

Rukun Negara - Centric Civic Education in The Digital Era: Policy Recommendations for Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Malaysia's foundational civic philosophy, the Rukun Negara, was conceived as a normative instrument for nation-building, inter-ethnic cohesion, and constitutional governance. However, its effective transmission to contemporary Malaysian youth is increasingly compromised by three interconnected structural challenges: an examination-driven curriculum that privileges theoretical recall over experiential civic engagement; deficiencies in civic and constitutional literacy among young people; and the normalisation of ethically problematic behaviour within digital media ecosystems. Although Rukun Negara principles are formally embedded across the national curriculum, pedagogical delivery continues to be dominated by rote-learning approaches that impede meaningful internalisation of civic values. Compounding this are systemic gaps in teacher preparedness and inadequate formative assessment strategies that collectively diminish pedagogical effectiveness. At the ideological level, globalisation, competing transnational value systems, and the politicisation of national principles contribute to youth disengagement, particularly with respect to constitutional supremacy and the rule of law. Simultaneously, the rapid proliferation of social media platforms and digital content creators introduces novel vectors of civic erosion, as algorithmically amplified discourse increasingly normalises disrespect, legal transgression, and anti-civic behaviour. Drawing on multidisciplinary scholarship in civic education, constitutional law, digital citizenship, and youth studies, this article analyses the implications of these converging threats, including attenuated patriotism, weakened social cohesion, and diminished commitment to national values. It further proposes a Rukun Negara-Centric Civic Education Model grounded in constitutional patriotism, incorporating

curricular reform, experiential learning, digital citizenship education, peer-led initiatives, and enhanced teacher professional development as pathways toward revitalising civic instruction in Malaysia.

1. Introduction

The Rukun Negara constitutes Malaysia's preeminent national philosophy, formally proclaimed on 31 August 1970 as a constitutional and socio-political response to the inter-communal violence of 13 May 1969. The racial conflict of that year exposed profound structural vulnerabilities within Malaysia's plural society, prompting the government to establish the National Consultative Council with a mandate to formulate a unifying national framework capable of restoring public confidence, reinforcing constitutional order, and strengthening inter-ethnic relations (Suffian, 2000; Hamid et al., 2021). The proclamation of the Rukun Negara by the fourth Yang di-Pertuan Agong, Ismail Nasiruddin Shah, on Malaysia's thirteenth Independence Day, gave institutional expression to five foundational principles: Belief in God (*Kepercayaan kepada Tuhan*), Loyalty to King and Country (*Kesetiaan kepada Raja dan Negara*), Supremacy of the Constitution (*Keluhuran Perlembagaan*), Rule of Law (*Kedaulatan Undang-undang*), and Courtesy and Morality (*Kesopanan dan Kesusilaan*). Collectively, these principles function as a normative guide for governance, citizenship, and social conduct in a constitutionally pluralistic state.

The Rukun Negara is not merely a symbolic declaration but is organically linked to the substantive provisions of the Federal Constitution of Malaysia, particularly those relating to constitutional supremacy, the institution of constitutional monarchy, and the rule of law. This constitutional dimension has been affirmed through several landmark judicial decisions. In *Semenyih Jaya Sdn Bhd v Pentadbir Tanah Daerah Hulu Langat* [2017] 3 MLJ 561, the Federal Court explicitly affirmed the doctrine of separation of powers and the inviolability of judicial power as a core expression of constitutional supremacy. Similarly, *Indira Gandhi a/p Mutho v Pengarah Jabatan Agama Islam Perak* [2018] 1 MLJ 545 reinforced the judiciary's constitutional role in safeguarding fundamental liberties and upholding legal accountability. These decisions underscore that the philosophy embodied in the Rukun Negara is not merely ideological but constitutes an integral dimension of Malaysia's evolving constitutional jurisprudence.

Despite the centrality of the Rukun Negara to Malaysia's constitutional and civic identity, the effective transmission of its values to younger generations has become a subject of considerable academic and policy concern. The national education system formally incorporates civic and constitutional education through subjects such as History and Moral Studies; however, prevailing pedagogical approaches remain predominantly examination-oriented, constraining students' capacity to internalise these principles as lived civic commitments rather than as declaratory content to be recalled for assessments (Hashim & Langgulung, 2008; Rahim, 2020). This pedagogical limitation is particularly acute in an era characterised by digital connectivity and globalised public discourse, wherein issues of race, religion, and constitutional identity are frequently contested within polarised online environments. Incidents involving offensive expression directed at national institutions, religious communities, and ethnic groups, regularly investigated under statutes such as the Sedition Act 1948 and the Communications and Multimedia Act 1998 illustrate the persistent tension between freedom of expression and the imperatives of social harmony and constitutional order.

