

Demographic Correlates of Assertiveness, Social Skills, and Psychological Well-Being among Public University Students in Malaysia

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Abstract

This study investigates the demographic correlates of assertiveness, social skills, and psychological well-being among undergraduate students in Malaysian public universities. A total of 1,206 first-year students participated in the survey. To ensure representativeness, a multistage sampling approach was employed, which involved cluster sampling of universities across different regions followed by proportionate stratified random sampling of students. The study utilized three validated instruments, namely the Rathus Assertiveness Schedule (RAS), the Social Skills Inventory (SSI-Del-Prette), and Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scales. Reliability analysis demonstrated strong internal consistency with Cronbach's alpha values of 0.93 for the RAS, 0.94 for the SSI, and 0.88 for Ryff's PWB. The results revealed no significant gender differences in any of the three domains. However, significant variations emerged by field of study and socioeconomic status (SES). Students in the Social Sciences reported higher levels of assertiveness, social skills, and psychological well-being compared to those in Science and Technology, while students from higher SES backgrounds consistently demonstrated stronger outcomes across all domains. These findings highlight the influence of structural and disciplinary contexts on psychosocial development. The study contributes theoretically to the understanding of psychosocial competencies in collectivist societies, offers practical insights for higher education policy, and underscores the importance of promoting equity in student development.

Keywords: Assertiveness, Social Skills, Psychological Well-Being, Gender, Socioeconomic Status, Public Universities

Introduction

Higher education is not only a pathway for acquiring academic knowledge but also a critical environment for the development of psychosocial competencies. As students transition into adulthood, they are required to balance academic demands with personal growth, interpersonal relationships, and adaptation to new social contexts (Arnett, 2023). The ability to navigate these challenges effectively often determines not just academic success but also

broader life satisfaction and resilience. Three interrelated psychosocial domains are especially important during this stage. Assertiveness reflects the ability to communicate one's needs, opinions, and emotions clearly while respecting others, enabling students to maintain healthy boundaries and advocate for themselves in academic and social settings (Rathus, 1973). Social skills involve both verbal and non-verbal communication, empathy, and the capacity to build and sustain meaningful relationships, which are essential for collaboration and peer support in university life (Riggio, 1986). Psychological well-being encompasses self-acceptance, positive functioning, and resilience against stress, which together sustain students' motivation and overall mental health (Ryff, 1989). A growing body of literature links these psychosocial competencies to a range of outcomes including academic achievement, social integration, and mental health stability (Commodore et al., 2018).

However, demographic factors such as gender, field of study, and socioeconomic status may shape how these competencies are developed and expressed. Research in different cultural contexts has produced mixed findings. Some studies suggest that male and female students differ in assertiveness or psychological well-being, while others report no significant gender differences. Students from social sciences and science and technology disciplines also show divergent patterns of interpersonal (Szewczyk-Zakrzewska, 2019) and well-being outcomes (Abdul Hafaz et al., 2023) potentially due to differences in curriculum emphasis and learning environments. Socioeconomic status also plays a crucial role, with students from higher-income backgrounds often demonstrating stronger social and psychological resources than their peers from less advantaged families (Dougall et al., 2023; Navarro-Carrillo et al., 2020). Despite the importance of these issues, empirical evidence in the Malaysian higher education context remains limited. Malaysian public universities enrol diverse cohorts of students, reflecting varying demographic backgrounds and academic disciplines. Understanding how psychosocial competencies differ across gender, field of study, and socioeconomic status can provide critical insights for designing targeted interventions to support student well-being and personal development. The present study was conducted to investigate demographic correlates of assertiveness, social skills, and psychological well-being among undergraduates in Malaysian public universities.

Literature Review

Assertiveness, social skills, and psychological well-being are essential psychosocial attributes that have been widely studied across disciplines, yet evidence regarding their demographic determinants has been inconclusive. Studies on assertiveness show mixed results. Some investigations suggest that men tend to be more assertive, reflecting traditional gender roles, while others show no significant differences between men and women. Parray and Kumar (2016) reported no differences by gender or place of residence among Indian students, though commerce students scored slightly higher than arts and science students. In contrast, Sureyya et al. (2021) and Samfira (2022) found that male students displayed higher assertiveness than female students. Cultural constraints and patriarchal expectations have also been cited as barriers for women, particularly in collectivist contexts, where assertive expression may be viewed as confrontational (Acharya et al., 2016; Rusnac & Roşciupchin, 2023). Socioeconomic background is another relevant factor. Uzuntarla et al. (2016) showing that students from higher-income households reported greater assertiveness than peers from lower-income groups, reflecting the impact of resources and confidence nurtured by social advantage.

