# Rethinking Pedagogic Discourse in Social Movement Learning in a Semi-Democratic Setting

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| Article Info | Abstract |
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| | This study investigates the relationship between youth mobilisation and social movements within the educational framework of a semi-democratic environment. Drawing from a curriculum fellowship and informed by pedagogical observations, this study assesses students' knowledge levels before and after a social movement course to identify effective instructional methods. Leveraging Bernstein's pedagogic discourse, findings highlight the effectiveness of social movement courses in knowledge transfer. However, the findings reveal that practical experiences beyond the classroom are essential to empower students in semi-democratic contexts like Malaysia. This study contributes to transformative pedagogy, highlighting the necessity of student involvement in the learning process, particularly in courses deemed "controversial". By emphasising the synergy between theoretical knowledge and experiential learning, this study advances the understanding of educational methods that foster critical engagement in restricted political environments. The analysis suggests the importance of a transformative pedagogical approach, asserting a secure and enabling learning environment in social movement courses. |

## Introduction

The political landscape in Malaysia does not conform to the definitions of a full democracy, as evidenced by scholarly observations (Levitsky & Way, 2002; Giersdorf & Croissant, 2011; Lee, 2018; Washida, 2018). Despite the safeguards outlined in the Federal Constitution to ensure fundamental civil liberties, these rights are subject to limitations at the government's discretion. This assertion is corroborated by scholarly research (Guan, 2002; Haque, 2003; Liow, 2004). The government has historically exploited racial divisions to suppress challenges from civil society, ostensibly in the name of fostering interracial harmony, thereby strategically leveraging these divisions to perpetuate its authority and stifle dissent (Haque, 2003; Khoo, 2014, 2016).

Malaysia's history of protests and collective action predates its independence. For instance, Malay resistance against the Malayan Union manifested in a 1946 rally protesting the loss of the Sultans' political rights. Early engagement in collective action was primarily observed within labour movements, a legacy attributed mainly to the colonial organisation of labour (Kratoska, 1982; Leong, 1999; Weiss & Hassan, 2003) that employed a divide-and-rule approach. The delineation of ethnic divisions in Malaysia, accentuated by the racial riots in 1969, led to

a decline in the mobilising potential of trade unions and labour movements. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, social opposition and mobilisation were primarily associated with labour and ethnicity. Concurrently, this period witnessed the emergence of various organisations and groups, including student groups, which significantly influenced Malaysian politics. The mid-1980s marked an unprecedented social challenge to the *Barisan Nasional* (BN) regime, characterised by protest mobilisations (Nair, 1999). Unlike preceding cycles of protests that were largely rural and rooted in ethnic and labour issues, the protests and collective action of the 1980s highlighted the growing importance of civil society and social movements, reflecting the emergence of a new "middle class" transcending class, regional, and ethnic boundaries.

While the scholarly focus is still predominantly on political parties and state politics in Malaysia (Case, 1993; Gomez, 2016; Ufen, 2020; Wong, 2023), there has been a notable surge in scholarly attention towards the significance of social movements as actors driving social and political transformations in Malaysia, particularly in the aftermath of the *Reformasi* movement in 1998. This heightened interest has led to increased research on Malaysian politics, with a particular emphasis on the role played by social movements such as the Coalition for Clean and Fair Elections (Bersih) (Radue, 2012; Govindasamy, 2014; Khoo, 2014, 2016; Chan, 2018), alongside other movements like Hindu Rights Action Force (HINDRAF) and *Pertubuhan Pribumi Perkasa* (Perkasa). These movements have substantially influenced Malaysian politics (Govindasamy, 2014; Khoo, 2014, 2016) and shifted Malaysian political culture.

The societal perception of protests is often deemed "illegal" to a certain extent and labelled as "chaotic" or "violent" rather than being recognised as a civic duty (Azlan, 2020; Khoo, 2014). Furthermore, social movements carry a degree of negativity among students, as it is perceived as an act "against the government". One main factor contributing to this reluctance comes from the regulatory framework outlined in the Universities and University Colleges Act (UUCA), which serves as the principal legislation governing public universities. Historically, the UUCA has garnered notoriety for curbing the freedom of speech, assembly, and association within academic institutions. Although the Act underwent several amendments aimed at permitting university and college students to engage in on-campus political activities without fear of reprisals, calls for its complete abolition persist among student groups, albeit without conclusive resolution (Malaysiakini, 29 July 2020).

