

Exploring the Attitudes of Malaysian Undergraduate Students towards Good Citizenship: A Quantitative Study

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Abstract

The concept of good citizenship comprises a variety of critical components that are required for a community to function well. Good citizenship requires engaging in ethical and responsible behaviour, actively contributing in the community, and adhering to both legal and ethical standards of conduct. The significance of citizenship values in fostering moral accountability and promoting active involvement in global concerns among the youth is receiving increasing recognition, thus establishing them as a crucial element of good citizen. However, due to a lack of citizenship education development in Malaysian higher education, young people's skills, knowledge, and attitudes toward citizenship values remain moderate. This paper aims to investigate the relationship between Malaysian youth attitudes toward good citizenship values. A questionnaire-based study was conducted among 117 university students from Malaysian public universities. The present study employed multiple regression analysis to test four hypotheses. The findings indicate that only membership was found to have a significant relationship with citizenship. The study's findings were analysed to identify both theoretical and practical implications, which can inform future research endeavours in this area of study.

Key words: good citizenship, national identity, citizenship values, youth, higher education

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Introduction

A nation with good citizenship ensures that its citizens are responsible, active, and engaged in the development of their country. However, the citizenship debate often disputes the moral values, such as equality, freedom, justice, rights, respect for difference, duties, responsibility, freedom, transparency, solidarity, etc., that underpin a citizen's stance and beliefs on political and social issues like human rights, social order, citizenship, multiculturalism, and welfare policy (Tan et al., 2018). A nationhood and citizenship education curriculum, which may be taught at higher education is one of the typical strategies that is used to cultivate good citizens (Procentese et al., 2019).

One of the primary advantages of exhibiting good citizenship is that it fosters civic engagement and promotes active involvement within the community. The significance of good citizenship values in character education is gaining recognition due to its ability to foster a sense of moral responsibility among young individuals and motivate them to actively participate in shaping a good citizen in Malaysia (Tan et al., 2017). According to Mahadir, Piang, and Osman (2019), a well-rounded education in civics equips students with the knowledge and skills necessary to participate actively and responsibly

in public and democratic life, including an understanding of politics, the law, and economics. Consequently, teaching young people their rights and responsibilities is necessary for fostering good citizenship.

Malaysia is a heterogeneous society comprising of three primary ethnic groups, namely Malays, Chinese, and Indians, together with a significant number of other ethnic minorities, including Orang Asli, Kadazan-Dusun, Murut, Dayak, Bajau, Iban and many more. Cultural diversity and citizenship have become essential components of the educational mission in Malaysia. According to Renato Rosaldo (1999), citizenship is about being visible, heard, and having a sense of belonging. In the context of Malaysian education, it is expected for students to undertake and successfully complete the subject of Malaysian Studies. This course encompasses aspects of national education that are imparted through various academic subjects, such as history, civic education, ethnic relations, general studies, and Malaysian studies (Awang et al., 2013). According to Tonge, Mycock, and Jeffery (2012), citizenship and citizenship education are of great importance to individual cultures, particularly when it comes to youth, as citizenship education can play a role in instilling the necessary beliefs and behaviours for young people to thrive and develop, as well as the manner in which individuals hold out their responsibilities as citizens.

Malaysia's National Education Blueprint (2013-2025), which seeks to cultivate national unity and social cohesion, places significant emphasis on the promotion of good citizenship values (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013). Consequently, Malaysia's educational system aims to instil citizenship values in students and cultivate responsible, society-contributing individuals (Ismail et al., 2019). The education system in Malaysia acknowledges the significance of including moral education as part of the standard curriculum in order to instil in young people essential qualities such as respect, responsibility, and social awareness. However, studies showed that there is a lack of exposure to civics education in Malaysian higher education, which has resulted in university students having moderate levels of knowledge, skills, and attitudes towards the values of citizenship (Yusof et al., 2019). This is concerning since university students are the future leaders of society. In order for them to become knowledgeable and responsible global citizens, they need to have the values and abilities that will allow them to become successful (Hussain & Yusoff, 2018). Therefore, it is essential to investigate the attitudes of Malaysian university students toward citizenship values in order to identify potential improvement areas (Ismail et al., 2020). The current study aims to investigate Malaysian youth's perceptions on good citizenship, with a focus on undergraduates at higher institutions.

