

The Impact of Acculturation and Interpersonal Communication on the Adaptation of East African University Students in Malaysia

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The objective of the study was to explore how acculturation and interpersonal communication impacts the adaptation of East African students in Malaysia. Research samples were selected strictly based on the original formation of East Africa (Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania), university students in Malaysia. Just like other international students these students face challenges to adapt in a new culture while striving to achieve their academic goals. To test the study's hypotheses, a statistical package for service solution (SPSS) 20.0 was used to analyse data collected from 240 respondents. This study's theoretical framework was derived from Gu's (2008) Acculturation Scale for Asian International Students (ASAI) and Rubin and Martin's (1994) Interpersonal Communication Competence Scale (ICCS). These two studies were used independently to examine and identify any effects that acculturation may have on interpersonal communication. According to Pearson's correlation test, acculturation and interpersonal communication are all significantly negatively correlated. However, the results of the study indicated a significant difference in the length of stay and interpersonal communication for the adaptation of East African university students in Malaysia for the Independent t-test. In other words, the longer an international student stays in a country to pursue his or her goal, the better their interpersonal communication skills get. The results of this study show that both acculturation and interpersonal communication impacts the adaptation of these international students at different levels. This study looks forward to stimulating future studies of other international students' acculturation processes from communication perception. Communication researchers can play a vital role in promoting understanding between and among ethnic communities and the host societies.

Keywords: *East African, acculturation, adaptation, interpersonal communication, Malaysia.*

INTRODUCTION

According to UNESCO 2014, a worldwide basis, the number of students pursuing higher education studies overseas has exceeded more than double since the beginning of the year 2000 to almost four million students. More precisely, moving to Malaysia, for example, is a great opportunity for students from East Africa to see a whole new world. However, this can significantly impact people who are in the process of adjusting to the new culture. Any foreign student who wishes to succeed in a new environment must be able to adapt and acclimate. This ensures an active and creative existence which consists of the internal and external balance of one's capabilities and expectations, in the proportion of one's pleasant personality, as well as their professional and social environments. For instance, a research done by Ismail et al. (2021), about challenges and intercultural adaptation of Japanese students to Malaysian culture, found

out that through the reading of gathered tales, international students in an intercultural communication context sharpen their awareness of intercultural conflict situations and hone their communication abilities in order to comprehend how to adjust to a new environment. According to Zakharenko et al. (2008), adaptation is a system that enables one to adjust to changing environmental conditions. Additionally, they said that social and psychological adaptation is when a person can adapt to the standards of a group and, conversely, may adapt a social group's interests to a particular person inside the group. Their research on adaptation mechanisms contributes to our understanding of acculturation because both are necessary for any international student trying to adjust to a foreign environment while putting forth significant effort to meet their objectives.

Berry's Acculturation Model is the most well-known theoretical model for evaluating the acculturative process (Schuman et al., 2020). It has been widely utilised in psychology to frame the experiences and methods that international students have when they are abroad in a 'foreign' socio-cultural milieu. According to Berry's acculturation model, acculturation should be assessed separately on two levels: maintaining one's own culture and interacting with dominant and Indigenous cultures. This model acknowledges the complexities of the acculturation process while also considering how individuals value both cultures. International students endure sociocultural adaptation as they settle into a new setting. According to Samokhvalova (2020), assimilating into a new social and cultural milieu is a difficult task in the broadest sense. When one successfully integrates into a community, they feel inner fulfilment and a fullness of life, which is what it takes to fully adapt. Contrarily, it refers to a person's active engagement in the social and cultural life of a specific group within society as a whole, which is the outer part. Acculturative pressure could be brought on by the difficulties in adjusting to the new culture.

