

**A STUDY ON RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN
SPIRITUALITY AND ENVIRONMENT
CONNECTEDNESS, HOLISTIC INDIVIDUAL
CHARACTERISTICS AND SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR
AMONG ADOLESCENTS IN MALAYSIA**

BY

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degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education**

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ABSTRACT

Malaysia explicitly stated in its Educational Philosophy that it strived to produce holistic and contributing young individuals. The present cross-sectional study was conducted to examine the nature of, and relationships between, Spirituality, Environment Connectedness, Holistic Individual Characteristics and Social Behaviour among Malaysian adolescents. Spirituality in this study was focussed on God Connectedness. A sample of 395 Form Four students were selected using the multistage cluster sampling method and the instruments consisted of seven survey questionnaires adopted and adapted from established scales. A pilot study was done to test the reliability and validity of the scales. Descriptive statistics were analysed using IBM SPSS version 27 and Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) using IBM Amos version 27 was done for further analysis. A General Model was constructed after validating all the measurements models. The results showed that the general model fitted the data with fitness indices achieving the required level, specifically, the value of RMSEA= 0.042, GFI=0.927, CFI=0.946, TLI=0.938, CMIN/DF=1.696 and P value was 0.000. In addition, the results showed that there were important significant causal effects of Spirituality and Environment Connectedness on Social Behaviour as well as on Holistic Individual Characteristics. However, Holistic Individual Characteristics was not a mediator of the relationship between God Connectedness and Environment Connectedness to Social Behaviour. This study contributed to theoretical knowledge in terms of methodology as using SEM for analysis in the area of research related to Malaysian adolescents was still scarce. It also contributed to bridge the gap in knowledge since studies involving the relationship between Spirituality, Environment Connectedness, Holistic Individual Characteristics and Social behaviour among Malaysian adolescents were still lacking. As for practical implications, these findings lend empirical evidence to responsible parties as to how and what to focus in developing holistic Malaysian adolescents with good social behaviour.

خلاصة البحث

لقد ذكرت ماليزيا بصراحة في فلسفتها التربوية أنها تسعى نحو تكوين مواطنين متكاملين وقادرين على المساهمة في المجتمع. فقد أجريت الدراسة الحالية لبحث النموذج البنائي الذي يبرز الجانب الروحي (الذي يتمثل في علاقة الفرد مع الله) ، وعلاقة الفرد مع البيئة ، والخصائص الفردية الشاملة والسلوك الاجتماعي ، وكذلك العلاقات بينها ، لدى عينة من المراهقين الماليزيين. واستهدف البحث أيضاً استكشاف دور الخصائص الفردية الشاملة كمتغير وسيط بين علاقة الفرد مع الله ومع البيئة وسلوكه الاجتماعي. وتمثلت عينة البحث في 395 طالب وطالبة في الصف الرابع الثانوي من المدارس الحكومية في ولايتي سيلانجور وكوالالمبور، باستخدام طريقة أخذ العينات العشوائية الطبقية. وقد تم استخدام سبع أدوات لجمع البيانات المطلوبة ، تم تصنيفها على مقياس ليكرت المكون من خمس نقاط. وقامت الباحثة بتصميم المقاييس وتقنيها وإجراء دراسة استطلاعية لاختبار صحتها وثباتها قبل استخدامها في الدراسة الرئيسية. وقد تم تحليل البيانات من الدراسة الرئيسية باستخدام IBM برنامج SPSS الإصدار 27 للإحصاءات الوصفية ومنهجية نمذجة المعادلات البنائية (SEM) باستخدام الإصدار 27 من Amos IBM كأداة، وتم ذلك في خطوتين أساسيتين هما التحليل العاملي التوكيدي (CFA) ثم اختبار فرضيات الدراسة في النموذج الهيكلي، وقد أكدت نتائج التحليل العاملي أن أداة البحث تمتعت بالخصائص السيكمترية. وأظهرت النتائج أن النموذج البنائي يناسب البيانات مع تحقيق مؤشرات اللياقة للمستوى المطلوب ، وتحديدًا كانت قيم المؤشرات كما يلي: $RMSEA = 0.042$ ، $GFI = 0.927$ ، $CFI = 0.946$ ، $TLI = 0.938$ ، $CMIN / DF = 1.696$ وقيمة P كانت 0.000. بالإضافة إلى ذلك ، أظهرت النتائج أن هناك تأثيرات ذات دلالة احصائية بين علاقة الفرد مع الله والسلوك الاجتماعي وكذلك مع الخصائص الفردية الشاملة. إلى جانب ذلك ، كان لعلاقة الفرد مع البيئة أيضاً تأثيرات ذات دلالة احصائية على السلوك الاجتماعي والخصائص الفردية الشاملة. ومع ذلك ، فإن النتائج لم تدعم وجود دور للخصائص الفردية الشاملة كمتغير وسيط بين علاقة الفرد مع الله والسلوك الاجتماعي وكذلك العلاقة بين علاقة الفرد مع البيئة والسلوك الاجتماعي. وساهمت هذه الدراسة في الإطار النظري من حيث المنهجية حيث أن استخدام SEM للتحليل في مجال البحث المتعلق بالمراهقين الماليزيين لا يزال نادرًا. كما ساهم في سد الفجوة المعرفية حيث تندر الدراسات حول علاقة الفرد مع الله وعلاقته مع البيئة والخصائص الفردية الشاملة والسلوك الاجتماعي لدى المراهقين الماليزيين، وقدم البحث تصورا جديدا للعلاقات المتبادلة بين المتغيرات المدروسة. وفيما يتعلق باسهام

