



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF
EDUCATION, PSYCHOLOGY
AND COUNSELLING
(IJEPC)

www.ijepec.com



ETHNOGRAPHIC OBSERVATION OF CROSS-CULTURAL
EDUCATION OF CHINESE STUDENTS IN MALAYSIA: A
COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW

Xiao Jingyuan^{1*}, Alexander Stark², Nur Azuki Yusuff³, Julia Tan Yin Yin⁴, Yu Wei⁵

¹ Language Studies and Human Development, University Malaysia Kelantan, Malaysia
Email: e22e041f@siswa.umk.edu.my

² Language Studies and Human Development, University Malaysia Kelantan, Malaysia
Email: alexander.s@umk.edu.my

³ Language Studies and Human Development, University Malaysia Kelantan, Malaysia
Email: nurazuki@umk.edu.my

⁴ Language Studies and Human Development, University Malaysia Kelantan, Malaysia
Email: julia@umk.edu.my

⁵ Language Studies and Human Development, University Malaysia Kelantan, Malaysia
Email: e20e0255f@siswa.umk.edu.my

* Corresponding Author

Article Info:

Article history:

Received date: 07.04.2024

Revised date: 22.04.2024

Accepted date: 14.05.2024

Published date: 12.06.2024

To cite this document:

Xiao, J., Stark, A., Yusuff, N. A., Tan, Y. Y. J., & Yu, W. (2024). Ethnographic Observation Of Cross-Cultural Education Of Chinese Students In Malaysia: A Comprehensive Review. *International Journal of Education, Psychology and Counseling*, 9 (54), 99-106.

DOI: 10.35631/IJEPC.954007

This work is licensed under [CC BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)



Abstract:

This article aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the cross-cultural education status of Chinese students studying in Malaysia. Through in-depth analysis of the cross-cultural adaptation process of these students in Malaysia, the main problems and challenges they encounter in language communication, cultural conflicts, and psychological adaptation are explored. Additionally, this article also reviews the practical experiences and innovative measures of Malaysian universities in cross-cultural education, including curriculum design, cultural exchange activities, and student services. Based on this, targeted suggestions and measures are proposed to help Chinese students better adapt to the cultural environment of Malaysia, thus enhancing the quality and effectiveness of cross-cultural education. This research is not only significant for promoting the personal growth and international perspective expansion of Chinese students, but also provides valuable references and insights for Malaysian universities to improve cross-cultural education.

Keywords:

Ethnographic Observation, Cross-Cultural Education, Chinese Students

Introduction

With the deepening of globalization and the increasing frequency of international exchanges, cross-cultural education has become an important topic in the field of education (Altbach & Knight, 2007). Malaysia, as a multicultural country, attracts an increasing number of Chinese international students with its unique educational resources and cultural charm (Yip & Kwan, 2018). However, due to differences in cultural backgrounds, values, and social customs, Chinese international students often face many challenges in their studies and daily life in Malaysia (Kaur & Sidhu, 2019). The main purpose of this study is to conduct a comprehensive and in-depth analysis of the cross-cultural education status of Chinese international students in Malaysia (Liu & Hu, 2019). Specifically, we will focus on several aspects: firstly, exploring the main issues and challenges encountered by international students in Malaysia during their cross-cultural adaptation process, analyzing their causes and impacts; secondly, analyzing the practices and innovations of Malaysian universities in cross-cultural education, including curriculum design, teaching methods, cultural exchange activities, etc. (Mohd. Hamdi & Syed Abdullah, 2018); finally, proposing targeted suggestions and strategies to help Chinese international students better adapt to the cultural environment of Malaysia, and enhance the effectiveness and quality of cross-cultural education (Chen & Wang, 2019). This article provides an in-depth exploration of international students' educational experiences, cultural adaptation challenges, and the importance of cross-cultural communication in Malaysia through a literature review method. Altbach and Knight (2007) and Yip and Kwan (2018) focus on the motivations and realities of internationalization in higher education, offering valuable insights into the background of international students studying in Malaysia. Kaur and Sidhu (2019) delve into the challenges faced by international students in Malaysia, highlighting key issues related to cultural adaptation. Additionally, a series of studies on cultural adaptation and cross-cultural communication (e.g., Liu & Hu, 2019; Mohd. Hamdi & Syed Abdullah, 2018; Lim & Sahbaz, 2021) provide profound insights, aiding in a better understanding of the situation of international students in Malaysia. In addition to the challenges faced by international students in Malaysia, the literature also emphasizes the importance of cross-cultural education and the unique multiculturalism of Malaysia. Studies (e.g., Kamarulzaman & Mohd Noor, 2018; Maznah & Abdul Hamid, 2020; Zaidi & Husain, 2019) highlight Malaysia's characteristics as a multicultural society and the significance of cross-cultural education in promoting social integration.

