



PLANNING MALAYSIA:

Journal of the Malaysian Institute of Planners

VOLUME 22 ISSUE 1 (2024), Page 184 – 193

PLANNING FOR QUALITY OF LIFE: AN ASSESSMENT OF INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES IN MALAYSIA

**Ismafatin Nabilah Ismail¹, Mohd Khairul Amri Kamarudin², Mohamad
Hafis Amat Simin³, Wan Nor Azilawanie Tun Ismail⁴, Noorjima Abd
Wahab⁵**

^{1,2}*East Coast Environmental Research Institute,
UNIVERSITI SULTAN ZAINAL ABIDIN, MALAYSIA*
^{2,3,4,5}*Faculty of Applied Social Sciences,
UNIVERSITI SULTAN ZAINAL ABIDIN, MALAYSIA*

Abstract

Malaysian society develop awareness on the environmental issues such as air pollution, floods, heat waves and increase in temperature. The indigenous people community is no exception; indeed, they are the primary community to directly experience the consequences of the natural changes taking place. This study aims to assess the quality of life for indigenous people in adapting to environmental issues. This study was conducted in Gua Musang, Kelantan with 87 residents of indigenous people. Data collected through questionnaire and analysed using Relative Importance Index (RII). The findings of the study show that majority of the indigenous people were satisfied with the air quality and generally feel safe in their residential area. Moreover, various indicators and measure were highlighted aimed at enhancing the existing living standards in improving the quality of life for indigenous people.

Keywords: Environmental Issues; Indigenous People; Quality of Life; Relative Importance Index

² Lecturer at Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin. Email: mkhairulamri@unisza.edu.my

INTRODUCTION

Malaysia is experiencing a range of environmental issues such as climate change effects, including altered rainfall patterns, elevated temperatures, and meteorological extremes that pose a hazard to human life (Ismail et al., 2023). As anthropogenic activities increase, the country is expected to experience increasingly unpredictable weather systems. According to the IPCC, more than 50% risk that global temperature rise would increase by 1.5 degrees celcius or more between 2021 and 2040 in all scenarios observed (Boehm & Schumer, 2023) and for the scenarios of a high-emissions trajectory, the world may exceed the threshold in between 2018 and 2037 or even sooner than expected.

The Temiar people are one of the indigenous people tribes from the Senoi tribe. Indigenous peoples are diverse social and cultural groups that have inherited connections to their ancestral country and natural resources (United Nation, 2021) which they have a strong connection with personalities, values, and livelihoods, and they depend entirely on the land and natural resources to live their daily existence. As mentioned by Muhammad & Yaacob (2020), Malaysia known as a country with possesses abundant resources, however it confronts several challenges that are leading to the concerning trend of environmental change, most notably the disappearance of forested areas.

Several research have explained that the indigenous people community in the rural areas feels threatened since they are unable to adjust to safe settings due to pressure from environmental and social changes (Ford, 2020). Traditionally, the lifestyle of indigenous people has been closely related to nature, for instance the forest serving as the basis for their primary income sources and economic activities. Hence, in terms of environmental issues, adaptation can lessen danger and social pressure while allowing indigenous people to continue living with the changes that come with naturally sustainable.

Research by Rosli et al. (2018) mentioned that the idea of Quality of Life (QOL) is associated with psychological well-being, which includes the perception of health, access to sufficient nutritious food, shelter, and environmental adaptation, including everyone's and group's perception of the environment as a resource as well as a resource of aesthetic satisfaction. The objective of this study is to investigate the quality of life for indigenous people in adapting the environmental issues. The outcome from this paper will identify the well-being of indigenous people in adjusting to the environmental issues occurred in their residential.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Indigenous People of Malaysia

The term "Orang Asli" refers to the indigenous people of Malaysia, who are primarily widespread in the states of Peninsular Malaysia. Over 852 communities

in Peninsular Malaysia are belong to the diverse group known as the indigenous people of Malaysia (Saifullah, 2020). Stated by Salim et al. (2023), indigenous people have its own unique belief and knowledge systems, and they also have vital expertise about natural resource management strategies that are sustainable. In Malaysia, the government organisation tasked with ensuring the welfare of the indigenous peoples is called the Department for Orang Asli Development (JAKOA). The Negritos, Proto-Malays and Senois were the three main ethnics for indigenous people with 18 ethnicities (Government of Malaysia, 2023). The Orang Asli Negrito group is made up of the ethnic groups Bateq, Mendriq, Jahai, Lanoh, Kintak, and Kensiu; which primarily found on the northern side of the peninsula and live in the area surrounding the Titiwangsa range. Meanwhile, the Titiwangsa slopes of Perak, Kelantan, and Pahang are home to the Senoi tribe, (Che Wong, Semai, Semoq Beri, Jahut, Mahmeri, and Temiar).

