

Housing preference among young people: A study from the perspective of university students in Malaysia

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 28 July 2023
Revised 14 August 2023
Accepted 23 August 2023
Online first 7 October 2023
Published 31 October 2023

Keywords:

housing preference
young people
Malaysia

DOI:

10.24191/smrj.v20i2.24314

ABSTRACT

This article aims to investigate housing preferences among young people in Malaysia. This article argues the difference between the supply and demand of homes in this market that needs to be improved, especially on the actual needs of young people. This study utilises a quantitative survey to collect data, and statistical analysis to evaluate the research findings. The study's findings revealed that their housing preference was significantly influenced by factors such as housing price, housing location, housing environment and housing attributes. This research aims to assist housing providers in developing affordable housing that matches potential homebuyers' preferences to avoid property overhangs and offer fundamental guidance to the government for creating housing policies that benefit young people.

INTRODUCTION

House is a place where family members or household members live to provide shelter and protection from outsiders. Article 17(1) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that everyone has the right to own property alone as well with others (UN Habitat, 2017). Home is not only the place for human beings to live in, but it also acts as protection, a possession and self-regard. It is clearly described that a house is essential for every household to own (Bilal, Meera & Abdul Razak, 2019). However, the inaccessibility for a household to acquire a house is increasing. This issue is mainly faced by lower and middle-income families who cannot afford to buy a house that is too costly. Housing has now become a debate not only in Malaysia but internationally.

In countries like the UK and the US, homebuyers, especially young people, find it hard to buy a house as they cannot pay the monthly mortgage. Meanwhile, in Asian countries like Cambodia, a report from UN Habitat (2017) revealed that almost 2 million houses are still not meeting the minimum standard of housing quality. In Malaysia, the housing scenario has also become a concern and has attracted attention, especially

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<https://doi.org/10.24191/smrj.v20i2.24314>

among young people. People needed help to afford housing due to the increasing price of the houses the house developers offered. Recently, the cost of a small house has needed to be lowered and keeps rising yearly. The rate of young people owning a house is decreasing due to current economic and social conditions (Soon & Tan, 2019).

A debate in Dewan Rakyat by the Deputy Local Government Development Minister Akmal Nasrullah Mohd Nasir highlighted that housing prices in Malaysia have risen by 4.1 percent, higher than the rate of income increases (Daim & Harun, 2023). According to NAPIC's statistics, which show each year an increase in house prices, it is clear that this is the case.

According to Khazanah Research Institute (2019) report titled "Rethinking Housing: Between State, Market, and Society," Malaysia's average housing market price continues to rise (Ismail., 2019). The average house price in Malaysia as of Q2 2022 was RM439,084, a slight decrease from Q1 2022 at RM444,230, marking the worst quarterly drop since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, but it continues to rise year on year. Also, the percentage of overhang and unsold residential units is reported to be high between 2018-2022 (National Property Information Centre, 2022). The question that arises is, why is there a trend of unsold properties in Malaysia? Was it due to the high price of housing beyond the affordability level, or was it due to the mismatch between the supply and the actual needs of the people? This has raised the debate on whether the housing offered is suitable for the housing preferences of the people.

Therefore, this study examines factors influencing young people's housing preferences by employing final-year university students as a sample. It is important to study the housing preferences of young people so that relevant housing providers can offer and provide houses that match their preferences. The article is organised as follows: Section 2 describes the literature reviewed on housing preference and the variables employed. Section 3 depicts the methodology of the study. Section 4 presents the findings and discussion. Finally, Section 5 concludes the study and outlines the limitations.