Social skills are equally shaped by demographics and educational context. Carneiro Machado et al. (2020) found that nursing students scored higher in social skills than psychology students due to the practical and interpersonal nature of their training. Prada et al. (2022) emphasized teamwork as an essential social skill, observing that female students generally outperformed male students in this area. Research also points to the role of socioeconomic status, with Gul et al. (2023) showing that students from low-SES backgrounds reported poorer peer relationships and reduced opportunities for social engagement compared to high-SES peers. Psychological well-being, as measured by Ryff's multidimensional model, has produced varied results across demographic factors. Pumpuang et al. (2021) reported no gender differences in psychological well-being among Thai students, while Matud et al. (2019) observed that women scored higher in relational aspects and men higher in autonomy. Studies have also highlighted field of study as an important variable, with students in demanding fields such as engineering and medicine reporting lower well-being due to heavy workloads and stress (Che Rahimi et al., 2021). Socioeconomic status is consistently associated with higher psychological well-being, as individuals from wealthier families often enjoy greater support, healthier lifestyles, and reduced financial stress (Dougall et al., 2023; Navarro-Carrillo et al., 2020). Despite these insights, limited research has been conducted in the Malaysian context, particularly among undergraduates at public universities. This study builds on the existing literature by exploring how gender, field of study, and socioeconomic status relate to assertiveness, social skills, and psychological well-being among Malaysian students.

Methodology

This study employed a cross-sectional survey design to examine the demographic correlates of assertiveness, social skills, and psychological well-being among first-year undergraduate students in Malaysian public universities. A survey design was considered appropriate because it allowed the researchers to collect information systematically from a large number of participants and to generalize the findings to the broader student population. The study population consisted of first-year undergraduate students enrolled in the 2021/2022 academic session across twenty public universities in Malaysia. A multistage sampling strategy was applied to ensure representativeness. In the first stage, cluster sampling was conducted by dividing the universities into five geographical zones, namely Central, Southern, Northern, Eastern, and Borneo. One university was randomly selected from each zone, resulting in Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM), Universiti Malaysia Pahang (UMP), Universiti Teknikal Malaysia Melaka (UTeM), Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), and Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS). Within these universities, proportionate stratified random sampling was then used to ensure that students from different academic programs were adequately represented. A total of 1,206 students participated in the survey, which exceeded the minimum recommended sample size of approximately 420 students based on Krejcie and Morgan's sampling table (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970). This large sample size strengthened both the reliability and generalizability of the findings.

The survey instrument was developed using the adapt-and-adopt approach and consisted of four main sections (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2017). The first section collected demographic information, which included gender, ethnicity, field of study, place of residence, and socioeconomic status. The second section measured assertiveness and was adapted from the Rathus Assertiveness Schedule originally developed by Rathus in 1973 (Rathus, 1973). The

third section assessed social skills, using items adapted from the Social Skills Inventory designed by Del-Prette in 2001 (Del Prette, 2001;2013). The fourth section measured psychological well-being, using items adapted from Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scale introduced by Ryff and Keyes in 1989 (Ryff & Keyes, 1989). This scale evaluates six dimensions that include autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. Data were collected using a structured online questionnaire administered through Google Forms. The distribution of the questionnaire was facilitated by the Student Affairs Divisions of the selected universities, and students were given two weeks to complete their responses.

A pilot test was conducted before the main study to examine the reliability of the adapted instruments. The results of the pilot test showed that the instruments demonstrated strong internal consistency. Cronbach's alpha values were 0.93 for the Rathus Assertiveness Schedule, 0.94 for the Social Skills Inventory, and 0.88 for Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scale. According to Hair et al. (2014), a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.70 or above is considered acceptable in social science research. Values between 0.70 and 0.80 indicate adequate internal consistency, while values above 0.80 demonstrate good reliability. In this study, the scales used to measure assertiveness, social skills, and psychological well-being all exceeded the recommended threshold, indicating that the instrument had satisfactory reliability for further analysis. Data analysis was carried out using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Independent sample t-tests were employed to examine differences in assertiveness, social skills, and psychological well-being based on gender and field of study. One-way analysis of variance with Scheffé post-hoc tests was conducted to assess differences across socioeconomic status groups. Effect sizes were calculated to provide a deeper understanding of the magnitude of the observed differences and to complement the results of the significance tests.

