

Quality of Life in Urban Neighborhoods in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia

Calidad de vida en barrios urbanos en Jeddah, Arabia Saudita

Abdurahman Majrashi Abdulaziz

Department of Architecture, College of Engineering and Architecture,
Umm Al-Qura University, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
aamajrashi@uqu.edu.sa
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6974-6546>

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ABSTRACT

Quality of life has become an increasingly important concept in recent times. Lately, the notion has received tremendous attention from governments, organizations, and decision-makers across the globe. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is one of the countries that have in recent years focused on improving the quality of life of its citizens and visitors through the Vision 2030 framework, under the Quality of Life Program. This study aims to assess the current situation in the Al-Aziziyah neighborhood in the city of Jeddah. An exploratory approach was employed to conduct the research. Sets of indicators were used to assess housing and circulation in the study area. The findings of the study revealed that quality of life has improved with the provision of quality housing, healthcare facilities, green/open spaces, and other related urban facilities/services. The findings are also in-line with the requirements of the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11 for sustainable human settlements/cities. The study further recommends comparative studies between cities of the Kingdom and cities of nations with the best quality of life.

Key words: Quality of Life; Urban neighborhoods; Jeddah; Saudi Vision 2030; Art.

RESUMEN

La calidad de vida se ha convertido en un concepto cada vez más importante en los últimos tiempos. Últimamente, la noción ha recibido gran atención por parte de gobiernos, organizaciones y tomadores de decisiones en todo el mundo. El Reino de Arabia Saudita es uno de los países que en los últimos años se ha enfocado en mejorar la calidad de vida de sus ciudadanos y visitantes a través del marco Vision 2030, bajo el Programa Quality of Life. Este estudio tiene como objetivo evaluar la situación actual en el barrio de Al-Aziziyah en la ciudad de Jeddah. Se empleó un enfoque exploratorio para llevar a cabo

la investigación. Se utilizaron conjuntos de indicadores para evaluar la vivienda y la circulación en el área de estudio. Los hallazgos del estudio revelaron que la calidad de vida ha mejorado con el suministro de viviendas de calidad, instalaciones de atención médica, espacios verdes/abiertos y otras instalaciones/servicios urbanos relacionados. Los hallazgos también están en línea con los requisitos del Objetivo de Desarrollo Sostenible (ODS) 11 para asentamientos humanos/ciudades sostenibles. El estudio recomienda además estudios comparativos entre ciudades del Reino y ciudades de naciones con la mejor calidad de vida.

Palabras clave: Calidad de vida; Barrios urbanos; Jeddah; Saudí Vision 2030; arte.

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Introduction

Nations across the globe are continuously concerned with improving the quality of life of their citizens, a concept that is in-line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly with the SDG 11, aimed at developing sustainable human settlements as well as several other planning concepts such as the creation of livable and sustainable cities and other related issues. For citizens' quality of life to improve, cities should be able to consider all dimensions of sustainability, namely social, environmental, economic, and cultural. The importance of quality of life cannot be overemphasized, as it plays a vital role in building a vibrant, livable and sustainable society. According to Alqahtany (2020), improving the quality of life can be achieved through creating a conducive environment comprising all human needs and services to strengthen social ties. To do this, urban design needs to incorporate sustainability issues (Aina et al., 2013; Balabel & Alwetaishi, 2021; Asif, 2016). Quality of life is a complex and multidimensional concept, that is why this study focuses not only on quality and satisfaction but also on housing, infrastructure, transport and recreation.

In 2018 the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia launched its strategic framework called Vision 2030 (<https://www.vision2030.gov.sa/v2030/overview/>), which focuses on improving the quality of life at an individual and family level by providing the necessary environment to support and create new alternatives that enhance the participation of citizens, expatriates and visitors in cultural, entertainment, sports, and tourism activities. The objective of this framework is to enhance the overall quality of life, create jobs, diversify the economy and advance the position of Saudi cities in the world's best cities classification. The plan to implement the vision focused on key sectors, namely economy, health and well-being of citizens, cultural and heritage conservation, urban services, the environment, and sports (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Vision 2030). Most of the efforts have been geared towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations. The Vision 2030 framework has been assessed in different dimensions to determine its capacity and effectiveness and the Kingdom's commitment to build resilient, inclusive and sustainable societies. Alshuwaikhat, & Mohammed (2017) weighed the program in relation to the needs of the people and their outcome revealed that the Vision's goal and objectives are indeed well designed and reflect the desires and aspirations of Saudi Arabian people.

