

# Meaning in Life among Malaysian University Students

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## Abstract

Meaning in life is strongly related to mental health and the psychological state of individuals. Man is in a continuous search for meaning to find coherence, significance and purpose in life. However, the perception of meaning in life differs from one individual to another. Meaning in life can be formed from multiple factors, such as experience, culture and religion. Meaning in life and/or the search for meaning in life can have beneficial effects on individuals such as resilience but also depression in individuals that lack it. This research aims to study and explore the perception of Malaysian university students of meaning in life, how it affects them and where they find meaning in life. A descriptive phenomenological qualitative research approach is utilized. A total of 9 participants will be participating in the actual study. A semi-structured in-depth interview will be used to gather data. The data is then analyzed using thematic analysis. The result of the present study shows that: 1) motivation and direction in life and value of self and self-determination is the main component of the perception of Malaysian university students of meaning in life, 2) positive emotions, negative emotions and search for meaning in life is the main component of the effect of meaning in life on Malaysian university students and 3) the sources of meaning in life for Malaysia university students are purpose and goals, family, relationship, religion and God, sense of accomplishment, and death. The novel findings are the emergence of the value of self-determination, death and experiences in life as a component of meaning in life. Given the small and predominantly female sample, the generalizability of the findings is limited. Future research with a more diverse and larger sample is recommended to validate these results. This limitation should be considered when interpreting the findings. Additionally, race and socioeconomic status may also shape an individual's perception of meaning in life. For instance, individuals from different economic backgrounds may experience and prioritize meaning differently. Similarly, religious beliefs may strongly influence how participants perceive purpose and existential meaning.

## Keywords

Meaning in Life, Existential Psychology, Positive Psychology Source, Malaysian University Students

## 1. Introduction

Meaning in life constitutes an array of perspectives and has been defined in a myriad of ways. Michael Steger (2009) broke down the three aspects of meaning in life as: 1) comprehension, whereby we make sense of our existence, 2) purpose whereby we have goals or missions for our life and 3) significance whereby we perceive our efforts in living our lives as something worthwhile and has significant value. On the other hand, Martin Elias Seligman, considered to be the father of positive psychology stated in his book *Flourish* (2012) and *Authentic Happiness* (2002) that meaning in life meant using one's strength to serve an entity, be it abstract, or concrete believed to be bigger than oneself. Humanity has since created various avenues to create such opportunities to serve, from volunteer relief work to religion. All of these are for the sake of having a purpose or mission that is greater than their self which in turn generates life satisfaction and happiness.

Having a purpose or meaning in life is heavily attributed to having life satisfaction, a correlation to wellbeing, a source of resilience and a protective psychological component. A study conducted by Lau et al. (2018) showed that students who tried searching for the meaning in life while increasing psychological resilience were able to gain new life insights and achieve life satisfaction. This made sense, because individuals who have achieved a high sense of proficiency while in search of meaning in life can achieve aspirations and insights which in turn cause them to experience better psychological wellbeing (Steger, Kashdan, Sullivan, & Lorentz, 2008). Furthermore, meaning in life has been shown to be connected to various elements of positive psychology. A comprehensive study conducted on teachers in Türkiye showed that those who have experienced meaning in life had greater life satisfaction and showed a positive self-concept. Not only that, but the individuals who had experienced meaning in life also had a greater sense of control in terms of internal locus of control (Taş & İskender, 2018).

In 2011, research was conducted by Mohamad, AbdRazak and Mutiu (2011) on Muslim students at IIUM (International Islamic University Malaysia) which identified strong Islamic values as meaning in life among these students. The participants found value both from a material and spiritual perspective. As such, spirituality is expected to be a major contributor to meaning in life in this research as well. Kok, Goh and Gan (2015), on the other hand, examined the overall understanding of Malaysian youth aged ranging from 15 to 24 on the topic of meaning in life. Their study showed that Malaysian youths focused more on happiness, relationships, and goal and interestingly, 4 participants indicated that there was no meaning in life.

In conjunction with the above statements, university students will be one of the most important groups of individuals in which meaning in life should be explored. A study by Kotera and Ting (2021) showed that Malaysian students' mental health had a strong relationship with positive psychology and one of the variables tested, engagement, is rooted in finding meanings. Besides, the various aspects related to meaning in life and the concept of meaning in life itself can be utilized to not only predict the wellbeing and psychological state of university students but also can be explored as a buffer or protective element against mental health diseases and suicide (García-Alandete, 2015; Kleiman & Beaver, 2013).

