

# Comparative Review between Youth in Malaysia and Saudi Arabia

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## Abstract

Youth population in Saudi Arabia and Malaysia are large and growing. In Saudi Arabia, the definition of youth involves those people falling from 15 to 24 years. In Malaysia, the definition of youth involves those people from 15 to 40 years of age. They form part of the largest population in both countries, and this implies that the future of young generation will depend on the above discussed patterns such as their education, culture, food, mode of dressing, restriction on cinema, music and sports, news media and religion, and literature and sports.

**Keywords:** Youth in Saudi Arabia; Youth in Malaysia; young generation and Youth and Development

## 1. Introduction

The youth policy act in Saudi Arabia (youth chapter 2010-2014) defines youth as people falling between 15 to 24 years. In 2009, youth population amounted to 3.9 million accounting for 21 percent of the country total population, and 35 percent youth working age. Half of this population is under 9 years. In terms of gender, youth population in Saudi Arabia is evenly distributed. For instance, in 2007, young women exceeded young men in terms of population size by 40 thousand. Moreover, there are disparities existing between gender groups such as education, marriage, health, and employment. The percentage of youth in Saudi Arabia aged between 15 to 24 years is currently 18.3 percent of the entire population in the country. It is projected that the percentage will decrease by 14.7 percent in 2050 (the percent of the working age group). According to the youth policy in Saudi Arabia, a large number of youths are distributed in large cities (SaudiArabiaYouthPolicy, 2014)

According to the Malaysia Youth Policy, an individual is defined as a youth when he/she ranges from 15 to 40 years of age. However, the policy further specifies that youth developmental programs and activities are only focused to those individuals aged from 18 to 25 years. Education and literacy rates among youth in Malaysia are high just like in Saudi Arabia. The population of youth in Malaysia has been increasing significantly, owing to the stable economic growth of the country in the recent years. For instance, in 2010, there were 10.1 million youth aged from 15 to 40 years, and this was an increase of 2.7 million from the previous year. The population of youth from 15 to 24 years also increased significantly from 18.8 percent to 19.8 percent. Just like in Saudi Arabia, in terms of gender, area, and ethnicity youth population in Malaysia is evenly distributed. For instance, in 2010, there were equal members of females and males falling in the category of 15 to 24 years while those falling from 15 to 40 years, the proportion of males were higher than females at 50.3 percent and 49.7 percent respectively. A large portion of youths live in urban areas (53.5 percent) while those living in rural areas have a population of 47.8 percent. However, there are equal proportions of females and males aged from 15 to 24 years and 25 to 40 years living in both urban and rural areas. Ethnically, Bumiputera form majority of the youth population in Malaysia at 57.9 percent (MalaysiaYouthPolicy, 2014).

## 2. Education

According to UNESCO report, the net enrolment rate (secondary school) for Saudi youths is 90.10 percent for both sexes. For instance, in 2013, enrolled Saudi Arabia students amounted to 31.4 percent of the total population. Students in Saudi Arabia have a special educational relationship with the institutions hence a special important element of the social development process of the youth. These educational institutions have provided the youth with the basic knowledge, skills, and means to achieve their aspirations in life. Youths are able to conduct their economic and social work as active citizens and economic producers, as well

(SaudiArabiaYouthPolicy, 2014).

The literacy rates for both sexes were 98.02 percent whereby boys have a higher literary rate of 99 percent while girls have a literary rate of 97.01 percent. On this note, Saudi Arabia education system is currently focusing on closing the gender gap in education and literacy rates among youths in the country. The education and literacy gap among females and males is expected to decline in the coming years. The education system will also ensure that the education literacy rates for youths goes up, and obtaining a university degree amongst the youth is currently seen as a goal for many Saudi youth women (SaudiArabiaYouthPolicy, 2014).

According to a report by the World Bank, Saudi Arabia invested 19.3 percent of its budget and 5.6 percent of its GDP to youth education. Youth development in Saudi Arabia reported that the current youth generation has higher education rates and low illiteracy rates compared with previous generations. The current youth generation is connected to online platforms and social media hence more amenable to assimilating developments and accepting change (SaudiArabiaYouthPolicy, 2014).