Against this backdrop, this article advances three principal objectives. First, it critically examines the structural, pedagogical, and digital challenges that undermine effective Rukun Negara education. Second, it analyses the civic, constitutional, and social implications of these challenges through the theoretical lens of constitutional patriotism. Third, it proposes a structured Rukun Negara-Centric Civic Education Model designed to reinforce constitutional literacy, ethical digital citizenship, and national unity among Malaysian youth. By identifying systemic gaps within existing educational and institutional frameworks, the study seeks to contribute policy-relevant recommendations for educators, curriculum planners, legal practitioners, and government stakeholders committed to sustaining Malaysia's constitutional democracy.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Rukun Negara as a Framework for Civic Identity and National Unity

Scholarship on the Rukun Negara consistently identifies it as a foundational ideological instrument for civic identity formation and inter-ethnic cohesion in Malaysia. Introduced against the backdrop of the May 1969 communal conflict, the five principles were designed to provide a shared normative and constitutional foundation for a society characterised by significant ethnic, cultural, and religious heterogeneity (Suffian, 2000; Hamid et al., 2021). Additionally, its five guiding principles are designed to integrate diverse communities and promote harmonious coexistence, acting as an “integrative key” to Malaysia’s stability and success (Hamid et al., 2021). Mahmod (2014) characterises the Rukun Negara as a unifying civic doctrine whose principles function not merely as symbolic declarations but as actionable guidelines shaping public conduct, governance accountability, and civic responsibility. This framing situates the Rukun Negara within broader debates about constitutional democracy and the normative prerequisites of a functioning plural society.

A substantial body of empirical scholarship establishes that youth awareness of the Rukun Negara correlates positively with patriotism, social trust, and cross-cultural tolerance (Abdullah et al., 2016; Mohd Rizal & Thay, 2018; Othman et al., 2021). This relationship is theoretically explicable through Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), which posits that individuals derive a significant component of their self-concept from membership in salient social groups. When internalised effectively, the Rukun Negara functions as a symbolic marker of collective national identity, encouraging citizens to perceive themselves as members of a shared political community transcending ethnic and religious particularisms. The pedagogical implication is that civic education programmes anchored in the Rukun Negara may play a formative role in reducing intergroup conflict and reinforcing inclusive national identity.

The Rukun Negara is often viewed as a social contract or compromise, balancing the interests of the indigenous Malay community with the peaceful coexistence of all national groups, thus underpinning the nation’s civic identity and sense of belonging. However, recent political changes have led to the neglect of these principles, resulting in increased inter-communal conflict and weakened ethnic harmony, highlighting the ongoing need for Rukun Negara-centric civic education to reinforce its role as a unifying framework (Din et al., 2025). Community initiatives such as the Neighborhood Watch Scheme (KRT) have demonstrated the practical application of Rukun Negara’s principles in strengthening inter-ethnic harmony and social cohesion at the grassroots level (Kaspin et al., 2025).

Overall, the Rukun Negara remains central to Malaysia's efforts to build a cohesive civic identity and promote national unity, especially in the digital era (Hassan et al., 2023).

2.2 Civic Education, Constitutional Literacy, and Democratic Citizenship

A distinct strand of scholarship examines the relationship between Rukun Negara-based civic education and the cultivation of democratic citizenship. Researchers consistently argue that integrating constitutional literacy into the educational curriculum strengthens students' understanding of democratic institutions and their responsibilities within the constitutional order (Lim & Hoon, 2019; Omar et al., 2020). Mahmod (2014) contends that civic education grounded in national principles cultivates responsible citizenship by fostering respect for constitutional governance, public institutions, and the rule of law — precisely the values enshrined in the third and fourth pillars of the Rukun Negara. Longitudinal research further indicates that structured exposure to civic education programmes is associated with higher levels of civic participation and political engagement in adulthood (Lim & Hoon, 2019). These findings underscore the democratic significance of civic instruction beyond its immediate nation-building objectives.

The concept of constitutional patriotism, developed by Habermas (1992) and further elaborated by Müller (2007), provides a theoretically productive framework for understanding these dynamics. Constitutional patriotism posits that loyalty to the nation should be grounded not in ethnic or cultural particularity but in allegiance to universal constitutional principles — the rule of law, fundamental rights, and democratic self-governance. Applied to the Malaysian context, this framework suggests that Rukun Negara education should be reconceived as an exercise in constitutional engagement, cultivating rational, principled loyalty to constitutional values rather than mere emotional attachment to national symbols. Horsley (2022) similarly argues that teaching constitutional documents as primary sources equips students with analytical skills to evaluate the quality of civic information and resist the distortions of misinformation.