HOUSING PREFERENCE

Understanding the housing preference of the young is pertinent. A study among young professionals in Malaysia found that the security criterion is the highest priority in housing preferences among the respondents (Sohaimi et al., 2017). According to Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (2023), housing means "rumah", and it refers to anywhere that people tend to live and stay. Housing Preferences can be classified by many things, including the type of house, location of the house, size of the house, attributes of the house and any other features (Henilane, 2016). Preferences can be seen as a choice made by an individual that could change and be decided according to the situation (Taiwo, Yusoff, & Aziz, 2018). Housing preference can be described in two terms: expectation and aspiration. Housing aspiration can be seen through the desire of the buyer to buy it, while housing expectations reflect the expectations of the future housing condition (Thanaraju et al., 2019). Meanwhile, Kumar Gupta and Malhotra (2016) stated that two macro-level and micro-level determinants have driven housing preference. Macro-level determinants include the market and system of the house and the condition of the economy of the buyers (Kumar Gupta & Malhotra, 2016).

A study among Saudis and Jordanians by Moghimi and Jusan (2015) articulates that another critical attribute that has become buyers' concern before buying a house is the number of rooms and bathrooms. Their findings found that Jordanians have different preferences than Saudis. They tend to consider choosing the house based on the decorations, housing layout and materials used by the developers. It means that the buyers would only choose to buy a house when it fulfils their choices, as Farasa & Kusuma (2018) argued.

HOUSING PRICE

Financial conditions influence the preference for buying a house among young people's generations. Financial conditions include the housing price, the income of the household, loans, and the mechanism of

repayment. Chia *et al.* (2016) stated that the determinant that influences the most in purchasing a house is the property's price. Housing Prices can influence the preference for buying a house among young people's generations. A study investigating the housing prices in Malaysia found a correlation between the affordability of the people and the price offered. Moreover, the availability of home loans was found to influence people's preferences and housing decisions (Kumar & Khandelwal, 2018). An analysis of homebuyers' preferences by Soon and Tan (2019) indicated that the housing price in the current market is beyond most homebuyers' affordability. Specific attributes are important to homebuyers and should be addressed. This was further proven by a study among millennials in Indonesia that detected financial factors positively influencing millennial's purchase decisions towards housing in Indonesia, alongside the structural and locational factors (Kurniawan *et al.*, 2020). Hence, this study hypothesizes that: There is a significant relationship between housing prices and housing preference among young people.

HOUSING LOCATION

Housing location and housing preferences can have a significant influence on each other. A home's location can affect a person's housing preferences and otherwise. A factor that can influence the preference for buying a house among young people is location accessibility. Kurniawan *et al.* (2020) said that location is one of the most important things to consider before purchasing a house. The location attributes can be the distance to the workplace, institutions and transportation facilities (Tan, 2016). According to Chia *et al.* (2016), some matters need to be considered when purchasing a house: distance to the workplace, distance to educational institutions such as schools, distance to business centre areas and distance to retailers' outlets. It shows that the distance refers to the strategic locations of the house relative to the important places the households always go to. This has been important in a study done by Kam *et al.* (2018), which revealed that the values and way of life of Generation Y had a significant impact on their demands and preferences for home characteristics. They believe engaging with family and friends and travelling a short distance to work influence homeownership decisions.

Based on the findings from Hartono *et al.* (2022) found that distance has a positive relationship with housing purchasing. Olanrewaju and Woon (2017) also claimed that reasonable housing is usually far from the town, which will affect the high cost of fuel expenses and time. We have therefore proposed the following hypotheses based on the evidence already mentioned: There is a significant relationship between housing location and housing preference among young people.

HOUSING ENVIRONMENTS

According to recent surveys, housing studies have argued that young people favour affordable housing options that are reasonably priced, easily located, and offer a strong sense of community. Additionally, they are drawn to green features and services like bike storage, parks, and accessibility to public transportation. Furthermore, many young individuals desire flexible housing arrangements supporting changing lifestyles and permitting remote employment. It was suggested by Chia *et al.* (2016) that the matters that need to be considered in purchasing a house are the distance to the workplace, the distance to educational institutions such as schools, the distance to the business centre area and the distance to retail outlets. Their findings found that distance has a positive relationship with housing purchasing. Olanrewaju and Woon (2017) also claimed that reasonable housing is usually far from the town, which will affect the high cost of fuel expenses and time. According to Tan (2016), a neighbourhood can be defined as a place where it gathers all neighbours with the same interest. His research also claimed that to determine the types of neighbourhoods, the house purchaser can look at the environmental qualities of the area of the neighbourhood. His findings revealed that neighbourhoods with a gate-guarded have more interaction with their neighbour, thus becoming the buyers' preferences. Another study among Malaysians found that the homes developers deliver must meet what home buyers expect (Soon & Tan, 2019). Based on this, the following hypothesis

is developed: There is a significant relationship between the housing environment and housing preference among young people.