The same report by UNESCO shows that education and literacy rates in Malaysia amongst the youths are quite high. For instance, in 2013, the net enrolment rates in secondary schools were 66.41 percent for youths aged from 15 to 24 years. 67.25 percent were males (15-24) and 65.61 percent were females (15-24 year). This shows that the enrolment rate for males is higher than for girls. The literacy rates for both females and males were 98.42 percent (15-24). However, the literacy rate for females was higher at 98.46 percent unlike males with a literacy rate of 98.38 percent (15-24) (MalaysiaYouthPolicy, 2014).

The Malaysian government has also invested heavily on education programs for youths. For instance, the 2013 budget and spending allocated \$ USD 227 million in sports. The government further allocated 21.30 percent of its government expenditure to education and 5.13 percent of its GDP on education provision.

### 3. Culture

There are many aspects of life that form Saudi culture such as religion and tribal systems. A large population of Saudi Arabia culture is the Muslim culture (culture of Muslim societies: 100 percent Muslim). This implies that Islam plays a great role in shaping Saudi culture by defining its traditions, practices of the society, social manners, and their obligations. Islam is the core element of the Saudi culture as it sets the moral principles and behaviours of all youths in the country and in the gulf region. On this note, all youths are expected to have a strong sense of loyalty to all members of the society. Saudi youths are expected to build a lasting relationship with all members of the society. This is essential in the society because it helps in upbringing youths that are respectful and obedient. This is essential in their social development process because it helps in enhancing their cultural values, and also in ensuring that their communities are free from conflicts. A large portion of youths in Saudi Arabia are associated with suicides and drug use. This has been attributed to lack of social support and family conflicts in the country despite the strict religious doctrine in the country that forbids cultural deterrence behaviours such as substance use and suicide. For instance, the current tobacco use among youth aged 13 to 15 years in Saudi Arabia is increasing for instance; females have a percentage of 9 percent while males have a percentage of 21 percent (Cochran, et al., 1989).

Malaysia, on the other hand, is one of the Asian countries with a multi-ethnic, multilingual, and multi-cultural society. Their culture is commonly referred to as Asia in Miniature, and they have substantial influence from other cultures such as Indian and Chinese culture (Nor, 2011). Unlike Saudi Arabia, there are many aspects that define Malaysia culture such as religion, language, food, art, symbol, norms, cultural values, ethnicity, and political values. A joint Malaysian culture is evident in the symbiosis of the people's culture including influence from other communities such as India and China communities (Donahue, 1995). On this note, culture has played a great role in shaping the behaviour of young Malaysians as they go through their developmental process to become adults. They tend to see each other with fairness and equality hence strengthening their moral behaviours in society (Mahmood, et al., 2008). Unlike Saudi Arabia whose culture is defined by religion, Malaysia culture is defined by ethnicity (members of distinct and self-conscious cultural communities) hence most of the people tend to identify themselves with their languages, religion, and culture. On this note, this has tended to define the social life and taste of most of the youths. However, the culture in Malaysia has also resulted into substance use in the country amongst youths. For instance, a large proportion of youths have engaged in substance use including tobacco use. In 2010, a survey done by WTO shows that 22.6 percent of youths aged 13 to 15 years smoked tobacco. Males reported a higher rate of 35.1 percent while females reported a low rate of 9.4 percent (Cochran, et al., 1989).

