

# Intellectual Discourse

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Volume 34

Number 2

2026



**International Islamic University Malaysia**  
<https://journals.iium.edu.my/intdiscourse/index.php/id>

# *Intellectual Discourse*

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Volume 34

Number 2

2026

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*Intellectual Discourse* is a highly respected, academic refereed journal of the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). It is published twice a year by the IIUM Press, IIUM, and contains reflections, articles, research notes and review articles representing the disciplines, methods and viewpoints of the Muslim world.

*Intellectual Discourse* is abstracted in SCOPUS, WoS Emerging Sources Citation Index (ESCI), ProQuest, International Political Science Abstracts, Peace Research Abstracts Journal, Muslim World Book Review, Bibliography of Asian Studies, Index Islamicus, Religious and Theological Abstracts, ATLA Religion Database, MyCite, ISC and EBSCO.

ISSN 0128-4878 (Print); ISSN 2289-5639 (Online)

<https://journals.iium.edu.my/intdiscourse/index.php/id>

Email: [intdiscourse@iium.edu.my](mailto:intdiscourse@iium.edu.my); [intdiscourse@yahoo.com](mailto:intdiscourse@yahoo.com)

Published by:

IIUM Press, International Islamic University Malaysia

P.O. Box 10, 50728 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Phone (+603) 6196-5014, Fax: (+603) 6196-6298

Website: <http://iiumpress.iium.edu.my/bookshop>

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## Transliteration Table: Consonants

Arabic	Roman		Arabic	Roman
ب	b		ط	ṭ
ت	t		ظ	ẓ
ث	th		ع	‘
ج	j		غ	gh
ح	ḥ		ف	f
خ	kh		ق	q
د	d		ك	k
ذ	dh		ل	l
ر	r		م	m
ز	z		ن	n
س	s		ه	h
ش	sh		و	w
ص	ṣ		ء	’
ض	ḍ		ي	y

## Transliteration Table: Vowels and Diphthongs

Arabic	Roman		Arabic	Roman
اَ	a		أَ، آَ، إِيَّ	an
أُ	u		أُوَّ	un
إِ	i		إِيَّ	in
آَ، آِ، إِيَّ،	ā		أُوَّ	aw
أُوَّ	ū		إِيَّ	ay
إِيَّ	ī		أُوَّ	uww, ū (in final position)
			إِيَّ	iyy, ī (in final position)

*Source: ROTAS Transliteration Kit: <http://rotas.iium.edu.my>*



# **Fostering National Harmony through Inter-Religious Education: An Analysis of *Pendidikan Moral* KSSM and *Pendidikan Islam* KSSM Syllabi**

**Nur Nisa Solehah binti Muhamad Haswazil\***

**Fatmir Shehu\*\***

**Ainul Azmin binti Md. Zamin\*\*\***

**Abstract:** This article explores the role of inter-religious education in fostering national harmony in Malaysia, with a specific focus on the content of *Pendidikan Moral* (Moral Education) and *Pendidikan Islam* (Islamic Education) syllabi under the *Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Menengah* (Secondary School Standard Curriculum). The goal of this study is to examine the inter-religious education elements present in both syllabi and assess their effectiveness in promoting understanding, tolerance, and peaceful coexistence among students of diverse religious backgrounds. This research is particularly important because it offers a critical lens for evaluating the current educational frameworks in shaping a unified, multi-religious society. The focus of the discussion is on: (a) defining the concept and urgency of inter-religious education in the Malaysian context;

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(b) introducing *Hikmah Pedagogy* as a suitable framework for Malaysia; and (c) analysing the content of both syllabi for the presence and depth of inter-religious education elements. The methods employed in this paper include textual analysis of curriculum documents, evaluation of textbook content, and comparison with existing scholarly research. This research concludes with the finding that, while inter-religious education elements are present, especially in the *Pendidikan Moral KSSM* syllabus at the lower secondary level, they are insufficiently integrated into the *Pendidikan Islam KSSM* syllabus.

**Keywords:** Inter-religious Education, *Pendidikan Islam*, *Pendidikan Moral*, KSSM, Malaysia.

**Abstrak:** Kajian ini bertujuan meneliti peranan pendidikan antara agama dalam memupuk keharmonian nasional di Malaysia dengan memberi tumpuan khusus kepada kandungan silibus *Pendidikan Moral* dan *Pendidikan Islam* di bawah Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Menengah. Objektif utama kajian ini ialah untuk menganalisis elemen-elemen pendidikan antara agama yang terdapat dalam kedua-dua silibus tersebut serta menilai keberkesanannya dalam memupuk kefahaman, toleransi, dan kehidupan harmoni dalam kalangan pelajar yang berbeza latar belakang agama. Kajian ini penting kerana ia menyediakan kerangka kritikal untuk menilai keberkesanan sistem pendidikan semasa dalam membentuk masyarakat majmuk yang bersatu padu. Kajian ini menumpukan kepada tiga aspek utama, iaitu: (a) mentakrifkan konsep serta kepentingan pendidikan antara agama dalam konteks Malaysia; (b) memperkenalkan *Pedagogi Hikmah* sebagai pendekatan yang sesuai diaplikasikan dalam sistem pendidikan negara; dan (c) menganalisis kandungan kedua-dua silibus bagi menilai kewujudan serta tahap penghayatan elemen pendidikan antara agama. Kaedah kajian ini melibatkan analisis teks terhadap dokumen kurikulum, penilaian kandungan buku teks, serta perbandingan dengan kajian ilmiah sedia ada. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa elemen pendidikan antara agama sememangnya wujud, terutamanya dalam silibus *Pendidikan Moral KSSM* di peringkat menengah rendah, namun masih belum diterapkan secara menyeluruh dalam silibus *Pendidikan Islam KSSM*.