HOUSING ATTRIBUTES

Factors influencing the preference for buying a house among young people can also be seen in the House Attributes. House Attributes include the design of the interior and exterior houses and the quality of the building or finishing, which will become the factors to influence the buyers to buy the house (Chia *et al.*, 2016). It was suggested in the study that the developers are required to analyse the trend of housing criteria in the current market before deciding to build a house (Olanrewaju & Tan, 2018). It can be seen in many aspects, including the layout of the house, the design and the quality of the house. In a study done by Chernobai and Hossain (2017), the size of a house is one of the house attributes that can be the factors in choosing a house.

Meanwhile, as discussed by Delgado and Troyer (2017), buyers are willing to pay more if the house tiles use granite tiles. Another study by Soon and Tan (2019) discovered that privacy and floor are among the attributes that shape housing preference, perhaps due to the different cultures and family sizes. The influence of housing attributes was also confirmed by the study of Kam *et al.* (2018) revealing that Generation Y values and lifestyle have significantly affected their needs and preferences in housing attributes. Thus, this study proposes the following hypothesis: There is a significant relationship between housing attributes and housing preference among young people. The above discussion was further conceptualised through the following framework:

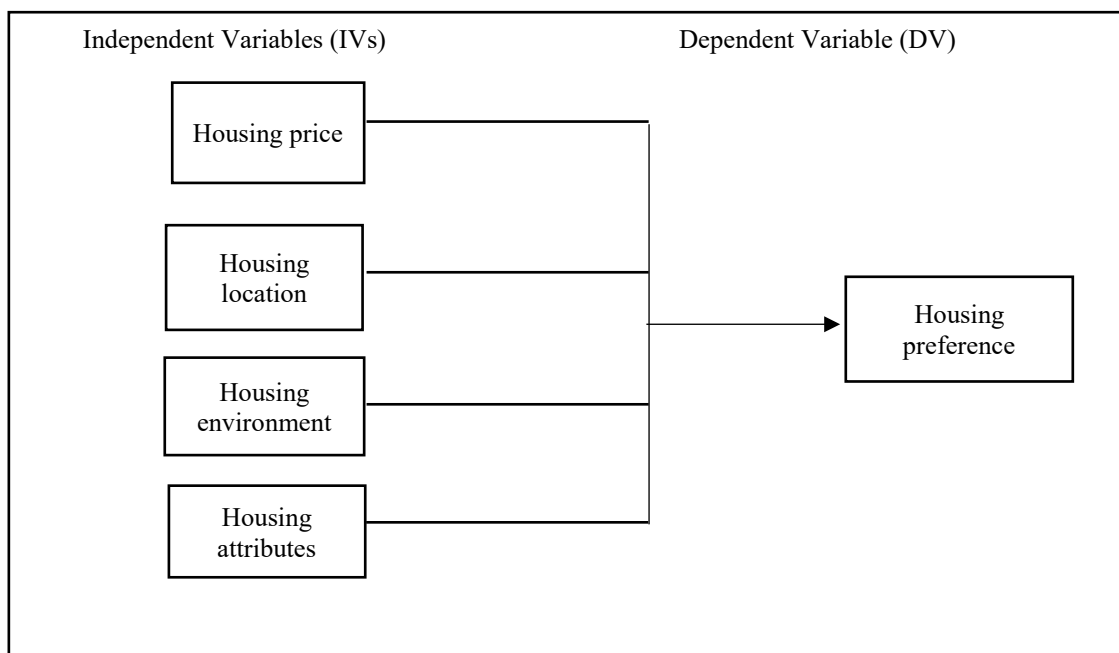


Fig. 1. Conceptual framework

Source of Figure 1: Kurniawan *et al.* (2020); Kam *et al.* (2018); Soon & Tan (2019).