2.3 Pedagogical Limitations in Civic and Rukun Negara Education

Despite broadly positive assessments of Rukun Negara education in principle, the literature identifies persistent structural and conceptual deficiencies in its implementation. The most frequently documented concern relates to the dominance of examination-oriented pedagogy, which encourages memorisation of civic content without facilitating critical reflection or behavioural internalisation (Hashim & Langgulung, 2008; Rahim, 2020). Empirical studies corroborate this diagnosis: Zain et al. (2019) found that while Malaysian students generally demonstrated accurate declarative knowledge of the five principles, their capacity to apply these values in contextualised real-life situations remained markedly limited. This gap between cognitive acquisition and civic practice represents a fundamental weakness in current curricular approaches.

Teacher preparedness constitutes a further structural constraint. Khoo (2018) identifies significant deficiencies in teacher training programmes specifically oriented toward Rukun Negara pedagogy, resulting in inconsistent and frequently superficial delivery of civic content in classroom settings. Omar et al. (2020) similarly observe that conventional assessment methods fail to capture the nuanced understanding and practical application of civic values, thereby perpetuating an examination culture that is misaligned with the deeper purposes of civic education. These findings collectively support calls for a

fundamental reimagination of pedagogical approaches to national civic education in Malaysia.

2.4 Digital Culture and Emerging Threats to Civic Norms

More recent scholarship has begun to map the complex intersections between digital media culture and civic value formation among Malaysian youth. While digital platforms offer opportunities for enhancing civic engagement and broadening access to civic information, they simultaneously expose young people to misinformation, polarised political discourse, and normative environments that can actively undermine civic values (Lim et al., 2023). Annuar (2024) demonstrates that digital participation among Malaysian youth frequently occurs within algorithmically driven media ecosystems that amplify sensational, divisive, and emotionally charged content, creating conditions antithetical to constructive civic engagement. The rapid growth of social media usage with the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) reporting over 26 million social media users as of 2020, a majority of whom are youth amplifies the civic significance of these digital dynamics (MCMC, 2020).

Research on digital citizenship theory (Ribble, 2015; ISTE, 2016) emphasises that ethical online behaviour, digital respect, and responsible participation constitute essential competencies for contemporary civic life. Tan et al. (2017) and Salleh et al. (2019) demonstrate that participatory and technology-mediated teaching approaches can substantially enhance civic awareness and ethical reasoning among students. Nevertheless, the existing literature reveals a significant gap between the normative ideals of digital citizenship and the social media realities experienced by Malaysian youth, creating a tension that current civic education frameworks have not adequately addressed.

3. Research Methods

3.1 Research Design

This study employs a qualitative exploratory research design to examine how the principles of the Rukun Negara are understood, operationalised, and challenged within Malaysia's civic education system and broader digital environment. A qualitative approach is appropriate given the study's objective of interpreting meanings, institutional practices, and social dynamics surrounding civic values rather than generating quantitative outcomes. The research is guided by a constructivist epistemological orientation, which recognises that civic identity, national values, and moral norms are socially produced through complex interactions between educational institutions, legal frameworks, and youth culture (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This perspective informs the study's interest in how Rukun Negara principles are internalised, reinterpreted, or contested by young people within contemporary Malaysian society.

3.2 Data Collection and Document Analysis

Data were gathered through purposive documentary analysis of materials representing key institutional and social domains. The corpus includes national policy and curriculum documents notably the National Education Blueprint and civic education syllabi alongside primary legal instruments including the Federal Constitution, the Education Act 1996, the Communications and Multimedia Act 1998, the Sedition Act 1948, and the Personal Data

Protection Act 2010. Selected judicial decisions involving constitutional principles and digital speech were also incorporated to examine the legal dimensions of civic responsibility. In addition, samples of social media discourse, institutionally sponsored civic campaigns, and digital content creator material were analysed to capture how youth engage with and at times contest national values in online spaces. The triangulation of educational, legal, and digital data sources provides a comprehensive analytical perspective on how Rukun Negara principles operate across multiple institutional contexts.

