

Original Article

The Role of Appreciation of Ethics and Civilization in Fostering Social Cohesion among Malaysian Higher Education Students

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Abstract

Malaysia's higher education institutions face both challenges and opportunities arising from cultural diversity. The Appreciation of Ethics and Civilization, a compulsory university course, was introduced to promote tolerance and a shared national identity; however, its impact on social cohesion is often limited by weak integration with students' everyday experiences. This study examines the role of the Appreciation of Ethics and Civilization course in fostering social cohesion among Malaysian university students. Using a qualitative approach, the study analyses primary data comprising course syllabus, students' assignments, and course feedback. The role of Appreciation of Ethics and Civilization is examined through three interrelated dimensions: knowledge acquisition of ethics and civilization, interracial bonding through learning activities, and student acceptance of the course. Findings show that these dimensions mutually reinforce one another, enhancing students' appreciation of cultural diversity and national unity. The study highlights Appreciation of Ethics and Civilization's potential as a catalyst for social cohesion, offering practical implications for promoting harmony in Malaysia's plural society. The study also demonstrates to worldwide communities how ethics education when aligned with relational and experiential learning can promote social cohesion in multicultural societies.

Keywords: Education; Fostering; Social Cohesion; Teaching; University

Introduction

Social cohesion is broadly defined as the degree to which individuals experience trust, solidarity, connectedness, and a sense of belonging within a group or society while the key attributes of social cohesion include trust, an inclusive identity, cooperation for the common good, and shared values. This concept reflects the social bonds or "glue" that holds communities and societies together, promoting collective wellbeing and resilience.¹

According to Shamsul Amri Baharuddin, social cohesion is understood as a peaceful, stable, and prosperous environment that exists in a society, especially a multiracial one. He emphasizes that social cohesion involves processes such as accommodation, amalgamation, and assimilation among different ethnic groups, allowing cultural acceptance without erasing identities. Social cohesion is seen as essential for national unity, requiring a certain degree of integration and agreement before ultimate unity can be achieved. In a multicultural society like Malaysia, it includes components like justice, equality, tolerance, social inclusion, and the lessening of socioeconomic gaps.²

¹ Ega B Harna, Fahmi Rizal, and Universitas Negeri Padang, 'Analisis Dan Evaluasi Kurikulum Program Studi Pendidikan Seni Rupa Pada Perguruan Tinggi: Tinjauan Komprehensif Tataran Teoretis Dan Implementasi Dalam Konteks Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka', *JURNAL ARMADA PENDIDIKAN*, 4.1 (2026), 42–47 <<https://doi.org/10.60041/jap/v4i1.327>>.

² Wahidah Mat Said, Rina Fakhizan Mohd Sukri, and Hafizah Ismail, 'Understanding Ethics and Civilization: A Study of Lecturers in the Department of General Studies, Polytechnic Zone Pahang', *Journal of Advanced Research in Social and Behavioural Sciences*, 39.1 (2025), 28–36 <<https://doi.org/10.37934/jarsbs.39.1.2836>>.



In the multicultural and multiethnic of Malaysia, social cohesion is perceived as being vital because it is the pillar of peace, stability and national unity. By promoting a tolerance and common sense of national identity in a sense of national diversity, and it reinforces the bonds of unity and solidarity for Malaysians.³ This acceptance and affiliation foster social cohesion and political stability as a result of reduced ethnic and cultural disputes which are critical issues in Malaysia.

Social cohesion also contributes very much to economic development in Malaysia through productivity of workers and inclusive growth. It makes social contacts and collaboration between various groups easier by lowering social disintegration and mistrust. Moreover, social cohesion is essential to prevent societal disintegration into violence or social dissolution, especially amid the country's complex ethnic and religious landscape. The role of social groups in enhancing the sense of social cohesion among rural youth virtual communities. Therefore, social cohesion in Malaysia is essential for maintaining harmony in a pluralistic society, supporting economic development, reducing socio-economic disparities, and ensuring overall national integration and stability.⁴

Social cohesion is closely related to universities and university students in Malaysia as a reflection of societal harmony, diversity, and unity on campus. Research shows that social cohesion among university students strengthens social ties that cross ethnic and religious lines, which remains crucial for fostering national unity in a multiethnic society. Conducted a survey involving 554 business university students from diverse ethnic backgrounds to explore the patterns of ethnic relations and cohesion on campus. Their findings indicate that, despite observable differences among ethnic groups, strong social cohesion persists among students, manifesting in daily social interaction and mutual solidarity.⁵ The authors describe this phenomenon with the phrase “they talk conflict, they walk cohesion,” suggesting that while individuals may express disagreement or debate openly (talk conflict), they nonetheless maintain cooperative and harmonious relationships in social practice. Therefore, studies find although ethnic and religious differences exist among students, these differences to be relatively small, indicating that social cohesion is developing within the university environment. This cohesion can be further strengthened by addressing social gaps and promoting ethnographic research on campus interactions, which will ultimately promote efficient governance and the advancement of the university.⁶