METHODOLOGY

Data for the study was collected through the survey method. A self-administered questionnaire was used as the research instrument in collecting data. The questionnaire was adapted from the previous studies by Kurniawan *et al.* (2020); Kam *et al.* (2018); Soon and Tan (2019).

The study sample comprised students from a public university in Malaysia, who were randomly selected for the study using a systematic sampling technique. 361 questionnaires were distributed among the final-year students (young graduates) to investigate their housing preferences and plans. These students were targeted based on the assumption that they would be more likely to embark on employment and search for their first home (Department of Statistics (DOSM), 2022).

At this university, 361 students were randomly selected using a list of names obtained from the student affairs office and a self-administered questionnaire was used as the data collection method. The questionnaire consists of four main sections covering the profile of the respondents in Part A. Part B explains the plan of young people to buy a house in the future. Parts C, D, E and F explained the study's independent variables, covering Housing Price, Location, Housing Environment and Housing Attributes. The last part (Part G) explained the study's dependent variable, Housing Preference among young people. All the obtained data were analysed using Descriptive Statistics.

Next, to analyse the relationship between the determinant factors (Housing price, Location, Housing Environment and Housing Attributes) and Housing Preference, this study used Pearson's Correlation. Pearson's Correlation is a method to analyse the relationship between independent and dependent variables. The *r* or Pearson's Correlation can determine whether the independent variables have a relationship with the dependent variable. Next, to analyse the most important factor that influences housing preference among young people, Multiple Regression is used. Multiple Regression explained the most important factors between all those three independent variables. It will identify which are the most significant factors that can influence housing preference.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 below summarises the profile of the respondents for this study. Based on the result, most respondents are female, 70.6 percent (255), whereas male 29.4 percent (106). This can be seen that female respondents are dominant in this study because the gender gap between males and females is quite huge in the university. The Ministry of Higher Education has released the Higher Education Statistics Report 2017. The report analyses that the number of male students enrolled in public universities was 38 percent (205,067) while female students were 62 percent (333,488). Most respondents are at the age of 20-24, which is 95.3 percent (344), and age 25 years old 4.7 percent (17). It was because Bachelor of Degree students are expected to complete their studies within 20 to 24 years old. Thus, chances to meet final year degree students aged 25 could be higher.

As for cluster, most of the respondents are from the Science and Technology Cluster which are 60.1 percent (217), followed by the Management and Business Cluster which are 21.6 percent (78) as well as the Social Science and Humanities Cluster, which are 18.3 percent (66). The findings show that most of the young people who have answered the survey are from the Science and Technology Cluster. This happens because many Faculties come from the Science and Technology Cluster. In UiTM Shah Alam, there are thirteen (13) Faculties from the Science and Technology Cluster, nine faculties from the Social Science and Humanities Cluster and five faculties under the Management and Business Cluster. Thus, the chances of getting more young people from this cluster are higher than others.

The respondents were asked further about their housing plan. The respondents were required to answer 1 for Yes and 1 for No. The findings show that 96 percent (345) of respondents plan to buy a house.

Meanwhile, another four percent (16) of respondents have yet to plan to buy a house in the future. The result shows that most of them have plans to buy a house. The finding shows that most young people in this study intend to buy a house once they join the workforce. The finding is consistent with the study conducted among young people, which concluded that young people in China who are renters intend to own a house (Zheng, Cheng & Ju, 2019). The chances for them to buy a house in the future are high as young people are at the stage where they want to live independently. They will start a new life after graduating, getting a job, and entering the working environment. On the other hand, owning a house means that young people are ready to commit and have assets for their future. Thus, it concludes that young people need a house for independent living.

The findings reveal that many young people in this study prefer condominiums or apartments if they plan to buy a house. Condominium or apartment becomes their choice because of the house structure which is simpler and more convenient for young people. Not only that, but the price of a condominium or an apartment is much more affordable for young people to afford to buy. Moreover, living and staying in a condominium or an apartment are considered cost-efficient because of the facilities in that housing.

