

## The Influence of Residential Environment on the Character Formation of University Students: A Case Study of UTHM Pagoh, Johor, Malaysia

Arwansyah Kirin<sup>1\*</sup>, Khairuddin<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Islamic Studies Department, Centre for General Studies and Co-curricular, University Tun Hussein On Malaysia, Malaysia

<sup>2</sup> STAI Syekh Abdur Rauf Singkil, Indonesia

\*Corresponding Author: [arwansyah@uthm.edu.my](mailto:arwansyah@uthm.edu.my)

**Abstract:** The residential environment plays a pivotal role in shaping students' character, yet empirical studies in Malaysia particularly in semi-rural campuses such as UTHM Pagoh remain scarce. The shifting lifestyles of students living away from their families highlight the urgent need to examine how physical conditions, social interactions and prevailing norms within their residential settings influence character formation. This study aims to analyze the impact of residential environment on the character development of UTHM Pagoh students. Employing a quantitative survey design with 304 respondents, data were analyzed using simple regression via SPSS 25. The findings reveal that the residential environment has a statistically significant effect on students' character ( $0,000 < 0,05$ ), although its contribution is relatively small (8.6%). These results affirm that residential factors while not dominant, remain integral in shaping students' moral behavior alongside family background, digital media and academic engagement. Theoretically, this study expands the discourse on character education by highlighting the often-overlooked role of residential context. Practically, the implications offer valuable insights for universities and policymakers in designing dormitory environments and character-building programs that are more conducive, inclusive and effective.

**Keywords:** Residential environment, character formation, university students, UTHM Pagoh, Malaysia

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## Introduction

The dynamic changes in students' lives both academically and socially have made the role of the residential environment increasingly crucial in shaping character. The relationship between humans and their environment is reciprocal humans influence the environment and the environment in turn affects human character. According to Wunn and Grojnowski (2019), the environment encompasses everything in the surroundings that holds meaning or exerts influence on individuals. Bayramova (2023) defines the environment as factors affecting child development such as climate, surroundings, economic conditions, housing, food, clothing and neighbors. Other forms of environment include the social environment such as family, peers, the wider community and culture, including norms, customs and local values. These elements play an important role in shaping students' personalities and character. Character refers to traits, values and behaviors that constitute individual identity such as morality, ethics and virtues aligned with societal values.

In Malaysia, the UTHM Pagoh campus presents a new academic environment that requires students to adapt quickly in socio-emotional aspects. While much research has highlighted the general influence of the social environment, the specific impact of residential settings on student behavior and character in semi-urban campuses such as UTHM Pagoh remains underexplored. Numerous studies indicate that the social environment, including family, school and society plays a significant role in shaping student character (Chairany et al., 2025). However, the lifestyle transformation of students living away from families, particularly in dormitories or campus housing, creates an urgent need to understand this context. The lack of empirical studies in Malaysia especially in Pagoh further heightens the urgency of this research. This study introduces a new approach by focusing on the "*residential environment*" rather than merely formal social environments such as family and school. For example, international studies have found that the physical and organizational conditions of dormitories significantly influence students' perceptions and behaviors (Blimling & Schuh, 2015). However, the local context of campuses like UTHM Pagoh located between academic zones and local communities presents an intriguing area of study. Theories of social

development state that a student's living environment including physical structure, social interaction and environmental control has a significant impact on moral formation and identity (Inala, 2023; Mauliyani, 2025). Furthermore, research by RMN Education and Development concludes that social environmental factors such as parents, peers, schools and media strongly influence student character (Daud et al., 2023). In Malaysia, poor student morality has emerged as a national concern. For example, in 2018–2019 the Student Discipline System (SSDM) recorded an increase in cases of character violations from 238,790 (5%) to 304,578 (6.4%) (Daud et al., 2023). When the environment is marked by social problems such as poverty, violence, or disharmony it can negatively impact student character leading them to imitate undesirable behaviors present in their communities. Rasmy et al. (2017) argue that an uncondusive social environment can drive students towards undesirable behaviors such as vandalism and drug abuse. Sebu (2023) found that areas lacking adequate access to quality education and learning resources hinder students' potential development. For example, students living in People's Housing Projects (PPR) in Lembah Subang, Selangor often face social issues such as fights, drug abuse, and truancy. These students demonstrate low discipline and lack motivation to study due to negative surroundings and family economic pressures. As a result, many drop out of school prematurely.