Furthermore, participation in social and community-related activities, promoting positive interaction and belongingness is often linked with social cohesion among Malaysian adolescents and college students. Stronger social cohesion is positively correlated with increased involvement and active engagement in such initiatives which help students develop meaningful social networks and a sense of community.⁷

The high cultural diversity of the higher education system in Malaysia at present time reflects multiethnic structure of the nation. Promotion of social cohesion among college students is both helped and hampered by this diversity. It is currently in great need to develop the principles of respect, tolerance and unity, and since 2019 the Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education has set the course of Appreciation of Ethics and Civilization as a compulsory course in the regular university

³ Jean Nethania Feby Widiyanto and others, ‘Faktor Yang Memengaruhi Tingkat Pluralisme Kaum Muda Di Era Digital’, *JSSH (Jurnal Sains Sosial Dan Humaniora)*, 6.2 (2022), 55 <<https://doi.org/10.30595/jssh.v6i2.12763>>.

⁴ Zefanya Ayu Valencia and Annisa Fitriana Lestari, ‘Pola Komunikasi Antar Budaya Generasi Z Dalam Menjaga Toleransi Beragama (Studi Kasus War Takjil Ramadhan 2024 Di TikTok)’, *ARUNIKA: Bunga Rampai Ilmu Komunikasi*, 02.02 (2024), 59–72 <<https://doi.org/10.36782/aronika.v2i02.376>>.

⁵ Leryani Mince Maria Manuain and others, ‘Persepsi Generasi Z Terhadap Toleransi Beragama Di Media Sosial’, *ASKETIK*, 6.2 (2022), 213–24 <<https://doi.org/10.30762/asketik.v6i2.269>>.

⁶ Vanbe Toven Hulu and others, ‘Pluralisme Agama Di Indonesia: Memperkuat Toleransi Dalam Masyarakat Majemuk’, *Pietas: Jurnal Studi Agama Dan Lintas Budaya*, 2.1 (2024), 1–12 <<https://doi.org/10.62282/pj.v2i1.1-12>>.

⁷ Akmal Ludin Nasution and others, ‘Implementasi Nilai Toleransi Bagi Mahasiswa Guna Mencapai Perdamaian Dalam Bermasyarakat’, *JISPENDIORA Jurnal Ilmu Sosial Pendidikan Dan Humaniora*, 4.3 (2025), 397–407 <<https://doi.org/10.56910/jispendiora.v4i1.3195>>.



curriculum. The aim of the course is to sensitize the students about the presence of diversity of the Malaysian community with moral behavior and to foster unity and patriotism.⁸

The Appreciation of Ethics and Civilization play a significant role in the social cohesion process of Malaysian university students. A peaceful, stable and wealthy society is based on social cohesion is a pre-requisite to unity. Numerous studies have been conducted on the significant of the Appreciation of Ethics and Civilizations course, the result can be seen that the students in Malaysian universities can establish a sense of social cohesion with the appreciation of ethics, tolerance, and patriotism. This leads to harmonious relationships among different ethnic groups and enhances their understanding of the moral principles required to make up a happy society.

Thus, as one of the compulsory courses, the Appreciation of Ethics and Civilization disseminate the idea and practice of social cohesion by stressing on virtues such as tolerance, accountability, and harmony. By introducing ethics and civilization to the classroom, these classes attempt to inculcate the moral principles that are required in order to create a peaceful community as well as a strong sense of national identity.⁹

Meanwhile the study conducted by Hashim, S. N. I et al. show how the Appreciation of Ethics and Civilization courses helps Malaysian university students build critical thinking skills and social cohesion which in turn helps to create a Madani generation. They also greatly improve knowledge of fundamental principles like respect and civility. Similarly, Zahid et al. also found that the course aims to cultivate high moral standards and critical thinking while promoting social cohesion through the introduction of Malaysian values and national identity. These educational objectives align closely with Wawasan Kemakmuran Bersama 2030. Malaysia's national economic and social policy framework introduced in 2019, which emphasizes inclusive, equitable, and sustainable development across income levels, ethnic groups, regions, and supply chains, alongside the transition towards a high-value, knowledge-based economy that ensures meaningful and dignified living standards by 2030.¹⁰

Although the Appreciation of Ethics and Civilization plays a significant role in fostering social cohesion among Malaysian university students. However, it has been observed that social cohesion among university students in Malaysia is moderate, primarily due to ethnic polarization where students tend to interact within their own ethnic groups. Studies also show that the Appreciation of Ethics and Civilization's practical influence on promoting genuine social cohesion is restricted by its dependence on conventional teaching techniques and its scant integration of course material with students' real-world experiences.¹¹

Thus, this study examines the extent to which Malaysian universities students who are studying the course on Appreciation of Ethics and Civilization enables to have better understanding on social cohesion. It also identifies important factors that contribute to its effectiveness such as the evaluation of its content, learning activities and students' acceptance regarding the course that bridges to the diversity and foster harmony among the Malaysian university students.