In this study, semi-democratic refers to a political environment characterised by inherent flaws within its democratic framework without necessarily implying a complete authoritarian regime. Given the evolving dynamics within the country, a compelling rationale arises for the inclusion of studies on social movements within the curricula of public universities in Malaysia. In 2015, the author undertook the initiative to introduce an undergraduate course titled "Social Movements and Democratisation". Throughout three academic sessions teaching this module, the author encountered significant challenges inherent to operating within a politically constrained environment characteristic of a semi-democratic setting.

The data presented in this paper are derived from a curriculum fellowship granted to the author by the International Center on Nonviolent Conflict (ICNC), facilitating the implementation of a classroom-based course integrating literature on civil resistance. This educational endeavour assumes significance within the Malaysian context,

where opportunities for such specialised courses are scarce, partly attributable to the constrained public space, which restricts discourse on social movements. In the Malaysian political landscape, scant attention is given to the role of social movements and the significance of youth mobilisation within mainstream discourse, which conventionally revolves around the state's role or the activities of political parties. This lacuna underscores the limited exposure of university settings to discourse on movements, contributing to the perpetuation of unequal power dynamics reinforced by external influences imposed upon academic institutions.

This paper investigates the adequacy of existing pedagogical approaches in facilitating the delivery of courses deemed "controversial" within a semi-democratic setting. Utilising a secondary analysis approach, the paper endeavours to evaluate students' knowledge acquisition both pre- and post-course, aiming to discern optimal methodologies for enhancing student comprehension within a politically constrained environment. In this paper, I argue that it is necessary to unpack the relations of "outside to inside", looking into the notion of the pedagogic device, which Bernstein (1990) described as the ensemble of rules or procedures where the knowledge is transferred through different channels such as the classroom discussion, curricula and online communication. This paper is organised as follows: The first section explores Bernstein's theory of pedagogical discourse. The succeeding section delineates the methodological approach adopted. The third section delves into the presentation and analysis of survey findings, culminating in a discussion in the fourth section, which precedes the concluding remarks.

## Social Movement Courses and Pedagogic Discourse

Courses on social movements within the education field have become increasingly relevant in fostering democratic values among students. Recent literature, such as that by Westheimer and Kahne (2020), highlights how social movement courses in educational institutions can cultivate a deeper understanding of democracy by encouraging students to analyse power dynamics and engage in civic action critically. Such courses are particularly valuable in higher education, where students are encouraged to connect theoretical knowledge with practical activism, fostering a more engaged and informed citizenry. The work by Apple (2019) emphasises that education is not only a field for transmitting knowledge but also a battleground for ideological contestation. Social movements, particularly those focused on education, often respond to perceived systemic injustices and challenge existing power structures.

The incorporation of social movement courses into the educational curriculum serves as a means of democratising education itself. According to Malott and Porfilio (2018), these courses challenge traditional pedagogical approaches by promoting participatory and experiential learning methods that reflect the democratic values they aim to teach. By studying social movements, students are exposed to diverse perspectives and are encouraged to question dominant narratives, which can lead to a more inclusive and democratic educational environment. This approach aligns with the broader goals of education for democracy, where the focus is not just on transmitting knowledge but also on empowering students to become active participants in democratic processes.

Despite the growing recognition of the importance of social movement courses in education, there remains a

significant gap in the literature regarding how social movement courses can be effectively delivered. While there is ample research on the immediate benefits of these courses, such as increased political awareness and activism, there needs to be more understanding of the political condition of how these courses are being delivered and how that could impact their effectiveness. Additionally, much of the existing literature focuses on Western contexts, with little exploration of how social movement courses are delivered and implemented in non-Western educational settings. Addressing these gaps would provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of social movement education in fostering democratic values globally and across different cultural contexts.

Bernstein's (1990, 1996) conceptualisation of pedagogic discourse has influenced our understanding of how knowledge is constructed, distributed, and reproduced within educational settings. This framework highlights the intricate relationships between language, social class, and educational outcomes, suggesting that how knowledge is framed can perpetuate existing social inequalities (Stahl, 1975). Moreover, Bernstein's analysis emphasises the role of specific communicative styles and genres in shaping students' access to educational content, which can differ significantly based on their sociolinguistic backgrounds and the cultural contexts of their schools, thereby affecting their overall academic success (Limerick & Thomas, 1993).