Instability of character such as indiscipline, dishonesty and deviant behavior indicates that residential environment factors may be an important component yet to be thoroughly studied. Although numerous studies have examined social and educational environments such as family and school involvement most have neglected the physical and social dimensions of students' residential environments. Another gap is the scarcity of empirical studies at Malaysian universities focusing specifically on residential settings. Therefore, analysis in the UTHM Pagoh context helps to bridge this academic gap. This study is academically relevant as it enriches the literature on how residential environments affect student character formation, especially in semi-rural campus settings. Practically, the findings provide a foundation for campus policy recommendations regarding dormitory design, social development and more effective character-building programs. The central research question is: To what extent does the residential environment of students at UTHM Pagoh

influence their moral character formation and positive behaviors? This question encompasses physical aspects (facilities, layout), social interactions (relationships with peers and staff), and the norms and values present in the surrounding environment. Accordingly, the aim of this study is to describe and analyze the influence of residential environment on student character formation at UTHM Pagoh. Theoretically, the study expands understanding in the fields of character education and environmental psychology. Practically, it is expected to benefit universities and policymakers in designing conducive residential environments for example by improving dormitory design, fostering healthy social interaction and promoting community activities that strengthen character. The findings may also serve as a reference for other universities with similar geographical contexts.

Students' residential environments play a critical role in shaping character and personality, particularly for those adapting to higher education life. At UTHM Pagoh, most students live in residential colleges, rented houses or homestays near the campus each exerting distinct influences on student behavior and value formation. Environmental factors such as daily interactions, safety levels, basic facilities and existing social controls shape how students think, act and interact. Students residing in positive, safe and conducive environments tend to demonstrate stronger self-discipline, higher cooperation and greater responsibility toward themselves and society. Conversely, students living in unsafe, noisy or poorly managed areas are at greater risk of engaging in social problems, skipping classes or facing disciplinary issues. Afivah Laela Sari and Sri Mulyani (2022) reported that family environment accounts for 24.01% of students' character formation. This finding confirms that family is the foundation of personality formation through early inculcation of values. Similarly, Laily Nurmalia (2023) noted that out of school environments such as residential settings and social interactions significantly influence discipline. Without supervision and guidance students can easily be influenced by negative peer behaviors. This demonstrates that students in well-monitored and positive social environments are more likely to develop disciplined attitudes while those exposed to negative social interactions are prone to deviance. Thus, residential environment is a primary factor shaping or damaging students' character.

Agus Faisal Asyha (2023) found that students raised in families that practice positive values are more likely to possess good and beneficial character. Similarly, Fanny Septiany Rahayu (2024) concluded that family influences 75.3% of students' character formation confirming the importance of positive home environments and moral support. Residential environment also influences students' learning motivation though less so their creativity. This indicates that calm and conducive surroundings encourage learning motivation (Nurdiati, 2019). This aligns with Umi Lestari and Sri Widayati (2021), who showed that residential and school environments contribute 21.1% to academic performance with safe and comfortable housing enabling students to concentrate better. The family, as the first educational institution provides a stable and loving home environment that fosters values such as discipline, empathy and cooperation (Hadian, 2021). At the university level, campus environment, disciplined dormitories and character-building programs directly enhance student motivation. Adequate facilities and infrastructure support learning processes while character development programs in dormitories form part of strategic management. Student responses were overwhelmingly positive with many appreciating these programs for helping develop their spiritual and social potential. Student learning motivation in dormitories also increased, as they showed persistence in completing assignments, resilience, courage to express interests and talents, and strong aspirations for success (Permana, 2023).

## Method

This study employed a quantitative approach using simple regression analysis to examine the presence and nature of the relationship whether positive or negative between residential environment and character formation among students at Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia (UTHM) Pagoh, Johor, Malaysia. Quantitative research was used to measure statistical values with more than 10 samples for each variable (Norsyamimi & Mujaheed, 2019). The chosen method for data collection was a questionnaire, as it is the most practical and effective means to obtain information (Najmul Hasan & Bao Yukun, 2020). The research design was a survey aimed at assessing the influence of residential environment on the character formation of UTHM Pagoh students. The study sample consisted of 304 students: 165 males and 139 females. UTHM Pagoh

was chosen because most of its students live in campus dormitories. Student character and behavior are highly susceptible to changes either positive or negative, due to peer influence, limited dormitory space and campus-provided internet access. These factors can potentially shape students' character in both positive and negative ways.