#### 4. Food

Nutrition and lifestyle in Saudi Arabia youths is one of the most debated issues in the country. This is because the youth in most of the communities have adopted unhealthy nutrition and lifestyles hence affecting their performance in the society. For instance, a large part of the population of Saudi Arabia youths live in large cities hence tend to consume too much soft drinks and fast foods. They also tend to have an inactive lifestyle free from muscular and physical activities hence affecting their economic performance in societies. They also have numerous health issues according to the ministry of health in the country because a large portion of the youth population in large cities have reported increasing cases of diabetes, quick fatigue, obesity, high blood pressure, and early cardiac vascular disease. All these diseases according to health experts in the country have been related with the food the youths consume most. On this note, the type of food most of the youths consume is becoming a health issues/concern hence the need to address the menace in terms of advocacy, prevention, and an oversight on the food the youths consume, as well as the promotion of good health habits. On this note, a center for non-communicable disease has been set up in Saudi Arabia, and it is currently instituting different programs including prevention of these non-communicable diseases among youths. Other programs include healthy diet and advocacy campaigns to raise awareness on a healthy diet among the youth in large cities (FAS., 2006).

Just like Saudi Arabia, nutrition and lifestyle in Malaysia youths is one of the most debated issues in the country. Food intake among youth is influenced by eating habits and culture. The fast foods and soft drinks characterize eating habits and lifestyles for most of the youths in large and small cities in Malaysia. This is because most of the youths in the urban areas are directly exposed to soft foods while those in the villages are directly exposed to traditional foods (Mohd, 2009). For the Chinese, most of the youths take meat and chicken while Indians take squid and shrimp. Based on the eating habits for most of the youths in urban areas, there has been increasing cases of health problems such as diabetes, obesity, quick fatigue, high blood pressure, and early cardiac vascular disease. The eating habits and lifestyles has put most of the youths especially in urban areas inactive in most of the physical activities. This has an impact on their economic performance in the country because most of them have health problems that impede them from taking physical roles in urban areas and in villages, as well (Che, et al., n.d).

In Saudi Arabia and Malaysia, youths are surrounded by food products with high content of sugar, fat, palatable, and attractive foods, and in many cases, these foods are poor for their diet. They are less costly and are readily available in shops hence resulting into overweight and other healthy issues among youths below 12 years. This is a health concern because overweight youths live shorter lives and a number of them suffer from other body complications such as heart diseases and diabetes. This tends to interfere with their emotional, psychological, and physical developments. On this note, both governments need to take precautionary measures to ensure that youths have adapted to healthy nutrition's based on their religion and culture. If this is not addressed in the future, the young generation in both countries will decline, and this will have an economic impact in both countries (Che, et al., n.d).

#### 5. Restrictions on Cinema

Owing to their strong religious culture, a large population of Saudi Youth (two-thirds) has no access to cinemas or even night clubs. However, in Malaysia, a large population of youths has access to cinemas. However, the film industry in both Saudi Arabia and Malaysia has gained popularity in the recent years owing to more new themes that are covered in these cinemas. Both governments have made efforts to sponsor most of the films for instance, in schools because they tend to have educational themes that are essential for mental and social developmental process of youths. For instance, Malaysia government established a national film development corporation in 1981 intended to sponsor most of the films in order to grow the sector because it is largely dominated by young men and women (Yaqin, 1997).

Moreover, both governments have made tremendous efforts to censor sex, sexuality, and racial/ethnic films because they tend to spoil most of the youths in both countries. Most of the youths in Malaysia attend cinemas because they are less restricted by the government, and some of the cinemas have been beneficial and others do spoil the youths. They have an impact on their moral and social development in the future. In Saudi Arabia, youths especially females are restricted to viewing cinemas especially cinemas that conflict with their religion and customs of Islam. However, some tend to view them secretly from their parents and this is why most of them have engaged in immoral behaviours such as substance use and sex abuse. These behaviours are against the Muslim religion and customs and this is why youths are restricted from attending cinemas. For the educational cinemas, girls are accompanied by their parents in order to deter them from bad peers in cities and villages, as well (Yaqin, 1997).

In both countries, both parents are responsible for the cinema attendance for the youths. Most of the cinemas show unacceptable behaviours in society including war and sexual abuse, and it is upon the parents to ensure that youths do not attend cinemas more than once a fortnight. In order to protect youths from attending cinema shows that are not meant for them, the government should ensure that it has increased the price for selected films that are not intended for youths. Educational cinemas must also be arranged by school teachers and the education system. Again, debates should be arranged at school and in other youth clubs in order to train youths to make their own judgments of cinemas they have viewed. This will help the youth enhance their behaviour in society and also ensure that youths do not copy the behaviours of criminals they learn from most of the cinemas. Religion and culture must remain the main grounds through which the behaviour of youths is based on in order to ensure that the youth generation does to decline in the future (UNESCO, 2007).

