

**THE ADAPTATION PROCESS OF
INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AT MALAYSIA’S
RESEARCH UNIVERSITIES: AN ANALYSIS OF
CHALLENGES AND THE ROLE OF
UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATION**

YUS SHARMIZA BINTI YUSHRIMAN

**MASTER OF SCIENCE
UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA TERENGGANU**

2025

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YUS SHARMIZA BINTI YUSHRIMAN

**Thesis Submitted in Fulfilment of the Requirement for the
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I dedicate this thesis to:

My all: Ayah and Mama.

My heart and soul,

My husband, Safwan Hamzani

My guidance throughout this journey,

Dr. Isma Rosila Ismail

My anchor throughout the storm & turbulence:

Adik, Yoya, Pah, Amalina

I owe you guys, big time.

Thanks, a lot!

May Allah bless you guys throughout the journey in your wonderful life.

**Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Malaysia Terengganu in
fulfilment of the requirements for the of Degree of Master of Science**

**THE ADAPTATION PROCESS OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AT
MALAYSIA'S RESEARCH UNIVERSITIES: AN ANALYSIS OF CHALLENGES
AND THE ROLE OF UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATION**

YUS SHARMIZA YUSHRIMAN

2025

Main Supervisor : Isma Rosila Binti Ismail, Ph.D.

School/Institute : Centre for Fundamental and Continuing Education

The Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education has recently unveiled a Strategic Plan aimed at increasing international student enrolment by 25% by the year 2025, with the goal of positioning Malaysia as a global education hub. However, as the number of international students rises, it is essential to ensure that local communities and host universities are adequately prepared to support these students' adaptation and integration into the new environment. This study applies Kim Young Yun's Cross-Cultural Adaptation Model to explore the factors influencing the adaptation process of international students within the Malaysian context. It specifically investigates the challenges faced by current international postgraduate students in Malaysia, as well as the roles played by university staff in supporting their adaptation. To ensure comprehensive coverage, this research focuses on the challenges faced by current international postgraduate students in Malaysia, as well as the contributions of host university staff in facilitating their adaptation process. The study employed quota sampling to select 24 informants, comprising 12 international postgraduate students and 12 staff members, from four renowned research universities in Malaysia: UPM, UKM, UM, and USM. A qualitative approach was adopted using an inductive method, with data collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews. Thematic analysis was conducted with the aid of a colour-coding technique using ATLAS.ti software to identify emerging patterns and themes. The research findings indicate that international students in Malaysia experience five major

forms of challenges throughout their adaptation journey, encompassing physical, psychological, social, cultural, and academic dimensions. Concurrently, the contributions of staff members involve student management, support systems, facilitation of local adjustment, and effective communication. These results carry significant implications for prospective international students enrolling in universities across Asia, as well as for their respective host institutions. This study recommends that host universities prioritise the needs of postgraduate students by strengthening institutional support and implementing targeted strategies to promote their well-being and successful adaptation.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Malaysia Terengganu
sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk Ijazah Sarjana

**PROSES ADAPTASI PELAJAR ANTARABANGSA DI UNIVERSITI
PENYELIDIKAN DI MALAYSIA: ANALISIS CABARAN DAN PERANAN
PIHAK PENTADBIRAN**

YUS SHARMIZA BINTI YUSHRIMAN

2025

Penyelia : Isma Rosila Binti Ismail, Ph.D

Pusat Pengajian/Institut : Pusat Pendidikan Asas dan Lanjutan

Kementerian Pengajian Tinggi Malaysia telah mengumumkan satu Rancangan Strategik yang bertujuan untuk meningkatkan kadar pendaftaran pelajar antarabangsa sebanyak 25% menjelang tahun 2025, dengan matlamat untuk menjadikan Malaysia sebagai sebuah hab pendidikan bertaraf antarabangsa. Namun, penting untuk diakui bahawa peningkatan jumlah pelajar antarabangsa menuntut kesediaan masyarakat tempatan dan universiti sebagai institusi tuan rumah untuk membantu pelajar ini dalam menghadapi proses adaptasi dan penyesuaian terhadap persekitaran baharu. Dalam kajian ini, Model Adaptasi Antarabudaya oleh Kim Young Yun digunakan untuk meneroka faktor-faktor yang mungkin mempengaruhi proses adaptasi pelajar antarabangsa dalam konteks tempatan. Bagi tujuan tersebut, kajian ini menumpukan kepada dua aspek utama iaitu cabaran yang dihadapi oleh pelajar pascasiswazah antarabangsa di Malaysia dan peranan kakitangan universiti dalam menyokong proses penyesuaian mereka. Kajian ini menggunakan kaedah pensampelan kuota melibatkan 24 responden, terdiri daripada 12 pelajar antarabangsa dan 12 kakitangan dari empat universiti penyelidikan utama di Malaysia iaitu di UPM, UKM, UM, dan USM. Kajian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif berasaskan teknik induktif, dengan data dikumpulkan melalui temu bual separa berstruktur dan mendalam. Data yang dikumpulkan dianalisis secara tematik menggunakan kaedah kod warna dengan

bantuan perisian ATLAS.ti. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa pelajar antarabangsa di Malaysia menghadapi lima cabaran dalam proses penyesuaian mereka iaitu aspek fizikal, psikologi, sosial, budaya, dan akademik. Sumbangan kakitangan universiti merangkumi aspek pengurusan pelajar, sistem sokongan, penyesuaian dalam konteks tempatan, komunikasi berkesan, serta menunjukkan komitmen institusi dalam memastikan kelangsungan adaptasi pelajar antarabangsa secara holistik. Dapatan ini memberi implikasi penting terhadap pelajar antarabangsa pada masa hadapan yang mendaftar di universiti-universiti di Asia. Kajian ini menyarankan agar universiti-universiti memberikan penekanan yang lebih terhadap keperluan pelajar pascasiswazah antarabangsa dengan memperkukuh peranan sokongan institusi serta melaksanakan pendekatan yang bersasar demi kesejahteraan dan kejayaan proses adaptasi mereka.

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APPROVALS

I certify that an Examination Committee has met on 30th July 2025 to conduct the final examination of Full Name, on her Master Degree's thesis entitled "**The Adaptation Process Among International Students At Malaysia's Research Universities: The Challenges And Administrative Assistance**" in accordance with the regulations approved by the Senate of Universiti Malaysia Terengganu. The Committee recommends that the candidate be awarded the relevant degree. The members of the Examination Committee are as follows:

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Professor/Dean,

Centre for Fundamental and Continuing Education

Universiti Malaysia Terengganu

Date:

DECLARATION

I with this declare that the thesis is based on my original work except for quotations and citations which have been duly acknowledged. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted for any other degree at UMT or other institutions.

YUS SHARMIZA BINTI YUSHRIMAN

Date:

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ATLAS.ti	Archiv für Technik, Lebenswelt und Alltagssprache (Archive for Technology, Lifeworld and Everyday Language.
RU	Research University
GoT	Graduate on Time
HEI	Higher Education Institution

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Background of the Study

The term intercultural adaptation describes the dynamic process people go through in order to fit in and adapt to a new cultural setting. The adaptation process, as its name implies, is a cycle that takes some time to experience since it entails changing treatments to align with the target population's cultural norms, meanings, and values (Heim & Knaevelsrud, 2021). This study uses Young Yun Kim's Cross-cultural Adaptation Model as the main model to contextualise the adaptation experiences of international postgraduate students at Malaysian public universities and the administrative support system given by the research universities in Malaysia as the host country. As an emerging global centre for education, Malaysia has made internationalisation a top priority in its higher education system, with the Ministry of Higher Education establishing aggressive goals to boost the number of international students enrolled. The student body has grown and become more varied as a result of internationalisation, but it has also highlighted serious issues with social integration, cultural adjustment, and institutional support.

Language barriers, culture shock, and restricted engagement with local students and communities are among the recurrent problems that international students encounter. According to prior study. These difficulties can undermine the entire study experience by causing psychological stress, social isolation, and academic difficulties.

For example, research by Yu et al. (2023) and Lashari et al. (2023) highlights how social and cultural disparities, especially in areas with different cultural norms like Malaysia, lead to acculturative stress among international students. Moreover, the role of host universities, particularly administrative staff, in facilitating this adaptation has been underexplored, despite their potential to mitigate these challenges. This study aims to investigate the challenges encountered by international postgraduate students in Malaysian public universities and the role of administrative staff in facilitating their adaptation. By incorporating multiple theoretical perspectives, this research aims to offer a holistic understanding of the adaptation process and provide practical strategies for improving the international students' support systems in Southeast Asia.

Based on the 2022 statistics published, there are 40,140 international students from more than ten countries study at more than 100 public and private universities in Malaysia (EMGS, 2022). Most international students were from Southeast Asia, Middle Eastern, Middle Asian, and African nations, with only a small proportion coming from Europe. English and Bahasa Melayu are mixed as the official languages of instruction in Malaysian universities. Due to their global origins, these students may help foster a society accepting of many cultures and promote intercultural understanding, both of which are crucial for addressing the issues presented by international affairs. The figure below is the distribution of the top ten countries that submitted their applications and have chosen Malaysia as their host country in the year 2020 and 2021.

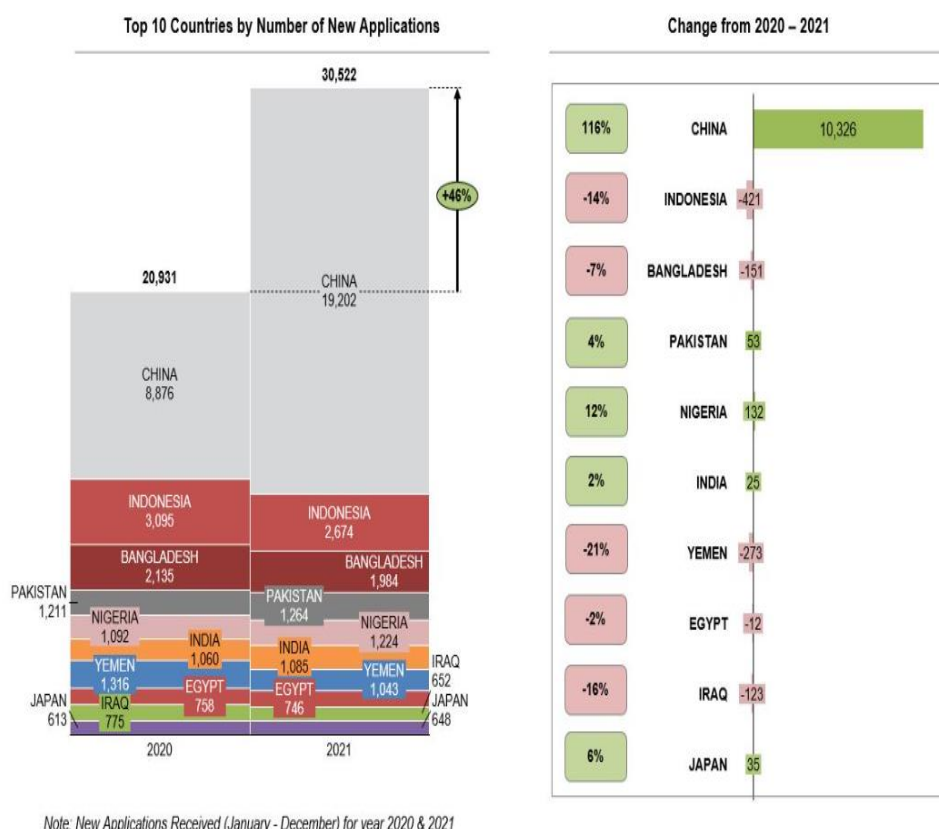


Figure 1.1 International Student Country Distributions in Malaysia (EMGS, 2022)

Higher Education Ministry's Education Malaysian Services, which will be available starting in 2022, shows an auspicious number in terms of enrolment. Interestingly, Malaysia currently has a sizable population of international students pursuing PhDs. It is clear that the Movement Control Order (MCO) that Malaysia implemented in 2020 and 2021 did not stop an increase in the number of applications. Over 11,611 international doctor philosophy (PhD) candidates applied to study in Malaysia's public and private Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in 2021, a noteworthy increase nearly twofold from the previous year. Meanwhile, for the year 2022, by June, it is known that a number of 5503 new applications for PhD students have been received. It is the same with the Master international students in 2021, with a number of 11,492 international students applications. It continues to increase only half of the year 2022 with the current number of 6276 students.

For global context, academic advancement, and economic growth, college and university staff members must familiarise themselves with international students and their particular difficulties. The financial impact of international students in Malaysia in 2019 was estimated to be RM 5.9 billion and is projected to increase to RM 15.6 billion by 2020. Sixteen scholarships from seven universities were published as all-year-round scholarships that can be applied by postgraduate international students studying in Malaysia (EMGS, 2022). Postgraduate international students has received a high number of admissions and applications year by year. Half of the number of international students were master's and PhD students, and the remaining was a mix-up of degrees, diplomas, and certificates. The statistics provided by the EMGS (Education Malaysian Global Services, an international students' platform to provide all services regarding furthering their study in Malaysia, show an increase in the number of postgraduate international students from 50% to 65% of the new applications.

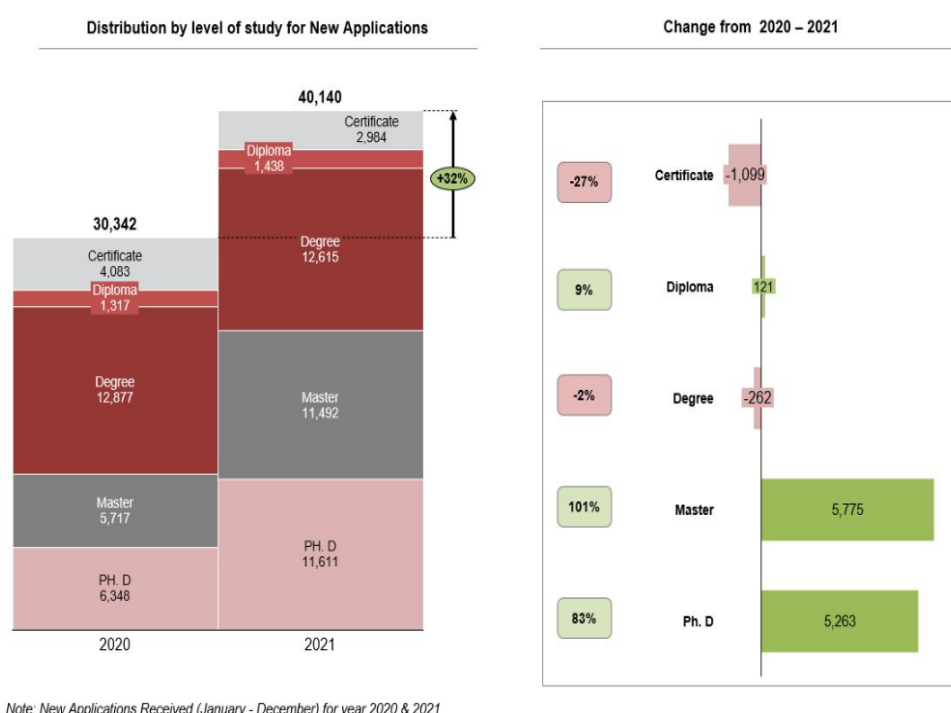


Figure 1.2 International students' level of study in the years 2020 and 2021 (EMGS, 2022)

To show its greatest regard for education, Malaysia's government spends about 5% of its GDP on it, more than the global and regional average. At the same time, it is beginning to emerge as the third group of essential destinations in higher education. With the inclusion of international students, there is an intercultural adaptation process. Nevertheless, it is found that international students face problems in adaptation processes mainly because of the locals (Pekerti et al., 2020), such as cultural adaptation of learning (academic), psychological and social challenges, language issues, attitudes, ethics, local community stereotypes and norms held (Lashari et al., 2023). These problems can contribute to acculturative stress (Yu et al., 2023) from the above aspects if not overcome throughout their learning period. For a generation that will need to operate in multicultural teams and workplaces, experiencing worldwide culture or attending virtual mobility is crucial (Ismail et al., 2022). This study uses the Cross-cultural Adaptation Model pioneered by Young Yun Kim in 2001 and revised in 2017 as the primary medium for information retrieval.

Malaysia is a heterogeneous nation made up of Malays, Chinese, and Indians—three sizable ethnic groups—as well as individuals of other nationalities and indigenous people. These are shaped by several cultures, which impart a wide range of values and perspectives on the world. Each community, however, is distinct and has its own cultural values. Intercultural communication may happen when locals interact with foreign residents as well as when locals interact with other locals. Intercultural communication includes interactions between people from the same culture as well as interactions between locals and visitors (Voevoda, 2020). Therefore, interactions between the personnel from the host university and the international students might be regarded as intercultural in character.

The university's internationalisation agenda served as the Ministry of Higher Education's Strategic Plan in an effort toward the internationalisation of the country and was sealed on 27 August 2007 (MoHE, 2020). As a result, Malaysia began receiving an increased influx of international students from all over the world. The government set the target of international student admissions at a capacity of 150,000 in 2015 and rose to 200,000 by 2020 (Negara, 2022), aiming to meet a target of 250,000 international students by 2025. As a result, higher education in Malaysia

began to undergo radical changes to meet the internationalisation requirements. The enrolment of these international students continues to be a strong force in Malaysia's higher education, as evidenced by the record level of their movement to the country. Record numbers of these students are arriving, but why do they do so? Furthermore, and perhaps even more crucially, how are they doing? How are they adjusting to these unfamiliar surroundings and cultures? Are their institutions supporting them appropriately in this shift, as well?

Each issue is crucial to Malaysia's higher education system and calls for in-depth investigation. By serving the internationalization agenda, the quality of hospitality, along with the increase in the number of international students, should also be considered a serious matter. In order to do that, all parties must cooperate, whether the staff is academic or non-academic. Hence, it has come to the view of the researcher to put the primary topic of this study as enlightenment on how these international students, no matter whether new or old postgraduate international students, are adjusting to their campus cultures at a sizable public university. This comprises four selected Research Universities (RUs), namely Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), Universiti Malaya (UM), Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), and Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM).

In Malaysia's public universities, postgraduate students have historically made up the majority of overseas enrolment, which is 57.77% of the 15,524 international students enrolment in the second quarter of the year 2022. There have occasionally been brief waves of greater international student populations from Asia, including China, Bangladesh, Japan, India, and Indonesia. At many Malaysian universities, especially larger ones with strong Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) and business departments, this enormous expansion in Chinese undergraduate enrollment has been the main driver of the enormous growth of overseas students (Zhao, 2023; Xu et al., 2024; Singh, 2021). Additionally, the educational opportunities in host societies can give international students a fantastic chance to broaden their perspectives on various cultures and simultaneously learn about the host society's culture as it differs from their own.

Undoubtedly, Malaysia is a very desirable education location for students from outside. Increased foreign enrolment in Malaysia's private HEIs as a result of the 1997 economic crisis' influence on the ringgit's value was driven chiefly by students from the developing world (Soyer et al., 2020). Moreover, Malaysia has also been recognized as a student-friendly city since it actively promotes the integration of international students into its cultural and economic life (Soyer et al., 2020). In addition, several student-friendly services and opportunities are offered, including volunteerism, non-governmental organisations, and industrial internships. Most universities interact with new international students through international student orientation programmes, which typically focus on giving students much information in a short time right before the start of the student's first academic term to deal with these adjustment issues.

Many times, these orientation programmes overwhelm the mental and physical health of the students, especially international students with problems such as communication difficulties, jet lag, knowledge overload, and cultural shock can all be experienced by students at once (Abd Malek & Ahmad, 2023; Pacheco, 2020). The new international students are educated by well-intentioned orientation leaders, administrators, and faculty about campus resources, classroom culture, social norms, student codes of conduct, and federal non-immigrant regulations during the course of a typical orientation programme, which can last anywhere from one day to as long as two weeks. There is, in fact, a lot to learn. However, there is not much time until these international students move on to the next phase of their journey—starting classes—to impart that knowledge. Malaysia has responded to this problem by having institutions have implemented strategies to flatten this learning curve. One strategy is to prepare new international students for their time at the university by informing and educating them before they arrive on campus (Mohamed, 2020). Another strategy is to modernise the standard orientation session and expand on the lessons learned with a subsequent orientation course. Finding out what these overseas students need to know at these different stages of their transition is the essential factor in leading these efforts and then creating programmes to target the proper learning (Nadeem et al., 2022; Tajima, 2020)

1.1 Problem Statement

The adaptation process, as stated above, is when the process of intercultural communication leads to the merging of the communicator's original lifestyle with the foreign or new environment (Mandari & Boer, 2021). International students will experience psychological symptoms such as inferiority complexes, confusion, homesickness, loneliness, anxiety, anger, isolation, lost identities, insomnia, low motivation, inability to focus, and lack of self-confidence if they fail to adapt to their new environment (Worae & Edgerton, 2023; Bonsaksen et al., 2021; Bethel et al., 2020). Upon arrival, these international students must be prepared to accept Malaysia as their new home. International students, in many ways, experience similar difficulties adjusting to a new culture and setting, such as living away from home for the first time (Zhao et al., 2023; Mekonen & Adarkwah, 2023; Billedo et al., 2020).

However, they may also encounter challenges that are particularly exclusive to students adjusting to a new society, educational system, and, frequently, a new language (Bond, 2022; Bai & Wang, 2022; Mandari & Boer, 2021). Research has also revealed that international students may feel grateful for the opportunity to study abroad and think they should just put up with their hardships and refrain from complaining to finish their studies fast and graduate on time, leading to them isolating themselves (Mbous et al., 2024). Berry (1997) outlines the major concerns for international students living in a different cultural setting. These include how people behave in the new environment, whether they adapt their repertoire of behaviours, and whether there is a pattern of community and change in how people go about their lives in the new society.

Although language obstacles and cultural distance are commonly mentioned as impediments to communication in the literature, it is unclear how they impact the communication process (Zhang & God, 2021). Previous research found that Australian and Chinese students are favourable to language and cultural differences but suffer from understanding issues and poor interaction quality (Zhang & God, 2021). A study done in Sabah also found that it is hard to learn the Malay language since they rarely talk with the locals, especially in the informal language of Sabahan, which contributes to the slower adaptation process (Rathakrishnan et al., 2021). Poor English language

skills prevent overseas students from participating completely in their studies, and having to adapt to the many dialects and slang terms used by local teachers makes it even more difficult for them (Rathakrishnan et al., 2021). International students can interact with locals and have a deeper understanding of local culture by learning the native language (Jailani et al., 2020).

Knowledge of the local languages is expected to aid international students in establishing social relationships, conversing with university personnel, and settling down in new locations. Difficulties when they came to Malaysia were food adjustment, language barrier, and managing time between their study and family (Aizawa et al., 2020; Chiumento et al., 2018; Freeman et al., 2017; God & Zhang, 2021; Yu & Mustafa, 2017). Still, culture shock can be prevented when these students are involved in their home networks, highlighting the importance of social media in keeping people linked at home (Chen et al., 2022). Per the studies, it might be difficult for newcomers to acclimatise to the local way of life, including the food, weather, finances, health care, and language, as well as the accommodations and housing options (Tseng & Newton, 2002; Lin & Yi, 1997; Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007).

Another difficulty is that many international students do not utilise school resources that could help them succeed (Tas, 2013; Sumer, 2009; Baysden, 2002). Hence, the lack of staff contribution towards the adaptation process as the host was highlighted as the main problem in this research. Church (1982) claims that interactions with host country citizens may be the most crucial aspect of adjustment. It has been discovered that both the quantity and quality of these interpersonal relationships are beneficial for psychological adjustment (Ward & Kennedy, 2001; Ward & Rana-Deuba, 1999). A reduced social adjustment has been linked to unsatisfactory interactions with locals, especially for overseas students (Berry, 1997; Yogeeswaran et al., 2021). Most of the previous research has narrowed its scope towards intercultural adaptation among international students regardless of the role of staff at the university in assisting the adaptation of international student culture to their respective institutions of study.

However, it is known that international students do not feel that the university is a big help in their adaptation process (Mohamed et al., 2020; Musling & Yazid, 2019). A study found that the approachability and ease of access by the students towards the staff is one of the highest factors in their service satisfaction rate, but has always been neglected by the non-academician staff (Ruangkanjanases, 2015), which is seven years later. It is seen that assurance and empathy from service quality dimensions, as well as cultural differences and religious belief variables from socio-cultural adaptation challenges, all positively influence overall international student satisfaction (Yilmaz & Temizkan, 2022).

Based on the original model of Intercultural Adaptation by Kim Young Yun, which was built within the Western context in America as the main informants. When it comes to acclimating to a nation with a strong hold on customs and culture, such as Malaysia, it can be noted that several of the attributes in the model do not cover a wide scope regarding the adaptation process as there is less research done for the international students in the Asia countries (Zhao et al., 2023). For example, America has fewer cultures and customs than Asian countries, with a long history of customs, culture, and a mix of religions (Singh & Jack, 2022). Hence, international students from non-Asian countries might face difficulties adjusting to the local lifestyle. For example, the clothing style in most of the Asian countries only allows modest wear. Therefore, a wider prospect focusing on international students furthering their studies in Asian countries was needed for the adaptation process to happen smoothly. The founder of the model, Kim Young Yun, has clarified that Asian international students have a higher probability of facing culture shock than European students when studying in the Western region (Kim & Kim, 2016).

A study that focused on Indian and Chinese students as representatives of Asian students identified three acculturation stressors: a lack of diversity on campus, the anxiety of making mistakes, and microaggressions both in and out of the classroom (Ma et al., 2022). In addition, this research will justify the suitability of the current model in the context of higher education in Malaysia. This is very significant because if the intercultural adaptation issues are not handled efficiently, the implication of Malaysia being the choice among international students as the preferred destination

will be severe and affect the increasing admission of international students to HEIs in Malaysia. Since the majority of the Cross-cultural Adaptation Models were created in a Western context (Arasaratnam & Banerjee, 2011; Arasaratnam et al., 2010a; Arasaratnam, Banerjee, & Dembek, 2010; Arasaratnam, 2006; Deardorff, 2006), several researchers have emphasised the need to reconsider the idea that originated in the West to test comparable constructs in Asian cultural contexts (Arasaratnam, 2006; Arasaratnam et al., 2010a, 2010b). A study mentioned that Asian students usually experience higher stress than European students who study in the United States (Y.S., Kim & Y.Y, Kim, 2016). The study conducted by Kim Young Yun (2001) did not consider the current factors that have implications for the adaptation process of an individual student. Hence, the model improvised by Kim Young Yun (2017) was used to complement and adapt to the latest factors in the adaptation process of international students.

Although Kim Young Yun's Cross-Cultural Adaptation Theory has been extensively used to analyse the experiences of immigrants and sojourners in Western nations, particularly the United States, its applicability in Asia is still somewhat restricted. There aren't many empirical investigations using this idea in Asia, and they have only lately surfaced. Few studies have employed the model in Malaysia's public university system, although it has been used, for instance, to study how overseas students adjust in China and Thailand (Li & Zizzi, 2018; Yu & Jia, 2019). Only a small number of research used Kim's model, and theoretical frameworks were implemented inconsistently, according to a recent systematic review on Chinese students in Malaysia (Chow et al., 2023). Given the distinct cultural, linguistic, and religious diversity of Malaysian society, this points to a major vacuum in the literature and emphasises the necessity of extending and contextualising Kim's theory for the country's intercultural setting.

Hence, this research was intended to serve as the extension of future research in assisting the Ministry of Higher Education in conducting policy regarding the arrival of international students and, at the same time, providing guides to the host university to design appropriate courses in training staff in handling the international-students

during their phases of the adaptation process and at the same time, maintain students' relationships with the host university and locals before they begin their study Malaysia and during their stay in Malaysia. Aspects such as Academic and Career Development for students and staff, integration of culture between the students and staff, and the completion of the Kim Young Yun model were used widely in both Western Asian contexts. Again, this study aims to identify the elements that affected international students as challenges that may be solved and assisted by the institution, which is the student's host university.

1.2 Significance of the Study

The topic of intercultural adaptation in higher education, specifically in the Malaysian setting, has benefited from the theoretical and practical contributions this study offers. It tackles a neglected aspect of the literature by concentrating on the difficulties faced by overseas postgraduate students and the responsibilities of university employees.

1.2.1 Theoretical Significance

In theory, this study advances the field of intercultural adaptation research by implementing Kim Young Yun's (2017) Cross-Cultural Adaptation Model in Malaysian public universities. The sociocultural realities of a multicultural Asian nation are compared to Kim's model, which was first created in a Western setting. This shows how the model could need to be modified to consider local values and institutional processes. The Social Adaptation Theory by Yoesoep Edhie Rachmad (2022) is cited as a comparative lens to bolster the justification for choosing Kim's model, even if it is not incorporated into this investigation. The comparison highlights how Kim's approach provides a more thorough framework for comprehending how communication, surroundings, and individual tendencies all play a part in cross-cultural adaptation—aspects that are particularly pertinent in the Malaysian context.

According to the literature review in Chapter 2, there is an opportunity to expand the use of Kim's Cross-Cultural Adaptation Theory outside Western contexts because there isn't much study using it in Asian settings, particularly Malaysia. By incorporating the intercultural adaption model into Malaysia's multilingual and culturally diverse higher education system, this study closes a theoretical gap and promotes the models' global applicability and improvement. Additionally, this study highlights current adaption model limitations, particularly with relation to post-pandemic digital learning and the growing importance of administrative staff. The necessity for theoretical frameworks that integrate social media use, hybrid learning, and non-academic staff interactions is highlighted by the fact that these changing dynamics are rarely covered in previous models (Choi et al., 2021; Antwi et al., 2022; Bukhari et al., 2020; Chen et al., 2022; De Rycker et al., 2023).

1.2.2 Practical Significance

Practically speaking, this study offers Malaysian Research Universities (UM, UKM, UPM, and USM) useful information to improve their internationalisation plans. The study highlights particular institutional, external, and personal obstacles that overseas postgraduate students must overcome and makes suggestions for enhancing administrative and interpersonal support networks. The results highlight the sometimes disregarded function of university employees outside of academic and foreign offices. Departments including faculty administration, postgraduate centres, and health centres are crucial in determining how well students adapt. Supporting a more inclusive academic environment requires enhancing staff preparedness, communication abilities, and cross-cultural knowledge (Gopi et al., 2020; Zhao et al., 2023; Chan et al., 2021).

