

# Sports Culture Among Malaysians: Challenges and Way Forward

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**Abstract** Sports culture can be defined as a positive value attitude of an individual to sport. These values act for the individual as social ideals, senses, symbols, norms, and samples of behavior that regulate the entire activity and social relations in a sports sphere. The Institute for Youth Research Malaysia (IYRES) initiated to determine the nation's sports culture since 2018. The latest research on the Malaysian Sports Index conducted in 2022, among 3735 respondents from various backgrounds according to age group, gender, ethnicity, and location using a self-designed questionnaire by IYRES with two domains and five indicators. The first domain is participation with activeness as the indicator. The second domain is sporting spirit with four indicators namely Voluntarism, Dedication, Expenditure and Contribution. Each and every indicator contributes towards Malaysian sports culture index based on the Index score scale created by experts from IYRES. The descriptive analysis showed Malaysian Sports Culture Index 2022 (MSCI'22) still in the moderate level with the score (52.0). The independent sample t-test showed there is significant difference by gender, with male (M= 59.06;

SD=33.83) and female (M= 44.69; SD=32.90); p=0.000. Analysis by location also indicated that there is a significant difference in sports culture between urban and rural populations, with urban (M= 51.13; SD=34.19) and rural area (M= 54.78; SD=33.74); p=0.009. One-way ANOVA test to determine the sports culture based on ethnicity showed there were significant differences by ethnic group (p=0.000). The age group also showed a significant difference (p=.0.000) in sports culture among Malaysians. In conclusion, this research indicates that behavioral changes are needed among the Malaysian population to truly embed sports as a cultural element in their lives. Such changes cannot be expected to transpire immediately. To foster this transformation, raising awareness and providing accessible facilities for regular sports, exercise, and recreational activities are vital responsibilities for stakeholders because sports as a cultural element can effectively enhance healthy lifestyles.

**Keywords** Sports, Culture, Index, Participation, Sports Spirit & Domain

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## 1. Introduction

Sports culture refers to the values, customs, and practices associated with sports and physical activity. It encompasses everything from the way sports are played, discussed and watched, to the way they are organized and governed by individuals and stakeholders. Sports culture pertains to the principles, traditions, and behaviors associated with sports and physical endeavors [1]. Sports culture index in Malaysian perspective is a quantitative measurement of Malaysian population's engagement, interest, and involvement in sports-related activities, exercise and recreational activities. As an index it includes a range of factors that contribute to the overall sports culture of the nation. These factors are divided into two domains and five indicators. The domains are participation with one indicator activeness and sporting spirit with four indicators namely voluntarism, dedication, expenditure and contribution [2].

Sports are physical or mental activities that involve skill, competition, and often teamwork. They are usually structured activities with established rules and regulations, conducted in various settings such as fields, courts, tracks and swimming facilities. Sports can range from individual activities like badminton, tennis, running or swimming to team-based games like soccer and netball. The primary purpose of sports is entertainment, time passing, skill development, and also professional competition. They can be played for recreational purposes or at a competitive level, and they often promote physical fitness, cooperation and wellbeing [3].

Exercise refers to planned physical activity or movement that is performed to improve or maintain physical fitness, health, and overall well-being. It involves engaging in repetitive and structured activities that enhance the cardiovascular, muscular, and skeletal systems. Exercise can come in various forms, including aerobic activities, flexibility exercises such as Yoga, Tai Chi, and so on. The primary goals of exercise include improving cardiovascular health, increasing muscle strength and endurance, enhancing flexibility, managing weight, reducing stress, and promoting mental well-being. Regular exercise has been linked to numerous health benefits, including reduced risk of chronic diseases like heart disease, diabetes, and obesity. It is an essential component of a healthy lifestyle and is recommended by health professionals for people of all ages [4].

Recreational activities refer to leisure-time pursuits and hobbies that individuals engage in for enjoyment, relaxation, and personal satisfaction. These activities are typically pursued during one's free time and are not directly related to work, responsibilities, or obligations. Recreational activities can encompass a wide range of interests and can be enjoyed individually or with others.