Method

The research applied a qualitative research methodology in order to examine the ways in which the Appreciation of Ethics and Civilization subject fosters social cohesion among the University students in Malaysia. Qualitative methods are suitable for in-depth understanding of the meanings, experiences, and contextual influences that shape students' perceptions and engagement with the course.¹²

⁸ M. Thoriqul Huda and Uly Dina, 'Urgensi Toleransi Antar Agama Dalam Perspektif Tafsir Al-Sya'rawi', *TARBIYA ISLAMIA: Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Keislaman*, 8.1 (2019), 44 <<https://doi.org/10.36815/tarbiya.v8i1.344>>.

⁹ Fajri Sodik, 'Pendidikan Toleransi Dan Relevansinya Dengan Dinamika Sosial Masyarakat Indonesia', *Tsamratul Fikeri | Jurnal Studi Islam*, 14.1 (2020), 1 <<https://doi.org/10.36667/tf.v14i1.372>>.

¹⁰ Ridho Siregar and others, 'Toleransi Antar Umat Beragama Dalam Pandangan Generasi Milenial', *Al Qalam: Jurnal Ilmiah Keagamaan Dan Kemasyarakatan*, 16.4 (2022), 1342 <<https://doi.org/10.35931/aq.v16i4.1094>>.

¹¹ Pipit Widiatmaka and others, 'Dinamika Kerukunan Antar Umat Beragama Di Kota Singkawang Sebagai Kota Toleransi', *Jurnal Bimas Islam*, 18.1 (2024), 41–62 <<https://doi.org/10.37302/jbi.v18i1.984>>.

¹² Rika Kartika and others, 'Nation And Character Building: Pergulatan Ide Nasionalisme, Identitas Dan Kohesivitas Masyarakat Majemuk', *Integralistik*, 36.1 (2025) <<https://doi.org/10.15294/wr9pv566>>.



Data collection was conducted in three systematic phases, each aligned with the study’s thematic focus on social cohesion. First, a structured analysis of the course syllabus was undertaken to identify core themes related to ethics, civility, national identity, unity, and multicultural coexistence. Second, purposively selected student assignments, particularly group projects, were examined to capture evidence of collaborative learning, intercultural interaction, mutual respect, and shared responsibility—key indicators of social cohesion within diverse learning environments. Third, students’ feedback on the course was gathered through a simple voting-based questionnaire, with respondents randomly selected from students who had previously completed the course, to assess perceived impacts on ethical awareness, respect for diversity, and sense of belonging. Data derived from the syllabus and student assignments were analyzed using document analysis (Bowen, 2009) and thematic analysis, allowing for the identification of recurring patterns related to social cohesion, ethical reasoning, and collective engagement. Questionnaire data were analyzed descriptively to complement the qualitative findings by providing an overview of students’ perceptions regarding the course’s role in promoting social harmony and shared values.

Results and Discussions

Table 1: Topic on the Appreciation of Ethics and Civilization’s Course Syllabus

Topics	
1	Appreciation of Ethics and Civilization in the context of Malaysia
2	Introduction to the Concept of Ethics and Civilization
3	Ethics and Civilization in a Malaysian Diversity Society
4	Building Malaysian Unity
5	Strengthening Plural Civilization in Malaysia
6	The Malaysian Constitution as a Medium of Integration as well as Ethics and Civilization in Malaysia
7	The Role of Information, Communication and Technology (ICT) in Driving Malaysia National Unity
8	The Role of Ethics and Civilization in Fostering Social Responsibility
9	The Challenges of Sustainability of Ethics and Civilization in Malaysia

Source: <https://jpt.mohe.gov.my/>

The table above shows a list of the topics from Appreciation of Ethics and Civilization’s course being taught to students in Universiti Malaysia Terengganu. A detailed analysis on the content for every topic mentioned as below:

Topic 1: Appreciation of Ethics and Civilization in the context of Malaysia. This topic highlights the core of this course is about the appreciation of moral values, cultural heritage, and societal norms that underpin the nation's development. The Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education introduced the Appreciation of Ethics and Civilization to nurture a Madani generation characterized by sustainability, well-being, respect, confidence, and courtesy. This course promotes social responsibility at various societal levels by grounding ethics and civilization in the Malaysian model, which is anchored by the Federal Constitution and Rukun Negara.

Topic 2 - Introduction to the Concept of Ethics and Civilization. Students are introduced to the fundamental definitions, tenets, and philosophical foundations of civilization and ethics in this foundational subject. It prepares students to comprehend ethics as a framework that governs morality and human behavior, whereas civilization is portrayed as a multifaceted social-cultural entity that includes customs, values, and cultural heritage. The subject develops cognitive awareness which is critical for the contextualization of the later education on the interaction of people and society, focusing on a multicultural context.

