, any real effort to steer back or unplug is being seen as running the risk of falling behind and failing.

In the latest work of Paul Roberts, an American journalist based in Washington State, USA, the author argues that the creation of an Impulse Society has allowed and encouraged for greater individual advancement, generating more material wealth, resulting in increased consumption, the natural expectation of a more instantaneous gratification, and the increasing prominence of self-expression.

However, according to Paul Roberts, the downside of an Impulsive Society, is which society itself becomes fragmented, due to excessive individualistic aspirations, that has steadily undermined the well-being of society as a whole. This is attributed to the fact that the Impulse Society creates a systemic norm that registers mainly short-term gains, and largely ignores the complications of long-term costs.

▶▶ NO SOCIETY  
CAN SURELY BE  
FLOURISHING AND  
HAPPY, OF WHICH THE  
FAR GREATER PART  
OF THE MEMBERS ARE  
POOR AND MISERABLE ◀◀

Adam Smith in *The Wealth of Nations*, 1776

## THE KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF AN IMPULSE SOCIETY

The main characteristic of an Impulse Society is the self that is at the centre of everything, and everything is about the self. This individualistic attitude in turn influenced the present general consumer culture that is highly characterized by individual wants and aspirations, rather than for the benefit of public good. Almost a century ago, the physical world of production was mainly geared towards public goods that would bring about collective benefit for society, via ground-breaking innovations such as production of automobiles, building of amenities and infrastructures and the creation of the digital age. Today, much of society's consumption is meant to fulfil society's intangible criteria, hence the production of personal goods that are meant to meet customers' inner-most desires, so that to perpetuate their craving for social esteem, self-identity, or filling in their gaps of boredom and anxieties – hence, today's focus of technology, innovation and investments are geared more towards the aesthetics.

In this present age of digitalization, members of society are exposed to high volume of information, but many succumb to a low level of comprehension mode, in terms of processing and understanding the information that they have at hand. Paul Roberts in fact believes that information overload may in fact result members of society to process information obtained in a more simplistic and superficial manner, thus, diluting the learning points from these information. The long term implication will eventually result in a society which is generally less able to think and reason out problems and issues effectively, despite the avalanche of information surrounding them.

Ironic to the fact that our present world today has become more diverse than ever before, due to result of transnational movement and interaction within our globalized setting, which are enhanced by more effective mode of transport and telecommunication infrastructures, Paul Roberts pointed out that somehow or rather, society in general today is still unable to tolerate diversity. According to the author, unfamiliarity and strangeness becomes stressful for a large part of society members, disagreement becomes traumatic, and conformity is regarded as the accepted norm. For those minority members of society who differ in terms of the everyday norms and common beliefs – grouped under the "Other" – this group tends to be subjected to the prejudicial eyes of the majority.

For an average person within an Impulse Society, Paul Roberts observed that individuals tend not to have strong opinions, lacking the conviction in their own viewpoints, and tend to adopt the average view of those around them. These members of the society are inclined towards the middle, naturally reverting to the mean, for their fear to be different. This lack of conviction in standing firm by one's own principles has penetrated through the different level of the social strata – from the highest social echelons such as politicians, academicians, technocrats, business circle, and right up to the general common masses.

In addition, present society within this Impulse Society runs a risk of becoming a soft generation, in which, inconveniences in life are seen as errors and a mark of inefficiency. Members of an Impulse Society, according to Paul Roberts, have little tolerance towards: discomfort, difficulty, anxiety, suffering, depression, rejection, uncertainty and ambiguity. They do not see the situation as an opportunity to mature or toughen up as individuals.

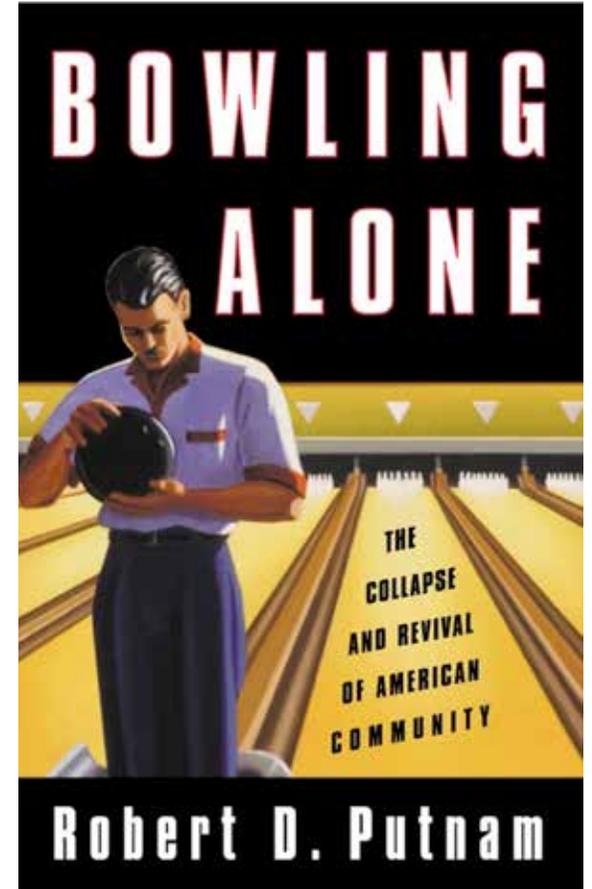
As a collective, the Impulse Society has witnessed a regression in terms of social connectedness. This situation occurs when many of the tight social structures of the past have been eliminated or replaced with new social arrangements that are focused to the self, rather than the priorities of a collective. As a concrete evidence, Paul Roberts cited the work of Harvard University academician, Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone* (2000), in which, Putnam highlighted the fact as to how the American society in the United States of America since the 1950s had regress in terms of their participation in the political and civic organizations, mainly due their disillusionment with the present mainstream leadership and governance. In other words, the impact marks a situation of all man for himself, placing human