The study also offers helpful guidance for university stakeholders, including academic supervisors, administrative staff, and student affairs experts, to better support international postgraduate students. Additionally, it puts Malaysian universities in a better position to achieve internationalisation goals by tailoring support systems to the intricate challenges faced in an Asian setting. In keeping with

Malaysia's goal of internationalising higher education, the report also backs institutional initiatives to raise student happiness, retention, and on-time graduation.

1.3 Research Objectives

Specifically, the research objectives are as follows:

- a) To identify and analyse the types of challenges faced by international postgraduate students at Malaysian Research Universities (RUs) during the adaptation process.
- b) To examine the administrative and interpersonal support systems that facilitate the adaptation process among international students at Malaysia's RUs.
- c) To suggest an expansion model of the Cross-cultural Adaptation Model in the Asian context.

1.4 Research Questions

What are the international post-graduate students' intercultural experiences while furthering their studies in Malaysia? In particular,

- a) What are the types of challenges faced by international postgraduate students at Malaysian Research Universities (RUs) during the adaptation process.
- b) What are the administrative and interpersonal support systems that facilitate the adaptation process among international students at Malaysia's RUs.
- c) What elements should be incorporated into an expanded cross-cultural adaptation model to reflect the Asian context accurately?

1.5 Terms & Operational Definition

1.5.1 Intercultural Adaptation

Modifying various behaviours is called "intercultural adaptation" (Cai & Rodriguez, 1996). Kim (2001) gives 'intercultural adaptation' as when someone enters a new culture, they may first find themselves in a "disequilibrium" state but eventually find their way back to equilibrium. Four years later, Kim (2005) explained that because people from various cultures interact with one another in various ways, adjusting to a new culture entails various factors, including behavioural and psychological changes. The intercultural adaptation process is a person's adaptation process that can eventually create a feeling of comfort with the situation in a new environment (Kim, 2017). While multiculturalism refers to the coexistence of several cultural identities in an already established cultural environment, intercultural communication is simply the exchange of information and ideas between members of different cultural groups (Bai & Wang, 2022). In this research context, the international students will allow themselves to accept new behaviours by experiencing the unique culture and academic study. At the same time, this intercultural adaptation process is expected to be aided by the contribution of the universities executed by the staff.

1.5.2 International Students

The international students were identified as 'sojourners,' with criteria such as living in a foreign country for more than six months but not later than five years and their purpose of stay for education, military purposes, or business (Panocová, 2022). In this study, international students were identified as students from outside of Malaysia, from other countries, with different backgrounds, furthering their studies as postgraduate students. They have resided in Malaysia for more than one year.

1.5.3 Staff

Staff are identified as ‘support staff’ or ‘administrative staff,’ which is one of the most valuable resources at universities who "possess much of the systemic knowledge and intellectual capital needed to ensure the university's operation." (Bossu, Brown, & Warren, 2019). Hence, this research referred to staff as the university personnel that handles the students directly, but not from the international office and not an academician such as lecturers. They are the personnel that has worked for more than five years and from departments such as health centre, faculty, or postgraduate centre.

1.5.4 Intercultural Challenges

The rising tide of globalisation and the internationalisation of education may be the reason why the learning sustainability of international students is now not only a current problem but also a perennial problem (Yassin et al., 2020). In this research, ‘challenges’ will be referred to as the obstacles and hardships international students face while studying as postgraduate students in Malaysian public universities.

1.5.5 Contribution

Contributions are made by the played by a person or thing to bring about a result or help something to advance (Shehata & Abdeldaim, 2020). This research focuses on the scope of universities’ personnel or staff participation and involvement, existing or already in progress, handled by host universities. These ‘contributions’ were executed by the staff and personnel. The host country's contributions were considered an effort to facilitate and assist international students in staying and studying in a country other than their home country.

1.5.6 Public Universities

Public universities, often known as state universities or government universities, are government-funded and administered institutes of higher learning. These universities are built and maintained using public finances, often from state or national governments. They are intended to provide a wide range of students with affordable education (Guzman-Valenzuela, 2016). In this research, four selected public universities were involved: Universiti Malaya, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, and Universiti Sains Malaysia. These four public universities were out of twenty-two public universities founded in Malaysia.

1.6 Limitation of Study

1.6.1 Theoretical Constraints

The Cross-Cultural Adaptation Theory of Kim Young Yun served as the main basis for this study. Despite providing a thorough description of intercultural adaptation, Kim's approach was initially created in a Western setting with a primary focus on immigrants and sojourners in the US (Kim, 2001, 2017). Because of this, the model can have built-in cultural biases that fail to adequately represent the complex socio-religious and linguistic dynamics found in Asian nations like Malaysia. While Social Adaptation Theory was included to expand the breadth, the theoretical underpinnings are still Western-centric and may ignore important regional subtleties such as strong hierarchical academic norms, multicultural religion practices, and collectivist beliefs.

1.6.2 Methodological Constraints

In this study, 24 informants—12 international postgraduate students and 12 administrative staff members from four public Research Universities (RUs) in Malaysia—were recruited using a quota sampling technique and a qualitative research design. Although this approach made it possible to examine participants' lived

experiences in great detail, it has a number of methodological drawbacks. First off, universities in Malaysia's more conservative and linguistically diverse regions, like Terengganu, Kelantan, Kedah, and Sabah, were not included in the sample; instead, it was restricted to RUs situated in urban or central areas. It is possible that this absence limited the study's capacity to identify more widespread cultural differences in the adaption process. Second, the majority of interviews were done online because of limitations during the data gathering stage. Although required, this might have hindered rapport-building with participants, limited nonverbal communication cues, and decreased the degree of interpersonal interaction. Thirdly, the study only used one technique for data analysis—Thematic Network Analysis with colour coding through ATLAS.ti—instead of using other triangulation techniques like document reviews or focus groups. As a result, even though the results are reliable in the context of the study, they might not be as reliable or generalisable to larger populations.

1.6.3 Practical and Policy Gaps

This study found that university employees have a variety of responsibilities in helping students adjust, although many of them lacked specialised training for working abroad. This draws attention to a policy need in professional development and capacity building for support and non-academic workers. These implications are still preliminary and would benefit from more confirmation in policy-driven research, even if the findings point to crucial areas for institutional intervention, such as the development of culturally sensitive training and enhanced communication protocols.

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter will help compile the significance of the study and the problems the international student faced while residing in Malaysia, including the review of related topics and previous studies that the researcher wishes to shed light on. They are compiled here as a compilation of justification, and general issues were discussed to give the readers a better understanding of this research.

2.1 Adaptation and Migration

Human migration often occurs in accordance with the demands of life (Kim, 2001). Students usually migrate to another country to continue their studies. This migration demands that they get to know and deepen their local culture. In this migration process, adaptation needs to be done to ensure they can adapt to the new environment (Bethel et al., 2020). Hofstede (Alqarni, 2022) contends that despite language and discourse playing a significant part in these exchanges, intercultural encounters do not always result in mutual understanding. Adapting to a new place will often take some time, depending on how quickly an individual adapts. These individuals will try to adapt to a new social environment where these differences can pose problems. Challenges and problems that arise, such as bringing the image, are new experiences this group will face (Tajima, 2020). However, the situation may be different for a country with a different origin than Malaysia. Cultural differences, lifestyles, languages, and other differences require every migrating person to adapt naturally (Kasza et al., 2021; Falavarjani et al., 2020). The aspect of intercultural communication provides an opportunity for them to determine the self-behaviour that has indeed been inculcated in the original culture and be defined as intercultural adaptation, which is the changes individuals undergo to form relationships with the host community in a country (Kasza et al., 2021). Koo et al., (2021) stated that

intercultural adaptation involves understanding and incorporating the host culture's behaviours, values, and beliefs into one's original cultural perspective. In comparison, Kagan and Cohen (1990) believe that Intercultural adaptation is a process that involves several interrelated factors of behavioural, cognitive, affective, and demographic aspects and results in various stages of adjustment from cultural assimilation to cultural transmutation. The students' theoretical perspectives, acculturation, and cultural adaptation are characterised as a combination of strategies to adapt while away from their comfort zone (Azram et al., 2024).

2.2 Intercultural Communication

When the Foreign Service Institute was founded in the United States in 1946, the term Intercultural Communication (IC) was first used by cross-cultural researchers. It was developed in response to the demand for instruction, specific terms in the languages, and the anthropological and cultural understanding of various cultural groups by foreign diplomats and country ambassadors. As a result of Hall's 1959 book "The Silent Language," which translated abstract anthropological ideas into the material world and later expanded the anthropological view of culture to include communication, the phrase has become omnipresent (MacDonald, 2022). Since then, the literature examining many civilizations has linked culture and communication. Many academics in this discipline have argued the words for intercultural communication, which are also known as multi, inter, trans, or cross (Baker, 2022). On the other hand, Machart (2018) and Welsch (1999) favour the term "transcultural," Song and Cadman (2012) prefer the term "multicultural" to describe the intercultural notion. In the meantime, intercultural communication should address the complexity of aspects that transcend culture and recognise lesser cultures in addition to larger ones (Lotman, 2024). Practically speaking, cross-cultural communication should be able to apply outside the culture itself, particularly "the ability to read the culture, which emerges from beneath the universal cultural processes" (Holliday, 2021).

Intercultural communication can serve as an analytical tool for observing differences and encounters while dealing with individuals from other backgrounds, as

well as a means of comprehending the significance of cultural variations (Chen et al., 2020). Hence, in terms of this research, the observation of interests between the international students and the staff from the host university. Intercultural communication, according to Chen et al. (2020), is a way to understand other cultures by examining the communication objectives or language distinctions that need to be valued and interpreted differently for the contact to succeed.

The term "art of knowing and being understood by the audience of another culture" (IC) refers to the ability to communicate with individuals or small groups of people from a different culture (Sitaram, 1980). Similarly, IC refers to sharing information between individuals from various cultural backgrounds (Sabijanovna, 2022). The fact that communicants are representatives of several cultures greatly affects and, in some cases, determines the direction of their conversation. The theory of intercultural communication examines this interplay. This study defines IC as an interaction between people or groups from various cultural, religious, and racial backgrounds, which international students represent. This interaction can either positively or negatively affect how well the international students are able to adapt to a new, foreign environment. The main persona that will contribute to intercultural communication is the international students and the staff in the host university.

2.3 International students' challenges

Challenges faced by international students have long been a concern to the host university, whether in the Western region, the European region, or Asia. Although intercultural challenges were shown not to impact these students' learning abilities, they had a detrimental effect on their ability to sustain their learning (Yassin et al., 2020). In 2010, a study focusing on Malaysia found that the students faced culture, climate, and care as a form of obstacle to them (Ma hmud et al., 2010). Five years later, in 2015, a study involving 150 international students in Malaysian public universities discovered that the weather and care (transportation and accommodation) continue to pose significant challenges to these students. However, these challenges

have been supplemented by new factors like making friends, communicating, eating, working, and time zones (An & Chiang, 2015; Akanwa, 2015).

As Lashari et al, (2023) stated, the most significant challenges experienced by international students include those related to adjusting to their new surroundings, psychological and cultural variables, language, academic challenges, and social issues. This study's findings resulted in five acculturation strategies and outcomes: assimilation, which involves building relationships with new cultures; (ii) separation of values and characteristics of the original culture based on denial of the influence of the new culture; (iii) marginalisation of native cultures in daily life practises; (iv) integration of preserving the original culture while exploring the unique culture; and (v) transformation of new and old cultures. The three factors for the international students adaptation factor, which are the Personal, External, and Institutional factors, were selected as the main factor based on Kim Young Yun's Cross-cultural Adaptation Model. These three factors highlight the importance of personal communication and social communication to help the adaptation process. The elaboration regarding the challenges posed by international students in terms of these three factors will be described in the sub-topic below.

2.3.1 Personal Factor

Higher quality education programs, affordable tuition fees, and a higher standard environment are the key motivational factors attracting Korean students to study in Malaysia (Kumar & Garg, 2021). These kinds of physical adaptations usually act as an obstacle in the international student's adaptation process. The apparent social and religious similarity between Middle Eastern students and Malaysia motivates these students to come to Malaysia to further their education (Al-Aghbas, 2020). However, it would be different if Malaysian students furthered their studies in countries with different cultural backgrounds.

Cultural shock, acculturation, and cultural adaptation are among the issues of intercultural relations (Pekerti et al., 2020) that often plague the lives of international

students who migrate to Malaysia to continue their studies. Among the topics of cultural adaptation include different academic cultures, local cultures that are very contrary to one's own culture, stereotypes of the local community, language problems, accommodation, and others that can contribute to acculturation stress throughout the study period. Cultural shock is a significant phenomenon during these contacts in a foreign cultural setting. Cultural shock has been characterised by many authors in many situations, whether it is in business (War et al., 2022; Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars, 2021), tourism (Pung et al., 2020), and even among countries in the world (Bai & Wang, 2022) and it is a concern because of the effect towards them. However, Kim's definition of the culture shock state is currently the most thorough since, while the stages outlined in other theories are relevant, cultural shock cannot be thought of as a linear process. Cultural shock, in Kim's opinion, is not a phenomenon that is linearly adapting and changing but rather one that is continual and cyclical, developing intercultural communication and adaptation abilities through a continuous process of learning and development. The author prefers to refer to this occurrence as "stress" rather than "culture shock" and views it as a beneficial aspect of the adaptation process (Kim, 1988; Kim, 2001; Kim, 2017).

The principal source of funding for most colleges nowadays is recruiting overseas students (Marom, 2023). However, international students from China are known to be the students with the lowest proficiency in English (Lan & Vijayaratham, 2020). Therefore, particular attention should be paid to cultivating and developing psychological capabilities to increase students' resilience (Khairina et al., 2020). Some academics distinguish psychological adaptation as nurturing personal well-being, such as self-esteem and social adaptation (Bethel et al., 2020; Jackson, 2020). However, studies have shown rises in depression (Reid et al., 2024), anxiety (Kibbey et al., 2021), and students tend to be alone and rely on social media to gain interaction (Bonsaksen et al., 2021) among vulnerable groups such as youngsters (Liu et al., 2020) and older individuals as well as the general population (Vahia et al., 2020). Depression is among the related concerns when it comes to psychological adaptation factors. A study mentioning self-efficacy and self-esteem as a healing factor proves that international students with higher self-esteem continuously struggle to successfully navigate intercultural adjustment to uphold their deservingness (Cao & Meng, 2022).

Although there are few cross-cultural studies on self-esteem, several studies have found a link between people's self-esteem and their feelings of loneliness and despair, as well as their life satisfaction and a decreased likelihood of engaging in depressive symptoms (Abd Malek et al., 2023).

Age of international students who are still in their early 20s and lack maturity, educational background, family influence, status as a non-resident alien for an extended period in the host country, the cultural distance between the countries of origin and the host country, and the justification for student mobility to continue their studies abroad are some factors that influence acceptance or rejection of acculturation (Othman et al., 2022). Hence, this study chose postgraduate students who are, on average, in their late 20s to compare the relationship between maturity and the challenges in their phases of intercultural adaptation.

2.3.2 External Factor

The lack of interaction between postgraduate international students and local students causes them to be very slow and not proficient at intercultural communication (Bond, 2022). For adaptation and acculturation to happen, contact with different cultural groups is important (Jackson, 2020). Discussing "images of others" in culturally diverse tandem teams has been demonstrated to improve multiperspective and critical cultural awareness in particular (Irwin, 2020). As people get used to the unfamiliar environment, the acculturation process involves varying degrees of discomfort. In order to achieve Graduate on Time (GoT) with a significant CGPA (Cumulative Grade Point Average) by the end of the semester, it is a concern that their social intelligence was deemed an important issue. While coping strategy has a non-significant negative correlation with Grade Point Average (GPA), social competency has a strong positive relationship with students' GPA (Kim, 2017).

Their sociodemographic traits might significantly impact international students' potential for sociocultural adaptation in the host country (Shehata & Abdeldaim, 2020). This study found that older students tend to have adaptation

problems, especially when they do not have the essential ability to converse in the native language. In a study focusing on Social and Cultural Adaptation, this element has a high overall total mean of 91.75 over 130. It could be explained by the informants' extremely high level of adaptation to Malaysia. At the same time, language adaptation and social adaptation have relatively low total means among the sub-scales, indicating that students from other countries are unable to quickly learn and understand the local language and, as a result, are unable to form and sustain positive relationships with local people. Farsad and Modaressi discovered in 2023 that language ego, or the pride of speaking one's tongue or native language while studying in a different place, might hinder cultural adaptation for international students.

The ongoing engagement with the local community promotes the individual's various cultures. But sometimes, the stereotypes or prejudices might affect the students' mental health by leading them to stress and overthinking. The gap between the local and international students is one of the issues. A study done in China relays the issue of the locals not being open to international students, especially by preferring students from Western countries and making it hard for international students from other Asian countries to find part-time jobs or communicate at the counter. (Antwi et al., 2022). In this case, these students should learn from the Nigerian students. Nigerian students are among those who do not experience the honeymoon period when they are entirely focused on finishing their studies and are unconcerned with the prejudices of the local community (Ahmad et al., 2016). China is now the country that sends the most students overseas for higher education, sending over 500,000 Chinese students abroad to study in the last few years and having the most challenging time learning the Malay language as the official language of Malaysia (Singh & Jack, 2022). Considering that academic performance mostly rests on students' capacity to read materials, compose assignments, and exam answers in English, a survey revealed that international students experience difficulties with their language abilities at the start of their academic studies (Yassin et al., 2020).

The degree of homesickness the students experienced decreased with their ability to adjust to their environment (Rathakrishnan et al., 2021). Homesickness, a frequent sense of distress when one is leaving their family or home and being in a

strange environment, is characterised as a strong longing feeling where individuals may be anxious. (Lashari et al., 2023; Rathakrishnan et al., 2021). However, these challenges can be solved when the assimilation of culture happens so that the adaptation process can happen smoothly. When a person continues his studies in a new country, such as Malaysia, there is already an enclave of the local community. For example, an Indonesian student studying in Malaysia will find it easier to adopt because more Indonesians are in Malaysia, creating Indonesian villages. For example, it is easier for them to socialise and get food from Indonesia. Similarly, students from the Middle East find it easier to adapt to Malaysia because many Arabs are in Malaysia, and there is a growth of Arab food restaurants in Malaysia (Hassan & Nurfarahiyah, 2020; Mohamed, 2020).

As mentioned in Chapter 2, Kim Young Yun highlights the importance of experiencing culture shocks to adapt well to the new environment. Hence, many studies have made it their study goal to highlight the significance of promoting socio-cultural adaptation, social sustainability, and lowering homesickness among international students (Rathakrishnan et al., 2021). If these goals were entertained as a part of the adaptation process, they would gradually lead to culture shock, which has long been a source of concern for overseas travellers' well-being and mental health (Pacheco, 2020). Despite rapid globalisation and the introduction of various technologies that have been found to 'buffer' the effects of culture shock over the last three decades, conceptualizations of the phenomenon's nature, prevalence, and effects have not been explicitly modernised to suit such a contemporary social landscape. In proportion to the above issues, the expected impact is to increase the likelihood of the postgraduate students graduating on time and not prolong their stay as students but apply their knowledge towards the development of their country and our country. Hence, it is expected that the findings of this study may contribute to the happiness and satisfaction of international students living abroad, which is quite a concern to scholars studying when hosting postgraduate international students, which the study says to be more meticulous of their rights (Razgulin et al., 2023; Yılmaz & Temizkan, 2022). Based on this study's results, the institution in the host country may design activities that will facilitate their less difficult cultural acculturation and decreased stress levels.

A study shows that having and using a smartphone and the internet can help international students communicate more effectively with international postgraduate students to ensure they have no trouble reaching their families or close friends for assistance (Yorganci & Sadrimovahed, 2024). With the widespread usage of smartphones and available communication apps like Facebook, Whatsapp, WeChat, and others, it is quite convenient for people to contact whomever they want. The international students were usually connected to their home networks, highlighting the importance of social media in keeping people linked at home (Y. S. Kim & Kim, 2016). A total of 300 Korean students studying in Malaysia state that a higher quality education programme, lower tuition prices, and a higher standard atmosphere are the primary motivators encouraging them to study in Malaysia (Kumar & Garg, 2021). This statement confirms that a lifestyle has to be suited to the original lifestyle of the international students in the new environment.

2.3.3 Institutional Factor

In an attempt for the university administration to be more concerned about the acculturation implications of survival and interconnectedness with academic achievement among international students, the discussion of empirical data is woven with a selection of narratives referring to the original dialogue of the research informants (Othman et al., 2022). Therefore, one of the most significant and successful variables in supporting the process of adaptation is the university's cultural competence so that academic adjustments can be made. The international students' performance will not be affected (Abd Malek & Ahmad, 2023). Considering that the academic reputation of a university, Malaysian culture (Culture based on Islam), environment, and low cost of living are some of the criteria post-graduate students consider when choosing public universities in Malaysia, these factors are the factors that the country needs to improve when issues of the enrolment of international students are mentioned (Lashari et al., 2023). The research also emphasises the importance of global cooperation and networking in advancing internationalisation in Malaysian higher education. Research findings have demonstrated that the Malaysian higher education system reasonably emphasizes political, academic, and socio-cultural justifications (Manzoor et al., 2021). When international students adapt, their cultural background—

in this case, their place of origin—can significantly impact their academic success (Tabassum & Akhter, 2020). The Malaysian government has been working to enhance the administration of international students. For instance, rather than being provided yearly, student visas are now granted for the duration of the programme, and visa applications may be submitted online and tracked in real time (Soyer et al., 2020)

2.4 Staff's contribution

Staff contribution includes the programmes curated by the university. The staffs act as the executor of the programme, but also act on their personal choice. Hence, the section is divided into two, which are the work factor and the personal factor. When it comes to international students' satisfaction, most of the study (Deuchar, 2022; Siebold & Yimin, 2023; Yılmaz & Temizkan, 2022) comes up with staff contribution towards the adaptation process as one of the important factors. This factor covers the academician (lecturers, teaching assistants, tutors) and non-academician (customer service, treasurer, visa counter, etc.) as the face of the host university and one of the first groups of people that can impact the international student's impression to the host country. Hence, staff contribution, whether personal or work requirement, is important in helping the adaptation process of international students. Following a survey, Malaysian universities still have insufficient governance, research, learning, and teaching infrastructure (Lashari et al., 2023). It is necessary for employees to get involved and contribute to improving the following factors. This obligation does not solely fall on the shoulders of the international office. The factors this research intended to cover are elaborated on in the sub-topic below.

2.4.1 Work Factor

A study found that resilience for international students can be built using social support systems (Khairina et al., 2020). Based on a study's findings, code-switching and code-mixing have been successfully employed in cross-cultural communication to overcome language obstacles and narrow cultural gaps in the workplace (Martha et al.,

2022). A study held at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia discovered that services provided by libraries, medical centres, and graduate affairs were reasonable for postgraduate students (Mohamed, 2020). As a result of the more outstanding tuition fees charged and the slow service provided by the counter at the international office, international students are expected to receive benefits with higher expectations than local students, such as those connected to research and study (Mohamed, 2020).

The factors for international students to choose a university are the quality and reputation, learning environment/facilities, cost of studying/living, non-academic/administrative activities, and perceived value for money (Lashari et al., 2023). International students took full advantage of campus-wide activities and resources, but there is a need to establish customised programmes and resources to address the difficulties that are particular to these students (Aloka et al., 2023)

The findings of this study indicate that overseas students in Malaysia should receive proper social support. Therefore, while creating intervention programmes to encourage sociocultural adjustment among overseas students, universities where such students are enrolled, must emphasise social assistance (Razgulin et al., 2023). It has been discovered that the library staff at USIM have to converse in both English and Arabic to adapt because most of the international students enrolled as postgraduate students are from the Middle East (Al-Aghbas, 2020).

2.4.2 Personal Factor

Besides students, self-reflection also needs to be done by the university staff. Staff must be able to adapt to be the face of the institution as their workplace when interacting with international students if their work is to be completed smoothly. (Ismail et al., 2020; Martha et al., 2022). Language proficiency, work culture adjustment, media usage, daily connection with the clients, interaction among staff and students, and genuine aid for foreigners were among the common problems they faced (Antwi et al., 2022). Communication between staff and international students in handling matters such as complaints, receiving and giving one-to-one advice,

attending consultations, and maintaining a great internal ecosystem between staff and students is important to ensure that information transfers are done effectively. Since this research focuses on staff from departments and offices besides the international students, it is important to pay attention to the fact that all staff are able to handle and assist the international students. Previous research shows that only staff from international offices were to be the top priority in having the skills such as conversing in English, relaying accurate messages from international students to the higher-ups, and, most importantly, the ability to accentuate the skills to work diligently during the intercultural exchange interaction between the staff and international students (Borsetto, 2023). By illuminating the fact that Malaysia is a country that has a long way to go before achieving its quota in receiving international students at all levels of education (Ebrahimi & Yusoff, 2020), it is crucial that Malaysia can provide staff with matching skills of handling a big number of international students from various cultures.

By reviewing the issues and latest trends in coping with the endemic era and new generations of international students, this study focuses on the importance of international students working together with the existing contributions by the staff in host universities.

2.5 Theoretical Framework

This study explores a number of theoretical theories in order to offer a more comprehensive viewpoint on intercultural adaptation. The Social Adaptation Theory by Yoesoep Edhie Rachmad (2022) is examined in addition to Kim Young Yun's Cross-Cultural Adaptation Model in order to comprehend how people adapt behaviourally and cognitively to changing social contexts. Although social adaptation theory emphasises emotional control, stress management, and psychological flexibility, it does not specifically address communication skills, which are essential in cross-cultural settings. Kim's model, on the other hand, highlights the importance of mass and interpersonal communication as the catalyst for adaptation over time. Kim's model offers a more organised and interaction-oriented perspective, which is appropriate given the breadth of this study, which focusses on how international postgraduate students engage with various university stakeholders in a culturally complex environment like Malaysia. Because of its ability to explain adaptation as a cyclical, communicative, and sociocultural process, Kim's Cross-Cultural Adaptation Model serves as the main theoretical framework for this study, even though it acknowledges the value of other models.

2.5.1 Cross-cultural Adaptation Model by Kim Young Yun

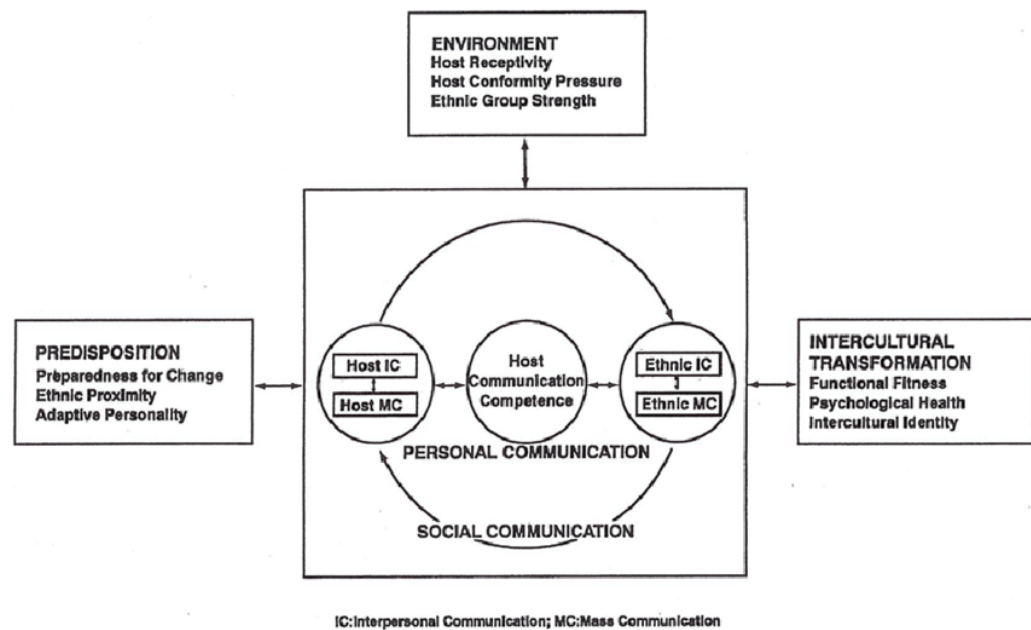


Figure 2.1 Cross-cultural Adaptation Model (Kim, 2017)

This study uses the cross-cultural adaptation model pioneered by Young Yun Kim through the integrative communication theory of cross-cultural adaptation, which was developed in 2017. It is developed based on three presumptions: people have a natural desire to adapt and change, that social environment adaptation happens through communication, and that adaptation is a difficult and dynamic process. The integrative communication theory of cross-cultural adaptation offers two models; Process Model and the Structural Model (in this research it is known as the Cross-cultural Model) to explain how and why people are continuously exposed to interactions with the host environment when moving from a familiar home culture to a new culture (Othman et al., 2021). However, this study will only use one of the two models from the integrative communication theory of cross-cultural adaptation, which is the Cross-cultural Adaptation Model. In the next paragraph, this research will describe the function of these two models.

The first model, which is the Process Model, describes the stress-adaptation-growth dynamic as a dialectical psychological movement through a cycle that supports the gradual transformation of an individual to have better psychological health in the host country's environment and promotes cross-cultural identity orientation and cultural boundaries. At the same time, the stress-adaptation-growth dynamic is depicted in the process model as the dialectic and cyclical psychological movement underlying an individual's gradual transformation toward greater functional fitness and psychological health in relation to the host environment as well as an emerging intercultural identity orientation beyond the confines of a single culture (Kim, 2017). However, the researcher has decided not to apply this model since it only addresses a portion of the adaptation process—namely, the relationship between stress and adaption dynamics—and does not address the entire process that international students will encounter.

As mentioned above, the researcher has chosen to use the second model, the Cross-cultural Adaptation Model, which is also known as the Structural Model of Cross-cultural Adaptation, which highlights the ability of individuals to communicate according to the cultural norms and practices of the host country and active involvement in interpersonal activities and communication with the host country, also serves as the main engine driving the process of intercultural adjustment. The communication factor explained through the model is how an individual influences, and is influenced by, the conditions in the host country's environment and the individual's particular and ethnic tendencies (Kim, 2001). In addition, this Cross-cultural Adaptation Model describes how individuals adapt their communication with people from different cultures based on previous experience. The structural model also emphasises that the major force behind an individual's adaptation process is their capacity to communicate in accordance with the host cultural norms and practises, as

well as their active participation in these activities in interpersonal and mass communication. These communication parameters are also addressed in terms of how they affect and are affected by important aspects of the host environment as well as the personal and racial preferences of the individual.