**Kata Kunci:** Pendidikan antara Agama, Pendidikan Islam, Pendidikan Moral, KSSM, Malaysia.

## Introduction

Malaysia's national identity has long been shaped by its diverse religious, ethnic, cultural, and traditional composition. Although Islam is the official religion of the Federation, Malaysia is home to other religions, namely, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism, and others. In this multi-religious setting, the role of education becomes crucial in fostering social cohesion. One of the core strategies employed by the government to foster unity is through the national curriculum, via *Pendidikan Islam* (Islamic Education) and *Pendidikan Moral* (Moral Education). These two subjects are compulsory core components: the former for Muslim students and the latter for students of other religious affiliations and ideologies. Generally, both subjects encompass universal and civic values, aiming to produce holistic citizens who are equipped for life after school, content with academic knowledge, strong moral character, and a firm national identity, which leads to the shaping of a generation that appreciates the diversity of Malaysia. Despite the government's vision, as outlined in key policy documents such as the *Pelan Pembangunan Pendidikan Malaysia 2013-2025*, PPPM 2013-2025 (Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025) (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 2013), there remain concerns regarding whether these curricula adequately embed inter-religious understanding.

Previous studies on this subject include an article by Sulmi Badar et al. (2004), which critiques the limited presence of inter-religious elements in the *Pendidikan Islam* KSSM syllabus, but this study focuses its discussion on the textbook of Form 2 without the analysis of the *Pendidikan Moral* (Moral Education). Bakar (2010) and Mohd Khambali et al. (2023) advocate for inter-religious awareness through education, in fighting against exclusivity of the Muslim community and issues like discrimination or prejudice. However, both studies focus on philosophical arguments for inter-religious dialogue and portray the virtues of inter-religious education specifically, without conducting detailed comparative curriculum analysis. Önal's (2010) work focuses on identifying the intersection point between religions through the concept of wisdom. However, it does not explain the specific frameworks for educational implementation from an inter-religious approach.

*Hikmah* Pedagogy (HP) portrays the applicable pedagogical model for the Malaysian context, which has been applied and utilised in

numerous research studies and classrooms (Hussien et al., 2017). While it demonstrates the suitability and relevance for Malaysian classrooms, it has not been tested within the scope of both KSSM subjects. Therefore, this research addresses these gaps by offering a thematic, textbook-based evaluation of both *Pendidikan Moral* and *Pendidikan Islam* under the *Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Menengah*, KSSM (Secondary School Standard Curriculum) syllabus, through comparative curriculum analysis, along with a detailed narration of the importance of inter-religious education and introducing Hikmah Pedagogy as a suitable educational framework for the Malaysian context.

This article aims to: (a) define the concept and urgency of inter-religious education in the Malaysian context; (b) introduce Hikmah Pedagogy as a suitable framework for Malaysia; and (c) analyse the content of both syllabi for the presence and depth of inter-religious education elements. The methodology includes qualitative textual analysis of official curriculum documents: Standards-based Document for Curriculum and Assessment, textbooks, and selected academic research.

### **The Crucial Needs of Inter-religious Education in the Malaysian Context**

The urgency of implementing inter-religious education in Malaysia's national education system needs to be comprehensively understood by the country's citizens.

#### ***Defining Inter-religious Education***

"Inter-religious education" encompasses both direct and indirect perceptions concerning a religion or its adherents that may be processed and perceived by one's consciousness, leading to a discussion of mediated religious experience. It occurs through the co-socialisation between the adherents of different religions, including conversations in direct learning encounters. At the centre of these encounters lies a dialogue in which the interlocutors attempt to respect and understand one another (Rothgangel, 2016, p. 2). It aims to transform attitudes and behaviours that may stereotype, demonise, or view those of other religions with suspicion or a judgmental approach (Engebretson et al., 2010). It is understood from these definitions that inter-religious education is crucial in fostering mutual understanding and genuine

appreciation among the youth generation, aiming to produce a harmonious society that encompasses multi-religious and multicultural backgrounds. It provides a platform for students and teachers from diverse religious backgrounds to engage in meaningful dialogue, discover shared values within their respective religions, and transcend judgmental, discriminatory, and racist attitudes toward communities different from their own. This platform involves a dialogical learning process for students that could increase their understanding of the different worldviews of other religious groups and their appreciation of the world. This is the researchers' view on inter-religious education, which will be more relevant if it is applied in the context of *Wasatiyyah* (moderation). Indeed, *Wasatiyyah* is the backbone of inter-religious education, where the application is based on the spirit of tolerance, fairness, and humble treatment, which helps sustain religious harmony and peaceful coexistence between multi-religious communities (Mohd Khambali et al., 2023).

### ***The Urgency of Inter-religious Education in Malaysia***

Malaysia has a multi-faith composition, and Islam is the official religion in the country. With a population of about 34.2 million, ethnic groups are composed of Malays (58.1%), Chinese (22.4%), Indians (6.5%), and other Bumiputera (12.3%). This variety generates coexistence but also produces challenges of social harmony (Sulmi Badar et al., 2024). Unity is achieved through an education system that underscores the necessity of interfaith/intercultural dialogues in the education of religion in national religious formation. These actions could counteract racism and bias (Bakar, 2010; Mohd Khambali et al., 2023). However, the dangers of religious education include the drift of education towards secularism and segregated religious learning environments, where students are increasingly trapped in their ethnic or religious cliques (Hull, 2002).