Results and Discussion

Quantitative data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, were used to summarize the demographic characteristics of the respondents, such as gender, ethnicity, field of study, socioeconomic status (SES), and place of residence. For inferential statistics, independent samples t-tests were conducted to examine differences in assertiveness, social skills, and psychological well-being based on gender and field of study. In addition, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) with Scheffé post-hoc tests was employed to identify group differences across socioeconomic status.

Demographic of Respondents

A total of 1,206 first-year undergraduate students from Malaysian public universities participated in this survey. The demographic characteristics of the respondents are presented in Table 1, which summarizes their gender, ethnicity, field of study, place of residence, and socioeconomic status (SES).

Table 1

Demographic of respondents

| Demographic | Frequency (f) | Percentage (%) |
|---------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|
| Gender | | |
| Female | 702 | 58.2 |
| Male | 504 | 41.8 |
| Ethnicity | | |
| Malay | 678 | 56.2 |
| Chinese | 180 | 14.9 |
| Indian | 110 | 9.1 |
| Bumiputera Sabah | 125 | 10.4 |
| Bumiputera Sarawak | 113 | 9.4 |
| Field of Study | | |
| Science and Technology | 704 | 58.4 |
| Social Sciences | 502 | 41.6 |
| Place of Residence | | |
| Urban | 634 | 52.6 |
| Rural | 572 | 47.4 |
| Household Income | | |
| Low (\leq RM4,850) | 562 | 47.0 |
| Middle (RM4,851–10,959) | 544 | 45.0 |
| High (\geq RM10,960) | 100 | 8.0 |
| Total | 1206 | 100 |

The sample included a higher proportion of female students (58.2%) compared to male students (41.8%). In terms of ethnicity, more than half of the respondents were Malay (56.2%), followed by Chinese (14.9%), Bumiputera Sabah (10.4%), Bumiputera Sarawak (9.4%), and Indian (9.1%). Regarding field of study, 58.4% of the participants were enrolled in Science and Technology programs, while 41.6% pursued studies in the Social Sciences. Slightly more than half of the respondents resided in urban areas (52.6%), whereas 47.4% lived in rural areas. Household income distribution showed that nearly half of the students were from low-income families (47.0%), followed by those from middle-income households (45.0%), and a smaller proportion from high-income families (8.0%). This demographic composition reflects the diversity of the respondents and enhances the representativeness and credibility of the study's findings.

Differences in Assertiveness, Social Skills, and Psychological Well-Being among First-Year Undergraduate Students in Malaysian Public Universities Based on Gender, Field of Study, and Socioeconomic Status

This study further examined differences in assertiveness, social skills, and psychological well-being among students according to gender, field of study, and socioeconomic status. The results of these analyses are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2

Summary of differences in assertiveness, social skills, and psychological well-being among First-Year Undergraduate Students in Malaysian Public Universities based on gender, field of study, and socioeconomic status

| Outcome | Factor | Result | Group Differences | Effect Size |
|--------------------------|--------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------|
| Assertiveness | Gender | ns, $t(1204)=0.74, p=.46$ | Female (M=80.06) ≈ Male (M=79.62) | $d=0.02$ |
| Assertiveness | Field | sig., $t(1204)=-2.60, p<.05$ | Social Sciences > S&T | $g=0.15$ |
| Assertiveness | SES | sig., $F(2,1203)=11.01, p<.001$ | High > Medium & Low | $\eta^2=.018$ |
| Social Skills | Gender | ns, $t(1204)=-0.02, p=.49$ | Female ≈ Male | $d=0.00$ |
| Social Skills | Field | sig., $t(1204)=-2.28, p<.05$ | Social Sciences > S&T | $g=0.13$ |
| Social Skills | SES | sig., $F(2,1203)=8.09, p<.001$ | High > Medium & Low | $\eta^2=.013$ |
| Psychological Well-Being | Gender | ns, $t(1204)=0.40, p=.35$ | Female ≈ Male | $d=0.02$ |
| Psychological Well-Being | Field | sig., $t(1204)=-2.22, p<.05$ | Social Sciences > S&T | $g=0.13$ |
| Psychological Well-Being | SES | sig., $F(2,1203)=6.85, p<.001$ | High > Medium & Low | $\eta^2=.011$ |

ns = not significant; sig. = significant. d = Cohen's d , g = Hedges' g , η^2 = eta squared; S&T=Science and Technology