The study was conducted at Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia, Pagoh campus. Simple random sampling was used giving all individuals in the population an equal chance of being selected (Norma Jusof & Mohd Isa Hamzah, 2020). The questionnaire consisted of three sections: Part 1 on respondent demographics, Part 2 on residential environment (10 items) and Part 3 on student character (10 items). Parts 2 and 3 used a Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = somewhat disagree, 4 = agree and 5 = strongly agree). The questionnaire was distributed online via WhatsApp and Telegram, leveraging group chats accessible to the researchers. This facilitated broader dissemination among students. Due to the large population, a correspondingly large sample size was required. Data collection lasted approximately four months to ensure an adequate sample was achieved. After data collection, analysis was conducted using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25 lasting about one month. Data analysis was based on the study's objective: to identify the influence of residential environment on the character formation of UTHM Pagoh students.

## Result and Discussion

### Respondent Demographics

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Respondents

Students Background	Information	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	165	54.1
	Female	139	45.6
Age	18 - 20 years	26	8.6
	21 - 23 years	198	65.1
	24 - 26 years	70	23.0
	26 years and above	10	3.3
Ethnicity	Malay	116	38.2
	Chinese	68	22.4
	Indian	86	28.3

	Orhers	34	11.3
Religion	Islam	119 41	39.1
	Buddhism	82	13.5
	Hinduism	51	27.0
	Christianity	11	16.8
	Others		3.6
Level of Education	Diploma	51	16.8
	Bachelor's of Degree	239	78.6
	Master's Degree	6	2.0
	Phd	8	2.6
Faculty	Faculty of Applied Sciences & Technology	73	24.0
	Fakulty of Engineering Technology	187	61.5
	Centre of Diploma Studies	44	14.5

Table 1 presents respondents' demographic characteristics including gender, age, ethnicity, religion, faculty and study level. Of the 304 respondents, 165 (54.1%) were male and 139 (45.6%) female. Most respondents were aged 21–23 years (n = 198, 65.1%) while the smallest group was 26 years and above (n = 10, 3.3%). Malay students formed the majority (38.2%), followed by Indian (28.3%), Chinese (22.4%) and other ethnicities (11.3%). Most respondents were Muslim (39.1%). Regarding study level, the majority were undergraduates (78.6%) while only 2% were master's students. Most respondents were from the Faculty of Engineering Technology (61.5%).

### The Influence of Residential Environment on Character Formation

Hypothesis testing and data analysis revealed the following:

#### 1. Coefficient of Determination Test

The Coefficient of Determination (R Square) serves to determine the significance of the variable, therefore the coefficient of determination (R Square) must be calculated. This coefficient of determination is used to see how much influence the independent variable (X), the residential environment has

on the dependent variable (Y), student character formation which can be seen in the Model Summary table below.

Table 2 : Test Of Coefficient of Determination

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std.Error of the Estimate
1	.298 <sup>a</sup>	.089	.086	4.42972

a. Predictors: (Constant), Residential Environment

Table 2 shows that the value of the coefficient of determination (R Square) is 0.089, which means that the amount is significant because  $\alpha > 0.05$ . Then, the adjusted coefficient of determination (Adjusted R Square) is 0.086. Thus, the results indicate that 8.6% of the student character variables at UTHM Pagoh are influenced by the residential environment. Meanwhile, the remaining portion (100% - 8.6% = 91.4%) is influenced by other factors outside this study, such as family background, media, peer influence and the academic climate (Daud et al., 2023). The results of the study indicate that although the quantitative contribution value is only 8.6%, the residential environment is statistically proven to be significant in shaping students' character. This means that residential factors such as safety, cleanliness, comfort and social atmosphere can exert a direct influence on the moral development and behavior of students. This finding is in line with the view of Inala (2023) who stated that good residential management strengthens both academic performance and student character, as well as Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological theory of human development which emphasizes the role of the microsystem (the immediate environment) in shaping individual behavior. However, the findings of this study show that the contribution of the residential environment to the formation of student character is only 8.6%.