Furthermore, some studies focus on the learning experiences and cultural adaptation challenges of Chinese students in Malaysia (e.g., Cheng & Ming, 2019; Rajoo, 2016; Shen & Wu, 2017), providing a comprehensive understanding of the educational experiences of students from different countries in Malaysia. In summary, this article systematically reviews the educational experiences and cultural adaptation challenges of international students in Malaysia, emphasizing the importance of cross-cultural communication in the field of education and highlighting the multicultural characteristics of Malaysia.

Literature Review

Background of Chinese International Students in Malaysia

The backgrounds of Chinese students studying in Malaysia are diverse, reflecting not only the flourishing development of international educational exchanges but also the pursuit of high-quality educational resources by Chinese students (Cheng & Ming, 2019). In recent years, Malaysia has attracted an increasing number of Chinese students due to its high-quality

educational environment, rich cultural resources, and friendly social atmosphere (Yee & Lai, 2018). According to statistics, the number of Chinese students studying in Malaysia has surpassed the hundred thousand mark, and this figure continues to rise annually (Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, 2019). The motivations for Chinese students to choose to study in Malaysia vary (Lim & Sahbaz, 2021). Some value Malaysia's education quality and international reputation, hoping to gain academic training and professional skills aligned with the global standards. Some are attracted by Malaysia's multicultural atmosphere, aiming to broaden their international perspectives through the experience of different cultures. Others are drawn to the relatively lower costs of studying and living in Malaysia, hoping to realize their dreams of studying abroad. With the deepening development of relations between China and Malaysia, the number of Chinese students studying in Malaysia is expected to continue to grow, and the forms of study abroad will become more diverse (Ibrahim, Wong, & Yew, 2021). This will not only promote exchanges and cooperation in the education sectors of the two countries but also provide more opportunities for mutual learning and understanding among young students of both nations.

In terms of academic research, studies on Chinese students studying in Malaysia are also deepening (Cheng & Ming, 2019). These studies not only focus on the academic performance and learning motivations of international students but also involve aspects such as their cross-cultural adaptation and mental health. Through the review of these studies, we can gain a more comprehensive understanding of the overall situation of Chinese students studying in Malaysia and provide targeted support and assistance to relevant departments and universities.

In conclusion, Chinese students studying in Malaysia have diverse backgrounds, and their study abroad experiences are not only personal growth journeys but also important bridges for educational exchanges and cooperation between China and Malaysia (Koay & Khoo, 2018). We look forward to more Chinese students choosing Malaysia as their study destination in the future, jointly writing a new chapter in Sino-Malaysian educational exchanges.

Cultural Background of Malaysia and China

Malaysia, a multicultural country in Southeast Asia, possesses rich and unique cultural characteristics (Kamarulzaman & Mohd Noor, 2018). Here, Malay culture, Chinese culture, Indian culture, and others intertwine and blend, forming a distinctive cultural landscape (Maznah & Abdul Hamid, 2020). Malay culture, as the mainstream culture, showcases Malaysia's unique charm through its distinctive art forms and music and dance (Zaidi & Husain, 2019). From exquisite Malay calligraphy to colorful hand fans, from lively drum beats to graceful dances, all reflect the diversity and inclusiveness of Malaysian culture. Additionally, Malaysia's religious culture adds a strong religious color to it (Rashid et al., 2017). The coexistence and harmony of multiple religions reflect the Malaysian people's respect for and tolerance of religions.

China, an ancient country with a civilization history of five thousand years, possesses profound and unique culture (Liu & Hong, 2019). The cultural charm of China is reflected in various aspects such as language, art, and philosophy. From ancient oracle bones to modern simplified characters, Chinese characters carry thousands of years of history and culture (Zhou & Ma, 2020). Traditional Chinese arts such as calligraphy, painting, and opera showcase the creativity and aesthetic concepts of the Chinese nation (Chen & Jiang, 2018). Chinese philosophical thoughts, such as Confucianism and Taoism, have deeply influenced the values and behavioral

norms of the Chinese people (Yang & Liu, 2020). Whether it is the emphasis on family values and filial piety or the colorful festival celebrations, they all embody the unique charm of Chinese culture.