Differences in Assertiveness by Gender, Field of Study, and Socioeconomic Status

Independent t -tests showed no significant gender differences in assertiveness, with female students ($M = 80.06, SD = 18.91$) and male students ($M = 79.62, SD = 18.66$) scoring similarly, $t(1204) = 0.74, p > .05$. Field of study comparisons revealed significant differences, as Social Science students ($M = 81.54, SD = 19.48$) scored higher than Science and Technology students ($M = 78.69, SD = 18.22$), $t(1204) = -2.60, p < .05$. One-way ANOVA indicated significant differences by socioeconomic status, $F(2,1203) = 11.01, p < .001$, with high-SES students ($M = 87.70, SD = 20.38$) scoring higher than both medium-SES ($M = 80.12, SD = 19.22$) and low-SES students ($M = 78.24, SD = 17.74$).

The findings of this study revealed no significant gender differences in assertiveness, indicating that male and female student's express comparable levels of confidence and self-advocacy. This outcome is consistent with research by Akkaya and Tuzgol Dost (2021) and Younes (2021), which similarly found no gender-based differences. A possible explanation is that increasing access to higher education and broader social mobility in Malaysia have reduced traditional gender gaps, enabling both male and female students to gain confidence in expressing themselves. Nevertheless, evidence from previous studies remains mixed. Some researchers report that men are more assertive because of traditional socialization practices that emphasize dominance and independence (Rani, 2019; Ibrahim, 2023). Women, by contrast, are often socialized toward nurturing and cooperation, although recent studies suggest that female students may now demonstrate levels of assertiveness equal to or exceeding those of men (del Carmen Meza-Mejía et al., 2024).

Cultural context provides an important explanation for these variations. Social Role Theory argues that assertive behavior is evaluated differently when expressed by men and women (Folberg et al., 2022). Women who act assertively may be penalized and perceived as aggressive or unfeminine, whereas men who display the same behavior are often rewarded as competent and capable (Rusnac & Roşciupchin, 2023). This cultural double bind helps explain why some studies continue to report lower female assertiveness, even though controlled measures sometimes reveal similar or higher scores among women. Cross-cultural research further demonstrates that in collectivist societies such as Malaysia, assertive communication may be discouraged as it is viewed as disruptive to group harmony, while in individualistic societies it is considered a valued attribute for success (Guo et al., 2025; Parham et al., 2015). The findings of this study therefore suggest that Malaysian undergraduates, regardless of gender, are negotiating cultural expectations in ways that allow them to balance confidence with sensitivity to social relationships.

Significant differences in assertiveness were observed across academic fields. Students enrolled in Social Sciences reported higher assertiveness compared to those in Science and Technology. This aligns with the findings of Toktaş et al. (2022) and Melhem (2021), who argued that Social Science curricula emphasize discussion, debate, and collaboration, all of which nurture assertive communication. Students in these disciplines are often encouraged to articulate opinions, defend arguments, and engage in critical reflection, which enhances their ability to communicate assertively. By contrast, Science and Technology programs tend to focus on technical proficiency, analytical problem-solving, and individual performance, which may limit opportunities for the practice of assertiveness. However, other studies have reported the opposite trend, with Science and Technology students displaying higher assertiveness due to competitive academic environments and the need to advocate for ideas in high-stakes laboratory or project contexts (Gutgeld-Dror et al., 2024). These inconsistencies suggest that assertiveness is shaped by a complex interplay of disciplinary culture, learning environments, and individual characteristics.