One of the central tenets of Bernstein's theory is the notion of "classification" and "framing," which describe the degree of boundary maintenance between different categories of knowledge and the extent of control exercised by teachers over the selection, sequencing, pacing, and evaluation of educational content, respectively (Limerick & Thomas, 1993). This dual mechanism not only delineates what is considered valid knowledge but also influences how students are positioned within the educational hierarchy, ultimately shaping their learning experiences and trajectories as a function of their sociocultural identities (Fernandes, 1988). In this regard, the nexus between pedagogic and social structures becomes apparent, as resistance to alternative educational frameworks often emerges from deeply ingrained societal norms and expectations, which Bernstein's work helps to elucidate (Limerick & Thomas, 1993).

According to Bernstein (1990), the efficacy of pedagogic discourse hinges upon two critical elements: conditions and structures, which render its implementation feasible and significantly influence its delivery. This renders pedagogic discourse inherently contingent upon external influences drawn from the "outside" to shape its discourse. However, Bernstein (1990) contends that while individuals may be mindful of the discourse they propagate, they may need to understand the restrictive processes imposed by the structures and conditions governing discourse. This assertion resonates with the argument posited in this paper, where implementing a social movements course within a university setting is deemed effective in knowledge transfer yet needs to be improved in facilitating practical exposure beyond the classroom, resulting in the absence of student voices.

Scholars such as Hoadley (2008) and Barrett (2007) have examined implementing pedagogic models within diverse educational settings, considering cultural and social expectations and challenges surrounding under-resourced educational systems and settings. In the context of a semi-democratic educational environment, pertinent questions revolve around the nature of power dynamics, the allocation of authority, and the feasibility of universities undertaking independent political actions, thus underscoring the significance of "outside-to-inside"

connections (Apple, 2002) in understanding the potential impact of education (Apple & Wexler, 1978; Apple, 1999).

While the literature about pedagogical experiences within social movements continues to evolve, considerable scope remains for further exploration. Scholars such as Clover and Hall (2000) and McFarlane (2011) have examined individual and collective learning within social movements, albeit with limited research conducted in the Malaysian context. Additionally, studies by Kowzan, Zielinska & Prusinowska (2014) and Cox (2016) have delineated various modes of learning within social movements, ranging from situated learning to collective inquiries. Critical pedagogy frameworks, as explored by scholars like O'Cadiz (2018), Motta et al. (2014) and Fischman & McLaren (2005), offer insights into how modifications to pedagogic practices can democratise educational institutions and influence knowledge production and dissemination processes. Despite the utility of Bernstein's theoretical models in elucidating pedagogic discourse dynamics, some scholars, such as Sadovnik (2001), have questioned their applicability to everyday educational contexts. Nevertheless, this paper acknowledges Bernstein's theoretical underpinnings while leveraging personal teaching experiences within a semi-democratic setting to underscore the practical implications of power relations delineated by Bernstein (1990).

## Method

This study employs a secondary analysis approach (Szabo & Strang, 1997), integrating mixed qualitative and quantitative datasets. The qualitative component derives from the author's teaching observations, while the quantitative aspect emanates from the findings of four surveys conducted during the social movement course. The 2019 ICNC fellowship enabled the author to develop and conduct an undergraduate course titled "Social Movements and Democratisation," which was initially convened during the academic session of 2016/2017. Subsequently, leveraging the ICNC curriculum fellowship obtained in 2019, the author delivered the course, incorporating literature on civil resistance, during the academic session of 2019/2020. Spanning 14 weeks with three credit hours per week, the course is a compulsory subject offered to second-year students.

Using ICNC resources and the author's teaching materials, the course imparts knowledge on civil resistance and social movements within the discourse of democratisation. Covering various topics, it explores the concepts, theories, and impacts of social movements on global politics within a transnational framework. Key curriculum elements include misconceptions, historical precedents, the efficacy of civil resistance, strategies, tactics, and the evolving nature of civil resistance movements.

