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## TRANSFORMING HRM EDUCATION THROUGH VALUES-BASED PEDAGOGY: THE ADAB+ APPROACH AND CORPORATE RELEVANCE

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### ABSTRACT

This study introduces ADAB+, an educational innovation at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) that extends the earlier ADAB framework rooted in the values of *adab* and *amanah*. ADAB+ incorporates *akhlaq* and the principle of *ihsan*, with the intention of nurturing honesty, empathy, and compassion as integral aspects of student learning. Grounded in the Malay worldview (*pandangan semesta*) and core Malay values, ADAB+ situates Human Resource Management (HRM) not merely as a managerial discipline but as a humanistic field that embodies cultural and ethical dimensions. To understand how students experience this innovation, an action research approach was employed. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews designed to capture participants' lived experiences and the meanings they ascribed to their engagement with ADAB+. Analysis focused on identifying the essence of these experiences, highlighting how students internalized values and reflected upon their roles as future professionals. Findings reveal that students associated ADAB+ with heightened ethical awareness, deeper engagement in classroom interactions, and a renewed appreciation of local knowledge systems often overlooked in

conventional HRM education. Moreover, students emphasized the personal resonance of values such as sincerity and compassion, which they perceived as shaping both their academic development and future practice. By centering on lived experience, this study underscores ADAB+ as a culturally responsive model that humanises HRM education, offering an alternative to Western-centric paradigms and advancing pedagogical practices that harmonise moral, cultural, and professional learning.

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## **1. Introduction**

Human Resource Management (HRM) in Malaysia has historically drawn heavily from Western paradigms that privilege efficiency, standardisation, and measurable outcomes. Such approaches, while instrumental in advancing managerial professionalism, risk overshadowing the relational, ethical, and cultural dimensions of people management (Fontaine & Richardson, 2003). Over time, this has shaped both organisational practices and the way HRM is taught in Malaysian universities, with students socialised into frameworks that emphasise productivity, strategic alignment, and performance metrics above all else. In this environment, softer yet equally vital qualities such as compassion, sincerity, and moral sensitivity have been steadily displaced (Wee Chan Au et al., 2023).

This orientation is not confined to corporate structures alone. Within Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), which dominate Malaysia's business landscape, empirical research has shown that many owner-managers naturally adopt a performance-centric approach, only occasionally integrating relational practices when guided by personal conviction or religious principles (Wee Chan Au et al., 2023). The emphasis on profitability, output, and measurable success has created a professional culture where ethical care remains sporadic rather than institutionalised. For younger generations entering the workforce, this focus on quantifiable success has further contributed to the erosion of values such as empathy, collective responsibility, and sincerity. These qualities, while often perceived as intangible, are in fact central to the moral foundation required for sustainable and humane people management (Md Aroff, 2014)

In light of these challenges, there is a pressing need to reorient HRM education toward a model that embeds ethical consciousness and cultural grounding alongside managerial expertise. Recognising this, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) pioneered the ADAB module as a university-wide initiative to reintroduce values-based learning in higher education. The ADAB framework is built around three pillars: *ketuhanan* (divinity), *kemanusiaan* (humanity), and *kelestarian alam* (environmental sustainability). It aims to guide students not only toward

academic achievement but also toward holistic character formation. Central to this approach are the values of *adab* (proper conduct), *amanah* (trustworthiness), and ethical awareness, which collectively nurture responsible citizenship, integrity, and moral accountability across disciplines

Building upon the foundation of A.D.A.B. developed at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), this study advances ADAB+ as a discipline-specific expansion tailored for Human Resource Management (HRM) education. Unlike the broader ADAB framework, ADAB+ integrates additional ethical constructs such as *akhlaq* (virtuous character) and the principle of *ihsan* (excellence rooted in sincerity and compassion). It also draws on core Malay values and the *pandangan semesta* (Malay worldview), thereby offering a pedagogical model that is both culturally grounded and aligned with contemporary corporate practice. This initiative recognises that HRM, at its essence, is concerned with people and relationships. Accordingly, it must transcend mechanistic approaches to incorporate moral reasoning, cultural consciousness, and ethical sensibility (Endicott et al., 2003).