They contribute to personal well-being, mental relaxation, and a break from the routine demands of daily life. Jungle tracking, hiking, cycling, and river crossing are all leisure-time pursuits that individuals engage in for enjoyment, relaxation, and personal satisfaction [5&6]

Participating in sports related activities as a daily routine is influenced by geographical environment, social network, financial ability, health condition and facilities. According to Song and Zhang (2018), the geographical environment is closely related to sports and sports culture. The difference of human culture is related to the local geographical environment and national characteristics. At the same time, in the development and promotion of sports and sports culture, the geographical environment will produce positive and negative changes. limited condition is one of the most important factors that affect the regional development of sports. Climate conditions affect not only the feasibility of sports, but also the participant's motivation and physiological function [6].

Bilohur & Andriukaitiene (2020), explore the fundamental role of sports culture in promoting personal integrity in the face of challenging sports situations. The study emphasizes sociocultural and anthropological analysis to comprehend the impact of sports culture on the development of individual personalities. This study revealed that the philosophy of sports culture through its perspective of philosophy and anthropology and personality development work together as sports culture where both physical and mental strength can be enhanced. Additionally, it highlights the differences between men and women as well as explains how sexual dimorphism contributes to social-cultural differences in sports. The findings showed that sports culture has a big effect on a person's integrity by sociocultural, anthropological and philosophical aspects, this study gives sports scholars and policymakers valuable insights and a plan for improving sports culture in the modern society [5].

A complex environment of sports and physical activity opportunities is often associated with the sports culture because it is affected by factors like gender, income, cultural perceptions, and the distance to facilities. Importantly, inequality can be caused by governance, even though government policies try to get more people involved, they can sometimes make things worse. It is important to have a holistic standpoint on sports regulations that not only encourages more people to get involved but also actively works to fix any potential inequalities. This makes sure that sport really does become a way for everyone to move forward in society [7].

An experiment by Han (2023), describes how snow sports are becoming more and more popular in China, which is due to the country's strong economic growth and better quality of life. As people's interest in snow sports grows, they need to pay more attention to cultural growth if they want to keep making progress. Recognizing that the cultural qualities of athletes and the culture of sports go hand in hand, the study proposes that all aspects of cultural

involvement on sports teams be improved. This investigation proves how vital this effort will be in the long run. Beyond sports, the study focuses on how snow sports contribute to social stability, mental development, and the idea of a harmonious socialist society as a whole [8]. This insightful study helps us learn more about how cultural dynamics interact with the changing landscape of sports.

Bo Pang et. al. (2022), investigates the ways in which having an entrepreneurial spirit might improve sports culture. The research outlines specific actions that may be taken to strengthen the tie between entrepreneurial drive and the culture of sports and offers suggestions for how this connection might be strengthened. The study investigates from a psychological point of view how entrepreneurial thinking influences the culture of sports. In addition to this, it investigates the significance of entrepreneurial spirit in relation to society, the economy, and ethics. According to the findings, most respondents think that an entrepreneurial attitude is beneficial for the culture of sports. On the other hand, they believe more work must be done to cultivate a culture of athletics [9]. The research suggests that an entrepreneurial spirit should be introduced into the culture of sports and that it should be promoted through education. These realizations can serve as a guide for attempts to improve sports culture in China and worldwide, making it livelier and more meaningful for everyone involved.

An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis conducted by Warner & Dixon (2015), on lower percentage of women than males participating in sports indicated that sports programs must strike a healthy balance between cooperative and competitive elements in order to attract and retain both male and female participants. According to the findings of the study, males and females have different views regarding the nature of competition, which impacts the degree to which they take satisfaction in participating in sports [10]. Sports programs should have elements of both teamwork and individual competitiveness in order to attract more people of both genders.

Malaysia is a multi-racial and religious country. The relationship between religion and sports participation can vary significantly based on cultural, regional, and individual factors. In some religious communities, sports participation is encouraged as a means of promoting physical health and well-being. It can also be seen as a way to build character, teamwork, and discipline. On the other hand, certain religious beliefs or interpretations may discourage or limit participation in certain sports activities due to concerns about immodesty, violence, or conflicting schedules with religious observances.

Sports and religion have a conflicted relationship. At times, sport has served the objectives of religious authorities and has been imbued with a morality and philosophy derived from religious doctrine. At others, it has been rejected for its secular, corporeal emphasis and its capacity to divert attention from godly activities. Sport has been utilized as a means to evangelize and to convert non-believers, and yet it has also represented a threat to the

social and moral order. As such, religion has had an indelible impact on modern sports, and sports have been both embraced and rejected by religious authorities across the centuries [11].