#### **6. News Media and religion**

Youths are among the prolific users of the media as emerging studies have indicated that youths spend a considerable portion of their daily live watching television or reading newspapers. The Saudi Arabia society has undergone major changes in the use of media news in televisions. Most of the young generations spend most of the time watching news, and this has a positive and negative on them. On the negative side, the news media spends many hours on foreign culture hence affecting family ties, studying habits, friendship concept, family size and the use of leisure time (Barker, 2009). A large portion of Saudi Youths are active in the social media for instance, through the internet. The social media has tremendously expanded their world view because they are able to interact with different cultures hence learn the stereotypes of other people from different cultures. Through these interactions, they are able to understand why other people do things the way they do them, why they believe in what they believe hence develop a deeper understanding of different perspectives of life. On the other hand, the social media has provoked increased skepticism among youth in Saudi Arabia based on the fact that there are so many ideas on the internet (Ahn, 2010). On the other hand, a large portion of Saudi Youths are Muslims (100 percent) and their religion does provide a behavioural guideline or long accepted behavioural guidelines that are supposed to shape their behaviour. However, not all Muslim youths confirm to these behavioural guidelines because they see them as essential to their own faith. Islam is the symbolic and social force dominating the Arab culture and it is considered a religion that defines their identity at young age (Clark, 1983).

In both Malaysia and Saudi Arabia, news media and religion has played a great role in their everyday life. They have a great influence on molding the youths for instance; they are able to receive a vast quantum of information and knowledge hence make congruent ideas concerning their behaviour and lifestyles. The media news also brings awareness to the society hence engage in economic and social activities that would benefit their societies. The news media has a powerful capacity to encourage global awareness hence promote cross-cultural understanding, acceptance of other ethnic groups, religious and gender differences, and cultural tolerance (Clark, 1983). However, freedom of expression by the media is not recognized by the Saudi government. Public speeches, news stories, and other acts of personal expression by media are not intended to conflict with Islamic values because Islam is the core feature of Saudi culture. Unlike Saudi Arabia, much of the Malaysia media is tied to the UMNO ruling party. The government owns the main newspaper and television. However, other opposition parties still have their own news media, but the government has dominated the news media. Like Saudi Arabia, the freedom of the media is regulated by the government as the government is criticized for cracking down the news media by other opposition parties. For instance, in 2007, the government made a report barring all TV and newspapers from reporting speeches made by the opposition leaders. All in all, the youth in Malaysia has been able to access information from the news media and utilize it to enhance their knowledge. However, the regulated freedom of expression by the Malaysian government has threatened and reduced employment opportunities for most of the youths who aspire to become journalists in the future (Clark, 1983).

Seemingly, news media and religion are core factors in the lives of youths in Malaysia and Saudi Arabia. News media and religion, as well influence their attitudes and behaviour in ways that are positive and constructive. For instance, religions have been attributed with a variety of desirable and healthy outcome for most of the youths who have made it to adulthood. News media recently have reported the increasing cases of substance use and their effects for those who consume them. Religion, on the other hand, has instilled moral behaviours among the youth hence you find that most of the youths who are religious are inversely related to substance use such as alcohol, juvenile drug, tobacco, and cocaine. Religiosity is also inversely related to suicidal cases, attempts of suicide, and actual suicide among youths. This implies that religiosity and news media play a great role in shaping the behaviours of youths in societies (Ellison, et al., 1991).