The results are expected to be a novel evolution of the adaptation process using the Young Yun Kim formula of the cross-cultural adaptation model. This process is considered a defence mechanism to lessen the impact of the challenges raised in this study. Using this model, Kim Young Yun also explains the existence of multiple forces surrounding the communicative interface between the individual and the host environment, ranging from environmental conditions to the individual's ethnic and personal predispositions. According to this notion, the cross-cultural adaptation process is a cooperative venture in which a stranger and the host culture work together (Mandari & Boer, 2021). Individuals are ultimately responsible for this process. Additionally, it is not an uncommon occurrence that only great people can do. Instead, it is merely an instance of a typical human mutability showing up in the work of regular individuals "extending" themselves beyond the stale and well-known culture.

2.5.2 Social Adaptation Theory by Yoesoep Edhie Rachmad

As the objective in Chapter 1 has stated, this study aims to compare the compatibility of the theories regarding cross-cultural adaptation in Asian context. The need to comprehend how individuals and groups adapt in dynamic and frequently unpredictable social situations led to the introduction of the Social Adaptation Theory by Yoesoep Edhie Rachmad in 2022. Since it seems to be relatable to the international students capability to adapt while studying, this research has choose to examine and compare this theory in depth. Being able to adjust to social changes has grown more crucial in an era of fast globalisation and digitisation. This theory was created by Rachmad to offer direction on how people might modify their attitudes and actions to succeed and be happy in a variety of social situations.

According to this idea, social adaptation is the process by which people alter their behaviour, thoughts, and emotions in response to shifts in their social surroundings (Pikulýtska, 2022). The foundation of this theory is that self-awareness, flexibility, and the capacity to engage with a variety of people and groups are necessary for successful social adaptation. The theory highlights how crucial it is to comprehend social dynamics and deal with change in a constructive and productive way. Based on the idea that people who find it difficult to adjust may experience stress and challenges as a result of fast societal changes, including cultural upheavals, technological breakthroughs, and economic restructuring. Adapting to new standards and expectations can be difficult for many people, which can have an impact on their wellbeing. It draws attention to the pressing need for strategies that support people in improving their capacity for social adaptability.

The core ideas of social adaptation theory include helping people acquire the abilities and tactics necessary to adjust to changing social norms (Razgulin, Argustaitė-Zailskienė, & Šmigelskas, 2023). This involves developing effective communication techniques, emotional control, and self-awareness. The importance of cognitive flexibility and the capacity to see things from various angles is also emphasised by the theory. People can lessen the stress related to adaptation and more effectively navigate social changes by doing this (Lambert, 2020). The theory's primary considerations include social relationship quality, stress management skills, and cognitive flexibility. Life happiness, social interaction, and successful communication are other markers. These factors can be measured by surveys, interviews, and observations of conduct in social contexts.

Although there are obstacles to implementing this theory, such as reluctance to change, a lack of awareness of the significance of social adaptation, and a lack of resources, these obstacles can be overcome with the help of strong social support, a culture that encourages adaptation, and continuous education (Razgulin et al., 2023; Yorganci & Sadrimovahed, 2024). The ability to establish environments that encourage engagement and individual adaptability is also essential for success. The ability of people to adjust to social changes is crucial for success and well-being, according to social adaptation theory. The theory offers a thorough framework for

comprehending and controlling social adaptation processes in a variety of domains. When applied correctly, this theory can assist people and organisations in gaining the abilities they need to adjust to changes and improve their social and professional lives.

This study explores a number of theoretical theories in order to offer a more comprehensive viewpoint on intercultural adaptation. The Social Adaptation Theory by Yoesoep Edhie Rachmad (2022) is examined in addition to Kim Young Yun's Cross-Cultural Adaptation Model in order to comprehend how people adapt behaviourally and cognitively to changing social contexts. Although social adaptation theory emphasises emotional control, stress management, and psychological flexibility, it does not specifically address communication skills, which are essential in cross-cultural settings. On the other hands, Kim's model, on the other hand, highlights the importance of mass and interpersonal communication as the catalyst for adaptation over time. Kim's model offers a more organised and interaction-oriented perspective, which is appropriate given the breadth of this study, which focusses on how international postgraduate students engage with various university stakeholders in a culturally complex environment like Malaysia. Because of its ability to explain adaptation as a cyclical, communicative, and sociocultural process, Kim's Cross-Cultural Adaptation Model serves as the main theoretical framework for this study, even though it acknowledges the value of other models.

2.6 Conceptual Framework

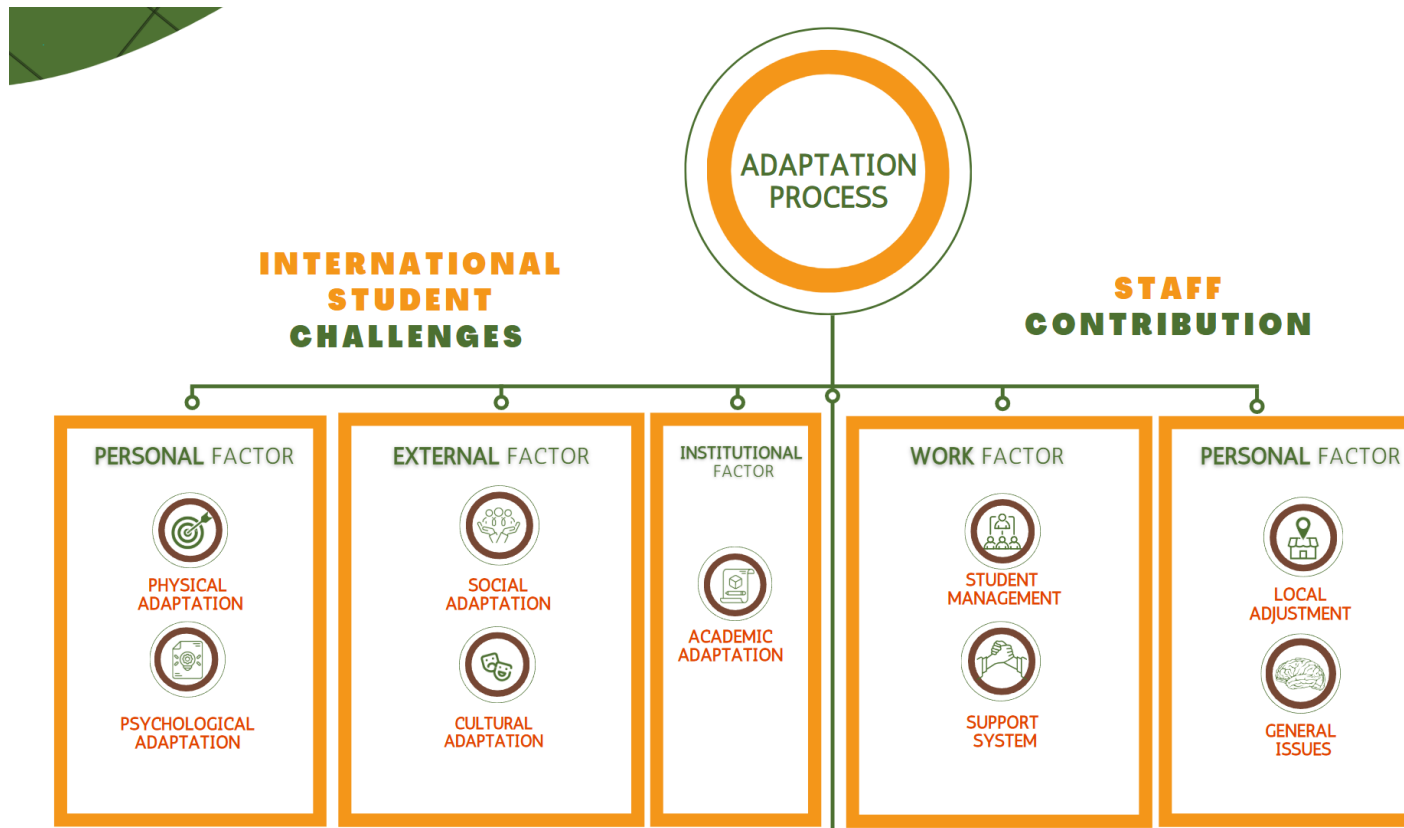


Figure 2.2 Variables Developed Based On The Theoretical Framework

The paragraph above describes a specific conceptual framework developed to address challenges faced by international students in Malaysia and the factors of contribution by the staff in Malaysian public universities. In terms of international students, the framework focuses on three factors: personal, external, and institutional, which are seen as challenges to the student's experience. These factors are further categorized into psychological, physical, social, cultural, and academic adaptation issues. The framework highlights the role of staff members in Malaysian universities as the initial point of contact and facilitators for international students to interact with the local culture and navigate the new environment. The staff's contribution is viewed as crucial in enhancing the study experience of international students, who are considered clients of the university. The framework identifies five specific issues to address: support system, cultural and social adaptation, student management, and general subjects. The development of the conceptual framework is supported by a literature review that examines previous and current problems faced by international students and the contribution of staff members. The framework draws on the Cross-cultural Adaptation Model, which provides a theoretical basis for understanding the challenges and adaptation processes in intercultural contexts. This framework also aims to provide a systematic approach to addressing the identified challenges and enhancing the experience of international students studying in Malaysia. By considering the personal, external, and institutional factors and focusing on specific issues, the framework seeks to create a supportive and inclusive environment for international student.

2.7 Extraction of element

Based on Figure 2.3, the researcher has chosen to select a few elements based on the literature review. Issues portrayed in the literature review were sorted in the form of the conceptual framework in sub-chapter 2.6. This chapter will explaining the rephrasing of the elements extracted by the researcher to match the conceptual framework this research has developed. In the Malaysian context, Kim's paradigm is operationalised in Figure 2.2. This study incorporates institutional and social adaption subcomponents derived from local interview data, while retaining the original categories of predisposition, environment, and communicative ability.

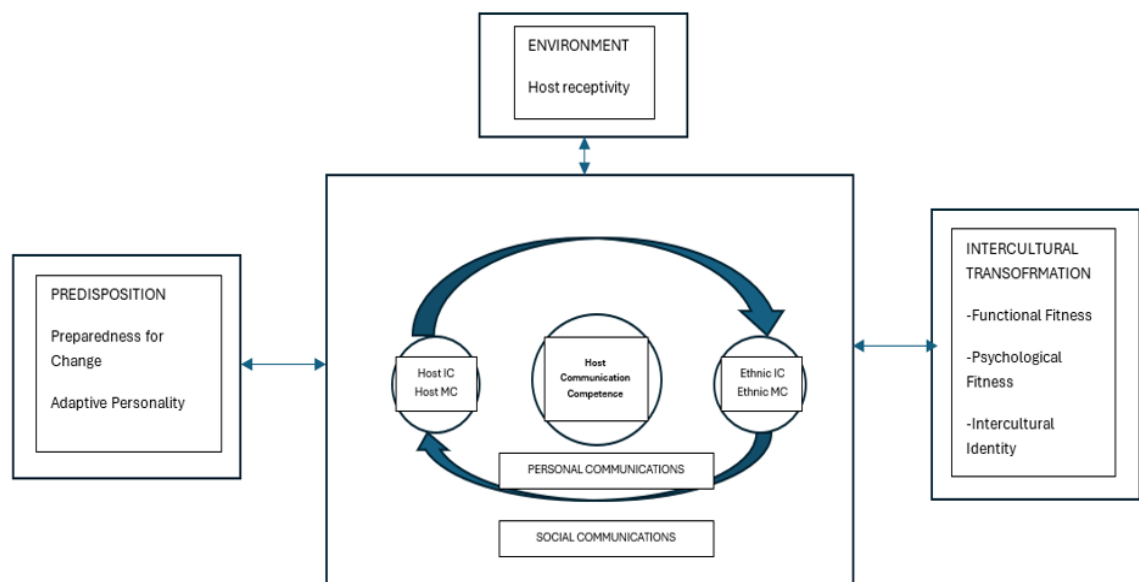


Figure 2.3 Extracted element from Kim Young Yun's model

Figure 2.3 above shows a few elements from the original framework to serve as the backbone of this research. For the elements IC and MC in the Host and Ethnic section, IC means Intrapersonal Communications (interaction between two people) and MC means Mass Communication (interaction between a person and a large group of people) (Kim, 2017). Besides rephrasing the elements into more relatable words, this research has also rearranged the position of every heading to be more fitted into the rephrased categories, as shown in Figure 2.2. Refer to Table 1 below for more information on the rephrased elements. The rephrased categories were extracted from the Kim Young Yun's Cross-cultural Adaptation Model developed in 2017 which were recontextualised to suit Malaysian's setting.

Table 1 Elements and Extracted Elements

Elements	Rephrased Elements
Predisposition	Personal Factor
Environment	External Factor
Intercultural Transfromation	Institutional Factor
Adaptive Personality	Social Adaptation
Preparedness for Change	Academic adaptation
Functional Fitness	Physical Adaptation
Psychological Fitness	Psychological Adaptation
Intercultural Identity	Cultural Adaptation
Host receptivity	Staff Contribution
Host communication competence; Personal Communications	Personal Factor
Host communication competence; Social Communications	Work Factor
Host	Staffs
Ethnic	Students

As explained in the paragraph above, Table 1 shows the rephrased elements that were arranged in simpler words. The first category for International Students is Predisposition which is rephrased into Personal Factors. Under the Predisposition, there are two factors which are Functional Fitness (Physical Adaptation) and Psychological Fitness (Psychological Adaptation). Secondly, there is the arrangement of Environment (External Factor) to be fitted as the heading for two factors which are Adaptive Personality (Social Adaptation) and Intercultural Identity (Institutional Factor). The third category is Intercultural Transformation (Academic Adaptation) which has one factor which is the Preparedness for Change (Academic Adaptation).

The second category is for the Staff Contribution and it is rephrased from the element Host Receptivity. There are two category under the Staff Contribution which are the Work Factor (Host communication competence; Social Communications) and Personal Factor (Host communication competence; Personal Communications).

Lastly, the researcher has chosen to portray the Host elements as the Staff and Ethnic as the Students.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter discusses the type of research design, population, and sampling. This chapter also discusses the exact planning for the data collection. Hence, the data collection and data analysis to be used are also elaborated. The research will revolve around international postgraduate students and the management staff at Malaysia's Research University (RU). Interviews will be held according to the students' and staff's free time. Although most of the interviews will not be face-to-face and will be replaced with online interviews, the researcher will be able to obtain responses through the suggested communication platform.

3.1 Research Design

The study design uses a qualitative methodology which allows for reflections on the cultural values, language use, and conflict resolution strategies at the RU in question, as well as comments on the informants' intercultural experiences while pursuing higher education using the Cross-cultural Adaptation Model as the framework. The qualitative methods are interwoven and created to frame the experiences of the students and staff involved into a framework. The study explores the ways in which

international students experience their adaptation process as well as how they are restricted by psychological, physical, study system, social, and cultural forces. The recognition may be able to allow them to empower themselves as they negotiate their relationships with classmates and university staff members who come from different backgrounds by taking the informants' perspectives.

This research adopted qualitative research. The data of this design is in the form of subjective answers from interviews that will be conducted. Questions are constructed according to the research questions that have been stated above. Every informant who will be interviewed will be chosen based on specific characteristics that are connected to the hypothesis stated. This research design was selected because perceptions are subjective and uniquely defined by each person's subjective view (Mezmir, 2020). Hence, the quantitative research design cannot be chosen because of the minimal answers given in each survey.

The Cross-Cultural Adaptation Model by Kim Young Yun serves as the primary framework for this study's deductive qualitative research design. In deductive qualitative research, data collection and analysis are guided by an established theoretical framework with the goal of assessing, developing, or improving the theory in light of empirical findings. This method enables researchers to methodically evaluate theoretical constructs in practical settings, which aids in the improvement of pre-existing models, as Fife and Gossner (2024) point out. A focused investigation of predetermined themes like host communication competence, personal predisposition, and environmental factors is made possible by Kim's model, which offers an organised lens through which to view the adaptation experiences of international postgraduate students in Malaysian universities.

3.1.1 Steps of conducting online interviews

Since the interviews were conducted during the pandemic era, the researcher has to be flexible and adapt to the COVID-19 situation, where travel restrictions were imposed on every citizen of Malaysia. Hence, the accessibility of the informants was

quite limited since many of the international students were sent back to their countries at the peak of the disease spread in 2019. To ensure the progress of this research successfully reached a conclusion, the online approach research was constructed using the Qualitative e-research Framework by Janet Salmons. This framework consists of eight categories, as shown in the figure below. The book *Online Interviews* provides key questions for the researcher to review in order to complete the process and complement the use of the provided framework. Figure 3.1 illustrates the framework provided by the book to build the interview process.

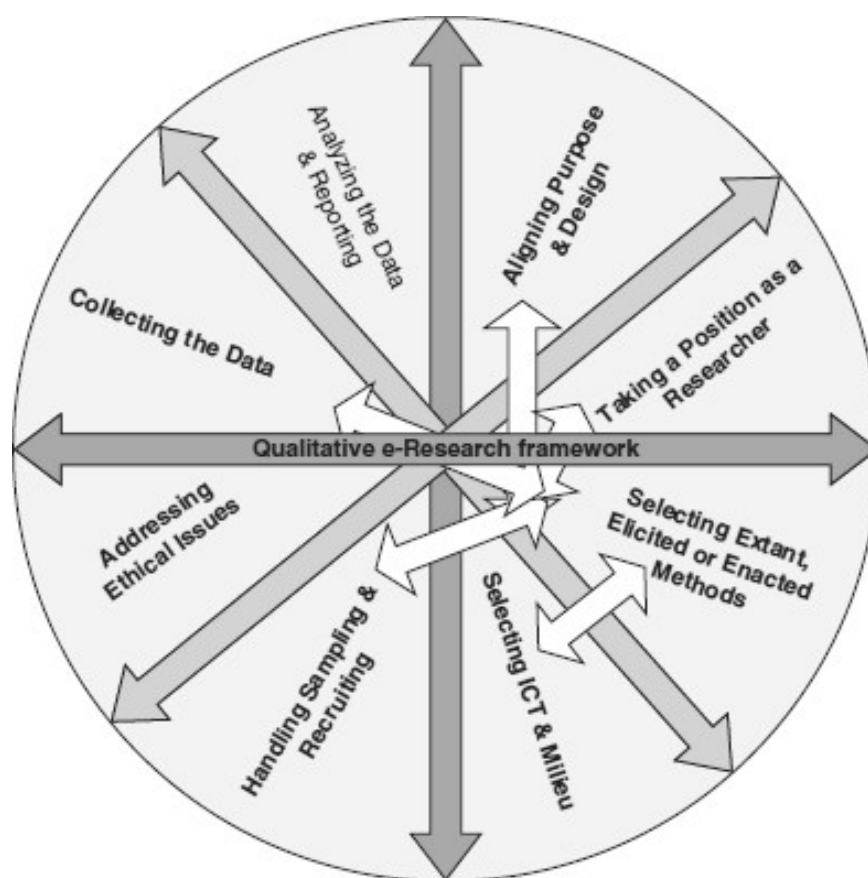


Figure 0.1 Qualitative e-Research framework (Salmons, 2017)

The research design for this study consists of several categories and key questions. In terms of aligning purpose and design, it is important to clearly state the study's goal and explain how it distinguishes itself from previous research. Additionally, the research objectives should align with relevant theories, methods, and techniques supported by scholarly sources while effectively communicating the study's

components. Regarding the researcher's position, disclosing any conflicts of interest or biases is crucial. If participants are sharing personal experiences, it should be clarified. The description of reflective processes and modifications made during the study helps provide transparency and improve the research process. When selecting data collection methods, explaining how online data collection was facilitated is important. Identifying barriers and strategies for accessing participant replies is crucial, as well as addressing any validity or credibility concerns and considering alternative options.

The choice of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and study environment should be clearly related to the study's goals and questions. Specifying the type of data to be collected and its relevance to the chosen ICT is essential. Additionally, stating technology requirements and providing alternatives, if needed, helps ensure a well-rounded design. Sampling and recruitment should be conducted carefully. Methodology and sampling plan compatibility should be ensured, and the sample's suitability should be justified based on the study objectives. Ethical practices should be followed, particularly concerning participant reliability and age, and necessary permissions for observations, archives, or records should be obtained.

Ethical issues need to be addressed throughout the study. Summarizing ethical concerns and protocols followed is important, as well as handling ethically contentious issues appropriately. Participants should be notified about the publication of findings, and their rights should be respected. Adherence to ethical standards imposed by the research site and community is essential while maintaining confidentiality and respecting human and digital identities. The data collection process should follow the study plan and techniques. Consideration should be given to participants' preferences, technology literacy, and access. Reflexive and recursive methods should be employed to monitor data collection.

Finally, the analysis and reporting of data are crucial stages. Describing the steps and significance of data analysis is important, as well as connecting the analysis to the chosen theory and methodology. Comparing findings with previous research and highlighting new issues is essential. Additionally, suggesting additional research based

on the study's outcomes helps advance the field. By addressing these categories and answering the key questions, the researcher can ensure a well-designed and ethically conducted study.

3.2 Scope of Research

3.2.1 Research Sample

Interviews involved a total of 24 informants, which were divided into 12 international postgraduate students and 12 staff from the faculty or the administrative division from four chosen RUs. Instead of randomly choosing these samples, the researcher used non-probability techniques to choose samples based on their subjective assessment. The researcher used the snowballing technique to gain access to informants. Typically, researchers began with a small number of initial contacts (known as seeds) who were invited to participate in the study because they met the requirements. These willing participants were then requested to suggest more contacts who might be willing participants, creating a chain of participants that grew in length. Sampling often ended when the desired sample size or saturation point was reached. Researchers studying qualitative research have shown that six to seven individuals are usually necessary for data saturation in a study population (Islam & Aldaihani, 2022). Furthermore, further research by Guest et al. (2020) supports earlier findings by indicating that the maximum degree of data saturation can be achieved with a sample size of twelve participants.

This technique gave the researcher access to all 24 informants by having access to the first and second informants, both international students and staff, and they introduced the next informants. The first and second informants were recruited by sending an official email to all four university representatives. For the international students, the researcher contacted the International Students Association, which includes UPMISA, UMISA, USM Buddy, and UKM Buddy, to provide three international students from each university. As for the staff, the researcher reached out

to the registrar's office for every university, and from that, the office distributed or nominated three of their staff to help do the interviews. The guideline of basic theory-based research provided by Makri and Neely (2021) is to have 20 to 30 interviews to satisfy the in-depth interview and provide enough data to elaborate the original model into a new theoretical model and meet the requirements of a new model, and Morse (1995) needs only six to be able to complement the usage of deductive approach. However, generally, to support this approach, among the earliest theories was Bertaux (1981), who stated that fifteen is the smallest sample that can be acquired for qualitative research. The latest theory adapted by Guest et al. (2006) has adapted this statement and is supported by Braun and Clarke (2021), who recently updated that the minimum bare for data saturation is twelve (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022) informants to eighteen (Fofana et al., 2020) informants.

Sample Criteria and Selection

In order to fulfil the stated objectives, it is determined that the informants should be selected from the population of the four RUs in Malaysia, namely Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), Universiti Malaya (UM), and Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM). The selection of the four RUs was based on their highest density of international student population. The researcher recruited interested individuals through email and messaging applications. Initially, the researcher contacted the first and second students and staff members through referrals from the International Office and Registrar Office. Subsequent informants were obtained using the snowballing method.

To enhance the richness of data collection through in-depth interviews, participants were chosen based on specific criteria, as described in the following paragraph. Given the limited accessible sample population, quota sampling was utilised. Quota sampling allows interviewers to determine the exact number of individuals or quotas with different characteristics to be interviewed (Islam & Aldaihani, 2022). The selection of informants was based on particular criteria, such as gender, age, and marital status, as these factors significantly influence their backgrounds and lifestyles (Worae & Edgerton, 2023).

For this study, the selected students were post-graduate students who had resided in Malaysia for more than one year. The chosen staff members had been handling international students for more than one year. However, this research focused on staff members who are not working in the international office but in other departments without specialized training in handling international students. Targeted departments included offices with customer service counters, faculties, and laboratory staff. This choice of informants aimed to ensure the participation of all personnel in the host university and their familiarity with handling international students.

3.2.2 Research Site

UKM, USM, UPM, and UM were the four locations chosen because of their high density of international students, and the high frequency of the administrative division staff handling international students is higher than in other universities. Among all the 20 public universities in Malaysia, these four prestigious universities are among the oldest and most prominent.

The higher education system was established to ensure that all 20 UA (*Universiti Awam*) which means public universities, can establish a reputation for having dynamic, competitive capacities as well as the capacity to foresee issues in the future and be prepared to respond effectively in response to global trends. In order to build a top-notch higher education system, efforts will continue to be made to increase UA's capacity to carry out its duties and obligations more effectively, transparently, and efficiently. To that end, Malaysia's UA is divided into three (3) groups: Focused Universities (FUs), Comprehensive Universities (CUs), and RUs.

RUs have five under them: UM, UKM, UPM, UTM, and USM. Whereas CUs offer a wide range of courses and subject areas, FUs concentrate on niche fields associated with their creation, and RUs concentrate on research as the main purpose of their appointments. Since this study focused on postgraduate international students, it is reasonable to say that RUs with a specialisation in creating students picked for publishing at the SCOPUS or article journal levels were chosen as the sample site.

3.3 Research Instrument

Interviews are the main instrument used to acquire data for this study. According to the premise that each person's perception is unique, the researcher chose this tool because it lets participants freely express their opinions without being confined by the predefined answers found in surveys or questionnaires (Maxwell & Reybold, 2015). In addition, it permits the informants to express their viewpoints, which yields more reliable data than the quantitative method (Hennink, 2020). As surveys provide a limited perspective on the possibilities, they may not be adequate for justifying the purpose and objectives of this research. Furthermore, the observation of experiences in daily life poses challenges. In the contemporary 21st-century context, the influence of social media and close friends on informants' early assumptions adds complexity. Consequently, relying solely on quantitative research techniques might hinder the researcher's ability to capture nuanced and subjective aspects of the phenomenon under investigation. The fundamental benefit of qualitative research is that it supports the idea that each person has a unique perspective by allowing participants to freely express their ideas without being confined by the predefined answers found in surveys or questionnaires.

Guidelines for an effective online interview were extracted from *Qualitative Online Interviews* (Salmons, 2017). Since many informants live in different states or areas, interviews were conducted online. It uses the Zoom, Google Meet, and WebEx applications or puts them on the telephone line. The interviews will also be easier to transcribe since they are recorded during the call. Hence, the time set for both researcher and informants will be synchronised. It will be easier for both parties to cooperate and have interviews conducted online.

This interview used open-ended and semi-structured interview questions as the main instrument for collecting data. Informants were chosen based on their accessibilities since they are postgraduate students and full-time workers with work commitments, family commitments, assignments, deadlines, and presentations in a week. Each question was constructed based on the research questions, objectives, and literature on related studies. They were initially produced to serve the research and answer the questions that revolved around them (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021).

Gender, age, department, present location (hostel or house), university sectors, residential region (urban/rural), province, level of study, year of stay in Malaysia, and marital status were the demographic parameters included in the study. An expert in the social science field was asked to validate the constructed questions. The letter of validation was attached as an appendix.

This research has adopted a qualitative research design involving semi-structured interview questions directed toward the desired. Questions given will mainly focus on their adaptation process and experiences. This dissertation will allow the collected data to gain perceptions, thoughts, and phenomena to avoid biases in the answers (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021). Non-probability sampling with quota sampling as a sub-technique from purposive sampling would be the population sampling type. Interviews are the most effective tool for data gathering because this research is qualitative and uses the Cross-cultural Adaptation theory as the framework. The questions cover topics such as how the research questions and objectives were considered valid when the informants were asked to participate in interviews, satisfy the research, and validate procedures (Ruslin et al., 2022). Furthermore, the crucial part of the data analysis was done using two combined methods, colour-coding and thematic network analysis, which ought to be more efficient in analysing data (Marriot, 2022; Saunders et al., 2023). Hence, the interview questions were also constructed based on the elements in the Cross-cultural Adaptation Model (Kim, 2017) as the question's focus subject. Question sets for both international students and staff were attached to the appendix section.

The differences between the international students and staff interview questions are 13 demographic questions and 18 leading questions for the international students. For the staff interviews, there are nine demographic questions and 13 leading questions. The interview questions for the international students and staff were constructed using the elements in the Cross-cultural Adaptation Model.

The first step of data analysis is to sort the themes colours are used to differentiate themes. For example, if the researcher encounters a word or text passage with the same or close suitable to the research, it can be sorted into the same code as

the previous one and highlighted with the same colour (Stottok et al., 2011). Once the coding step is done, thematic networks will be built in ATLAS.ti version 9 based on these colours. These codes will be sorted into Basic Themes (Factors), Organising Themes (sub-factors), and Global Themes (themes) to process the textual data into a more convenient image and link them to each other (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Qualitative research is often assigned to case studies, historical studies, and different qualitative approaches (Urcia, 2021).

3.4 Data Collection

According to Braun and Clarke (2022), thematic analysis emphasises specific criteria. It puts the general answers of informants into a narrow scope while examining and recording patterns or themes (Braun & Clarke, 2023). Data collection is the process involved in collecting data. Interviews are not restricted by only face-to-face interviews (Sato et al., 2024). In this research, questions constructed beforehand will be asked according to the sample through online interviews. They were chosen due to advantages such as reduced travel time and expenses, and the speed of data gathering is often faster than traditional approaches (Saarijärvi & Bratt, 2021). It also makes it easier to reach 'hard to reach' groups and individuals owing to location or cultural differences (or due to the sensitivity of the subject) (Braun et al., 2021).

When conducted online, this method can be employed synchronously and asynchronously, and because the online interviews are transcribed using Artificial Intelligence (AI), high cost, time, and travel savings are realised. For an interview to be qualified to be called an interview, the minimum of its participants would be two people interacting with each other (Hennink et al., 2022), and for a scholars agreed that for qualitative research to be considered valid, the required participants the interview should be more than 20 people and this research use 24 informants as the sample.

The research sample for the interviews will be approached based on quota sampling. Quota sampling requires specific characteristics from the selected

population (Makri & Neely, 2021). The informants will be interviewed using a set of semi-structured questions. The interview questions were constructed with validation from scholars and experts in the field of social sciences. The requirements for selected students are to be post-graduate students from countries besides Malaysia, namely international students. They should also have lived in Malaysia for more than one year. Interviews will be conducted in English. The original words underwent a regeneration period during translation. Hence, they do not have to be precise and copy the original word's exact copy as long as it serves its primary purpose (Taquette & Borges da Matta Souza, 2022).