To enhance student engagement, the course included several activities. Firstly, a group exercise on case studies from four regions—Americas, Europe, Africa, and the Middle East. Students divided into groups and created presentations incorporating visual aids. This "Movement Analysis" exercise, following classes on foundational concepts, theories, strategies, tactics, and the role of media, aimed to deepen their understanding through applied learning. Presentations were shared via the university's online platform, with evaluations based on creativity and engagement. Secondly, students participated in two group simulations—the "Spectrum of Allies" and "People

Power: The Game of Civil Resistance"—from ICNC resources. Thirdly, students also completed a tutorial presentation, a 2,000-word essay, an 800-word mid-term essay, and a final exam with three questions aligned with course content. These assessment methods were designed to foster comprehensive understanding, critical thinking, and practical application of course concepts and principles.

Although planned guest lectures could not occur due to the logistical challenges, alternative strategies enriched the course. Some students attended protests, gaining first-hand experience of civil resistance. This was exemplified by an incident where a graduate brandished a protest placard during the university convocation ceremony, which prompted a response from the university administration, igniting a nationwide debate that even caught the prime minister's attention. Students also attended a campus talk by a foreign professor. However, post-event scrutiny from the university administration ensued, citing the absence of requisite permits for organising the talk. Additionally, students participated in a workshop on human rights activism convened by the author at the university and contributed to a book discussion on social movements in Malaysia. These activities provided practical insights into the real-world applications of theories discussed in class. Despite administrative challenges, these experiences highlighted the value of integrating experiential learning into academic coursework, bridging theory and practice for a holistic educational approach.

As indicated in Table 1, the surveys were conducted in four stages: Survey 1 Pre-Course, Survey 2 Post-Course, Survey 3 Course Evaluation, and Survey 4 Follow-Up, which involved over 30 students enrolled in the course for seven months, from September 2019 to March 2020. Survey 1 Pre-Course was administered one week before the commencement of the course, providing a baseline measure of students' initial understanding and knowledge. Subsequently, Survey 2 Post-Course and Survey 3 Course Evaluation were disseminated to students during the final week, enabling the assessment of learning outcomes and overall course satisfaction. Furthermore, Survey 4 Follow-Up was distributed approximately two months after the conclusion of the course, facilitating a longitudinal analysis of knowledge retention and the sustained impact of the course.

Table 1. Four Stages of Surveys

| Survey | Survey Aim | Total Survey Questions | Survey Questions | Total Responses Received |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Survey 1: Pre- Course Learning Gains** | To assess participants' knowledge prior to the course that is related to the themes covered during the course | 30 | The questions are divided into six parts: 1. General questions, 2. Attitude/belief about civil resistance and social movements, 3. Concepts of civil resistance and social movements, 4. Strategies and tactics of social movements, 5. Dynamics of civil resistance and | 41 |

| Survey | Survey Aim | Total Survey Questions | Survey Questions | Total Responses Received |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | social movements in the democratization process, 6. Effectiveness of civil resistance and social movements. | |
| **Survey 2: Post-Course Learning Gains** | To assess participants' knowledge after the course that is related to the themes covered during the course | 27 | The questions are divided into six parts: 1. General questions, 2. Attitude/belief about civil resistance and social movements, 3. Concepts of civil resistance and social movements, 4. Strategies and tactics of social movements, 5. Dynamics of civil resistance and social movements in the democratization process, 6. Effectiveness of civil resistance and social movements. | 34 |
| **Survey 3: Course Evaluation** | To gather student assessment of the delivered course content, ways it was delivered, perspectives on what helped or hindered their learning and used in reflecting on how to improve the course when offered in the future. | 20 | The questions are divided into six parts: 1. Course content, 2. Group work, 3. General impression of the course, 4. Knowledge gained, 5. Applicability, 6. Improvements and recommendations. | 39 |
| **Survey 4: Follow-Up** | To assess the lasting impact of the course. | 11 | The design of Survey 4 is shorter than the other three surveys, and basically, the questions are about how the students use the knowledge, content, pedagogy or information in the course in their current or planned activities. | 30 |

