THE PERCEPTION OF CIVILIZATION DIALOGUE AMONG MALAYSIAN UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS: A CASE STUDY OF UNIVERSITI SELANGOR (UNISEL)

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Abstract: *Civilizational dialogue is crucial in multiracial countries like Malaysia, where diverse racial and religious groups coexist. Universities provide critical platforms for nurturing a deeper understanding of civilization. Nevertheless, limited studies have explored how Malaysian undergraduate students perceive and are involved in such dialogue. This study explores the perception of civilization dialogue among undergraduate students at University Selangor (UNISEL), focusing on the importance, challenges, and initiatives in participating in civilization dialogue. This study employs a quantitative survey (N=362) with undergraduate students from five faculties. The survey measured students' awareness of the importance, challenges, and initiatives in civilization dialogue. Descriptive statistics are used to analyze the data. Preliminary results suggest that while students recognize the importance of civilization dialogue in promoting social harmony, engagement remains limited due to language barriers, cultural misconceptions, and a lack of institutional support. Many students express interest in structured programs that facilitate civilization dialogue. Findings show that diverse ethnic backgrounds exhibit varying levels of willingness to engage, influenced by personal experiences, religious perspectives, and social interactions. The study highlights the need for*

university-led initiatives, such as dialogue forums, cross-cultural workshops, and curriculum integration, to enhance students' participation in civilization dialogue. These findings contribute to ongoing dialogue on higher education's role in fostering civilization understanding and provide policy recommendations for strengthening Malaysia's national unity efforts.

Keywords: *civilization dialogue, higher education, undergraduate students, Malaysia, Universiti Selangor (UNISEL)*

Introduction

Islam is *Ad-din* (religion), the religion of Allah SWT, which was brought and conveyed by the Prophet Muhammad SAW to all mankind for the sake of the mercy of the whole world. The word *Ad-din* carries a broad meaning and connotation, which is also closely related to the concept of civilization. Therefore, in Islam, religion (*ad-din*) is the essence and spirit of culture and civilizations. While the word Islam is an Arabic word from the root word سَلِمَ which carries the meaning of safe or secure. The meaning and connotation of Islam support, guide, and maintain the peace and well-being of humans, society, and the world. The word Islam, in terms of a noun, means submission, obedience, and surrender to Allah SWT in total. Islam as a religion carries its own identity, characteristics, and elements (Kamar Oniah Kamaruzaman, 2003). Islam, as a universal religion, supports the aspiration of dialogue. Islam has, since the beginning, focused on the dialogue approach as an effective method. In the Quran, there are many appearances of dialogues between the Messenger of Allah and his people or society. The principles and conditions of dialogue in the Islamic context are guided by the principles contained in the Al-Quran and Al-Hadith. Furthermore, this practice of dialogue can be traced back to the life of Prophet Muhammad SAW which shows that the dialogue approach is an approach to approaching and providing understanding of a message or *dakwah* (Siddiq Fadzil, 2003).

University students are the generation that inherits the country's leadership and shapes the thinking of the future society. Universiti Selangor (UNISEL) students consist of various fields of study, races, cultures, religions, and customs that are different, but study on campus and live in the same dormitory. Therefore, this study was conducted to identify the extent to which the level of civilization dialogue is especially seen in terms of cultural dimensions, interaction and dialogue, values of honesty, concern, and tolerance. Is there such culture and values in students to create understanding within themselves. In other words, are there values of civilization dialogue that are translated into daily life on campus?

Problem Statement

The perception of civilization dialogue plays an important role in shaping intercultural understanding, fostering tolerance, and promoting social cohesion in a multicultural society like Malaysia. In Malaysia's diverse cultural and religious landscape, fostering civilization dialogue is essential for promoting national unity and mutual understanding among its citizens (Mohd Zulfahmi Mohamad, 2023). Malaysia is often described as a prime example of a severely divided society along ethnic lines. The country is also among the few pluralistic societies that have achieved some measure of success in managing ethnic conflict and enjoying relative political stability. Therefore, the dialogue of civilizations, which is often associated with the development of harmonization among multi-ethnic societies, can be part of the essence of

learning for today's young people as well as pointing to the education system as a key place where national unity may be nurtured.

Undergraduate students, who represent the future leaders and intellectuals of the nation, understand and engage in civilization dialogue, which is vital for sustaining harmony in a diverse environment. While Malaysia's education system emphasizes multicultural values, it remains unclear whether undergraduate students actively engage in meaningful discussions about civilization, history, and cultural exchange. Factors such as societal influences, personal beliefs, and educational experiences may contribute to varying levels of awareness and appreciation for civilization dialogue.

