THE INFLUENCE OF PERCEIVED VALUES AND CULTURE ON THE WELL-BEING OF MALAYSIANS

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ABSTRACT

Quality of life is used as a method to determine the level of well-being in a society. Since quality of life is subjective, it is determined by a variety of factors and one of the factors is perception. This study aims to identify the relationship between ethnicity, education level and income among households towards their quality of life. The research methodology used are document analysis, individual and group interviews, as well as direct observation. In this study, Indian ethnicity showed higher perception of quality of life than other ethnicities. The findings also show that the level of tertiary education and income status encourage positive perceptions towards the family environment and cultural values. Based on the three findings of this study, it can concluded that family environment influences the perception of ethnicity, education level and income of Malaysians on their quality of life.

Keywords: Quality of life, environment, cultural values, ethnicity, income

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The lifestyles of Malaysians has changed from time to time. Additionally, based on the improved socio-economic development, the quality of Malaysians life too has changed. This is expected and in line with the status of Malaysia as an industrialized country. As stated by Ghosh et al. (1996), the path of developed countries do not lie solely on quantitative figures, but also takes into account the people's quality of life.

In 2020, Malaysia's GDP contracted 5.6 per cent as compared to 4.3 per cent in 2019 (DOSM, 2021). Household spending is a major driver of economic growth,

in addition to growth in employment opportunities and increase in wages, as well as salaries. In the post-election of 2018, private sector investments showed improvements and contributed towards the Malaysian economy and this is expected to be maintained in the existing momentum. This economic growth benefits the B40 group, and also helps reduced stress on the cost of living especially with respect to income and productivity. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines quality of life as determined by how individuals view themselves in life. These perceptions influence the existing value system towards the self, the form of culture and the desired life goals, as well as standard of living in the society (Salehi et al., 2014).

1.1   Research Objective

The objective of this study is to identify the relationship between ethnicity, education level and income status among households with quality of life.

2.0   LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1   Definition of Quality of Life

The foundation of the concept of quality of life began in 1972 and a more detailed study was done in 1980. Several researchers have given definitions of the quality of life that influences the way of thinking in societies. Quality of life is a general statement of an individual's well -being and a highly valued goal in society and this concept is multi-dimensional. It affects physical health, psychology, personal views, and social relationships with the environment (Oort et al., 2015).

Szalai and Andrews (1980) defines the quality of life based on 'the degree of excellence or satisfactory character of life'. Borthwick-Duffy (1992) presented three perspectives on quality of life which are: (a) quality of one's life conditions, (b) satisfaction with life conditions, and (c) combination of both life conditions and satisfaction. Meanwhile, Zapf (2000) states that quality of life is not only a living condition but also a subjective living condition. In general, quality of life can be defined as the degree of well-being felt and experienced by individuals or societies and this covers many aspects. The two basic components of quality of life are physical and psychological (Institut Sosial Malaysia, 2011). Report on Malaysia Quality of Life defined quality of

life as encompassing self-improvement, living healthy lifestyles, having access and freedom of knowledge, enjoying a standard of living that exceeds basic expertise and having the psychology to achieve a level of social well-being in line with national aspirations (EPU, 2011). Studies on Malaysia's quality of life have been conducted five times respectively from 1999, 2002, 2004, 2011 and 2013.

There are indicators studied in the Quality of Life Malaysia from 1990 to 2000 which show that almost all indicators recorded an improvement in quality of life, especially public safety and the environment (EPU, 2004). In the Malaysian Social Report 2011, the analysis of the first Social and Well-Being Index found that the social condition of the Malaysian society improved during the observation period from 1990 to 2007. Subsequently, the second Social and Well-Being Index was at 76 percent (Institut Sosial Malaysia, 2011). An analysis of changes in the quality of life of Malaysians for the period 2000-2010 was carried out to assess the well-being of individuals, families, and communities. The Malaysian Quality of Life Index 2010 uses the year 2000 as the base year, which involves 45 indicators and 11 components. These selected indicators are closely linked to the community and the people of Malaysia (EPU, 2011).