3.3 Analytical Framework

Thematic analysis was conducted following the six-phase reflexive framework developed by Braun and Clarke (2006). The process commenced with systematic familiarisation through repeated close reading and annotation of all documents. Initial coding identified concepts relating to civic identity, moral behaviour, constitutional awareness, digital conduct, and national unity. These codes were subsequently organised into broader analytical categories corresponding to educational, legal, and digital domains. Through iterative review, four overarching themes were consolidated: (1) curriculum design and pedagogical effectiveness in Rukun Negara education; (2) digital-era challenges to civic norms, including misinformation and algorithmic media effects; (3) legal and institutional frameworks governing civic education and digital accountability; and (4) policy interventions for revitalising constitutional civic education. Analytical findings were interpreted through the theoretical lens of constitutional patriotism, supplemented by digital citizenship and civic education scholarship.

To enhance methodological rigour, triangulation was employed across legal, educational, and digital data sources, enabling cross-validation of interpretive findings. Reflexive memo writing was maintained throughout the analytical process to document coding decisions and mitigate potential researcher bias (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The study acknowledges several limitations. The reliance on documentary data rather than primary data from classroom observations or interviews with educators and students constrains direct insight into lived pedagogical experiences. Digital content is also inherently mutable, and online material reviewed during data collection may subsequently be modified or removed. Furthermore, official policy documents necessarily reflect institutional perspectives and may not fully capture the range of social and subaltern viewpoints on Rukun Negara education.

4. Findings & Discussion

4.1 Theoretical Foundations: Constitutional Patriotism and Social Identity

The findings of this study are interpreted through an integrative theoretical framework drawing on constitutional patriotism (Habermas, 1992; Müller, 2007), Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), constructivist learning theory (Vygotsky, 1978), and digital citizenship theory (Ribble, 2015). Constitutional patriotism provides the normative foundation for the proposed model by arguing that civic loyalty should be grounded in rational allegiance to constitutional values rule of law, fundamental rights, and democratic governance rather than primordial ethnic or cultural attachment. This framework is particularly well-suited to Malaysia's multicultural constitutional context, wherein the Rukun Negara's third and fourth pillars constitutional supremacy and rule of law provide explicit normative anchors for civic identity formation.

Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) illuminates the mechanisms through which national identity is constructed and sustained. When Rukun Negara principles are meaningfully internalised, they function as superordinate identity categories capable of transcending ethnic and religious boundaries, thereby reducing intergroup tension and reinforcing a shared Malaysian civic identity. Constructivist learning theory (Vygotsky, 1978) provides the pedagogical rationale for the study's proposed interventions, emphasising that deep civic learning requires active construction of knowledge through social interaction, collaborative inquiry, and situated experience rather than passive reception of transmitted content. These theoretical foundations collectively inform the study's critique of prevailing pedagogical approaches and its recommendations for reform.

4.2 Structural Threats to Rukun Negara Education

4.2.1 Curricular Misalignment and Examination-Oriented Pedagogy

The analysis reveals a fundamental misalignment between the stated objectives of Rukun Negara education and the curricular structures through which it is delivered. Across subject areas, the formal integration of Rukun Negara principles is operationalised primarily through summative examination requirements, which incentivise declarative knowledge recall rather than experiential civic engagement. This finding corroborates Hashim and Langgulung (2008) and Rahim (2020), who identify examination-oriented pedagogy as a persistent structural impediment to meaningful civic education in Malaysia. The consequences of this pedagogical model are evidenced by Zain et al.'s (2019) finding that students can accurately recite the five principles while demonstrating limited capacity to apply them in contextualised civic scenarios.

Constitutional literacy is particularly underdeveloped within the current curricular framework. Document analysis confirms that substantive instruction in constitutional principles is largely confined to Form Six civics courses and post-secondary programmes in law and political science. Given that the Rukun Negara's third and fourth pillars explicitly enshrine constitutional supremacy and rule of law as foundational civic values, the absence of constitutional education in mainstream secondary schooling represents a critical gap. Horsley (2022) argues persuasively that teaching constitutional documents as primary sources equips students with the analytical literacy necessary to evaluate civic information critically and engage meaningfully with democratic institutions capacities essential for the formation of constitutionally literate citizens.

4.2.2 Teacher Preparedness and Assessment Deficiencies

A second structural dimension concerns the preparedness of educators to deliver civic content effectively. As Khoo (2018) documents, teacher training programmes in Malaysia lack dedicated provision for Rukun Negara pedagogy, resulting in inconsistent and frequently superficial classroom delivery. Without teachers who are equipped with both substantive knowledge of constitutional principles and the pedagogical skills to facilitate experiential civic learning, curricular reforms will remain limited in their practical effect. The assessment dimension compounds this problem: Omar et al. (2020) observe that conventional examination formats are poorly suited to evaluating students' internalisation of civic values, necessitating the development of more contextualised, competency-based assessment instruments aligned with civic learning objectives.