Objectives
The objectives of this study are threefold. Firstly, it aims to analyze respondents' beliefs regarding the significance of dialogue in fostering civilization. Secondly, it seeks to examine the perceptions of young individuals regarding the challenges and obstacles that hinder civilization dialogue within the context of Malaysia Madani. Lastly, the study explores respondents' perspectives on initiatives and efforts to enhance the effectiveness of contemporary civilization dialogue. Therefore, the research aims to provide valuable insights into the role of dialogue in promoting mutual understanding and the factors influencing its success in a multicultural society.

Literature Review
Two points will be discussed in the literature review as followed:

Ethnic Relations Issues in Higher Education Institutions
The content of the dialogue of civilizations is a major issue that must be addressed properly so that it does not have a long-term impact. This study focuses and looks at the level of understanding of students and what further actions should be taken so that the issue of race relations does not become a major problem in facing the future better. Several issues related to misunderstanding, ethnic relations, mutual distrust and disrespect must be understood so as not to cause racial tension.

In the aspect of ethnic relations in Malaysia, the consequences of ethnic and cultural differences occur. Among them is ethnic polarization, which still cannot be reduced. According to Hazri Jamil & Raman (2012) stated that ethnic polarization still exists because the education system "…*does not promote real understanding between different ethnic groups in the society, beyond mere acceptance and tolerance. This is in part because educational policies have not effectively encouraged meaningful interaction among students from the different communities*."

In addition, public higher education institutions are also seen as less successful in solving the problem of ethnic polarization, which may also be due to meritocracy. They suggest that integration is not just about acceptance and tolerance but must be linked to discussions regarding national cohesion and policies that are democratically and justly oriented.

Moreover, Ahamad Rahim (2011) also explained that Malaysian history studies are written from the perspective of the Malays only and marginalize the role of other ethnic groups in the development of the country's history. Similarly, the history curriculum is the history of the Malays and not the history of Malaysia. It is also supported by Shamsul Amri Baharuddin (2012) that the history taught is only about "*the history of the winners and losers, the heroes*

and the villains". This approach is considered exclusive because it does not take into account the things that shape the history of a society and country. This is what sometimes causes a lack of respect, an attitude of intolerance that can cause racial tension to occur.

Lack of Dialogue Among Students in Institutions of Higher Education

Looking at the current reality, it is found that the absence of the implementation of inter-ethnic dialogue has caused low social relations among students in institutions of higher learning, whether private or public. Several researchers, such as Ramlee Mustapha et al. (2016) suggest that inter-ethnic dialogue be carried out at the university level as a step to promote good social relations among students of different ethnicities. The concept of inter-ethnic dialogue has not yet existed in a structured manner and has not been touched upon by previous researchers. This concept has, in principle, existed in higher education policies and also in the national education philosophy, which emphasizes unity between races (or ethnicities). Therefore, researchers look at the need to build the concept of inter-ethnic dialogue and see the relationship between the two aspects, namely the concept of "dialogue" and the concept of "ethnicity" in improving social relations among students of various ethnicities in institutions of learning.

Similarly, Rusimah Sayuti et al. (2019) states that there is a lack of open and serious discussions among students of various ethnicities on political, economic, and social issues of the country. Without this openness, it will invite misunderstanding, and racial tension may arise in the future.

Methodology

This descriptive survey study was designed to collect data to examine students' perceptions of civilization dialogue by using a Google Drive form. The feedback was received from 362 undergraduate students from five faculties at Universiti Selangor (UNISEL), including those from both the Bestari Jaya and Shah Alam campuses. This method is deemed appropriate for collecting direct feedback from students, ensuring a broad and representative sample. Sample sizes were determined using the Raosoft sample size calculator. For a 95% confidence level, 360 samples are needed, respectively.

The survey was used as a modified version of a tool (Emie Sylviana Mohd Zahid et al., 2022; Siti Rahayu Hassan et al., 2023) and organized into different sections. Section A collects basic demographic details, such as gender, age, and the faculty or centre to which students belong. Section B is divided into three sections: Part I explores students' perceptions of the importance of civilization dialogue, Part II examines perceived challenges and obstacles, and Part III evaluates students' views on efforts to enhance understanding in civilization dialogue. This survey used a simple three-point scale for responses: (1) Strongly Agree, (2) Agree, and (3) Not Agree.

The questionnaire was distributed through Google Forms, making the data collection and analysis quick and easy. The results were analyzed using Google Forms' built-in tools, giving us breakdowns and summaries of responses across four main areas: demographics, the significance of civilization dialogue, perceived challenges, and suggestions for improving understanding.

