

**INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF
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(IJMOE)**www.gaexcellence.com/ijmoe**THE EROSION OF ADAB AMONG MALAYSIAN YOUTH
WITHIN THE DIGITAL SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT**Nor Azira Mohd Radzi^{1*}, Majdah Chulan², Azhar Abdul Rahman³¹ Academy of Language Studies, UiTM Perlis, Malaysia norazira202@uitm.edu.my <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6757-5226>² Academy of Language Studies, UiTM Perlis, Malaysia majdah@uitm.edu.my <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1187-1760>³ Academy of Contemporary Studies, UiTM Perlis, Malaysia azharabdulrahman@uitm.edu.my <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6869-1619>

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DOI: 10.35631/IJMOE.830049**Abstract:**

This conceptual paper examines the declining of Islamic ethics and manners or called as Adab among Malaysian youth and their digital social environment. Adab is treated as a holistic moral framework underpinning the Malay-Islamic philosophy of education, which link knowledge acquisition to character formation. The article identifies the main reasons of declining adab are due to normalised academic dishonesty, disrespectful social relations, and modesty, the increasing of emotional and behavioural problems, and disruptive patterns of digital interaction. It then proposes an integrated educational response centred on refining of adab through teacher education, curriculum reform, school culture, critical digital literacy, and family-community partnerships. It is believed that if adab is not integrated into educational practice, Malaysian society is at risk in producing the youth that is not only technically proficient but also lack of manners.

Keyword:

Adab, Academic Integrity, Social Media, Malaysian Youth, Islamic Ethics



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Introduction

The Malay proverb “*Adab dahulu, kemudian ilmu*” (manners first, then knowledge) captures the notion that one’s intellectual development is not detached from moral formation (IKIM, 2021). The word *adab* refers to being polite, showing respect to people and having good behaviour. It further highlights a holistic ethical orientation that shapes a person’s relationship with Allah, with knowledge, with teachers, with peers, and with the wider community (Fadzilawani et al, 2025). Respect, humility, accountability, modesty, and integrity are the main result of true education rather than an optional "add-on." (IKIM, 2021).

However, today in Malaysia, educators, parents, and policymakers have observed there are alarming signs that *adab* among students is declining. Reports of digital manners deterioration, academic dishonesty, disrespect toward educators, and emotional and behavioural problems among students suggest that the cultivation of *adab - ta’dīb*, may be overshadowed by education goals such as examination performance and employability (IKIM, 2021).

This article intends to clarify the concept of *adab* and its educational significance. It further discusses the key manifestations of *adab* deterioration among the Malaysian Youth and highlights the educational responses grounded in an integrated philosophy of character and knowledge. Finally, the article places *adab* within national aspirations for holistic development and the reality of digital culture from educational viewpoint.

Adab as an Educational Ideal

In Islam, *Adab* is closely related to *ta’dīb*, which is the process of teaching the right conduct and assigning things in their proper place intellectually, spiritually, and socially (IKIM, 2021). According to Al Attas, the term *adab* in the context of human interactions, is defined as moral principles that should be applied depending on the individual status which is decided by the Qur’an according to its standards of knowledge, reason, and honourable actions (Daud, 1998). He further states that when a person truly shows modesty, respect, affection concerns towards his parents, siblings, children, neighbours, and community leaders, that means he understands his actual position. In the Malaysian context, this notion supports the development of human beings (*insan seimbang*) in the National Education Philosophy and the Malaysian Education Blueprint, that emphasizes on holistic development intellectually, spiritually, emotionally, and physically (IKIM, 2021). Historically, these ideals were exemplified in *pondok* and *madrasah* settings, where the transmission of knowledge occurred within close teacher–student relationships and the daily practice of Islamic ethics. As supported by one of the great scholars in the Islamic tradition Al-Ghazali, a good education is one that can integrate knowledge with high moral values (Ali, 2023).

However, the transmission of *adab* has been formalised into discrete “Moral Education” or “Islamic Studies” subjects, while other subjects were often treated as morally neutral as the schooling systems expanded, secularised, and standardised it. (IKIM, 2021). Thus, moral education is separable instead of being introduced into the entire curriculum and school culture.

As a result, though students are more likely to achieve high academic credentials, yet they lack the ethical grounding, self-discipline, and social responsibility that *adab* is intended to produce (IKIM, 2021). This provides the current concerns about the loss of *adab* among youth. As mentioned by Al-Attas (1979), the main problem of Muslims today is “loss of *adab*” which refers to loss of discipline about one's spiritual, physical, and intellectual aspects (In’ami et al,2025).

Factors Contribute to Deterioration of Adab Among Malaysian Youth

The loss of *adab* among Malaysian youth is due to academic conduct, social interaction, personal well-being, and digital citizenship.