All e-interviews with overseas students took place over the course of three months. Due to the slow response rates of the informants, the e-interviews for the RU personnel lasted for more than three months. The researcher gave them adequate time to answer the email requests for an interview session, but only a handful did so. The emails containing the interview questions were kept in a folder and labelled with the informant's name and the date the information was gathered. Occasionally, the researcher also took notes and watched the informants' behaviour throughout the one-on-one interview just in case it was necessary to explain the results. Informants were also urged to contact the researcher if they could not recall any information requested during the interview.

3.5 Data Analysis Procedure

ATLAS.ti version 9 has aided thematic and coding analysis as a fact-finding tool. The application tool is the best choice to analyse the data from all 12 interviews efficiently. This analysis requires six full phases to be completed and get accurate results. There are a total of 24 informants to be interviewed. The six phases are to become familiar with the data that are going to be collected. Transcription will be done as the first phase. The second phase generates initial codes by doing a) data reduction and b) data complication. The third phase will be conducted to search the themes. These themes will be reviewed in the fourth phase. There are two levels in this phase, Levels 1 and 2. The fifth level is to define and name the themes after the review has

been done. The sixth step will be to produce a report as the last step to complete the phases of analysing Qualitative Data.

A deductive coding technique was used for thematic analysis, with the coding process being led by predetermined themes taken from Kim Young Yun's Cross-Cultural Adaptation Model. Using this method, the theoretical constructs were applied to the data in order to evaluate their relevance and applicability in the context of higher education in Malaysia. According to Fife and Gossner (2024), deductive thematic analysis makes it easier to conduct an organised analysis of evidence, which enables the confirmation and possible improvement of preexisting hypotheses. This study guarantees a cogent analysis that advances the notion of cross-cultural adaptation by coordinating the coding procedure with the theoretical framework.

A total of 18 questions for the international students and 13 questions for the staff regarding their experiences will be asked in the samples. Questions were constructed according to the research objectives to reach the aim of the investigation. After all the 12 interviews had been conducted, an analysis was done using a combined method. The analysis method in the options is the Thematic Network analysis and Colour-coding analysis (Stottok et al., 2011). Data saturations were reached by the tenth participants for each category, international students and staff. The saturation was determined by five factors, which were pre-established codes and themes, sample size, informant relevance, number of research methodologies, and duration of data collection sessions (Mwita, 2022).

3.5.1 Transcription

Collected data were recorded using online applications such as WebEx and Google Meet. The recorded video will be converted into audio, and transcription will be done using an Online Audio-to-Text converter, HappyScribe.com. Since this is an AI application, some polishing and rechecking will be needed using the human transcriber for precise transcriptions. Transcripts of interviews will be included in the appendices.

3.5.2 Colour-coding Method

The first method used is the Colour Coding method because it has been proven that colours give better memory trigger to the brain because of the arousal caused by colours such as red and yellow (Bays et al., 2024) instead of the original Grounded Theory Method (GTM) which is to do the numbering (Humble & Mozellius, 2022). Therefore, Thematic Network and Colour-Coding combination give easier data analysis techniques with efficient results. However, analysis requires researchers to do some mind mapping with branching for thematic networks. Hence, the thematic network will justify and clarify the categorised keyword in the colour coding. Thematic networks are web-like illustrations built to aid the research (Braun & Clarke, 2022) and have three themes as a branch structure. These branches are Basic Theme, Organising Theme, and Global Theme, and they were sorted according to the table in colour coding. These two analysis methods focus on finding the similarity of codes or keywords extracted from the interview answers from the informants.

Since the qualitative approach was subjectively arranged, data accuracy was hard to prove because of the terms of the Garbage in, Garbage out (GIGO). GIGO is the slang term to tell that no matter how precise a program's logic is arranged and run, the results will still be fallacious and out of place if the input data is wrongly submitted (Štěpánek et al., 2021). Moreover, since the approach of this research is only a single method and design, the triangulation method to prove the data accuracy created for the combined method (Roden et al., 2022) was certainly not suitable. However, it is the most relevant in this era. Anyhow, the four aspects were taken from the previous research article's suggestion. Therefore, this research should be cautious of the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability aspects.

3.5.3 ATLAS.ti as a fact-finding tool

Software analysis called Computer-Aided Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) is created to make it easier to analyse qualitative data. The various steps of the analytic process are supported by several tools in CAQDAS like ATLAS.ti, NVivo, MAXQDA, and Quirkos, each of which has benefits and drawbacks.

Regarding which CAQDAS is better than others or may offer the greatest tools and packages in data analysis, a number of concerns were found. Despite the fact that there are many disagreements over CAQDAS, the similarities across the software's underlying fundamental concepts for facilitating qualitative data make these discrepancies less significant. The CAQDAS offers a wide range of tool combinations. The data gathered for this investigation was specifically analysed using ATLAS.ti version 9. The usage of ATLAS.ti 9.0, which accepts a variety of data forms, including text, graphics, audio, and video, aids in the triangulation of data collecting (Mattimoe et al., 2021). Additionally, ATLAS.ti offers flexibility in managing the data so that it can be organised and coded for simpler analysis.

The first method was the Colour Coding method, and the second method was the Thematic Network which will be assisted using the ATLAS.ti version 9 application. The researcher has chosen to combine these two methods because they allow the researcher to use visualisation, mind mapping, and colour generators.

3.6 Data Validity

One of the most important components of a qualitative investigation is trustworthiness. It illustrates the standards for quality and the level of assurance in data collecting and the approach taken to demonstrate the calibre of a study. Data validations were used to complement the trustworthiness elements in doing qualitative research. Since the data is in abstract form, one perspective is not enough to ensure the reliability of the data.

3.6.1 Pilot test

To assess the viability of the interview question, a pilot study was carried out among international postgraduate students at the researcher's own university, Universiti Malaysia Terengganu (UMT). Before doing the real research, the informants must comprehend the interview question, calculate the amount of time

needed for each session, and identify any potential issues (Elhami & Khoshnevisan, 2022). Additionally, pilot tests were carried out to assess the effectiveness of the research instruments in the real study project. Gani et al. (2020) stated that the researcher would be better equipped to confront the problem because the outcomes of the pilot study may address the research study's deficiency. Given that the researcher has begun to adjust to the actual study, a thorough analysis of the pilot study's interview format, interviewers' methods, and the content of interviewees' responses can improve the research's quality. In other words, the pilot study's experience enables the researcher to refine the usage of the instruments and plan for any potential pitfalls in the actual research. To clear up any misunderstandings regarding interview format and lingo, the designed interview procedure will be tested throughout the pilot study.

In this study, two international students and two staff from Universiti Malaysia Terengganu participated in a pilot interview that was done informally and online through WebEx and then analysed by ATLAS.ti. Potential interview subjects were informed about the research study, including its objectives, and informed that they would be invited to give the researcher constructive criticism of the tools and techniques employed. The pilot test was also used to ensure the effectiveness of the Online e-Research framework stated above. They were informed that the observation and audio recording would begin immediately. Based on the pilot test, a few amendments to the questions' sentence structure were made to achieve the research objectives.

3.6.2 Informant Validation

Informant validation offers the ability to learn more and establish a strong rapport in order to confirm that the initial impression was accurate (Cotchett et al., 2020). This process was used to cross-check the facts of the analysed data with the informants. In an interview, the researcher will recite or summarise facts before asking the subject a series of questions to ascertain their correctness. Following the conclusion of a study, member checks are carried out by informing all participating participants of all findings. The informants will confirm the discussion with the researcher's

written report before it is submitted to the thesis committee by giving each participant a copy of their transcript and a spreadsheet with emergent themes.

3.6.3 Peers Checking

Peer checking was employed to ensure the credibility of this study. Peer checking works together during the interview session to check the study findings by the informants and prevent errors in interpreting the results (Johnson et al., 2020). Participants participated in the process during four iterative stages: independent thought, hearing results, evaluating findings, and negotiating final representations. This method changed the research direction to "give voice" to participants and create more equitable relationships between researchers and those being studied. It also increased the accuracy of the results and encouraged critical thinking by incorporating fully descriptive data and assessing the degree of participant agreement with the findings (Brear, 2019). Member checking as a method for boosting "holistic" validity in qualitative research can advance with further development, application, and evaluation of recursive, dialogic methodologies (de Loyola González-Salgado et al., 2022).

First, a related work titled *International Students' Adaptation Process in Malaysian Public Universities: A Social Communication Challenge* was successfully published in a Scopus-indexed journal which is the *Malaysian Journal of Communication* and has undergone pre-publication academic peer review. The validity of the research design, data interpretation, and conceptual clarity were externally validated by blind reviewers with disciplinary knowledge through this formal academic publishing process.

Second, throughout the actual research, a peer review procedure was carried out, either internally or collaboratively. ATLAS-generated categories and thematic codes. Both the research supervisor and a separate academic with experience in social science and intercultural communication examined and validated the analysis. In order to ensure consistency with the theoretical framework, this cooperative checking

procedure assisted in reducing personal bias, confirming coherence, and refining theme boundaries.

In order to verify the accuracy of the interpreted themes, a non-formal member checking process was also conducted with a chosen group of participants. Credibility was further increased by data triangulation between the informants which are the staff and student viewpoints, which compared findings from various informant groups. These various validation techniques guarantee that the analysis stays solid, open, and based on the real-world experiences of the participants.

3.7 Interview protocol and procedures

This study has already obtained ethical approval from the UMT Postgraduate and Ethics Office, as an Ethical Clearance Application was submitted. In adherence to ethical guidelines, all interviews were recorded with the necessary permissions obtained to research the topic of "Adaptation Process: International Students Challenges and Staff Contributions in Malaysian Public Universities." Informants were provided with consent forms and informants' information forms. During the transcription process, all dialogue transcripts were anonymized, and pseudonyms were used to ensure the confidentiality of the informants' identities. To ensure the security of communication via email, only the researcher will have access to the account. Additionally, the password for the email account will be changed regularly for security purposes. These measures are implemented to uphold the privacy and confidentiality of the research participants and their information.

This research study adhered to the policy outlined by the UMT Postgraduate and Ethics Office and followed the ethical clearance guidelines set by UMT. The study obtained ethical approval for low-risk research involving human participants. Additionally, prior to conducting the research, ethical clearance was obtained from the organization where the study was conducted. In the process of recruiting eligible participants, individual emails were sent to inform staff members about the research. The Registrar offices of the respective RUs also received an introductory email

regarding the research prior to data collection. Therefore, all participants were informed that the researcher would interview their students and staff members.

Before conducting any specific interview, each participant received a consent letter to review and sign. The consent letter ensured that participation in the study was voluntary, confidential, and private. A copy of the consent form is included in the appendix of this thesis. Throughout the thesis, the participating organisations were referred to as UKM, UM, USM, and UPM, while interviewees were identified using pseudonyms to protect their identities. Consequently, all interviews were video recorded with the explicit permission of the interviewees.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

4.0 Introduction

The findings of interviews with staff and international students are analysed in Chapter 4. The data analysis produced a number of themes based on the Cross-cultural Adaptation Model. The results pertaining to the research questions are presented in each of the two primary sections that make up this chapter. The research issue is addressed in each area below (please see sub-chapters 4.3 and 4.4), and the findings are extended and described as follows.

Along this chapter, the informant for the international students will be known as S1 (Student 1), S2 (Student 2), S3 (Student 3), S4 (Student 4), S5 (Student 5), S6 (Student 6), S7 (Student 7), S8 (Student 8), S9 (Student 9), S10 (Student 10), S11 (Student 11), and S12 (Student 12). The next sub-chapter, staff informants in the Research Universities (RUs), will be known as SP1 (Staff Personnel 1), SP2 (Staff Personnel 2), SP3 (Staff Personnel 3), SP4 (Staff Personnel 4), SP5 (Staff Personnel 5), SP6 (Staff Personnel 6), SP7 (Staff Personnel 7), SP8 (Staff Personnel 8), SP9 (Staff Personnel 9), SP10 (Staff Personnel 10), SP11 (Staff Personnel 11), and SP12 (Staff Personnel 12).

4.1 Informant's Demographic

4.1.1 International Student Demographic

There are 12 informants from four selected RUs, Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), and Universiti Malaya (UM) were selected to complement the required characteristics in this research. Three students were selected from each university to gain twelve students. They were international students living in Malaysia for more than one year and have started their studies in either MSc. or PhD. These informants were a mix of students with coursework modes and full research modes. The accessibility of the informants was obtained by contacting them directly via e-mail, WhatsApp, or from the researcher's close contacts.

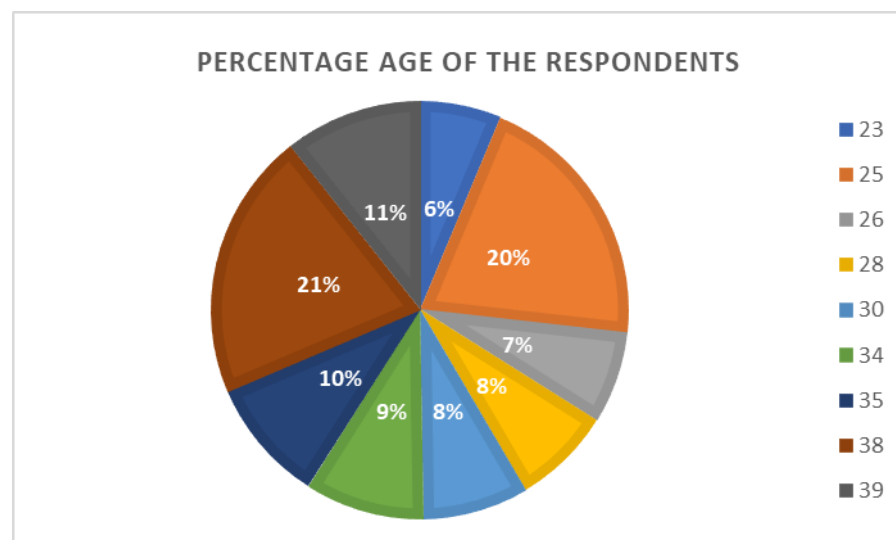


Figure 4.1 Age of Informants

Based on the Figure 4.1 above, out of the 12 informants interviewed, one informant is the youngest, age 23 years old. Eight informants are in their twenties, respectively ranging from 24 to 28 years old. The remaining three are in their thirties, with ages ranging from 30 to 38 years old. Referring to Table 4.1 above, among the informants in their twenties, only one of them is studying for his PhD in Health Communication, and the remaining five were studying MSc. of Political Science, MSc. of Early

Education, MSc. of Physics, MSc. of Computer Science, and MSc. of Computer Science. Of the informants in their thirties, three were studying for a PhD. in Electrical Engineering, PhD in Mechanical Engineering, and PhD in Aerospace Engineering. The remaining informants in their twenties were studying MSc. of Medical Physics, MSc. of Medical Physics, MSc. of Radiation Physics, and MSc. of Computer Science. The courses taken by informants were all different because randomisation techniques were used to choose these informants. The distribution of the course taken by the informants were displayed as below.

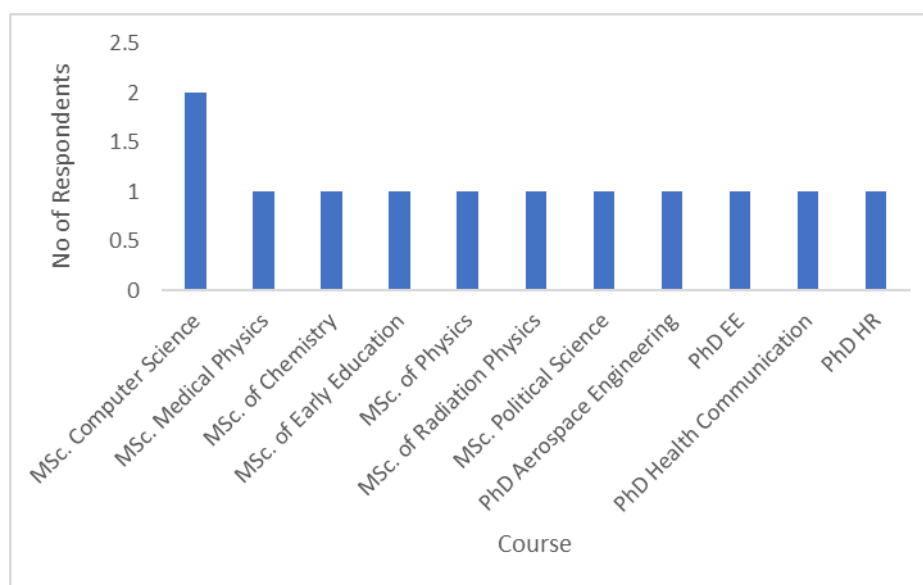


Figure 4.2 Course taken by Informants

The country distribution as displayed in Figure 4.3 below shows that the informants are mainly from the Asia Continent (Southeast Asia, Western Asia, and Southern Asia), and the Africa Continent. Jordan contributes one male informant and two female informants, while Indonesia contributes a total of four informants: two male and two female. The remaining five informants, two females and four males, are each from Syria, Tanzania, Iran, Nigeria, and Bangladesh.

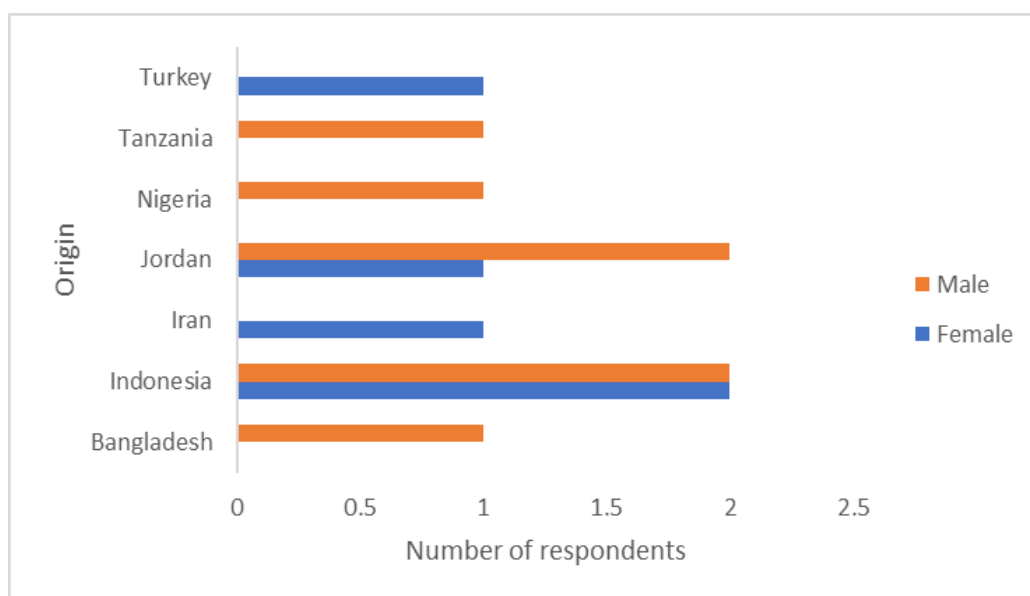


Figure 4.3 Distribution of Country and Gender of International Students

4.1.2 Staff Demographic

A total of 12 staff from the department and offices that handle international students directly were interviewed and selected from the four RUs: UPM, UKM, USM, and UM. These staff members were not from the International Office to vary their experience in handling international students and to ensure that the population of the staff in the university with knowledge of handling international students is wide. All twelve informants have been in service for more than ten years in their respective universities.

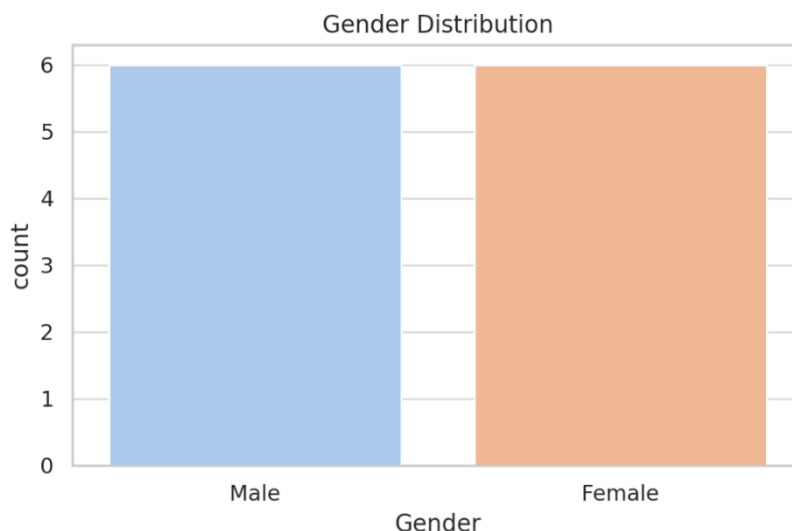


Figure 4.4 Staff Gender Distribution

The Figure 4.4 above shows the gender distribution for the staff participated in this research. It shows that in this research, more female informants participated than male respondents, according to the gender distribution of staff members working with international students' adaption processes. This trend might be a reflection of more general employment trends, which frequently exhibit female predominance, in student affairs, administrative, and academic support services. The interpersonal dynamics and communication techniques used in cross-cultural support networks for international students may change if there are more female employees.

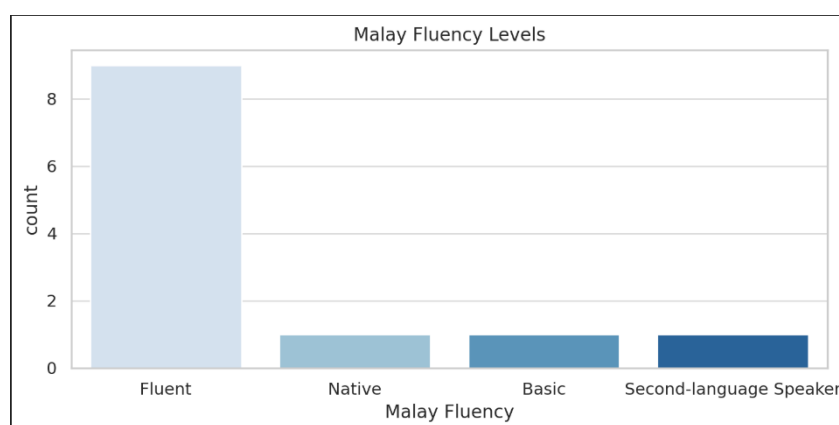


Figure 4.5 Staff Malay Fluency Level

Figure 4.5 shows that the staffs' Malay language proficiency varies; the majority report "fluent" proficiency, while fewer report "native" or "basic" abilities. One responder

notably described themselves as a "second-language speaker," underscoring the linguistic variety even among local employees. International students' experiences of cultural immersion and integration may be impacted by the way the Malay language and subtleties are communicated to them due to the prevalence of fluent speakers rather than native speakers.

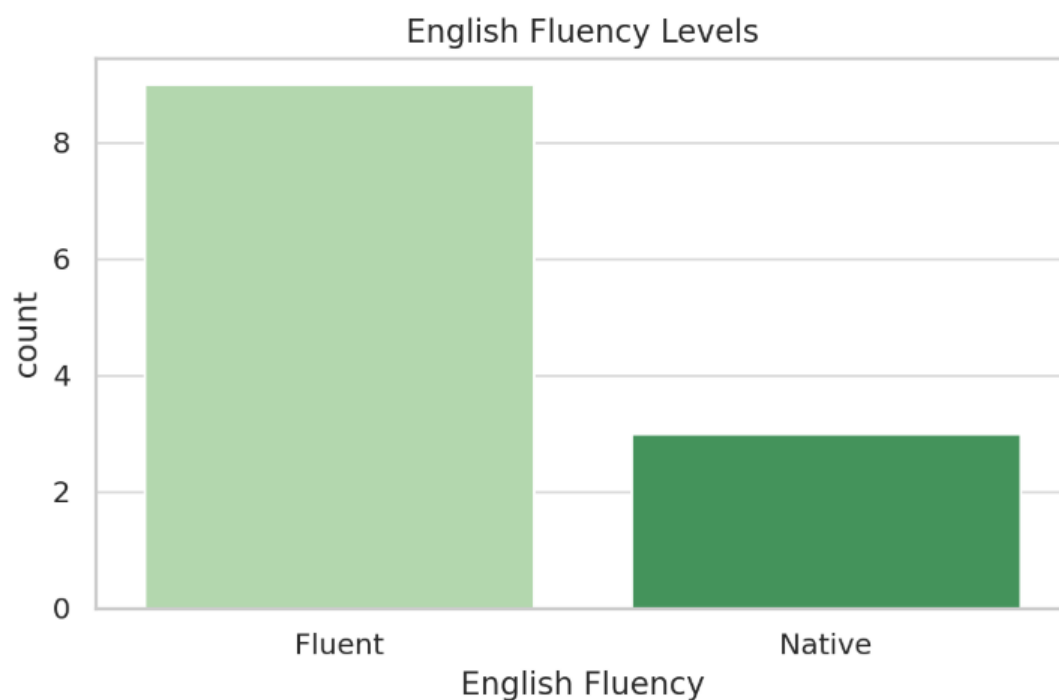


Figure 4.6 Staff English Fluency Levels

The graph in Figure 4.6 above shows that the majority of respondents reported being "fluent" in English, and many of them identified as "Native" speakers, indicating a remarkably high level of fluency in the language. The use of English as a communication medium in Malaysian higher education, especially when interacting with international students, is reflected in this language proficiency. Widespread fluency facilitates efficient communication and could help students from different linguistic origins adjust more easily.

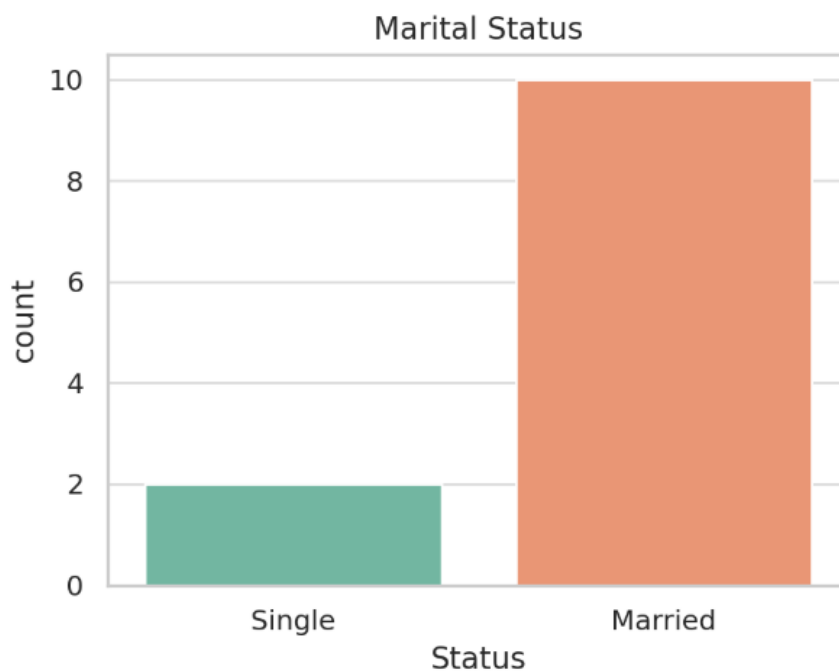


Figure 4.7 Staff Marital Status

Figure 4.7 shows that only a small percentage of staff respondents identified as single, with the rest being married. Staff members' viewpoints and empathy may be indirectly influenced by their marital status, particularly when attending to the adaptation requirements of overseas students who are experiencing social isolation or difficulties adjusting to a new culture. Married staff members might also contribute more cultural knowledge or family-focused viewpoints to the of welcoming and encouraging learning environments for pupils.

The support systems that Malaysian Research Universities offer to international students are greatly influenced by the linguistic and demographic traits of their employees. The majority of female and married employees point to a workforce that may be marked by relationship stability and empathetic engagement, both of which could have a good impact on the delivery of student support services. Furthermore, staff members' good proficiency in English makes it easier to communicate with international students, while different Malay proficiency levels

point to areas where cultural immersion techniques should be strengthened even further. Key universities like USM and UKM are actively involved, as evidenced by institutional representation, highlighting the significance of institutional commitment in creating inclusive adaption environments. When taken as a whole, these results show how crucial it is to match personnel profiles and training to the linguistic and intercultural requirements of foreign student services in order to improve the overall experience of adaptation.

4.2 International Students Challenges

The original five themes have been developed into challenges that have been divided into three factors, five sub-factors, and themes derived from codes by ATLAS.ti. There are three factors contributing to the international student's adaptation process which are the Personal factor, External factor, and Institution factor. Personal factors have been divided into two sub-factors of Adaptation, which are Psychological Adaptation and Physical Adaptation. From the two factors, sub-themes from the transcription were categorised into eight themes as the main findings.

The first theme, Comfortability, is under the Personal factor, which is the Physical Adaptation as the sub-factor. Under the theme of Comfortability, sub-themes such as weather, same sports interests, transportation, and facilities were derived from the informants. From the same factor, the Psychological Adaptation sub-factor was found as the sub-factor, and the theme of the social circle was obtained as the second theme. Sub-themes related to this theme are open-minded, local approaches, cooperative classmates, support groups, perceptions, and stereotypes.

The third theme is under the External factor, where Social Adaptation and Cultural Adaptation factors were derived. Medium of Communication is the theme derived from the Social Adaptation sub-factor, and sub-themes derived were language barrier, interpersonal communications, English as a second language, Malay as an easy

language, and mix-up of language. The fourth theme under the same sub-factor is Guidance. Sub-themes under Guidance are lives within a circle, Indonesian enclave, early exposure, unlimited social circle, safe environment, and friends from the same country. The External factor also elaborates on the Cultural Adaptation sub-factor with three sub-factors as the themes. The fifth theme, Lifestyle, was categorised from the sub-theme clothing style, decent, multicultural, and not extremist. The sixth theme, host country, has tourism, sight-seeing, local culture, and greenery as sub-themes. Familiarity is the seventh theme, along with food varieties, accessibility of ingredients, and similar culture as the sub-themes.

The third main factor is the Institution factor, and Academic Adaptation is the sub-factor. Two themes, Teaching Style and Sense of Responsibility, were derived as the themes. Teaching Style has sub-themes such as lecturers' way of teaching, workload, and syllabus arrangement, while Sense of Responsibility has a motherly bond, good guidance, friendly personnel, and an easy registration process as the sub-themes. The network of the themes sorted into the model can be viewed at the end of the chapter in Figure 4.13 (Expansion of Model).