In line with Creswell (2023), questionnaires are considered one of the most effective tools for data collection in survey research, as they allow for the systematic gathering of responses in a natural setting. The rationale for employing questionnaires in this study is to obtain varied,

quantifiable, and easily analyzable responses, thereby ensuring the reliability and validity of the findings.

Results And Analysis

Section A: Demography
The survey at UNISEL gathered responses from 362 participants, and the survey has an interesting gender mix. Out of the respondents, only 80 were male, making up about 22.1%, while a huge 282, or 77.9%, of respondents were female. This emphasizes that more female students took part in the respondents, they ranged from 18 to over 25 years old, with the biggest group being 21 years old (88 respondents), followed closely by 22 years old (68 respondents), and 20 years old (47 respondents). The smallest group was the 18-year-olds, with just 11 participants. Other age groups included 19 years old (42 respondents), 23 years old (30 respondents), and 24 years old (19 respondents), while respondents over 25 years old accounted for 57 individuals. Additionally, the survey included students from five faculties, with the Faculty of Business and Accountancy (FBA) comprising the largest group, with 206 respondents (57.1%). This was followed by the Faculty of Education and Social Sciences (FESS) with 77 respondents (21.3%), the Faculty of Health Sciences (FHS) with 65 respondents (18.0%), the Faculty of Communication, Visual Arts, and Computing (FCVAC) with 9 respondents (2.5%), and the Faculty of Engineering and Life Sciences (FELS) with only 2 respondents. Furthermore, 3 respondents were categorized under "others." The findings suggest that the survey captured a diverse sample of students across different faculties and age groups, with a notable predominance of female students and FBA representatives.

Section B: Survey Questions

Part I: The Importance of Civilization Dialogue Among the Young Generation.

Table 1: Perceptions Related to the Importance of Civilization Dialogue Among the Young Generation.

| No	Questions	No. of respondents (362)		
		Strong Agree	**Agree**	**Not Agree**
Q1	*I believe that the dialogue of civilization is an effort to create harmony.*	126 (34.8%)	216 (59.7%)	20 (5.5%)
Q2	*I believe that the dialogue of civilization must be developed and practiced.*	147 (40.6%)	198 (54.7%)	17 (4.7%)
Q3	*I believe in the dialogue of civilization in realizing mutual respect and respect.*	165 (45.6%)	177 (48.9%)	20 (5.5%)
Q4	*I believe that the dialogue of civilization can reduce racial and religious tensions.*	131 (36.3%)	20 (55.5%)	30 (8.2%)
Q5	*I believe that the dialogue of civilization as a medium raises the pure values of the nation.*	146 (40.3%)	196 (54.1%)	20 (5.5%)
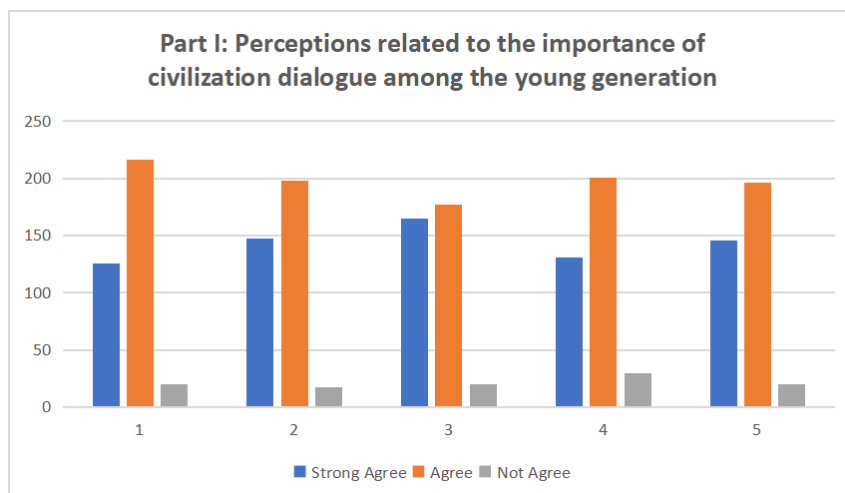
Figure 1: Graph of Perceptions Related to the Importance of Civilization Dialogue Among the Young Generation.
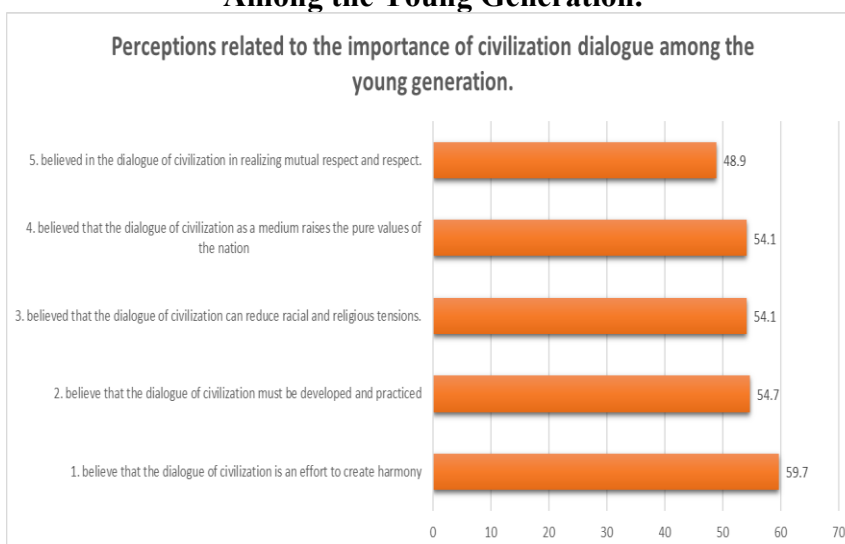