Uncertainty, anxiety, despair, marginalisation and alienation, heightened mental symptoms, and identity confusion are some of the effects of the acculturative strain (Kreienkamp et al., 2023). High levels of acculturative stress raise the risk of psychiatric issues emerging. Additionally a study done by Roysircary et al. (2022), highlights that intergenerational stress and role conflicts that a person must deal with in a new context might combine to cause acculturative stress. International university students must successfully adjust to a new culture in order to achieve their educational goals. This is demonstrated by studies conducted among these students. Some people may have trouble trying to adjust, which causes them to struggle with acculturation and fall short of their targeted objectives. According to research conducted in the United States by Awour (2021), acculturative stress is experienced by international students in the form of culture shock, confusion about role expectations, loss of social support, alienation, discrimination, and language barriers.

The ability to engage with individuals from different origins is one of the key criteria of a person's personal and professional life in today's globalised and multicultural environments (Sarwari et al., 2019). Interpersonal interaction also enables people from various social and cultural backgrounds to get to know one another and exchange knowledge and information. Adzovie et al. (2021), adds that communication is the main tool that enables people from various backgrounds to share knowledge and establish social and cultural ties. Additionally Dalib et al. (2019) in their study about Intercultural Competence Among Students in Malaysian Campuses confirm that being able to enhance one's language and communication abilities will make one

more culturally competent. The aforementioned researchers have demonstrated how important communication is to the process of adaptation.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Studies on the challenges African students faced in Malaysia have been widely discussed by various scholars. Suleiman and Ibrahim (2020), in her exploration of African students' experiences in Malaysia, found that it is easier for African students in Malaysia to nurture friendships with international students from various countries than with Malaysian students since they perceive students from Malaysia to be indifferent to or intolerant of other cultures. She also found it difficult for African students to do group work with Malaysian students, which is a normal encounter since individual characters can serve as a communication obstruction. This challenge is intensified when cross-cultural matters and concerns are not analytically addressed as a part of the classroom learning experience. It is an area that requires attention since they share the same classes with Malaysian students. This requires understanding the sense making of these students as it impacts their interaction ability. They use their ability to transfer knowledge to comprehend what the other person is saying, which makes them aware of the need to accept the other person. This acceptance also depends on how much the other person knows about their culture and how to act in a way that is both appropriate and productive (Harun et al., 2021).

Cultural multiplicity in the classroom is important and must be addressed because the world has become increasingly borderless as the movement of individuals becomes smoother. In their study about international students from Nigerian in their interaction with Malaysians, Suleiman and Ibrahim (2020), found interpersonal communication to be one of the significant problems between African and Malaysian students, hence posing problems in intercultural communication. Indeed, interpersonal communication familiarity of African students while intermingling with Malaysians is, generally, tricky because Malaysians have reservations towards foreigners, lack of greetings, indirectness, interrogations, limited exposure towards Africans, and gender issues (Singh, 2021). Secondly, African students, while interacting with locals, experience cultural differences, language barriers, prejudices, and stereotypes because Africans are always perceived to come from a continent that is not well exposed (Shamsul, 2010). Lastly, Africans use two types of coping approaches to regulate emotional distress and stress when confronted with these problem-focused and emotion-focused strategies that tend to see them rely on their fellow African students for assistance. Another study regarding challenges confronting African students in Malaysia found that students faced many challenges including monetary, social, and cultural changes, being separated from their social networks, abuse by proprietors, and stigmatisation by locals due to negative reports from media publicity (Umar et al., 2012).

The three East African countries of Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda were the focus of this study primarily because they share a similar colonial history and culture with Britain, and because Malaysia was colonised by the British, they also adhere to the same educational practices as their coloniser. The East African Community Common Higher Education Area (EACHEA) came into existence on May 20, 2017, when the summit of East African Heads of State declared the East African Community (EAC) a common higher education area (Inter-University Council for East Africa, IUCEA, 2017). Three historical contexts can be linked to the founding of the EACHEA. The

first is the colonial setting, which led to the establishment of higher education in East Africa as a cooperative venture with the Federal university of East Africa. The second is the Arusha Convention, which was signed by African countries in 1981 at a meeting organised by UNESCO in Arusha, Tanzania, to encourage professional and student mobility across the continent (UNESCO, 1981). The third creation of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) through the Bologna process and the desire of EHEA countries to replicate Bologna-like processes in other regions of the world through tools like tuning, aimed at increasing compatibility of other higher education systems to those of Europe (Gouache, 2018).