Topic 3 - Ethics and Civilization in a Diverse Malaysian Society. This topic deals with the adaptation of the civilizational and ethical notions to Malaysia's multiethnic society. It helps students comprehend the challenges and opportunities of negotiating diversity. Among the knowledge acquired is the advantages of plurality, sensitivity to culture and the moral requirements of respect and tolerance related to a multicultural society. It is essential that contextual learning be a focus when promoting the values of social cohesiveness. Topic 4 - Building Malaysian Unity. This is a subject that extends understanding of the political, social and historical background of Malaysian nationhood. Students learn morals and values such as unity, patriotism, and being a part of a group, all of which are crucial to building a nation. The subject fosters a moral self-awareness and patriotism



which is grounded on tolerance for difference, providing the emotion and thinking skills which are needed for commitment to national unity.

Topic 5 - Strengthening Plural Civilization in Malaysia. This topic introduces students to plural civilization with an appreciation of the multi-civilizational heritage in Malaysia such as Malay, Chinese, Indian and indigenous civilization heritage. Knowledge that is gained is about understanding dynamics of coexistence, shared values, and role of dialogue and mutual respect. This promotes ethical pluralism and expands intercultural competence of peaceful coexistence. Topic 6 - The Malaysian Constitution as a Medium of Integration as well as Ethics and Civilization in Malaysia The Malaysian Federal Constitution is introduced to the students as a moral and legal framework that unites many groups under shared rule. The knowledge centers on how constitutional ideas act as a moral compass and a pillar of culture, fostering equity, justice, and unity. It improves knowledge of the interaction between ethics and the law for national unity and social cohesiveness.

Topic 7: The Role of Information, Communication and Technology (ICT) in Driving Malaysia National Unity. This topic examines how information and communication technology can be used as a contemporary incentive to advance morality and national cohesion. Understanding how digital communication may promote inclusivity, awareness, and interethnic discourse is part of this knowledge. It highlights the potential of ICT to heal societal divisions and ethical issues in digital interaction. Topic 8: The Role of Ethics and Civilization in Fostering Social Responsibility. This topic focuses on the relationship between ethics and civilization as a means of encouraging social responsibility in both individuals and societies. Among the ethical theories learned are those pertaining to stewardship, social justice, and community service. Based on the civilizational ideals of empathy, cooperation, and sustainability, students gain an understanding of their role in promoting the well-being of society.

Topic 9: The Challenges of Sustainability of Ethics and Civilization in Malaysia. This final topic discusses current issues like globalization, technological advancement, and cultural changes that pose a danger to the sustainability of ethics and civilization. Acquiring knowledge involves critical understanding of these dynamics as well as considerations for how to long-term preserve moral values and cultural heritage. It is what encourages the proactive, moral leadership and flexibility in thinking that is needed towards the welfare of the society in future.

Student assignment, through the process of creating mini-dramas, group discussions, and productions, group projects in "Appreciation of Ethics and Civilization" course aim to engage actively students in the multiracial context in Malaysia in promoting social responsibility, values of ethics and understanding of cultures. Students from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds cooperate in these interactive exercises to creatively bring to life subjects of national unity, ethics, and the civilization. With a concentration on experiential learning, these exercises challenge students to practice role-playing and storytelling in order to explore societal issues, cultural stories, and moral dilemmas. In addition, by incorporating theoretical knowledge in other subjects such as Federal Constitution, Rukun Negara, ethics in different societies and social responsibility, these exercises help the students to draw real-world examples from abstract concepts. Through active involvement in these creative group projects, students build greater sense of national identity and social solidarity in the multiracial framework in Malaysia. In a nutshell, these activities promote sustainability, well-being, respect, confidence and courtesy - and so prepare students to deal effectively in the complex fabric of Malaysian society.

Table 2: The mini drama project

Theme	Title of drama	Group name	Total members
The Role of Information, Communication and Technology (ICT) in Driving Malaysia National Unity	Antara Fakta atau Provokasi	Etikahwin Dulu	10
	Cahaya Dari Skrin	One Plus Nine	10
	Di Sebalik Skrin	Skuad Alpha	10
	Bayang-bayang Digital	Bida'ah Walid	11
	Jerat Digital: Scam Online	Just Us	11
	Luka Digital	Stecu Stecu	10
	Dunia Maya yang Nyata	Serumpun	11
	Love Scam	The King among Divas	13
The Role of Ethics and Civilization in Fostering Social Responsibility	Along	Astro Second	9
	Selera Lama Luka Baru	Estari	10
	Bayang-bayang Persahabatan	Asmara Lela	10
	11 Hati 1 Jiwa	Aristotle's Army	11
	Sahabat dan Sikap Kita	Nightfall Crew	11
	Budi Bukan Sekadar Kata	Womenrangers	10
	Dalam Nama Sahabat	Ethics Brothers	11
	Asap Yang Memudar	Hidden Aura	10