Figure 2: The Ranking of the Majority of Respondents Who Believed in the Importance of Dialogue in Civilization.

The data presented in Figures 1 and 2 provide a comprehensive overview of respondents' perceptions regarding the dialogue civilization. The findings indicate there is a strong consensus among the majority of participants, reflecting the positive attitudes towards the role of such dialogue in fostering and understanding.

The significant proportion of respondents, about 59.7%, agreed that the dialogue of civilization serves as an effort to create harmony. This suggests that the young generation recognized the potential of intercultural and interfaith discussion in reducing societal divisions and promoting peaceful coexistence. Furthermore, 54.7% of the young generation expresses their belief that the dialogue of civilization must be further developed and actively practiced. These results underscore the importance of continuing efforts to integrate such dialogue into educational and social frameworks to ensure its sustainability and effectiveness.

Additionally, 54.1% of respondents supported the idea that dialogue between civilizations contributes to mitigating racial and religious tensions. This perspective aligns with existing literature that emphasizes the role of intercultural communication in resolving conflicts and

fostering mutual understanding. Similarly, an equal percentage (54.1%) believed that this dialogue serves as a medium for promoting the pure value of the nation. This implied that the young generation views such dialogue as a means to reinforce national identity and uphold cultural integrity. Lastly, 48.9% of respondents acknowledged the dialogue of civilization as an instrument for realizing mutual respect and understanding. Overall, the findings indicate a prevailing positive attitude toward dialogue of civilization, highlighting its perceived significance in fostering harmony, reducing tensions, and preserving national values. These results suggest a need for policies and programs that encourage intercultural dialogue as a means of promoting peace and understanding.

Part II: Challenges and Obstacles to Civilization Dialogue among the Young Generation in the Context of Malaysia Madani.

Table 2: Perceptions of Challenges and Obstacles to Civilization Dialogue among the Young Generation in the Context of Malaysia Madani.

