

BEYOND THE BEAT: A NARRATIVE CASE STUDY OF IDENTITY, BELONGING, AND HOLISTIC GROWTH THROUGH BRASS BAND PARTICIPATION IN MALAYSIAN SECONDARY EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Co-curricular participation has long been part of Malaysia's educational vision, yet its deeper role in shaping identity and belonging remains underexplored. This study investigates how membership in the Jabatan Seni Persembahan Orkestra (JSPO) brass band in Penang fosters discipline, emotional growth, and civic identity among secondary school students. Using a narrative case study design, eight band members aged 14 to 17 were purposively selected and engaged through semi-structured interviews, naturalistic observations, and document analysis. Data were thematically analysed using Braun and Clarke's framework, guided by sociocultural learning theory and Eisner's concept of the hidden curriculum. Findings indicate that brass band participation cultivated self-discipline, resilience, and emotional regulation while creating a sense of family-like belonging across ethnic and social boundaries. The band also functioned as a symbolic and civic space, where wearing the uniform and performing patriotic repertoire reinforced accountability and national pride. This research contributes to the limited Malaysian scholarship on music and identity by showing how brass bands operate not as supplementary co-curricular activities but as pedagogical ecosystems that align with the *Pelan Pembangunan Pendidikan Malaysia (PPPM) 2013–2025* and *Malaysia MADANI* aspirations. Implications are offered for policymakers, educators, and school leaders seeking to reposition arts education as central to holistic student development.

Keywords: *Brass Band, Identity, Belonging, Arts Education, Co-Curricular Development, Malaysia, Narrative Case Study*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Across the world, music has been recognised as a powerful medium for shaping not only artistic skill but also identity, community, and resilience (Hallam, 2019; Rickard et al., 2021). For young people, participation in school-based ensembles often represents much more than extracurricular involvement; it provides a structured environment where values are internalised, friendships are forged, and self-confidence is nurtured. In Malaysia, the Ministry of Education has long acknowledged this potential. The *Pelan Pembangunan Pendidikan Malaysia (PPPM) 2013–2025* calls for a balanced, holistic education system that nurtures intellectual, emotional, spiritual, and civic capacities. More recently, the *Malaysia MADANI* framework has reinforced the vision of an education system rooted in trust, cultural respect, and civic responsibility (MOE, 2023).

Yet, despite these policy ambitions, music and the performing arts in Malaysian schools remain marginalised. While students are required to participate in co-curricular activities, music programmes are often treated as optional, with greater emphasis placed on sports or academic clubs (Rahim & Nor, 2021; Lai & Tan, 2022). As a result, the wider role of music ensembles in supporting identity formation, intercultural understanding, and emotional wellbeing is frequently overlooked.

International studies show that ensembles provide spaces where adolescents negotiate belonging and identity (Creech et al., 2020; Welch et al., 2022). Regional research in Singapore and Indonesia has demonstrated that school music programmes also serve as platforms for civic pride and intercultural cohesion (Chong, 2020; Rohmah & Fadilah, 2020). However, in Malaysia, most research on co-curricular bands has focused on performance quality, competition results, or logistical challenges (Che Lah & Mamat, 2018; Zulkifli et al., 2020). Few studies have centred student voices to understand how ensemble participation shapes their personal, social, and civic development.

This study addresses that gap by investigating the Jabatan Seni Persembahan Orkestra (JSPO) brass band, a multicultural school ensemble in Penang with a strong tradition of public performance. Using a narrative case study design, the research foregrounds student experiences to explore three key questions:

1. How does participation in the brass band contribute to students' sense of identity and belonging?
2. In what ways does the band support emotional growth, discipline, and resilience?
3. How does brass band membership reinforce values of civic pride and responsibility in line with Malaysian education policy?

The novelty of this study lies in positioning brass bands as pedagogical ecosystems that embody the hidden curriculum of discipline, responsibility, and civic identity. Its contribution is both theoretical and practical: it enriches the global literature on music and youth development with Malaysian evidence, and it provides educators and policymakers with a framework for reimagining co-curricular arts programmes as central to holistic education.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Arts Education and Holistic Development

A growing body of scholarship highlights the role of arts education in fostering holistic student growth. International evidence demonstrates that active participation in music develops not only artistic ability but also transferable skills such as perseverance, collaboration, and critical thinking (Hallam, 2019; McPherson & Welch, 2018). Ensemble-based learning, in particular, has been associated with increased self-esteem, improved emotional regulation, and stronger academic engagement (Rickard et al., 2021; Guhn et al., 2019). These outcomes are increasingly recognised as essential for preparing young people to navigate the complexities of the 21st century.