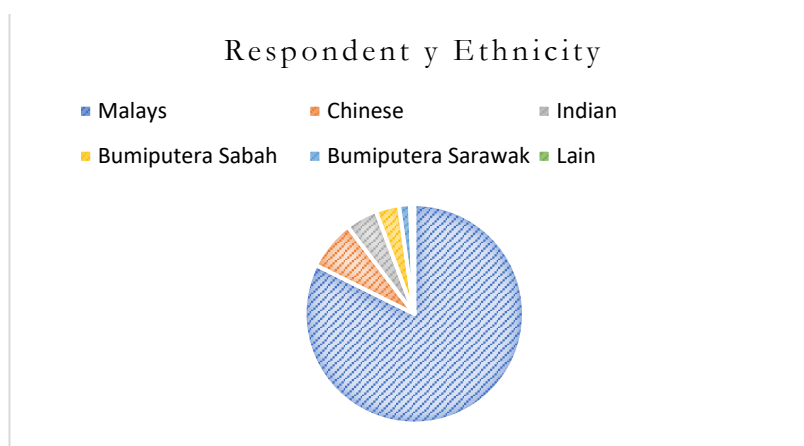


The Challenges of Sustainability of Ethics and Civilization in Malaysia	Langit Tingkat 5	The Fighter	12
	Temam Tanpa Nama	Blacklist	10
	Suara Mahasiswa: Amanah di Tangan Kita	Classy Girl	10
	Di Balik Tirai Sunyi	Kampong People	10
	Di Sebalik Gemerlapan	Ten Together	10
	Pemerdagangan Manusia	Scene Sister + 1	11
	Bayang-bayang Neon	Kepochi	11
	The Betrayal	The Blacklist	10
	Amanah Dalam Bayangan	The Secret Society	11
	Cermin Retak	The Brothers Sisters	9
	YOLO: Sekali Hidup Jangan Sampai Hancur	Masha & The Bear on Wheel	12

Source: Student assignment on mini drama

Table 2 represents the outcome of student assignment. Through mini drama, students were instructed to form a group consist of 10 to 12 members (depend on the total number of students in every class). Then, every group were asked to make a group discussion on the theme, the content or synopsis of their drama as well as a job description for every member in a group. Later on, they need to set up the timeline for shooting and produce a mini drama. Students' Feedback on the course, this voting involved 809 respondents consisting of students who took the course Appreciation of Ethics and Civilization in their previous semester; 216 men or 25.7 percent and a total of 593 people or 73.3 percent is a female student.

Figure 1: Total respondents according to ethnicity

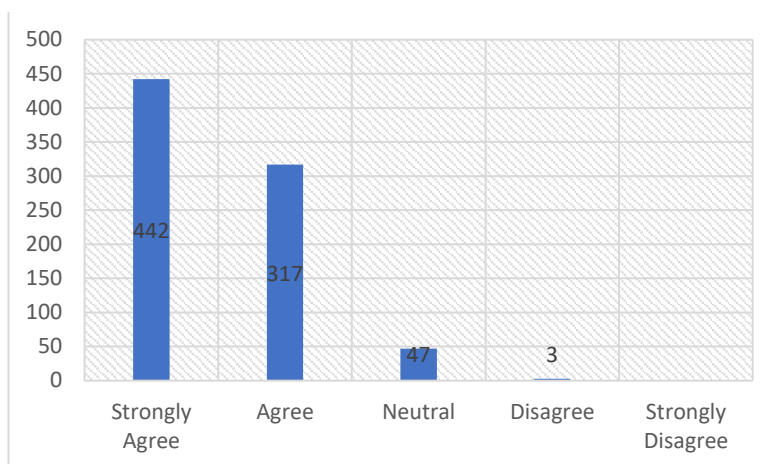


Source: Students' voting on the course

Figure 1 illustrates the ethnic composition which represents the total number of students involved. The findings show that 82.3 percent of respondents consist of Malay students, namely 666 people, followed by Chinese students at 7.3 percent, namely 59 people, 4.7 percent or 38 Indian students, and the remaining 5.7 percent or 46 Bumiputera students from Sabah and Sarawak as well as others.

Figure 2: The Appreciation of Ethics and Civilization Appreciation Course





Source: Students' voting on the course

Figure 2: The Appreciation of Ethics and Civilization Appreciation Course can create interaction and foster social cohesion among students at UMT. A simple question was asked to the students of students regarding the Appreciation of Ethics and Civilization Appreciation Course can create interaction and foster social cohesion among students at UMT. Figure 2 shows the result of the voting that 442 respondents or 54.6 percent strongly agree, followed by 317 respondents or 39.2 percent agree, the remaining 47 respondents or 5.8 percent were neutral while 3 people or 0.4 percent disagree for the statement that the Ethics and Civilization Appreciation Course can create interaction and foster social cohesion among students at UMT.