| No.	Questions	No. of Respondents (362)		
		Strong Agree	**Agree**	**Not Agree**
Q1	*Lack of respect for racial, ethnic and racial differences.*	66 (18.2%)	167 (46.1%)	129 (35.6%)
Q2	*Doesn't communicate well everywhere.*	57 (15.7%)	169 (46.7%)	136 (37.6%)
Q3	*Feelings of hatred and create feelings of contrast to each other.*	62 (17.2%)	158 (43.6%)	142 (39.2%)
Q4	*Not willing to help even though they are of differenct religions and races.*	52 (14.4%)	140 (38.7%)	169 (46.7%)
Q5	*Incorrect information affects oneself.*	65 (17.9%)	184 (50.8%)	113 (31.2%)
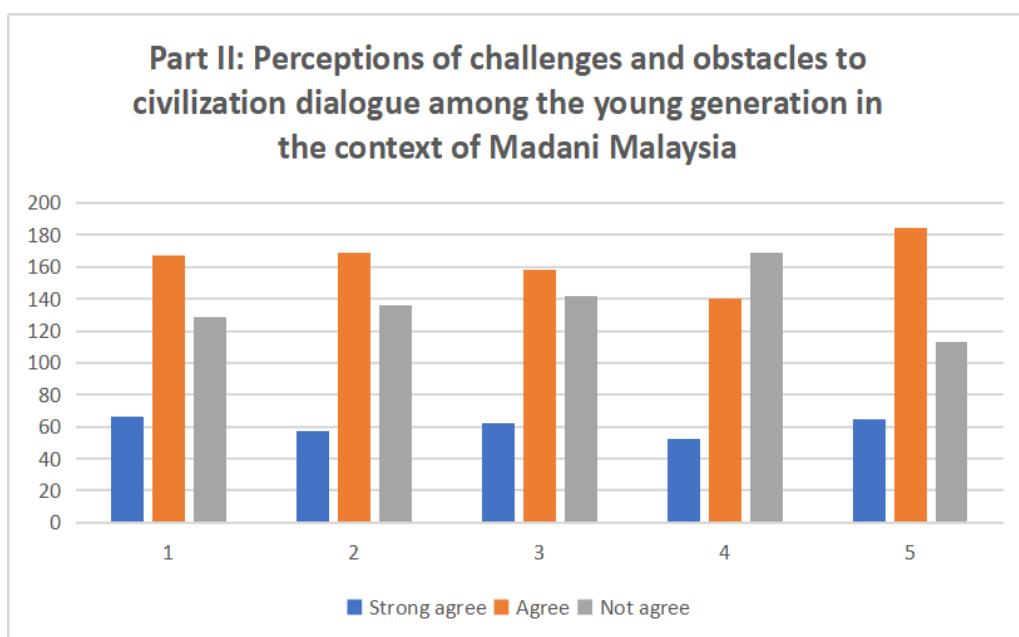
Figure 3: Perception of Challenges and Obstacles to Civilization Dialogue Among the Young Generation in the Context of Malaysia Madani.
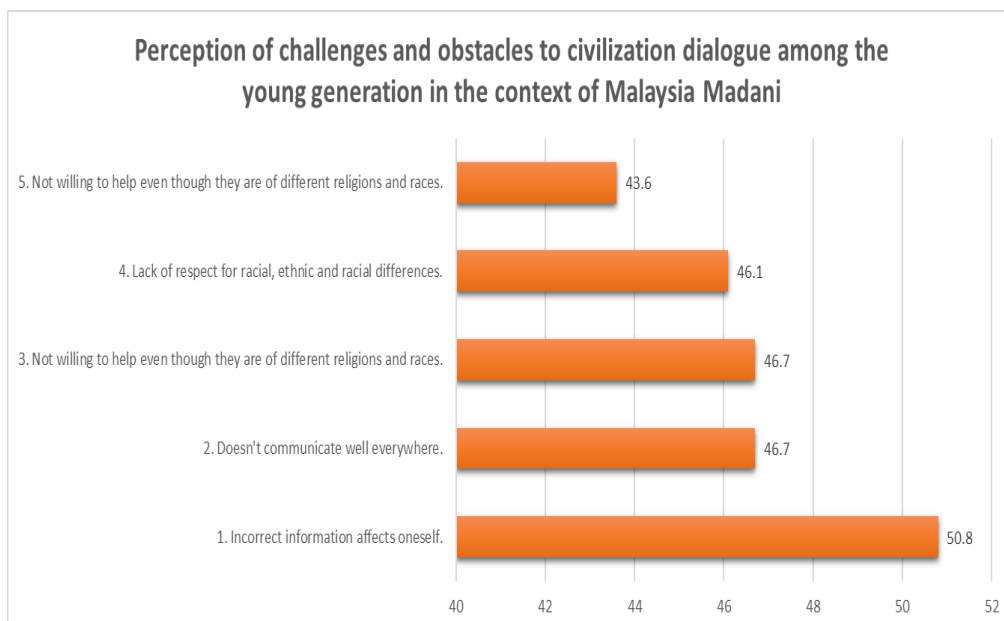
Figure 4: The Ranking of the Majority of Respondents Who Perceived the Challenges and Obstacles to Civilization Dialogue Among the Young Generation in the Context of Malaysia Madani.

The findings reveal several significant challenges and obstacles that hinder the effective implementation of the dialogue of civilization. Among the primary barriers is the spread of incorrect information, which influences individuals' perceptions and attitudes. According to the data, approximately 50.8% of respondents identified misinformation as a critical challenge. This suggests that distorted or misleading narratives contribute to misunderstandings and prejudices, ultimately obstructing constructive dialogue between different cultural and religious groups. Addressing this issue requires efforts to promote accurate information dissemination through education and media literacy initiatives.