4.2.1 Personal Factor

Personal Factors are the internal factors that come from the students themselves and still impact their adaptation process. Factor that is divided into two sub-factors. The two sub-factors are the Adaptation factor, which involves and impacts the international students during their adaptation process. Personal factors mean that these sub-factors can be the adaptation that affects the internal adaptation process of these international students. These internal factors were divided into two which are Physical Adaptation and Psychological Adaptation.

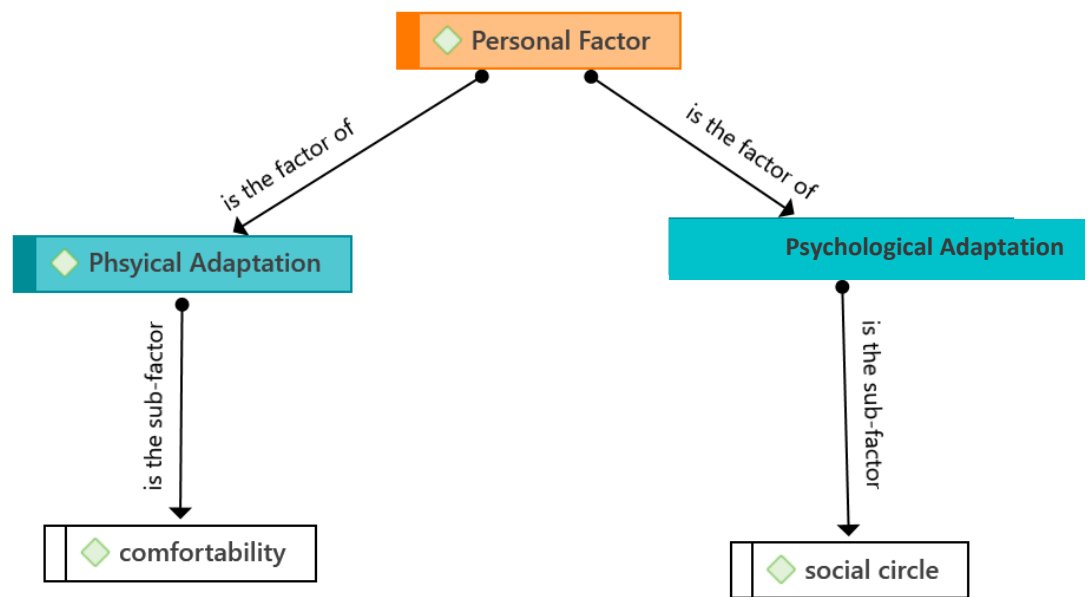


Figure 0.8 Personal Factor

4.2.1.1 Physical Adaptation

Physical adaptation factor is a factor that may help or hinder their adaptation process through their interest in choosing public universities in Malaysia as their destination of choice. Under the comfortability theme, Figure 4.8 shows the sub-themes are ‘weather,’ ‘same sports interests,’ ‘transportation,’ and ‘facilities.’

a. Comfortability

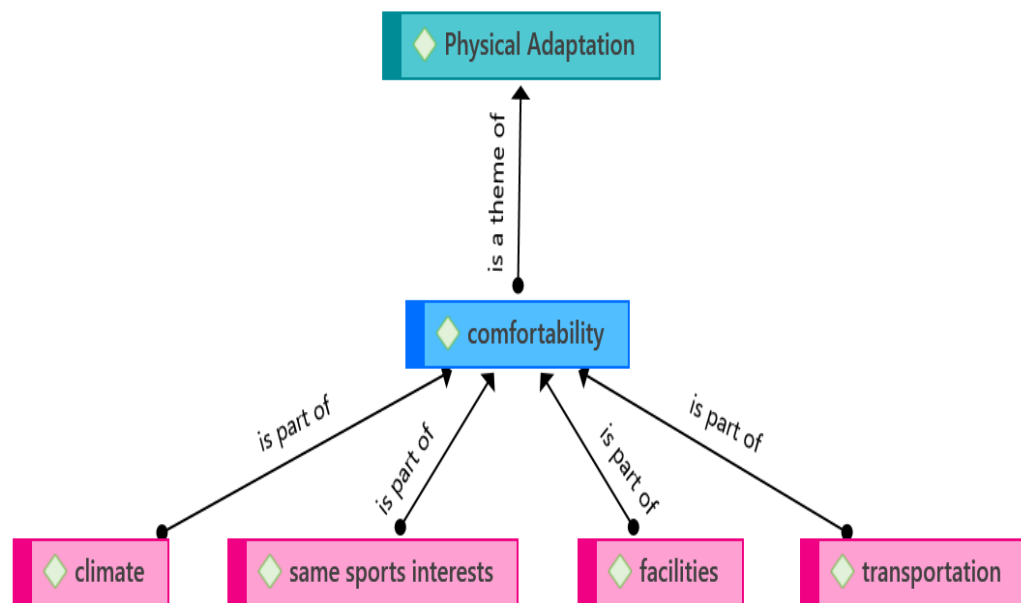


Figure 0.9 Comfortability

Figure 4.9 shows the sub-theme ‘comfortability’ and its categories of branches. During the adaptation process, the first factor that provides impact as a challenge to the international process is Physical Adaptation. S1 said she was more comfortable studying in Malaysia than in her previous country of study during her degree. S1 said that,

“...all facilities in the university are so good, and one thing that is interesting to me is about the dormitory...”

“Malaysia is more comfortable than Austria and Iran...” (S2)

S2 mentioned in her answer regarding her first impression before coming to Malaysia that she did not have any stereotypical thinking before coming to Malaysia. However, she expected that most of the people in Malaysia utilise the public transport provided by the government efficiently.

“I thought that to move from place to place in Malaysia would be easier and many people would prefer to walk rather than using their own transportation. So, I never gave a thought to transportation because maybe there would be many people walking, and there would be many pavements. But it turns out there is no one that walks, so I try to learn to use public transport. (S5)

S5 also mentioned this when answering the question, “Is it hard to adapt in Malaysia?” Her answer was also related to the public transportation service. She felt a little uncomfortable since it was wasting her time to wait for the bus.

“...transport was my concern during my early phase of adaptation in Malaysia. It is actually the bus. For one bus to arrive it is quite a long wait, and if you missed that bus, you are going to have another long wait. So, if you are going to campus, you are going to be tired just waiting for the bus. (S3)

S3 also mentioned in his conversation with the researcher that he thinks it is important for his physical environment to be related to the fact that the weather can suit his physical comfort.

“Although I did not know that the university I attended was at the top of the list, I just thought that the campus was very beautiful. At that time, I did not know about the ranking, but when I know now, it is quite an interesting fact. (S2)

The adaptation process by S2 has also been affected by the facilities provided for them to use during their study. Hence, transportation is one of the sub-themes. Besides that, it is also acknowledged by S2 that weather is one of her important factors before choosing to further her studies in Malaysia.

“I thought that before coming here, Malaysia is not that hot. Maybe Jakarta is hotter, but no, Malaysia was hotter when I first started my study.” (S2)

S3 mentioned earlier in the conversation that his research before coming to Malaysia and choosing the university as the place to continue his study when he said that Malaysia's temperature is better than the University of Canada's lower temperature, which he also got an offer from.

“So, I received the offer letter from Columbia University Canada, and the temperature is very low; maybe I cannot survive in the environment, and once I get the offer letter, I googled like it is snowing, like but the temperature is very much lower than Malaysia and Bangladesh.” (S3)

S4 also thinks that it is comfortable for him to settle down in Malaysia, which has the same climate as Tanzania.

The weather is very good. The weather is the same as we all are in the tropical area. Tanzania, which is also tropical, is very similar to Malaysia, which has a lot of rain. S6 also mentioned that he did not have that many issues while adapting to Malaysia because the locals did not discriminate against him.

“During my degree, when I used to have only locals in my class, and I was the only international student in the class, I settled there very well. I felt at home, so I had never had any issues.” (S4)

Since male usually bonds with sports (Lee & Snow, 2021), it becomes common factor for them to have adaptation factors through the same sports interests. For example, S4 bonds through football and meets new friends from the university team or team that he plays football casually.

“I usually made many international friends during football. Many of my friends, I get to know my current best friend because we play football together. Apart from being in the same faculties, we actually never met before football unites us.” (S4)

In terms of physical adaptation, comfort refers to how at ease and comfortable a person feels in a certain physical setting or circumstance. It includes elements that can impact a person's health and performance, including temperature, lighting, noise levels, and ergonomics. Since each person has unique preferences and sensitivities, comfortability might change from person to person.

Finding a balance between individual preferences and environmental requirements is necessary for comfort. This can be accomplished by altering the environment to suit individual needs or using discomfort-coping techniques. People can improve their general well-being and productivity by creating a comfortable physical environment, creating a more joyful and effective experience.

4.2.1.2 Psychological Adaptation

Psychological Adaptation is a factor that comes from an international student's mind and way of thinking or an element from their own doing that may impact their mental state.

a. Social circle

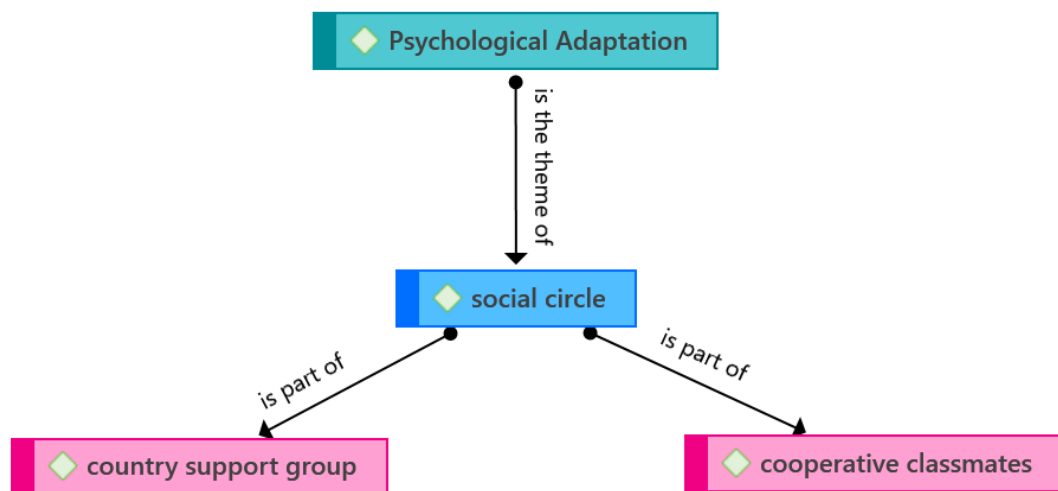


Figure 0.10 Social circle

Sub-themes derived from the Figure 4.10 social circle theme are 'country support group', 'cooperative classmates,' 'local approach,' 'homesickness,' and 'no early assumption.'

Many scholars mentioned issues such as acculturation stress and depression among international students (Falavarjani, 2020; Koo et al., 2021). These types of mental health issues will affect student's life, especially from the psychological aspect, in the long term. S2 mentioned that she depends on a lot with her support group from her country, Indonesia.

"This support group was first found in my university's library, and then after a few meetings we created a WhatsApp group for

communication for the next meeting to be easy. The group's name is Sumber Kebahagiaan (Source of Happiness), and its members are from many different backgrounds, Master and PhD., but all of them were from Indonesia.” (S2)

S4 from Tanzania also had his own support group he made and met during his first arrival in Malaysia. This community is the community that will help them get to the embassy and meet any other needs during their study in Malaysia.

“We have a community, especially for Tanzanians in Malaysia. It is not big, but it is sizable. Good enough. When we first arrive, this community will approach us as in a WhatsApp group. So, whenever there is new information or new Tanzanians arrive, we will know.” (S4)

Not all students have support groups from their own country. However, they can find their own support by building a healthy circle to ensure that they are surrounded by good people. For example, when international students are in need, they need to have someone in their inner circle as a lifesaver. Since their families are far away from them, these students need to have a good support system in order to stay healthy both psychologically and physically. This statement can be supported by an incident where S1 had difficulties opening her local bank account.

“I have no bad experiences with my classmates. They are very friendly, and they help when we first arrive here. At that time, we could not open our bank account because of COVID-19, the banks were all closed. So, we could not buy anything online. But one of me and my husband’s friends offered to help us buy our things and offered to let us use his address during our quarantine.” (S1)

S3 from Bangladesh said that his country does not provide an official support group. However, he tried to gather his friends from his country as a support group that would help him and them adapt here. The S3 statement is as stated below:

“Usually, we are our own support group. But I have a circle of friends which is a bit small because everyone has finished their studies. Right now, all the members around my age are doing master’s and some of them have not finished their bachelor’s degree, so they are my juniors. This circle consists of seven people. (S3)

S2 also mentioned that she is happy that her classmates are very cooperative during their work group. This contributes to her mental health to not be burdened thinking about the free rider during the submission of an assignment.

S2 affirmed this statement by stating that,

“Most of my group mates are very dedicated to their given tasks. There are none that gone missing during the middle of assignments, and none of them have been a burden to either one of us.” (S2)

S1 also gave the same answer to the researcher's questions, saying that she had no problems during her online class before coming to Malaysia. She commented that,

“Assignments were always done harmoniously with my classmate although it is an online class. We made time for each other and never crossed the assignments dateline.” (S1)

S5 thinks that her circle is very supportive. Again, although it is the COVID-19 era, her circle never forgets each other in self-development. She made references to this statement by saying,

“Since it is still in online mode in my university, instead of hanging out physically, my friends from Malaysia, no matter whether they are Malay, Indian, or Chinese, we do activities such as hanging out in the online space (GMeet, WeBex, WhatsApp, etc.) and if there are assignments that require brainstorming, quizzes, we always wait

for any one of us to initiate it like saying things such as 'Guys, let us study!'. (S5)

Numerous participants believed that the manner in which the indigenous population engaged with them fostered a sense of hospitality and inclusion throughout their sojourn in Malaysia. The gestures and actions of the locals created an atmosphere where they did not feel like outsiders, as the local inhabitants often took the initiative to initiate interactions. Nonetheless, there were instances where these overtures were not made, and no proactive measures were undertaken by the local populace. Hence, international students had to approach them first. As evidence, S3 felt that his approaches towards local and making friends had changed more than his degree time.

"In my first and second years of degree, I did not have any friends from my classmates or any Malay friends, but later, when we made a group for an assignment, we started to share our daily life, gossiping and hanging out together. (S3)

Now that he is doing his master's, he felt the need to reach out first with the same approaches for the locals outside the university. In his interview, S3 pointed out this situation by mentioning that,

"So, these are the same things I found to be used outside of the university. I feel like I need to reach them first instead of waiting for them to do it. So, every time I see potential new friends, local or university students from different countries, I try to reach them first because, during my bachelor's, I always confine myself. I had a thinking that "Don't go near them," "Don't talk to them" (S3)

Homesickness, which has always been one of the main reasons adaptation processes are hard to happen, merely impacts these international students, especially the older students. This happens because some of them already brought their family to Malaysia, and sometimes staying longer in Malaysia makes them feel used to it.

Homesickness usually happens one or two times a year. However, nothing can be settled with the existence of technology.

S4 discussed this statement as below,

“No. Not at all homesickness ever happened. I managed to settle very well, and very easily. I think the Malaysians, especially the one I met during my degree, and plus my international community, made my adaptation process go well.” (S4)

Two informants from Indonesia and one from Bangladesh encountered their homesickness using the technology already the connector and lifted the time zone and distance barrier.

S5 also mentioned that, from the early phase of her study until now, when she reached one year of physical class in Malaysia, she felt homesick every day. But what she would do is give her family a call and make time for her closest friends.

“I call straight away every time homesickness consumes me. This year, I had to celebrate Eid in Malaysia, and my Ramadhan was not easy without my family. Quality time with family was already replaced with quality time with friends.” (S5)

But sometimes, homesickness can also be cured by distracting yourself from the thought of it. For example, S2 mentioned that during her studies, she felt she needed a home to carry on her life as a student, so she went for a walk.

“After a year of furthering my studies here, I always miss home. But none of the feelings made me feel like I wanted to die, feeling sick or in misery or something. A phone call can always settle it, and life must go on. And if the feelings continue, I will go for a walk to release the feelings or do some exciting activities. (S2)

The impact of the social circle on numerous facets of well-being is what makes it so important in psychological adaptation. For starters, social relationships offer emotional support, which is essential for mental wellness. Second, the social circle gives the individual a sense of belonging and identity. Participating in a community or group provides a sense of purpose and acceptance. It enables people to create a sense of self and make meaningful connections that improve their overall well-being (Pazil, 2023).

In conclusion, the social circle is critical for psychological adaptation because it gives emotional support, a sense of belonging, and possibilities for personal progress. Meaningful interactions within one's social network contribute to general well-being, resilience, and the ability to adjust to life's adversities.

4.2.2 External Factor

The external factor as shown in Figure 4.11 are where people, organizations, or elements that surround international students have an impact on them. Under the Social Adaptation sub-factor, two themes were derived which are Guidance and Medium of Communication. There are also Cultural Adaptation sub-factors where themes of Host Country, Lifestyle, and Familiarity were obtained as results.

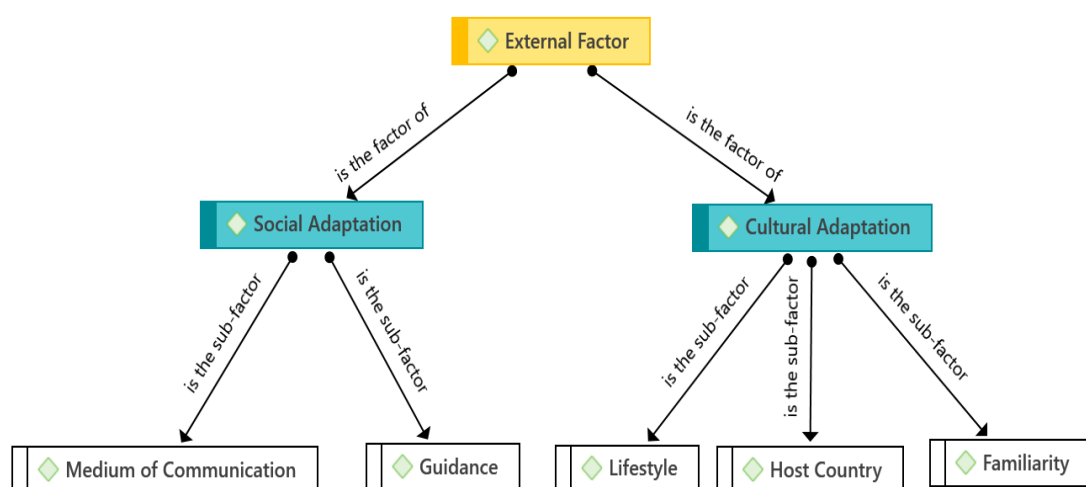


Figure 0.11 External Factor

4.2.2.1 Social Adaptation

a. Guidance

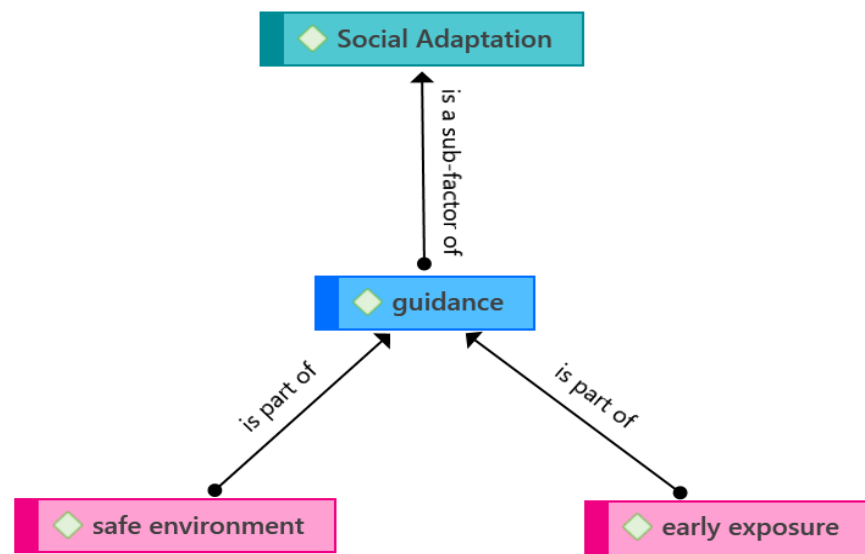


Figure 0.12 Guidance

Guidance was chosen as the theme after sub-themes such as ‘safe environment’ and ‘early exposure.’

As an external factor, a safe environment is critical for international students. It supports academic achievement, improves institutional reputation, and improves student satisfaction by ensuring physical and emotional well-being, facilitating adaptation and integration, promoting academic success, and enhancing institutional reputation. International students can focus on their studies, participate in campus life, and make significant connections in a safe and supportive environment. A safe environment promotes a better study abroad experience, attracts more students, and increases retention. It is a vital component that directly impacts the quality and success of international student trips.

Overseeing that only one of the twelve informants is married, all of the remaining responders require approval from their families before studying abroad. The informants primarily stated that because Islam is the official religion of Malaysia, they believe it is safer for a Muslim lady to live alone, far away from her family. Hence, a

safe environment is one of the important factors in choosing an international student's place of study. At the same time, it contributes to the external factor of adaptation.

S2 refers to this statement by saying that,

“My family did not think twice about it. I mentioned that I want to continue my S2 (MSc.), but I have two choices in my mind whether it is German or Malaysia. I actually said I wanted to go to Germany, but I did not learn the language yet and many more for me to adapt, so I cancelled the plan and chose Malaysia. My parent was so happy because they thought it was good and safer for a Muslim woman, and there was nothing weird and things for them to be worried about. The most important thing is they can easily travel here whenever they want. So, they are very happy.” (S2)

Following that, the decision-making process for obtaining a master's degree presented two options: Germany and Malaysia. While initially favouring Germany, worries about language proficiency and adaption led to Malaysia being chosen as the preferred destination. The family's support and delight with this decision was primarily motivated by Malaysia's perceived safety and acceptability for a Muslim woman, as well as the ease of visiting. This conclusion emphasises the importance of taking into account numerous elements, such as cultural compatibility and accessibility, while making educational decisions, particularly for people from diverse backgrounds. Referring to the 'safe environment' themes, S5 conveyed her family's concerns during her early decision to choose Malaysia to continue her studies.

S5 alluded that,

“We in Jakarta mostly think positively when it comes to lifestyle in Malaysia because it is very Islamic in Malaysia compared to us. For example, a man and woman with no family relations cannot shake their hands, whether on campus with teachers or lecturers. If it is in Indonesia, we have to shake hands with teachers and lecturers.

Malaysia also did not have any motorcycle e-hailing, which I think also because of the woman and man Islamic gap and woman safety.” (S5)

The next sub-theme is the ‘early exposure’. This describes their experience of knowing Malaysia as their place of choice to study. S1 pointed out that she chose Malaysia to do her third master’s degree because her husband said that Malaysia is a good place to stay. She has already come to know it through her brother’s experience.

“My husband was a student here in USM, and 10 years ago, my brother studied in Johor. So, when I traveled to Malaysia to visit him, I really liked it here and decided to further my study here later.” (S1)

This statement illustrates the idea that it is important to have an early perception as an external factor in adaptation. The factor serves as a guide to the decision-making process and, at the same time, allows the international students to feel familiar with the environment they will face if they continue their studies as international students and, apparently, have to stay in Malaysia.

On the other hand, S2 knew about UKM from her undergraduate lecturer. She was one of her main supervisors. She asserted this as below,

“My lecturer during my degree year did her PhD here in UKM. So, she introduced me to UKM. That is why I chose to enrol in UKM too.” (S2)

As a case in point to the above statement, by following her lecturer’s suggestion and early exposure regarding the environment and study system in UKM. S2 was influenced in making the decision and felt that the early exposure helped her decide to continue her studies at UKM.

S3 discovered that he has friends enrolling in the same university with good prospects and suitable requirements. So, he decided to follow them.

“At that time, I found two of my friends coming to study in UM under the business and engineering faculty. We discussed the plan to further our study together and then I see that all the requirements match to me.” (S3)

By making sure that the universities he chose were top-notch and were according to his preferences and budget, the early exposure of experience S3 got from his friends who had been studying there affirmed his decision.

S4, who has been living for 13 years, knew about Malaysia from his brother-in-law. He started his study with his foundation and is currently pursuing his PhD in Aerospace Engineering. He also mentioned that he saw Malaysia on television, whether through tourism or political figures. This proves that the internationalisation agenda planned by the prime minister at that time was successful in penetrating the world outside of Malaysia.

“Around 2004 or 2005, my brother-in-law was pursuing his PhD in economics at UPM, so he was the one who advised and introduced us to Malaysia. But before that, I used to see Dr Mahathir as the Prime Minister in the news. I also saw the advertisement about Malaysia on CNN Malaysia Truly Asia. So yes, I always knew about Malaysia. (S4)

As for S4, receiving advise and an introduction from his brother was not the only early exposure he obtained. The tourism advertisement served as a niche that sparked his interest in continuing his studies in Malaysia.

S5, who once went through a mobility program in Malaysia, decided that her experience in Kedah for two months was so exciting that she decided at that time that she might want to study or work here for a year or two. Her last straw of decision was when she heard that one of her friends had already applied to study at UKM.

S5 mentioned that,

“I actually know UKM from my friends because they had already applied and enrolled in UKM. He told me that UKM is a good place to study. This is actually my fifth time coming here to Malaysia. During my degree, I was in an exchange program at UUM Sintok, Kedah, for two months. When I finished the program, I thought that maybe one day I would study or work here for at least one or two years.” (S5)

In conclusion, international students can progressively overcome feelings of homesickness, uncertainty, and worry by immersing themselves in the host country's culture, language, and social dynamics from the start. This psychological adaptation improves their general well-being and mental health. In conclusion, early exposure is critical for international students since it facilitates a smoother adaption process, allowing students to prosper academically, socially, and personally in their new environment.

b. Medium of Communication

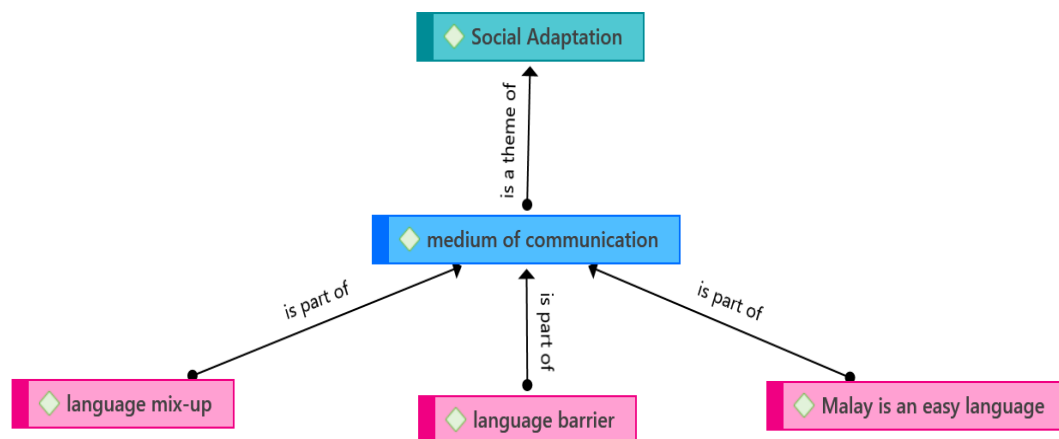


Figure 0.13 Medium of Communication

Sub-themes under the theme are ‘language barrier,’ ‘communication,’ ‘second-language barrier,’ and ‘Malay is an easy language to learn.’

Most of the informants do not have any problems communicating with the locals since most Malaysians are able to converse in English and are at least under

comprehension. However, a new issue among Indonesian international students arises when language mixed-up happens. It is a new issue that may cause conflicts when intercultural communication happens during their study.

They said that some of our words mean something different from their mother tongue. Nevertheless, to overcome this barrier, she tried to get into a simple conversation with the university's janitor, who came from her country. She would ask them about their experiences and their life in Malaysia as a foreigner. S2 statements of the language mixed up were as follows:

“Actually, when I first came here (in Malaysia), it was quite hard to adapt because the language (Malay language) is like my own mother tongue (Indonesia) but mixed and scrambled.” (S2)

Her friend from the same country and university, S5, also said the same thing, proving that the language barrier is still happening but in a minor group of international students.

“I think in language terms, it is quite hard for me because I am from Jakarta. I think if it is my Sumatran, Minang, or Riau friends, it will be quite easy for them to adapt to the language because they also speak Malay. But because Jakarta has its own language identity, we use either the official Indonesian language or English. There are so many similar vocabularies but with different meanings. For example, when we say car, we say ‘mobil’, but ‘kereta’ for Malaysia. Meanwhile, in Indonesia, ‘kereta’ means train.” (S5)

From both of the informants, the researcher can confirm that the language barrier still happens among the informants who speak a language that is close to the Malay language as their mother tongue. But it is different with the people outside the Malay Archipelago. This is because language mixed-up does not happen. They converse only in English, or they learn Malay as their medium of communication.

S1 from Jordan, for example, does not face any problems communicating during her stay in Malaysia. The university's initiative to make the Malay language compulsory for postgraduate international students made their studies in Malaysia a bit better. She said that:

“Since almost all Malaysians speak in English, especially in Penang, I think communication is not much of a problem to me. Besides, I also know some of the necessary daily words and alphabets in Malay because it is a required course for me to graduate.” (S1)

S3 also mentioned that the language was not a problem for him after a few months because he rarely met Malaysians who did not know at least the basics of communicating in English.

Being a resident in Malaysia since his foundation, S4 thinks that language has never been an issue for him. Most of the people he met can speak English, and he has already spoken in Malay after 17 years of residency in Malaysia. Although he learned it starting with informal slang, he thinks that these words are useful for him.

“I think especially during my degree time, that is when I catch up with the locals in Malay. All those slogans, good words, bad words, everything. Especially when you have guys who just finished their high school, you know they are so young and when they teach you Malay, they start with negative words.” (S4)

The aforementioned statement demonstrates that confidence and practice are crucial elements for achieving proficiency in a language. The ability to discern between what is beneficial and what is detrimental in language is a personal decision that aids in determining the type of adjustment overseas students are undergoing, whether it is positive or negative.