The findings of this study demonstrate that the Appreciation of Ethics and Civilization course functions as a structured pedagogical mechanism for fostering social cohesion among university students by integrating knowledge acquisition, experiential engagement, and value internalization. Drawing from syllabus analysis, student assignments, and students' feedback, the discussion reveals how course design and learning activities collectively operationalize theoretical principles of social cohesion within a Malaysian multicultural context.¹³The Appreciation of Ethics and Civilization course syllabus, as outlined in the topics, fosters knowledge acquisition among university students on social cohesion in several comprehensive ways:

Contextualizing Ethics and Civilization in Malaysia, the course roots ethics and civilization within Malaysia's unique multicultural and historical context grounded by the Federal Constitution and Rukun Negara, facilitating students' understanding of foundational societal values that promote unity and social responsibility at multiple levels in society. Topics like the Introduction to Ethics and Civilization lay the groundwork by explaining basic moral and civilizational concepts, essential for students to critically frame human conduct and societal norms in a diverse, multi-ethnic setting such as Malaysia.¹⁴

Emphasis on Diversity and National Unity, the syllabus emphasizes Malaysia's plural society, highlighting the ethical imperatives for tolerance, respect, and social cohesion in a multi-ethnic context that transforms diversity from a challenge into an asset. This nurtures students' intercultural competence, vital for social cohesion. By delving into Malaysian unity, plural civilization, and integration under the constitution, students become aware of the socio-political foundations of nationhood and the ethical values that underpin collective identity and patriotism, enhancing their commitment to national harmony.

Interaction of Ethics, Technology, and Social Responsibility, the syllabus explores modern drivers such as ICT and their ethical role in fostering awareness and unity, teaching students to navigate contemporary digital spaces ethically to promote inclusion and dialogue. Discussions on social responsibility as motivated by ethics and civilization help learners appreciate their individual

¹³ Timur Tumanggor and others, 'Politik Identitas Dalam Ruang Demokrasi Indonesia: Dinamika, Strategi, Dan Implikasinya Terhadap Kohesi Sosial', *Jurnal Indonesia : Manajemen Informatika Dan Komunikasi*, 6.2 (2025), 1417–26 <<https://doi.org/10.63447/jimik.v6i2.1436>>.

¹⁴ Fuadi Mardatillah, Muchlinarwati Muchlinarwati, and Dayan Abdurrahman, 'Integrating Islamic Educational Values in Higher Education: A Framework for Social Cohesion and Peacebuilding in Aceh', *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development*, 20.2 Special Issue: Freedom of Religion, Development, and Peacebuilding (2025), 150–70 <<https://doi.org/10.1177/15423166251342683>>.



and collective roles in societal well-being, embedding real-world application of ethical theories to community and sustainability matters.¹⁵

Educational Impact on Knowledge Acquisition, the course's conceptual and affective dimensions collectively develop students' critical and analytical thinking, ethical self-awareness, and patriotism, targeting cognitive, interpersonal, and professional competencies necessary for social cohesion. Academic engagement with these topics through discussions, case studies, and reflections enhances students' understanding of societal dynamics and ethical citizenship, essential for fostering unity in diversity. The course design systematically integrates ethical principles, civilizational appreciation, and Malaysia's multicultural realities to generate a deep, multifaceted knowledge base among university students, empowering them as socially responsible, cohesive members of Malaysian society.¹⁶

About student engagement, the process inherently promotes student engagement and fosters social cohesion through several mechanisms. First, How Mini Drama Leads to Student Engagement - The group formation and collaborative discussion on themes, content, and role allocation requires active participation, ensuring that students engage cognitively and socially with the task. Drama activities increase students' confidence in their understanding and ability to communicate ideas, which enhances engagement with the content and peers. Through discussions and planning, students exercise decision-making and negotiation skills, enhancing their involvement and investment in the activity.

Second, How Mini Drama Fosters Social Cohesion - Working in groups of 10 to 12, students must cooperate, delegate roles, and support each other, building positive interdependence and social bonds. Drama encourages empathy and perspective-taking as students take on various roles, deepening social awareness and mutual understanding. The shared goal of producing a drama nurtures a sense of community and belonging, essential components of social cohesion in educational settings. The collaborative nature of drama fosters a classroom environment where students feel safe to participate, take risks, and build trust among peers. Drama-based instruction not only improves academic outcomes but also enhances social skills such as cooperation, belonging, and empathy, directly contributing to social cohesion. The mini drama activity described leads to higher student engagement by requiring active participation, collaboration, and communication, while simultaneously fostering social cohesion by building empathy, cooperation, and a sense of belonging among group members.¹⁷ Through active involvement in these creative group projects, students build greater sense of national identity and social solidarity in the multiracial framework in Malaysia. In a nutshell, these activities promote sustainability, well-being, respect, confidence and courtesy - and so prepare students to deal effectively in the complex fabric of Malaysian society.¹⁸