Ethnic groups in Malaysia mostly speak their native languages. The Chinese mainly speak Cantonese, while Indians communicate in Tamil. The Malays speak Bahasa Melayu while Bumiputera communities in Borneo speak a multitude of ethnic languages. The three primary school types are *Sekolah Kebangsaan* (SK), *Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan Cina* (SJKC) and *Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan Tamil* (SJKT). The issue of ethnic stratification has also raised serious problems, with parents opting for schools that mirror their own ethnicity, which contributes to

homogeneity. Students interact with classmates from backgrounds other than their own during secondary school – in the absence of a national secondary education system to integrate them – but early experiences likely restrict their experiences of cross-ethnic experiences. The government recognises that 7–17-year-old children go to school, spend many hours in various settings, and this can contribute to the sense of national unity. Therefore, the Ministry plans to promote social cohesion through education outlined in the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013–2025.

The Razak Report 1956 (Report of the Education Committee, 1956) sought to reinforce national identity and access for everybody in the Malaysian education system through societal unity. Other initiatives, such as the Student Integration Plan for Unity (RIMUP) and 1 Student 1 Sport, were established to help build inter-ethnic friendships but faced challenges regarding funding. Islamic Education for Muslims and Moral Education for non-Muslims are core components of the curriculum. The transition from KBSM to KSSM aligns education with the needs of the 21st century, focusing on social intelligence, entrepreneurship, health, and social justice, thereby enhancing the national curriculum to international standards.

Although both *Pendidikan Islam KSSM* and *Pendidikan Moral KSSM* seek to cultivate an all-encompassing approach to development, they have different emphases. *Pendidikan Islam* wants to instil knowledge, faith, and good deeds to prepare the students as Allah's vicegerents. The curricula for both syllabi include 21st Century Learning Skills, Higher Order Thinking Skills, and Cross-Curriculum Elements. This alignment of the curriculum and government policies with the National Philosophy of Education 1996 reflects the overarching aim of Malaysia: a united and harmonious country. This initiative is designed to produce balanced and morally upright Malaysian citizens with knowledge and a strong national identity that embraces Malaysia's diversity. The Ministry's focus under KSSM on Islamic Education and Moral Education is to enhance social cohesion among both Muslim and non-Muslim students, emphasising national unity. However, questions arise about the effectiveness of these efforts in promoting a genuine appreciation for diverse traditions and beliefs. This emphasises the need for inter-religious education in the Islamic Education and Moral Education KSSM syllabi.

### **Inter-religious Education: Virtues and Hikmah Pedagogy**

Inter-religious education will undoubtedly contribute numerous virtues to the Malaysian communities at the international level. The discussion in this section explores the benefits of inter-religious education in Malaysia and examines the *Hikmah* pedagogy as a proposed framework.

#### ***The Virtues of Inter-religious Education***

Introducing inter-religious education via the KSSM syllabi for *Pendidikan Islam* and *Pendidikan Moral* is a means to promote national harmony among youth. This education features three core dimensions: cognitive, affective, and experiential. The cognitive dimension involves learning about various religions, delving into their breadth and depth. The affective dimension encourages students to connect personally with the content, reflecting on the implications for their values and potentially challenging their previous assumptions, without intending to convert or sow doubt. It is hoped that for many students the affective process will lead to reflection on personal values and attitudes, and perhaps a challenge to change previously held attitudes and assumptions (Engebretson, 2010), far from the intention to convert those of other faiths or make others have doubts about their faith (Shehu, 2014). Meanwhile, the experiential dimension engages students through listening to others' religious experiences, visiting places of worship, and participating in projects that promote justice, development, and peace.

It aims to help foster the development of interreligious understanding and mutual respect among different beliefs. It is a well-intentioned, non-discriminatory, and inclusive teaching practice for inter-religious education to help students appreciate the diverse perspectives of other religious communities with the purpose of encouraging social cohesion, peace, and a dialogue of mutual understanding (Engebretson, 2010). Studying other faiths adds awareness with a non-prejudiced view of differences (Danner & Akpınar, 2024). Dialogue helps students develop religious identities and align their beliefs (Girivirya, 2023).

Inter-religious education's function is to use religious teachings to highlight the demand for human rights, justice, and peace. It demonstrates the holism that religions stand for, dismissing violence and urging kindness. Such teaching promotes mutual respect and understanding among followers of separate religions (Engebretson,

2010). It is specifically intended to work in constructive relations for mutual understanding and improvement of cooperation in a multi-religious context, because positive perceptions for diverse believers are nurtured by dialogue (Mohd Khambali et al., 2023).

### ***Hikmah Pedagogical Concepts for Malaysian Classrooms***

*Hikmah* Pedagogy (HP) is an extension of the Philosophy for Children Programme (P4C), a method that promotes critical, creative, benevolent, ethical, and higher-order thinking through philosophical inquiry (Hashim & Alias, 2020). The Community of Inquiry (CoI) in the classrooms encourages students to think independently and consider different answers to issues. This trains them to be more open to accepting various answers. Students will learn that it is quite impossible to arrive at a single final answer, since some answers can be considered better than others based on their evidence or argument (Lipman, 2003).