4.2.2.3 Cultural Adaptation

Cultural Adaptation is the factor that has been developed into the theme ‘host country,’ ‘lifestyle,’ and ‘familiarity.’

a. Host country

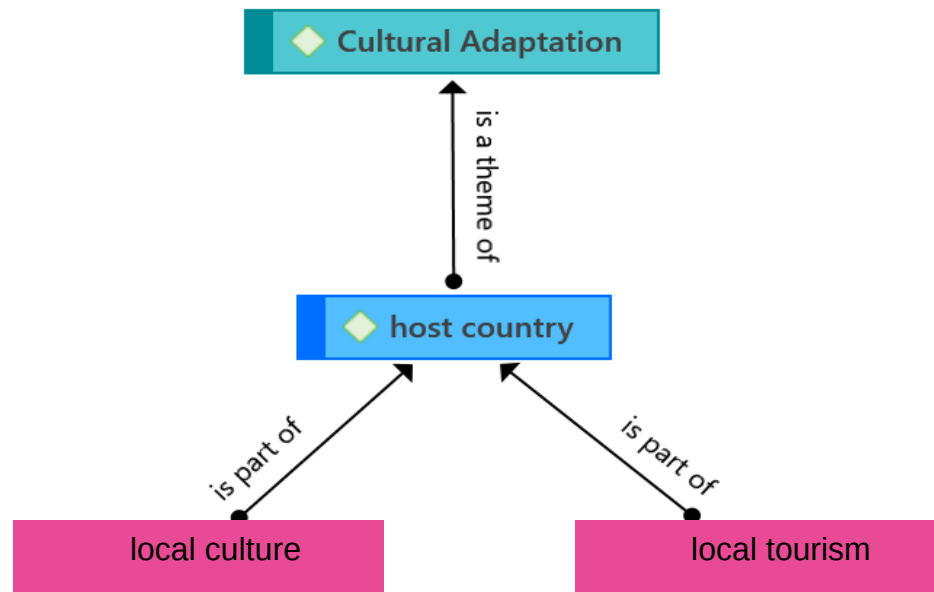


Figure 0.14 Host country

Sub-themes for the ‘host country’ are the ‘local tourism’ and ‘local culture.’ From the findings, the researcher has discovered that the international students’ adaptation process has also been affected based on how they control their emotions and manage their free time. A local tourism for these international students is mostly how they cope with their stress and release them into things that calm and ease them from the stress of their studies.

Most of these students redirect their stress into having a place as a goal to achieve and self-rewarding themselves for their hard-earned efforts. For example, S2 said that:

“When I had to escape from my assignments, me and my friends would go on an immediate and unplanned road-trip. At this rate I can finish

travelling the whole Peninsula Malaysia. I have been to Malacca to see the infamous historical castle, and Negeri Sembilan to see the building built without nails.” (S2)

S3 did the same thing to answer his ‘short-term break activity’ question. However, he is already setting up his mind to finish his studies as fast as possible and would rather read more and more. Nevertheless, sometimes, he chose to go on vacation to fill in his free time.

“Well, I usually do not want to waste my time, but besides studying, I think I would prefer to go on a vacation. Since my country does not have that many islands, I always go on an island-hopping activity or hiking. For the time being, I have been to Pulau Pangkor, Pulau Redang, and Pulau Besar near Tioman and Redang. I have also been to Langkawi. (S2)

S5 said that her short-term activity preference is to adapt to the new environment and visit new places. She said that:

“I prefer to visit new places to get fresh air and view. So far, I have visited Johor, Cameron in Pahang, Penang, Kedah, and Nilai, Negeri Sembilan.” (S5)

Since S1 came to study in the middle of the COVID-19 chaos, she told the researcher that she came twice to Malaysia before furthering her studies and experienced among the best memories she had as a tourist. However, her experience as a postgraduate student has not started yet because, during the interview, she was still under quarantine and had not yet experienced any stress-relieving place in Penang.

After analysing, researchers also found that the relationship between international students and locals can impact their adaptation process. Locals in their closest context were the local students with whom they went to class and did assignments together. These local students were considered the face of our country,

and the way they treat the international students can adjust their perception of them towards our whole community.

In this context, S4 describes his experience with the locals as very comfortable and easy. He said that:

“Although I have more international friends than the locals, I still think that the locals are somehow special. The majority of my locals’ friends are Malay, and doing business or talking with them is very easy, and you will feel very comfortable with them. I also have friends from different races like Chinese and Indians as well. I am also from Sabah and Sarawak. But I think the Malays are much friendlier.” (S4)

In another statement, he also describes the Malays as reserved at first. He does feel awkward when he starts to get to know them. His exact statement was:

“When you have Malay friends, at the beginning, they will be very reserved and awkward. But after quite some time of getting to know them and they start to trust you, you will feel like you are one of them. It is only hard at the beginning.” (S4)

Being a foreigner was not totally easy for him. Although he has many good friends with the local students, he also mentioned a bad experience when he rode with a taxi driver. Because of this incident, he might have a bad stereotype and perception towards a certain race. This proves that even one life experience can change or give positive or good impressions of a person’s cultural background. S4 mentioned that this incident was embedded in his memories, although it had happened years ago:

“There was one time, I was in a taxi with an uncle. I think I do not have to mention his race. This is mostly because I find this race very difficult to deal with at that time. He chased me with some machete because I argued that the guy overcharged me and my friends. He got upset when I questioned him and thought that I tried to argue because he thinks I

did not want to pay for his service. But it was a minor incident, and things happened. The rest of the time, I had a wonderful time.” (S4)

S5 also mentioned that local vendors and restaurants give the most satisfying customer service because they are all nice and helpful. However, she also had bad experiences with locals.

“When I first came here to find a rental house, I was given a very dirty house, and when I arrived, it turned out to be a prostitution house. I only stayed for two weeks and immediately found another place. I think this experience is very challenging for me.” (S5)

b. Lifestyle

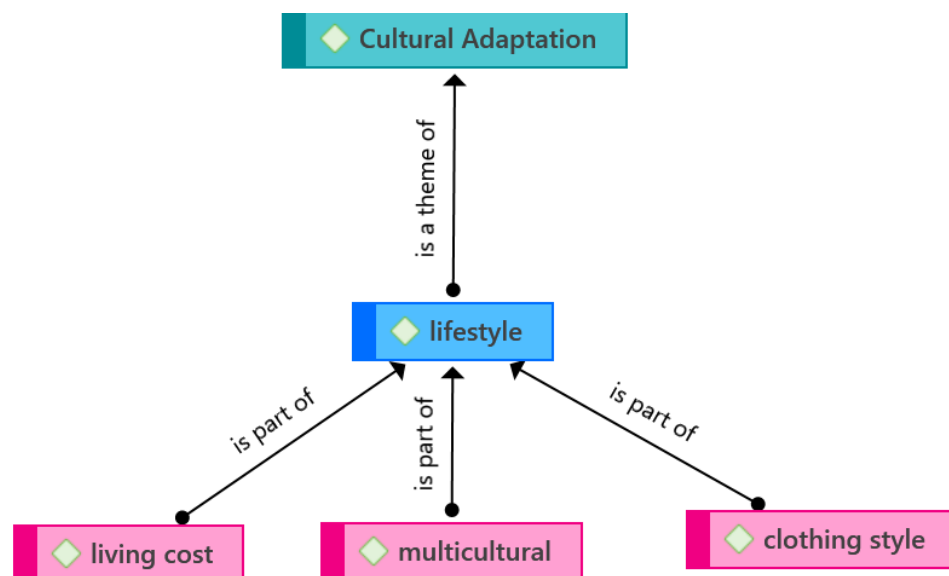


Figure 0.14 Lifestyle

Lifestyle themes can be elaborated by the sub-theme ‘living cost,’ ‘clothing style,’ and ‘multicultural.’ Surviving in a new environment with a different currency, it is important to suit the international students’ original lifestyle with the new one. This factor usually leads to shock when they face lower or higher living costs in the new environment. Living cost includes their daily expenses, tuition fee, and funds

provided by the institution. Usually, if international students come from a well-provided family, they do not have problems finishing their studies.

c. Familiarity

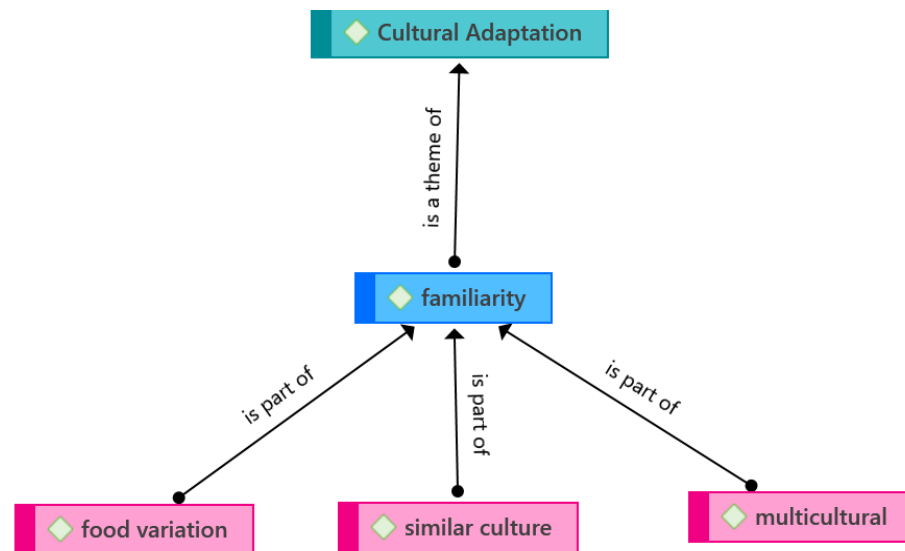


Figure 0.15 Familiarity

The theme of familiarity will discuss the sub-themes ‘variety of food,’ ‘similar culture,’ and ‘multicultural.’ Food was among the first concerns for students from Middle Eastern countries because the majority of them were Muslims. Hence, halal food should be their top priority. Although Malaysia is known for its food as a part of its identity (Ismail et al., 2021), many of the students consider the food does not cater to their taste. Halal food can be defined as those that do not include any ingredients that Muslims are forbidden from eating, for example, food that contains alcohol or any essence of pork (Abdallah et al. 2021). The informants mentioned this as the main challenge before. Correspondingly, food from various countries has increased and is easily accessible, especially because their universities are located at the heart of the country, Kuala Lumpur. S1 said:

“There are varieties of food from my homeland to choose from small restaurants and shops in Malaysia.”

Although food is accessible, living costs in the city have always been the main concern for students, especially self-funded students. Hence, grocery shopping is the next option. S3 mentioned in his interviews that he splurged all his money on eating outside before coming to Malaysia. However, since COVID-19, he has learned to cook for himself, as he has not been home for two years and has already missed his mother's cooking. S3 said that:

"I always went home every long-term holiday. When the COVID-19 travel ban was enforced, I was in despair. I miss my mom's cooking so much. Fortunately, because of technology, I am able to cook my favourite food with my mom. I am so glad Malaysia is a country with multiple ethnicities. All of the required ingredients listed by mother were easy to find" (S3)

As mentioned above, halal food was the top priority, and he mentioned that he was so grateful that Malaysia is a multicultural country. We live in a peaceful state with each other, and Malaysia's ability to accept outsiders and new cultures is an amazing phenomenon. S1 mentioned that:

"I am so glad that although Malaysia is not a Middle East country, the local food suits my taste. Sometimes, when I wanted to eat food from Syria, I could easily Google them, and they were one click away." (S1)

Coming from Indonesia, S2 was also amazed that Malaysians can live with more than two ethnicities in harmony. Moreover, each of these people in Malaysia carries their ethnicity in their names.

"We have Chinese and Malay in Indonesia, but we rarely have Indians there. And I am so excited that we can recognise a person's race and religion not only by their physical attributes, but also by their name. It is not common in Indonesia because we all have Indonesian names as our identity." (S2)

At the same time, S5 also mentioned that she is impressed with the locals in Malaysia and that most of them are actually multilingual:

“I know that all of the Malaysians can speak Malay, but I did not expect to hear Chinese talking in Mandarin and Indians talking in Tamil. We all speak in Bahasa Indonesia back home.” (S5)

4.2.3 Institutional Factor

Institutional Factor discusses how the university and the staff around the university affect the international students’ adaptation process as challenges and obstacles from their perspectives. The only sub-factor managed to be analysed under the Institutional Factor is the Academic Adaptation.

4.2.3.1 Academic Adaptation

The academic adaptation factors that have affected the adaptation process of postgraduate international students in Malaysia are divided into two, which are the Teaching Style and Sense of Responsibility.

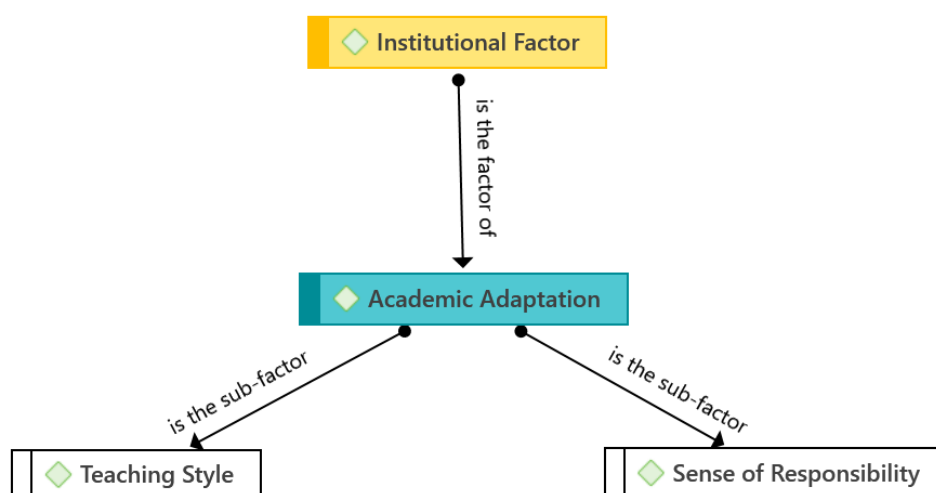


Figure 0.16 Institutional Factor

a. Teaching Style

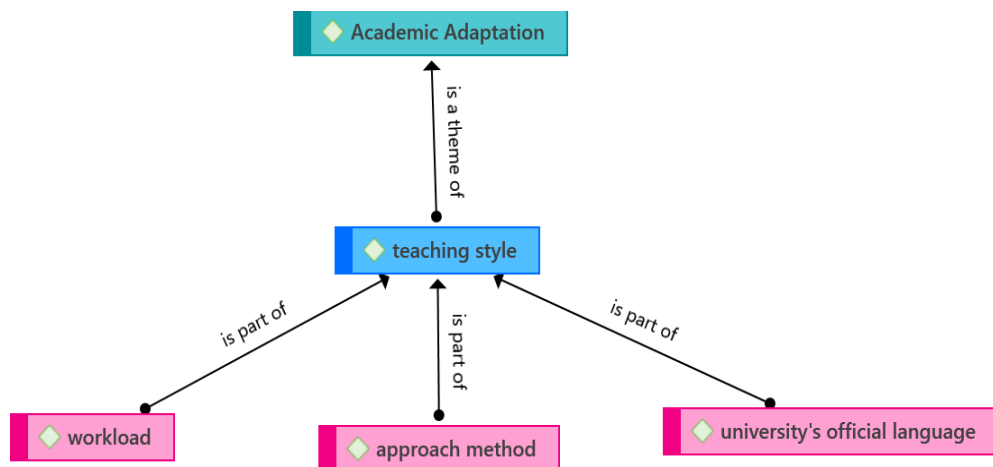


Figure 0.17 Teaching style

The sub-theme that will be discussed in this subsection is regarding the approaches used by the lecturers and the other staff to complement the university's style in delivering the syllabus. For example, 'workload,' 'approach method,' and 'university's official language.'

S2 mentioned that compared to her study between Indonesia and Malaysia, she receives more workload here than in her homeland:

"I think in terms of study system, the tasks assigned to students here are much more than I used to face back in Indonesia" (S2)

At the same time, as a computer student, S3 is also glad that the academic system in Malaysia did not leave their students to be 100% independent. Although he is a postgraduate student taking a research mode study, he feels that whenever he meets his supervisor, it is like reading a new book.

"The CGPA and GPA calculation is obviously different, but I think in Malaysia when the lecturers try to give you knowledge, they give you the whole. Like in-depth knowledge. But in my country, they only give

you the basics and less practical work. In UM, I got to work in the Cisco Lab often, and sometimes I could even bring them back home.” (S3)

As Malaysia declared English as its second language, S5 thought she would be studying and doing assignments in English. However, as she enrolled in UKM, she probably missed the instructions informing her that the university would use the Malay language as their main communication medium. Hence, she finds out that it is hard for her to adapt to the academic style used by UKM. She said that:

“Before enrolling, I studied for IELTS because I thought it was the compulsory preparation before studying abroad. But it turns out that since I entered UKM, all of the mediums of communication use only Bahasa Melayu. So, I was quite shocked and confused since my other friends in another university all use English in their classes. I think that is quite a challenge since I started studying here.” (S5)

b. Sense of Responsibility

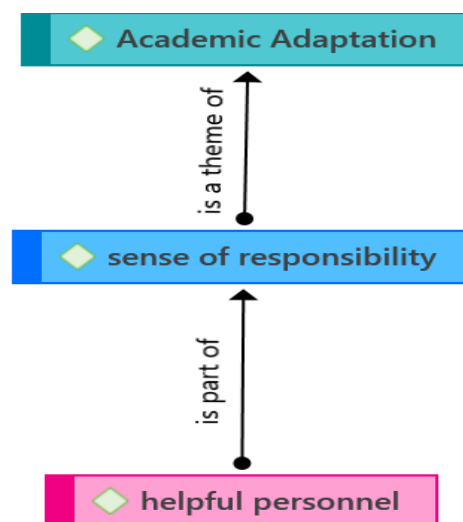


Figure 0.18 Sense of Responsibility

The following sub-theme focuses on the academic' role in assisting international students in adapting to Malaysia as their temporary residence while pursuing their studies, resulting in the emergence of the sub-theme 'helpful personnel.'

S1, in her interview, said that among all her education years (she has already obtained one degree and three master's), she still chose Malaysia as the best education provider:

“Between Iran, Austria, and Malaysia, I choose Malaysia because the students are so close with the lecturers. For example, the lecturers’ and students’ relationships are most likely just like between friends, which cannot be found in my country. We do not call lecturers by their first name. The lecturer also guides me with videos to show me how to get to my laboratory. She also gave me clear instructions about the facilities in the laboratory until I became familiar with it. I am very grateful to the lecturers in Malaysia.” (S1)

Every international student would have to go through more processes such as registration, visa, and many more that are quite complicated than the local students. They must interact more with the staff and personnel to complete the process and documentation. For S5, she is very glad that her business and any interaction with the staff at the counter are very smooth.

“In Indonesia, to meet the academicians, even if they are your lecturers is very hard, which I find is quite a big difference in Malaysia. A consultation with lecturers in Malaysia is super easy especially in terms of booking a meeting or consultation slot. But in Indonesia, to meet your lecturers is like setting a meeting with God, which I find super hard. Malaysia even has its own system, and this is what I really wanted during my study.” (S5)

As for S3, he admires his supervisor as a role model who has been with him since his bachelor's degree and now his master's degree:

“I found a person that is very helpful to me. She is very caring and supportive in terms of mental well-being and health care. She is my supervisor. Sometimes, I see that she tried to be in my shoes in order to understand my current state. Even when I had a financial situation, she tried to find me a job. But I think all people in Malaysia are very supportive.” (S3)

S4 could not explain the differences in the study system in terms of higher education because he started his tertiary education in Malaysia. Therefore, he has never experienced the tertiary education system in his country.

S5 saw that the lecturers in Malaysia were very professional and welcoming when she, as a student, wanted to approach them. She also found that the duration of classes in Malaysia is quite long.

“The lecturers are very cooperative. But, the big difference I found after studying in Malaysia was that it took a few classes (five to six classes) before the students got to present their findings and discussion regarding the topic. But in Indonesia, after the first introduction, the next class would be the presentation. As for the class duration, one course only requires two hours maximum of class, but in Malaysia we even have three hours of class.” (S5)

4.3 Staff Personnel Contribution in Adaptation Process

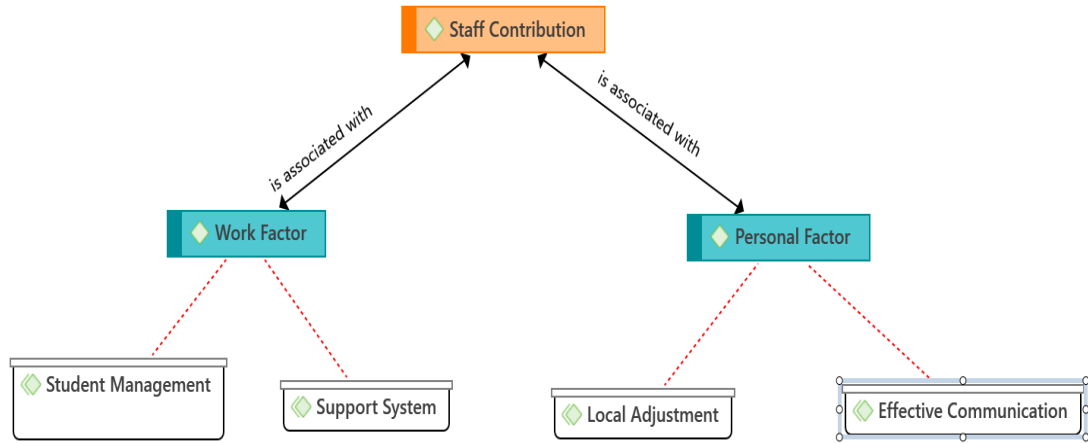


Figure 0.19 Staff Contribution

Throughout the analysis, it has been found that the staff's contribution should be divided into two main factors, which are the Work factor and the Personal factor. Each of these factors has been expanded into two sub-factors, which are Student Management and Support System under the Work factor, and Local Adjustment and Effective Communication under the Personal Factor. A total of four themes under the Staff's Contribution were derived from the 12 informants involved.

4.3.1 Work Factor

The work factor in this research has been divided into two sub-factors and two themes. The first sub-factor is Student management, with Hospitality by the staff from the respective universities as the first theme. The related sub-themes are pre-arrival orientation, post-arrival orientation, user guide, and trouble-free counter process. As for the Support System as the sub-factor, informants provided information related to counselling, 24-hours hotline system, buddy system, assigned peers, and faculty representative as the sub-themes to be categorised under the second theme, which is Guidance. The analysis of the themes network is shown below in Figure 4.14.

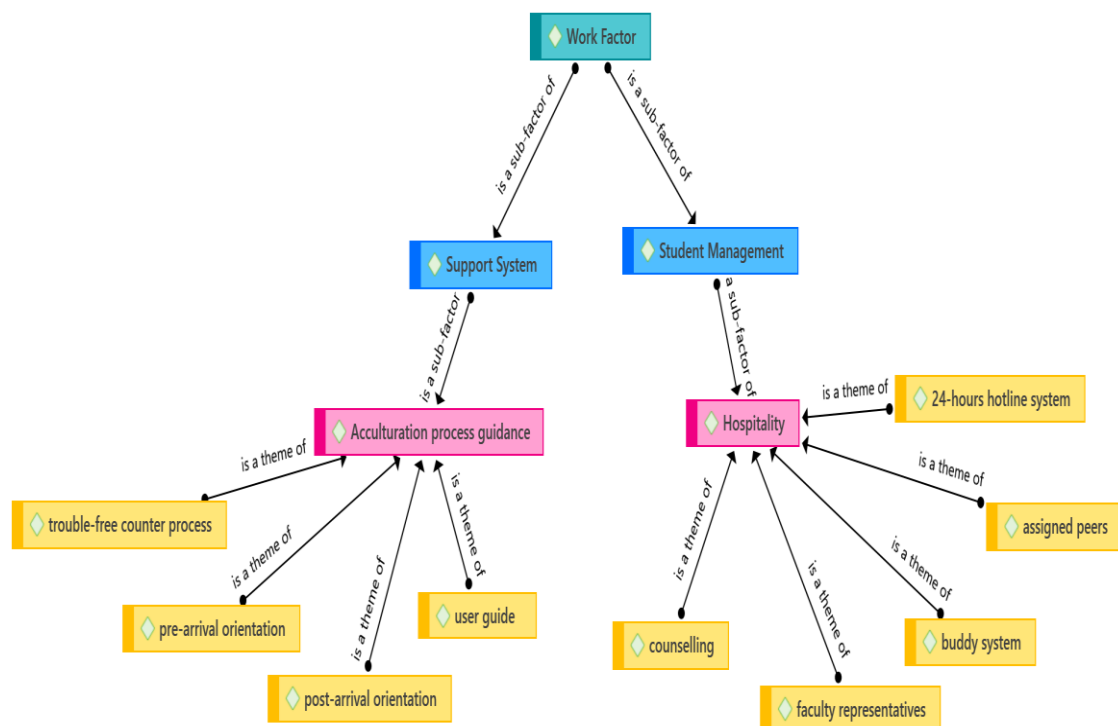


Figure 0.20 Work Factor

During the adaptation process by the international students, Malaysia, which has always been known as a country with a warm welcome, has been portrayed and defined a lot by the image of the staff brought as one of the first locals the international students meet and interact with. Judgmental and stereotypical thinking are things that cannot be changed without the person's will to change, and one should learn the truth first before sending the judgement. Based on the results above, the improvisation of the staff in the international student's management office can be contributed wholly when they made an earlier study regarding the international students' background. For example, to be a host to a country with males as dominant, such as the Middle East countries, Jordan, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia, a certain precaution or manner must be provided by them. A lot of the staff mentioned that the male students from these countries refused to be served by female staff at the counter. Safety measures for these female staff members must be taken so that they are not treated harshly, whether physically or verbally.

SP1, the director of the academic management centre, guaranteed his presence whenever a male international student from the Middle East visited the office to ensure proper treatment of his female staff. This contributed to a smooth and hassle-free process at the counter, providing convenience for both the staff and the international students.

“Sometimes, when a Middle East student comes to our office, he usually shows his feeling of being uncomfortable to be served by the female staff. If the situation is not critical, we will try to reason with them, or I myself will stand behind the female staff. But if they really insist, we will call a male staff member to take over.” (SP1)

This shows that it is his choice as a staff member to ensure that the student's business with his office is done without hassle and that he feels comfortable with the locals he interacts with. It is also his personal choice to make sure that his staff are dealing with the students in the correct manner. As a higher-up, he could just leave the situation to be handled by the staff and international students. However, he chose to make sure everything was okay. Hence, for the international students to be served and handled at the utmost of their comfort, these staff must be able to understand their client's background, and, in this case, the international students serve as the clients.

A personal guide from their respective university for each international student may function as a helpful support system through programmes or activities such as counselling, a 24-hours hotline system, and close contact with them to ensure that their study progress is still ongoing. Staff from the nerve centre (SP2) told the researcher that this type of support system is a must to help these international students because most of them stayed in the provided residency. SP2 said that:

“When COVID-19 happened, we were among the first universities that issued a total lockdown for the whole university. So, when this happened, the international students who stayed inside the university would feel stressed and be in an anxious state not knowing what was happening outside the campus and when the lockdown would

end. So, as a hotline centre, we were publicizing widely so that they could reach us anytime we needed. We even help set up a grocery village on the campus for them to restock their supply.” (SP2)

The experiences of the staff interviewed show that the students who came with family usually took the longest time to Graduate on Time (GoT). Since these students were tied with a commitment to feed the family, sometimes their studies got pending, which caused them to go missing. Most of these types of students were from the research mode because they were supposed to be independent.

The contribution to help postgraduate students is usually made by the international students who use the research method. For the coursework and mode students, they have their classmates and lecturers in class to help them adapt to the new environment. While in research mode, they rarely meet with their supervisors physically. SP4 said that:

“If we do not chase them, these postgraduate students will go MIA (missing in action) for months. Lecturers will have a headache when they have to submit progress.” (SP4)

From here, we can see that postgraduate international students need to be given extra attention, unlike undergraduate international students. SP5 also mentioned that she has to change her style of teaching to ensure the postgraduate students stay on track. But it is not because of her initiatives. She did it to ensure that she was free of problems and that the negative outcomes from the student's behaviour would not affect her in the future. Sometimes, the worker ensured that the international students were safe and sound because of the work factor. SP5 said:

“Back in the era before COVID-19, I always let the students do their own business. I never chase them if they do not want to come to my class or do not finish my assignments because the university will email them to give a warning four times. But now, if they are not

chased, I will be in trouble with the higher-ups. The attendance, the marks, all of that are on me.” (SP5)

The statement above proves that without the staff’s initiative under the pressure of the university’s management, the staff contributes to the development of the international students’ academic progress. Hence, the staff contributes to the adaptation process by the terms of work factor because of their responsibility as a worker at the host university. This action is considered as a Support System and a pushing factor for the international students’ academic adaptation.

4.3.2 Personal Factor

Personal factor, as the second factor in staff’s contribution, has also been divided into two sub-factors, which are the Local Adjustment and General Issues. Under the Local Adjustment, Early Exposure was chosen as the theme to adjunct the sub-themes, which are the cultural village, festive season, virtual tour, and inclusion in cultural activities. As for the last and fourth theme, Effective Communication as the sub-factors were chosen to complement the remaining varieties of activities and initiatives to facilitate the international students’ adaptation process in the public universities in Malaysia. After some coding and categorisations, one theme was derived from three sub-themes. Under the theme of Psychological Mindset, the sub-themes were warden help, no judgemental issues, and no stereotype embedded. The distribution is shown in Figure 4.15 below.