Generally, the sports culture index is influenced by environment, trends, income, cultural perceptions, religious principles, financial support, facilities and human demographic factors such as gender, ethnicity, age and maturity. Based on the current contribution of sports towards well-being and healthy lifestyle, this research aims to determine the sports culture index among Malaysian population and compare it based on gender, locality, ethnic and age group.

## 2. Methods

This study uses a quantitative survey method involving 3735 respondents. The distribution of respondents was evenly distributed throughout the country where the sampling refers to the population aged 13 and above based on the category used by the Department of Statistics Malaysia (2019). The respondents of this study consisted of 50.0% males and 50.0% females. Perfectionate random sampling is used to select the respondents. A self-designed questionnaire by IYRES (2021) with high content validity ( $r=.93$ ) and reliability ( $r=.96$ ) was used to collect data. The questionnaire consists of two domains and five indicators. The first domain is Participation with activeness as the indicator. The second domain is sporting spirit with four indicators namely voluntarism, dedication, expenditure and contribution. Descriptive analysis was used to determine the level of sports culture based on the score scale IYRES (2022). The comparison for sports culture based on gender and locality employed independent sample t-test. One-way ANOVA was used to analyze ethnic and age group differences.

## 3. Results

The quantitative data using descriptive analysis showed Malaysian Sports Culture Index 2022 (MSCI'22) still in the moderate level with the score 52.0 based on the score scale which created by IYRES experts (Table 1). Inferential analysis was employed to compare the sports culture among Malaysian population based on gender, locality, ethnic and age group. The findings were explained statistically using the independent Sample t-test and One-way ANOVA.

**Table 1.** Sports Culture Index Score Scale

Scale	None	Low	Moderate	High	Very High
Score	0	1-49	50-69	70-84	85-100

### 3.1. Sports Culture based on Gender

The Independent Sample t-test shows that the value of  $t(37.33) = 13.16$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ,  $p < 0.05$  is significant. The

result shows that there is a significant difference in the mean score of IBSM22 between male and female respondents, Male ( $M= 59.06$ ,  $SD=33.83$ ) and females ( $M= 44.69$ ,  $SD=32.90$ ). The Male population has a higher level of sports culture compared to women (Table 2&3).

**Table 2.** Descriptive Statistical Analysis of Mean Scores and Standard Deviations

Gender	IBSM'22		
	n	Mean	SD
Male	1869	59.06	33.83
Female	1866	44.69	32.90

**Table 3.** Independent T-Test

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		T-Test for Equality of Means		
	F	P-value	t	Df	P-value
Equal variances assumed	26.01	.000	13.16	37.33	0.000
Equal variances not assumed			13.16	3730.439	0.000

Significant at the 0.05 level

### 3.2. Sports Culture based on Locality

The inferential analysis to compare sports culture based on locality showed that the value of  $t(37.33) = -2.630$ ,  $p = 0.009$ ,  $p < 0.05$  is significant. The finding shows that there is a significant difference by locality, urban area ( $M= 51.14$ ,  $SD=34.20$ ) and rural area ( $M= 54.78$ ,  $SD=33.75$ ). The result indicated that rural population's sports culture is higher than urban people (Table 4&5).

**Table 4.** Descriptive Statistical Analysis of Mean Scores and Standard Deviations

Area	IBSM'22		
	n	Mean	SD
Urban	1973	51.14	34.20
Rural	1762	54.78	33.75

**Table 5.** Independent T-Test

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		T-Test for Equality of Means		
	F	p. value	t	Df	P-value
Equal variances assumed	2.103	.147	-2.630	37.33	0.009
Equal variances not assumed			-2.651	1193.008	0.008

Significant at the 0.05 level

### 3.3. Sports Culture based On Ethnic

Comparison by ethnicity using One-way ANOVA showed that there were significant differences in sports culture between the ethnic groups,  $F(4.681) = 5421.46$ ,  $p = 0.000$  ( $p < 0.05$ ). The Sabahan, Sarawakians and Malay showed higher mean score compared to other ethnic groups. This result indicates that ethnic also plays a major role in developing sports culture among Malaysians (Table 6&7).