The Centre for Philosophical Inquiry in Education, commonly known as the Centre for Teaching Thinking (CTT) at the International Islamic University Malaysia, has remodelled Lipman's approach to include religious and ethical values relevant to the Muslim and Malaysian society. The programme is known as *Hikmah* Pedagogy (HP). Originally an Arabic word, *Hikmah* has been assimilated into the Malay language, meaning "wisdom" (Hashim et al., 2014). HP offers a method of teaching thinking that can be done either as a 'stand-alone' approach or an infusion. Stand-alone is an approach where a thinking programme is taught outside the school curriculum, with its main objective focusing on the development of thinking skills. Infusion, on the other hand, integrates the development of thinking skills into a subject. The infusion approach considers mastery of the content and development of thinking skills as its objectives (Hussien et al., 2017).

Fisher (2013) mentions that teaching thinking and philosophical inquiry can be infused in numerous learning subjects, such as English, Mathematics, Science, Design and Technology, History, Geography, Physical Education, Religious Education, and Citizenship Education. In the Malaysia's strict curriculum and limited timeframe in the schooling system, the infusion approach is the most practical choice for teaching critical thinking. Recent studies have proven that HP is highly recommended for Malaysia's educational system (Hashim et al., 2014). Studies have shown the same findings that *Hikmah* Pedagogy

(HP) enhances students' higher-order thinking skills (HOTs), critical thinking, reasoning abilities, open-mindedness, and communication skills (Zulkifli & Hashim, 2019; Hashim & Alias, 2020; Hussien et al., 2021; Zulkifli et al., 2022; Aiyetoro et al., 2024).

*Hikmah* Pedagogy aims to produce the Community of Inquiry (CoI), which is also known in many studies as 'Community of Philosophical Inquiry' (CoPI) (Cassidy, 2025), and 'Collaborative Philosophical Inquiry' (CPI) (Millett and Tapper, 2012). The CoI is a moral and philosophical exploration journey, where a group of students can sit together and listen to one another with respect, build one another's ideas, challenge one another to supply reasons for otherwise unsupported opinions, assist each other in drawing inferences from what has been said, and seek to identify one another's assumptions (Lipman, 2003). While students in Malaysia are usually devout followers of a particular religion, they can bring their religious beliefs to the forefront of the discussion through moral and philosophical exploration. It is conducted through dialogical discussion, which encompasses elements of listening to others' views, empathy, respect, friendship, and cooperative thinking. Furthermore, CoI challenges students' unquestioned opinions and views, compelling them to think beyond conditioned and stereotyped views to form a meaningful reaction and a deeper understanding of specific issues in the real world (Hussien et al., 2017).

Students do not necessarily arrive at a definitive answer, and disagreement is commonly allowed if it is expressed subtly and respectfully. They must think independently for themselves. Even the teachers will be there, acting as facilitators, good listeners, open-minded, and skilful questioners to help students discuss at a deeper level. This could help students exchange and re-examine their views through logical analysis, revising them when necessary. To achieve those results, the classroom environment must be emotionally and intellectually safe, enabling participants to reason and reflect on the issues discussed without the influence of any authority. Therefore, CoI will eventually enable students to think together with tolerance and increase their understanding and appreciation of the world (Hussien et al., 2017).

Before conducting the five stages of CoI, students will be arranged to sit in a circle or horseshoe shape, facing each other, as this type of seating

signifies the equal status and rights of each CoI member. Then, the first stage involves offering a stimulus, such as a text, poster, or video, that contains values and issues to engage and prompt students to question. In the second stage, students will take turns reading aloud the stimulus to discover its meaning. Next, students will generate their questions based on the stimulus, with each question assigned to a specific questioner's name. This could help in discovering students' interests and what they consider important. The teacher will guide students to categorise the questions and determine which category to discuss first. After the fourth stage, the discussion must lead to deliberation and attempts to answer the questions. At this stage, the articulation of agreements and disagreements will begin, aiming to achieve a deeper understanding of the meaning and concepts in the stimulus (Hussien et al., 2017).

Consequently, the CoI fosters a democratic classroom, where the teacher must facilitate the classroom discussion and empower students to think and express their voices. The success of creating a CoI depends on the teacher's own thinking skills and disposition. Generally, teachers must undergo HP training, where they are involved in the CoI for an extended period until they have mastered the programme and can conduct it independently. Thus, any CoI conducted will help develop students' reasoning abilities, acknowledge their ideas, and teach them to value and tolerate others' different opinions, which fosters their open-mindedness and helps them cooperate with each other to achieve a common goal in the class. Additionally, they will be encouraged to understand the importance of working and living in harmony through tolerance, respect, and open-mindedness (Hussien et al., 2017). These qualities are of utmost importance and should be incorporated into our current syllabi of *Pendidikan Islam* and *Pendidikan Moral* under KSSM, enabling students to understand and become more tolerant towards others' views and religious practices.

The successful result of Hikmah Pedagogy could be seen in numerous published and unpublished studies, conducted and supervised by the members of CTT, highlighting the benefits of implementing HP in subjects like *Pendidikan Islam* (Islamic Education), *Pendidikan Moral* (Moral Education), *Pendidikan Sivik dan Kewarganegaraan* (Civic and Citizenship Education, CCE), in both English and Malay. The study conducted by Hussien et al. (2017) shows that HP helps Muslim students improve their inquiry skills and have a better understanding

of Islam in the teaching of Islamic Education in secondary classes. Moreover, students become more open-minded towards contradictory views when they realise that there is no right or wrong in expressing an opinion (Hussien et al., 2021). Juperi (2011) exemplifies in his study the teacher's success in highlighting the right to have a prayer or worship place for both Muslim and non-Muslim communities. The topic of 'Preserving the Sanctity of the Mosque' provides an opportunity for students to explore the rights and practices between Muslim and non-Muslim communities, fostering tolerance through better reasoning, guided by the teachings of their respective religions.