4.3 Declining Civic Consciousness and Legal Literacy Among Youth

4.3.1 Youth Disengagement and Constitutional Unfamiliarity

The study identifies a discernible pattern of civic disengagement among Malaysian youth, characterised by limited awareness of constitutional provisions, attenuated patriotism, and weakened commitment to national principles. Globalisation exposes young Malaysians to a diverse range of transnational ideologies and value systems that may compete with or displace domestically rooted civic identities (Lee, 2021). Noor (2019) highlights the distinctive challenge of promoting national unity through the Rukun Negara while simultaneously respecting the cultural distinctiveness of Malaysia's multiethnic communities a tension that, if mismanaged, risks engendering perceptions of cultural homogenisation or ideological imposition.

The politicisation of Rukun Negara principles presents a further obstacle to effective civic education. Abdul Rahman et al. (2020) observe that partisan contestation over the interpretation of national values can generate youth skepticism, with some young Malaysians perceiving civic education as a vehicle for political indoctrination rather than genuine democratic formation. This dynamic is particularly evident with respect to the principles of constitutional supremacy and rule of law, which have periodically become sites of political controversy. Addressing this perception requires pedagogical approaches that emphasise the universal, principle-based character of constitutional loyalty precisely the contribution of constitutional patriotism as a theoretical framework.

4.3.2 Weakening Patriotism and Social Cohesion

The documented decline in patriotic sentiment among Malaysian youth reflects the cumulative effect of the structural challenges identified above. Othman et al. (2021) note that a sense of national belonging depends not merely on formal civic education but on the quality of civic experiences in multiple social contexts family, community, and public life. Johari (2019) identifies globalisation, changing educational priorities, and the influence of social media as contributing factors to attenuated national identity among younger generations. Evans and Kelly (2002) provide a broader comparative perspective, arguing that the erosion of national pride and historical consciousness can contribute to weakened civic culture, diminished institutional trust, and long-term threats to social cohesion. These findings underscore the urgency of reinvigorating Rukun Negara education as a substantive national priority.

4.4. Digital Culture as an Emerging Civic Threat

4.4.1 Social Media, Algorithmic Discourse, and Civic Norm Erosion

The analysis of digital media environments reveals a significant and undertheorised dimension of the challenges facing Rukun Negara education. The rapid proliferation of social media platforms encompassing WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok, and YouTube has transformed the communicative landscape within which Malaysian youth form their civic identities. As Annuar (2024) demonstrates, digital participation frequently occurs within algorithmically curated environments that prioritise engaging but potentially divisive or sensationalist content. The fifth pillar of the Rukun Negara,

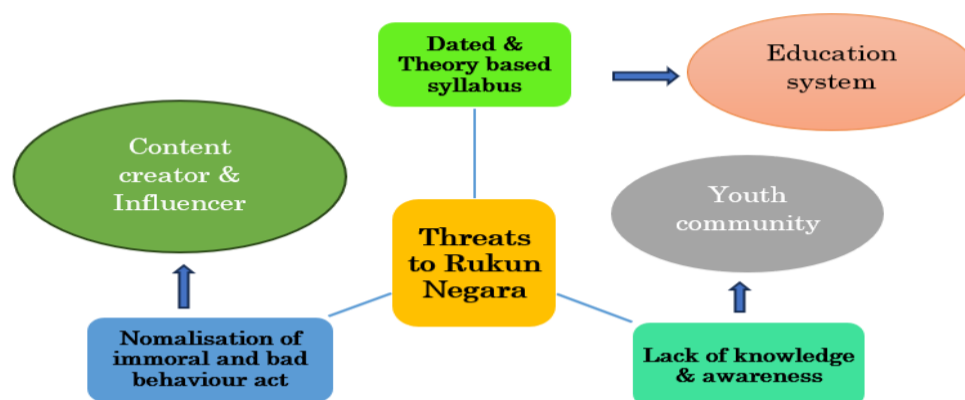
Courtesy and Morality is particularly vulnerable to erosion within social media contexts characterised by anonymous interactions, incivility, and the normalisation of hostile discourse. The cultural normalisation of disrespect and interpersonal aggression in online spaces represents a structural challenge to the civic norms that Rukun Negara education seeks to instil.