networking and connectedness, or sociologically termed as the level of social capital, into a secondary backseat.

Paul Roberts interestingly further commented that the emphasis on the "self" within the Impulse Society has to a certain extent led to certain members within society to be obsessed for acknowledgement from others. Citing Sherry Turkle, a sociologist and clinical psychologist who has spent decades researching on digital interaction, Roberts argued that since it is now possible to be in virtual constant contact with others, there is a significant pool of individuals within society who tend to communicate so excessively, that even a momentary lapse of disconnection from normal communication means such as the various social media applications, would leave these individuals feeling isolated and abandoned. This is in comparison with society in the pre-digital age, where it was not alarming to go hours or days or even weeks without hearing from someone. Today, the digital mind can become uncomfortable and anxious without instant feedback from one's social circle.

The root cause in explaining the anxiety for acknowledgement amongst members within the Impulse Society may be attributed to the historical fact that the evolution from a subsistence and agrarian society that empowered members of society to be small-time producers of their own consumption. Mass production in the age of industrialization had instead converted majority of society members to become from producers to consumers. As a result, many of these individuals lost much of their production skills, diminishing their sense of competence and lacking self-reliance. This in turn creates successive generations that lack significantly in terms of self-confidence, self-security and self-assurance.

In the long-term, the above-mentioned individuals become steadily hungrier for the approval of peers, so that to feed their level of insecurity. For Paul Roberts, his main concern is that individuals who seek self-assurance among their peers tend to resort to misusing social media as a means of escapism by communicating incessantly, posting every conceivable life event, expressing every thought no matter how incompletely formed, or inappropriate or mundane – hence, diluting the notion of communication as a whole.



Full Title: *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*  
Publisher: Simon & Schuster Ltd  
Place of Publication: London  
Date of Publication: 2001

## THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC REALITIES IN THE IMPULSE SOCIETY

In better understanding the socio-economic landscape of the Impulse Society, Paul Roberts closely examined the work by economist, Tyler Cowen, entitled *Average is Over* (2013). For Cowen, he termed the top 15 per cent of the workforce as being made up of "hyper-productives" – individuals who are extremely bright, and who either know how to optimize the latest technologies or how to manage other hyper-productives. These hyper-productives naturally hold on to the largest economic pie within a society.



Below the hyper-productives will be a narrow stratum termed as service providers. This group are known as the middle-class, providing moderate-skilled service support to the various industries within an economy. At the bottom of the workforce hierarchy are mainly low-skilled workers, holding on low-wage jobs in the service sector such as: food service, security, janitorial, garden landscape and health-care. These jobs are defined as "low-skilled" as the skills adopted by these workers are considered as generic and almost anyone can embrace the skills within a short period of time. In other words, the labour force under this category is considered as dispensable.

in taxes in relation to their personal income and production output. For the hyper-productives, affluence is more for personal gain, rather than for collective good.

Meanwhile, workforce from the middle-class hierarchy tend to be under consistent pressure of having to keep up with the various performance metrics, measuring their productivity capacity, where non-performers will be branded as "irrelevant", and at the extreme case, cast aside and slip into the position of the new underclass, where the workforce are considered as archaic and unemployable.

Sadly, according to Paul Roberts, for a large pool of unskilled workers at the bottom of the socio-economic hierarchy of an Impulse Society, they will likely remain unemployed or under-employed, as business investments tend to focus in enhancing productive output such as the purchase of machines and robots, rather than the retraining of the workforce. In turn, employment opportunities diminishes with technological advances.

As the economy increasingly rewards high-level skills, the gap between the hyper-productive elite and the rest of society

will widen significantly. This elite group not only more likely to get better jobs, but also will more likely gain access to a more successful social circle, provide family members with better head start in terms of vital life opportunities such as education, career guidance and social networking. As for the rest of society, the glass ceiling will be more challenging to overcome, and there will be a tendency in witnessing the shrinking of the middle-class, whereby workforce within this group tend to struggle to keep up with the increasing expectations, in terms of their capacity to stay relevant in the labour market, that are primarily based on technological savvy, effective man-management and high output productivity.