البحث في الجانب التطبيقي, تقدم هذه النتائج المرتكزات التي يمكن للمسؤولين التركيز عليها في
مراهقين مالزيين متكاملين ذوي الأخلاق الاجتماعية الحسنة.



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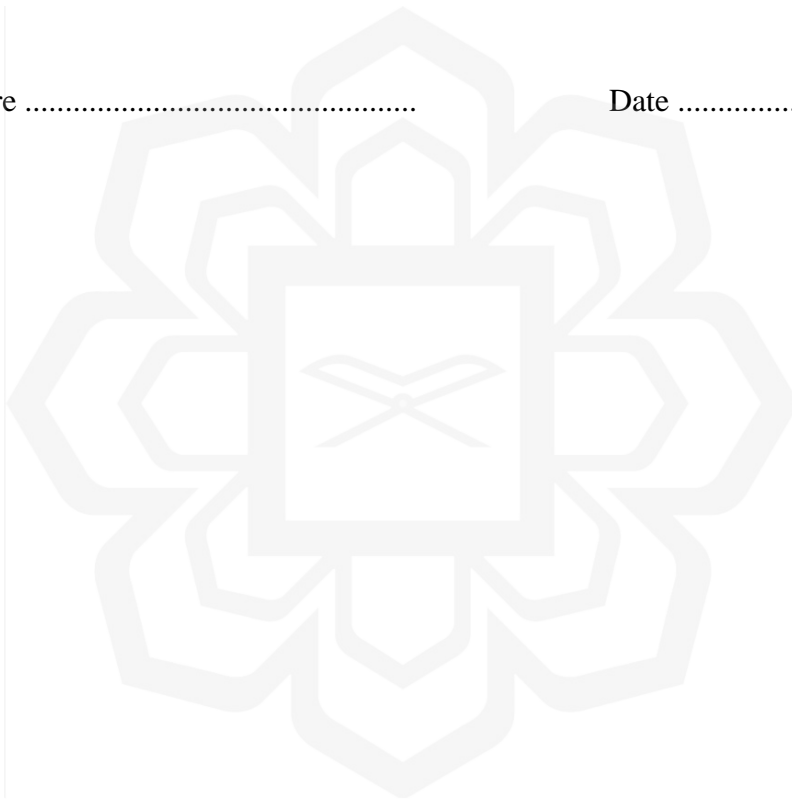
DECLARATION