Besides, the Proto-Malay Orang Asli ethnic group consists of the Temuan, Semelai, Jakun, Orang Kanaq, Orang Kuala, and Orang Seletar tribes; lived in valley, kuala, and coastal areas (Abdullah, 2022). Research for the indigenous people is advancing among social scientists, development planners and academics in Malaysia with a variety of perspectives from the disciplines of history, economics, anthropology, and the environment are emerging (Saifullah et al., 2021). According to the 2020 Census, Malaysia's Indigenous Peoples were predicted to make up 11% of the country's 32.4 million inhabitants (Jaouen, 2023).

Quality of Life (QOL) Indicators

Quality of life known as self-improvement, healthy lifestyle, access to and independence from knowledge acquisition, and a standard of living that surpasses the physiological and psychological demands of individuals to reach a level of social well-being consistent with national aspirations (MENTERI, 2012). Stated by Yadav & Gupta (2021), the term quality of life (QOL) describes the "goodness of life" and the capacity to have a prosperous and contented existence in one's surroundings. The concept of quality of life has been extensively explored as a key measure of well-being in scientific, professional, service, and diverse fields (Pitting & Radza, 2022). Hence, attaining a higher standard of living is an essential component for Malaysia in line with the goal of being a developed nation. Table 1 shows the Malaysia Quality of Life (MQLI) components.

Table 1: Malaysia quality of life (QOL) components (MENTERI,2012)

Components	Sub-Index
Income and Distribution	113.3
Workplace Environment	104.6
Transportation and Communication	120.3
Health	110.5
Education	120.4
Housing	115.7
Environment	106.6
Family Life	104.6
Social Participation	110.1
Public Safety	110.8
Culture and Leisure	113.5
Malaysia Quality of Life Index	111.9

*Note: Base Year 2000 = 100

The Malaysia Quality of Life Index (MQLI) has 45 indicators categorized under 11 components of QOL. Reported by MENTERI (2012), the level quality of life in Malaysia has indicating an improvement during the 2000-2010 period with increasing of 11.9 points for the Malaysia Quality of Life (MQLI) index. All the 11 components of MQLI demonstrated an increment compared to the base year 2000, as shown in table 1. Thus, recognizing the well-being of the community could help local decision-makers to evaluate how well the government meets the requirements of the community and how effectively local resources are allocated (Rasdi et al., 2023).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The quantitative study applied in this research was conducted in Kuala Lah (5.125077743473917, 101.9796729227671), Gua Musang, Kelantan. This study was carried out in December 2023. Figure 1 displayed the location of study area. The head of household or called as "*ketua isi rumah*"(KIR) for indigenous people in Kuala Lah were 87 (JAKOA, 2022). The study samples involve 87 indigenous people who live in Kampung Kuala Lah. Furthermore, a questionnaire instrument was utilized in collecting the information related to climate change and the impact of land use and its relation to the quality of life of indigenous people in Kuala Lah. Besides, a likert scale ranging from 1 to 5 is employed for answering the survey questionnaire. The research data collected was analysed by the Relative Importance Index (RII). Those measurements and statistical, mathematical, or numerical analysis that can be converted into a useful statistic are highlighted by the quantitative methods.