In overall, the level of quality of life in Malaysia has increased for the period 2000-2010, with the Malaysian Quality of Life Index increasing by 11.9 points. Meanwhile, for the period 2000 to 2018, the economic well-being sub-composites increased 31.0 points while the social well-being sub-composites increased 17.7 points. The economic well-being sub-composites includes components such as transportation, income and distribution, as well as education while the social sub-composites include components such as leisure, public safety and social participation. A study by The National Population and Family Development Board on Family Well-Being Index in 2019 showed that eight components have increased significantly, with the family relationships component reported to have the highest score of 8.35 points, followed by family, religion/spiritual at 8.25 points, as well as family and community at 8 points (Table 1).

Table 1: Malaysian Family Well-Being Index Score 2019
(National Population and Family Development Board, 2021)

No.	Domain	Score
1	Family Relationships	8.35
2	Family Economy	7.67
3	Family Health	7.44
4	Family Safety	7.86
5	Family and Community	8.00
6	Family, Religion/Spiritual	8.25
7	Housing and Environment	7.35
8	Family and Communication Technology	6.82

In the fifth report of Malaysia Well-being Report 2013, the improvement of the Malaysian Well-being Index is stated to achieve a more comprehensive indicators of social well-being as a measure of the country's progress. This report serves as a benchmark for the government to shape policies and advocacy programmes towards a high-income, sustainable and inclusive nation. This report is also a commitment of the Economic Planning Unit to measure the impact of economic development on Malaysia's social development programmes (Aisyah et al., 2016).

Table 2: Malaysian Well-Being Index, 2019 and 2020
(Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2021)

Component	2019	2020	2019-2020	
2000=100			Index point change	Growth (%)
ECONOMIC WELL-BEING	130.7	126.2	-4.5	-3.4
Transport	137.9	127.7	-10.2	-7.4
Communications	130.5	130.0	-0.5	-.04
Education	130.9	132.2	1.3	1.0
Income and Distribution	130.3	117.6	-12.7	-9.7
Working Life	123.7	123.7	0.0	0.0
SOCIAL WELL-BEING	115.4	114.0	-1.4	-1.2
Housing	119.3	120.5	1.2	1.0
Entertainment and Recreation	131.5	110.9	-20.6	-15.7
Public Safety	126.6	140.4	13.8	10.9
Social Participation	118.7	121.7	3.0	2.5
Governance	121.5	120.4	-1.1	-0.9
Culture	109.3	91.7	-17.6	-16.1

Health	107.1	113.1	6.0	5.6
Environment	106.9	1.9.8	2.9	2.7
Family	97.4	97.0	-0.4	-0.4
MALAYSIAN WELL-BEING INDEX	120.8	118.3	-2.5	-2.1

In another study released by the Department of Statistics Malaysia showed that Malaysian Well-being Index (MyWI) in 2020 decreased 2.1 per cent to 118.3 points as compared to 120.8 points in 2019. Both of the well-being sub-composites showed a decline in 2020. The economic well-being sub-composite recorded a decrease of 3.4 per cent in 2020 to 126.2 points and the social well-being sub-composite declined 1.2 per cent to 114.0 points at the same period (Table 2).

Despite of this slight decrease, the achievements of the quality of life reported are in line with the reduction in the poverty rate which has shown a significant reduction trend since 2009 (Table 3). The reduction from 8.4 percent (rural) and 1.7 percent (urban) to 1.6 percent (rural) and 0.3 percent (urban) in 2014 shows that poverty eradication programs have been successful. In 2019, the poverty rate of the urban population of Malaysia was at 3.8 percent, while rural poverty was at 12.4 percent. In 2019, Malaysia revised its national poverty line income, increasing it from 980 Malaysian ringgit to 2,208 Malaysian ringgit. This accounted for the increases in the poverty rate in 2016 (Hirschmann, 2021).