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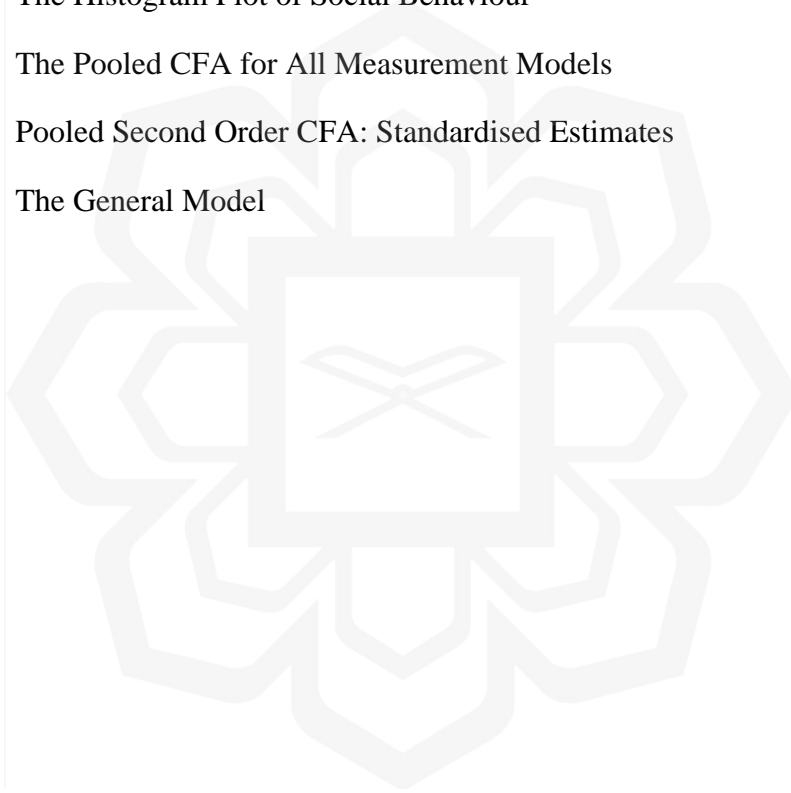
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION TO CHAPTER

This chapter presents the background of the study addressing the issues and the challenges in adolescents' lives and social behaviour. It proceeds with a review of exploring possible relationships between adolescents' social behaviour, spirituality (as represented by the construct God connectedness) and environment connectedness. A brief description of being a holistic individual from two standpoints, namely the spiritual and emotional intelligence is also discussed. Possible relationships between emotional and spiritual intelligence to adolescent social behaviour, God and environment connectedness are also explored. The problem statement, aims and objectives of the study, research questions, hypotheses, significance and delimitations of the study are then explained.

1.2 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Society's concerns showed that there is a problem with adolescents' development and social behaviour. Issues related to this domain have been the subject of many research by scholars and policy makers.

Adolescents form a big catchment of future leaders and workforce. In 2020, young people under fifteen years old made up 26% of world's population (Population Reference Bureau, Statista.com, 2020). However, challenges posed in the lives of these adolescents may thwart them from undertaking the healthy roles that they are supposed to undertake. Malaysia is no exception.

Demographic wise, Malaysia is a relatively young country. In 2018, statistics have shown that 29% or 9.4 million of the overall 32.4 million population, fall in the range of age from 18 years and below. Out of this, 4.85 million are males while 4.55 million are females (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2019).

Being a country that has a large young population and considering adolescence is not only a time of vulnerability but also an age of opportunity, it is apparent that the conditions of this generation is of paramount importance. Young people are our future and their role in shaping the country and the world's economy as well as society is clear. Attention on helping them to improve their life chances and achieve their potentials are imperative. It is pertinent that they be empowered and given the opportunity to participate and get connected in the community.

To enable our young people to grow up to be good people and responsible citizens, they must learn to feel, think and act with respect for themselves and for other people. They need to pursue their own well-being, while also being considerate of the needs and feelings of others. In short, the nation needs well-rounded holistic young individuals with strong character and good social behaviour. Helping them to amend their challenging behaviours and strengthening their positive social behaviour are among the basic things that ought to be done. Thus, it is important to understand the current challenges faced and experienced by our young people particularly the factors that could influence their social behaviour.

1.2.1 Adolescence: Challenges and Social Behaviour

Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him), emphasized that adolescents and young people should appreciate the importance of young age. In a hadis reported by Ibn Abbas: The Prophet Muhammad said, "Take advantage of five things before the

emergence of five things: - Young age before old age, healthy time before illness, your wealth before you are poor, your life time before your death, and your leisure time before your busy time" (Al Hakim, n.d.).