The ADAB+ pedagogy is implemented through lectures, guided discussions, and reflective exercises, designed to encourage students to critically engage with values in relation to their future roles as HR professionals. The model was developed through iterative cycles of classroom application and refinement, aligning with interpretive approaches in education research that emphasise meaning-making and lived experiences (Ironside, 2006). Qualitative insights from student reflections and interviews reveal that the ADAB+ initiative fosters stronger ethical awareness, increased sensitivity to interpersonal relationships, and a deeper appreciation for indigenous knowledge systems often overshadowed by Western-centric curricula. Students reported that ADAB+ not only shaped their academic engagement but also influenced their personal outlook on leadership and responsibility, linking classroom learning with anticipated corporate realities (Wee Chan Au et al., 2023).

The corporate relevance of ADAB+ lies in its capacity to prepare graduates who can bring relational and ethical sensitivity into organisational life. In contemporary business environments, companies are increasingly evaluated not only on financial performance but also on their commitments to corporate social responsibility, employee well-being, and environmental, social, and governance (ESG) standards (Bhandari et al., 2022). HR professionals shaped by the ADAB+ framework is therefore equipped to advance corporate cultures that balance efficiency with integrity. They are able to humanise workplace practices by embedding sincerity, trust, and compassion into recruitment, performance evaluation, and employee development. This stands in contrast to narrowly defined efficiency-driven practices that may deliver short-term results but weaken long-term organisational resilience and trust.

Furthermore, ADAB+ graduates are well-positioned to contribute to the institutionalisation of ethical standards in Malaysian corporations. By grounding HRM practices in *ihsan* and *akhlaq*, they are likely to prioritise fairness in employment policies, empathy in conflict resolution, and transparency in managerial decisions. These competencies are increasingly valued in a globalised corporate environment where relational capital and ethical reputation are as important as technical efficiency (Wang, 2014). In this sense,

ADAB+ not only responds to critiques of Western-centric HRM education but also aligns Malaysian students with global demands for values-driven leadership.

In summary, the ADAB+ innovation represents more than an educational reform. It is a deliberate attempt to reframe HRM pedagogy in Malaysia through the integration of *adab*, *amanah*, *akhlaq*, and *ihsan*, anchored within the Malay worldview. By cultivating relational and moral awareness among students, ADAB+ offers a scalable model for rehumanising HRM education and bridging the gap between academic training and corporate practice. In doing so, it positions Malaysian HRM education not as a passive recipient of Western paradigms but as an active contributor to the global conversation on ethical leadership and values-based management.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. Systemic Failures in HRM and the Imperative for Ethical Reform in Malaysian HR Education**

Human Resource Management (HRM) education in Malaysia remains heavily influenced by Western, outcome-driven frameworks that prioritise performance measurement and administrative efficiency, often at the expense of ethical and humanistic considerations (Fontaine & Richardson, 2003). This orientation has resulted in a disjuncture between technical competency and moral responsibility in professional practice. The consequences of this gap are reflected not only in higher education, where student misbehaviour, cultural insensitivity, and emotional disengagement are increasingly reported by (Bernama, 2024b; Yong et al., 2024), but also in the workplace, where HR practices have been criticised for overlooking relational ethics and care-based responsibilities (Akanmu et al., 2025).

The neglect of ethical grounding in HRM education is mirrored in the rising number of workplace abuse cases in Malaysia. Media and government reports document persistent issues such as bullying, harassment, constructive dismissal, and retaliation against whistleblowers (Parkaran, 2024; The Malaysian Reserve, 2024). For instance, the Ministry of Health recorded more than 350 workplace bullying complaints between 2022 and 2024, yet only a fraction were formally investigated, leaving victims without adequate protection (Nizam & Aina, 2025). Cyberbullying in the workplace has emerged as a critical concern, significantly affecting employees' mental health and overall productivity (Bernama, 2024a). Incidents of workplace bullying can also expose shortcomings in HR, when HR fails to address or prevent such behaviour, employees may experience increased stress, disengagement, and reduced job satisfaction, ultimately undermining organisational performance.