Another major challenge highlighted by 46.7% of respondents is ineffective communication. Poor communication skills or a lack of willingness to engage in meaningful discourse can result in misinterpretations and reinforce existing biases. When individuals fail to communicate effectively, opportunities for mutual understanding diminish, making it difficult to establish common ground. This finding underscores the importance of fostering intercultural communication skills to bridge gaps between diverse communities.

In addition, the reluctance to assist religious and racial boundaries presents another significant obstacle. With 46.7% of respondents acknowledging this issue, it is evident that social cohesion is undermined when individuals prioritize their affiliations over collective well-being. This reluctance may stem from deep-seated prejudices or societal divisions, underscoring the need for initiatives that foster solidarity and cooperation among diverse groups.

Furthermore, a lack of respect for racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity is identified as a barrier by 46.1% of respondents. Disregard for diversity often fosters exclusionary attitudes and behaviors, preventing meaningful dialogue and collaboration. Promoting respect for cultural differences through awareness campaigns and inclusive policies is crucial in overcoming this challenge.

Lastly, 43.6% of respondents indicated that feelings of hatred and opposition toward others hinder the dialogue of civilization. These sentiments create divisions and perpetuate conflict, making it difficult to establish a foundation for peaceful coexistence. Addressing this issue requires initiatives that promote empathy, intergroup interaction, and conflict resolution strategies.

The findings highlight the critical challenges impeding the dialogue of civilization, emphasizing the need for proactive measures to counter misinformation, enhance communication, foster mutual support, cultivate respect for diversity, and mitigate hatred. Addressing these obstacles is essential in creating an inclusive and harmonious society.

Part III: Perceptions of Efforts to Improve the Work of Today's Civilization Dialogue

Table 3: Perceptions of Efforts to Improve the Work of Today's Civilization Dialogue.

| No	Questions	No of respondents (362)		
		Strong agree	**Agree**	**Not agree**
Q1	*Increase inter-dialogue programs of different religions and nations.*	111 (30.7%)	211 (58.3%)	40 (11.1%)
Q2	*To mobilize dialogue activities and programs in schools, universities, and communities.*	148 (40.9%)	191 (52.8%)	23 (6.4%)
Q3	*Programs in the media and TV about the harmony of different nations and religions.*	137 (37.8%)	199 (54.9%)	26 (7.2%)
Q4	*Establish joint committees in the community and neighbourhood programs.*	128 (35.4%)	199 (54.9%)	35 (9.66)
Q5	*Establish rules and laws to preserve harmony.*	140 (38.7%)	198 (54.7%)	24 (6.6%)
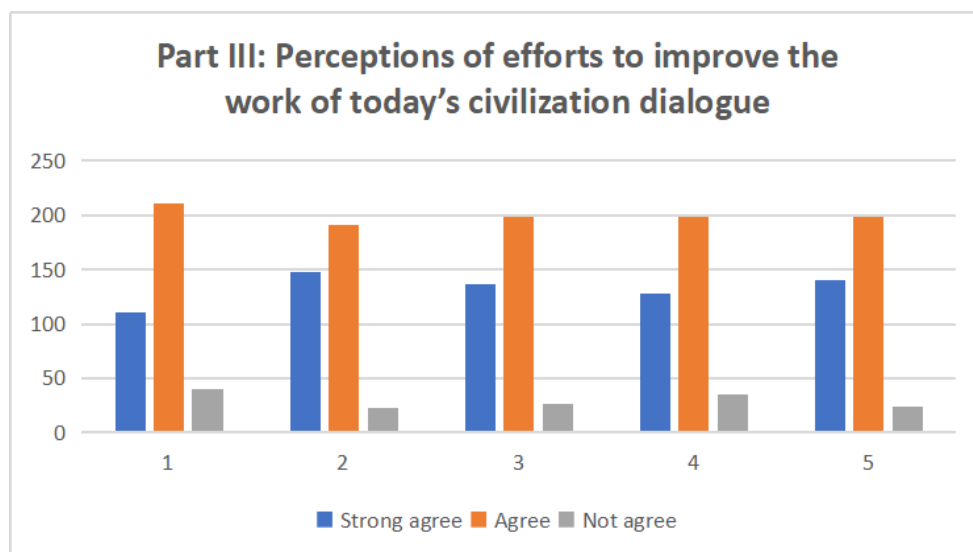
Figure 5: Perception of Efforts to Improve the Work of Today's Civilization Dialogue.
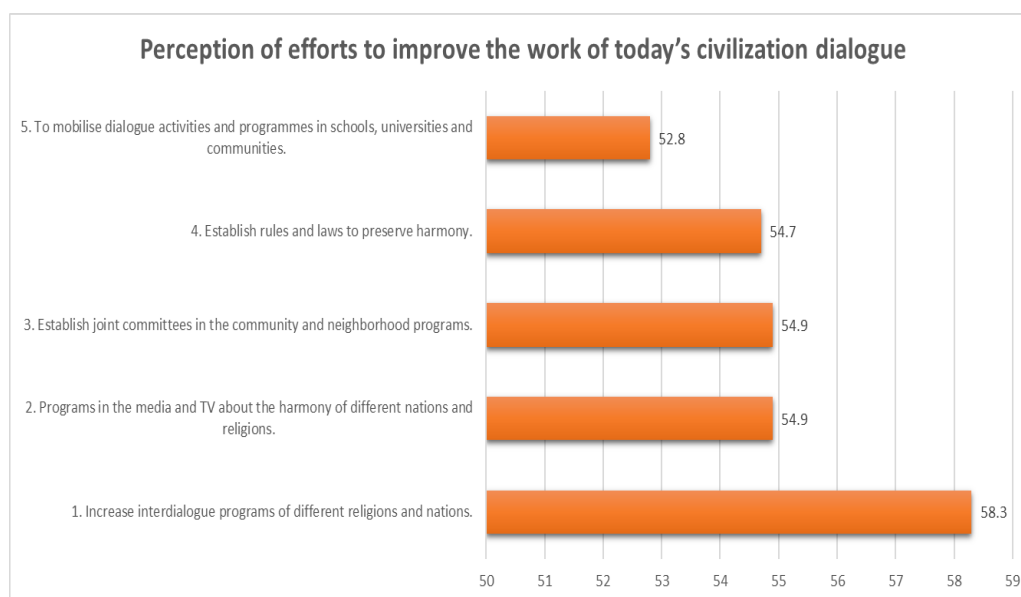
Figure 6: The Ranking of the Majority Respondents that Perception of Efforts to Improve the Work of Today's Civilization.