The emphasis is to gain the benefits of youth, for when one is young, one is in the best condition to discharge heavy duties and overcoming the barriers and challenges faced.

Among the challenges that adolescents face is the identity development. According to Erikson (1950, 1968), individuals go through the identity versus identity confusion stage of development during adolescence. It is a stage of identity development, whereby adolescents explore questions such as who am I, what am I, where am I going and what are my roles in this life. The ability to resolve such questions, explore positive roles, and arrive at a positive path to follow in life, will lead them to achieve a positive identity. The inability to do so will result in identity confusion and crises. According to Marcia (1980, 1994, 2002), there are four identity statuses or ways of resolving identity crises, namely identity diffusion, identity foreclosure, identity moratorium and identity achievement. Adolescents who achieve the identity achievement stage will form a stable identity and will be able to execute their expected roles well (Santrock, 2016). In addition, at this stage they also go through a process of emotional development. Their emotions become more complex and powerful than in childhood.

Nevertheless, an individual at this age has the potential to carve out a brilliant future for himself, his family and society. The cognitive changes that lead to being able to think abstractly, the psychological changes that lead to an increase potential of being able to handle family and societal expectations; as well as biological changes

that comes with the onset of puberty, all can not only be exciting but also daunting if not managed well.

Growing up in the twenty-first century can be fun and exhilarating, but at the same time, it can also be a frightening and risky experience. Young people today face many different issues as they develop into adulthood. Some of the common ones are constructing their identities, self-worth, forming relationships, indulging in aggressive behaviour, risk-taking and oppositional defiant behaviours like cigarette-smoking, drug use, going against the law and teenage pregnancy. Mental health issues like self-harming, anxiety and depression are also affecting their psychosocial well-being.

In other words, adolescents are not spared the challenges of becoming a holistic wholesome person. Problems and issues can mushroom during their development with serious consequences. The related issues can affect them in numerous different ways including their connection with the Creator of the universe, family, society, environment and mutually acceptable behaviour that benefits both their individual selves and society.

In short, adolescence is a stage of human development that is full of challenges and changes. It is a transitional developmental stage between childhood and adulthood, which involves changes in biological, cognitive and socioemotional aspect, starting from about 10 to 13 years of age and ending in late teens (Santrock, 2016).

These challenges can be encountered or manifested in adolescents' social behaviours. Social behaviours are behaviours that are directed towards society, or taking place between members of the same species (OMICS International, 2020). They are behaviours that are directed towards other selves.

In general, adolescents have a positive self-image, self-confident, and optimistic about their future. They are also happy most of the time, enjoyed life and

capable of exercising self-control, valued work and school, have positive feelings towards their families, and are able to cope with life stresses (Santrock, 2016). As such, generally they are potentially capable of behaving with good social behaviours.

However, at times, some types of social behaviour become a problem when they deviate from the norms and standards accepted by society, such as the inability of an individual to respect the rights of others and the social norms. As such adolescent social behaviours can have a positive or negative impact on other individual selves as well as society.

Allah emphasizes on the responsibility of developing the young people, as mentioned in the Holy Qur'an,

“And when he attained his maturity and became full grown, we granted him wisdom and knowledge; and thus, do we reward those who do good (to others)” (Al Quran: Al-Qesas, 14).

The young generation should be developed to be able to act or behave with wisdom and based on knowledge. In turn, they are supposed to be good to others or to have good social behaviour.

An abundance of studies have associated adolescents' social behaviour development with many factors in the domain of biological, including hormonal changes, psychological and social-cultural, religiosity, relationship with God, Connectedness to God, life-cycle and life events, family, peers, school, community, race, self-esteem and self-efficacy beliefs and emotional regulation skills (Laird, Krause, Funes & Lavretsky, 2019; Santrock 2016; Goeke-Morey et.al., 2014; Day and Wanklyn (2012-2013); Silke, Brady, Boylan and Dolan, 2018). Undeniably, all these factors interact with each other as an individual grow up and will shape and contribute to the development of adolescents.