Kamarudin (2015) highlighted the case of a student who faced difficulty in finding a place to pray in a Christian country where cross symbols are found everywhere, which led him to raise the issue of whether Muslims are allowed to pray in such places. Their discussion continued with a controversial issue regarding a protest by Muslim demonstrators who forced a church to take down its cross, fearing it would pose a challenge to Islam and the faith of Muslim youth. Ultimately, some students realised that they held views that were mostly emotional rather than founded on Islamic principles and values. This discovery was an eye-opener for them, as they realised that many of their beliefs and views were shaped by society rather than rooted in true Islamic teachings (Hussien et al., 2017). HP also highlights the practice of fasting among all religions. Some Muslim students were unaware of this ritual in other religions. Dietary restrictions, halal food, vegetarian options, and *Eid* Open House were discussed as part of understanding and showing respect and tolerance across ethnic lines. Students expressed their views on HP's accomplishments in developing their respect, tolerance, and understanding for others' opinions, and breaking the stereotype of emotional perspective towards any controversial issues regarding differences in religious practices and others (Hussien et al., 2017, pp. 103-105).

Jarawi and Zulkifli (2020) demonstrated that HP and KBAT are successful in shaping students who accept the diversity of cultures in Malaysia, aligning with the aspirations of the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025. Yet the question of whether the current elements in *Pendidikan Islam* and *Pendidikan Moral* of the KSSM syllabi fulfil all the requirements for inter-religious education, particularly in terms of their relevance as a stimulus for conducting inter-religious education,

remains. It is necessary to delve into the analysis of both syllabi to identify what can be termed ‘inter-religious elements’ that are crucial in fostering a genuine understanding among students about the religions of their ‘neighbours.’

### **Critical Analysis of Pendidikan Moral KSSM and Pendidikan Islam KSSM**

The Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025 (PPPM 2013-2025) identifies societal unity and harmonious coexistence as its core aims. These objectives are reflected in both the syllabi of *Pendidikan Islam* (Islamic Education) and *Pendidikan Moral* (Moral Education) under the KSSM. Through both curricula, the government hopes that students from diverse backgrounds, including teachers, will interact dialogically and intellectually via the national education platform known as ‘inter-religious education.’ It refers to the cognitive, affective, and dynamic experiential process of fostering understanding, genuine appreciation, tolerance, respect, and national harmony.

The researchers’ determination in choosing the secondary school level syllabi (KSSM) stems from multiple reasons, including *the* examination of inter-religious elements in both syllabi, as both are the Ministry’s main mediums for fostering national unity among students. It is imperative for students to genuinely understand their neighbours’ religions and traditions, build positive perceptions of differences, and foster national unity. This is none other than the urgency of fundamental information from all traditions that exist in Malaysia, connoted as ‘inter-religious elements.’

The secondary school level is considered the appropriate phase of theological maturity to introduce students to inter-religious knowledge without causing confusion. This is the phase where secondary school students are firm in their faith, as believing in God and engaging in religious practices have been cultivated in most of them from early stages, beginning with infancy, preschool, and the primary level (Farisia, 2020). Students learn under constant supervision and continuous monitoring by trained teachers in both subjects. Furthermore, many studies and models of inter-religious education implementation are always being established at the secondary level, where numerous experts trust this is the best developmental phase for students to enter the inter-religious education realm (Goldburg, 2010; Ng, 2010; Wanden, 2010; Erricker,

2010; Filus, 2010). The context of inter-religious education itself is far from converting participants, yet it keeps them aligned with their own religious identity/worldview after addressing the differences in religions from other communities. Therefore, this analysis will determine whether the current syllabi are embedded with inter-religious elements as a stimulus for students, to prove that the government's aspiration for national unity is being operationalised, or if they only remain aspirational ideals on paper.

### ***Analysis of Inter-religious Elements in Pendidikan Moral KSSM***

*Pendidikan Moral KSSM* textbooks, from lower secondary levels (Form 1, 2, and 3) to upper levels (Form 4 and 5), are structured similarly. The former is built around four key thematic areas and continues around three key themes. All the contents are organised under subunits of each area, comprising six key elements: stimulus, concept, reinforcement, enrichment, remediation, and assessment. Additionally, three disciplines of moral development – reasoning, emotion, and action – are also embedded through various activities across the textbooks, such as role-playing, exploratory projects, invention-based tasks, and teamwork. These activities open the floor for students to communicate, collaborate, and develop a caring, inclusive, and patriotic character, where teachers are encouraged to conduct the activities creatively, tailored to students' learning abilities, intelligence levels, and classroom contexts. Inclined towards DSKP (Standard-Based Document for Curriculum and Assessment) objectives in producing 21st-century learners, *Kemahiran Berfikir Aras Tinggi*, KBAT (Higher Order Thinking Skills), is also cultivated in every unit of the syllabus, evaluating pupils in applying, analysing, evaluating, and creating.