Within the Malaysian context, the *Pelan Pembangunan Pendidikan Malaysia (PPPM) 2013– 2025* positions co-curricular activities as integral to nurturing balanced individuals who embody intellectual, emotional, spiritual, and physical strengths (MOE, 2013). The introduction of the *Malaysia MADANI* framework in 2023 further emphasises values-based education, civic responsibility, and intercultural understanding. Arts education and music in particular has unique potential to serve these aims, yet remains underrepresented in both practice and research (Rahim & Nor, 2021; Lai & Tan, 2022).

School Ensembles as Spaces of Identity and Belonging

School music ensembles are not only performance groups but also social communities where identity and belonging are actively constructed. Wenger's (1998) concept of "communities of practice" provides a useful lens, suggesting that identity is shaped through shared routines, mutual accountability, and collective meaning-making. International studies show that ensembles create safe spaces for adolescents to develop friendships and explore personal identity within a supportive community (Creech et al., 2020; Parker, 2019).

In Southeast Asia, research indicates that ensembles also function as sites of civic and intercultural learning. Chong (2020) observed that Singaporean school ensembles fostered cross-cultural understanding, while Rohmah and Fadilah (2020)

reported similar outcomes in Indonesian music groups. These findings are particularly relevant for Malaysia, a multicultural society where education is tasked with cultivating both unity and diversity. Yet, studies in Malaysia tend to emphasise performance outcomes or administrative challenges (Che Lah & Mamat, 2018; Zulkifli et al., 2020), with limited attention to student voices on identity and belonging.

Discipline and Emotional Wellbeing Through Music

Participation in music ensembles often requires discipline, sustained effort, and teamwork. Such experiences align with the concept of “character education” in schools, where responsibility and perseverance are cultivated through structured practice. Wong and Nasir (2021) found that Malaysian school band members reported improvements in time management and self-regulation, skills also highlighted in the PPPM as essential for 21st-century learners.

Beyond discipline, music has been shown to support emotional expression and wellbeing. Saarikallio and Erkkilä (2020) demonstrated that adolescents use music to regulate mood and manage stress, while Yinger and Gooding (2023) highlighted its therapeutic value in promoting social-emotional skills. In Malaysia, where concerns about youth mental health are growing (Tan & Yusof, 2021), co-curricular music ensembles represent a promising avenue for providing supportive, non-academic spaces for emotional growth.

Gaps in the Literature

Despite international recognition of music’s educational and developmental value, gaps remain in Malaysian scholarship. Three issues are particularly salient:

1. **Underrepresentation of student voices** – Most studies focus on performance metrics, attendance, or programme management rather than the lived experiences of student musicians (Rahim & Nor, 2021; Lai & Tan, 2022).
2. **Limited qualitative research** – Few studies employ narrative or case study approaches to explore identity, belonging, and growth as experienced by young people themselves.
3. **Weak integration with national policy goals** – While the PPPM and *Malaysia MADANI* highlight holistic education and values-driven citizenship, little empirical work demonstrates how music ensembles actually contribute to these aspirations.

This study addresses these gaps by adopting a narrative case study approach centred on student perspectives. By examining the Jabatan Seni Persembahan Orkestra (JSPO) brass band in Penang, it provides empirical evidence of how ensemble participation shapes identity, belonging, and growth, while situating these outcomes within the broader framework of Malaysian education policy.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative narrative case study approach in order to explore how participation in a school brass band contributed to students' identity, belonging, and growth. A case study was considered most suitable as it allowed for an in-depth examination of a bounded system the Jabatan Seni Persembahan Orkestra (JSPO) brass band in Penang within its natural school setting. The integration of narrative inquiry was equally important, as the intention was not simply to document practices but to foreground the voices and lived experiences of the students themselves. Their stories provided the central lens through which the processes of discipline, emotional development, and civic identity could be understood.