Additionally, issues of sexual harassment and gender-based discrimination remain unresolved. A widely publicised case involving the dismissal of a bank employee after she reported harassment by her superior revealed deep flaws in organisational justice systems and the protection of vulnerable employees (Shahirah, 2024). Beyond white-collar contexts, foreign workers continue to experience exploitative conditions such as unsafe environments, excessive working hours, and withheld wages, pointing to systemic failures in upholding employee dignity (Zaugg, 2020).

These persistent cases of HR-related abuses underscore an urgent gap in the moral and cultural grounding of HRM education in Malaysia. Current curricula risk producing graduates who are technically skilled yet ethically unaware, thereby perpetuating cycles of workplace mistreatment, employee disempowerment, and declining organisational trust. Such trends undermine not only employee well-being and organisational integrity but also Malaysia's broader aspirations for sustainable development and equitable labour practices. Addressing this issue requires a culturally responsive and values-based educational innovation. The ADAB Plus model offers such an approach by integrating principles of *adab*, *amanah*, and *ihsan* into HRM pedagogy, thereby aligning technical knowledge with ethical conduct and culturally embedded moral reasoning. By cultivating morally conscious and socially responsible practitioners, ADAB Plus has the potential to fill the existing gap in HRM education and mitigate the systemic challenges facing Malaysia's workplaces.

## **2.2. A.D.A.B in Education**

The Malaysian National Education Philosophy aspires to nurture individuals who are physically, emotionally, spiritually, and intellectually balanced. This holistic vision is further strengthened by the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2015–2025 (Higher Education), which underscores the importance of producing graduates who are not only technically competent but also morally responsible and socially engaged. In the context of globalisation and rapid technological advancement, education cannot be limited to technical expertise or professional skills alone. There is a growing need for graduates who are rooted in ethical values, culturally sensitive, and capable of contributing positively to society with a deep sense of responsibility toward God, humanity, and the environment.

Responding to this national aspiration, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) introduced the ADAB Model, a pedagogical framework designed to integrate values-based education into teaching and learning. The foundation of this model rests on two key principles: *adab* and *amanah*. *Adab* refers to proper conduct, encompassing respect, humility, and ethical awareness in one's relationship with the Creator, fellow human beings, and the environment. It guides learners toward the cultivation of discipline, respect for knowledge, and an appreciation for the role of educators as transmitters of wisdom (CIDL, 2025). *Amanah* refers to trustworthiness and accountability, reminding learners and educators alike of their responsibilities as vicegerents of God on earth. This principle emphasises responsibility not only toward individual tasks but also toward society and the natural environment. Together, *adab* and *amanah* provide a moral and spiritual foundation that ensures education becomes a transformative and holistic process.

The ADAB Model is organised into four interconnected components (CIDL, 2025). The first component is Analysis, which focuses on aligning educational content with intended learning outcomes, anticipating the needs of learners, and situating knowledge within community and workplace contexts. The second component is Design, which structures learning experiences to foster connectedness to knowledge, people, the environment, and the Creator, while encouraging contextualised and respectful learning interactions. The third component is Assess, which prioritises continuous and reflective evaluation. This form of assessment goes beyond measuring academic knowledge to include indicators such as engagement, interpersonal respect, and the development of transversal skills necessary for life and work. The fourth component is built in Belief, which embeds reflection, values, and conviction to ensure that

knowledge is internalised and becomes a guiding principle in both personal and professional domains.

Supporting these four processes are seven key pedagogical elements that encourage academics to integrate values meaningfully into their teaching delivery. These elements emphasise reflection, sustainability, and ethical responsibility, ensuring that the classroom becomes a space for character formation as much as for intellectual growth. Importantly, the ADAB Model highlights that values are not restricted to individual behaviour but extend to collective and ecological responsibilities. By instilling civic-mindedness and environmental stewardship, the model prepares students to act responsibly in society while remaining sensitive to global challenges.