The emergence of a substantial digital content creator ecosystem in Malaysia further complicates the civic education landscape. With over 26 million social media users as of 2020 (MCMC, 2020), Malaysia possesses a large and active online public, within which content creators exercise considerable influence over youth attitudes, behaviours, and value orientations. Cases of digital content attracting regulatory intervention including proceedings under the Communications and Multimedia Act 1998, such as *Samsudin Mokhtar v Public Prosecutor* [2020] and the Amira Mutsara case [2018] illustrate the legal dimensions of the tension between digital expression and constitutional civic values. These cases highlight the inadequacy of existing legal frameworks in providing systematic governance of online conduct that undermines civic norms.

4.4.2 Legal and Institutional Gaps in Digital Civic Governance

The documentary analysis identifies three mutually reinforcing institutional failures. First, constitutional values are inadequately operationalised within the national curriculum, with constitutional literacy effectively confined to specialist post-secondary education. Second, digital behaviour increasingly diverges from civic norms, normalising legal ignorance, moral relativism, and disrespect for public institutions. Third, existing legal frameworks lack a clear statutory mandate for Rukun Negara education or systematic provisions for digital civic accountability. The Communications and Multimedia Act 1998 and the Sedition Act 1948 provide reactive legal instruments for addressing egregious violations but do not constitute a coherent framework for proactively cultivating digital civic responsibility. Viewed through the lens of constitutional patriotism, these institutional failures collectively impede the development of rational, principled loyalty to the constitutional order among Malaysian youth.

Diagram 1: Threats to Rukun Negara Pillars



5. Recommendations

5.1 A Rukun Negara-Centric Civic Education Model: Policy Recommendations

5.1.1 *Constitutional Literacy in Secondary Education*

The study's primary recommendation concerns the formal introduction of constitutional literacy as a substantive component of the secondary school curriculum, integrated across relevant subject areas rather than confined to post-secondary specialisations. Drawing on Horsley's (2022) arguments regarding primary source constitutional instruction, the proposed model advocates for teaching the Federal Constitution as a living civic document, enabling students to understand how constitutional principles including those directly reflected in the Rukun Negara govern public institutions, protect individual rights, and define the boundaries of lawful conduct. This constitutional dimension should encompass the separation of powers, judicial review, fundamental liberties, and the legal framework governing citizenship. The constitutional amendment process, including landmark democratic reforms such as the UNDI 18 initiative that lowered the voting age from 21 to 18 years (Suruhanjaya Pilihanraya Malaysia, 2022), provides contextually relevant material for engaging students with constitutional change as an active civic process. Such instruction directly addresses the knowledge deficit identified in the literature and equips young Malaysians to engage substantively with the constitutional principles that underpin their civic identity.

5.1.2 *Experiential and Constructivist Pedagogical Approaches*

Translating the constitutional patriotism framework into effective pedagogy requires a fundamental shift from didactic, examination-focused instruction toward experiential and constructivist learning methodologies. Drawing on Salleh et al. (2019) and Tan et al. (2017), the proposed model incorporates community service projects, cultural exchange programmes, collaborative problem-solving activities, and civic simulation exercises as core pedagogical mechanisms for internalising Rukun Negara values. These approaches are grounded in Vygotsky's (1978) constructivist learning theory, which emphasises that deep understanding is achieved through active engagement, social interaction, and the application of principles in authentic contexts. By providing students with structured opportunities to practise civic values — including inter-ethnic cooperation, respectful dialogue, and constitutional reasoning — experiential learning creates the behavioural foundations for enduring civic commitment rather than transient declarative knowledge.

5.1.3 *Digital Citizenship Education and Regulatory Governance*

Addressing the civic threats posed by digital culture requires a dual response combining educational intervention and regulatory governance. Within the educational domain, the proposed model recommends the systematic integration of digital citizenship education grounded in Ribble's (2015) framework and aligned with ISTE standards across all secondary school subjects. This should encompass instruction in ethical online communication, critical evaluation of digital information, understanding of the legal frameworks governing digital expression, and the cultivation of constructive online civic participation. Such education directly operationalises the Rukun Negara's fifth pillar, Courtesy and Morality, within the digital sphere, providing students with the normative and analytical tools to navigate algorithmically mediated public discourse responsibly.

Within the regulatory domain, the study recommends legislative reform to establish a coherent statutory framework for digital civic accountability. This should include enhanced content governance provisions under the Communications and Multimedia Act 1998, clear regulatory guidance for digital content creators regarding civic and constitutional obligations, and robust enforcement mechanisms proportionate to the severity of civic norm violations. Lim et al. (2023) demonstrate that digital platforms, gamified civic learning tools, and online campaigns can significantly increase youth engagement with national values indicating that digital media can serve as a vector for civic education rather than exclusively a threat to it, provided that appropriate regulatory and pedagogical frameworks are in place.