Housing is one of the vital indicators of quality of life. Saudi's Vision 2030 targets to increase the citizens' ability to own quality homes for their families, and to raise housing ownership from the current status of 8.49% to 60%. Housing ownership has been identified in literature as a means to improve the health and well-being of citizens (Soliman et al., 2015). The delivery of healthcare is also among the indicators of quality of life. Karim & Awawdeh (2020) revealed that a significant number of citizens in the city of Buraidah can access urban health services within few minutes. The assessment of the implementation plan also revealed that healthcare facilities and the delivery of healthcare, as contained in Vision 2030, are in-line with the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, and that the Kingdom is on the rail to achieve its Vision and the 2030 SDGs (Rahman, & Qattan, 2021).

Transportation, which is also a key indicator of urban development, has an influence on all dimensions of sustainability (Al Zohbi, 2021). Pawar indicated that although transport has a negative impact on the environment, it contributes positively to economic development and socio-cultural wellbeing (2019). He also stated that there is a strong and positive relationship between road infrastructure and Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth. This can be attributed to the fact that an improved transportation system attracts both local and foreign investors, who create job opportunities. Similarly, Al-Atawi (2015) highlighted that sustainable transportation can go a long way not only to promote the sustainability of the transportation system, but also environmental sustainability. This study aims to assess quality of life in urban the neighborhoods of Jeddah, with specific reference to the spatial arrangement of land uses, building quality, accessibility, and urban services.

Study Area and Methodology

The study was conducted in the city of Jeddah, in Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Jeddah is located at latitude 21°32'36"N and longitude 39°10'22"E, which is a strategic position along the coast of the Red Sea in the Western part of the country (See Figure 1). It has a symbolic role as the gate way to Mecca and the Kingdom at large. It is a historic city with outstanding values recognized by The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Heritage. The city also plays a significant role in the economy of the Kingdom.

Figure 1: Study Area



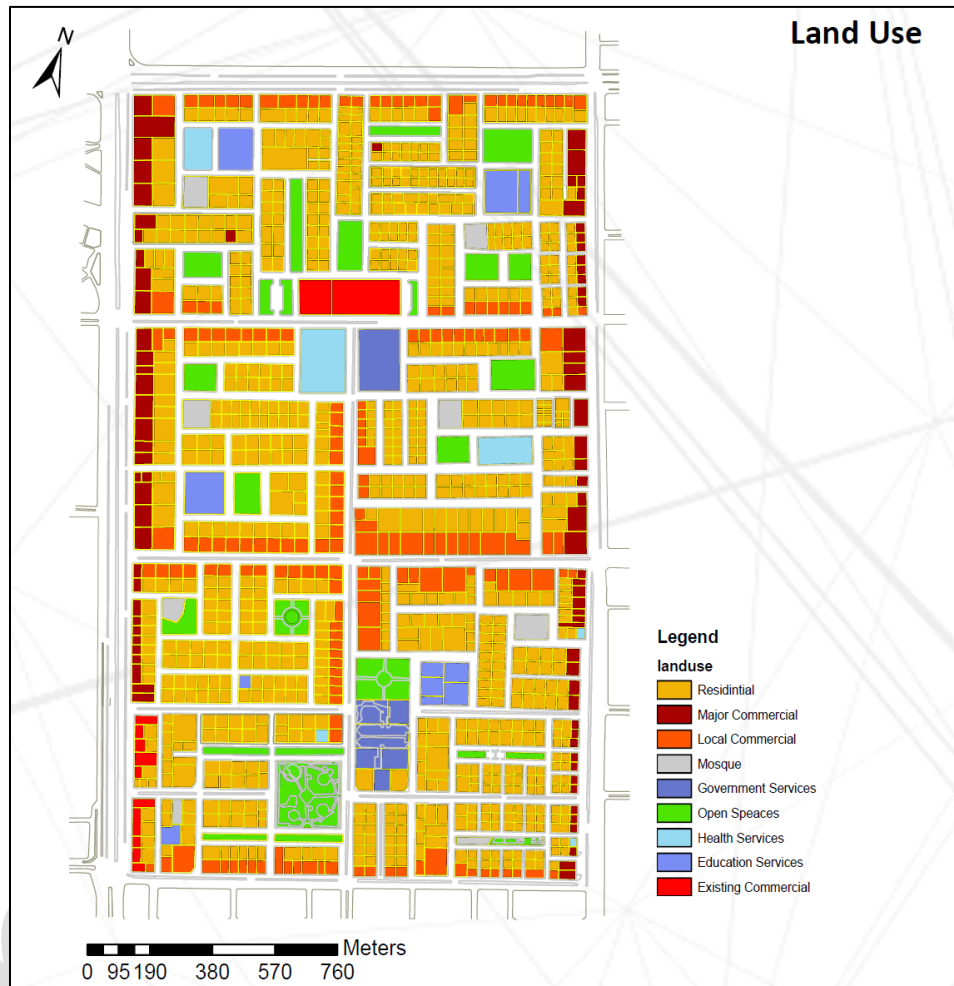
The study used an exploratory approach of inquiry to assess the quality of life in the city. Our research assesses the Al-Aziziyah neighborhood, regarding the Quality of Life Program developed by the Kingdom. A field survey was conducted to assess physically the extent of the developments put in place to improve the quality of life of the Jeddah and Makkah citizens. Seven indicators were used to assess housing quality in the study, including finishes, materials, windows, doors, walls, the absence of external extensions, the external structure. Additionally, five indicators were used to assess connectivity in the area, involving the availability of sidewalks, lighting, quality of streets, afforestation elements, directional signage. The aim of this paper is also to determine the level of achievement of the program's target and goal. The paper also assesses the extent to which the development in the area aligns to the indicators of quality of life.