Students' acceptance on the course, the finding from the voting results at UMT indicates a strong acceptance among students regarding the practicality of the Ethics and Civilization Appreciation Course in fostering social cohesion. High acceptance reflects practical impact where the overwhelmingly positive endorsement suggests that the course effectively encourages student interaction and builds a cohesive social environment. Such a high consensus indicates that the course content and activities resonate well with students' experiences and perceptions of social bonding. The course likely provides a structured platform for knowledge sharing, mutual respect, and ethical understanding that nurtures interpersonal relationships and collective identity among students.¹⁹

First, encouragement of Interaction and Team Cohesion. According to research, cohesive educational activities that promote knowledge sharing and collaboration enhance team performance and social integration. This aligns with the students' perception that the course facilitates meaningful interactions. The course's role in fostering ethical awareness not only improves individual moral

¹⁵ Sudi Raharjo, Adam Latuconsina, and Akhmad Syahbudin, 'Islamic Education and Social Cohesion : Fostering Tolerance and Understanding in Multicultural Societies', *International Journal for Science Review*, 2.6 (2025), 359–68 <<https://doi.org/10.71364/ijfsr.v2i6.50>>.

¹⁶ Tobroni, Asyraf Isyraqi Bin Jamil, and Eka Firmansyah, 'Embracing Diversity: Navigating Religious Identity in Multicultural Societies', *Online Journal of Research in Islamic Studies*, 12.1 (2025), 37–60 <<https://doi.org/10.22452/ris.vol12no1.3>>.

¹⁷ Zaini Othman, 'Social Capital in a Diverse Malaysia: Enhancing Bonding, Bridging, and Linking for Greater Social Cohesion.', *E-BANGI Journal*, 22.1 (2025), 251 <<https://doi.org/10.17576/ebangi.2025.2201.20>>.

¹⁸ Tobroni, Jamil, and Firmansyah.

¹⁹ Achmad Anwar Abidin, Izzul Fatawi, and Shakila Kausar, 'The Values of Islamic Education for Building Tolerance in the Jombang Community: A Qualitative Study of the Role of Religious Harmony Forum', *Tafkir: Interdisciplinary Journal of Islamic Education*, 6.1 (2025), 1–16 <<https://doi.org/10.31538/tijie.v6i1.1182>>.



values but also instills collective social norms that support inclusivity and harmony within the university setting.²⁰

Second, role of Ethics Education in Social Cohesion. Ethics and civilization courses are known to build awareness of societal values, norms, and interpersonal responsibilities, which underpin social cohesion by encouraging respect for diversity and collective well-being. Ethical climate and leadership within educational institutions further amplify these effects by reinforcing collective moral efficacy and social cohesion, which are crucial for sustaining collaborative and supportive groups. The voting results reflect a strong student acceptance of the Ethics and Civilization Appreciation Course as a practical and effective tool for fostering social cohesion among university students at UMT. This result also demonstrates that this course can greatly improve the level of interaction, cooperation and cohesion between university students within a learning environment by promoting information sharing, ethical understanding and collective identity.

From a theoretical perspective, social cohesion is commonly understood as the presence of trust, shared values, mutual respect, and a sense of belonging within a group. The syllabus analysis shows that the course systematically embeds these elements through topics on diversity, unity, plural civilization, constitutional integration, and social responsibility.²¹ By grounding ethics and civilization within Malaysia's constitutional framework and Rukun Negara, the course provides students with a shared moral and civic reference point, which aligns with theories of civic integration and collective identity formation. This theoretical grounding explains why students are able to cognitively frame diversity not as a source of division, but as a foundation for unity.

Empirically, this cognitive foundation is reinforced through experiential learning, particularly the mini-drama group projects. The requirement for students to collaborate in large, ethnically diverse groups operationalises social interdependence theory, which posits that cooperative tasks promote positive intergroup relations, trust, and shared responsibility.²² The themes chosen by students such as digital ethics, social responsibility, and sustainability challenges, demonstrate the translation of abstract ethical concepts into lived social realities.²³ From the researcher's analysis, these activities do not merely enhance engagement but actively simulate real societal interactions, enabling students to practice negotiation, empathy, and ethical decision-making in a controlled academic environment. This supports prior findings that drama-based and collaborative pedagogies enhance both engagement and social bonding.