## 2. Purpose of the Study

With a firm understanding of how meaning in life affects individuals, especially university students, tertiary education institutes will be able to create resilience programs for their students which uses aspects of positive psychology specifically creating purpose and significance in their life. As an effect, it is hoped that this will be able to reduce the prevalence of mental health issues among university students as the environment in which they study is also important. Based on these findings, resilience programs at institutions could integrate meaning-centered approaches. For example, interventions like logotherapy workshops, guided reflections on personal goals, and community-building activities can help students strengthen their sense of purpose. Additionally, structured mentorship programs that focus on career and personal development may enhance their psychological well-being.

As children grow, they first absorb values and principles from their parents. In light of this, it is hoped that by understanding what is meaning in life for university students and how they acquired this perception, parents can become more aware and play an active role in becoming role models for their children. They are the first agents to teach and show how purposeful and significant life is. They can also help by teaching values such as kindness and community efforts which can help develop a child's comprehension of life and with a strong understanding of life's meaning can develop a stronger resilience and flourish as a university student and later in life.

The main beneficiaries of this research will be university students. By understanding what is the perception of university students towards life and finding its meaning, we can not only help by providing aid in terms of counselling and other aspects to prevent existential frustration from a negative view of meaning in life and hardships faced in the search for meaning in life but also if identify the positive perceptions of university students towards meaning in life and instill the same perception or identify patterns in a positive search for meaning in life which has led to life satisfaction and implement the same experience for other university students.

With this, university students hope to be able to have a more satisfactory experience in life not only as students but also as individuals. From a happier life, it is

hoped that university students will be free from mental health issues or at the very least have an extra protective factor of having a strong meaning in life. Besides that, having a significant life will hopefully help them to excel in their studies, especially when the search for meaning becomes a motivating factor.

Research defining the understanding and perception of Malaysian university students will prove useful for those that would like to pursue further research in the application of positive psychology in our community. A lot of the contextual understanding of theories of positive psychology has yet to be modified and applied to an Asian community more of the unique multicultural Malaysian community. It would be optimal for different variables that have been proven to be significant in a Western community to be retested and evaluated in an Asian community.

With this, future researchers can help gather more data and information on how specifically positive psychological aspects such as meaning in life can be used to help our community. For example, modifying logotherapy for Malaysia application.

### 3. Design and Methodology

This research uses the qualitative method because the qualitative method is a research design that is used to understand a group of people that contributes to either an individual or societal matter (Salkind, 2019; Creswell & Creswell, 2017). A descriptive phenomenological design was chosen because it suited the needs of the research where the researcher wanted to understand how the aspect of meaning in life (the phenomenon in this study) was understood by the target population of Malaysian university students. This is a study to comprehend and provide an explanation for the real-life experiences of the respondents. The participants will be instrumental in explaining the phenomenon based on their understanding (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). This study was conducted in Klang Valley, Selangor, Malaysia. The target population is Malaysian university students. The participants of this study consisted of 9 university students from the ages of 20 to 29 from universities throughout Klang Valley, Selangor, Malaysia. The purposive sampling technique use where the participants must meet the criteria of being Malaysian and undertaking tertiary education in a Malaysian based university situated in Klang Valley, Selangor, Malaysia. The Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ) is a 10-item instrument designed to measure two dimensions of meaning in life. Originally, the MLQ items were rated on a seven-point scale from “Absolutely True” to “Absolutely Untrue”. However, in your research, the items were changed to open-ended questions

### 4. Analysis and Findings

The demographics of the participant will be presented within the descriptive analysis subchapter. The data from the transcribed interview sessions have been successfully coded, and then several themes relevant and strongly supported have

been chosen to be presented in the thematic analysis subchapter.

### Raw Data Spread

**Table 1.** The raw data spread detailing the demographic information of the 9 participants.

Participant	Age	Sex	Race	Religion	State of origin
Participant 1	22	Female	Bumiputera Sarawak	Islam	Sarawak
Participant 2	23	Female	Bumiputera Sabah	Islam	Sabah
Participant 3	23	Female	Chinese	Buddhist	Johor
Participant 4	20	Female	Bumiputera Sabah	Christian	Sabah
Participant 5	23	Female	Indian	Hindu	Melaka
Participant 6	24	Male	Chinese	Free thinker	Johor
Participant 7	25	Female	Indian	Christian	Kuala Lumpur
Participant 8	23	Female	Malay	Islam	Perak
Participant 9	29	Female	Chinese	Christian	Sarawak

Based on **Table 1**, the mode of data is the age of 23 with 4 participants out of the 9 participants. 8 out of 9 participants were female with only one male participant. The race indicates that Chinese with 3 out of the 9 participants with 2 of Indian and Bumiputera Sabah each and one each for Malay and Bumiputera Sarawak. Based on religion data, Islam and Christian with each having 3 participants, while Buddhist, Hindu and Freethinker have one participant each.