Although there are differences in culture between Malaysia and China, there are also many similarities. Both countries emphasize family values and cherish family harmony and affectionate ties (Chang & Hew, 2018). Whether it is Malaysian Chinese families or traditional Chinese families in China, they all value filial piety and respect for elders. Moreover, both countries have similarities in festival celebrations. Chinese traditional festivals such as the Spring Festival and the Mid-Autumn Festival, as well as Malaysia's celebrations, reflect people's pursuit of a better life and their desire for family reunion. In today's globalization, cultural exchanges and cooperation between Malaysia and China are increasingly strengthening (Chin et al., 2021). By gaining a deeper understanding of the cultural backgrounds of both countries, we can better promote cultural exchanges and cooperation between Malaysia and China, and further advance the relationship between the two countries. Whether it is cooperation in the field of education, organizing cultural exchange activities, or interactive development in the tourism industry, they all provide more opportunities for mutual understanding and learning between the two peoples. It is believed that with the joint efforts of both sides, cultural exchanges and cooperation between Malaysia and China will continue to reach new heights, injecting new vitality into the deepening development of bilateral relations.

Challenges Faced by Chinese International Students in Malaysia

Chinese students studying in Malaysia encounter numerous challenges. Firstly, language barriers are a significant hurdle they must overcome. Malaysia is a multicultural country where Malay is the official language, while English serves as an internationally recognized language used widely across various domains. For many Chinese students, although English is familiar, the Malaysian English accent and everyday usage may pose communication difficulties (Rajoo, 2016; Zhang, 2017). Additionally, mastering Malay is crucial for better integration into the local social and cultural environment. Chinese students need to diligently learn the language in their daily lives, overcoming communication barriers to better adapt to the Malaysian living and learning environment.

In addition to language barriers, academic adaptation is also one of the challenges Chinese students face. Malaysia's education system differs significantly from China, with variations in teaching methods, curriculum, and assessment standards (Chang & Wah, 2017; Sow, 2018). Chinese students need to adapt to this diverse academic environment, learning to think independently and engage in self-directed learning. Moreover, collaborating with local students on academic research or projects may encounter communication challenges or misunderstandings due to cultural backgrounds and different ways of thinking. Therefore, Chinese students need to actively adjust their academic attitudes and methods, engaging in effective communication and collaboration with local students to achieve better academic outcomes. Furthermore, social integration and cultural adaptation are also significant issues for Chinese students. Malaysia is a melting pot of diverse cultures, where people of different ethnicities and cultural backgrounds coexist (Shen & Wu, 2017; Lee & Yeoh, 2019). Chinese students need to strive to integrate into this multicultural environment, learning to interact with individuals from diverse backgrounds. They must respect and understand local cultural customs, religious beliefs, and social norms while actively participating in local social activities to expand their social circles. Through engaging in volunteer activities, cultural exchanges, and

other means, Chinese students can gain a better understanding of Malaysian culture, fostering friendships and mutual trust with local residents. While adapting to Malaysian culture, Chinese students should also maintain their cultural identity. They should actively promote and uphold Chinese culture, showcasing their cultural uniqueness and contributing to cultural exchange and integration between China and Malaysia. Through cross-cultural exchanges and learning, Chinese students can broaden their horizons, enhance their understanding and respect for different cultures, laying a solid foundation for future international exchanges and cooperation.

Cross-Cultural Education Initiatives in Malaysian Universities

Malaysian universities have been proactive in promoting cross-cultural education initiatives. These universities recognize the importance of cultivating students with cross-cultural awareness and skills in the increasingly globalized world. Here are some examples of cross-cultural education initiatives in Malaysian universities:

Firstly, there is a strong emphasis on intercultural education in the classroom. Universities offer a range of multicultural and international courses that expose students to the differences and commonalities of various cultures. These courses help students develop a deeper understanding of other cultures and foster respect for cultural diversity. Secondly, international exchange programs are actively pursued. Malaysian universities have established partnerships with numerous renowned universities worldwide, enabling students to study and exchange ideas in different countries. This provides students with an opportunity to gain insights into the cultures, economies, and politics of other nations, enhancing their cross-cultural understanding.