The analysis will be documented following the order from the lower to the upper secondary levels. The Form 1, 2, and 3 textbooks have four key thematic areas, namely: "Introduction to Morality," "Self, Family and Friendship," "Relationships between Self, Community and Society," and "Morality, Rules and Laws." Starting from Form 1 textbook, Unit 4: "Living a Religious or Faith-Based Life Brings Blessings" falls under the second theme, 'Self, Family, and Friendship.' This topic emerges as the most explicit example of inter-religious content in the syllabus. It presents a vast range of religious traditions practised in Malaysia from diverse backgrounds; Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, Christians,

Sikhs, and indigenous belief systems, like the Kadazan and Semai communities. The description of how the communities perform the act of worship and prayers in the places of worship, celebrate their religious festivals, and connect themselves with the Divine in their daily religious experiences, such as the meditation of Buddhists, fasting for Muslims, and thanksgiving ceremonies like *Kinorohingan* of the Kadazan's tradition (Nur Munirah Teoh binti Abdullah et al., 2016).

Students are also taught to respect their friends during prayer times and not to disturb fasting friends during Ramadan, as well as how to participate appropriately during celebrations like Hari Raya Aidilfitri, Vaisakhi for Sikhs, or Vesak for Buddhists. Activities such as role-play, creative poetry, and folio projects are taught in the unit, including reflective KBAT questions and group discussions. The classrooms will be the platform for students to interact meaningfully with peers from different backgrounds, guiding them towards the realms of inter-religious dialogue and building mutual understanding across faith communities (Nur Munirah Teoh binti Abdullah et al., 2016). Overall, Unit 4 discusses the inter-religious elements that are central and detailed in relation to the learning objectives.

The *Pendidikan Moral KSSM* Form 2 textbook is the direct continuation of the Form 1 syllabus, with four key themes of its moral and pedagogical objectives, where the focus remains on shaping a morally upright, socially responsible student who is ready to engage harmoniously in a plural society. Unit 2, under the same theme "Religion or Belief as a Foundation for Noble Character Formation," introduces briefly to the moral teachings and role models of major religions in Malaysia, such as Islam [Prophet Muhammad], Christianity (Jesus Christ), Buddhism (Siddhartha Gautama), Hinduism (Swami Vivekananda), and Sikhism (Guru Nanak), including indigenous belief systems such as animism in Iban culture and spiritual healing in Kadazandusun communities, which is written in the *Adat Iban 1993* (The Iban Customary Law 1993) document. Students are exposed to Gawai celebrations, ancestral taboos, and traditional healing methods, along with reflective KBAT questions and researching and observing the religious traditional healing process. This allows students to satisfy their curiosity experientially and encourages respect across diverse religions (Nur Munirah Teoh binti Abdullah et al., 2017).

It indicates that Unit 2 is unique in its inter-religious content and other units focus on respect, harmony, and civic duty, highlighting the importance of cross-faith engagement throughout Unit 2. Units 5, 6, and 7 address the issue of intercultural dialogue (i.e., lessons on respect during the Gawai festival and lessons about empathy at funerals and weddings of members of different cultures). Though Unit 2 tackles inter-religious topics, the other units spread messages of tolerance and understanding among Malaysia's diverse citizens. Once again, inter-religious elements are only being highlighted in one unit, while the other presents indirect contact between traditions, emphasising the universal values of tolerance, respect, empathy, and genuine understanding as united citizens of Malaysia.

The Form 3 textbook contains the same structure of key themes, enriched with learning elements such as role-playing, group discussions, art-oriented activities, and KBAT-oriented tasks, with the same goals of developing pupils' moral reasoning, emotional maturity, and social skills, producing a well-prepared youth for the 21<sup>st</sup>-century challenges and demands. The Form 3 syllabus addresses inter-religious elements through cultural and traditional narratives, together with daily social conduct. Under theme 2 "Self, Family and Friendship," Unit 4: "Family Traditions as Our Shared Heritage," introduces students to traditional family practices, such as *bersalaman* (greeting elders by kissing their hands), *makan besar* (reunion dinner on Chinese New Year), *tang yuan* preparation for Dong Zhi Festival, placing *daun lalang* behind ear to ward off evil spirits (in *Bidayuh* traditional belief), and including traditional wedding ceremonies passed down through generations (Abdul Pabil bin Adam et al., 2018).

The third theme, "Relationships between Self, Community and Society" in unit 6 discusses "Living in Unity Generates Well-Being," where unity is encouraged through shared festivals, like celebrating Deepavali, Hari Raya Aidilfitri, Chinese New Year, Christmas, and Hari Gawai with neighbours of different backgrounds (Abdul Pabil bin Adam et al., 2018). The same goes to Unit 13: "Traditions in a Multicultural Society," under the fourth theme, "Morality, Rules and Laws." Here, unity is practiced through the traditions such as *Pengirih* rituals (a *Bidayuh* mutual communal support), *Bedurok* (an Iban mutual communal support), and *Sewang* (an Orang Asli traditional dance ritual). Students also participate in cultural simulations such as making *ketupat*

(traditional Hari Raya dish), *tanglung* (Chinese lantern), and *rangoli* (Indian floor art), and traditional dances like *Sewang* (Pesta Kaamatan traditional dance) (Abdul Pabil bin Adam et al., 2018).

The traditions and practices reflect religious and spiritually rooted worldviews, such as purification rituals, symbols of protection, and cultural taboos. The *Pendidikan Moral KSSM* Form 3 curriculum leans more towards cultural literacy and civic integration in most of its contents, which could also be interpreted as incorporating inter-religious elements. While the other units in the textbook convey the message of unity and social harmony through various themes, it also asserts civic freedom and democratic rights, a message of societal unity that is not directly related to the ‘inter-religious elements.’