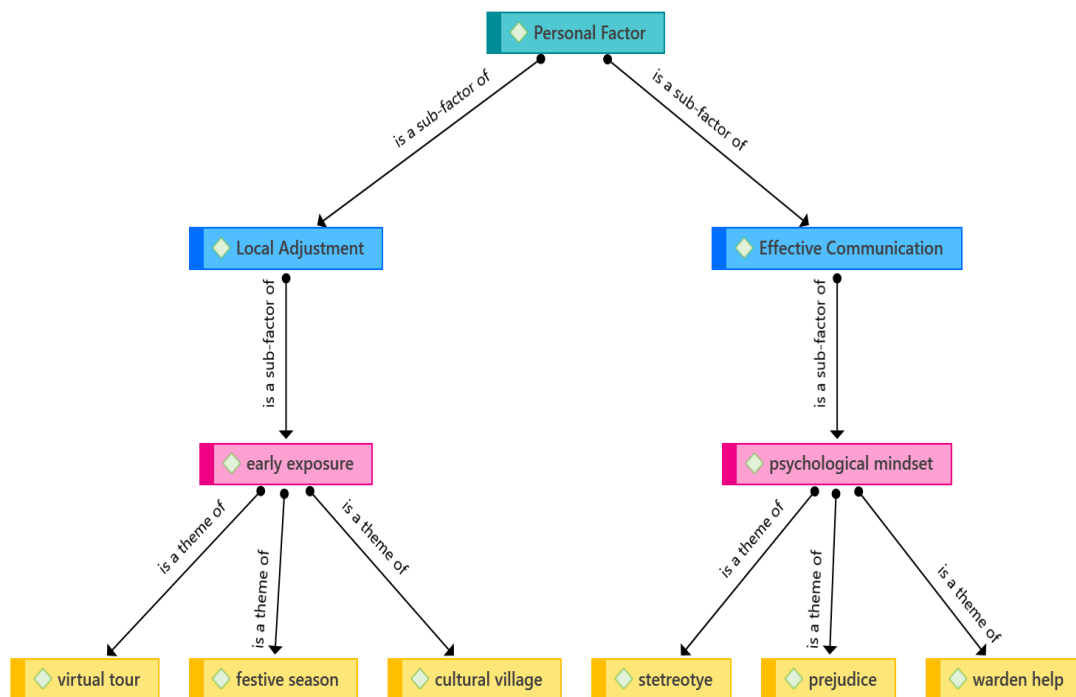


Figure 0.21 Personal Factor

As for personal factors, the researchers found that the lecturer's or staff's initiative sometimes helps the students adapt better to the university. As international students, the staff in the host university were among the first people they met as representatives of the country.

“The Middle East students were usually from a well-off family, and they are a bit choosy about the facilities. It is like they are preparing to inherit their father's company. So, they have to give a good ambience to study. They want a private room with totally silent surroundings. Sometimes, they knock on my door in the middle of the night just to complain. So, it is my job to calm and reason with them.”
(SP12)

SP12, who works as a fellow for the residency blocks that accommodate postgraduate international students, agrees that the students from the Middle East were the fussiest students among all the students he handled. Hence, it is

under the staff's personal initiative to cater to the complaints from the smallest and fussiest matter to the biggest matter, especially if it is made outside her working hours.

4.4 Building a suggested framework

Since the first framework uses only the Western context as the informants in building the model, the researcher has proposed the extension of the Cross-cultural Adaptation Model to suit the model in the usage of the Asian context. By taking the factors mentioned in 4.2 and 4.3, the model was expanded according to the sorted themes. As a measure, scholars have found that Asian students face greater difficulties in adapting than students from other regions (Amiri & Puteh, 2021). It is supported by the latest study stating that the acculturative stress for Asian international students was higher due to their origin country customs and lifestyle (Cao & Meng, 2022), which considered analysing the part that intercultural communication concerns between international students in the host country. Therefore, instead of replacing and proposing a new model, the extension of the model is shown in the dimension below.

The original model was first used as the framework of the study. The interview questions were constructed based on the original elements of the Cross-cultural Adaptation Model. After the interviews were done, newly founded elements were sorted into the model. The elements were expanded using the themes obtained from the thematic analysis to make the model fit into the Asian context. under the branch to complement the existing factor. Based on the Figure 4.16 below, it is suggested for the readers to read the Blue box as elements that represent the International Student Challenges and the Red box as elements that represent the Staff Contribution.

The first expansion is under the environment factor with branches of host receptivity, host conformity pressure, and ethnic group strength. The results of data analysis have expanded the element into the institutional factor, where the institution as the host is seen as an important factor in the adaptation process. The institutional factor highlights Academic Adaptation for international students with a 'sense of

responsibility' and 'teaching style'. Next, the international transformation, which branches only the physical fitness, psychological health, and intercultural identity as the original, has been expanded meticulously for each of the elements. Under physical fitness, the researcher found that Physical Adaptation can be complemented by the 'comfortability' during the international student's stay, which, if not addressed as an important challenge, will obstruct the adaptation process. For psychological health, Psychological Adaptation produces the result of a 'social circle' as a theme of challenge under the element. The intercultural identity fits Cultural Adaptation under its branches. It highlights challenges such as 'familiarity,' 'lifestyle,' and 'host country' as the expansion of the branches. Lastly, the third expansion focuses on the host's communication competence. The competency of the staff as a part of the host brings out the staff contribution part. The existing contributions were sorted into four themes, which are divided into Work Factors: 'student management,' and 'support system' as well as Personal Factors: 'local adjustment' and 'some general issue.'

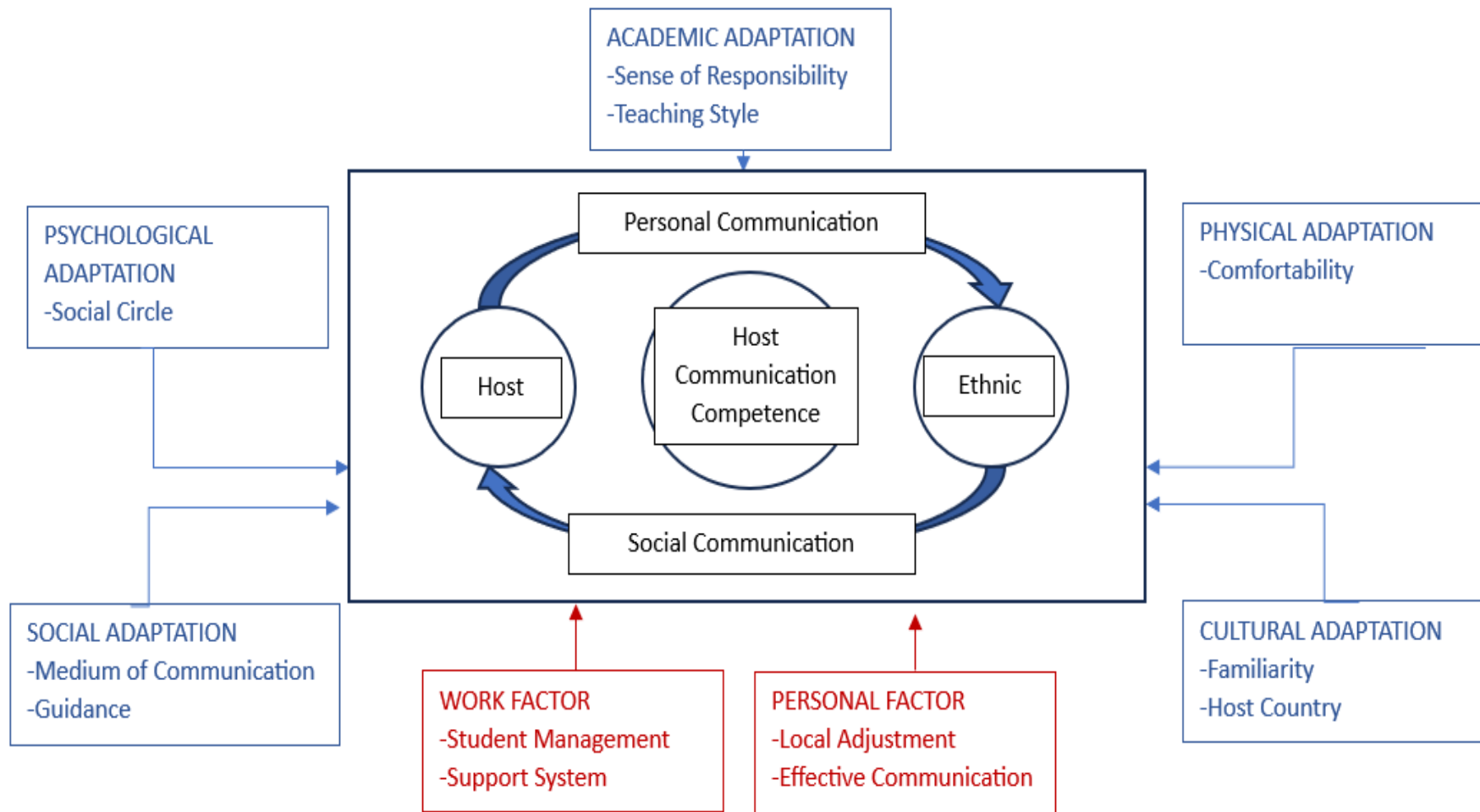


Figure 0.21 Suggested Model Expansion of the Cross-cultural Adaptation Model

Chapter 5

DISCUSSION

5.0 Introduction

This chapter will encompass the analysis and discussion of the conclusions derived from the qualitative data gathered. The e-interviews conducted involved the participation of twenty-four informants, resulting in the acquisition of valuable qualitative data. The findings provide empirical support for the interconnections between challenges encountered and the contributions of the staff in facilitating the adaptation process. Moreover, they shed light on the potential for expanding the Cross-cultural Adaptation Model to suit the Asian context better, suggesting modifications to Kim Young Yun's existing model. By identifying the challenges faced during the adaptation process by international students, this section aims to provide valuable insights to the readers while addressing the research questions and objectives outlined in Chapter 1.

5.1 Facing pre-pandemic adaptation challenges

International students are important assets for higher education. However, they frequently encounter difficulties since they are not socially active and are not familiar with the local culture. Based on the findings above, some of the challenges faced by the previous international students and stated in the literature review have already dissolved over time with the help of search engines and social media, which varies depending on their need for information (Shi et al., 2021). Prior to and following their

arrival in Malaysia, international students have different information needs. These students use search engines and social media to help them get early and wider views regarding their universities and host countries, where they discuss and do information through groups mainly on Facebook (Bukhari et al., 2020). Resources like blogs, Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook, along with the availability of numerous hashtags and keywords, have enabled them to see the country's positive aspects and to take precautions while visiting using information about the country's negative aspects, such as its "dos and don'ts" and "black areas."

Table 2 Personal Factor

Factor	Sub-Factor	Theme	Code
Personal Factor	Physical Adaptation	Comfortability	Climate
			Facilities
			Transportation
			Same sports interest
	Psychological Adaptation	Social circle	Country support group
			Cooperative classmates

The first factor, which is the Personal Factor, listed Physical and Psychological Adaptations as the sub-factor. Under the physical adaptation, the international students highlight their comfort during their stay in Malaysia. Along with the findings of this research, international students think that the climate of the chosen country is an important factor that might hinder their comfort as students. These students usually

choose a country with a climate most similar to theirs. Students from MENA (Middle East and North Africa) countries prefer Malaysia as a country to continue their studies because they do not have to handle the four-season living cost, such as cold outfits and heaters for the winter or air-conditioners for the summer. This poses a significant challenge for European and Western students as they often struggle to cope with the tropical climate in Malaysia, which has high temperatures and humidity throughout the year. Consequently, their daily activities may be hindered.

Although climate change in Malaysia has become a very much concern to environmentalists, it is still a weather cycle that international students can endure physically. This aspect has been cited by researchers in earlier studies as a barrier that overseas students face (Broucker et al., 2021a; Tuerxun et al., 2020). Similarly, Mahmud et al. (2010) conducted a focus group of international students in Malaysia and discovered a similar effect; one of the concerns students complained about was the weather. Furthermore, (Singh et al., 2022) and (Yu et al., 2023) studies show that climate adaptation issues such as hot temperatures and severe rains limit students' activities.

The term comfortability also might be related to the *facilities* provided by the university and the way the host country manages its public transport system. If given a choice, most international students would prefer to live on campus, especially when they need to commute from their living space to the laboratory or the postgraduate room for the study ambience. Hence, facilities such as the hostel, laboratory, library, postgraduate room, or any required facilities that the university can provide will greatly help them in the adaptation process. These factors are among the first searches they will do before furthering their study, and according to the findings, few of the students that got to enrol in the four Research Universities (RUs) are especially satisfied with the facilities provided. Although it is not perfect compared to other countries, international students think that Malaysia is among the countries with the best facilities at the university. Living variables such as cost of living and accommodation were two crucial variables for international students to reach satisfaction while living in Malaysia (Tavares, 2024).

The comfort of the students is also included in the *transportation* factor. Most first and second-world countries have good transportation systems that would save the students' living costs and time spent waiting for the train or bus transition. Therefore, it would be a challenge in their adaptation process if their living cost rises. They have to spend more time considering their living costs, such as rental, internet services, and transportation, rather than studying (Namoco, 2022). The study found that Malaysia still has a bad transportation system and walking from place to place. However, the students who live in the big city are still impractical. A study mentioned this issue by stating that it is better than facing ridiculous taxi fares and that the roads in Malaysia are quite convenient for students to use bicycles. As mentioned in Chapter 4, the international students' expectations of Malaysia's transportation systems are high before coming to Malaysia. However, as they arrived here, public transportation systems were not recommended for use if you were in a rush or on a strict schedule, and as for the consequences, they had to walk. The students also mentioned that the transition schedule between the trains or buses is usually not punctual, and this sometimes has caused the students to get tired of waiting or have problems when meeting with lecturers or attending classes. This problem was also mentioned by a group of international students from Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), who stated that the public transportation systems were so bad and lacked in frequency, and the schedule was not provided by the university (Abdullah et al., 2015; Tavares, 2024). This is considered a hassle for international students because, upon arrival, they will have difficulties adjusting to the transportation system, especially for international students who are staying outside of the campus.

Lastly, the students also found that having the *same sports interests*, such as football, futsal or badminton, as the local students give them the comfort to adapt well and make them feel closer to the local surroundings. Men and women generally define friendship differently. Men want partners for adventures, while women appear to look for close confidantes (Moradi, 2020). In the researcher's opinion, having the same sports interests is included in the physical adaptation challenge because having a stepping-stone or having chemistry with the circle you are living with every day gives you a thrill in life. Living as a postgraduate student, you have to be very independent and most of the journey is a lonely one. However, having a group of people that can

divert their focus from their studies at a certain chosen time and loosen their muscles, living a healthy life, can help international students adapt well in Malaysia. International students were found to cultivate their resiliency skills during the adaptation process through group projects, in-class activities, and by utilising university and private support systems (Singh, 2021). As the Southeast Asian country with the most obese population, up to a fifth of national healthcare spending is already allocated to addressing obesity-related disorders (Kasirye et al., 2020). Hence, it is encouraged by the government to practice a healthy lifestyle either by exercise or food intake.

It is important to care about the mental health of each individual because without having mental stability, the self-esteem and self-efficacy of an individual can be affected by depression, which results in low life satisfaction (Gebregergis et al., 2019). Hence, psychological adaptation must be stressed, especially for students, because not everybody can share their problems and burdens others. The people in one's *social circle* are significant because they are the ones they will interact with frequently and regularly on a daily basis. Correspondingly, the social circle will have the biggest impact on how well postgraduate international students adapt. In addition to the lecturer, this group will teach them about local customs, the university's working procedures, the new academic system, and everything else about how society functions, all of which will change their perspectives of the locals—either positively or negatively. A *support group* is important in helping international students adapt as postgraduates. It is either officially founded by the university or created by its close circle. The social circle established among international students does not necessarily entail regular weekly meetings or mandatory attendance at organized activities, as communication and interaction can also occur through online group chats or phone calls. These interactions may involve casual updates on academic pursuits, discussions of the news from their home countries, the exchange of ideas or opinions, or simply spending time together, such as sharing meals or engaging in travel activities (Broucker et al., 2021b). Such support groups have been shown to hold significant importance, particularly for postgraduate students engaged in research studies who may have arrived in Malaysia without pre-existing family or contacts. These social circles play a crucial role in bridging the gap between acculturative stress and

psychological adaptation, as evidenced by Falavarjani's (2020) research. By having a support group, postgraduates, especially students doing research mode who are expected to be independent, can have a place for them to share. Even though mixed-mode and coursework postgraduate students can rely on or utilise their friends as references, they still need someone who understands their circumstances, such as a support group from their own country. Having a support network from the same country requires less explanation because they share the same background and understanding, even if they speak a completely different language. Families and friends from home can also act as a support group, but having them virtually is not as enough as sharing with someone who is physically there. It is a concern for a few scholars that if these international students lose their social support, it can decrease the quality and process of their adaptation, mainly in the psychological and academic adjustment phases (Abd Malek & Ahmad, 2023; Pekerti et al., 2020).

When discussing the mode of study, it is also important for postgraduate international students with coursework or mixed mode study to have *cooperative classmates*. The multicultural environment in the classroom is seen as a key determinant in whether international students will promote the university to others as evidence of a successful adaption process (Tavares, 2024). A variety of new elements in an environment can lead to stress in handling burdened groupmates or problematic classmates. These problems can delay their own studies and can act as major challenges during the early phase of the adaptation process. This can also cause them to be unable to move into the adjustment phase in the adaptation process because they get stuck trying to figure out how to handle the behaviours of their classmates. A study featuring first-year students mentioned that the inability to fit among classmates is a major adjustment issue (Tengku et al., 2021). Nevertheless, the findings of this study show that international students in Malaysia feel that their classmates are very cooperative during class activities or group assignments. The international students have concerns, such as free-riders or any of the group members ignoring their responsibilities as part of the tasks. However, until this point, international students have never had that kind of problem as they often faced it during their studies.

Table 3 External Factor

Factor	Sub-factor	Theme	Code
External Factor	Social Adaptation	Medium of Communication	Language barrier
			Language mix-up
			Malay is an easy language
		Guidance	Safe environment
			Early exposure
	Cultural Adaptation	Familiarity	Food variation
			Similar culture
			multicultural
		Lifestyle	Living cost
			Clothing style
			Host Country
		Host country	Local tourism
			Local culture

The second factor is the External Factor. Under this factor, social adaptation and cultural adaptation are seen as challenges. Usually, these two adaptations were combined as sociocultural adaptations. However, since the cultural factor in Malaysia has a stronger and wider attribute in terms of impact on international students, the researcher has separated it to give each adaptation factor a more specific discussion. The social factor of the students derived the theme of the medium of communication and guidance after the analysis.

Individuals who are socially capable, according to Marlowe (1986), appear to have a rich, meaningful life, as opposed to shortened emotive experiences. Therefore, to ensure that international students have the utmost experience during their studies in Malaysia, their social adaptation process must also go smoothly. Medium of communication focuses on the code *language barrier* and Malay as an easy language. This study found that only some of the international students feel that the language barrier still challenges them. The students from countries far from Southeast Asia, like the MENA, Tanzania, Nigeria, and Africa, discovered that living in Malaysia, where the majority of the population can at least speak basic English, or if they cannot reply, they can at least understand the context of the conversation, is not a big issue to them. This language ability was available to every citizen of Malaysia who went to get their formal education. They started learning English as early as 5 years old. They were required to take English as a compulsory subject for the *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia* (Malaysian Education Certificate) as their high school graduation requirement at 17 years old. This is especially true during interactions like food purchases or customer service.

Table 4 Example of context differences between Malay and Indonesian language (Lin et al., 2019)

Words	Bahasa Melayu	Bahasa Indonesia
lemas	drowned	tired
comel	cute	fussy
bual	chatting	telling lies
gincu	lipstick	food colouring
pengacara	master of ceremony	lawyer
becak	mud	trishaw
percuma	free of charge	pointless

However, the analysis also found that those international students who live in the Southeast Asia region, especially the country's neighbour, feel that they can get confused with the language used by the locals. The figure below shows some of the differences in meaning that cause confusion in daily life usage by Indonesian students. As the example stated in Chapter 4, language mix-up happens because we can see the

different contexts. However, the same words were the cause of these problems, which were identified as semantics problems. Hence, the language barrier was found to be a challenge only to postgraduate international students whose language is almost similar to Malay. When Malaysia's educational system differs from the effect of the British language, and Indonesians are raised in a culture that uses the native language but is influenced by the Dutch alphabet and language system, they find it difficult to change the system (Setiawan, 2020). The Indonesian people use the Indonesian language to express even the most basic aspects of their personal identities, such as their name, race, ethnicity, shop signage, and academic writings, to support the country's language policy (Fitriati & Rata, 2021).

As a solution, these students have to use the English language as a medium of communication so as not to feel left out or get confused with the context of conversations. Linguistic practise can boost social confidence and keep the linguistic ego from controlling the learning process (Xiashi & Lin, 2020). Thus, while they are adapting to their new surroundings, international students have a great probability of surviving if the students are able to try to speak in Malay language too. Findings demonstrate that Malaysians frequently pronounce vowels with a larger vocal tract and are not overly cognizant of vowel duration. It is also significant to note that the analysis's findings indicated that Malaysian English vowel production is more similar to American English vowel production than British English vowel production (Edwards & Zulkornain, 2019). The figure below shows the differences in phonetics pronunciations, with the names of the countries as an example. As written in the table below, Malay is a language that emphasises its syllable pronunciations based on vowel strength, which is different from English. In contrast, Malaysia stresses using English as a lingua franca and every Malaysian's second language to keep up with the developing world. Because they rarely get the opportunity to practise in their native country, it is rather difficult for the majority of Indonesian students who travel overseas to study.

COUNTRY NAME	IPA TRANSCRIPTION	PRONUNCIATION (MALAY)	EXPLANATION
India	^ˈ Indiə	india	Malay is a very easy, straightforward language. The pronunciation of each syllable is according to its vowel. So usually, for country names ending with A, the sound is /a/
Brazil	brə ^ˈ ziɪ	bra ^ˈ ziɪ	Replace /ə/ sound with /a/
Thailand	^ˈ taɪ.lænd	^ˈ taɪ.lænd	Same as English
Vietnam	vi.ət ^ˈ nam	vi.ət ^ˈ nam	Same as English
Kazakhstan	.kazak ^ˈ stan	kazak ^ˈ stan	Same as English
Korea	ko ^ˈ riə	ko ^ˈ ria	Replace /ə/ sound with /a/
Pakistan	^ˈ pækɪ.stæn	^ˈ pakɪ.stan	Replace /æ/ sound with /a/
Portugal	^ˈ pɔɹtʃegəl	^ˈ pɔɹtugal	Replace /ə/ sound with /u/ and /a/

Figure 0.1 Example of pronunciations differences between English and Malay (Edwards & Zulkornain, 2019)

It has also been discovered that these international students like to try to learn the Malay language as part of their way of overcoming the communication barrier. As a postgraduate student, it is crucial to develop communication skills because they help one's ability to communicate effectively. In order to interact effectively in their personal and professional lives, students who attend a multicultural institution with peers from other nationalities may develop certain intercultural communication skills (Bond, 2022). The justification for these international students is that learning the *Malay language is easier* because the words can roll easily on their tongues. Malay is a language that is very transparent in terms of pronunciation, spelling, and the way it is read, which is quite different from the English language because the syllables written are not the same as the ones pronounced. Hence, instead of polishing their English, they also feel proud that they can already understand and sometimes join in the conversations with their basic Malay. Note that this excluded the conversations when the speakers used their state dialects, such as Terengganu or Kedah.

The cultural adaptation demonstrates that familiarity, lifestyle, and stress relievers strongly influence the students' issues. The first theme, familiarity, can be connected to the environment into which each individual was born, which may affect

how they identify as they age. These two will serve as a reminder of their identity and place in the world. This identification also brings out the comfort of being at home when they live in a new place. According to one study, religious connections do not always ensure integration in intracultural dialogue among persons who practise the same faith, especially when they originate from various ethnic and cultural backgrounds (Al-Aghbas, 2020). This factor is determined as familiarity. In contrast to living in a completely foreign and alien culture, these international students may relate to and adapt to the new culture more easily through familiarity. This issue also impacts the decision of where to continue one's studies. Hence, familiarity is important in terms of cultural adaptation because having even a tiny bit of elements that can be acquainted with from back home can help the students reduce acculturation stress. Familiarity is also related to food variation, similar cultures, and multiculturalism. Since the majority of Middle Eastern students are Muslims, food preparations and sources were considered their main priority, which is especially true for students from Muslim-dominated countries (Febriastuti, 2023). Their diets changed as a result of both personal and environmental causes. While studying abroad, dietary changes may impact a student's weight and health. Compared to local students, international students were more susceptible to food poverty (Shi et al., 2021). Food that does not contain any elements that Muslims are prohibited from consuming, such as food that contains alcohol or any pork essence, is referred to as halal. In addition, it was difficult to match their Middle Eastern inclinations with Asian cuisine. These are the main obstacles mentioned by the informants who have lived in Malaysia for a long time. However, now a wider variety of food is available, much of it easily accessible. Whether it is groceries or ready-to-eat food, Malaysia, known as the food hub by the locals, provides food from almost the whole world. New trends in food emerge almost every week and month. Hence, there are countless food options for them to choose from.

This importance of having a lifestyle is crucial to adapting the international students' previous lifestyle to the new one so they can survive in a foreign country with a different currency. This element typically results in shock when individuals experience cheaper or higher living expenses in a new environment. Their daily expenses, tuition, and monies granted by the institution are included in their living

costs. International students who come from well-off families typically do not encounter difficulties finishing their studies. This factor is also related to the locals' fashion style. We can see that although Malaysia is a widely diverse country, the locals still practice decent clothing styles as they were raised in Eastern manners, customs, and elements. Hence, most international students who came to Malaysia were from Muslim countries, which also practice decent clothing styles. This factor also contributes to fewer international students from Europe or Western countries.

The environment of the host country is also a challenge for international students. In the cultural context, the students need to have a place to relieve their stress. According to the research findings, how international students manage their emotions and their free time impacts how well they adjust to their new environment. For these international students, managing their tension and letting it out into activities that calm and relieve their study-related stress is a major stress reliever. The majority of these students channel their stress into setting a specific objective and rewarding themselves for their diligent work, which is a diversion of acculturative stress (Yorganci & Sadrimovahed, 2024).) Hence, the surroundings of the host country are crucial as a part of the adaptation process. The stress during the study was relieved by walking and breathing fresh air. Imagine if the host country has bad air quality or an environment with scenery of trash everywhere. Taking a brisk walk would be a horror experience for them and much more stressful. The local culture is also a contributing factor because, from the results of observations, researchers discovered that the interactions between locals and international students can affect how well they adjust to their new environment as the students face discrimination because of their status as foreigners. Discriminations happen based on negative stereotypes, fear, or suspicion of anything outside their norms or cultures because of a lack of in-depth knowledge regarding the discussed matter or subjects (Ismail et al., 2022). Locals closest to them were the local students with whom they attended classes and completed tasks. These local students were viewed as the face of our nation, and how they treat overseas students can change how the rest of our community views them.

Table 0 Institutional Factor

Factor	Sub-factor	Theme	Code
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Institutional Factor	Academic Adaptation	Teaching style	Workload
			Approach's method
			University's official language
		Sense of Responsibility	Helpful personnel

Evidence suggests that students' overall experiences at the institution impact how they advocate their current university to prospective students (Tavares, 2024). The third aspect, the institutional factor, demonstrates two difficulties in academic adaptation: the sense of duty and the teaching style. The students frequently noted that their lecturers in their home country hardly ever expressed concern for them as students when discussing their feelings of duty. In contrast to their lecturers, Malaysian lecturers follow their students' progress without considering the pupils. The university's official language is a challenge from the institutional side. For example, the informants said that the official language used by UKM is Malay, which is quite a challenge to international students since all the assignments and classes are held in Malay (Singh & Jack, 2022). They also need to take at least three course subjects as a graduation requirement. In the opinion of the overseas students, the lecturers in Malaysia show considerably more concern than just imparting knowledge. They believe that lecturers in Malaysia always serve as a maternal figure for them as sojourners, despite the fact that they are postgraduate students who are meant to become independent despite being in a foreign country. Their sense of responsibility ensures that the student's Graduate on Time (GoT) and graduate with quality.

5.2 Staff's existing contribution

The study has recommended that the framework be expanded to incorporate staff input in the adaptation for international students. This advice is made because staff members are among the first visitors to international students. The importance of the critical time during the international student's arrival was most strongly influenced

by students' interactions with the university's accommodation office and their participation (Tavares, 2024). When they first arrive on campus, new international students find adjusting to their new living situation and making friends difficult. Before students can interact with their peers, classmates, and roommates, they must deal with the staff from arriving at the airport until the tour, registration, or helping to resolve housing or academic issues. As a result, for these international students, the staff is crucial to the smooth progression of the adaptation process. Upon analysis, it was found that the contribution of the staff was fractionated into two sections, which are the work factor and the personal factor.

Work factors were chosen as a symbol that the decision for the staff to contribute to the adaptation process of the international process is due to their obligations as a worker at the university and their work scope at the department they were assigned to. The first theme derived from the analysis of the interviews was that the student management sections were required to provide hospitality to the students as the host in the country. Examples of the services provided include pre- and post-arrival orientation, personal counselling, a user guide, and a counter with staff specialising in handling international students. As for the support system, the university provides guidance programs or services such as a 24-hour hotline system and programs such as a buddy system. Other than that, a faculty representative by the country of origin, where the local students act as their assigned tour guide or a person to refer to before these international students go straight to the office counters, causes hassle to the staff. All of the services were considered initiatives by the university for international students to familiarise themselves with the new surroundings. The assigned staff were the executors of the plan and guidelines, strategized and provided by the university executives and higher-ups in the adjustment process of the international students. Besides the need for a welcoming environment, the university also provides a support system that international students can turn to if they need the opinion of adults or someone familiar with the surroundings and university system. The general, academic, and social adjustment of international students is influenced by perceived lecturer support and the host country's national support (Chan et al., 2021).

The next factor is the personal factor. This factor is chosen as a category of contribution because the researcher finds that it is the staff's personal choice to extend their help and gratitude, whether as a lecturer or staff at the counter, to assist the international students in their adaptation process. As for the local adjustment, the findings show that the staff had fun introducing the local culture to the international students as an early exposure. The postgraduate students, especially the research mode students, usually have closer bonds with their supervisors because of their one-to-one interactions. The next theme is the general issues such as the personal treatment of the students, the abstract feelings of sincerity, and the psychological mindset of stereotypes and prejudices with the origins of the students.

5.3 Expanding the Western context model to suit the Asian context.

As for the third objective, the model has been elaborated into a wider version of the framework. Some of the factors in the original model have been elaborated into new factors, and some have been replaced with new ones. The original factor, Predisposition, Environment, and Intercultural Transformation as mentioned in Chapter 2, has been developed to suit the Western context. Hence, the researcher found out that the original model needs to cover more aspects because when it comes to the Asian context, in this case, the local context referring to Malaysia specifically, social and cultural aspects need to be highlighted due to the existence of a society that lives with more than one mother tongue, dialects, customs, and lifestyle.