Overall, the UiTM ADAB Model reflects a culturally grounded and humanistic pedagogy that bridges technical knowledge with moral development. It redefines education as a process of cultivating balanced individuals who are intellectually capable, ethically anchored, and socially responsible. Through the integration of adab and amanah, the model produces graduates who embody respect, integrity, and compassion. These qualities are essential for advancing sustainable development and nurturing ethical leadership in contemporary society.

### **2.3. ADAB+ Expansion in HRM**

ADAB+ is not simply an extension of UiTM's ADAB framework; it represents a paradigm shift in Human Resource Management (HRM) education by embedding an indigenous, values-driven pedagogy that challenges the dominance of Western-centric HRM models. Conventional HRM teaching often privileges efficiency, standardisation, and performance metrics as the basis of decision-making (Fontaine & Richardson, 2003). ADAB+, by contrast, reframes HRM as a discipline of moral practice, cultural consciousness, and social stewardship, grounded in the Malay worldview (*pandangan semesta Melayu*).

The novelty of ADAB+ lies in its epistemological repositioning of HRM from a purely technical domain toward a humanistic and spiritually anchored discipline. By integrating *adab* (propriety and discipline), *amanah* (trust and responsibility), and *ihsan* (excellence grounded in sincerity), ADAB+ shifts the pedagogical focus to values-based learning outcomes that prioritise ethical discernment alongside technical competence.

Furthermore, ADAB+ is unique in its decolonial intent. It offers a culturally situated pedagogy that acknowledges the legacies of colonial educational paradigms in Malaysia and seeks to indigenize HRM education. By drawing from Malay concepts such as *musyawarah* (consultative dialogue) and *gotong-royong* (communal cooperation), ADAB+ introduces ethical and cultural practices that are collectivist in orientation, thereby countering the hyper-individualistic assumptions of mainstream HRM theory.

Another dimension of its uniqueness is its transformative pedagogical design. Instead of confining values to co-curricular or character-building modules, ADAB+ embeds them directly into core HRM topics such as recruitment, performance appraisal, employee relations, and conflict resolution. This integration ensures that ethical reflection is not an add-on but a central mode of disciplinary engagement.

In practical terms, ADAB+ develops students into morally grounded practitioners who are capable of exercising compassion, fairness, and responsibility in managing people. It cultivates a generation of HR professionals who can balance organisational imperatives with ethical obligations, contributing to the sustainability of workplace harmony, social justice, and cultural continuity in Malaysia.

Most importantly, ADAB+ is scalable and transferable. While rooted in the Malay worldview, its principles of moral responsibility, spiritual accountability, and cultural responsiveness provide a template for context-sensitive HRM education across different cultural settings, making it both locally grounded and globally relevant.

*Table 1*

*Core Components, Functions, and Transformative Outcomes of ADAB+*

| <b>Component</b>                           | <b>Description</b>                                                                   | <b>Function in Teaching</b>                                                     | <b>Transformative Educational Outcome</b>                                                     |
|--------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Malay Worldview (Pandangan Semesta Melayu) | Integrates spirituality, humanity, and harmony with nature into HRM.                 | Provides indigenous philosophical grounding for HRM decision-making.            | Cultivates holistic, culturally responsive, and ethically grounded HRM professionals.         |
| Values Integration (Adab, Amanah, Ihsan)   | Ethical-spiritual values embedded in HRM curriculum.                                 | Frames HRM issues within moral accountability and divine guidance.              | Shapes graduates with integrity, sincerity, and accountability in organisational contexts.    |
| Lecture-Based Infusion                     | Conventional lectures are enriched with ethical, spiritual, and cultural narratives. | Introduces HRM theories alongside moral-ethical critique.                       | Encourages critical questioning of Western models and adoption of values-driven HR practices. |
| Case-Based Moral Reasoning                 | HRM dilemmas presented through ethical-cultural lenses.                              | Engages students in reflective discourse and practical ethical problem-solving. | Develops capacity for ethical decision-making in real workplace dilemmas.                     |
| Facilitated Dialogue (Musyawarah)          | Interactive, consultative discussion modelled on Malay communal ethics.              | Encourages participatory learning and moral reasoning through dialogue.         | Promotes empathy, cultural confidence, and cooperative conflict resolution.                   |
| Experiential Learning (Gotong-Royong)      | Learning activities based on teamwork,                                               | Reinforces HRM theories through collaborative,                                  | Strengthens interpersonal trust, leadership humility, and communal responsibility.            |

|                                                 |                                       |
|-------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| service learning,<br>and communal<br>practices. | community-<br>centred<br>experiences. |
|-------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|