According to Paul Roberts, if the socio-economic landscape within the Impulse Society remains obsessed with only rewarding the hyper-productives, and failure to provide better economic equity to the other members of society, one day, the socio-economic hierarchy will be reduced to:

- ▶ The fantastically successful elite, working in the technologically dynamic sectors.
- ▶ Everyone else

The implication of a widening socio-economic gap between the successful and the bottom rung of society, if being unattended in the long-term, is the increased possibility of the creation of a permanent underclass, where members within the underclass will be facing an uphill task of emancipating themselves from the viscous cycle at a multi-generational level - hence, facing a continued lacking of material affluence, deprivation of human networking for the purpose of life progression, and increased possibility in family breakdown due to economic stresses that may lead to other social challenges such as domestic violence, high divorce rates and single parenthood; dropping out from school prematurely, juvenile delinquency, homelessness, low self-esteem, anti-social behaviours and petty crimes.

## CONCLUSION: CREATING HOPE BEYOND THE IMPULSE SOCIETY

Paul Roberts concluding chapter provides several key personal opinions as to how the Impulse Society can mature beyond its impulsive norms. The first component is the call to redefine

the notion of "progress" itself. According to the author, the idea of "progress" ought to include metrics that look beyond physical economic growth, in terms of accumulation of private wealth. Therefore, economic growth needs to be better distributed, so that the net profit out of the economic output can be transformed to various collective human benefits, such as the providence of better accessibility to education, increased in standards and affordability in terms of healthcare and the provision of better welfare for the less fortunate.

For the elite class within society, Paul Roberts greatly hopes that professionals such as technocrats, academicians, reform-minded politicians, the business circle and the rest of the social intelligentsia would be willing to be more persuasive in advocating for the greater allocation of public investments, in order to develop sustained progress for society in general, and therefore rectifying any economic imbalances that has created the large socio-economic gap within the social strata. For this aspiration to turn into reality, there needs to be the reworking on the relation between the self and the community or society at large.

By reinstalling the basic values within members of a society, Paul Roberts believes that the successful elite need to give back to society through the measures such as working towards a shared purpose between the elite and the masses, better co-operation among members in society, re-introduction to the value of self-sacrifice, and the long-term commitment to continue giving back to society in both tangible and intangible means. Ultimately, society may become more resilient in nature, when the more successful consistently support the weaker members of society, via progressive means, and in the long-term, transforming the weaker members in society to reach a more credible level of achievement in life.

Last but not least, Paul Roberts concludes that for developing sensible, long-term objectives of a society, the spirit of volunteerism, patriotism, esprit de corps and self-sacrificed need to be raised to a level where it will bring about an empowering relation between national and local settings, breaking the rigidity in the relationship between the state and the individual, and thus creating a social dynamic that can effectively address issues and challenges via top-down and bottom-up socio-interactive arrangement for the purpose of common good.

### THE ELITE (HYPER-PRODUCTIVES)

### The Middle-Class (ModerateSkilled Service Providers)

### The New Underclass (Low-Skilled/Wage Workers)

Paul Roberts predicts that within an Impulse Society setting, the hyper-productive elites will strongly try to keep their status quo, and hence would have the tendency to resist increase



MENDAKI Rubrix Newsletter 2014  
Issue 03, 2014  
Copyright © 2014 Yayasan MENDAKI

Research and Policy Department  
Yayasan MENDAKI, Wisma MENDAKI

Views presented in this publication are those of the individual authors. They do not purport to represent the views of the Editorial Team, the Publisher, the Board and Management of Yayasan MENDAKI or the institutions the authors are affiliated to.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be printed or reproduced or stored in any retrieval system by any electronic, mechanical or other means without permission in writing from the publisher and Yayasan MENDAKI.

All enquiries should be addressed to:  
Research and Policy Department  
51, Kee Sun Avenue, Off Tay Lian Teck Road,  
Singapore 457056

Main Telephone Line: 6245 5555  
Research and Policy Department: 6245 5860  
Email: [rpdpublications@mendaki.org.sg](mailto:rpdpublications@mendaki.org.sg)  
Website: [www.mendaki.org.sg](http://www.mendaki.org.sg)

Series Advisor : Mdm Tuminah Sapawi

#### EDITORIAL TEAM

Chief-Editor: Aidaroyani Adam  
Content Editor: Sabrena Abdullah  
Contributors:  
Khairun Nisa Yusni  
Norshahira Bte Abdul Aziz  
Siti Khadijah Setyo RS  
Muhammad Farouq Osman  
Muhammad Nadim Adam

Designed and Printed in Singapore by  
Design & Print International Pte Ltd  
[www.dpi.com.sg](http://www.dpi.com.sg)