Results

Our study revealed that there are several developments in the Al-Aziziyah neighborhood in Jeddah that provide virtually all facilities and services required in a well-planned area. Figure 2 shows the map including the use of the land in the area. The neighborhood has progressed significantly in providing quality housing for a varied population, public transportation systems to facilitate the movement of people, commercial areas for goods

and services, open spaces for the health and well-being of the citizens, and educational facilities.

Figure 2: Map of land use in the AL-Aziziyah neighborhood, Jeddah



The process of urban development and provision of a conducive living environment all over the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has been reported by several researchers (Karim & Awawdeh, 2020; Alqahtany, 2020; Alshuwaikhat, & Mohammed, 2017; Aina et al., 2013). This means that the Al-Aziziyah neighborhood is not an exceptional case. These developments are all geared towards achieving the Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030. This is positive for the well-being of the citizens of the Kingdom as well as for its visitors coming for Pilgrimage and other purposes. The developments also take into consideration various socio-economic needs of the people, as the map of land use above shows. It takes into consideration commercial, recreational, religious, educational, health and other related services. Figure 2 reveals that the needs of people are spatially distributed across the neighborhood in such a way that residents can easily access healthcare facilities and

services. This finding is similar to the reported by Karim & Awawdeh (2020), who related that 72% of the residents in the city of Buraidah can access urban services within few minutes. This finding proves that the government of Saudi Arabia is taking care of its citizens and their well-being through the Vision 2030 program.

The findings of Karim & Awawdeh's study further revealed that the provision of services within the zones in the land uses plan are in conformity with other zone uses and in-line with the planning standards of the Kingdom. Further analysis of the zoned areas for each land use is presented in Table 1 below. The land use that dominated the neighborhood is residential – 691 lots –, which is the most common. The area has 22 open spaces – which are the equivalent to a 1/6 of the size of the residential area, a ratio of 31 residential lots for each open space – dedicated to the welfare and well-being of citizens and their social relations. Services such as healthcare, education and security facilities are also located in the zoned area within reach for the benefit of the citizens. Previous studies have also reported that urban developments in other parts of the Kingdom have been designed in accordance with sustainable land use plans (Sultan, Katar, & Al-Atroush, 2021; Addas & Alserayhi, 2020; Muhammed and Abubakar, 2019), which are aimed at improving the quality of life of the citizens and increase human and environmental well-being (Addas, & Alserayhi, 2020). That is, developments across the Kingdom have the same concept, even though they have not been replicated.

Table 1: Land uses coverage in the Al-Aziziyah neighborhood

Land Uses	Area in sqm
Residential	620,434.4
Major Commercial	60,462.3
Local commercial	221,959.8
Upgraded commercial	26,501.1
Mosque	24,310.7
Government Services	22,761
Open Spaces	100,686.5
Health Services	27,737.5
Educational Facilities	27,111.8

In an effort to adequately evaluate the quality of life of the people, the quality of the buildings in the neighborhood was assessed as presented in Figures 3 and 4 below. The results revealed that 33% of the buildings in the area are in very good conditions, 51% are in fair conditions, which means that the occupants of the buildings need to do more in terms of maintenance, and 16% are in bad condition, which means that the buildings are poorly managed.