5.1.4 Peer-Led Civic Initiatives and Community Engagement

The proposed model incorporates peer-led and community-based strategies as complementary mechanisms for reinforcing Rukun Negara values beyond the formal classroom. Drawing on Aziz and Ibrahim (2020), the model advocates for structured peer mentoring programmes in which senior students assume leadership roles in facilitating civic learning for younger cohorts, thereby simultaneously promoting knowledge transfer and leadership development aligned with the Rukun Negara's emphasis on civic responsibility. Community reinforcement involving parents, community leaders, and civil society organisations in supporting and modelling civic values provides the social ecological context within which formal civic education can be sustained and extended. Omar et al. (2020) observe that the involvement of families and communities in reinforcing Rukun Negara principles significantly enhances the durability of civic learning outcomes, particularly across socio-economically diverse contexts. National historical sites and commemorative civic events additionally offer experiential resources for cultivating patriotic identification grounded in collective historical memory (Johari, 2019).

5.1.5 Teacher Professional Development in Civic Pedagogy

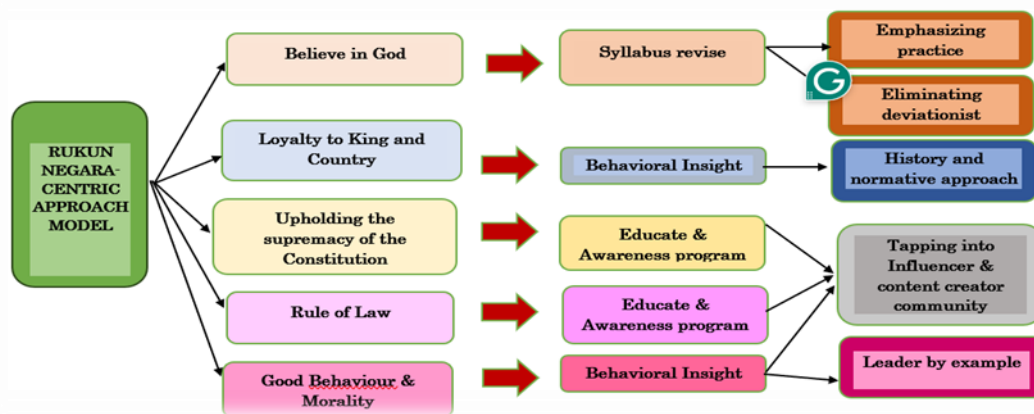
The effective implementation of the proposed model is contingent on substantial investment in teacher professional development. Khoo (2018) identifies the absence of dedicated civic pedagogy training as a primary cause of inconsistent and superficial Rukun Negara instruction in Malaysian schools. The model therefore recommends the development of comprehensive, accredited teacher training programmes specifically oriented toward constitutional civic education, incorporating both subject matter knowledge including constitutional law, democratic theory, and digital citizenship and the pedagogical competencies required to facilitate experiential, dialogic, and reflective learning. Such programmes should incorporate ongoing professional learning communities, peer observation, and formative feedback mechanisms to sustain pedagogical development over time. Aligning teacher assessment and promotion frameworks with demonstrated competency in civic pedagogy would provide institutional incentives reinforcing commitment to this dimension of professional practice.

5.1.6. Legal Reinforcement and Policy Mandates

Sustained implementation of the proposed civic education model requires strong legal and policy foundations. The study recommends that the Education Act 1996 be amended

to include an explicit statutory mandate for Rukun Negara-centric civic education as a core curriculum component at all levels of secondary schooling. This mandate should specify minimum instructional requirements for constitutional literacy, define competency standards for civic learning outcomes, and establish accountability mechanisms for institutional compliance. Complementary policy provisions should require the development of standardised, competency-based civic assessment instruments aligned with constitutional learning objectives, replacing or supplementing existing examination formats that inadequately capture civic understanding. The integration of civic education outcomes into national educational performance indicators would provide systemic leverage for sustaining the priority of civic learning within institutional frameworks.