Another reason a condominium or apartment has become their preference is the high level of security in that type of house. They do not have to worry about their safety living in that type of house. A security guard in the housing area will check on unknown people or visitors before letting them into the Condominium or apartment. Our finding thus corroborates with the findings of Nguyen et al. (2022) about the lifestyle orientation that prioritises other social qualities, such as safety from crime or the social status of residents when choosing a house. That gives the residents a feeling of security and comfort. It was found in a study by Yaacob, Bakar and Aziz (2017) that young people in Malaysia rated condominiums or apartments as the most suitable type of house for the younger generation as their starting point to live independently.

Table 1. Profile of the respondents

No.	Profile	Final Year Bachelor of Degree Student	
		Frequency	Percent (%)
1.	Gender:		
	Male	106	29.4
	Female	255	70.6
	Total	361	100.0
2.	Age:		
	20-24	344	95.3
	25	17	4.7
	Total	361	100.0
3.	Cluster:		
	Science and Technology Cluster	217	60.1
	Social Science and Humanities Cluster	66	18.3
	Management and Business Cluster	78	21.6
	Total	361	100.0
4.	Future plan: (whether to buy or not)		
	Yes	345	96
	No	16	4
5.	Types of houses preferred: Note: ^a This is multiple response answers		
	Single-story terrace	278	42.4
	Doubled story terrace	109	16.6
	Townhouse	51	7.8
	Low-cost house	10	1.5
	Flat	35	5.3
	Condominium/Apartment	154	23.5

Source of Table 1: Authors (2022)

<https://doi.org/10.24191/smrj.v20i2.24314>

The relationship between the determinant factors (housing price, location, housing environment and housing attributes) and housing preference

Findings in Table 2 below show that there is a significant relationship between housing price, location, housing environment and housing attributes towards housing preference among young people ($r = 0.328, p = 0.000$), ($r = 0.329, p = 0.000$), ($r = 0.419, p = 0.000$), ($r = 0.436, p = 0.000$). Therefore, the findings accepted H_1 . The findings affirm that all the determinant factors are significantly related to young people's housing preferences. According to Cohen (1998), an absolute value of Pearson correlation, r of 0.1, is classified as small; an absolute value of 0.3 is classified as medium. Lastly, a value of 0.5 is classified as significant. The first factor is regarding the housing price. The findings show that the Pearson correlation, r , for housing price, was 0.328, and the value for the significant, p , was 0.000. Thus, housing price plays a vital role in the housing preference of young people. It is because it indicates that the most preferred house by young people is a condominium or an apartment, and the price for that housing type is reasonable and suitable for young people to afford. In this context, young people will graduate soon and enter a working environment where their financial condition might not be adequate to afford other houses, such as a single-story terrace.

This study has supported the past research by Wang et al. (2017), which stated that the cost of residential property is supposed to be affordable and logical in the market as it influences the housing preferences of the people. Furthermore, Chia et al. (2016) see that the most important factor influencing people to own a home is financial. Thus, it is clearly shown that housing prices can influence housing preferences among young people.

In terms of location, the findings of this study show a significant relationship between location and housing preferences as the value of Pearson correlation, r , was 0.329, and the p -value for this study shows 0.000, which is lower than 0.01. The findings show that young people choose a condominium or an apartment as their preferred house due to the facilities in this area.

The study's findings are consistent with a past study by Sundrani (2018) where he stated that location is one of the most important things that need to be considered before purchasing a house. Besides, this research also supported the study by Kam et al. (2018) claimed that the house's location is more significant than the house itself. Furthermore, this study also supported past research by Nguyen, et al. (2022) and Yaacob et al. (2018) which the researchers indicated that distance has a positive relationship with housing purchasing. Finally, this study has supported the research by Hartono et al. (2022) that emphasises the travel time to the workplace, medical amenities, and educational institutions are the critical factors in choosing the house. Therefore, it shows that location significantly influences housing preference among young people.