Figure 3. Conditions of the buildings in the Al-Aziziyah neighborhood

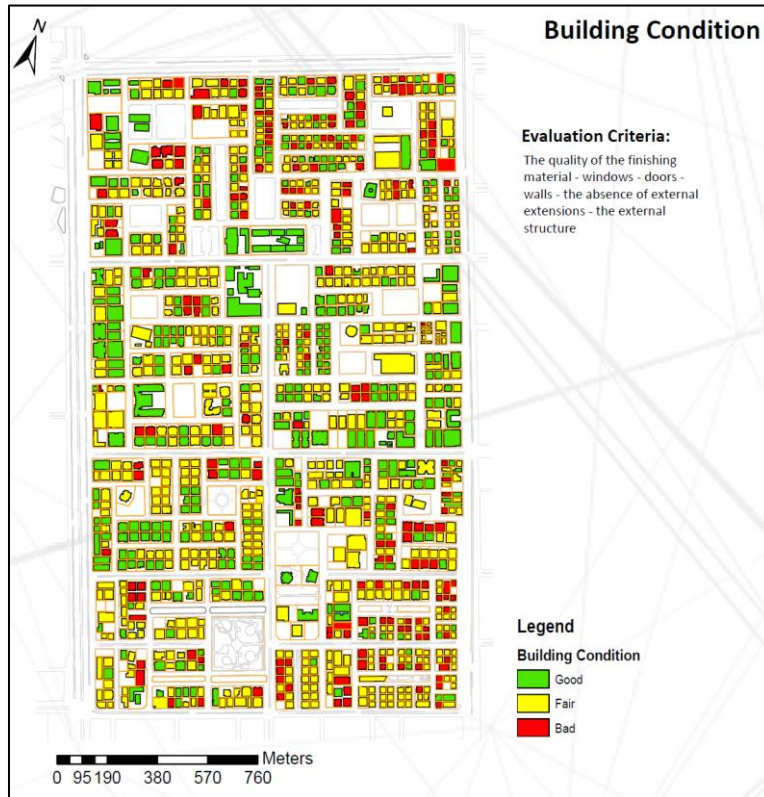


Figure 4. Examples of buildings showing their conditions in the study area

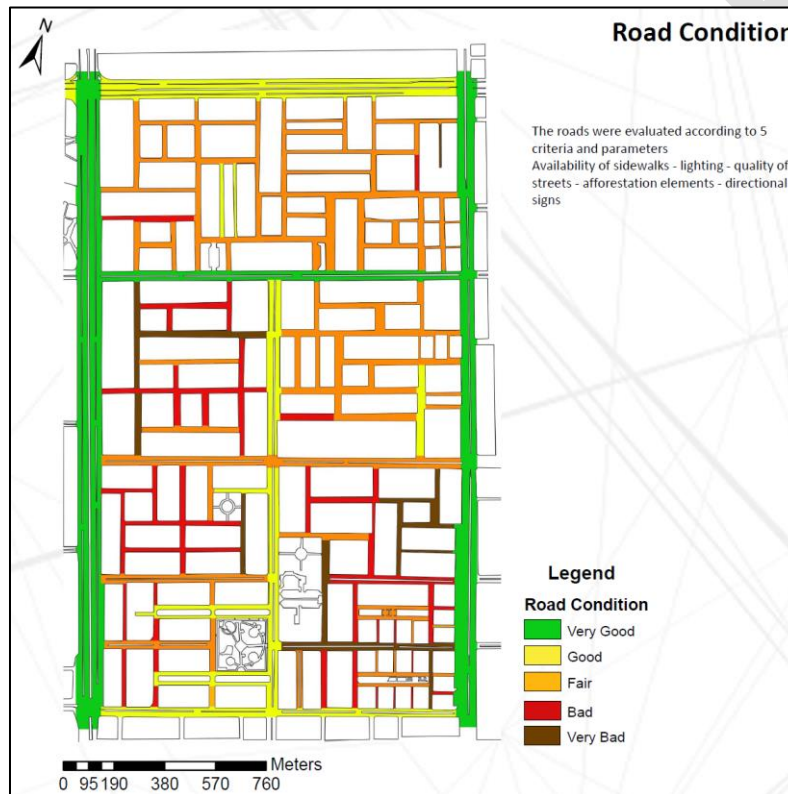


The findings above reveal that a greater effort is necessary in terms of improving the quality of the buildings in the Al-Aziziyah neighborhood. This is to enable the Ministry of Housing to achieve its goal of allowing citizens to own quality homes for their families and also increase the rate of housing ownership from 8.49% to 60%. These findings differ from the findings of Soliman et al. (2015), who reported that the quality of the housing provided by the Prince Salman Housing Program had resulted in the improvement of the socio-economic well-being of citizens and in micro-credit training.

As nations across the world are striving to make their cities more livable and in-line with the SDGs, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is also on the track to achieve the same, as

evidenced by its Quality of Life Program. Accessibility, which is key in any city or neighborhood, was assessed in the Al-Aziziyah Neighborhood. Accessibility is defined as the ease of movement of people, goods and services, and plays a vital role in socialization and