### Thematic Analysis Results

For this research, 3 themes were created, and 12 subthemes are subdivided into these 3 major themes (**Table 2**).

**Table 2.** 3 major themes and 12 subthemes were tabulated.

Theme 1: Perception of meaning in life.	Subtheme 1: Motivation and direction in life.
	Subtheme 2: Value of self and self-determination.
Theme 2: Effect of meaning in life.	Subtheme 3: Search for meaning in life.
	Subtheme 4: Positive emotions.
	Subtheme 5: Negative emotions.
Theme 3: Source of meaning in life.	Subtheme 6: Purpose and goals.
	Subtheme 7: Family.
	Subtheme 8: Relationship.
	Subtheme 9: Religion and God.
	Subtheme 10: Sense of accomplishment.
	Subtheme 11: Experiences in life.
	Subtheme 12: Death

### Theme 1: Perception of Meaning in Life

The participants mentioned that they perceived meaning in life as either a factor, event or element that gave them a form of motivation in life; something that pushed them forward. Some participants have described it as having a sense of way or direction.

Furthermore, the participants also perceive meaning in life as something that is experienced by themselves and that life is only meaningful through themselves as the individuals living the life.

### **Subtheme 1: Motivation and Direction in Life**

Participants described that meaning in life is a form of motivation or used the words “motivate”.

“When I feel that life is meaningful, I feel motivated, and I have a direction in life.” (P1, Female, 22)

Besides descriptions of being motivated, the participants also mentioned that they felt that they were moving forward and that they had a sense of direction in life where words such as “push”, “forward” and “hang on” were said.

“Meaning of life is very deep to explain. according to my understanding, the meaning of life is what motivates us to strive ahead forward every day despite what comes in the way.” (P5, Female, 23)

“My understanding of the meaning of life would be a drive or a purpose that pushes me forward because I do know that life is full of challenges, and we need that intrinsic outside motivation to push you, to drive you, and guide you.” (P6, Male, 24)

“It helps me move forward; it gives me something to hang on to.” (P7, Female, 25)

### **Subtheme 2: Value of Self and Self-Determination**

The participants frequently mentioned themselves as “I”, “me”, and “myself” as the main proponent that gives meaning to their lives and helps them perceive the life they live.

*“Meaning in life is from me.”* (P7, Female, 25)

*“I find meaning from myself”* (P9, Female, 29)

Other participants reasoned that it was because they were the individual that has lived experiences and thus, they related that they perceived meaning in life through themselves.

*“As a person, I have cognition, emotion and behaviour. It makes me learn what is meaningful. Most important is me myself to feel what is meaningful in life.”* (P3, Female, 23)

Some participants pointed out that what made life meaningful was their perception of self-identity. They decide that it is their identity that has elements of positive emotions.

*“If I don’t have a meaning in life, it makes me never step out of my comfort zone to seek for the next comings in life. It is what drives me to be who I am today. It is my identity that brings joy into life. without it, life would never be the same and I won’t be what I am.”* (P5, Female, 23)

Finally, Participant 6 and Participant 8 both mentioned what they wanted and believed as a major part of giving meaning in life. It can be seen from the statement below that Participant 6 strongly determined what they wanted for their life and that their decisions made life meaningful.

*“What really helps you to make that decision is your emotion, and your emotion is driven by your purpose of life. My purpose at this point is not to achieve high grades, to gather more experiences in life, to spend memorable time and to capture memories and to at least travel what you wrote. That’s the purpose of my goal, so therefore I made the decision to go on that vacation and I am still very happy. I have no regrets. So that’s one. It helps you make decisions.”* (P6, Male, 24)

*“Life has a different kind of meaning. Just because some people have a better life than yours doesn’t matter. Define the meaning of life the way you love. If we believe our lives are meaningful then so they are.”* (P8, Female, 23)

### **Theme 2: Effect of Meaning in Life**

The participants mentioned that meaning in life or rather the thought and need for meaning in life made them search for it. Some participants also described positive emotions and experiences when they were questioned about meaning in life while some have experienced negative emotions.