Moreover, another determinant factor that was found in this study is housing environment. It indicates a significant relationship between housing environment and housing preferences among young people as the value for Pearson correlation, r , is 0.419, and the value for significance, p is 0.000. By looking at the result of the findings, it indicates that the most preferred house by young people is a condominium or an apartment. The features of a condominium or an apartment consist of high-security control by the safety guard and the implementation of CCTV around every floor. Thus, it shows that young people prefer to buy a condominium or an apartment as their home due to security reasons. Besides, the condominium and apartment also have a sustainable neighbourhood area that is a gated and guarded residential area. Thus, it portrayed an excellent environment in the neighbourhood. Therefore, housing environments such as good-quality neighbourhoods and secure residential areas have influenced housing preferences among young people.

This study is aligned with past research by Zamri *et al.* (2022) which found that young civil servants' housing preferences are highly influenced by their neighbourhood, with the result that they prefer to buy a home with high security and protection in a neighbourhood with a low crime rate. It has also corresponded with a study done in Turkey in which the respondents emphasised accessibility and a safe environment as essential indicators of housing quality, influencing their housing preferences (Gürsoy *et al.*, 2022). Not only that, but this study also supported the research by Khan *et al.* (2017), where a factor influencing housing preferences is the social environment, including the residential area's safety.

Finally, other than housing price, location and housing environment, another determinant factor of housing preference is housing attributes. This study confirms that housing attributes become determinant factors towards housing preferences among young people as the value of Pearson correlation, r , is 0. 0.436 and the value for significance, p , is 0.000.

Table 2. Correlation analysis (housing price, location, housing environment and housing attributes)

Variables	Sig	Value
Housing Price	Pearson Correlation	.328**
	Sig.	.000
	N	361
Location	Pearson Correlation	.329**
	Sig.	.000
	N	361
Housing Environment	Pearson Correlation	.419**
	Sig.	.000
	N	361
Housing Attributes	Pearson Correlation	.436**
	Sig.	.000
	N	361

Notes: ** $p < 0.01$

Source of Table 2: Authors (2022)

CONCLUSION

This study contributes to our understanding of housing preferences among the younger generation. First, this study accepts the proposed hypothesis that all the employed variables of housing price, housing location, housing environment and housing attributes have significantly influenced the housing preferences of young people in Malaysia. The findings were generated based on the feedback of the final-year university graduates. Second, the study's findings revealed that most of them plan to own a house in the future. It was the homeownership culture in Malaysia that supported the homeownership aspiration. They have disclosed that condominiums and apartments are the most preferred types of houses they plan to own instead of other types. It happens because of their forecasting affordability based on their income level. Not only that, but these types of houses also fit their current lifestyle and family size. Overall, this study contributes to housing studies as there is a lack of current studies looking at the aspect of housing preference from the angle of university students, who eventually will embark on employment and independent living. The findings shed light on the current housing development in Malaysia, which is argued to be unstable due to the high number of unsold properties. The housing providers can find out the preferences of the customers to offer a more excellent housing package that matches the needs and preferences of the potential buyers, especially the young people, as they are the home seekers that could shape the housing market in the future based on the current population statistics in Malaysia. Despite the intriguing results, numerous limitations might prevent this work from making a significant contribution. First, this study is limited to the final-year students at one of the local universities, which restricts the generalisation of the findings to the whole of Malaysia. Second, this study employs only a cross-sectional survey. Nevertheless, this research provides insights into young people's preferences, which could help policymakers and housing providers design more attractive and suitable housing packages for them. Thus, this study recommends further research to extend the research

geographically to young graduates at other universities and employ longitudinal studies to investigate their path to independent living further.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS/FUNDING

The authors would like to acknowledge the participation of the respondents for this research. This study received no funding.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors agree that this research was conducted in the absence of any self-benefits, commercial or financial conflicts and declare the absence of conflicting interests with any parties.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Intan Nur Syazwana Makmar Kadapi and Nur Izzaty Hussain involved in the data collection. Mahazril 'Aini Yaacob conceptualised the central research idea, wrote and revised the article.

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