development at large. The neighborhood's roads were examined using the following criteria: Provision of sidewalks, lighting, presence of greenery and signage. Figure 5 shows graphically the condition of the roads in the area.

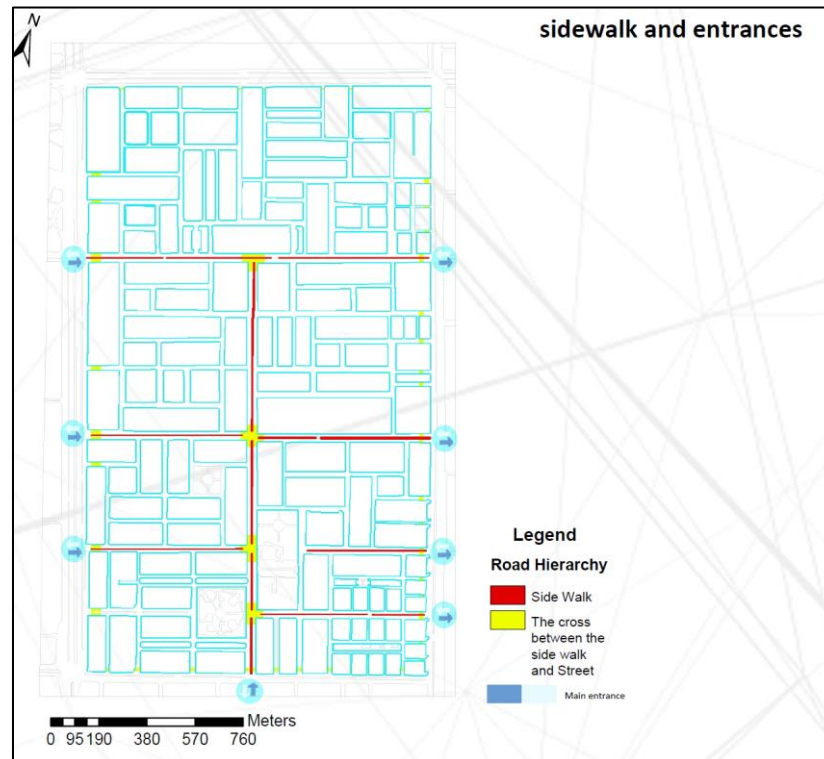
Figure 5. Road Condition in the Al-Aziziyah neighborhood



Al Zohbi (2021) and Pawar (2019) reported that well-connected and efficient transportation networks and systems contribute to sustainable economic development locally and regionally. Therefore, for the Al-Aziziyah neighborhood to compete favorably with other developed areas of Saudi Arabia, there needs to be an improvement in the transportation system and its efficiency.

Our study further categorized roads in good condition as those that are furnished with greenery elements that have presence of sidewalks, signage, and sufficient lighting. Roads in fair condition are those provided with lighting, pedestrian walk-paths, and asphalt. Roads in bad condition are those provided with asphalt and lighting and those categorized as in very bad condition lack all components with the exception of lighting. However, the findings revealed that there is a need for improvement on the provision of sidewalks in the study area as many streets lack sidewalks, as shown in Figure 6 below.