Both Form 4 and 5 syllabi are the direct continuation of the foundational curricula introduced in the lower secondary levels. The slight difference is only related to the continuation of the key thematic areas, where the continuation starts from the fifth to the seventh theme, namely, “A Person of Morality,” “Moral Identity,” and “Morality and Nationhood.” The Form 4 syllabus introduces moral identity, focusing on personal integrity, digital ethics, family values, and civic duties. It highlights ethical decisions based on fairness, compassion, and responsibility, and presents moral challenges in everyday interactions. Unfortunately, inter-religious elements are largely absent from the syllabus, compared to the previous one, where they were found in two units, albeit indirectly. Unit 9: “Social Unity as the Foundation of National Prosperity” lightly touches on multiple examples of religious festivals that are celebrated in Malaysia and some traditional cultural sports, underscoring the concept of patriotism and civic unity portrayal. A better example in Unit 11, though considered the most plentiful inter-religious elements compared to other units, is still far from the content presented in the lower secondary syllabi. The narrative in this unit categorises the Malaysian traditional foods, customs, and languages briefly (Abdul Pabil bin Adam et al., 2019). The list could possibly help students recall what they have learned from the lower secondary levels; however, the emphasis and major focus of the Form 4 textbook are largely on shared national identity and cultural solidarity.

Meanwhile, the Form 5 *Pendidikan Moral KSSM* textbook’s core focus topics are on global societies, international cooperation, and

cultural diplomacy, aligning national moral education with global moral reasoning. Even though the textbooks of Form 1 to Form 5 shared the same objective in shaping individuals of noble character and integrity who uphold universal values grounded in moral principles, and contribute towards national unity, societal well-being, and global harmony, this syllabus marks a significant shift from a diverse religious traditions narrative to a global ethics and responsibility portrayal. Overall, the textbook consistently promotes the core universal values of societal and national unity. The Form 5 syllabus scope has expanded to the global level, instilling international and global unity in students' minds (Mohd Hilmie bin Mohd Mokhtar et al., 2020). This could be part of the government's preparatory efforts for students before entering university life and the next, more challenging phase, in line with its aspiration to achieve 21<sup>st</sup>-century learning goals.

### ***Analysis of Inter-religious Elements in Pendidikan Islam KSSM***

The syllabus of *Pendidikan Islam KSSM* objectives, as documented in the DSKP, aims to equip students with the necessary qualities to become *Khalīfah* (vicegerent) of Allah with credibility based on *al-Qur'ān* and *al-Sunnah* to contribute to the improvement of the nation and national civilisation for the well-being of this life and the Hereafter. Consequently, the Form 1 to Form 5 textbooks are targeting the same objectives that we have mentioned, and they focus on six major fields, namely, *al-Qur'ān*, *Ḥadīth* [Sayings of the Prophet], *'Aqīdah* (Islamic Creed), *Fiqh* (Islamic Jurisprudence), *Sīrah dan Tamadun Islam* (Islamic History and Civilisation), and *Akhlāq Islāmiyyah* (Islamic Ethics). Each lesson is structured around the teaching and learning elements of stimulus, activities, and assessments. They are slightly different from the *Pendidikan Moral KSSM* syllabus in terms of structure or style, but still include the KBAT, EMK, universal values, and creative thinking, reflecting their role as a societal unity agent as usual.

The analysis of *Pendidikan Islam KSSM* textbooks at the secondary level is conducted in reference to the study conducted by Sulmi Badar et al. (2024). The study examines inter-religious content included in the syllabus through a qualitative approach, drawing on an examination of textbooks, curriculum standards, official government papers, and research publications. The study also involves in-depth interviews with four expert teachers and one draftsman. Their findings are based on

research data, document analysis, and interview data. The themes are (a) orientation of inter-religious elements, (b) inter-religious interaction forms, (c) information about other religions, (d) teaching and learning strategies on inter-religious elements, and (e) assessment of inter-religious elements (Sulmi Badar et al., 2024). The current study was matched with the previous study's analysis following this thematic order.

The first theme, "orientation of inter-religious elements," aims to track inter-religious aspects in the objectives of the *Pendidikan Islam KSSM* in DSKP. Here, the study's findings align with those of the previous study, as the orientation of inter-religious elements in the objectives was not specifically highlighted, resulting in a broad and unfocused approach. Hence, Sulmi's (2024) study shows that the syllabus is more focused on the six major fields in the textbooks, where inter-religious elements were only discussed indirectly when they matched the lesson topics in class. Additionally, the present analysis reveals that inter-religious interaction forms are included in the syllabus but are presented in a limited number of instances, in the most general and indirect manner.

Sulim et al. (2024) found inter-religious interaction in various lessons, such as *al-Qur'an*, *Sīrah dan Tamadun Islam*, and *Akhlāq Islāmiyyah*, from the Form 2 syllabus only. The present study, however, reveals that interreligious elements are present in all textbooks from Form 1 to Form 5, with the most extensive representation being in the Form 2 syllabus, compared to other textbooks. Though the elements exist at all levels, they are indirect and generally presented. For example, the relation of Prophet with the Arabs of *Jahiliyyah* (the pre-Islamic Era), his kindness and *Akhlāq* towards them, are found in Form 2 and 3 syllabi (Pendidikan Islam, Tingkatan 2, 2017; Pendidikan Islam, Tingkatan 3, 2018). They encouraged the ethics of Muslims while interacting with non-Muslims in Form 2 and 5 textbooks (Pendidikan Islam, Tingkatan 2, 2017; Pendidikan Islam, Tingkatan 5, 2020). The characteristics of Arabs *Jahiliyyah* were found in Form 1 textbook, while the portrayal of the treatment of the Abbasid empire towards the Persians was found in Form 4 textbook (Pendidikan Islam, Tingkatan 1, 2016; Pendidikan Islam, Tingkatan 4, 2020).