According to statistics from Education Malaysia Global Service, which serves as the entry point for foreign students looking to enrol in higher education programs in Malaysia, more students from Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda than students from the other five East African countries study in Malaysia (EMGS, 2020). Those East African students represent part of the largest numbers of international students joining institutions of higher education in Malaysia. This study was designed to understand acculturation and interpersonal communication of East African students in Malaysia using Berry's (1984, 1990) bi-dimensional model, along with behavioural and value aspects of individuals' acculturation. This study is also designed to identify natural acculturation status groupings (i.e., subtypes) among East African students, and how these students' acculturation status in the adaptation process and how it affects their interpersonal communication.

Objective

Using Berry's acculturation model, the study strived to confirm the relationship between acculturation and interpersonal communication as a framework for understanding the adaptation of East African University students in Malaysia. Challenges encountered by international students in a new cultural environment are stressful and require adjustment so they can fit in the host culture. However, knowledge of the acculturation process and interpersonal communication can aid in assessing the adaptation mechanisms of international students. Due to the continuous growth of the African international student population in Malaysia, studies concerning students' cross-cultural experience, inter-cultural and interpersonal communication, well-being, and coping styles is needed, especially for university personnel and other governing bodies in charge of international students.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Interpersonal Communication and Adaptation

The ability to engage with individuals from other origins is among the basic criteria of a person's personal and professional lives in today's world of globalisation and multicultural contexts (Sarwari, 2019). Interpersonal communication between people from various social and cultural backgrounds also enables them to get to know one another and exchange knowledge and information. Biwa (2022) confirms that communication is the main tool that enables people from various backgrounds to exchange knowledge and build cross-cultural and social bonds.

It was postulated that international students form three social interactional groups: co-national, multinational, and host national friends using the functional model of friendship network promoted by Tamimi and Edwards (2022). Multinational friends are other international

friends, co-national friends are friends from the same country of origin, and host-national friends are friends from the host nation. International students typically have distinct friendships with three categories of people: close friendships with friends from the same country, social and recreational friendships with friends from other countries, and academic and professional friendships with friends from the host country. Therefore, it can be said that international students are likely to develop close friendships with their co-national friends and possibly, to some extent, with their multinational friends. However, their interactions with host country citizens are largely superficial and pragmatic.

Interpersonal communication helps to explain how individuals behave or predict their character based on psychological information, which is derived from how well you know someone and how much that person is involved in external roles. According to the social penetration theory, self-disclosure broadens and deepens as relationships expand through time (Saputri & Hartanto, 2022). To achieve their interpersonal communication goals, Maqsood and Bukhari (2022) contends that the Uses and Gratifications model is appropriate for analysing interactive technologies in a composite communication environment. In this environment, both traditional and contemporary communication technologies are used. People who use cell phones, for example, can create their opinions about the messages they send and receive and the degree of their satisfaction depending on the fulfilling and sociological roots of their needs (Ekerikevwe, 2021).

Models of social interactions have effects on how people and activities are organised in space. This perspective is based on the theory of social penetration by Altman and Taylor (1973), which contends that as relationships progress, people reveal more of themselves, moving from relatively low levels to more intimate ones. This perspective demonstrates that people tend to expose more of themselves, especially their sentiments, as relationships progress. According to Devereux (2022), access to one's inner thoughts and secrets can only be made possible via disclosure. This plays a crucial role in developing and maintaining a relationship among social participants and so forming a stronger social networking bond.