The research was situated in a government secondary school that has maintained the JSPO brass band for more than a decade. Over the years, the ensemble has become a prominent co- curricular group, performing regularly at state and national ceremonies. Its membership reflects Malaysia's multicultural fabric, with students from different ethnic, linguistic, and socio- economic backgrounds learning and performing side by side. As a recognised uniformed body within the co-curricular framework, the band occupies a position of symbolic and disciplinary importance in the school. This made it an ideal context to examine how participation in musical ensembles intersects with Malaysia's national aspirations for holistic education as outlined in the *Pelan Pembangunan Pendidikan Malaysia (PPPM) 2013–2025* and the *Malaysia MADANI* framework.

A total of eight students between the ages of 14 and 17 were purposively selected as participants. Care was taken to include a balance of genders, ethnic backgrounds, and roles within the band. The group comprised section leaders, senior players, percussionists, and newer recruits, each of whom had been involved in the ensemble for at least a year. This ensured that the participants were able to reflect meaningfully on their experiences and the influence of the band on their personal development. Consent was obtained from parents, and assent was given by the students. To safeguard privacy, pseudonyms were used throughout the study.

Data collection unfolded over a three-month period and drew on three complementary sources. Semi-structured interviews formed the backbone of the research, providing opportunities for the students to articulate their motivations for joining, the challenges they faced, and the ways in which the band had shaped their sense of identity and belonging. These interviews were conducted in English or Malay, depending on the student's preference, and lasted between 30 and 45 minutes. Alongside the interviews, naturalistic observations were carried out during rehearsals, sectional practices, and public performances. These observations offered valuable insight into the discipline, leadership dynamics, and emotional energy that characterised the ensemble's daily practices. Finally, documents such as concert programmes,

rehearsal schedules, and certificates were collected to provide further context and triangulation.

The analysis of data followed Braun and Clarke's six-phase thematic framework, beginning with immersion in the interview transcripts, observation notes, and documents. Coding was conducted inductively, allowing key patterns to emerge directly from the students' narratives. These were gradually refined into broader themes that captured the essence of their experiences. Sociocultural learning theory, particularly Vygotsky's concept of scaffolded learning, was drawn upon to interpret how routines and structures in the band supported the development of discipline. Eisner's notion of the "hidden curriculum" further informed the analysis, highlighting how uniforms, rituals, and public performances conveyed implicit lessons about pride, responsibility, and citizenship.

To ensure trustworthiness, several strategies were employed. Themes were shared with participants for member checking, providing them the chance to confirm or challenge the interpretations. Data from interviews, observations, and documents were cross-verified through triangulation, while two colleagues in music education served as critical peers in reviewing coding and thematic decisions. An audit trail was also maintained to document the analytic process.

Ethical approval was granted by the Ministry of Education Malaysia and the Institutional Research Ethics Committee. Written consent and assent were carefully secured, and all participants were reminded of their right to withdraw at any stage. Data were anonymised and securely stored, and findings are presented in ways that protect the students' confidentiality.

4.0 RESULTS

The thematic analysis revealed five major themes that together illustrate how the brass band functioned as both a musical ensemble and a pedagogical ecosystem: discipline and structure, community and belonging, symbolic identity, emotional expression and regulation, and civic pride and responsibility. Each theme is elaborated below with evidence drawn from interviews, observations, and documents, followed by interpretation within broader educational and policy contexts.

Discipline and Structure

One of the clearest outcomes of participation in the brass band was the cultivation of discipline. Every participant reported that the demands of regular rehearsals, sectional practices, and performances created routines that reshaped their daily habits. Several explained that the strict rehearsal timetable forced them to prioritise tasks, leading to better time management in schoolwork and home responsibilities.

Observational data corroborated these accounts. During three months of fieldwork,

students were consistently punctual, often arriving 10–15 minutes before rehearsals. They prepared instruments independently, responded promptly to instructions, and maintained focus even during long practice sessions. Teachers interviewed informally noted that band members were among the least likely to be involved in classroom disciplinary problems, suggesting that behaviours cultivated within the band extended into other areas of school life.

This theme resonates with Wong and Nasir's (2021) findings that Malaysian school band members developed stronger self-regulation compared to their peers. From a theoretical perspective, Vygotsky's (1978) notion of scaffolding is useful here: initially, discipline was externally imposed through rehearsal schedules and teacher expectations, but over time, students internalised these routines as self-discipline.

In relation to policy, the PPPM 2013–2025 highlights the importance of nurturing self-directed learners capable of thriving in academic and personal domains. The brass band provided a concrete context for this policy aspiration, demonstrating that discipline is not simply about compliance but about developing lifelong habits of responsibility and perseverance.