#### **Subtheme 3: Search for Meaning in Life**

The participants tended to describe themselves as finding or searching for meaning in life, or life itself is a search for meaning.

*“I’m still searching and honestly confused when it comes to searching for meaning in life.”* (P2, Female, 23)

*“My inner strength that always helps me in this life path of searching for its meaning.”* (P5, Female, 23)

Other participants equivocally chose to describe it as a search for themselves and to piece together their lives.

*“I think I’m at that age where I’m just trying to find my steps trying to find myself, so I don’t find a lot of meaning in most things yet. But I think when I’ll probably grow older, I look back and then, you know, reflect on my past experiences and that’s where I get the true meaning of those experiences. I won’t know it now, but I’ll probably know it later.”* (P4, Female, 20)

*“Meaning in life helps me with wanting to know more things, to piece things together.”* (P9, Female, 29)

#### **Subtheme 4: Positive Emotions**

All the participants expressed a form of positive emotion when talking about meaning in life. This is both a form of experience of positive emotions or hopes to feel positive emotions.

*“Life is when you feel happy, accomplish something, good circle of friends and family. Without these, there won’t be a will to live.”* (P1, Female, 22)

*“I want to find happiness.”* (P2, Female, 23)

*“What I have now, I appreciate.”* (P3, Female, 23)



*"I've done something in life and I haven't necessarily wasted my time here. I am satisfied with what I've done here. So there are no regrets. So, I think that's the most important thing for me."* (P4, Female, 20)

*"I define meaning in life as our ultimate goal that brings not just happiness but the satisfaction that we are good in life and we are heading on the right path. Despite what the society labelled as meaning I personally would say that it depends on our subconscious peace and mental peace."* (P5, Female, 23)

*"Having meaning in life makes me feel very happy. I feel like you are going down the correct track. You don't have regrets. You are doing what you're supposed to do because life doesn't give your manuscript or guide you."* (P6, Male, 24)

*"I think it's more of like being content with yourself, so if you have that sort of meaningful life, you wouldn't have to like look externally or like."* (P7, Female, 25)

*"I feel blessed. Life is temporary so I have to enjoy and live with my life while it lasts."* (P8, Female, 23)

*"I feel in awe and feel amazed."* (P9, Female, 29)

#### **Subtheme 5: Negative Emotions**

A dichotomous finding to the previous subtheme, some participants answered that the search for meaning in life caused them to feel negative emotions. The word used we angry, sad and depressing.

*"I have not found my meaning in life and as such only find myself a burden. I have not seen indicators that my life is meaningful. I feel down and also sometimes angry. I also feel sad sometimes because I have not found my true meaning in life."* (P2, Female, 23)

*"Wandering, not knowing what to do with your life, that sounds very sad and depressing to me."* (P4, Female, 20)

#### **Theme 3: Source of Meaning in Life**

When asked about meaning in life, most participants will either intentionally or unintentionally answer using their source of meaning.

#### **Subtheme 6: Purpose and Goals**

The participants mentioned that life becomes meaningful or has meaning if there is something to look forward to and that there is a purpose to live.

*"I also have a part-time job teaching kid. I have something to work on. Just studying feels dead."* (P1, Female, 23)

*"I have defined clear purposes or achievable goals in my life, and I see that the results are from what I'm currently doing. I am slowly achieving those targets and hence I felt like it is meaningful."* (P6, Male, 24)

*"To me, meaning in life is to do something purposeful in my life. Something that gives my life purpose. Purpose gives meaning."* (P7, Female, 25)

*"Meaning in life when you have a purpose in life. It is something that you have a reason to live and have goals to aim in life".* (P8, Female, 23)

*"Having a purpose, pursuing and being open to new knowledge or wonders of*



*the world.” (P9, Female, 29)*

### **Subtheme 7: Family**

Participants of this research indicated that their meaning in life comes from either teaching by a family member or that they are living for a particular family member. Some also have indicated that they have a strong emotional attachment to family members such as love. Others, due to wanting to give back to their family.

*“I love my mom, and I want to provide for my family in the future.” (P1, Female, 22)*

*“I want to help and give benefit to my parents.” (P2, Female, 23)*

*“Family because I know they’ve done something for me, so that’s I think it’s only fair that I give something back.” (P4, Female, 20)*

*“I drew source of the meaning of life from my parents; from their philosophy, from their belief.” (P6, Male, 24)*

*“...my grandfather who has passed on...” (P7, Female, 25)*

*“I find meaning in life from family, religion, career, love and health.” (P8, Female, 23)*

### **Subtheme 8: Relationship with Others.**

Participants indicated life to be meaningful because of others. Specifically, some participants pointed out the importance of friends while other participants wanted to be of service to others.