The design of these surveys prioritised short and comprehensive responses from students. It employed ordinal scales ranging from 0 to 5, 1 to 3, or 0 to 10 to gauge varying levels of agreement, comfort, importance, influence, and interest. This scale methodology facilitated the ranking of variables according to their magnitude, enabling nuanced analysis of students' perceptions. Students were encouraged to offer reflections encompassing their entire learning experience and classroom and extracurricular applications of acquired knowledge. As indicated in Table 1, Survey 1 Pre-Course assesses students' knowledge before the course. It focuses on gauging the level of interest in the course, comfort level and attitude towards social movements and civil resistance, and the level of understanding of the concepts. Survey 2 Post-Course also assesses the students' knowledge after taking the course. Survey 3 Course Evaluation focuses on gauging the level of agreement with the course content, how it was delivered, and perspectives on what helped or hindered their learning. It is used to reflect on how to improve the course when offered. Survey 4 Follow-Up focuses on the long-term impact of the course, concerning the questions about the level of importance, frequency and influence of how these students use the knowledge, content, pedagogy or information in the course in their current or planned activities.

Two limitations emerged from the secondary analysis of the existing data. First, reliance on self-reported data inherently introduces the possibility of bias, as responses are contingent upon individuals' subjective perceptions rather than objectively observed behaviour. Second, while the class comprised 42 students, varying response rates were recorded across the four surveys: Survey 1 (41 responses), Survey 2 (34 responses), Survey 3 (39 responses), and Survey 4 (30 responses).

## Results

### Survey 1 Pre-Course and Survey 2 Post-Course

Surveys 1 and 2 reveal significant insights into the dynamics of student engagement, knowledge acquisition, and attitudinal shifts within a course on civil resistance and social movements. Initially, the pre-course survey indicated that participants possessed a moderate to high level of interest, which is crucial in predicting successful learning outcomes. However, their self-reported understanding varied widely, suggesting the presence of both novices and more informed participants. This diversity underscores the need for a curriculum that balances foundational content with advanced theoretical and practical knowledge. Surveys 1 and 2 findings suggest the progression observed in students' learning trajectories throughout the course. By juxtaposing pre-course and post-course survey results, the findings offer insights into the effectiveness of the course curriculum in fostering learning gains, particularly in the domain of civil resistance. Table 2 provides an overview of students' evolving perspectives and understanding over the course duration.

Table 2. Findings from Survey 1 Pre-Course and Survey 2 Post-Course

| Survey Aspect | Survey 1 Pre-Course | Survey 2 Post-Course |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Interest in Civil Resistance | Moderate to High | 85.3% reported increased interest |
| Interest in Social Movements | Moderate to High | 85.3% reported increased interest |
| Understanding of Civil | Varying degrees, basic to moderate | 97.1% reported increased |

| Survey Aspect | Survey 1 Pre-Course | Survey 2 Post-Course |
|---|---|---|
| **Resistance** | | understanding |
| **Understanding of Social Movements** | Varying degrees, basic to moderate | 97.1% reported increased understanding |
| **Knowledge of Civil Resistance Strategies** | Basic understanding, limited number of strategies known | 61.8% knew 6-10 strategies; 29.4% knew more than 10 |

*Survey 1 Pre-Course*

1. *Interest in Civil Resistance and Social Movements:* The pre-course survey indicates that most students were moderately interested in civil resistance and social movements. This suggests that the initial engagement level could positively influence the learning outcomes, as pre-existing interest is a significant predictor of knowledge acquisition and retention.

2. *Knowledge and Understanding:* Students self-reported varying degrees of understanding regarding civil resistance and social movements, with a notable portion indicating only a basic or moderate understanding. This variation implies a diverse group of learners, with some requiring foundational knowledge while others may seek to deepen their pre-existing understanding.

3. *Expectations and Learning Objectives:* The pre-course expectations were centred on gaining practical skills and theoretical knowledge relevant to civil resistance. Students anticipated learning about specific case studies, strategic planning, and the dynamics of nonviolent movements. The emphasis on practical application indicates a preference for learning that can be directly translated into real-world scenarios, suggesting that the course should integrate experiential learning opportunities.

*Survey 2 Post-Course*

1. *Changes in Interest and Engagement:* The post-course survey reveals a significant increase in students' interest in civil resistance and social movements, with 85.3% reporting an increase. This suggests that the course was effective in enhancing engagement and deepening interest in these subjects. The sustained or increased interest post-course is a critical outcome, as it implies a lasting impact of the course on students' motivation to learn and possibly participate in civil resistance movements.