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#### **2.4. Practical Application of ADAB+ in Human Resource Management Classroom**

ADAB+ represents a culturally grounded and values-driven approach to Human Resource Management education in Malaysia, designed to integrate ethical reasoning, relational awareness, and the Malay worldview into professional training. The model emphasises the principles of *adab*, *amanah*, and *ihsan*, which collectively foster moral responsibility, communal ethics, and holistic thinking in organisational decision-making. Central to ADAB+ are concepts such as *musyawarah*, or consultative decision-making, and *gotong-royong*, or communal cooperation, which encourage collaboration, shared responsibility, and ethical accountability. These values guide future HR professionals to consider the social, relational, and moral consequences of their actions, ensuring that HR practices are not only technically effective but also culturally coherent, socially responsible, and ethically grounded.

In practice, ADAB+ operationalises its pedagogy through lecture-based instruction and culturally contextual case studies. Lectures introduce students to the theoretical and practical foundations of HRM, including performance management, compensation, disciplinary procedures, career development, and employee engagement. Throughout these sessions, ethical reflection and moral reasoning are embedded to encourage students to critically evaluate organisational practices against the principles of *adab*, *amanah*, and *ihsan*. For example, in the area of performance management, students learn to assess employee contributions not solely based on quantitative outputs but also on relational behaviours, teamwork, adherence to organisational norms, and respect for colleagues. This approach aligns with the ethical leadership and stakeholder theory perspective, emphasising that HR decisions should balance organisational goals with employee welfare and social responsibility.

Compensation management within ADAB+ is taught as both a technical and moral practice. Students are exposed to frameworks for equitable reward systems, considering not only market standards and job roles but also fairness, transparency, and contribution to organizational culture. Case studies highlight scenarios where disproportionate pay structures or inequitable incentives could lead to dissatisfaction, disengagement, or perceptions of injustice. Learners are guided to design compensation systems that uphold *amanah* by distributing rewards responsibly and fostering employee motivation in alignment with organisational and communal well-being.

Disciplinary processes are similarly contextualised within ADAB+ values. Case studies involving workplace misconduct, harassment, or unfair treatment challenge students to consider ethical principles alongside procedural compliance. For instance, analysing a constructive dismissal scenario allows learners to practice implementing fair procedures, empathetic communication, and restorative measures while balancing organisational integrity. ADAB+ emphasises that disciplinary action should not merely punish but serve to correct behaviour, preserve dignity, and maintain trust. This perspective aligns with procedural justice theory, which underscores fairness, transparency, and impartiality in HR decision-making.

Career development is addressed through lectures and applied case studies that encourage holistic consideration of employee growth. Students learn to evaluate promotion, training, and succession planning decisions through the lens of *adab* and *ihsan*, ensuring that development opportunities are fair, merit-based, and aligned with both organisational needs and employee potential. Case scenarios may include dilemmas in talent promotion or succession planning, requiring students to balance the interests of the individual, team, and organisation. This approach enhances human capital by fostering engagement, motivation, and long-term employee development, while embedding ethical reflection into professional judgment.

Employee engagement and welfare are integrated throughout ADAB+ pedagogy. Students analyse situations involving workplace stress, work-life balance, and interpersonal conflicts, developing strategies that promote relational ethics, empathy, and social cohesion. Through guided reflection and discussion, learners explore how *musyawarah* and *gotong-royong* can inform collaborative problem-solving, participatory decision-making, and supportive organisational culture. This focus aligns with human relations theory and contemporary employee engagement frameworks, which highlight the role of trust, relational support, and ethical leadership in organisational performance and sustainability.