Literature Review

For a society to function effectively, the practise of good citizenship is essential. It involves demonstrating ethical and responsible behaviour, participating actively in the community, and adhering to both legal and moral principles. Good citizenship fosters trust and cooperation among community members, contributes to the improvement of society, and creates a secure and just environment in which everyone is treated with fairness and decency. Individuals must therefore endeavour to be good citizens and participate actively in the social, political, and economic affairs of their community.

Malaysia is a nation characterised by its multiculturalism and diverse community. The cultivation of good citizenship among undergraduates is imperative for the enduring progress of a nation as a whole. The significance of good citizenship values is becoming increasingly apparent to the youth of Malaysia. Critical thinking, social awareness, and the ability to work collaboratively towards common goals can all be developed through citizenship education, leading to resilient and inclusive societies who are prepared for the challenges of the twenty-first century (UNESCO, 2015). Numerous research studies have been undertaken to examine the various categories, classifications, or types of citizenship. According to Westheimer and Kahne's (2004) typology, there exist three distinct categories of citizens: those who are personally responsible, those who are participatory, and those who are justice-oriented.

The youth of today, and particularly university students, have a responsibility to demonstrate their appreciation or comprehension of Malaysia's history of independence and development. Higher education institutions play a crucial role in shaping the attitudes and behaviours of youth towards good citizenship. According to Hashim and Tan (2009), the aims of citizenship education were to promote a sense of national pride, cultivate a mindset of acceptance towards diverse races and communities, cultivate independence and autonomy, foster a positive attitude towards change, and instil good behaviours. Thus, teaching citizenship education in higher education in Malaysia can foster a sense of belonging and national unity among the country's diverse community. However, there is still a lack of emphasis on citizenship values and civic education in Malaysian higher education, resulting in youth with moderate level of knowledge, skills and attitudes regarding citizenship values (Yusof et al., 2019). Furthermore, Hussin and Ibrahim (2018) contend that the implementation of citizenship education in Malaysia is confronted with several obstacles. These challenges include fostering harmony and unity among Malaysia's diverse population, particularly when each community faces challenges to accommodate the interests and differences of others. As a result, it becomes challenging to strike a balance between promoting national unity and valuing diversity.

A number of studies have been conducted to study the perspectives of young people regarding citizen values in Malaysian higher education. According to Mahadir, Piang, and Osman, (2019), they found that students in Malaysia have a limited level of civic engagement and a moderate level of involvement in volunteer work. This implies that there is a need to improve young people's attitudes towards civic values and to encourage them to become more involved in their communities. Thus, the development of civic engagement and responsible citizenship relies on a thorough understanding of the factors that shape national identity, making it imperative to assess how young people feel about good citizenship values. Awang et al. (2020) conducted an investigation into the correlation between cultural values and the perspectives of Malaysian undergraduate students regarding good citizenship. The research revealed that cultural values, specifically collectivism, exerted significant impact on the students' perspectives regarding good citizenship. The present study adopts Lilli and Diehl's (1999) National Identity Measure (NIM) as a framework to investigate attitudes toward citizenship values among Malaysian university students.

The National Identity Measure (NIM) was established by Lilli and Diehl (1999) as a tool for measuring national identity in a multifaceted and comprehensive approach, and it has been employed in prior research to assess national identity among university students in Malaysia (Granhent & Abdullah, 2017). However, there has been little research on the use of the NIM to assess attitudes towards good citizenship among Malaysian university students. The NIM consists of items that assess national identity which include five dimensions: membership, public, private, identity and comparison.