2. *Fulfilment of Expectations:* An overwhelming 88.2% of students indicated that the course met their expectations. This high level of satisfaction reflects the course's success in imparting knowledge and practical skills. The course appears to have effectively balanced theoretical content with practical applications, catering to the diverse needs of the students.

3. *Knowledge Gains:* Students reported significant knowledge gains across various aspects of civil resistance and social movements. Notably, 73.5% identified knowledge acquisition about concepts and theories as a substantial

outcome, while 70.6% noted an increased understanding of specific case studies. These findings suggest that the course was particularly effective in enhancing participants' theoretical knowledge, essential for informed participation in civil resistance activities.

4. *Attitudinal and Belief Shifts:* The survey indicates positive shifts in students' attitudes and beliefs towards civil resistance. After completing the course, a significant majority (73.5%) expressed greater comfort in participating in nonviolent movements, and 47.1% felt more prepared to lead such movements. These findings underscore the course's impact on empowering individuals with the confidence and leadership skills necessary for active participation in civil resistance.

5. *Understanding of Civil Resistance Strategies:* The course significantly enhanced students' understanding of civil resistance strategies, with 61.8% reporting familiarity with 6-10 strategies post-course and 29.4% knowing more than 10. This suggests that the course content effectively covered various strategies, equipping students with the knowledge to choose and apply appropriate methods in real-world contexts.

**Survey 3 Course Evaluation**

Survey 3 findings revealed the potential enhancement of course delivery through increased engagement in various activities. This finding underscores the significance of employing diverse instructional methods and providing opportunities for students to interact with course content. By recognising the need for expanded exposure, the survey highlights avenues for optimising the pedagogical approach, contributing to a more enriching learning experience. Such insights underscore the importance of continuous improvement and adaptation in educational practices to meet the evolving needs of students. Findings from Survey 3 have proven instrumental in identifying critical areas necessitating an enabling environment for the more effective delivery of the social movement course.

1. *Course Content:* The survey reveals that the students found the course content clear and comprehensive, with 56.4% strongly agreeing and 43.6% agreeing that the learning outcomes and modules were well-structured. The balance in the course content and well-selected topics was positively received, with most students (56.4%) affirming the course's comprehensiveness. This indicates high satisfaction with the course structure, suggesting that the course effectively met its educational objectives.

2. *Collaborative Experience with ICNC:* The collaboration with the ICNC was regarded as a positive aspect of the course, with 61.5% of students strongly agreeing and 35.9% agreeing that this collaboration enriched their learning experience. The ICNC's involvement appears to have added significant value, particularly in providing real-world insights into nonviolent movements, which many students found transformative.

3. *Student Reflections on Course Impact:* The qualitative feedback underscores the transformative impact of the course on students' perspectives regarding nonviolent resistance and social movements. Many students reported a shift in their understanding, realising that peaceful methods could be powerful tools for achieving social and political goals. This shift was particularly evident in comments such as, "I used to think that only violence could

tame humans," "Nonviolent resistance is more effective than violent approaches in demanding rights," "This course has taught me how powerful a normal citizen can be in deciding the future of the states," which reflects a profound change in perspective.

4. *Recommendations for the Course:* The students highlighted the importance of creating an environment conducive to effective pedagogical delivery and favourable student learning outcomes. The suggestions, such as conducting or participating in actual social movements, engaging with individuals involved in established or ongoing movements, and experiencing real-world protests or demonstrations, highlight the value of experiential learning and firsthand exposure to social movement dynamics. Such insights underscore the importance of incorporating practical, experiential components into the curriculum to deepen students' understanding and appreciation of social movements. This recommendation is particularly significant with comments such as, "Integrating field trips or outside of class study in the course," "Maybe much more info on how students can be in a protest, what are the ways to protest in peaceful means which won't get the students into trouble." By incorporating experiential learning opportunities, addressing varying student preferences, and providing comprehensive information on social movement dynamics, educators can effectively enhance the educational experience and promote student learning outcomes.

**Survey 4 Follow-Up**

Survey 4 findings shed light on the critical role of a conducive political environment in effectively delivering a course on civil resistance, social movements, and democratisation. This survey aimed to assess the enduring impact of the social movement course by examining how students applied the knowledge gained beyond the classroom setting.