*“Life is when you feel happy, accomplish something, good circle of friends and family. Without these, there won’t be a will to live.” (P1, Female, 22)*

*“The sources are probably other people. It’s not necessarily myself. I like to think that I would have contributed to other people’s lives as well as my own and thus making it, you know, all around. So, it’s not like I’m being selfish. I want to help other people or earn experiences and, in those experiences, help other people you know, that sort of thing is like a give and take sort of thing between people and myself. So, I don’t think I’m fit to be alone because I’m fit to go out there and share and socialize.” (P4, Female, 20)*

Besides that, some participants mentioned that they needed others for emotional support and positive emotions such as good memories. This can also come from pets.

*“At least I know, I have people around me that continue to motivate me and that continues to support my journey in life.” (P2, Female, 23)*

*“I have my family and my pets. My family brings me good memories and for my pets, I spend time and feel happy.” (P3, Female, 23)*

Another participant indicated that relationships with others inspired them to be better and to continue to grow in life as such, making life meaningful.

*“It will be community comes from people that I grew up with, for example, my relative, my cousins and people like my classmates, my classmate, my friends, my housemates. They would share what they do in life or their purpose and it will reflect on mine because of the amount of time that spans with them and because*

*their philosophy is similar, say I live with someone very kind to everyone else who is always very bubbly, very happy, very positive. That would make me inspired to be as kind as the person that I'm with.*" (P6, Male, 24)

One participant mentioned that relationships with others were a source of positive recognition and how it is a natural social sense of belonging with other humans.

*"Sense of belonging. We are largely social creatures. belonging is our desire to be viewed favourably by others. We simply want to feel good about ourselves, that we are worthy of others' attention and affections. view one's traits and abilities favourably and to elicit positive recognition from others."* (P8, Female, 23)

### **Subtheme 9: Religion and God**

In this study, the participants conveyed that life is meaningful due to the presence of God and the act of worship made life fulfilling.

*"God, that is the most important. I think for me this is achieved through solat. If I do it, I feel filled but if I don't I feel empty. Life becomes complete."* (P1, Female, 22)

*"I've always found peace in God and praying. And it's from there that I draw meaning in life. To know what God's purpose for me is, to know if I am going on the right track in fulfilling those purposes."* (P7, Female, 25)

*"I find meaning in life from family, religion, career, love and health."* (P8, Female, 23)

Participant 6 also mentioned that life became meaningful from the different religious teachings that they learnt.

*"I personally am a free thinker, so I learn from different religions as long as they are applicable as long as they do not cause harm, and it gave me a good sense of what I'm doing is right."* (P6, Male, 24)

### **Subtheme 10: Sense of Accomplishment**

Most of the participants, being university students, said that life is meaningful when there is a sense of accomplishment.

*"Life is when you feel happy, accomplish something, good circle of friends and family. Without these, there won't be a will to live."* (P1, Female, 22)

*"If I look at my achievement, I was like, yes, I did well in school. I felt like I belong here, and this is my purpose. I want to achieve that. And if I didn't do well in dancing, for example, it will remind me that maybe this is I'm not cut for it, or this is not what I wanted to achieve. It doesn't make me happy because I felt good at it. It wouldn't make me happy. I wouldn't have that sense of belonging and sense of achievement and that specific area over the community."* (P6, Male, 24)

*"Having meaning in life will help me to achieve what I want. for example, I want to get a car by the age of 25 and now I must plan and get everything in order so that whatever I do is giving something the best for me in the end."* (P8, Female, 23)

*"...being able to accomplish things..."* (P9, Female, 29)

### **Subtheme 11: Experiences in Life**

Participants mention the different experiences that they live through and these experiences, regardless of whether it is a good or bad experience, help them find meaning in life.

*“I have seen the hardships of my parent raising me and this gives me strength to continue to go on with life.”* (P2, Female, 23)

*“Meaning in life is something or some event that brings happiness or memories for you. Something that happens even negative or positive.”* (P3, Female, 23)

*“Growing up with an oriented family makes life meaningful. I was 2 years old when my parents divorced and seeing my mother raise her 4 children on her own makes me think if I don’t appreciate my life then all my mother’s efforts are useless. so, I have to be there for my family, to show that my mother raised me to be a better human being, to have good purposes not just in my life, but to hers as well.”* (P8, Female, 23)

Other participants used the word adventure to describe the experiences that they have had.