Community and Belonging

Beyond discipline, participants repeatedly emphasised the brass band as a community where they felt safe, accepted, and valued. For many, the ensemble provided friendships that crossed ethnic, linguistic, and socio-economic boundaries. Students spoke of seniors mentoring juniors, sharing techniques, and offering encouragement before performances. The sense of solidarity was most visible during competitions, where collective success was prioritised over individual achievement.

Observations confirmed that the band operated as a family-like system. During rehearsals, senior players often guided newer members without teacher intervention, and moments of stress were mitigated by peer reassurance. For example, during a demanding sectional practice, senior brass players encouraged juniors who were struggling, transforming what could have been moments of exclusion into opportunities for bonding.

This finding is consistent with Creech et al. (2020), who documented that ensembles provide adolescents with spaces of belonging, particularly in contexts of diversity. In Malaysia, such intercultural friendships are highly significant, as schools often struggle with ethnic divisions. The brass band, by uniting students around a shared musical purpose, became a **community of practice** (Wenger, 1998) where identity was shaped through mutual accountability and shared goals.

This outcome aligns directly with Malaysia MADANI, which calls for educational practices that foster respect, inclusivity, and intercultural understanding. The brass band exemplified how co-curricular participation can act as a vehicle for these aspirations, creating lived experiences of harmony that extend beyond the rhetoric of

policy documents.

Symbolic Identity Through Uniform and Performance

Uniforms and public performances carried strong symbolic weight for students. Several described how wearing the brass band uniform transformed their sense of self. In uniform, they felt they carried not just their own identity but also that of the school and, at times, the nation. Observations during parades and competitions revealed heightened discipline: students marched with precision, maintained composure, and demonstrated a collective ethos of representation.

The significance of the uniform extends beyond aesthetics. It represents what Eisner (2002) termed the hidden curriculum the implicit lessons about responsibility, accountability, and pride that are learned through rituals and symbols rather than formal instruction. In this case, the uniform served as a pedagogical tool that reinforced discipline and institutional loyalty.

Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical theory also provides insight: students engaged in performances that shaped how they were perceived by others, which in turn reinforced their internal sense of accountability. By presenting themselves as disciplined, united representatives, they internalised the values associated with that role.

This symbolic identity links with the PPPM's emphasis on values-driven education, where schools are not only academic institutions but also sites of moral and civic formation. In the brass band, identity was constructed not only through musical performance but through embodied practices of representation.

Emotional Expression and Regulation

For many students, the brass band provided a crucial outlet for emotional expression. Participants described using music to channel frustration, sadness, or joy. Some reported that playing loudly helped release tension, while others emphasised that the act of performing in synchrony created feelings of calm and focus.

Observations provided further evidence: students who appeared distracted or stressed at the start of rehearsal often became more settled and composed after extended playing. Teachers also informally noted that band members seemed more resilient to stress compared to their peers.

This theme aligns with international findings that music serves as a tool for emotional regulation among adolescents (Saarikallio & Erkkilä, 2020). Yinger and Gooding (2023) similarly argue that ensemble participation fosters emotional awareness and social support, particularly during adolescence.

In Malaysia, where mental health among young people is increasingly recognised as a challenge (Tan & Yusof, 2021), these findings are significant. The brass band created a safe, non-academic space where students could manage stress and find emotional balance. Eisner's (2002) argument that the arts offer alternative forms of expression unavailable in other domains of schooling is powerfully illustrated here.

Civic Pride and Responsibility

The final theme highlighted the civic role of the brass band. Students described performances during national and state events particularly renditions of *Negaraku* as moments of honour and pride. They emphasised that these experiences reminded them of their responsibility as Malaysians, reinforcing their sense of civic identity.

Observation during the Merdeka celebration provided a vivid example: students stood taller, played with heightened energy, and afterwards expressed pride in having represented their school and nation. This suggests that brass band participation extends beyond personal or school identity to encompass civic belonging.

These findings are supported by Rickard et al. (2021), who found that ensemble participation fosters prosocial and civic values. In Malaysia, this directly reflects the PPPM's aspiration of cultivating values-driven citizens and Malaysia MADANI's call for education to nurture civic responsibility.

By serving as ambassadors at public events, students internalised the idea that their musical participation carried civic weight. This civic learning, while not explicitly taught, represents another form of hidden curriculum, where music became a vehicle for embodying national values.