The findings highlight several key initiatives that can be undertaken to enhance the dialogue of civilization, emphasizing the importance of structured programs, media representation, community engagement, legislative measures, and educational initiatives.

One of the most effective efforts identified is the increase in inter-dialogue programs between different religions and nations, with 58.3% of respondents supporting this approach. Such programs foster mutual understanding and cooperation, providing platforms for individuals from diverse backgrounds to engage in meaningful discussions. By encouraging intercultural and interfaith dialogue, these initiatives can help dismantle stereotypes and build bridges of communication between communities.

Another significant effort is the implementation of media and television programs that promote harmony among different nations and religions, which was supported by 54.9% of respondents. The media plays a crucial role in shaping public perceptions, and by broadcasting content that highlights cultural coexistence, tolerance, and shared values, it can positively influence societal attitudes. Awareness campaigns, documentaries, and discussions on these platforms can contribute to fostering an inclusive and harmonious society.

Additionally, the establishment of joint committees within communities and neighbourhood programs was identified as a critical measure, with 54.9% of respondents emphasizing its importance. Community-driven initiatives allow individuals to work collectively towards common goals, fostering grassroots-level engagement in promoting dialogue. These committees can serve as mediators during conflicts, organize cultural exchange programs, and facilitate discussions to address local issues related to diversity and inclusion.

Legal and regulatory frameworks also play a vital role in sustaining harmony, as evidenced by the 54.7% of respondents who supported the establishment of rules and laws to preserve peaceful coexistence. Legislation that safeguards minority rights, promotes anti-discrimination policies, and encourages inclusivity can help create a structured approach to maintaining

societal harmony. Governments and policymakers must ensure that such laws are effectively implemented and enforced.

Mobilizing dialogue activities and programs in schools, universities, and communities received support from 52.8% of respondents. Education is a fundamental tool in promoting intercultural awareness and fostering respect for diversity. Integrating dialogue-based curricula, organizing workshops, and encouraging student-led initiatives can help instil values of tolerance and mutual respect from an early age.

The findings underscore the necessity of a multifaceted approach to improving the dialogue of civilization. By implementing inter-dialogue programs, utilizing media platforms, fostering community engagement, enacting supportive legislation, and integrating dialogue initiatives in educational institutions, societies can work towards a more inclusive and harmonious future.