Academic Integrity and Instrumental Attitudes to Learning

One of the reasons the declining of Adab is because of academic dishonesty normalisation. A study by Vally and Abrahams (2025) validated a revised plagiarism attitude scale and reported more than 70% of Malaysian medical sciences university students involved in some form of academic dishonesty. They further found that most students rationalised plagiarism by citing language difficulties and copying text without proper acknowledgement since they perceived citation rules is complex and faced intense academic pressure. These rationalisations do reflect a weakening of the *adab* knowledge among students, where traditionally it demands them to be honest, respect for intellectual property, and sincere when engage with the sources. Hence, the declining of *adab* in social interactions shows disturbances in value socialization and character development among younger generation (NurAsyiah et al, 2026).

The enrolment of students to universities and professional programmes is largely perceived as a pathway to secure their job employment where their tendency only focuses on grades and certificates rather than intellectual and moral development (IKIM, 2021).

The ethical aspects like truthfulness, humility in the face of knowledge, and responsibility toward society are easily overshadowed by short-term performance goals. For example, the young generation nowadays are familiar and efficient with digital environments, accustomed to the availability of online repositories and AI tools which can further encourage superficial engagement and expedient rule-bending unless *adab* is intentionally cultivated.

Social Conduct, Modesty, and Respect for Educators

In classroom setting, educators have noticed there is a declining of *adab* among students, like disrespectful speech, lack of basic greetings, and confrontational attitudes toward teachers and administrative staff (IKIM, 2021). This trend reflects the loss of respect and *adab* where teachers are honoured as *mu’addib* (those who inculcate *adab*), they are not merely as content deliverers. When teachers are addressed by students as service providers rather than moral guides, it indicates there is a deeper transition in how authority, knowledge, and respect are understood.

There is also evident of the deterioration of *al-hayā’* (modesty), particularly in digital and social aspects. According to Norafifah et al (2025), social media culture has caused deterioration of *al-hayā’* (modesty), with the increased self-exposure, pursuit of viral popularity, and normalisation of content previously considered taboo from an *aqīdah* and *adab* perspective.

Based on the Islamic viewpoint, modesty is not just limited to dress, but it includes the controlling in terms one's speech, behaviour, and self-presentation. When such boundaries are repeatedly crossed for entertainment or attention, *adab* as a regulating inner compass is weakened (Norafifah et al., 2025).

Emotional and Behavioural Problems, Self-Concept, and Adab

The loss of *adab* is also associated with internal psychological struggles among youth. A longitudinal study of Malaysian school children by Yoshikawa et al (2019), found that approximately 9.3% experienced emotional and behavioural problems which lead to the conduct issues, impulsivity, or aggression and these behaviours are contradict to *adab* which the emphasis is on self-control, patience, and respect for others.

Besides that, the dissatisfaction of body image further indicates the relationship between inner turmoil and outward comportment of the youth. A study by Shah et al. (2017) revealed that there was 60.1% of young primary-school adolescents who experienced body image dissatisfaction where the distorted self-image can undermine their self-respect and contentment. The young people who feel disappointed about their body image may seek validation through risky behaviours, attention-seeking online content, or aggressive self-assertion. These actions can cause conflict with modesty, humility, and respectful interaction, in which these are important foundations for practising *adab* consistently.

Digital Culture and Disrupted Adab

Digital platforms are now a central ground in which *adab* is either practised or neglected in today's world. Handayani et al. (2024) found that social media has become an important source of academic information for students. However, it is often dominated by leisure rather than structured learning. Nafisah (2024) indicates that usage of social media among adolescents frequently involves imitative (*tasyabbuh*) behaviours, where the negative trends like provocative speech, mockery, or indecent content are copied and spread.

Behavioural psychology offers a useful lens. Likes, comments, and shares function as reinforcers. For instance, the repeated positive feedback for provocative or immodest content strengthens those behaviours, which gradually normalising them in the user's repertoire. The design of social media platforms encourages instant gratification and public performance where *adab* would encourage restraint, humility, and consideration of consequences. In educational context, teacher-student interaction is disturbed because students' attention is divided and their expectations of communication are influenced by fast, sensationalist content rather than thoughtful discourse, (Handayani et al., 2024).

Underlying Drivers of the Erosion of Adab

The loss of *adab* among Malaysian youth cannot be reduced to individual moral failure where it needs to be understood as the product of systemic, cultural, and technological forces.

Importance of Education

There is a risk that the moral mission of schooling becomes secondary when education is primarily focuses on the economic return, securing jobs, attracting investment, and improving

national competitiveness (IKIM, 2021). The assessment of school system heavily placed on examination scores and rankings may unintentionally lead students to involve in plagiarism, rote learning, and superficial engagement with content. The attitude of *ta'dīb*, in which knowledge is pursued for intellectual, spiritual, and societal benefit, not for individual growth, is undermined by the commercialisation of education. For the youth themselves, their educational journeys are often discussed on the notion marketability and future skills but disregard the ethical processes may be seen as negotiable when they appear to hinder competitive success.

Fragmentation of Moral Socialisation

The responsibility for moral and character formation has become shattered. Parents generally who are under the economic and social pressures may prioritise tuition and academic coaching instead of sharing their family activities that cultivate responsibility, empathy, and discipline. At the same time, schools often narrow down moral education to specific subjects or one-off programmes, instead of incorporating *adab* across the curriculum and school culture (IKIM, 2021). Therefore, students face strong academic expectations but inconsistent modelling of ethical behaviour and limited opportunities to practise *adab* in authentic contexts.

