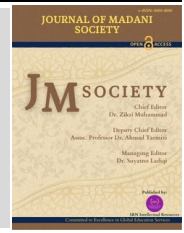




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## Editorial Article

# From Awareness to Identity: Environmental Hygiene as a Pathway to Madani Society and Sustainable Future

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**Abstract:** Environmental hygiene in universities is essential for advancing Malaysia's Madani vision, which emphasises compassion, responsibility, and environmental stewardship. As formative social environments, universities shape students' civic values and sustainable behaviours. Although studies indicate that Malaysian university students have a high awareness of hygiene and environmental issues, this awareness does not consistently translate into active participation or responsible practices. This gap reflects broader societal challenges, including an overreliance on institutional cleaning services, weak social norms, and limited community involvement in environmental programs. Critiques that students academically have been burdened with to engage in hygiene initiatives overlook the importance of shared accountability in building a resilient and responsible society. Research in environmental psychology suggests that voluntary participation in recycling, campus clean-ups, and sustainability campaigns fosters long-term pro-environmental habits and a stronger sense of civic identity. The Theory of Planned Behaviour further explains that attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control influence students' environmental actions, highlighting the need for more supportive structures that transform awareness into behaviour. Strengthening environmental hygiene culture requires integrated strategies such as curriculum-based sustainability modules, behavioural nudges, and partnerships with local communities. Enhancing hygiene practices on campuses contributes not only to institutional well-being but also to Malaysia's broader sustainable development goals, nurturing future leaders committed to environmental responsibility.

**Keywords:** Environmental Hygiene; University Students; Madani Society; Sustainable Development; Civic Responsibility.



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Universities are not only centres for academic learning; they are microcosms of society where future citizens develop ethical values, civic responsibility, and environmental consciousness (Porubčanová et al., 2024), aligning with Malaysia's commitment to fostering a Madani society that upholds compassion, responsibility, respect for the environment, and community well-being. Environmental hygiene has become a growing concern (Leonardi et al., 2024). The extent to which university students understand, practice, and engage in environmental hygiene now serves as an essential indicator of the nation's trajectory toward sustainable development and societal resilience. Although studies show that Malaysian university students demonstrate relatively high awareness of hygiene-related issues, this

awareness does not always translate into consistent hygienic behaviour or strong involvement in environmental initiatives (Ibrahim et al., 2019; Zailani et al., 2022). This gap between knowledge and action reflects broader societal challenges, including complacency in waste management, reliance on institutional cleaning services, and low participation in community-centred environmental programs. These patterns not only jeopardise campus hygiene but also hinder the cultivation of sustainability-oriented mindsets among future leaders.

Critics of hygiene-related student engagement frequently argue that students already face significant academic pressures and should not be burdened with additional responsibilities related to environmental maintenance (Yunita et al., 2023). While such concerns acknowledge the realities of student life, they overlook a fundamental principle of social development: shared accountability. A Madani society cannot depend solely on institutional enforcement; it thrives when individuals voluntarily participate in communal efforts that uphold collective well-being (Marzo et al., 2023; Mia et al., 2022). Limiting student involvement in hygiene initiatives undermines the civic ethos that higher education institutions strive to instill. Research in environmental and behavioural psychology reinforces this stance. Students who voluntarily participate in environmental activities, such as recycling programs, campus clean-up efforts, sustainability campaigns, and peer education initiatives, tend to develop stronger civic identities and more lasting pro-environmental behaviours (Bamberg & Möser, 2007; Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002). Longitudinal evidence supports the assertion that early exposure to environmental participation fosters habits that persist into adulthood, amplifying national sustainability efforts.

The Theory of Planned Behaviour provides further insight, suggesting that attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control have a significant influence on environmental action (Ajzen, 1991). Findings from UMT underscore this dynamic: despite high levels of awareness, students often report inconsistent hygiene practices and limited involvement in environmental programs (Ibrahim et al., 2019). These outcomes underscore the need for stronger social norms and more accessible channels for student participation to effectively convert awareness into meaningful action. The COVID-19 pandemic amplified the importance of hygiene as a collective health strategy rather than a mere individual preference. Research among Malaysian youths suggests that proactive hygiene behaviours significantly enhance community resilience and mitigate health vulnerabilities (Ithnain et al., 2024). In this context, strengthening hygiene practices within universities becomes a national imperative aligned with Malaysia's broader sustainable development and public health goals.

To cultivate a stronger environmental hygiene culture, universities must implement comprehensive and innovative strategies that promote a culture of environmental hygiene. Integrating sustainability and hygiene modules into academic curricula, embedding hygiene responsibilities into hostel and student club activities, and designing behavioural nudges, such as persuasive signage, reminders, and gamified challenges, can significantly improve students' hygiene-related actions (Thaler & Sunstein, 2009). Collaborations with local municipalities, NGOs, and community organisations can further expand students' exposure to real-world environmental concerns and deepen their sense of civic responsibility. Ignoring the importance of environmental hygiene means overlooking its broader societal and symbolic significance. Clean campuses reflect discipline, mutual respect, and care for shared spaces, all of which are central to the Madani vision. Students who internalise these principles are more likely to carry them into their personal, professional, and civic lives, ultimately contributing to a more responsible, sustainable, and cohesive society. In conclusion, strengthening environmental hygiene practices, awareness, and student involvement is essential for building the societal foundations envisioned in Malaysia's Madani framework. By nurturing responsible environmental behaviours among university students, Malaysia can advance toward long-term sustainability goals while cultivating future generations committed to environmental stewardship and social harmony.

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