**Table 6.** Descriptive Analysis by ethnic

	N	Mean	SD
Malay	1590	58.22	33.45
Chinese	357	55.07	34.02
Indian	222	55.17	33.93
Sabahan	250	62.89	33.49
Sarawakian	85	60.42	33.82
Indigenous	44	50.39	35.28
Others	136	49.40	34.76

**Table 7.** Statistical Analysis One-way ANOVA (Ethnic)

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p-value
Between Groups	32528.789	6	5421.465	4.681	0.000
Within Groups	4317458.321	3728	1158.117		
Total	4349987.110	3734			

Significant at the 0.05 level

### 3.4. Sport Culture based on Age Group

The One-way ANOVA test to compare sports culture between age groups showed that there were significant differences in sports culture between the age groups,  $F(110.76) = 118577.40$ ,  $p = 0.000$  ( $p < 0.05$ ). The adolescents aged 13-14 and adult aged 15-30 years old showed higher mean score compared to other age groups. This result indicates that the younger population in Malaysia has a higher sports culture (Table 8&9).

**Table 8.** Descriptive Analysis by age group

Age	n	Mean	SD
13-14	94	60.70	32.88
15-30	1676	61.03	33.21
31-59	1437	47.39	33.40
60 above	528	33.46	29.01
Total	3735	51.88	34.13

**Table 9.** Statistical Analysis One-way ANOVA (Age Group)

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p. value
Between Groups	355732.217	3	118577.406	110.762	0.000
Within Groups	3994254.893	3731	1070.559		
Total	4349987.110	3734			

Significant at the 0.05 level

## 4. Discussion

The findings of this study showed that the sports culture index among Malaysian population is still in moderate level. Several factors might be the challenges that contribute to the current level of sports culture in Malaysia. Limited sports infrastructure, training facilities, equipment and financial status are challenges for nurturing a strong sports culture. Successful sports programs often require significant financial support. If there is insufficient funding allocated to sports development, it can limit the country's ability to enhance participation and spirit of sportsmanship. Grassroots development is important to build better understanding and awareness among youngsters. Cultural norms and values can influence attitudes toward sports and impact the overall sports culture. Sports culture requires a long-term vision and commitment. Consistent efforts over time are necessary to address challenges and create sustainable improvements [10&12].

Sports culture refers to the attitudes, behaviors, and norms that surround sports and physical activities in a society. Historically, sports have often been seen as male-dominated, with fewer opportunities and support for female participation. While there has been progress in recent decades, gender disparities in participation still exist in many sports. Women's sports have faced challenges in terms of funding, media coverage, and resources compared to men's sports. Gender stereotypes also influence perceptions of sports participation. Men are often associated with strength, power, and competition, while women may be expected to exhibit grace and beauty. These stereotypes can affect how women are perceived and treated, influencing their opportunities to actively involve in sports [10]. In Malaysian contexts, societal attitudes toward gender and sports are evolving. More people are recognizing the importance of equal opportunities and representation in sports. Efforts to challenge traditional gender roles and expectations are helping to create a more inclusive sports culture. Gender differences in sports culture are influenced by other identities like race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and sexual orientation. Overall, gender differences in sports culture reflect broader societal norms and attitudes about gender roles. Progress has been made, but there's still work to be done to ensure equal opportunities, representation, and recognition for women

to be more physically active in sports, exercise and recreational activities.

The location or locality of Malaysian population also contributes towards sports participation. The pupils in rural areas are more likely to be involved in sport, exercise and recreational activities compared to those who live in urban area. The locality of the Malaysian population has a significant role in sports participation. Rural areas might have fewer entertainment options and facilities, which can lead to increased participation in outdoor sports and recreational activities compared to urban areas with a wider range of entertainment outlets beyond physical activities. The rural population also might have the culture that values physical activities, outdoor games, and communal engagement in traditional sports and games which foster a culture of sports participation. Rural areas typically have more open spaces and natural environments that encourage outdoor activities [4&6]. In some cases, access to sports facilities and equipment can be expensive in urban areas. Urban areas tend to have more access to technology and screens, which can sometimes lead to sedentary lifestyles. Time can also be an important factor among urban pupils to be less active due to traveling in traffic jams before and after working hours. Working more than eight hours per day to cater to the cost of living in urban locality might reduce their leisure time. Actually, social and cultural dynamics, infrastructure development, and government initiatives also influence sports participation across different areas of Malaysia.

Ethnicity plays a significant role in shaping the sports culture among Malaysians. Malaysia is a diverse country with a population composed of various ethnic groups. Each of these ethnic groups brings its own cultural traditions, religious principles, preferences, and historical influences on the realm of sports [7&10]. Different ethnic groups have their own traditional sports and games that have been passed down through generations. For example, the Malays have "Sepak Takraw, Gasing, Wau" while the Chinese have "Wushu," a traditional martial art. The Indians have "Kabadi". These traditional sports help preserve cultural heritage and provide a unique identity to each ethnic group's sports culture. Ethnicity plays a multifaceted role in shaping the sports culture in Malaysia. It influences the types of sports that are popular, the participation rates within different communities, the establishment of sports organizations, and the overall sense of identity and unity within the nation. These are the few factors that contribute to these research findings.