Membership dimension: This aspect measures an individual's sense of belonging and connection to their country. According to the findings of certain studies, those who feel a deeper feeling of attachment to their nation are likely to be more likely to participate in civic activities and express support for democratic norms (i.e Mahadir et al., 2019; Awang et al., 2013). The items encompassed in the statement are indicative of a sense of national identity, as exemplified by the expressions "I am a worthy member of the nation I belong to" and "I feel I don't have much to offer to the nation I belong to."

Public dimension: This public dimension pertains to an individual's perception of the political system and institutions of the country. The items comprise statements such as "Overall, my nation is considered good by others" and " In general, others respect the nation that I am a member of."

Private dimension: The private aspect measures an individual's emotional attachment to the country. It contains statements such as " Overall, I often feel that the nation of which I am a member is not worthwhile" and " I feel good about the nation I belong to."

Comparison dimension: The comparison dimension of the NIM assesses an individual's tendency to compare themselves to others regarding national identity. It includes items such as " All in all, my nation becomes less important in the world" and " Overall, the nation I belong to plays a more important role than other nations."

The concept of membership refers to individuals who feel a stronger sense of belonging to their national community and they may be more likely to support policies and institutions that promote the common good. According to (Hashim & Tan, 2009; Granhenat & Abdullah, 2017), those with a stronger sense of national identity are more likely to support policies aimed at promoting social justice and equal opportunities. Although the relationship between the membership dimension of national identity and good citizenship has not been extensively explored, existing research indicates that individuals who possess a heightened sense of attachment to their national community may exhibit an increased willingness to participate in citizenship-related activities (Granhenat & Abdullah, 2017).

The concept of private dimension posits that individuals who possess an increased sense of attachment to their nation are more inclined to participate in citizenship behaviours, which are considered a fundamental aspect of good citizenship (Hashim & Tan, 2009). Hence, it can be inferred that individuals who exhibit an increased feeling of patriotism are inclined towards supporting laws and establishments that foster the well-being of the society, thereby reflecting a crucial facet of good citizenship (Mahadir et al., 2019). In general, private aspect of national identity may be correlated with individuals' inclination to participate in civic activities which is regarded as a constituent of good citizenship.

The concept of public dimension refers to individuals with a stronger sense of national pride and support for their country's political system. Similar to membership and private, the correlation between the public dimension and good citizenship is complex and depend upon diverse contextual factors. However, scholarly investigations indicate that individuals who possess greater feelings of national pride and support of their country's political system are inclined towards participating in citizenship behaviours that foster the good citizenship (Mahadir et al., 2019).

The notion of social comparison, denoting the cognitive process of self-evaluation in relation to others, may have relevance to the domain of citizenship. According to Granhenat and Abdullah (2017), the correlation between social comparison and citizenship may be complex and depending on the context. Social comparison has the potential to impact individuals' perceptions of their own civic competence, attitudes towards groups and institutions that are pertinent to citizenship, and their views on the legitimacy and equity of political systems and institutions.