The students' feedback data further strengthens this interpretation. The overwhelming agreement (93.8% agree or strongly agree) that the course fosters interaction and social cohesion provides empirical validation of the course's effectiveness. When interpreted through the lens of engagement theory, such high acceptance suggests that students perceive the learning environment as inclusive, meaningful, and socially relevant. The researcher's analysis indicates that the alignment between course content, pedagogical methods, and students' lived experiences contributes to this positive perception, reinforcing the affective dimensions of social cohesion such as belonging and mutual respect.²⁴

Importantly, the integration of ICT-related ethics within the syllabus reflects contemporary theories of digital citizenship, which argue that ethical engagement in digital spaces is increasingly central to social cohesion in modern societies. Students' exploration of digital dilemmas through drama suggests an advanced level of ethical reflexivity, indicating that the course does not only transmit values but cultivates moral agency.²⁵ This aligns with the broader aim of ethics education to develop socially responsible citizens capable of sustaining cohesion amid rapid social and technological change.

²⁰ Muhammad Fahmi and others, 'Multicultural Islamic Education as Strategy for Strengthening Social Cohesion in Islamic School', *Nazhruna: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, 8.1 (2025), 154–75 <<https://doi.org/10.31538/nzh.v8i1.67>>.

²¹ Mohammed Abu-Nimer and Ilham Nasser, 'Building Peace Education in the Islamic Educational Context', *International Review of Education*, 63.2 (2017), 153–67 <<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11159-017-9632-7>>.

²² Levina Anggraeni and Heru Purnomo, 'Penerapan Merdeka Belajar Materi Pkn Pada Karakter Profil Pelajar Pancasila', *Attadrib: Jurnal Pendidikan Guru Madrasah Ibtidaiyah*, 6.2 (2023), 389–99 <<https://doi.org/10.54069/attadrib.v6i2.584>>.

²³ Zainal Abidin Muhja and others, 'Developing a Culture of Tolerance Through Islamic Religious Education', *Al-Hayat: Journal of Islamic Education*, 10.1 (2026), 1–19 <<https://doi.org/10.35723/ajie.v10i1.304>>.

²⁴ Baderiah Baderiah and Ahmad Munawir, 'Harmonizing Local Wisdom with Islamic Values', *International Journal of Asian Education*, 5.1 (2024), 63–75 <<https://doi.org/10.46966/ijae.v5i1.374>>.

²⁵ Aizathul Hani Abd Hamid and Khairul Anuar Kamri, 'Managing Ethnic Relations in Malaysia: Policies, Practices, and Prospects for National Cohesion', *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science (IJRISS)*, Volume 9 Issue 11, 9.11 (2025), 4333–40 <<https://doi.org/10.47772/ijriss.2025.91100337>>.



Overall, the convergence of syllabus design, experiential learning outcomes, and positive student perceptions demonstrates that the Appreciation of Ethics and Civilization course contributes to social cohesion through a multidimensional process encompassing cognitive understanding, interpersonal engagement, and value internalisation.²⁶ The findings extend existing literature by providing empirical evidence from a Malaysian university context, showing how ethics education can function as both a moral and social integrative force within higher education.

Conclusion

Through the teaching of tolerance, respect, patriotism and social responsibility, the Appreciation of Ethics and Civilization course is a must in creating harmony and social cohesion among Malaysian University students. The course began to be offered in 2019-2020 academic year and is focused on some key topics such as ethics, civilization and today's societal issues. It promotes students to put a price on the ethnic diversity present in Malaysia and foster the soft skills needed to live peacefully in a pluralistic society. Research shows that the course helps to build social cohesiveness and responsible youth that supports the national unity and common identity. However, the limitations of effectiveness of the course have the restrain the active engagement and practical use of ethics in the daily lives of students.

Through three interconnected dimensions—learning about ethics and civilization, interracial bonding activities, and student acceptance of the course—this study concludes that the Appreciation of Ethics and Civilization (AEC) course significantly contributes to social cohesion among Malaysian university students. Together, these factors improve students' understanding of diversity and fortify national cohesion. To close this gap and increase the course's societal impact, experiential learning must be more widely used and meaningfully integrated with students' real-world experiences. Altogether, the course remains highly relevant and valuable for fostering social cohesion in Malaysia's higher education context, provided these challenges are addressed for fuller realization of its goals. Future research should employ mixed methods and larger sample sizes to explore variations in implementation and the long-term effects on social cohesion, thereby offering a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the course's effectiveness in promoting harmony within Malaysia's plural society. Beyond the Malaysian context, this study offers an important academic contribution to international discussions on ethics education and social cohesion in multicultural societies where these findings are particularly relevant to societies facing increasing cultural pluralism and social fragmentation, demonstrating how ethics-based education can serve as a strategic tool for cultivating cohesive and responsible citizens.

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²⁶ Alif Achadah, Wahidmurni Wahidmurni, and Ahmad Fatah Yasin, 'Internalization of Character Education Values in Shaping Elementary School Students' Religious Behavior', *AL-ISHLAH: Jurnal Pendidikan*, 14.4 (2022), 4723–34 <<https://doi.org/10.35445/alishlah.v14i4.2509>>.



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