The integration of lectures and case studies ensures that students develop both technical HR competencies and ethical awareness. By embedding the Malay worldview into HRM pedagogy, ADAB+ emphasises the interconnectedness of organisational objectives, employee welfare, and communal responsibility. Graduates trained under ADAB+ are equipped to design HR systems and make decisions that uphold fairness, relational ethics, and accountability. They are prepared to implement performance management, compensation, disciplinary, and career development processes in ways that honour employee dignity and enhance organisational trust. ADAB+ thus provides a scalable framework for rehumanizing HRM education, producing practitioners capable of fostering workplaces that are socially responsible, culturally coherent, and ethically sound.

Overall, ADAB+ exemplifies how culturally informed pedagogy can bridge technical HR knowledge with moral reasoning and relational awareness. By integrating *adab*, *amanah*, and *ihsan* within lectures and case-based learning, the model prepares students to apply HR concepts such as performance management, compensation, disciplinary procedures, career development, and employee engagement in ways that reflect both professional competence and ethical judgment. In doing so, ADAB+ equips future HR practitioners to navigate complex organisational challenges while embedding ethical, relational, and culturally rooted values into everyday HR practice. This holistic approach ensures that Malaysian HRM education produces graduates who are not only skilled but also morally conscious, culturally literate, and socially responsible, capable of creating sustainable and human-centred organizational environments.

### **3. Methodology**

The ADAB+ initiative was developed and evaluated using an action research approach, emphasising iterative cycles of planning, action, observation, and reflection (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005). This approach allowed the researchers to design, implement, and refine the ADAB+ pedagogy in a real educational setting while responding dynamically to student feedback, ensuring both practical effectiveness and cultural relevance.

The study was conducted over a single academic semester within a Human Resource Management (HRM) course. The planning phase involved designing the curriculum to integrate the principles of *adab*, *amanah*, and *ihsan* with key HR functions such as performance management, compensation, disciplinary processes, career development, and employee engagement. Special emphasis was placed on embedding the Malay worldview (*pandangan semesta Melayu*), including values such as *musyawarah* (consultation) and *gotong-royong* (communal cooperation), to highlight relational ethics, fairness, and holistic decision-making.

The action phase involved delivering the ADAB+ curriculum through lecture-based instruction and culturally contextual case studies. Lectures introduced students to both HRM concepts and the ethical principles underpinning them, while guided discussions encouraged critical reflection on the application of these principles in professional practice. Case studies presented realistic HR scenarios, such as workplace conflict, disciplinary issues, or performance evaluation challenges, allowing students to apply *adab*, *amanah*, and *ihsan* in decision-making processes.

To evaluate the effectiveness of the pedagogy, semi-structured interviews were conducted with six students selected to represent a range of academic abilities and levels of classroom engagement. Interviews explored students' perceptions of ADAB+ and its relevance to HR practice. A key question included: "Why is it important to view Human Resource Management from the perspective of local culture, including Malay values, and do you think a Malay worldview-based module is suitable for implementation in HRM education?" Other questions focused on how the module influenced students' understanding of ethical HRM, decision-making in workplace contexts, and their anticipated professional behaviour.

The interview data were analysed thematically to identify recurring insights, perceptions, and suggestions for improvement. Preliminary findings indicated that students recognised the value of culturally grounded ethics in HRM, appreciating how Malay values provided a framework for relational decision-making, fairness, and organisational harmony. Participants also reported that the module enhanced their ability to critically evaluate HR practices and consider employee welfare, cultural sensitivities, and ethical responsibilities in practical contexts.

The reflective phase of the action research cycle enabled iterative refinement of the ADAB+ module. Adjustments included expanding case studies to cover contemporary HR challenges, increasing peer discussion opportunities, and providing guidance on linking ethical principles to technical HR functions such as performance appraisal, disciplinary action, and career development. Overall, the action research methodology ensured that ADAB+ remained a contextually relevant, dynamic, and student-centred educational innovation, bridging local cultural values with professional HR competencies.