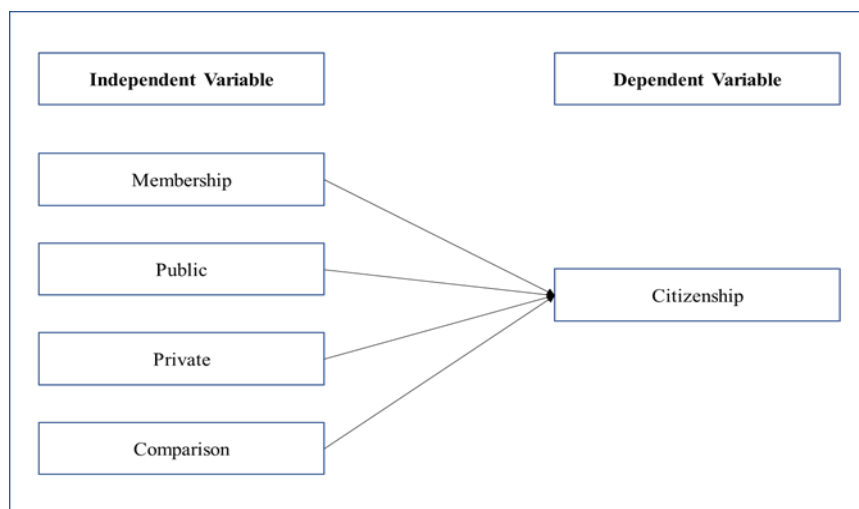


Figure 1: Demographic profile of the respondents
Source: Granhenat and Abdullah (2017)

Methodology

This study involved several steps to ensure accurate and reliable findings. They included reviewing relevant literature, conducting a questionnaire survey, and assessing the gathered information. The purpose of this study is to obtain understanding on attitudes towards citizenship values among Malaysian university students.

Participants

A total of 117 undergraduates from various Malaysian universities participated in the study using convenience sampling. All participants gave their consent to take part in the study voluntarily and after receiving all relevant information.

Instrument

This study adopted the National Identity Measure (NIM), that was developed by Lilli and Diehl (1999), to investigate the attitudes towards citizenship values among university students in Malaysia. The NIM is used as a framework for this study and the instrument was adapted to meet the objectives of this study. Participants were asked to respond to each item using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

Procedure

The participants were provided with a consent form and were given instructions on how to complete the questionnaire. The survey instrument was distributed through the online platform of Google Forms and necessitated a time frame of approximately 10 to 15 minutes for completion.

Results of the study

Table 1: Demographic profile of the respondents

Variable	Descriptive	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	22	18.8
	Female	95	81.2
Age (years old)	18-20	70	59.8
	21-23	36	30.8
	Above 24	11	9.4
Race	Malay	96	82.1
	Chinese	6	5.1
	Indian	3	2.6
	Others	12	10.3
Institutions	UM	2	1.7
	USM	1	0.9
	IIUM	65	55.6
	UiTM	3	2.6
	UPSI	1	0.9
	UNIMAP	21	17.9
	UPNM	1	0.9
	UMS	1	0.9
	Others	22	18.8

Table 1 presents the demographic information about the participants. The results indicate that out of the total number of respondents, 95 individuals (81.2%) identified as female, while the remaining 22 (18.8%) identified as male. Subsequently, the study involved a total of 117 participants, with 70

individuals (59.8%) falling within the age range of 18-20 years old, 36 participants (21.1%) between the ages of 21-23 years old, and finally, 11 respondents (9.4%) who were aged above 24 years old. Regarding the racial or ethnic background of the participants, the majority of the respondents, specifically 96 individuals (82.1%), identified as Malay. Out of the total respondents, six individuals, accounting for 5.1% of the participants in the study, identified as Chinese. Additionally, three respondents, comprising 2.6% of the sample, identified as Indian. The remaining participants belonged to the other ethnic such as Kadazan. The final inquiry pertaining to demographic profiles posed to the participants was regarding their institutional affiliation. 55.6% of the participants in the study were affiliated with the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). A total of 22 respondents, comprising 18.8% of the sample, were affiliated with Politeknik Kota Kinabalu. Out of the total respondents, 21 (17.9%) belong to UNIPAP, 3 (2.6%) are affiliated with UiTM, and 2 (1.7%) are associated with UM. Additionally, the data reveals an equivalent proportion of participants, comprising 1 respondent each (0.9%), were affiliated with USM, UPSI, UPM, and UMS.