Discussion

The Importance of Dialogue in Civilization

According to Ghazali Basri (1990) dialogue is a conversation, communication between two or more parties, whether formal or informal. In addition, dialogue is not simply a series of discussions, but rather a new way of thinking; a way of seeing nature and life and its meaning. Dialogue in Arabic is *hiwar*. Etymologically, the root word *hiwar* refers to the emphasis on basic concepts in Islamic civilization and culture. In Manzur (1955), *Al-Hiwar* or dialogue means return, "they dialogue" means they take and give in conversation. *At-Tahawwur* is the act of participating in dialogue, indicating a response or ability to respond. *Al-Haur* is stepping out of something or returning to it. *Al-Muhawara* refers to logic and rhetoric in dialogue. The civilization dialogue also means inter-communication and understanding between civilizations based on the important element of understanding each other's culture without prejudice towards people from other races (Chandra Muzaffar, 2003).

Therefore, dialogue of civilizations can be understood as negotiation, positive interaction between two parties, two-way communication, or more civilizations that aim to foster understanding and comprehension, share perspectives in solving problems in various aspects, tolerate dialogue partners from different civilizations, agree on cooperation, exchange of opinions and thoughts and so on. The term dialogue of civilizations is a term that can carry many meanings and connotations depending on which dimension we want to discuss. The two words, namely dialogue and civilization, are not new terms in the world of human civilization. The word is an old word in terms of its application in human life since the existence of humans on this earth.

Challenges and Obstacles to the Dialogue of Civilization

There are some essential challenges and obstacles in contemporary civilization dialogue. Firstly, should have mutual understanding and openness with one another. Concerning it, the Holy Quran says that, chapter al-Imran, verse 64, which means "*Say: 'O people of the Book! come to common terms as between us and you: that we worship none but Allah; that we associate no partners with Him; that we erect not from among ourselves Lords and patrons other than Allah." If then they turn back, say: ye! "Bear witness that we (at least) are Muslims (bowing to Allah's will*)." Understanding and openness to accept and understand the diversity of religions and ideologies are perfectly able to fill the space in the dialogue; therefore, it can be used to discuss and resolve issues related to religion (Azizan Baharuddin, 2008).

Secondly, the participants in the interfaith dialogue part should respect the ideas from the other side. In short, the participants in the interfaith dialogue have the freedom to express their own religion's perspectives, and each of them should respect the ideas that differ from them (Ramli Awang, 2008). This can be proven by saying the Holy Quran, which from Chapter al-Ghasyia verses 21-22 means *"Therefore do thou give admonition for thou art one to admonish (21) Thou art not one to manage (men's) affairs (22)"*. According to Siddiqui (1997), inter-religious dialogue is not for debate. The idea must be structured to include all aspects of dialogue, such as conversation, setting, goals, and format. In other words, the characteristic of this interreligious dialogue is not a comprehensive concept. The objective is to understand each other, solve problems together, and not preach to other religions.

Thirdly, knowing especially the knowledge of the issue in their interfaith dialogue is also a prerequisite for the individual or group that enters a dialogue. Therefore, the dialogue is not preaching or a mission. Meanwhile, ability means the ability of knowledge to any issues raised in the religion. Lastly, the theological approach in the interfaith dialogue should be avoided, as it may cause the outcome of the interfaith dialogue to be wasted (Garfinkel, 2004). According to Siddiqui (1997), dialogue is used to reduce conflicts of interest, that is, by sharing ways of thinking and views to understand each other, reduce differences and conflicts that exist, and identify some of the same issues, and lead to a focus on a certain field of study.

Conclusions

The findings of this study highlight the significant role of the dialogue of civilization in fostering harmony, understanding, and social cohesion among diverse communities. The majority of respondents demonstrated a positive perception of intercultural and interfaith discussions, acknowledging their potential in mitigating societal divisions and promoting peaceful coexistence. However, several critical challenges were identified, including misinformation, ineffective communication, reluctance to engage across religious and racial boundaries, lack of respect for diversity, and the persistence of prejudices. Addressing these barriers is essential to ensuring the effectiveness and sustainability of the dialogue of civilization.

To overcome these obstacles, a multifaceted approach is necessary, encompassing structured inter-dialogue programs, media representation, community engagement, legislative measures, and educational initiatives. The data underscores the importance of increasing interfaith and intercultural discussions, utilizing media to promote inclusivity, establishing joint community committees, implementing laws to safeguard harmony, and integrating dialogue-based education in schools and universities. By adopting these proactive strategies, societies can work toward reducing tensions, fostering mutual respect, and reinforcing national and cultural values.

Ultimately, the dialogue of civilization serves as a vital tool in addressing contemporary societal challenges and fostering global peace and understanding. The study's findings emphasize the need for continued efforts to promote and institutionalize intercultural dialogue as a fundamental aspect of social development. Governments, policymakers, educators, and communities must collaborate to create a more inclusive and harmonious society where diversity is embraced and mutual respect prevails.

Acknowledgment

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