Socioeconomic status also emerged as a significant predictor of assertiveness. Students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds demonstrated greater assertiveness than those from medium and low SES groups. This pattern is consistent with the findings of Uzuntarla et al. (2016) and Cheung and Tsang (2024), who observed that students from affluent families often have greater social capital, broader exposure to diverse experiences, and stronger parental encouragement, all of which foster confidence in self-expression. High-SES students may therefore feel more entitled to advocate for themselves and more capable of navigating institutional systems. In contrast, low-SES students may encounter social exclusion or internalized feelings of inferiority that restrict assertive behavior. The present study underscores the need for targeted interventions to strengthen assertiveness among lower-SES students so that they are not disadvantaged in their academic and personal development.

Differences in Social Skills by Gender, Field of Study, and Socioeconomic Status

No significant gender differences were observed in social skills, with female students ($M = 86.48$, $SD = 24.66$) and male students ($M = 86.51$, $SD = 24.28$) scoring almost identically, $t(1204) = -0.02$, $p > .05$. Students in Social Sciences ($M = 88.40$, $SD = 25.48$) reported significantly higher social skills than those in Science and Technology ($M = 85.14$, $SD = 23.69$), $t(1204) = -2.28$, $p < .05$. Socioeconomic status differences were also significant, $F(2,1203) =$

8.09, $p < .001$. High-SES students ($M = 95.23$, $SD = 25.10$) scored higher than medium-SES ($M = 86.79$, $SD = 24.92$) and low-SES students ($M = 84.65$, $SD = 23.65$).

The findings of this study revealed no significant gender differences in social skills, which supports previous research by Ahirrao (2023). This indicates that both male and female undergraduates are equally capable of managing interpersonal interactions and building social relationships. Nonetheless, some studies have highlighted more nuanced gender differences. For example, women often demonstrate stronger empathic and communicative skills, whereas men perform better in assertive or leadership-oriented contexts (Carneiro Machado et al., 2020; Salavera & Jarie, 2020). Longitudinal evidence provided by Hajovsky et al. (2021) also suggests that female students tend to develop more stable social skills over time, while male students exhibit greater variability in these abilities. These mixed findings reflect the complex interplay between gender socialization and developmental trajectories in shaping social competence.

Field of study was found to be a significant factor influencing social skills. Students enrolled in Social Sciences scored higher than those in Science and Technology, consistent with the findings of Hayat et al. (2020) and Abdul Hafaz et al. (2023). Social Science curricula typically emphasize group discussions, debates, and presentations that promote interpersonal growth and communication. In contrast, Science and Technology programs often prioritize technical tasks, analytical problem-solving, and individual performance, which may limit opportunities to practice and refine social interaction skills. While laboratory work and group projects exist in scientific disciplines, the emphasis is generally on technical outcomes rather than interpersonal processes. This disciplinary difference helps explain why Social Science students consistently report stronger social skills compared to their counterparts in Science and Technology.

Socioeconomic status also emerged as a significant predictor of social skills. Students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds demonstrated stronger social skills compared to their peers from medium and lower SES groups. This finding aligns with Li et al. (2020) and Tompsett and Knoester (2023), who observed that students from higher-income families often have greater access to extracurricular activities, social clubs, and networking opportunities that enhance interpersonal competence. By contrast, low-SES students may lack such opportunities, restricting the development of their social competencies. Gul et al. (2023) further emphasized that students from lower-SES backgrounds are more likely to experience social isolation and reduced peer support, which negatively affects their ability to develop and maintain social skills. Together, these results highlight the structural and environmental factors that shape students' interpersonal capacities beyond the classroom.

Differences in Psychological Well-Being by Gender, Field of Study, and Socioeconomic Status

Gender differences in psychological well-being were non-significant, with females ($M = 136.50$, $SD = 38.93$) and males ($M = 135.61$, $SD = 37.63$) reporting similar levels, $t(1204) = 0.40$, $p > .05$. Field of study comparisons revealed that Social Science students ($M = 139.03$, $SD = 39.75$) scored higher than Science and Technology students ($M = 134.06$, $SD = 37.26$), $t(1204) = -2.22$, $p < .05$. ANOVA indicated significant SES differences, $F(2,1203) = 6.85$, $p < .001$. High-SES students ($M = 149.50$, $SD = 39.82$) scored higher than both medium-SES ($M = 135.68$, $SD = 38.88$) and low-SES students ($M = 134.19$, $SD = 37.21$).