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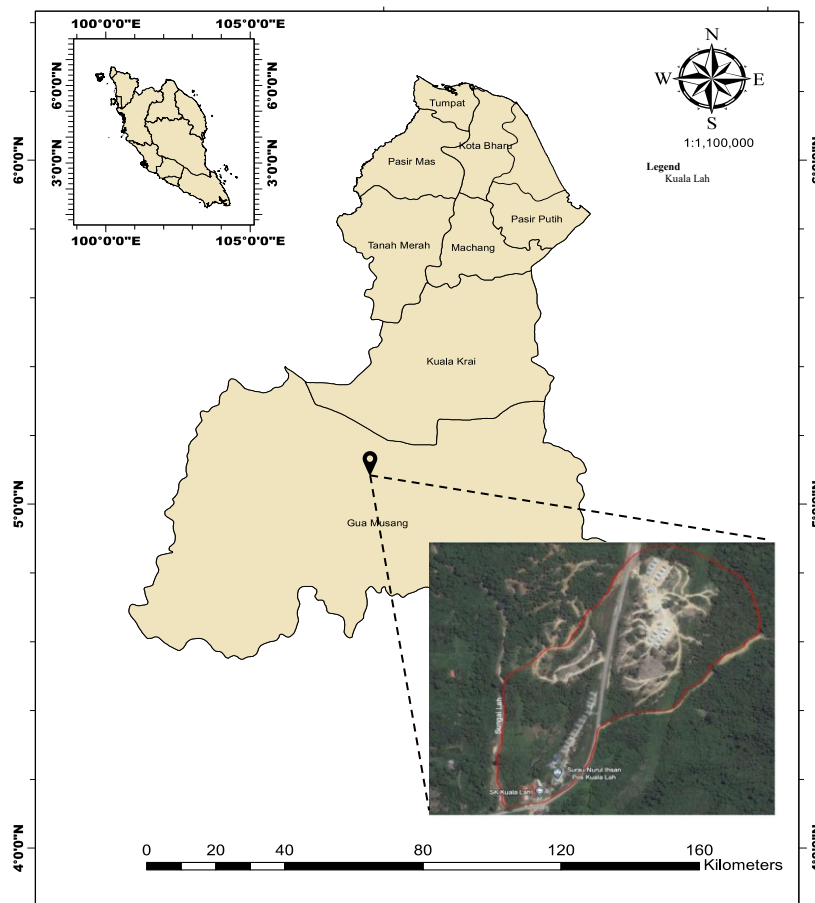


Figure 1: Location of the study area, Kuala Lah (E5.125, N101.979)

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Socio-Demographic Analysis

87 respondents living in Kuala Lah were selected. Respondents selected are between the age of 15 - 70 years old. The respondents had a range of demographic backgrounds and traits; thus, it makes the sampling randomly represent the population in Kuala Lah, Gua Musang.

Table 2: Socio-demographic profile from respondents

Socio-demographic		Percentage (%)
Age	Below 18	13.79
	19 - 25	16.09
	26 - 40	42.35
	41 - 59	22.99
	60 and above	4.60
Gender	Woman	55.2
	Man	44.8
Religion	Islam	98
	Others	2
Education Level	No formal education	32.2
	Primary school	21.8
	Secondary school	43.7
	STPM/HSC	1.1
Marital Status	Married	71.3
	Single	24.1
	Widow	4.6
Occupations	Self-Employed	47.1
	Government	1.1
	Private Sector	4.6
	Housewife	19.5
	Unemployed	24.1
	Others	3.4
Income	RM 1,000 and below	82.76
	RM 1,001-2,000	17.24

Table 2 shows the socio-demographic background of 87 respondents from Kuala Lah. Majority of the survey participants came from responders who were at age 26-40 years old (42.35%), and minority participants were at age 60 and above (4.60%) while the second-highest group age were 41-59 at 22.99%. Furthermore, majority of the respondents were 55.2% woman and minority of the were 44.8% man. 98% of the respondents were Islam and 2% of them are others religion.

Meanwhile, the education level was 21.8% of the respondents were primary school, 43.7% attended secondary school, 1.1% STPM with 32.2% got no formal education. Whereas 71.3% of the respondents were married, 24.1% were single with 4.6% were widower. For occupations, 47.1% of respondents were self-employed with government (1.1%) and private sector (4.6%). Moreover, 19.5% of the respondents were housewife and 24.1% were unemployed. Out of 87 respondents, 82.76% of respondents' income were RM1000 and below meanwhile 17.24% had RM1001 - RM2000 as their monthly income.

Relative Importance Index (RII) Analysis

The primary data from the field survey, which were used to measure QOL in this study, were based on the Relative Importance Index (RII). This RII was calculated based on the survey respondent's preference scale. The highest values of RII indicate the highest scale that respondents choose to measure their quality of life. The formula for calculation of RII were as below:

$$RII = \frac{\sum W}{A * N}$$

W = Weight given to each statement by respondents (range from 1-5)

A = Higher integers of respondents

N = Total number of respondents

Table 3: Relative Importance Index (RII) generated from QOL components.