Table 1. Themes Emerging from Brass Band Participation

Theme	Evidence Across Data	Educational Implication
Discipline and Structure	Reports of improved time management; observed punctuality and focus; fewer behavioural issues	Strengthens academic discipline and lifelong responsibility
Community and Belonging	Mentorship between seniors and juniors; intercultural family-like atmosphere	Builds social cohesion and supports Malaysia MADANI aspirations

Symbolic Identity	Uniform as symbol of pride and accountability; observed composure in public performances	Reinforces responsibility and institutional representation
Emotional Expression	Use of music for stress release; observed calmness after practice	Provides protective space for emotional wellbeing and resilience
Civic Pride and Responsibility	Performances at state/national events; pride in playing patriotic repertoire; heightened sense of citizenship	Embeds values of national identity and civic responsibility

5.0 DISCUSSION

The findings of this study highlight that participation in the brass band shaped students' development across five interconnected domains: discipline, belonging, symbolic identity, emotional wellbeing, and civic responsibility. Together, these domains demonstrate that the brass band functioned not merely as a co-curricular ensemble but as a pedagogical scaffold that contributed to holistic education. The following discussion situates these findings within existing scholarship, theory, and current Malaysian policy aspirations.

Discipline as a Pedagogical Scaffold

One of the strongest themes to emerge was the cultivation of discipline through routine rehearsals and structured performance preparation. Students reported improvements in time management, punctuality, and perseverance, and teachers observed fewer behavioural issues among band members. These outcomes mirror Wong and Nasir's (2021) findings that participation in school music ensembles enhanced students' self-regulation and responsibility. From a Vygotskian perspective, the band's structured environment can be understood as a **scaffolded learning space**, where external routines were gradually internalised as habits of self-discipline (Vygotsky, 1978).

This is significant in the Malaysian context, where the *Pelan Pembangunan Pendidikan Malaysia (PPPM) 2013–2025* identifies discipline and self-motivation as critical competencies for 21st-century learners. The brass band therefore exemplifies how co-curricular participation can directly contribute to national educational goals, countering the perception that such programmes are peripheral to “serious” academic development.

Belonging and Identity Formation

The brass band also emerged as a community of belonging, where students experienced acceptance across ethnic, linguistic, and socio-economic divides. This reflects Wenger's (1998) concept of communities of practice, where identity is shaped through shared activity and collective accountability. The finding resonates with international studies showing that ensembles foster intercultural friendships and solidarity (Creech et al., 2020; Parker, 2019).

In the Malaysian setting, where diversity is a defining characteristic of school life, such experiences carry special weight. Students' accounts of the band as a "family" echo the aspirations of *Malaysia MADANI*, which emphasises trust, respect, and cultural harmony in education (MOE, 2023). By providing a space where young people experienced unity in diversity, the brass band acted as a living model of social cohesion, offering insights into how co-curricular programmes can support national integration efforts.

Symbolic Identity and Representation

The uniform and public performances played a powerful symbolic role in shaping students' sense of accountability and pride. Donning the uniform signified more than participation; it transformed students into representatives of their school and community. This aligns with Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical theory, where self-identity is constructed through performance in public settings. Eisner's (2002) notion of the hidden curriculum also applies here: the lessons of discipline, pride, and responsibility were conveyed not through explicit instruction but through rituals of marching, playing, and representing.

This symbolic dimension extends the role of the brass band beyond musical training. It highlights how aesthetic practices intersect with civic education, positioning the ensemble as a vehicle for teaching accountability and leadership through embodied experience.

Emotional Wellbeing and Regulation

Equally important was the band's role in supporting emotional expression and regulation. Students described using music as an outlet for stress, sadness, or anger, with observations confirming visible improvements in focus and calmness after rehearsals. These accounts resonate with research on music's therapeutic functions in adolescence (Saarikallio & Erkkilä, 2020; Yinger & Gooding, 2023).

The relevance of this finding becomes particularly urgent in Malaysia, where concerns about youth mental health are rising (Tan & Yusof, 2021). While much of the national education discourse has focused on academic achievement, this study suggests that co-curricular music programmes can serve as protective spaces for

emotional wellbeing. Eisner's (2002) argument that the arts provide "forms of expression not accessible through other means" is vividly illustrated in the brass band context.