Moreover, the diverse student population in Malaysian universities contributes to cross-cultural learning. Students from diverse cultural backgrounds interact with each other on campus, sharing their customs and traditions. This interaction fosters cross-cultural awareness and appreciation among students. Additionally, Malaysian universities engage in international research projects. These projects attract scholars and researchers from different countries, promoting internationalization and academic exchange. This collaboration not only enhances the universities' research capabilities but also fosters cross-cultural understanding and cooperation. Finally, universities also organize cultural festivals and events to celebrate the diversity of cultures. These events provide a platform for students to showcase their cultural traditions and arts, promoting mutual understanding and respect among students from different backgrounds.

Evaluation and Effectiveness of Cross-Cultural Education Programs

The implementation and evaluation of cross-cultural education programs in Malaysian universities are important criteria for assessing their success. Such programs not only focus on students' academic achievements but also emphasize the development of their cross-cultural communication skills and understanding and respect for different cultures (Rosenbusch, 2019; Deardorff, 2009). Firstly, from an evaluation perspective, an effective cross-cultural education program should have clear assessment indicators. These indicators may include students' levels of awareness of other cultures, language communication abilities, interpersonal skills enhancement, and the strengthening of global awareness (Paige, 2003; de Wit, 2009). Through methods such as questionnaire surveys, teacher observation records, case studies, and others, we can obtain quantitative data on students' development in these areas. Additionally, collecting feedback from students and teachers is also crucial as it helps us understand the

problems encountered during the educational process and areas for improvement (Holliday et al., 2010; Bennett, 2008).

During the implementation of cross-cultural education programs, we can observe some significant achievements. Students participating in these programs can broaden their global perspectives, surpass regionalistic views, and have a better understanding of cultural diversity worldwide (Byram, 1997; Fantini, 2006). They have the opportunity to collaborate with individuals from different backgrounds, thereby enhancing their interpersonal skills and cultural sensitivity (Leask, 2015; Landis et al., 2006). Cultivating this cross-cultural awareness helps students become more globally minded individuals who can better integrate and adapt in cross-cultural environments.

However, the implementation of cross-cultural education programs also faces some challenges. For example, language barriers and cultural conflicts are common issues. To overcome these difficulties, program organizers can provide language training and cultural adaptation training, encouraging positive interaction among students (Jackson, 2017; Cushner & Mahon, 2002). Additionally, diversifying teaching content and activity arrangements is also key to ensuring the success of the program (Dervin, 2015; Brown, 2009).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the cross-cultural education programs implemented in Malaysian universities have demonstrated significant progress and positive outcomes. These programs are designed to equip students with the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively engage in a globalized world, where cultural diversity and intercultural interactions are inevitable. The evaluation of these programs has revealed that students have gained a deeper understanding and appreciation of different cultures, languages, and traditions. They have developed stronger cross-cultural communication skills and have become more sensitive and responsive to cultural nuances. This, in turn, has fostered a more inclusive and harmonious campus environment where students from diverse backgrounds can learn and grow together. Moreover, the cross-cultural education programs have also contributed to the overall internationalization of Malaysian universities. Through collaborations with international partners and the exchange of ideas and experiences, these universities have been able to expand their academic horizons and enhance their global competitiveness. However, it is also important to recognize that there are still challenges and areas for improvement in cross-cultural education. Language barriers, cultural misunderstandings, and the need for continuous training and development are some of the issues that need to be addressed. Ongoing efforts should be made to refine the programs, enhance their effectiveness, and ensure that they remain relevant and responsive to the changing global landscape.

Overall, the cross-cultural education programs in Malaysian universities have been effective in promoting cultural understanding, intercultural communication, and global awareness among students. They have laid a solid foundation for students to become global citizens and contribute positively to the world in the future. With continued efforts and improvements, these programs are poised to play an even more significant role in shaping a more inclusive and interconnected global community.

Acknowledgment

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my advisor. Next, I am grateful to UMK for providing me with ample learning resources and an excellent learning environment. Specifically, I would like to thank the staff at the library for their diligent work, which has enabled me to access the necessary literature conveniently. At the same time, I also want to thank my classmates for our shared growth and progress through academic discussions and teamwork. Lastly, I must express my sincere appreciation to the staff of this journal for their assistance and support. Thank you very much.