## 7. Music and Dance

Saudi Arabia cultural setting is Arab and Islam. There are many features/elements that form their culture including music and dance. For instance, Al Ardha is one of the most compelling folk rituals of Saudi Arabia (the country's national dance). It involves different dancing instruments such as drums and poet chants by different musicians. Youths participate heavily in music and dance because it tends to bring their cultural values together. They also sing and dance together, and are able to learn different moral behaviours from the elderly hence strengthen their social developmental process. This is essential for the communities because it helps in resolving conflicts and enhancing moral values amongst the youth in the country (WilsonCenter, 2011). On the other hand, Music in Malaysia reflects the specific ethnic groups in the country (Malaysia, Chinese, and Indian Culture). Music played by youths in Malaysia ranges from folk, classical, acculturated music, art music, and contemporary music. The currently played music in the country is popular and contemporary art music (western-based music that is combined with local elements). The youths are involved in music because music and dance tends to bring their cultural values together. For instance, it brings the Malaysian culture, Chinese culture, and Indian culture together. This is essential for youths in the country because it helps them appreciate other people's culture. It is also a source of living for most of the youths (25-40) because most of the youths participate in different music and dancing for commercial purposes (Hornik, 1981).

## 8. Dress

Dress is another features/element that forms Saudi Arabia culture. The mode of dressing among the youth is dictated by the religion and customs for both females and male. All young women in Saudi Arabia are expected to wear a black abaya in public (this is a long black cloak that covers all the female body except hand and their faces). On their head, the young women wear a full face veil that covers the head except the face. This is based on the Muslim culture whereby all young women not married are not expected to expose their body and hair, as well. On the other hand, Saudi Arabia young men irrespective of their social status wear a traditional dress commonly referred to as a thobe. However, during hot and warm weather conditions, Saudi young men are expected to wear white thobes while during cold weather conditions, they are supposed to put on wool thobes in dark colors. During special occasions, the young men put on mishlah or bisht over the thobe. These are long black, brown or white cloaks commonly trimmed with gold in order to make them representatives in the crowd. This form of dressing among the youth in Saudi Arabia tends to differentiate them from other cultures, and their form of dressing is essential in upholding their culture that is commonly defined by their religion and customs (WilsonCenter, 2011).

Just like in Saudi Arabia, the Islamic awakening in Malaysia has brought consciousness in the mode of dressing in most of the youths. Muslims in the country are bonded by Islam culture that requires young females to wear black abaya in public and full face veil that covers the head except the face. Young men wear a traditional dress commonly referred to as a thobe. However, owing to the globalization, morality is declining significantly among Muslim youths in Malaysia. The number of drug addicts is increasing and this is significantly eroding their mode of dressing as they involve with the young generation. Rape cases are also increasing amongst youths and juvenile delinquency is also increasing in the country. Youths are highly involved in all forms of crimes and diligence hence questioning their religious and cultural believes. On this note, the mode of dressing in both Malaysia and Saudi Arabia is strongly related with their religion and customs (Saodah, et al., 2009).

## 9. Literature and Sports

Literature and sports are still the other elements of their culture because it is through literature and sports that most of the youth are able to have social and economic wellbeing. Most of the youths in Saudi Arabia have engaged in sports and literature for instance, some of the great novelists and poetries who have published most of the books are youths (ArabNews., 2014). They also participate on art and theatrical works although in most of the time they face restriction on their freedom of expression. Literature and poetry has played a great role in shaping the life of most of the Saudi youths because they are able to earn a living, and at the same time enhance Saudi culture to other cultures including the western culture (Schlaffer, et al., 2011). Moreover, sports have also played a significant role in enhancing the behaviour of most of the youths in the country. For instance, soccer, which is the national sport in the country, has attracted the attention of so many youths, and most of the youths are part of the national team. Other prominent sports activities in the country include basketball and netball. The sporting events have also been introduced into schools in order to help nurture the talents of the youths who aspire to be sports men and women in the future. Most of the youths in the country have taken sports as a career and are able to earn a living through it (WilsonCenter, 2011). On this note, sports has played a great role in ensuring that youths do not engage in substance use such as drugs hence it has helped in their social

developmental process. It is also essential in that it has helped in reducing conflicts in societies (Vivelo, 1978).