This suggests that even though a good residential environment has a positive impact, its effect accounts for only a small portion of student character formation. For students in early adulthood, cognitive, spiritual and digital interaction factors have broader influence compared to the residential environment alone. In Bronfenbrenner's theory, there is also an overemphasis on direct physical environmental factors, while in reality, students at UTHM Pagoh are more strongly influenced by other elements such as digital media,

long-distance family education and virtual interactions. In other words, the traditional microsystem is no longer the dominant factor in the context of 21st-century students. In the study by Blimling and Schuh (2015), it was stated that the dormitory or residential environment influences learning and character development. However, the findings of this research instead show a relatively small effect (8.6%) albeit statistically significant. This study emphasizes that the influence of residential settings is not universal but contextual. In the context of UTHM Pagoh, which is located in a semi-rural area, students are more strongly shaped by internal factors (self-motivation) and other external factors (social media, family, or academic activities) rather than solely by their residential environment.

Daud et al. (2023) argued that social factors such as peer interactions and community engagement also reinforce students' moral development. This statement holds some truth, but in the findings of this study, the influence of the social and residential environment was not dominant. Instead, other more abstract factors such as family values instilled from childhood, academic experiences and digital media exposure were found to be stronger determinants of student character. Rambe's (2019) study also emphasized that family remains the primary factor in shaping students' character, while social media increasingly influences the lifestyle of university students in the digital era (Chairany et al., 2025).

## 2. $t$ -Test (Partial Test)

This statistical test is used to prove whether or not there is an influence of the independent variable on the dependent variable individually. With a significance level of 5% from  $df = n-K-1$ , the  $t$ -table value is obtained, then the  $t$ -table value is compared with the  $t$ -count value obtained. Thus, the testing criteria are as follows:

- a). If  $t\text{-count} > t\text{-table}$  or  $\text{sig} < 0.05$ , then  $H_0$  is rejected and  $H_a$  is accepted which means that there is an influence between the independent variable and the dependent variable.
- b). Whereas if  $t\text{-count} < t\text{-table}$  or  $\text{sig} > 0.05$ , then  $H_0$  is accepted and  $H_a$  is rejected which means that there is no influence between the independent variable and the dependent variable.

Table 3 : Result of T-Tes (Partial)

Coefficients <sup>a</sup>					
Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	
1 (Constant)	26.346	2.159		12.205	.000
<b>Residential Environment</b>	.297	.055	.298	5.432	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Students Character

Based on Table 3, by observing the t and Sig columns the results of the partial correlation coefficient test or t-test are as follows:

The residential environment variable (X) on student character formation (Y) obtained a significant value of  $0.000 < 0.05$ , thus  $H_0$  is rejected. The residential environment has a t-count of 5.432 with a t-table of 1.968 or  $5.432 > 1.968$ , which means that the residential environment has an influence on student character formation. It can be concluded that a conducive, safe and supportive residential environment that fosters holistic student development is able to shape better personality and character. Conversely, a disorganized residential environment or a lack of basic facilities can have a negative impact on student behavior. Therefore, the home environment plays an important role in shaping moral values and positive attitudes among students. Social interactions within the residential environment also contribute to the character development of learners. Students who live in residential areas with caring communities, active neighborhood associations and community-based activities are more likely to develop positive character traits such as tolerance, cooperation and responsibility.

These factors indirectly contribute to positive character development in the campus setting, as students are better prepared to face the challenges of campus life and the surrounding society when they have already been equipped with strong values at home. It can be concluded that the better the quality and atmosphere of a student's residential environment, the better the character that is formed within them and vice versa. This is consistent with the findings of Hasbullah Mat Daud et al. (2023), who argued that social environments such as family, peers and community strongly influence students' moral development and character formation. Positive interactions can shape noble values and

personal identity among students. Furthermore, the role of the campus environment positive interactions between lecturers and students, as well as a supportive and constructive campus culture can further reinforce moral and ethical values within students (Maslikhah et al., 2022).

## Conclusion

This study demonstrates that residential environment has a statistically significant, though modest influence (8.6%) on the character formation of UTHM Pagoh students. This indicates that residential factors cannot be overlooked in character education as they shape patterns of social interaction value, internalization and student identity. While less dominant than family, digital media and academic culture residential environments remain essential spaces where moral and ethical values are practiced and tested daily. Theoretically, this study enriches discourse on character development by introducing the residential dimension, often overlooked in previous research. Practically, it offers guidance for universities to prioritize dormitory design, character development programs, and supportive social structures to ensure inclusive and balanced character formation. Overall, these findings open avenues for future research into other environmental factors and their interplay with psychosocial and cultural variables shaping student identity in contemporary contexts.

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