In Malaysia, statistics show that the state of adolescents' social behaviour is not as it is hoped for. A significant number of Malaysian adolescents indulge in delinquent social behaviour. For example, adolescents drug abuse, stood at 43.4% in 2017, followed by property related crimes (29.5%) and people related crimes 13.6% (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2018). Besides that, adolescents' mental health, which may lead to unwarranted social behaviours is also a problem. For example, adolescents with anxiety is at 39.7%, depression is at 18.3% and stress is at 9.6% (Institute of Public Health Malaysia, 2017).

From the above discussion, it can be seen that adolescent social behaviour is an important area to be understood well. Specifically, the reasons being, firstly, adolescents have vast potential to shoulder the social responsibilities and contribute to the betterment society. Secondly, despite having the potential, adolescence is an age of challenging development which needs to be managed well so as to help adolescents become a good wholesome people. Thirdly, social behaviours of the adolescents have far reaching impact, either to people around them or society at large. Finally, in Malaysia, the state of the adolescents' social behaviour is not yet at its optimum and needs to be improved.

Thus, this study examined the relationship of spirituality as measured by the independent construct of God Connectedness, and the independent construct Environment Connectedness to Social Behaviour and Holistic Individual Characteristics. It also explored the possible mediating effect of Holistic Individual Characteristics on the relationship between God Connectedness and Environment Connectedness to Social Behaviour.

The sections below provide brief introductions to the concept of spirituality, the independent constructs of God Connectedness as well as Environment

Connectedness with its sub-constructs of Social Connectedness, Nature Connectedness and Cyber World Relationship. Besides that, the mediating constructs of Holistic Individual Characteristics and its sub-constructs of Emotional and Spiritual Intelligence will also be discussed.

1.2.2 Spirituality and God Connectedness

Spirituality is about wholeness. It entails seeing reality or the universe in a holistic manner, in which everyone and everything is seamlessly interconnected to everyone and everything else. It gives meaning at a deeply personal level (Culliford, 2011).

In other words, spirituality is about feelings of connectedness to others, self, and a higher power. It refers to one's engagement with what one considers holy, divine, or beyond the material world and includes reflections on the transcendental and the metaphysical. Thus, spirituality involves the search for connectedness to others, search for meaning and purpose in life, a sense of where we came from and where we are and where we are going. It also involves the search for connectedness to someone greater than the self, the sacred, supernatural or ultimate reality (Louca, 2016; Jensen, 2021). In addition, it also entails understanding, trusting or experiencing God (Louca, 2016).

Spirituality represents a personal inner state of being that can be found within or outside the context of religion (Louca, 2016). Thus, the journey of spirituality can be within the doctrines of a religion, if the individual subscribe to an affirmative relationship to a religion, or it can occur outside the realm of a religion.

In sum, spirituality covers faith in God and the sense of connection to God, irrespective of one's belief system, be it a set of ideas or religious doctrines. In this study spirituality is measured across the construct of God Connectedness.

God Connectedness

Even though people are born as individuals, there are always connections between them. We interact with and influence each other every day. This is also mentioned in the Quran:

“O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of God is the most righteous of you. Indeed, God is all Knowing and Acquainted” (Al-Quran, Surah 49, verse 13).

Being connected is having a sense of belonging or attachment to things or realities around them and more importantly, the Ruler of the universe that is, the God and the environment which include social (family and school), nature and cyber space domains. Intriguingly, an individual can be lost and disconnected from these facets even though they are not alone. This disconnection is a personal experience that cannot be discerned by others. Being disconnected brings about a feeling of loneliness, which is associated with various mental conditions and well-being, such as anxiety and depression (Hari, 2018).

God connectedness is the feeling of attachment to God, producing a feeling of well-being and being protected (Beck & McDonald, 2004). It refers to the affectional bond that exists between a person and God as the attachment figure. The attachment figure being a secure base and providing a safe haven and experiencing separation anxiety when removed from the attachment. It is a lasting connectedness (Santrock, 2016, Beck & MacDonald, 2004).

Thus, God connectedness is a very important spiritual experience and being spiritual involves experiencing something beyond oneself in a transcendent manner and living in a way that benefits others and society (Santrock, 2016). In this context,