Overcoming the challenges and maximizing the benefits of the ethnic diversity in shaping Malaysia's sports culture requires a thoughtful and inclusive approach. Creating sports programs, events, and initiatives that are inclusive and accessible to all ethnic groups can help break down barriers to participation and ensure that every community has the opportunity to engage in sports. Involving local communities in the development and planning of sports programs can bring different communities together and

promote a sense of shared pride [10]. By implementing these strategies, Malaysia can create an environment where ethnic diversity and religious principles enrich the sports culture, fostering a sense of unity, pride, and mutual respect among its people.

Religion and spirituality also play a significant role in sports participation. Religious based martial arts sports and sportswear, such as Muslimah dresses encourage Islamic individuals to participate in sports and make it a culture in their lives. Ultimately, the decision to participate in sports is often a personal one. Individuals may choose to engage in sports activities based on their own interests, regardless of religious affiliation. It's important to note that these generalizations might not apply universally, as individuals within the same religious community may have diverse attitudes towards sports participation. Additionally, the relationship between religion and sports is dynamic and subject to change over time as societal attitudes evolve.

Comparison based on age group indicates that the younger population in Malaysia has a higher sports culture. It's quite common for younger populations to have a more prominent sports culture compared to older generations. Younger generations often adopt new cultural trends and behaviors faster than others. Sports culture can be influenced by peer groups, media, and online platforms, making it more appealing to the youth. The younger generation has grown up with easy access to information through the internet and social media. This provides a wide range of sports that increases a stronger interest in sports. Schools and higher educational institutions play a major role in promoting sports among their students. Physical education classes and sports events in schools encourage students to participate and develop an interest in sports to be more health-conscious and focused on fitness [10&13]. Engaging in sports is often viewed as a way to maintain good health and stay active. Sports provide a platform for social interaction and networking, which can be appealing to younger individuals seeking to connect with others who share similar interests [1]. It's important to note that while younger populations may have a higher affinity for sports culture, this doesn't mean that older generations are devoid of interest in sports and lack sports culture. Preferences and interests can vary widely among individuals based on age group and social networking.

Developing sustainable strategies by the government, stakeholders and sport authorities to enhance physical activity among Malaysian population requires a holistic approach that involves creating supportive environments, promoting awareness, and offering opportunities that cater to a wide range of people with different preferences and abilities. Education and awareness about the benefits of physical activity and the risk of sedentary lifestyle are important. Public spaces should be designed to encourage physical activity by incorporating exercise equipment, play areas, and walking paths. Community organizations and sports clubs should play a significant role in organizing fitness challenges, walking groups, sports leagues, fitness

classes, and charity walks or runs to bring people together and promote sports as a culture. Developing apps and wearable devices that track physical activity and provide personalized fitness plans is also essential in promoting physical activity as a routine in daily lives.

## 5. Conclusions

Enhancing sports culture among multiracial Malaysians, involves creating an environment that promotes inclusivity, sportsmanship, skill development, and overall enjoyment of sports. Encouraging participation from people of all backgrounds, genders, ages, and abilities by creating opportunities to engage in sports, exercise and recreational activities will increase the sports culture index. Promoting sports as a preventive measure against sedentary lifestyle diseases also will motivate individuals to engage in physical activity regularly. The authorities should organize community events, tournaments, and sports festivals that bring people together and celebrate sports by collaborating with schools, higher education institutions, sports clubs, sport industries, and community organizations to enhance the overall sports culture. Develop and organize youth sports programs to nurture a love for sports from childhood. The stakeholders should provide access to sports facilities regardless of their socioeconomic status and provide opportunities for people of all ages to engage in sports, through leisure activities, recreational challenges and community-based competitions. Creating awareness by emphasize the lifelong benefits of physical activity and its contribution to overall well-being also will develop a sustainable sports culture among Malaysian nations. Enhancing sports culture is an ongoing process that requires dedication, collaboration, and a commitment to creating a positive and inclusive environment for Malaysians to actively participate in sports related activities to achieve the "Sporting Nation" aspiration.

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