Table 3: Percentage of poverty in Malaysia, 2009-2019

Year	2009		2012		2014		2016		2019	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
Percentage	8.4	1.7	3.4	1.0	1.6	0.3	17.5	4.8	12.4	3.8

In 2020, Malaysia's poverty rate spiked to 8.4 per cent as compared to 2019 which stood at 5.6 per cent (Table 4). The pandemic had caused disruptions to people's income, leading to many more households being exposed to poverty, especially for those in the most vulnerable categories. However, the government's efforts over the years have in fact succeeded in shaping the lives of Malaysians making it better and more prosperous through a planned and inclusive economic and social development policy.

Table 4: Percentage of absolute poverty, Malaysia, 2019 and 2020

Year	2019	2020
Percentage	5.6	8.4

2.2   The Quality of Life in Malaysia

Since independence, the economic, educational and social growth of Malaysians has changed a lot towards improving the quality of life. These changes are driven by a variety of policies and approaches that take into account the needs, problems and existence of diverse community backgrounds, locations, regions and social mobility. A clear indicator is through the rising household income due to the competitive vibrant economic growth.

Even though Malaysians have more income, the actual quality of life is not known because having much income does not necessarily mean the improvements of one's quality in life. Therefore, there is a need to know and comprehend the people's perceptions of their quality of life and whether this is aligned with the country's economic growth. This is because quality of life is a key indicator in ensuring that the country can produce and utilise important assets for national development. Good quality of life is very essential to ensure the harmony, well-being and sustainability of every member of the Malaysian society. As an effort towards achieving a developed country's status, the quality of life in Malaysia needs to be improved from time to time (EPU, 2013; Institut Sosial Malaysia, 2011).

The 2010 MDG report shows that Malaysia has achieved equitable development outcomes at selected levels in terms of population, strata, age groups and vulnerable groups. Malaysia also prioritizes development issues such as child poverty, inequality and vulnerability reduction, preschool and secondary education, enhancing women in decision-making positions as well as tackling gender-based violence. These examples show that Malaysia has taken a dynamic and forward-looking approach in its development (UNDP, 2018).

In another study by Salehi et al., (2015) on young Iranian women found that quality of life has a positive correlation with healthy living behaviours. Deterioration in quality of life is associated with increasing age, low income, living alone, low levels of religious practice, smoking, and lack of physical

activities. The study also found that quality of life goes beyond medical factors and living behaviours as it can offer a broader interpretation and help policymakers to plan more effective policies.

The study of quality of life is thus to identify factors that contribute to the goodness and well-being of life as well as the cheerfulness of society. It explores the interrelated relationships between factors. The core of quality of life is to understand and to promote the meaning of life to a society based on the environment that enables them to live in the best possible way (Asadi Sadeghi et al., 2008).

Demographics and social characteristics do not support the forecast of quality of life. Instead, the important factors are household income, length of residence, type and size of home and health status. Research shows that the quality of life of Hong Kong residents is linked to health status and nutritional food, as well as economic characteristics. This reflects the living standards and wealth status of the Hong Kong people (Low & Lai, 2016). In another study, Azahan et al., (2008) described that the quality of life does not only involve material but covers all things that can affect the level of human satisfaction according to space and time.

O'Rourke et al., (2015) stated four factors and experiences that link and separate each factor that influences the quality of life. These factors are relationships, activities in life, health perspectives and the feel of life at home. Happiness and sadness are the main results of high and low quality of life.

3.0   METHODOLOGY

The study used a combination of data collection methods that include a review of audit reports, document analysis, interviews and observation during fieldwork. Data are obtained through program reports and policy papers, statistics as well as past evaluation reports. During the analysis, the data obtained from these various sources were triangulated and cross-examined.