#### **4. Results and Discussion**

The implementation of ADAB+ in ADM181: Principles of Human Resource Management at FSPPP, UiTM, was evaluated through an action research approach involving six students. Data were collected via guided class discussions and written reflections, and analysed thematically. Three overarching themes emerged: cultural alignment and contextual relevance, ethical and relational development, and pedagogical efficacy for HRM learning.

## **Cultural Alignment**

Participants consistently highlighted the importance of localising HRM education to reflect Malaysian cultural and ethical values. Several students emphasised that integrating adab, ihsan, and the Malay worldview (pandangan semesta Melayu) enhanced HRM understanding beyond Western frameworks. One student explained, "So that HRM practices align with local values such as respect, courtesy, and consultation, thus forming ethical management suitable for our society" (R2). Another noted, "HRM should be taught through our cultural lens to ensure management practices are sensitive to Malaysian values and norms" (R1). R3 added, "This approach ensures that organisational decisions respect communal ethics and social harmony, which is often missing in conventional HRM education." These reflections indicate that culturally grounded pedagogy not only increases relevance but also provides a moral framework for decision-making, which is crucial in HRM functions such as performance management, recruitment, and employee engagement. Aligning HRM education with local values ensures that students can implement policies and practices that are both efficient and socially responsible, addressing concerns raised by studies on Western-centric HRM frameworks in Malaysia (Wee Chan Au et al., 2023).

## **Ethical and Relational Development**

Students also recognised that ADAB+ strengthens moral reasoning and relational awareness, areas often underrepresented in conventional HRM curricula. Participants emphasised that ethical reflection aids in balancing organizational priorities with employee well-being. One student remarked, "It embeds noble values such as akhlaq, ihsan, and humanity that resonate with the Malay world. This approach helps students understand HRM more deeply and equips them to face global challenges" (R5). R2 noted, "Very suitable, as it helps students understand HRM from a moral and cultural standpoint, not just Western theories." R4 highlighted, "By reflecting on ethical principles, I feel more confident about handling performance management and disciplinary actions with fairness and care." R6 added, "It highlights that HR is not only about procedures but about people, their dignity, and their rights, which must guide every organisational decision." These responses demonstrate that embedding cultural and ethical values helps students develop competencies in conflict resolution, disciplinary processes, and career development while fostering fairness and relational trust, which are essential for human-centred HRM (Armstrong & Taylor, 2023; Vinokur et al., 2024). The discussion suggests that ADAB+ nurtures future HR practitioners capable of reconciling performance objectives with ethical responsibility, mitigating risks of employee disengagement and organisational misconduct.

## **Pedagogical Efficacy for HRM Learning**

Students valued the lecture-based instruction and case study approach of ADAB+, which facilitated the integration of theory and practice. Lectures introduced HRM concepts, ethical reasoning, and culturally grounded principles, while case studies offered realistic scenarios, such as handling workplace conflict or evaluating employee performance ethically. R1 reflected, "The case studies made me think critically about real HR dilemmas, such as handling complaints or evaluating performance ethically." R3 added, "It helps me connect theory with practice, especially when facing disciplinary issues where fairness and cultural sensitivity matter." R5 emphasised, "I can see how consultation and communal decision-making can improve

organisational effectiveness while maintaining respect and trust." These findings align with Kolb's experiential learning theory (Kolb, 1984), which underscores reflection, conceptualisation, and application as key to developing practical and morally grounded HR competencies. Integrating values-based case studies with lectures enables students to apply *adab*, *amanah*, and *ihsan* to HRM functions, reinforcing ethical behaviour in performance appraisal, employee relations, and career planning while situating learning within a Malaysian cultural context.