1. *Influence of the Course on Participation in Civil Resistance:* The course had a significant impact on students' decision to join civil resistance campaigns within the past three months. The responses indicate a high level of influence, with most students (66.7%) reporting a strong or very strong influence from the course on their decision. This suggests that the educational content was effective in motivating participants to engage in activism, reinforcing the importance of well-structured courses in fostering civic engagement.

2. *Regularity of Staying Updated on Civil Resistance Strategies and Tactics*: The responses reveal a strong commitment to ongoing learning regarding the regularity with which students kept themselves updated on civil resistance strategies and tactics. Most (73.3%) of students reported regularly staying informed, with 50% indicating regular engagement. This finding underscores the course's lasting impact on students' interest and involvement in civil resistance, encouraging a continuous pursuit of knowledge and understanding in this field.

3. *Application of Knowledge Gained from the Course: The* survey results also shed light on how students have utilised the knowledge gained from the course. The most common applications were writing or reading about civil resistance (83.3%) and participating in civil resistance actions (43.3%). Notably, a smaller but significant portion of students (20%) reported using the knowledge to plan civil resistance campaigns or engage in training or

teaching activities. These findings demonstrate the practical value of the course, with students applying their learning in diverse and meaningful ways.

4. *Perceived Relevance and Value of Learning Gains:* The majority of students (76.6%) found their learning gains from the course to be either more relevant and valuable than immediately after the class or potentially valuable in the future. Most students (83.3%) indicated they primarily utilised the knowledge in writing or reading activities. This was followed by participation in civil resistance actions (43.3%), planning civil resistance campaigns (20%), and training or teaching (16.7%), while a minority (6.7%) reported not using the knowledge from the course. The prominence of writing or reading activities among students suggests a passive engagement with the course material, potentially influenced by the prevailing political climate. Conversely, the relatively lower engagement in direct civil resistance actions and campaign planning underscores the political environment's challenges in fostering active participation in social movements.

## Discussion

Survey 1 illustrates students' initial limited knowledge and positive attitudes/beliefs regarding civil resistance, social movements, and democratisation before the course. In contrast, Survey 2 reveals a significant improvement in knowledge and attitudes following completion of the course. Survey 3 highlights the potential for enhanced course delivery through additional activities and exposure. Lastly, Survey 4 underscores the necessity of a conducive political environment to effectively deliver a course on civil resistance, social movements, and democratisation. These findings emphasise the need for a conducive political environment to facilitate student engagement in civil resistance campaigns and social movements beyond academic settings. They also highlight the nuanced ways in which socio-political contexts shape the knowledge application gained in educational settings.

Bernstein (1990) delineates the rules governing pedagogic discourse, encompassing distribution, recontextualization, and evaluation. These rules operate within a hierarchical framework, where the distribution of knowledge regulates the recontextualization of concepts, which in turn influences the evaluation of course delivery. Through recontextualization, knowledge of civil resistance, social movements, and democratisation is transferred from its original production site to alternative contexts, resulting in varying interpretations and applications. Notably, this process facilitates the transformation of initially perceived "negative" notions associated with civil resistance and social movements into more "positive" conceptions following the course.

Various instructional tools and resources, such as ICNC reference materials and documentaries, were utilised throughout the course, complementing the various activities implemented. These activities included group exercises centred on case studies from four geographical regions and two group simulation exercises. Additionally, students were tasked with an assigned tutorial presentation and essay, an individual writing assignment serving as the mid-term exam, and a final assessment. Furthermore, four unplanned events related to social movements and civil resistance were incorporated into the curriculum. Surveys 3 and 4 consistently underscored the potential for enhanced course delivery through increased activity and exposure. This suggests a

crucial need for a conducive political environment to effectively administer a course on civil resistance, social movements, and democratisation. Bernstein's (1990) conceptualisation of the principle of distribution elucidates the intricate interplay between power dynamics, group dynamics, forms of consciousness, and practices, ultimately influencing the reproduction and production of knowledge. However, while distribution lays the foundation for course content, recontextualization is essential in translating this knowledge into meaningful learning experiences.