Figure 6. Sidewalks provided in the Al-Aziziyah neighborhood



Provision of sidewalks is vital to facilitate walkability and promote the livability of cities. Walkability also promotes physical activity and safeguards the environment in the area (Sultan, Katar, & Al-Atroush, 2021; Addas & Alserayhi, 2020; Muhammed and Abubakar, 2019; Koohsari, et al., 2015; Hillsdon, et al., 2006). Walkability and increased physical activity increase citizens' fitness and life expectancy.

The indicators assessed in our research – housing, healthcare and educational facilities, green/open spaces, security, urban services and environmental well-being – revealed that the quality of life of the people who inhabit the Al-Aziziyah neighborhood in Jeddah has improved. Our findings corroborate those of Muhammed and Abubakar (2019), Abubakar and Dano (2018), and Abubakar and Doan (2017). The type of developments that are present in the Al-Aziziyah neighborhood can also be found in other sectors of Jeddah and in other regions in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. However, they also need to be improved in-terms of quality of housing and circulation, specifically sidewalks along streets in the neighborhoods. Nevertheless, we can conclude that the Quality of Life Program of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has significantly achieved its objectives, targets and goal as it can be observed in many neighborhoods, cities and regions (Addas & Alserayhi, 2020; Karim & Awawdeh, 2020; Soliman et al., 2015). Therefore, such achievement can go a long way in raising the standard of the country at global level and also improve the ranking of the Kingdom.

Discussion

The Saudi Vision 2030 has adopted the concept of building a healthy and vibrant society by providing all that it takes to achieve it: Housing, education, job creation or opportunities, recreation, healthcare, and all urban services. The findings of this study corroborate those of Karim & Awawdeh (2020), who revealed that all regions of Saudi Arabia are experiencing different stages of urban development which are all geared towards improving the quality of life of citizens and visitors. The high rate of urban development has transformed the Kingdom's cities, improving the quality of life throughout the nation (Alqahtany, 2020). In that regards, the environmental dimension of sustainability has not been left out, as development focuses on sustainable land use, provision of green and open spaces, green shade for sidewalks, recreational areas and facilities. Additionally, it ensures the protection and provision of water and sanitation facilities, guaranteeing the fundamental protection of the environment and its well-being (Sultan, Katar, & Al-Atroush, 2021; Addas & Alserayhi, 2020; Muhammed and Abubakar, 2019). These are vital parameters for safeguarding the environmental well-being and the quality of life of citizens. Such parameters have also been identified as essential recreational tools that increase social interaction and improve welfare (Addas, & Alserayhi, 2020). Open space has been established to promote physical activity and walkability in urban environments (Hillsdon, et al., 2006; Koohsari, et al., 2015), thereby increasing the livability of urban areas or cities. This is essential because it improves the quality of life of the citizens, contributes to livability, and promotes environmental sustainability. Reducing the dependence on automobiles reduces the negative impacts on the environment such as air contamination and noise pollution (Al Zohbi, (2021).

From the economic point of view, improving the quality of life of citizens should focus on urban developments that can bring about economic improvement and expansion by creating job opportunities (Pawar, 2019; Abubakar and Doan 2017). These can improve the socio-economic activities and status of the people, pave the way for innovation, entrepreneurship, and positively impact the quality of life of the people (Abubakar and Dano, 2018). This can also help raise the life expectancy of the people.

Conclusion

The Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 framework and its Quality of Life Program have adopted the concepts of sustainable development and 'livable cities'. The quality of life of inhabitants of the Al-Aziziyah neighborhood has significantly improved as part of the effort to achieve the goals and objectives of the Vision 2030, in areas of housing even though there is need for improvement in facade beautification, provision of urban facilities and services such as commercial, institutional, security, healthcare and environmental well-being. All of these achievements are a result of the implementation of the Vision's goal

and objectives and can also go a long way to raise the standard of the Kingdom in its global image. The literature review conducted during the course of this study also made similar revelations regarding the significant urban development made in accordance with planning standards across the Kingdom. These are the rationale behind the improved quality of life in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Planning standards can increase the citizens' level of happiness and their life expectancy. Although the development is still undergoing in other parts of the country, it is expected to touch the lives of all its citizens.

Recommendation: Further studies should focus on conducting comparative analysis of cities of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia with cities of nations with the best quality of life in order to identify grey areas that need further improvement. This can go a long way in positioning the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on the top in the global ranking of nations with the best quality of life.

Conflict of Interest: The researcher declares no conflict of interest.

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