The information about other religions was not included in the syllabus, as claimed by Sulmi et al. (2024), as Lesson 25 of the Form 1 textbook portrays only the belief systems of the *Jahiliyyah* Arabs, before the Prophethood of the Prophet. The lesson covers *Dīn Ḥanīf* (the comprehensive revealed way of life followed by Ibrahim), the religion of idol worshippers, Zoroastrianism, animism, Judaism, and Christianity (Pendidikan Islam, Tingkatan 1, 2016). Additionally, “teaching and learning strategies on inter-religious elements,” is included in the textbooks. For example, the Form 1 and 5 textbooks include activities that involve inter-religious elements, i.e., research activities on Judaism and Christianity tasks for the pupils, and brainstorming activities on the importance of knowing the diversity of ethnic and races (Pendidikan Islam, Tingkatan 1, 2016; Pendidikan Islam, Tingkatan 5, 2020). The evidence proves the contrary claim of the previous study, which they only found in the Form 2 textbook under the *‘Aqīdah* field (Sulmi Badar et al., 2024). The assessment of inter-religious elements is also limited, which contradicts the claim of the previous study. They are found in the Form 2 and 5 textbooks, where the assessments encourage students to elaborate on their role in ensuring national harmony in Malaysia (Pendidikan Islam, Tingkatan 2, 2017; Pendidikan Islam, Tingkatan 5, 2020).

The *Pendidikan Islam KSSM* textbooks lack inter-religious elements, focusing mainly on historical interactions between the *Jahiliyyah* (Pre-Islamic Era) Arabs and Muslims. The *Pendidikan Moral KSSM* emphasises inter-religious content and promotes moral maturity. This disparity hinders national unity aspirations and reveals the exclusive approach of *Pendidikan Islam KSSM*, leaving non-Muslim students learning about Muslims while Muslim students remain isolated. An urgent re-evaluation is needed to ensure equal exploration of Malaysia’s diverse society for both Muslim and non-Muslim students.

## Conclusion

While KSSM is meant to help build the nation’s culture of togetherness, inter-religious implementation remains inconsistent in Malaysia’s education system, this study confirms. The lower secondary *Pendidikan Moral* syllabus does fairly well and covers diverse religious denominations, yet in upper secondary levels, this exposure is minimal. The *Pendidikan Islam* syllabus does not sufficiently address inter-

religiousness; instead, it focuses on historical contexts rather than Malaysia's diversity, which contradicts national goals for cohesion. To boost respect for religious diversity, the Ministry ought to increase inter-religious education in every syllabus, and more particularly with the programme *Pendidikan Islam*. This comprises the periodic revisiting of syllabi every 10-15 years and enhancing the orientation of teachers towards religious diversity. Some proposed reforms are (1) the integration of the *Hikmah* approach by means of exemplary practices of different religions, (2) the adoption of *Hikmah* Pedagogy to promote critical thinking and dialogue. Future research can examine the effectiveness of current syllabi and how *Hikmah* Pedagogy influences *Pendidikan Islam* and Moral in terms of student attitudes toward religious diversity.

### **Acknowledgment**

This article is a part of Erasmus+ Project “Facing Global Challenges-Environmental and Peace Education in Interreligious Cooperation for Religious Teacher Education (“R4ecology”)”<sup>1</sup> between University of Augsburg, Germany, and International Islamic University Malaysia, Malaysia (Nov.2023-Nov.2026).

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1 This research project is registered with Research Management Centre of IIUM: ID: **SPI24-208-0208** “Erasmus Plus Partnership: Facing Global Challenges–University Didactic Conceptualisation of Interreligious Environmental Education in Different Contexts.” and ID: **SPI24-209-0209** “Facing Global Challenges- Environmental and Peace Education in Interreligious Cooperation for Religious Teacher Training (R4ecology).”

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## **Chapter in a Book**

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Alias (2009)

Reference:

Alias, A. (2009). Human nature. In N. M. Noor (Ed.), *Human nature from an Islamic perspective: A guide to teaching and learning* (pp.79-117). Kuala Lumpur: IIUM Press.

## **Journal Article**

In-text:

Chapra (2002)

Reference:

Chapra, M. U. (2002). Islam and the international debt problem. *Journal of Islamic Studies*, 10, 214-232.

## **The Qur'ān**

In-text:

(i) direct quotation, write as 30:36

(ii) indirect quotation, write as Qur'ān, 30:36

Reference:

*The glorious Qur'ān*. Translation and commentary by A. Yusuf Ali (1977). US: American Trust Publications.

## **Ḥadīth**

In-text:

(i) Al-Bukhārī, 88:204 (where 88 is the book number, 204 is the ḥadīth number)

(ii) Ibn Hanbal, vol. 1, p. 1

Reference:

(i) Al-Bukhārī, M. (1981). *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*. Beirut: Dār al-Fikr.

(ii) Ibn Ḥanbal, A. (1982). *Musnad Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal*. Istanbul: Cagri Yayinlari.

## **The Bible**

In-text:

Matthew 12:31-32

Reference:

*The new Oxford annotated Bible*. (2007). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

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Research Management Centre  
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