Table 2: Correlation between Attitude and Citizenship

No	Variables	SD	Mean	1	2	3	4	5
1	Membership	.63399	4.0242					
2	Public	.75363	3.7077	.521				
3	Private	.83265	4.1923	.507	.575			
4	Comparison	.90873	2.9915	.361	.681	.443		
5	Citizenship	.70177	4.2125	.591	.321	.303	.296	

Table 2 presents the result from the relationship between Attitudes and Citizenship. Based on the results, it can be inferred that Membership exhibits a moderate correlation with Citizenship ($r=.591$, $p<0.01$), while Public ($r=.321$, $p<0.01$) and Private ($r=.303$, $p<0.01$) demonstrate a low correlation with Citizenship. Additionally, Comparison ($r=.296$, $p<0.01$) displays a lower correlation with Citizenship. Hence, the Malaysian Ministry of Education has a responsibility to ensure that the curriculum provided to students in Malaysia promotes a sense of unity, discouraging comparisons between themselves and people of other nations.

Table 3: Regression Analysis

Model	Standardized Coefficient Beta
Membership	.464**
Public	-.151
Private	-.051
Comparison	.189
R	.628
R ²	.395
Adjusted R	.362
F change	11.961
Significant F change	.000
Durbin Watson	1.989

Table 3 presented above displays the results of the multiple regression analyses conducted to examine the relationship between Attitude and Citizenship. As demonstrated in the table, the F-value calculated was 11.961. The F-value provides insight into the nature of the association between the regression and the residuals. The coefficient of determination, denoted as R², indicates that 39.5% of the variability observed in Citizenship can be accounted for by Attitude. The results indicate that only Membership holds significance in exerting an influence on Citizenship. Therefore, it can be concluded that hypothesis one has been validated.

As previously stated, Membership pertains to an individual's sense of belonging and connection to their country. Citizenship plays a crucial role in defining the identity of individuals, as it is closely linked to their role within the community. Bloemraad, Kymlicka, Lamont, and Hing (2019) posit that an increased sense of membership can result in "responsibilisation," in which individuals feel a greater sense of responsibility as citizens of their respective countries. Enhancing the sense of belonging towards the nation is likely to increase individuals' motivation to engage in various activities. However, it was determined that the remaining three (3) variables did not exhibit a significant relationship with Citizenship, namely Public, Private and Comparison.

Carden, Jones, and Passmore (2022) posit that the term "public" pertains to one's self-awareness of the political system of their nation. Self-awareness is a state of consciousness that encompasses diverse perspectives and cognitive frameworks with respect to the political system and institutions of a given nation. Regarding the Private dimension, Klussman et al., (2021) asserts that there exists a significant correlation between the Private and self-connection of individuals with their nation. This is the context in which individuals experience a sense of satisfaction by fulfilling their duties as responsible citizens of the nation. Furthermore, there exists a significant correlation between Private and self-connection towards the nation, particularly when individuals engage in purposeful endeavours aimed at enhancing their nation's development. Finally, Delmee (2021) has demonstrated that while Comparison is significantly associated with the development of self-identity, it is not significantly related to Citizenship. The extent to which an individual engages in social comparison has the potential to impact the progression of their self-identity development. The objective of engaging in social comparison is to acquire additional insights about oneself, as posited by Buunk and Gibbons (2007).

Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, the provision of citizenship education to students will equip them with the necessary skills to comprehend, question, and actively participate in the democratic society, encompassing various aspects such as politics, media, civil society, economy, and the legal system of the country. The provision of citizenship education is expected to foster the development of self-assurance and a proactive mindset among students, thereby equipping them with the necessary tools to navigate through various life transitions and adversities, including but not limited to instances of discrimination and harassment.

It is highly recommended that further studies be conducted on private universities in order to determine whether the results of this study, which exclusively examines public institutions in Malaysia, exhibit any similarities. Following studies may be carried out through a qualitative study utilising focus group interviews to increase the likelihood of obtaining a more profound understanding and awareness of the respondents' perception of citizenship. Finally, it is suggested that forthcoming studies explore additional potential attributes, such as morality and spirituality, due to their significant correlation with citizenship education. These qualities establish the basis for ethical and accountable conduct, and the inculcation of moral principles in youth is an essential component of citizenship education.

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