The constrained political environment of Malaysia, situated within a semi-democratic context, poses inherent challenges to achieving optimal course delivery outcomes. The limitations imposed by this environment, both inside and outside the campus, impede students' sense of empowerment and hinder their ability to engage actively in civil resistance actions. However, despite these obstacles, the findings from Survey 3 indicate a positive shift in students' mindsets, with some demonstrating initiative by participating in on-campus protests. This analysis underscores the dynamic interplay between pedagogical strategies, socio-political contexts, and student agency in shaping the learning experience. It highlights the need for educators to navigate and address the constraints posed by the broader socio-political landscape while striving to cultivate an environment conducive to critical thinking, empowerment, and active citizenship among students. The findings underscore the imperative of fostering a conducive environment, particularly in semi-democratic settings, for the effective teaching of courses deemed "controversial," "taboo," or "politically sensitive". This aligns with Bernstein's exploration of power distribution and the transformation of authority into structured principles to facilitate meaningful educational interventions. Thus, these insights shed light on the complex dynamics in educational settings and the inherent challenges of navigating socio-political contexts in pedagogical practice.

Intertwining teaching and learning processes with contextual factors underscores the importance of considering the broader environmental landscape in educational research (Samuelowicz & Bain, 2001). This paper addresses this gap by highlighting the significance of contextual factors and power dynamics (Bernstein, 1990) in delivering courses that may be perceived as "controversial" within semi-democratic settings. Consequently, it is imperative to scrutinise environmental factors such as the prevailing political climate (Frederiksen & Beck, 2010). To facilitate this, a re-evaluation of the power dynamics delineated by Bernstein (1990) is warranted, exploring how they may be practically implemented in educational settings. Although further research on a broader scale is warranted, the analysis also underscores the necessity for pedagogical reform within social movement courses, contingent upon creating a safe and conducive learning environment that safeguards academic freedom.

A restrictive political environment poses a significant obstacle to effectively implementing courses on social movements. This challenge can be elucidated through two primary factors. Firstly, the presence of laws and policies that deem social movements and their associated strategies, such as street protests, as "illegal" contributes to a restrictive political atmosphere. This phenomenon has been observed in Southeast Asian contexts like Thailand, where initiatives promoting human rights education, including courses on social movements, face legal constraints (SHAPE-SEA, 2019). Secondly, in environments where academic freedom is not adequately safeguarded and public discourse is constrained, educators encounter dilemmas in delivering such courses to avoid potential repercussions.

Various conceptual frameworks have been introduced to delineate the dynamic environments conducive to meaningful educational experiences, such as professional learning communities (Matthews & Crow, 2010) and caring learning communities (Sergiovanni, 1994). Notably, the effective delivery of courses on social movements is contingent upon an open and supportive learning environment. Research by Louis and Marks (1998) underscores the positive influence of professional learning communities on teaching effectiveness and student learning outcomes. This resonates with students' recommendations for more interactive activities, such as engaging with protesters and participating in workshops, to enrich their learning experiences.

Survey findings underscore the critical role of a conducive environment in optimising the delivery of social movement courses. There needs to be more than experiential learning to grasp the complexities of this subject matter. The surveys indicate students' emphasis on direct involvement in social movements to deepen their understanding of the course material. However, in semi-democratic settings, where social movements are often stigmatised, students may perceive such actions negatively. Recontextualization,a as conceptualised by Bernstein (1990), necessitates an understanding of the broader socio-political context within which social movement courses operate. Therefore, a conducive environment that enables students to engage in civil resistance actions is essential for effective pedagogical delivery.

## Conclusion

While this study may yield findings generalisable to broader contexts, it does shed light on the challenges inherent in delivering courses in semi-democratic settings. These challenges underscore the limitations of applying conventional pedagogical approaches, including experiential or active learning, in such contexts. While Bernstein's theoretical framework remains instrumental in understanding knowledge transfer, this study raises caution about the necessity of contextualising pedagogical practices within the political landscape of a country, particularly in the context of controversial courses necessitating empowerment by political circumstances. This study reveals the efficacy of social movement courses in knowledge dissemination but advocates for a complementary emphasis on practical exposure beyond the confines of the classroom, particularly within the semi-democratic context of Malaysia. The analysis suggests the need for a transformative pedagogical approach in social movement courses, asserting the requirement for a secure and enabling learning environment.

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