Civic Pride and Values-Driven Citizenship

Performing patriotic repertoire and representing the school at state and national events fostered a sense of civic pride and responsibility among participants. Students reported feeling honoured to perform *Negaraku* and described such experiences as moments of heightened unity. These findings reinforce Rickard et al.'s (2013) argument that ensemble participation nurtures civic engagement and prosocial values.

In relation to policy, these outcomes align directly with both the PPPM's aspiration to produce values-driven Malaysians and *Malaysia MADANI*'s vision of education that cultivates civic responsibility. Brass band performances, particularly in public ceremonies, thus act as powerful enactments of citizenship where students internalise the role of contributing to national identity.

Novelty, Contribution, and Significance

This study contributes to the literature in several ways. First, it fills a gap in Malaysian scholarship by foregrounding student voices in understanding how co-curricular music participation shapes development. Previous local studies have tended to focus on administrative or performance dimensions (Che Lah & Mamat, 2018; Zulkifli et al., 2020), leaving unexplored the lived experiences of the students themselves.

Second, it integrates theoretical perspectives sociocultural learning, communities of practice, dramaturgy, and the hidden curriculum to frame brass band participation as a pedagogical ecosystem. This multi-theoretical framing extends existing discourse on music education by showing how artistic practice intersects with identity, emotion, and citizenship.

Finally, the study has practical significance for Malaysian education. It demonstrates that brass bands are not supplementary add-ons but central spaces where discipline, belonging, emotional health, and civic pride are cultivated. Supporting such programmes, therefore, is not a matter of enrichment but of necessity if schools are to meet national aspirations for holistic, values-driven education.

6.0 CONCLUSION

This study examined how participation in a Malaysian secondary school brass band shaped students' identity, belonging, and growth. The findings revealed that the

ensemble functioned as more than a co-curricular activity; it operated as a pedagogical ecosystem that nurtured discipline, emotional expression, symbolic identity, and civic pride. Students consistently described the band as a family-like community that provided structure, emotional support, and opportunities to serve as representatives of both school and nation.

The results contribute to ongoing debates about the role of co-curricular education in Malaysia. In line with the *Pelan Pembangunan Pendidikan Malaysia (PPPM) 2013–2025*, the brass band demonstrated its capacity to support holistic student development by cultivating values, attitudes, and competencies essential for 21st-century learners. Furthermore, the emphasis on unity, responsibility, and service directly reflects the aspirations of the *Malaysia MADANI* framework, which seeks to anchor education in trust, respect, and civic responsibility.

Several implications arise from these findings. For policymakers, the evidence affirms that investment in co-curricular music programmes should not be viewed as optional enrichment but as central to national education goals. Allocating resources to sustain and expand school bands, particularly in under-resourced schools, can yield long-term benefits in shaping resilient and civic-minded citizens. For school leaders and teachers, the brass band provides a practical model of how structured, values-driven learning can take place outside the classroom. By recognising and integrating these outcomes into broader school development plans, administrators can ensure that co-curricular activities complement academic instruction rather than compete with it.

The study also carries implications for arts educators and practitioners. Brass bands, with their demands for discipline, teamwork, and public representation, offer a powerful medium for teaching life skills that extend beyond the arts. Music educators should therefore be encouraged to adopt pedagogical approaches that foreground identity, belonging, and citizenship, ensuring that musical learning is understood as a vehicle for holistic education rather than technical training alone.

Nonetheless, the study has limitations. As a narrative case study involving eight students in a single school, the findings cannot be generalised to all Malaysian contexts. The focus on student voices, while illuminating, also leaves out the perspectives of teachers, parents, and alumni, which could provide additional layers of understanding. Future research should therefore broaden the scope to include comparative studies across different types of ensembles: choirs, orchestras, or cultural troupes and employ mixed-methods approaches that combine qualitative insights with quantitative measures of wellbeing, resilience, or academic outcomes. Longitudinal studies would be particularly valuable in tracing how participation in co-curricular ensembles influences identity and citizenship into adulthood.

In conclusion, this study highlights the brass band as a site where the educational and cultural aspirations of Malaysia converge. By fostering discipline, unity, emotional

resilience, and civic pride, school ensembles embody the essence of holistic education envisioned by both the PPPM and *Malaysia MADANI*. Recognising and supporting these programmes is therefore essential if schools are to prepare students not only for academic success but also for meaningful participation in society.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare no financial, personal, or professional conflict of interest in the conduct or reporting of this study.

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