From the outcome, it can be seen that it is important for the host country to emphasize the country's uniqueness as the ambassador of the country. The role played by the host country differs according to the respective region, such as Asian and European countries (Nadeem et al., 2022). The issue of solving and handling cultural differences is important as deep disputes between groups are caused by differences in ethnic, religious, and cultural understanding and practises (Yılmaz & Temizkan, 2022).

The figure below shows the suggested expansion of the model derived for the Asian context. While the Western context offers only three factors as adaptation factors, these factors complement a part of the adaptation process in terms of the Asian context, mainly in Malaysia, which is the country in which international students choose to further their studies.

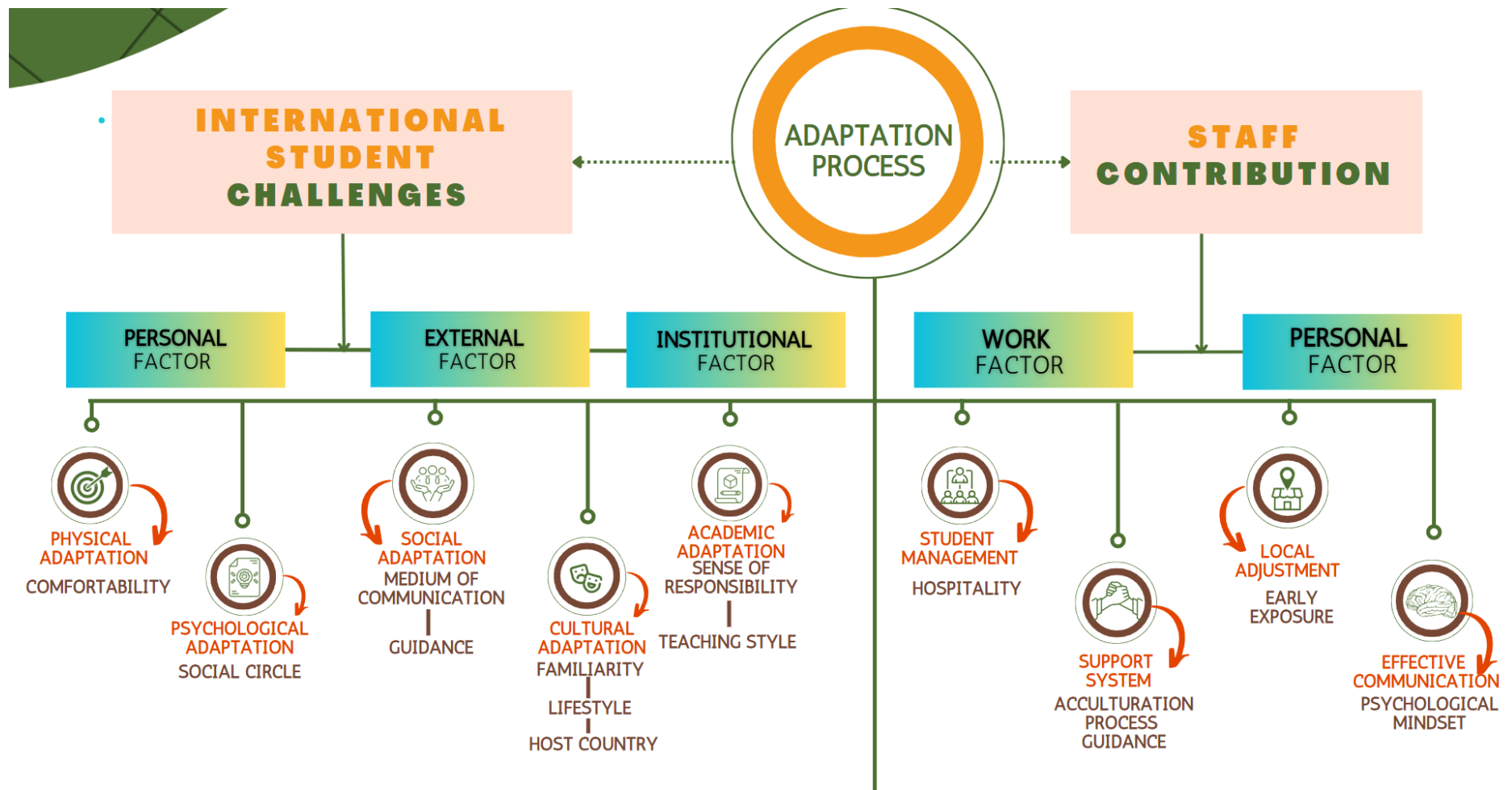


Figure 0.2 Suggested expansion of Intercultural Adaptation Model

5.4 The Role of Demographics in Adaptation Experiences

The demographic details of the informants offer important background that aids in explaining the differences in experiences between students and staff, even though the focus of this study is on the thematic obstacles and support networks involved in the adaptation process. People's perceptions and reactions to adaptation-related difficulties vary according on their age, nationality, gender, and institutional role. This section investigates how intercultural problems intersect with personal and professional backgrounds by looking at various demographic aspects. Additionally, it emphasises how these profiles fit into Kim Young Yun's Cross-Cultural Adaptation Model, providing more understanding of the dynamic interplay between host environment and individual predispositions. Both overseas postgraduate students and university employees are the subject of the discussion that follows, which demonstrates how their demographic traits influenced their adaptation experiences and their responsibilities in promoting adjustment.

The study's respondents' diverse experiences with adaptation are explained in part by their demographic profiles. Younger students in their twenties, for instance, frequently turned to friends and social media to help them get settled, whereas older students in their thirties had a harder time juggling their studies and family obligations. Due to cultural and religious commonalities, students from adjacent regions—like Indonesia and the Middle East—seemed to adjust more readily. However, students from Central Asia or Africa reported more challenges with communication and local traditions. These variations imply that students' reactions to the new environment and support networks can be significantly influenced by their age, nationality, and personal circumstances.

The demographic data gathered from university employees also gives the results helpful perspective. The majority of the personnel has years of experience working with international students. Their support for student adaptability was shaped in part by their experience and their involvement in day-to-day activities. When students encountered difficulties, female staff members—especially married ones—

tended to offer more emotional support by demonstrating patience and understanding. These findings are consistent with Kim Young Yun's Cross-Cultural Adaptation Model, which emphasises how the host environment and individual background affect adaptation. As a result, the demographic information is more than just descriptive; it also deepens the study's interpretation and shows how flexible the model is outside of its Western roots.

5.5 Substantial Future Contribution

This study identifies a number of possible avenues for further investigation on how overseas postgraduate students in Malaysia adjust. More study is required to build on and broaden the current findings in larger contexts, even if they provide valuable insights into the difficulties and support networks associated with student adaptation.

First, since this study only looked at postgraduate students, future research might examine the experiences of overseas undergraduate students. Due to a variety of characteristics, including age, maturity level, academic reliance, and limited experience to international academic systems, undergraduate students may encounter various adaption issues. A more comprehensive understanding of the diverse adaption patterns among international students in Malaysia may be possible by comparing these groups.

Second, a broader spectrum of university students, particularly those from rural or linguistically distinct states like Sabah, Sarawak, Terengganu, and Kelantan, might be included in the study. Compared to research universities in cities, these regions offer unique institutional and social contexts that might have a different impact on the adaptation process. Future studies could better understand how regional characteristics impact intercultural adaptation by broadening their geographic coverage.

Third, to supplement the rich qualitative insights presented here, other research could use mixed-method or quantitative methodologies. The themes found in this thesis may be confirmed and generalised with the aid of survey-based research with bigger sample

sizes. To monitor how adaptation changes over time and pinpoint crucial stages or turning points, longitudinal research might also be beneficial.

Fourth, this study discovered that the experiences of international students are significantly shaped by non-academic staff, an aspect that is often overlooked. Future studies can concentrate more on the multicultural awareness, training, and readiness of administrative and support personnel in various departments, as well as the effects of institutional culture and staff attitudes on students' academic performance and general well-being.

Lastly, the results point to the necessity of additional theoretical research and model development. Despite its strength, Kim's Cross-Cultural Adaptation Model might use some updating with Asian context-specific factors such as multilingualism, religious diversity, and hierarchical communication norms. Future studies could use actual data from various institutional and national contexts to improve or create hybrid models that more accurately represent adaptation in multicultural Asian countries.

5.6 Suggestions for future research

5.6.1 Theoretical Directions

Future studies could evaluate and improve Kim Young Yun's Cross-Cultural Adaptation Model in other non-Western or multilingual societies, even if this study used it in the Malaysian context. Given Malaysia's distinct sociocultural context, which is characterised by linguistic hybridity, religious plurality, and ethnic variety, it may be necessary to modify current theoretical frameworks or even create frameworks tailored to the country. Scholars should think about including cultural elements like linguistic hierarchy, power distance in academic contexts, and communal values that were not initially part of Western-based frameworks. The model's flexibility and limitations would be further elucidated by comparative studies conducted in other Asian nations using Kim's model and other adaptation theories.

5.6.2 Methodological Enhancement

A small sample of postgraduate students and employees from four Research Universities (RUs) participated in semi-structured interviews as part of this study's qualitative methodology. The current findings could be validated and generalised in future research using mixed methods or quantitative methodologies. The knowledge of adaption experiences across student demographics could also be improved by involving a larger pool of participants, such as undergraduate students, part-time learners, or students attending private colleges. The investigation of how local institutional cultures impact adaptation differently than in urban settings would also be made possible by broadening the geographic scope to include universities in conservative or rural areas (such as Sabah, Kelantan, and Terengganu).

5.6.3 Practical and Policy-oriented Research

This study brought to light the crucial—yet frequently overlooked—role that non-academic staff play in assisting international students. Staff training, intercultural competency, and communication methods in different departments (e.g., postgraduate centres, health clinics, faculty offices) should be the special focus of future research. The efficacy of certain orientation programs, social support systems, and institutional policies targeted at internationalisation could also be assessed through action-based or policy-driven research. Research involving legislators and university officials may also shed light on how institutional objectives match—or diverge from—the actual experiences of international students abroad.

5.7 Conclusion

As all the research objectives were achieved and the results complemented the early suggested conceptual framework, some recommendations were needed to ensure that this study was covered wholly. The current study significantly advances theory and practise in cross-cultural communication by implementing staff members' contributions to student problem-solving. The Cross-cultural Adaptation Model has

proven valid and reliable to be adopted in Malaysia's public universities because the original model failed to consider the advantages of culture. This study has developed an enlargement of the model in terms of a framework, which has supplied definitive guidelines. The Cross-cultural Adaptation Model's highlighted components bridge the gap between the Western and Asian contexts. Despite the students' struggles with adaptation, their closest friends overcame most of them. Additionally, it has been shown that the university's current curricula do not aid in their process of adaptation. Because of this, it would be a waste if the university spent its budget and funds incessantly to benefit its overseas students. Thus, for these two components to be combined, developing the Cross-cultural Adaptation Model was necessary.

The abundance of resources has made it easier for the students to adapt to the Malaysian lifestyle. A large part of their easy adjustment has come from early exposure to close relatives and friends. Food may have been one of the greatest challenges to adaptation. However, a recent study indicates that it is no longer a problem. Even if it were, it would have little impact. Early exposure to social media such as Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook was also a contribution. However, using search engines to see reviews, experience, and wider opinions about the country they reside in is much more of a help to them.

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INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

A. Demographic Questions/ Soalan Demografik

(Sila kenalkan diri and serba sedikit/ Please introduce yourself)

1. Nama/ Name
2. Umur/ Age
3. Kos/ Course
4. Fakulti/ Faculty
5. Jabatan/ Department
6. Tahun Pengajian/ Year of Study
7. Negara Asal (pelajar sahaja)/ County of Origins
8. Tugas utama (staf sahaja)/ Main Job Scope
9. Kefasihan Bahasa/ Language proficiency informants (self- rank)
10. Tempoh berada di Malaysia/ Length of time in Malaysia
11. Status Perkahwinan/ Marital Status
12. Jantina/ Gender

Appendix B

B. Leading Questions/ Soalan Berpandu

1. Pelajar

a. Social Adaptation

1. Bagaimanakah anda beradaptasi dan menyesuaikan diri dalam kalangan rakan bukan senegara? / *How do you adapt with your friends from different countries?*
2. Ceritakan pengalaman peribadi anda sepanjang pengajian anda di Malaysia? *Tell me about your personal experience during your study in Malaysia?*
3. Pada pendapat anda apakah cabaran terbesar dalam proses menyesuaikan diri? / *In your opinion, what is the biggest challenge in the process to adapt yourself?*
4. Pernahkah anda mengalami kerinduan melampau terhadap kampung halaman? Jika pernah, bagaimanakah cara anda mengatasi kerinduan itu? Jika tidak, kenapa? / *Have you ever felt an extreme homesick? If yes, how do you encounter that feeling? If not, why?*

b. Support System

5. Apakah pandangan anda tentang rakan- rakan sekelas anda di Malaysia? / *What is your opinion towards your classmates in Malaysia?*
6. Bagaimanakah penerimaan penduduk setempat terhadap anda? *What do you think about how the locals accept you as a part of society?*
7. Adakah anda mempunyai kumpulan sokongan daripada negara anda sendiri? *Do you have any support group from your own country?*
8. Bagaimanakah hubungan anda dengan rakan- rakan senegara dan pelajar-pelajar antarabangsa yang lain? *Do you have a good relationship with friends from your own country and the other international students from another country?*

c. Cultural Adaptation

9. Bagaimanakah anda menyesuaikan diri dengan persekitaran makanan dan budaya di Malaysia? / *How do you adapt to the food and cultural environment in Malaysia?*



40. Apakah pandangan pertama anda dan keluarga tentang Malaysia? / What were you and your family's first impression about Malaysia?

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11. Adakah anda mencari maklumat berkenaan budaya dan kehidupan di Malaysia sebelum datang belajar di Malaysia? Jika Ya, apakah perkara yang menjadi tumpuan anda? / Did you make some search or study about culture and life in Malaysia before you came here? If yes, what is your main concern?

d. Academic Adaptation (Study system)

12. Sebelum melanjutkan pelajaran ke Malaysia, apakah persediaan kamu untuk berhadapan dengan sistem Pendidikan di Malaysia? / Before furthering your study to Malaysia, what is your preparation towards Malaysian educational system?
13. Apakah pandangan pertama anda tentang menyambung pelajaran di Malaysia? What is your impression prior to come to Malaysia?
14. Apakah pandangan anda selepas mengalami sendiri sesi pembelajaran di Malaysia? / What is your opinion after you have experienced the study session in Malaysia?

e. Psychological and Physical adaptation

15. Apakah aktiviti semasa cuti pendek yang anda lakukan untuk memastikan anda dapat beradaptasi dengan persekitaran di Malaysia dengan baik? / What is your usual activity preferences to adapt with the new environment in Malaysia during short break?
16. Jika diberi pilihan, adakah anda akan pulang ke kampung halaman atau tinggal di Malaysia semasa cuti panjang? Kenapa? / If given options, will you come back home or stay in Malaysia during long break? Why?
17. Pernahkan anda mendapat sokongan sosial daripada keluarga, rakan dan staf universiti untuk mengurangkan cabaran dan tekanan yang anda hadapi di Malaysia? Sekiranya ada dalam kaedah bagaimana? / Have you ever receive social support from family, friends and university staff to minimize the challenges and stress they facing in Malaysia? If yes, what kind of method?
18. Adakah anda rasa anda dapat berfungsi dengan baik dalam kalangan masyarakat di Malaysia? Do you think you can function well in Malaysian society?

2. Staf

a. *Support System:*

Academic

1. What is your office's function in helping the international students furthering their study in Malaysia?/ *Apakah fungsi pejabat anda dalam membantu para pelajar antarabangsa menyambung pelajaran di Malaysia?*

Psychological

2. What are the activities held to help the the international students> What are their feedbacks?/ *Apakah aktiviti- aktiviti yang dianjurkan untuk membantu pelajar-pelajar antarabangsa? Apakah maklumbalas pelajar tentang aktiviti ini?*
3. Is there any special counselling slot to help the international students? If yes, did they use it? If not, do you think they are a need?/ *Adakah terdapat slot kaunseling khas untuk membantu pelajar- pelajar antarabangsa? Jika ya, adakah para pelajar antarabangsa ini menggunakannya? Jika tidak, adakah anda rasa ianya satu keperluan?*

b. *Cultural and Social Adaptation*

4. Are student associations under the auspices of the university specifically to help international students? What activities are done?/ *Adakah persatuan pelajar yang bernaung di bawah universiti khusus untuk membantu pelajar antarabangsa? Apakah aktiviti- aktiviti yang dilakukan?*
5. Are there any activities that involve the locals? If so, what activities are done, how often are they done and does it help them?/ *Adakah ada aktiviti- aktiviti yang melibatkan penduduk setempat? Jika ya, apakah aktiviti- aktiviti yang dilakukan, berapa kerap ia dilakukan dan adakah ia membantu mereka?*
6. What efforts have been made to help students who have dropped out academically and find it difficult to adapt to the environment in Malaysia?/ *Apakah usaha- usaha yang telah dilakukan untuk membantu pelajar yang kecikiran akademik dan susah untuk beradaptasi dengan persekitaran di Malaysia?*

c. *Student Management*

7. What are the difficulties and challenges often encountered in managing international students?/ *Apakah kesukaran dan cabaran yang sering dihadapi dalam menguruskan pelajar antarabangsa?*
8. How to manage students who are not proficient in Malay or English?/ *Bagaimanakah cara untuk menguruskan pelajar yang tidak menguasai Bahasa Melayu atau Bahasa Inggeris?*

9. Are there special preparation or orientation sessions for international students?/
Adakah terdapat persediaan atau sesi orientasi khas untuk pelajar- pelajar antarabangsa?

10. What is the main role of the university in helping these international students to adapt to the environment that is unfamiliar to them?/
Apakah peranan utama universiti dalam membantu pelajar- pelajar antarabangsa ini beradaptasi di dalam keadaan sekeliling yang asing bagi mereka?

11. Did the international students at your university graduate within the stipulated period?/
Adakah para pelajar antarabangsa di universiti anda menamatkan pengajian dalam tempoh yang ditetapkan?

d. General Issues

12. What is your view on the adaptation process of international students in Malaysia?/
Apakah pandangan anda tentang proses adaptasi para pelajar antarabangsa di Malaysia?

13. What is your view on the adaptation process of international students in Malaysia?/
Apakah isu- isu yang sering dihadapi para pelajar antarabangsa semasa belajar di Malaysia

EXPERT'S QUESTIONS APPROVAL

Tarikh
Bersamaan

: 1 Februari 2023
: 11 Rejab 1444H

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Assalamualaikum w.b.t

YBhg. Puan,

PERMOHONAN SEMAKAN DAN PENGESAHAN SOALAN TEMUBUAL

Dengan segala hormatnya perkara di atas adalah dirujuk.

2. Ketua Projek: Pembinaan & Pengesahan Model Adaptasi Budaya di Universiti-Universiti Awam di Malaysia, *Fundamental Research Grant Scheme* (FRGS) bernombor VOT 59656, Dr. Isma Rosila Binti Ismail, dengan sukacita melantik tuan sebagai pakar dalam bidang Komunikasi untuk menyemak soalan temubual yang akan digunakan di dalam kajian di atas.

3. Perincian butiran soalan adalah seperti yang dilampirkan.

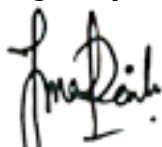
4. Semoga tuan dapat memberikan perkhidmatan yang terbaik kepada Universiti demi merealisasikan visi dan misi Universiti. Sekian.

Terima Kasih.

Sekian.

"WAWASAN KEMAKMURAN BERSAMA 2030"
"BERKHIDMAT UNTUK NEGARA"

Saya yang menjalankan amanah,



ISMA ROSILA BINTI ISMAIL



Universiti Malaysia Terengganu

LANJUTAN
TING

Ketua Projek FRGS Vot 59656
Jabatan Bahasa dan Komunikasi
Pusat Pendidikan Asas dan Lanjutan
Universiti Malaysia Terengganu
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Soalan Temubual/ Interview Questions

The purpose of the study

- 1) To find out the themes of the cultural adaptation for the international students who study in HEI in Malaysia and the staff who handles these international students.
- 2) To build and ratify the Cross-cultural Adaptation Model that suits the local context for the international student that studies in Malaysia's Higher Education Institution (HEI)

A. Soalan Demografik

(Sila kenalkan diri and serba sedikit/ Please introduce yourself)

13. Nama/ *Name*

14. Umur/ *Age*

15. Kos/ *Course*

16. Fakulti/ *Faculty*

17. Jabatan/ *Department*

18. Tahun Pengajian/ *Year of Study*

19. Negara Asal (pelajar sahaja)/ *County of Origins*

20. Tugas utama (staf sahaja)/ *Main Job Scope*

21. Kefasihan Bahasa/ *Language proficiency informants (self- rank)*

22. Tempoh berada di Malaysia/ *Length of time in Malaysia*

23. Status Perkahwinan/ *Marital Status*

24. Jantina/ *Gender*

B. Soalan Berpandu

Pelajar

Social Adaptation

19. Bagaimanakah anda beradaptasi dan menyesuaikan diri dalam kalangan rakan bukan senegara? / *How do you adapt with your friends from different countries?*
20. Ceritakan pengalaman peribadi anda sepanjang pengajian anda di Malaysia? *Tell me about your personal experience during your study in Malaysia?*
21. Pada pendapat anda apakah cabaran terbesar dalam proses menyesuaikan diri? / *In your opinion, what is the biggest challenge in the process to adapt yourself?*
22. Pernahkah anda mengalami kerinduan melampau terhadap kampung halaman? Jika pernah, bagaimanakah cara anda mengatasi kerinduan itu? Jika tidak, kenapa? / *Have you ever felt an extreme homesick? If yes, how do you encounter that feeling? If not, why?*

Support System

23. Apakah pandangan anda tentang rakan- rakan sekelas anda di Malaysia? / *What is your opinion towards your classmates in Malaysia?*
24. Bagaimanakah penerimaan penduduk setempat terhadap anda? *What do you think about how the locals accept you as a part of society?*
25. Adakah anda mempunyai kumpulan sokongan daripada negara anda sendiri? *Do you have any support group from your own country?*
26. Bagaimanakah hubungan anda dengan rakan- rakan senegara dan pelajar- pelajar antarabangsa yang lain? *Do you have a good relationship with friends from your own country and the other international students from another country?*

Cultural Adaptation

27. Bagaimanakah anda menyesuaikan diri dengan persekitaran makanan dan budaya di Malaysia? / *How do you adapt to the food and cultural environment in Malaysia?*
28. Apakah pandangan pertama anda dan keluarga tentang Malaysia? / *What were you and your family's first impression about Malaysia?*

29. Adakah anda mencari maklumat berkenaan budaya dan kehidupan di Malaysia sebelum datang belajar di Malaysia? Jika Ya, apakah perkara yang menjadi tumpuan anda? / *Did you make some search or study about culture and life in Malaysia before you came here? If yes, what is your main concern?*

Academic Adaptation (Study system)

30. Sebelum melanjutkan pelajaran ke Malaysia, apakah persediaan kamu untuk berhadapan dengan sistem Pendidikan di Malaysia? / *Before furthering your study to Malaysia, what is your preparation towards Malaysian educational system?*
31. Apakah pandangan pertama anda tentang menyambung pelajaran di Malaysia? / *What is your impression prior to come to Malaysia?*
32. Apakah pandangan anda selepas mengalami sendiri sesi pembelajaran di Malaysia? / *What is your opinion after you have experienced the study session in Malaysia?*

Psychological and Physical adaptation

33. Apakah aktiviti semasa cuti pendek yang anda lakukan untuk memastikan anda dapat beradaptasi dengan persekitaran di Malaysia dengan baik? / *What is your usual activity preferences to adapt with the new environment in Malaysia during short break?*
34. Jika diberi pilihan, adakah anda akan pulang ke kampung halaman atau tinggal di Malaysia semasa cuti panjang? Kenapa? / *If given options, will you come back home or stay in Malaysia during long break? Why?*
35. Pernahkan anda mendapat sokongan sosial daripada keluarga, rakan dan staf universiti untuk mengurangkan cabaran dan tekanan yang anda hadapi di Malaysia? Sekiranya ada dalam kaedah bagaimana? / *Have you ever receive social support from family, friends and university staff to minimize the challenges and stress they facing in Malaysia? If yes, what kind of method?*
36. Adakah anda rasa anda dapat berfungsi dengan baik dalam kalangan masyarakat di Malaysia? / *Do you think you can function well in Malaysian society?*

14. What is your office's function in helping the international students furthering their study in Malaysia? / *Apakah fungsi pejabat anda dalam membantu para pelajar antarabangsa menyambung pelajaran di Malaysia?*

Psychological

15. What are the activities held to help the the international students> What are their feedbacks? / *Apakah aktiviti- aktiviti yang dianjurkan untuk membantu pelajar- pelajar antarabangsa? Apakah maklumbalas pelajar tentang aktiviti ini?*

16. Is there any special counselling slot to help the international students? If yes, did they use it? If not, do you think they are a need? / *Adakah terdapat slot kaunseling khas untuk membantu pelajar- pelajar antarabangsa? Jika ya, adakah para pelajar antarabangsa ini menggunakannya? Jika tidak, adakah anda rasa ianya satu keperluan?*

Cultural and Social Adaptation

17. Are student associations under the auspices of the university specifically to help international students? What activities are done? / *Adakah persatuan pelajar yang bernaung di bawah universiti khusus untuk membantu pelajar antarabangsa? Apakah aktiviti- aktiviti yang dilakukan?*

18. Are there any activities that involve the locals? If so, what activities are done, how often are they done, and does it help them? / *Adakah ada aktiviti- aktiviti yang melibatkan penduduk setempat? Jika ya, apakah aktiviti- aktiviti yang dilakukan, berapa kerap ia dilakukan dan adakah ia membantu mereka?*

19. What efforts have been made to help students who have dropped out academically and find it difficult to adapt to the environment in Malaysia? / *Apakah usaha- usaha yang telah dilakukan untuk membantu pelajar yang kecikiran akademik dan susah untuk beradaptasi dengan persekitaran di Malaysia?*

20. What are the difficulties and challenges often encountered in managing international students? / *Apakah kesukaran dan cabaran yang sering dihadapi dalam menguruskan pelajar antarabangsa?*

21. How to manage students who are not proficient in Malay or English? / *Bagaimanakah cara untuk menguruskan pelajar yang tidak menguasai Bahasa Melayu atau Bahasa Inggeris?*

22. Are there special preparation or orientation sessions for international students? / *Adakah terdapat persediaan atau sesi orientasi khas untuk pelajar- pelajar antarabangsa?*

23. What is the main role of the university in helping these international students to adapt to the environment that is unfamiliar to them? / *Apakah peranan utama universiti dalam membantu pelajar- pelajar antarabangsa ini beradaptasi di dalam keadaan sekeliling yang asing bagi mereka?*

24. Did the international students at your university graduate within the stipulated period? / *Adakah para pelajar antarabangsa di universiti anda menamatkan pengajian dalam tempoh yang ditetapkan?*

General Issues

25. What is your view on the adaptation process of international students in Malaysia? / *Apakah pandangan anda tentang proses adaptasi para pelajar antarabangsa di Malaysia?*

26. What is your view on the adaptation process of international students in Malaysia? / *Apakah isu- isu yang sering dihadapi para pelajar antarabangsa semasa belajar di Malaysia?*

BORANG PENGESAHAN PAKAR

Bagi: SOALAN TEMUBUAL KEPADA PELAJAR ANTARABANGSA DAN
STAF DI UNIVERSITI AWAM DI MALAYSIA

Sesi/Semester: 2022/2023/1

1. Pelajar dikehendaki mengisi borang ini dalam **satu salinan** dan diserahkan kepada pakar untuk pengesahan.
2. Objektif dan soalan kajian hendaklah diserahkan bersama-sama borang ini.
3. Setelah pengesahan pakar dilaksanakan serahkan borang ini kepada Penyelia utama.

Setelah meneliti SOALAN TEMUBUAL

ini, dengan ini saya ___PROF. MADYA ABDUL LATIFF BIN AHMAD___ mengesahkan
bahawa; Nama Pelajar : ___YUS SHARMIZA BINTI YUSHRIMAN___

No Matrik: ___P4662___ Kursus : SARJANA KOMUNIKASI

Tajuk Kajian : PROSES ADAPTASI: CABARAN PELAJAR ANTARABANGSA DAN
SUMBANGAN STAFF DI UNIVERSITI AWAM DI MALAYSIA

dibawah bimbingan: ___DR. ISMA ROSILA BINTI ISMAIL

telah memenuhi syarat untuk projek ini dinilai dengan mengambil kira pandangan dan ulasan
(sekiranya ada) yang dinyatakan seperti LAMPIRAN.

Sekian, harap maklum.



Nama : ___PROF. MADYA ABDUL LATIFF BIN AHMAD___

Cop Jawatan : Assoc. Prof. Dr. Abdul Latiff Ahmad

Senior Lecturer

Fakulti / Jabatan : Centre for Research in Media and Communication

Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities

Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia

Tarikh : ___2 FEBRUARI 2023___

LAMPIRAN

Research Objectives

Specifically, the research objectives are as the followings:

- a) To explore the most significant challenges the international students have undergone during their adaptation process in Malaysia.
- b) To investigate the staff in the management office's contribution towards the adaptation process of international students.
- c) To discover the contribution as a solution to the challenges the international students faced during their adaptation process.

Research Questions

What are the international post-graduate students' intercultural experiences while furthering their study in Malaysia? In particular,

- a) What are the challenges the international students undergo to face the adaptation process in Malaysia?
- b) What has been done by the staff in the management office to help the international student adaptation process?
- c) Can the contribution of the staff solve the challenges the international students face in their adaptation process?

PANDANGAN DAN ULASAN

(Sila beri ulasan yang spesifik pindaan yang perlu dibuat oleh pengkaji, sila guna muka surat tambahan sekiranya ruang tidak mencukupi)

- 1) Lakukan *pilot test* untuk mengesahkan soalan-soalan
- 2) Pastikan penggunaan soalan semasa temubual boleh menjawab objektif kajian.
- 3) Tema-tema yang digunakan menepati Model Antarabudaya.

BIODATA OF AUTHOR

Yus Sharmiza Yushriman is a Master of Science (Communication) from Universiti Malaysia Terengganu. She obtained her Social Science (Language and Cross-cultural Communication) degree from the National Defence University of Malaysia in 2019. Her current interests are intercultural communication, international relations, and the intercultural adaptation process.

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