In adjacent, face -to -face interviews were conducted to extract the views of respondents to identify their quality of life that reflects the living situation of the community. During this session, questionnaires were distributed

by the research assistants to selected respondents. These respondents are selected through purposive sampling to ensure that the feedbacks gathered are valid coming from the people who are experienced, involved and have the knowledge. The assistants also conducted interview sessions with the respondents. Secondary data were obtained from government agencies such as the Population and Housing Census, the Malaysian Quality of Life Report 1999 and 2002, the Malaysian Social Report 2011 and The National Population and Family Development Board on Family Well-Being Index in 2019.

4.0   FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1   Differences in Environmental Perceptions and Cultural Values by Ethnicity

Table 5 shows the components of the environment that have been studied which are family environment, public environment and cultural values of the Malays, Chinese, Indians and others. In general, these inter-ethnic perceptions are not much different from each other, with the Indian recording the highest mean value of 3.95. Similarly, for the public environment, the Indians showed higher perceptions with a mean value of 3.67. With regards to cultural values, other ethnicities group recorded the highest mean value of 3.88.

Table 5: Mean values for perceptions of quality of life based on ethnicity

Items	Ethnicity			
	Malay	Chinese	Indian	Others
Family Environment	3.94	3.84	3.95	3.85
Public Environment	3.59	3.47	3.67	3.49
Cultural Values	3.87	3.74	3.83	3.88

4.2   Differences in Environmental Perceptions and Cultural Values by Education Level

Table 6 shows the education level of the respondents according to the environment and cultural values. The findings of the study found that there is a significant relationship between the education level and quality of life. Respondents who have a tertiary level of education are more likely to have a positive perception of the family environment and cultural values as compared to respondents who are not educated who depicted lower cultural values.

Table 6: Mean values for perceptions of quality of life based on education level

Items	Education Level			
	Tertiary	Secondary	Primary	No Education
Family Environment	3.97	3.87	3.72	3.77
Public Environment	3.50	3.50	3.50	3.50
Cultural Values	3.86	3.86	3.77	2.89

4.3 Differences in Environmental Perceptions and Cultural Values by Income

Table 7 below shows three income categories according to family environment, public environment, and cultural values. The group of respondents earning more than RM5000 recorded better perception of quality of life in the family environment and cultural values with mean values of 4.11 and 3.88, respectively. However, the findings for the other groups of respondents showed not much differences in mean values.

Table 7: Mean values for perceptions of quality of life based on income

Items	Income		
	<RM2999	RM3000 –RM4999	>RM5000
Family Environment	3.86	3.90	4.11
Public Environment	3.56	3.56	3.56
Cultural Values	3.84	3.85	3.88

Based on the three findings of this study, it was found that the family environment influences the perception of ethnicity, education level and income of the Malaysian society. Cultural values also play a role in influencing the perception of the quality of life of Malaysians.

Additionally, each ethnicity can be helped to form a better family environment through motivation and support for progress. Families need to be given access to help towards the formation of a better family environment. Talks and information regarding harmonious family environment can be conveyed through social media since most parents of every ethnicity uses telephones to communicate. A harmonious and better family environment can also be influenced by various factors including the school curriculum, as well as family programmes that can be held in nearby villages or communities.

The quality of life too can be improved by enhancing the quality of community education to be at the highest level. Admission children to schools must be given a priority. Additionally, providing highly educated teachers and encouragement to continue their education are equally crucial. Access to education also increases confidence and skills of the people and this contributes to improving the quality of life. The focus on lifelong learning should be given due attention to ensure the sustainability of the role of education in shaping the quality of life.

Last but not least, higher family income contributes to inspire and improve the people's quality of life. Efforts to improve the economic level of Malaysians must be given priority because this improves the family environment and promote positive values, lifestyle and culture.

5.0   CONCLUSION

Quality of life is influenced by various factors accordingly such as locality, culture, health, place of and residence. Additionally, the well-being of the family also includes the elements of values and culture that contribute significantly to strengthening the family institution. Various parties that are involve in the decision making and managing the policies related to family and quality of life such as the legislators, programme implementators, service facilities facilitators and agencies need to work hard to ensure the quality of life of Malaysians continue to become better and more dynamic.

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