Components	RII	Rank
<i>INCOME AND DISTRIBUTION</i>		
Satisfied with currently income	0.662	3
Well distribute the income and sufficient	0.683	1
Able to support myself and family with the income	0.680	2
<i>WORKPLACE ENVIRONMENT</i>		
Satisfied with current job	0.722	1
Low unemployment rate in my community	0.662	3
Current job activities involve high risks	0.701	2
<i>TRANSPORTATION AND COMMUNICATION</i>		
Own a vehicle	0.683	3
Use mobile phone for communication	0.779	2
Satisfied with road facilities in residential areas	0.805	1
<i>HEALTH</i>		
Satisfied with current health status	0.839	1
Community has long life expectancy	0.733	3
Satisfied with the healthcare facilities provided	0.830	2
<i>EDUCATION</i>		
Community can read and write	0.763	2
Majority communities pursuing education beyond the secondary level	0.639	3
Satisfied with the education facilities provided	0.777	1
<i>HOUSING</i>		
Satisfied with the current house	0.782	2
Sufficient electricity supply	0.798	1
Sufficient water supply	0.775	3
<i>ENVIRONMENT</i>		
Satisfied with the air quality	0.816	1
Satisfied with the water quality	0.766	2
Logging activity occurred around my residential areas	0.733	3
<i>FAMILY LIFE</i>		
Satisfies with food expenses and kitchen supplies	0.743	2
Large number of family members living together	0.834	1

Components	RII	Rank
Juvenile issues in my community	0.595	3
<i>SOCIAL PARTICIPATION</i>		
Community involved in NGO activities	0.752	3
Community participates in activities organized by JAKOA/JKKK/TOK BATIN	0.869	1
Register as electorate	0.761	2
<i>PUBLIC SAFETY</i>		
Feel safe in my residential area	0.841	1
Accidents frequently occur in residential area	0.664	2
Higher crime rate in residential area	0.607	3
<i>CULTURE AND LEISURE</i>		
Watch entertainment programs on television	0.724	1
Accommodations such as hotel/homestay/chalet at my residential	0.437	3
Many tourists visiting my residential area	0.577	2

Table 3 represents the relative importance index (RII) generated from the QOL components. For income and distribution aspects of QOL, the highest RII was well distribute the income and sufficient (RII=0.683) while (RII=0.662) were satisfied with currently income. Besides, for workplace environment aspects it shown that (RII=0.722) were satisfied with current job and (RII=0.701) mentioned that current job activities involve high risks.

The highest RII index was (RII=0.805) satisfied with road facilities in residential areas and the lowest RII index was (RII=0.683) with respondents own a vehicle for QOL aspects of transportation and communication. Moreover, for health aspects of QOL, the highest and lowest RII were (RII=0.839) and (RII=0.733) with the items of satisfied with current health status and community has long life expectancy respectively.

Majority of the respondents stated that large number of family members living together (RII=0.834) for QOL housing elements and feel safe in the residential area with (RII=0.841) for QOL public safety elements. For QOL elements of education, the highest RII index were satisfied with the education facilities provided (RII=0.777) and the lowest RII index were majority communities pursuing education beyond the secondary level (RII=0.639). Furthermore, for housing aspects, the highest and lowest RII were sufficient electricity supply and sufficient water supply with (RII=0.798) and (RII=0.775) respectively.

In terms of environment's QOL elements, it shown that (RII=0.816) were satisfied with the air quality in the residential and (RII=0.733) were mentioned logging activity occurred around the residential area. Overall, social participation aspects had the highest RII with community participates in activities organized by JAKOA/JKKK/TOK BATIN (RII=0.869). In contrast, the culture and leisure aspect had the lowest RII (RII=0.437) which accommodations such as hotel/homestay/chalet were provided at the residential.

CONCLUSION

In summary, regarding the environmental factors, the participants express satisfaction regarding the quality of the air. It indicates that sentiments on the perceived quality of the air in the surveyed area are generally favourable. Besides, the RII results indicates that the respondents generally feel safe in their residential areas in terms of public safety. To improve the quality of life for indigenous people in Malaysia, conservation and preservation of environment must through wisely resource management, cultural preservation, land rights protection, cooperative climate change adaptation, and wildlife protection.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This study was supported by the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) through Fundamental Research Grant Scheme (FRGS/1/2023/WAB08/UNISZA/02/1) provided by Ministry of Higher Education of Malaysia (MOHE).

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Received: 4th Jan 2024. Accepted: 23rd Jan 2024