References

- Altbach, P. G., & Knight, J. (2007). The internationalization of higher education: Motivations and realities. **Journal of Studies in International Education*, 11*(3-4), 290-305.
- Chang, C. T., & Wah, C. (2017). The learning experiences of Chinese international students in Malaysia: A qualitative study. **Journal of International Education Research*, 13*(1), 23-36.
- Chang, J. S., & Hew, J. K. (2018). Family Values in Malaysia and China: A Comparative Study. In **Proceedings of the 3rd International Conference on Humanities and Social Science Research (ICHSSR 2018)**. Atlantis Press.
- Cheng, Y., & Ming, H. (2019). Chinese Students Studying in Malaysia: Motivations, Challenges, and Coping Strategies.
- Chen, L., & Jiang, S. (2018). Exploration and Innovation of Chinese Traditional Art in Modern Design. In **International Conference on Education, Management, Computer and Society** (pp. 222-229). Springer, Singapore.
- Chin, C. H., et al. (2021). The Role of Cultural Exchange in Strengthening Malaysia-China Relations. In **Proceedings of the 4th International Conference on Humanities and Social Science Research (ICHSSR 2021)**. Atlantis Press.
- Ibrahim, H., Wong, Y. L., & Yew, T. W. (2021). The Development of International Student Mobility in Malaysia.
- Kamarulzaman, N. H., & Mohd Noor, N. (2018). Multicultural Education: Malaysia and Indonesia. In **Multicultural Education and Technology** (pp. 13-28). Springer, Singapore.
- Kaur, S., & Sidhu, G. K. (2019). Challenges faced by international students in Malaysia. **Advances in Social Sciences Research Journal*, 6*(1), 84-94.
- Lim, W. M., & Sahbaz, T. (2021). Understanding the Motivations and Challenges of International Students in Malaysia.
- Liu, J., & Hong, X. (2019). Chinese Civilization: Origin and Evolution. In **Proceedings of the 2019 2nd International Conference on Politics, Economics and Law (ICPEL 2019)**. Atlantis Press.
- Liu, Y., & Hu, C. (2019). A Study on Cultural Adaptation of Chinese Students in Malaysia. **Journal of South China University of Technology (Social Science Edition)*, 21*(1), 68-76.
- Maznah, M. Y., & Abdul Hamid, M. S. (2020). Multicultural Malaysia: Unique Cultural Diversity and the Impact of Population Mobility. In **Cultural and Economic Integration in the Processes of Globalization** (pp. 245-263). Springer, Cham.
- Mohd. Hamdi, N. S., & Syed Abdullah, S. N. A. (2018). The Role of Malaysian Universities in Promoting Cross-Cultural Education: A Case Study Approach. **International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 8*(6), 739-748.

- Rajoo, M. (2016). Challenges faced by international students of Asian origin in a Malaysian public university: A qualitative study. **International Journal of Asian Social Science*, 6*(10), 569-579.
- Rashid, A. A., et al. (2017). Malaysia: A Multicultural Society. In **Encyclopedia of the World's Nations and Cultures** (pp. 1-9). Springer, Cham.
- Sow, H. J. (2018). A comparative study of Chinese and local students' perspectives on education in Malaysia. **Journal of Education and Learning*, 7*(1), 87-95.
- Yang, L., & Liu, Z. (2020). The Influence of Chinese Traditional Culture on Contemporary Behavior. In **2020 International Conference on Social Science, Economics and Education Research (SSEER 2020)**. Atlantis Press.
- Yip, M. C. W., & Kwan, J. L. Y. (2018). Educational outcomes of international students in Asia: An overview of Hong Kong, Japan, Malaysia and Singapore. **Journal of Studies in International Education*, 22*(4), 378-397.
- Zaidi, M. A., & Husain, N. (2019). Malay Traditional Performing Arts as Malaysian Heritage. In **The Challenges of Sustainable Tourism in the Asia-Pacific Region** (pp. 91-107). Springer, Singapore.
- Zhang, Y. (2017). The psychological adaptation of Chinese international students in Malaysia. **International Journal of Psychology*, 52*(S1), 346.
- Zhou, Y., & Ma, Q. (2020). Development and Change of Chinese Characters. In **International Conference on Art Design and Education Reform** (pp. 243-248). Springer, Singapore.