The findings of this study indicated no significant gender differences in psychological well-being, a result consistent with the work of Pumpuang et al. (2021) who also reported similar well-being levels across genders. However, contrasting evidence exists in the literature. Matud et al. (2019) observed that women tended to score higher on relational dimensions of well-being, such as positive relationships, while men scored higher on autonomy. These inconsistencies suggest that psychological well-being is shaped by cultural expectations and developmental stages. In collectivist societies such as Malaysia, both male and female students may prioritize group harmony and social connectedness, which could minimize gender-based differences in well-being. Significant differences were observed across academic fields, with Social Science students reporting higher psychological well-being than their counterparts in Science and Technology. This finding aligns with Che Rahimi et al. (2021), who found that students in demanding programs such as engineering, medicine, and pure sciences often face heavy academic workloads, examination pressure, and limited opportunities for social interaction, which collectively reduce their well-being. By contrast, Social Science programs typically emphasize discussion, collaboration, and critical reflection, creating a more balanced academic environment that fosters resilience and psychological health.

Socioeconomic status emerged as a strong predictor of psychological well-being. Students from higher SES backgrounds scored significantly higher than those from medium and low SES groups. This pattern is consistent with findings by Dougall et al. (2023) and Navarro-Carrillo et al. (2020), who argue that both objective resources and subjective perceptions shape psychological well-being. High-SES students benefit from financial security, access to healthcare, and healthier lifestyles, all of which contribute to better well-being (Wang & Geng, 2019). By contrast, students from low-SES backgrounds are more likely to experience financial strain, social exclusion, and reduced opportunities, which negatively affect their psychological functioning. Across the three domains examined in this study, SES consistently emerged as a significant predictor, highlighting the structural inequalities that shape students' psychosocial development in higher education.

Conclusion

This study rigorously analysed the demographic correlates of assertiveness, social skills, and psychological well-being among undergraduates in Malaysian public universities, revealing critical insights. It found no significant gender differences in these domains, strongly suggesting that male and female students are developing psychosocial competencies at comparable levels. This challenges traditional assumptions about gender disparities and indicates a narrowing gender gap in psychosocial development within the Malaysian higher education context. However, the study identified significant disparities across academic fields and socioeconomic status. Students from the Social Sciences consistently exhibited higher levels of assertiveness, social skills, and psychological well-being than their counterparts in Science and Technology disciplines. Moreover, students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds showed markedly stronger outcomes across all three domains, underscoring the profound impact of structural and environmental factors on student development.

Theoretically, these findings extend the application of established psychosocial development models such as RAS, SSI-Del-Prette, and Ryff's psychological well-being framework by demonstrating how contextual variables like field of study and socioeconomic

status dynamically interact with individual psychosocial outcomes. The lack of gender difference aligns with Social Role Theory and cross-cultural perspectives, which emphasize cultural norms shaping the manifestation and perception of assertiveness and social behaviour. The persistent influence of socioeconomic status supports the integration of Critical Social Theory, highlighting structural inequalities that affect psychosocial competencies. Practically, this study implicates the need for universities to design differentiated and context-sensitive student support programs. For students in Science and Technology, targeted initiatives should focus on fostering interpersonal and reflective skills, while Social Sciences curricula that emphasize collaboration and communication appear to confer psychosocial advantages. Additionally, robust support systems such as assertiveness training, mentoring, and expanded extracurricular access must be prioritized for students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, addressing entrenched disparities. These strategies are crucial for creating equitable academic environments that nurture psychosocial competencies pivotal for both academic success and lifelong well-being.

This study not only makes significant theoretical contributions by refining our understanding of how demographic factors shape psychosocial development but also bolsters higher education research in Malaysia through comprehensive empirical data from over 1,200 undergraduates. The implications call for continued research employing longitudinal and qualitative methods to deepen insights into psychosocial competency evolution and lived cultural experiences. Institutional policies should integrate psychosocial development modules across disciplines, ensuring students acquire both academic and essential interpersonal and emotional resources. In summary, this research emphatically highlights the nuanced roles of academic discipline and socioeconomic status in shaping Malaysian university students' psychosocial growth while demonstrating gender parity in these competencies. It advances theoretical frameworks and provides a robust evidence base for practical interventions aimed at fostering holistic, equitable student development.

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