*“My goals, adventures that I seek, my education, the knowledge I gain from all the sources and seek of peace.”* (P5, Female, 23)

Participant 9 mentioned that they wanted to be present and experience life.

*“Meaning in Life is hard to seek sometimes, but I feel that it’s about being present and not taking the little pieces of life for granted.”* (P9, Female, 29)

#### **Subtheme 12: Death**

Two participants mentioned uniquely that the meaning of life is due to death. Life ending is inevitable and as such for the time they are alive, life becomes meaningful.

*“The opposite of life is death. So, while we are still alive and breathing, that is the meaning of life.”* (P1, Female, 22)

*“Ohh, honestly not a lot because it’s like trying to find that that specific thing that you know will make you feel fulfilled and when you die, you look back at your life. You’re like, OK, I’m ready. I’m going to go. That, that, that to me, is what the meaning of life means, I guess.”* (P4, Female, 20)

## **5. Discussion**

This study presents an intriguing finding: although Malaysian university students are raised in an Asian collectivist society, they place significant importance on self-value and self-determination, as highlighted in Subtheme 2. This observation aligns with Kok, Goh and Gan’s (2015) study, which found that 83.7% of their male participants identified self-determined goals and values as central to a meaningful life. Prior research has similarly suggested that, even within collectivist cultures, self-determination emerges as a crucial factor at the individual level (Cheng et al., 2016).

Theme 2: Effect of Meaning in Life

Subtheme 3: The Search for Meaning in Life emerged as a novel finding in the Malaysian context. However, parallels can be drawn with Kok, Goh and Gan’s

(2015) research, which revealed that nine participants perceived life as meaningless. This finding resonates with Yalom's (1980) existentialist perspective, which posits that individuals, when confronted with life's inherent meaninglessness, engage in a creative process of meaning-making.

Additionally, participants in this study expressed a strong need for positive emotions, particularly happiness. This is consistent with previous studies conducted among Malaysian adolescents and university students (Shin & Zhooriyati, 2021; Kok, Goh, & Gan, 2015). The desire for happiness is self-evident, reinforcing the idea that a happy life is inherently meaningful.

In contrast, Subtheme 5: Negative Emotion represents a newly identified theme in the Malaysian context. Participants reported experiencing negative emotions in their search for meaning, highlighting the need for further investigation into the psychological consequences of existential frustration. Future studies could incorporate longitudinal assessments to examine the long-term impact of such frustration on mental health. These findings align with Frankl's (1959) existential theories, which propose that individuals experience existential frustration when they struggle to find meaning in life. Such frustration may also arise from the challenges encountered in the search for meaning.

#### Theme 3: Sources of Meaning in Life

Regarding the sources of meaning in life, participants primarily emphasized purpose and goals as well as a sense of accomplishment. This aligns with previous findings by Kok, Goh and Gan (2015), who suggested that Malaysian youth are highly aspirational and motivated to achieve success. The ambition to live without regret appears to be a common trait among Malaysian university students.

Additionally, family and relationships emerged as significant sources of meaning. This finding corroborates the research by Shin and Zhooriyati (2021), which highlighted the direct influence of parental relationships on Malaysian adolescents' perceptions of meaning. Meanwhile, Kok, Goh and Gan (2015) distinguished between family as a source of happiness and relationships as a means of contributing to the wider community through service. Similarly, Mohamad, Abdrazak, and Mutiu (2011) found that, for Muslim Malaysian university students, meaning in life was closely tied to serving God's purpose—a notion deeply rooted in religious and spiritual beliefs.

Interestingly, this study also observed that Malaysian university students, regardless of religious affiliation—including those who identify as free thinkers—perceived an element of the divine as a significant aspect of meaning in life. This suggests that existential meaning for Malaysian university students is derived from both material and spiritual dimensions.

Furthermore, this study supports and contextualizes Subtheme 12: Death from a spiritual perspective. The recognition of death as an inevitable aspect of existence reinforces the idea that life serves as a means to an end. This notion aligns with religious and philosophical perspectives that view the awareness of mortality as integral to meaning making.

## 6. Conclusion

Overall, these findings highlight the complex interplay between cultural, individual, and existential factors in shaping the meaning of life among Malaysian university students. The presence of both positive and negative emotional dimensions, alongside material and spiritual influences, underscores the multifaceted nature of meaning-making in this context. Future research should further explore these themes through longitudinal and cross-cultural studies to deepen our understanding of how meaning in life evolves over time.

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## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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