### **Theme Integration and Implication**

The findings from all six participants demonstrate robust support for a culturally responsive and ethically grounded HRM pedagogy. Incorporating Malay philosophical and ethical values into HRM education addresses key limitations in conventional curricula that focus predominantly on technical proficiency while overlooking relational and moral competencies (Wee Chan Au, Stephens, & Ahmed, 2023). Participants emphasised that ADAB+ enhanced their ethical awareness, strengthened relational skills, and increased the overall relevance of the HRM curriculum. Students reported that learning through ADAB+ guided navigating real-world HR challenges, in a manner that balances organisational objectives with ethical responsibility and social sensitivity (Celma et al., 2018; Mamun et al., 2024)

The pedagogical integration of lectures and culturally contextual case studies enabled participants to link theoretical knowledge with practical application. Lectures introduced the principles of relational ethics, organisational justice, and communal values, while case studies allowed students to critically examine workplace scenarios, such as handling employee grievances or making fair performance appraisals. This combination helped students internalise ethical decision-making processes and cultivate human-centred HR practices aligned with the Malay worldview. Participants emphasised that these approaches not only enriched their academic experience but also prepared them to implement HR policies in ways that respect local cultural norms and uphold employee dignity.

Overall, ADAB+ demonstrates strong pedagogical efficacy by fostering a generation of HR practitioners who are both technically proficient and morally conscious. Its culturally grounded, values-based framework bridges the gap between theory and practice in Malaysian workplaces. By embedding ethical reasoning, relational competence, and cultural awareness into HRM education, ADAB+ equips graduates to create ethically responsible, socially aware, and performance-oriented organisational environments, offering a scalable model for enhancing HR practice and management education in Malaysia.

## **5. Conclusion**

The findings from the action research study provide compelling evidence that ADAB+ is a novel and effective approach for enhancing HRM pedagogy in Malaysia. Its integration of Malay philosophical and ethical values into HRM education represents a significant departure from conventional Western-centric, performance-driven frameworks, addressing a persistent gap in moral reasoning and relational competence among students. The study highlights several key strengths of ADAB+. Firstly, ADAB+ fosters culturally grounded ethical awareness, enabling students to navigate HRM functions such as performance management, disciplinary processes, employee engagement, and career development with moral sensitivity and social responsibility. Secondly, its blended use of lecture-based instruction and case studies offers practical

opportunities to translate theory into action, allowing students to apply ethical reasoning and culturally informed decision-making in realistic workplace scenarios.

The novelty of ADAB+ lies in its fusion of local cultural values, relational ethics, and human-centred HRM pedagogy, creating a scalable and contextually relevant model for decolonising management education in Malaysia. Participants consistently affirmed that grounding HRM practices in *adab*, *amanah*, and *ihsan* enhances both comprehension and application of HR principles while preparing graduates for culturally sensitive, ethical leadership roles. Nevertheless, the study has limitations. The sample was small, comprising only six students, and the data were collected within a single course context, which may limit generalizability. Future research should involve larger, more diverse cohorts and longitudinal designs to evaluate the sustained impact of ADAB+ on professional practice and organisational outcomes.

The significance of this study is twofold. Practically, it demonstrates an effective approach for producing morally grounded and culturally aware HR practitioners who can balance organisational efficiency with ethical responsibility. Academically, it contributes to the literature on values-based and culturally responsive HRM education, providing insights for curriculum design that integrates theory and practice while addressing systemic challenges in Malaysian workplaces. The study focuses on students from UiTM, where the ADAB+ model was developed and implemented, as they are the primary recipients of the pedagogy and can provide the most direct insights into how values-based learning is experienced and internalised. Perspectives from lecturers, administrators, or industry professionals were intentionally excluded because the study employs a qualitative and exploratory design aimed at understanding lived experiences rather than professional outcomes. While this focus limits the generalizability of the findings, future research could extend the study to other institutions and include multiple stakeholders to evaluate the broader applicability, effectiveness, and professional relevance of the ADAB+ model across different educational and cultural contexts.

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### **Authors Contributions**

ASM was responsible for drafting the manuscript. MRMA contributed to the conceptualisation of the study and the development of the theoretical framework. MAA implemented the ADAB+ module in class and collected the research data. All authors reviewed and approved the final manuscript.

### **Conflict of Interest**

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest associated with this publication.

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