Literature and sports have existed in Malaysia and they form part of its culture. The elderly have utilized literature and art such as folktales in order to educate the youth on how to be highly respected in societies. They also use relevant stories to educate the youth. Today, literature is still exercised by youths in schools. For instance, Malaysia poetry has been developed in different forms whereby students in school do their poems and they are able to nurture their careers in poetry. Students also do other forms of art such as poem writing and wood curving, and this has commonly been utilized in different sectors of the economy hence improving the performance of the economy. Youths in villages have also engaged in other art activities such as hand-woven baskets. They also use luxurious textiles that are strongly made hence enhancing their art work. This has brought social changes in society, and also new forms of literature in the country (Ooms, 2008). Currently, a number of native speakers in Malaysia have increased including Chinese culture and Indian culture, and most of the youths have produced different literature works on these cultures hence enhancing their living. Just like Saudi Arabia, sports have played a great role in shaping the behaviour of youths in the country. Most of the sporting activities such as soccer, hockey, squash, bowling, and badminton have been introduced in schools and this is essential in nurturing their talents. Furthermore, in the national team, most of the players are youths from different schools and colleges, and this has helped most of the youth to earn their living (Feldman, et al., 2005).

Malaysia still has other traditional forms of sports including Wau which is a traditional kite-flying activity and the kites go as high as 1640 ft. These games are played during events such as rice harvest season. Other traditional activities played by youth include dragon dancing, sailing, scuba diving, and dragon boat. Most of these traditional sporting activities are done by students during their music festival hence enhancing the Malaysia culture (Ooms, 2008). Sports have also helped in deterring most of the harmful behaviours in cities and villages such as substance use. Most of the youth are engaged in sporting activities hence facilitating in their social developmental process. In 1964, Malaysian government established a ministry of youth and sports whose vision was to champion the empowerment of a superior youth and sports development in the country. The ministry was also intended to inculcate sports culture within the society in order to ensure that most of the youths have engaged in activities that can deter them from immoral behaviours in societies. This is essential for their moral development because it helps in nurturing a society free from social conflicts (KBS, 2010).

#### **10. Conclusion and Impact to the Youth**

In conclusion, youth population in Saudi Arabia and Malaysia are large and growing. In Saudi Arabia, the definition of youth involves those people falling from 15 to 24 years. In Malaysia, the definition of youth involves those people from 15 to 40 years of age. They form part of the largest population in both countries, and this implies that the future of young generation will depend on the above discussed patterns such as their education, culture, food, mode of dressing, restriction on cinema, music and sports, news media and religion, and literature and sports. All these elements have impacted youths in one way or the other either positively or negatively. For instance, education has a positive impact on youths in Malaysia and Saudi Arabia in that the educated youths form the largest portion of the working population. In both countries, education and literacy rates are high amongst youth implying that they have the required knowledge and skills to earn a better living. Culture in both countries has also impacted youths in that through the religious backgrounds and customs, youths have been able to abide by their culture and religious beliefs hence shaping their moral and social behaviours in society. However, food and lifestyles in Saudi Arabia and Malaysia have had a negative impact on youth, and this is one of the health concerns in both countries. Their eating habits especially youths in large and small cities are poor and this has impacted their emotional, physical, and psychological performance in societies. Restriction on cinema is another vital element in both countries that has helped in shaping the behaviour of youth. Both countries have restricted youths from viewing cinemas not meant to them and this has helped in deterring most of the youths from coping bad behaviours from cinemas watched. News media and religion, on the other hand, has helped in influencing their attitudes and behaviour in ways that are positive and constructive. Music and dance has impacted youths positively in that it helps in resolving conflicts and enhancing moral values amongst the youth in both countries. The mode of dressing in both Malaysia and Saudi Arabia is strongly related with their religion and customs. This has an impact of the behaviour of youths in that it defines their moral standards and respect in society. Literature and sports have played a great role in ensuring that youths do not engage in substance use such as drugs hence it has helped in their social developmental process. It is also essential in that it has helped in reducing conflicts in societies.

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