Diagram 2: The Rukun Negara- Centric Approach Model



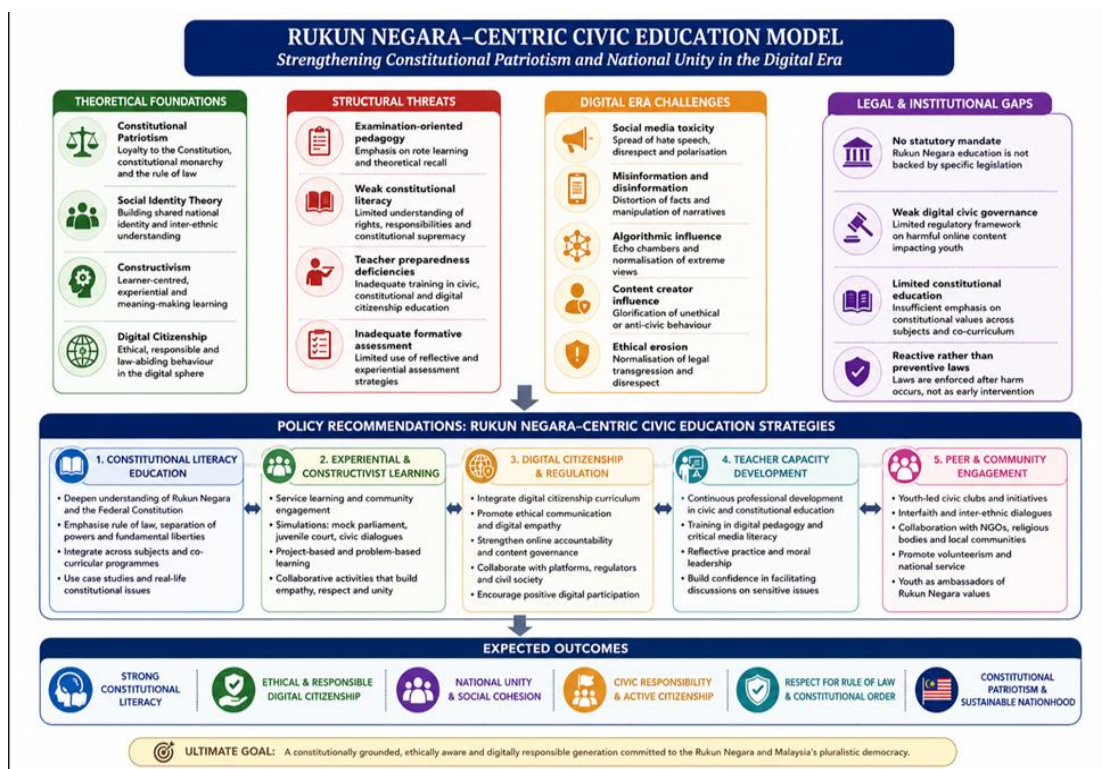
6. Conclusion

The Rukun Negara remains Malaysia's most coherent and constitutionally grounded civic philosophy, providing a normative foundation for national unity, inter-ethnic cohesion, and democratic governance. However, the capacity of the Rukun Negara to fulfil this function is significantly contingent on the depth and effectiveness of its educational transmission to successive generations of Malaysian youth. This study has demonstrated that prevailing approaches to civic education are structurally inadequate: they are characterised by examination-oriented pedagogy that privileges declarative knowledge over civic practice, insufficient constitutional literacy at the secondary school level, systemic deficiencies in teacher preparedness, and the absence of robust frameworks for navigating the civic challenges posed by digital media culture.

Anchored in the theoretical framework of constitutional patriotism, this study proposes a Rukun Negara-Centric Civic Education Model that reconceives civic instruction as an exercise in constitutional engagement rather than rote ideological transmission. The model's five integrated components constitutional literacy in secondary education, experiential and constructivist learning, digital citizenship education and regulatory governance, peer-led and community-based initiatives, and teacher professional development collectively address the identified structural gaps and provide a coherent pathway toward revitalising civic education in Malaysia. The recommended legislative reforms and policy mandates provide the institutional architecture necessary to ensure sustained implementation.

Looking ahead, the effectiveness of the proposed model will depend on meaningful political commitment, cross-institutional collaboration, and willingness to undertake substantive pedagogical reform. Future research should complement this study's documentary analysis through longitudinal empirical investigation of the civic outcomes associated with constitutionally grounded civic education programmes, including comparative studies with analogous national contexts. As Malaysia navigates the opportunities and challenges of an increasingly digitalised and globally connected society, ensuring that the Rukun Negara remains a living constitutional ethic genuinely internalised by a new generation of civic-minded Malaysians constitutes both an educational imperative and a democratic necessity.

Diagram 3: Mapping of the Rukun Negara Civic Education Model



Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

This study was exempted from ethics approval as it did not involve fieldwork or the collection of data involving human participants.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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