Psychological and Algorithmic Impact of Social Media

Recently, the media, researchers, and governments have brought significant attention on the extensive use of social media by children and teenagers and its effect on their mental health. Several studies stress on the relationship between social media usage and psychological problems among children and teenagers (Mougharbel et al, 2023; Keles et al, 2020). For young users who are in the stage of forming their identities, this situation can distort their perceptions of normality and success, the values around visibility as well as popularity (Nafisah, 2024; Norafifah et al., 2025). They need to face the challenges of others dissatisfaction, envy, and anxiety (Shah et al., 2017), which weakens their psychological stability. It is necessary for them to uphold *adab* in the face of peer pressure and online trends.

Reintegrating Adab into Educational Practice

The loss of *adab* requires moving beyond reactive disciplinary measures toward a proactive, systemic approach that re-centres *ta'dīb* within educational philosophy and practice.

Curriculum and Pedagogy

Adab must be incorporated into curriculum design in a visible and pervasive manner. Firstly, an explicit teaching of Islamic and civic ethics need to be implemented. It is not merely the abstract lists of rules, but the teaching needs to go through case studies, reflective discussions, and problem-solving activities which are related to students' real contexts and online setting (IKIM, 2021).

Secondly, the implicit integration across subjects needs to be carried out. For example, the language classes should put emphasis on the respectful discourse and responsible sharing of information, while in science laboratories, students should be taught on the reinforcement of safety, tidiness, and respect for shared resources as dimensions of *adab*. Besides that, when they are in group projects, they learn about evaluating cooperation and fairness alongside their

academic output. This integration confirms that character development is facilitated by both moral and religious subjects.

Teacher Education and School Culture

The central agents of *adab* are teachers. According to Nafisah (2024, al-Ghazali stresses that the teacher's personal character is often more influential than their spoken advice. Therefore, the contemporary teacher education programmes should have training in how to model respectful communication, manage classrooms with dignity and firmness, and integrate ethical reflection into daily lessons. Additionally, opportunities should be given to teachers to reflect on their own digital practices and how they can set examples for students (Nafisah, 2024).

At the institutional level, it is important for schools and universities to establish clear, lived codes of conduct that apply to all members of the community so that they can cultivate cultures that honour *adab* (IKIM, 2021).

Engaging Critically with Digital Culture

Educational institutions should treat digital literacy not only as a moral but also a technical domain. Programmes can be designed to help students understand how algorithms and engagement metrics shape what they see and how they feel (Handayani et al., 2024). Furthermore, it also helps them to recognise the Islamic principles which are relevant to online conduct such as modesty, truthfulness, avoid backbiting and mockery. Besides that, students need to apply them in their posting and commenting behaviour (Nafisah, 2024; Norafifah et al., 2025); and practise critical consumption of information which include verifying the sources before sharing and resisting sensationalism.

Academicians and higher institutions can utilize social media to model *adab* by sharing beneficial knowledge, highlighting community service, and fostering respectful dialogue in official channels. By doing this, it shows digital spaces can be sites for practising *adab* rather than its deterioration.

Family and Community Partnerships

Finally, *adab* need to be taught not in isolation in schools. Parents and community leaders play crucial roles in reinforcing values and practices. For instance, the parental workshops to model digital *adab* at home, the setting boundaries around device use, the striking balance between academic expectations and chores that foster responsibility, the collaboration with mosque committees and youth groups, and the running of programmes on character, mental health, and media literacy to ensure the consistency of messaging across contexts are indeed need to be carried out (IKIM, 2021; Nafisah, 2024). Therefore, by having such a “whole ecosystem” approach, the young people encounter aligned expectations and examples in the home, school, and community.

Conclusion

The deterioration of *adab* among Malaysian youth is a multidimensional challenge that reflects broader tensions in the aims and practices of education in a rapidly changing society. The evidence of normalised plagiarism (Vally & Abrahams, 2025), declining modesty and

respectful conduct (IKIM, 2021; Norafifah et al., 2025), rising emotional and behavioural problems (Yoshikawa et al., 2019), and the powerful influence of social media (Handayani et al., 2024; Nafisah, 2024) have pointed to the crisis of *Adab* deterioration.

To reclaim *adab*, it requires a re-centring of *ta'dib* as the organising principle of education in which knowledge must be pursued and applied within a framework of moral responsibility and spiritual awareness. This article presents an integrated response that encompasses the curriculum design, teacher development, school culture, digital literacy, and family–community partnerships. Meanwhile, there are also significant obstacles that need to be highlighted such as commercial pressures on education, pervasive digital distractions, and fragmented moral socialisation.

Future research could explore the impact of specific *adab* which centred interventions across different school types. In addition, researchers should investigate how successful institutions embed *adab* in their daily routines and examine the neurocognitive implications of intensive social media use on empathy and self-regulation in Muslim youth. For practitioners and policymakers, “*Adab dahulu, kemudian ilmu.*” remains since without *adab*, seeking knowledge will not be a light but a fire without direction.

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