Following the above references, one cannot adequately define a situation in interpersonal communication, the outsider looks for safety within the group. They use it as a source of knowledge and confirmation regarding the characteristics of the strange and new surroundings. Co-national group members are fellow strangers since they have the same perspective on being foreign. Its members have an impact on one another's perspectives on unfamiliar surroundings. Due to their similar conditions, the group of strangers may be trusted to give each other accurate information on social reality. Co-national networks offer a sense of security, a sense of belonging, and a chance for a group to learn about a foreign environment and strengthen their interpersonal communication ties. The co-national network supports the preservation of identity similarity amidst discontinuity and change by meaningfully anchoring the international student to a broader group.

Students who connect with others from various nationalities, cultures, and ethnicities get new cultural knowledge and develop their communication abilities. Interactions between international students of various racial and cultural backgrounds in academic settings may also help them to advance their academic performance and develop relationships with other multicultural networks of students. Interacting with people from other cultural origins is a crucial

skill for both public and private lives, according to Kobayashi and Viswat (2022) study. According to Devora (2021), international students may require a variety of manners and abilities, including tolerance and communication skills, to boost their chances of developing beneficial relationships with people from various backgrounds.

Interpersonal contact takes place because of the relationships that develop between people as a result of their collaboration, according to Bender (2022). The key prerequisite for people to carry out successful interpersonal interactions is interpersonal communication competency. This is because individuals who are proficient in interpersonal communication can have interactions that are efficient and well-planned. Interpersonal contact among people from other societies has an impact on their psychological well-being and functional fitness, according to Guerriche (2020). Additionally, effective interpersonal communication skills enhance the effectiveness and quality of interpersonal interactions

Acculturation of International Students

University students have several difficulties as they adjust to a new culture and educational system, including language hurdles, a sense of loss, a lack of social support, and estrangement from other students. They employ coping mechanisms that either successfully lower stress to a manageable level or, in some situations, raise it to deal with these novel life experiences. Long-term adaptation could result in kids becoming either more tolerant of their environment or better adjusted (Berry, 1997).

Culture shock frequently includes physical and cognitive reactions to foreign cultural surroundings in addition to emotional ones. According to a theory, a person will experience culture shock more severely the more starkly different their own culture is from their host society. These people frequently experience increased stress as a result of their effort to get over the culture shock and reduce the disparities between the two competing cultures. Berry (2019), suggested that acculturative stress is a better term to explain cultural shock because it is one of the greatest issues students experience when they enter university to begin a new academic life, even though the term "cultural shock" is recognised and commonly used.

Cultural socialisation to the host culture and to the culture from which he or she originated takes place when a person interacts with a foreign society. These two things seem to be separate processes that one must go through (Berry, 2019). No matter their cultural background, all university students must adapt to a new environment. Students live alone for the first time, fusing one identity with another while pursuing new academic ambitions. Acculturation contributes to the definition of self-identity since it shows how one's sense of self is formed through identifying with a particular culture, typically the culture in which one is born and raised. To accept the various features of the new culture, one's self-identity must change when one transitions from their heritage to mainstream culture. Through a series of sociocultural exchanges with the locals, the person picks up the values of the host culture.

East African students come to Malaysia to further their education. They are constantly looking for information to help them learn about and comprehend their new environment while they are abroad. It takes cultural adjustment to transition to college, which helps one better understand what is taught in class and improve academically. Students require additional social support, assistance navigating the campus, assistance learning academic jargon, and assistance

locating accessible resources. Hamat and Hassan (2019) assert that social networking is well known for providing channels for informal and unstructured learning, therefore assisting in the acculturation process of a person, even though educationalists believe that social networking fosters interactions between learners. Similarly, Xuan et al. (2020) asserts that social networking encourages critical thinking about one's learning and re-engages people with education. Users' views about specific technologies have changed as technology has advanced, which has led to the creation of new social and cultural phenomena.

Cultural and Social Adaptation of East African Students in Malaysia

Thousands of foreign students studied in the United States between 1972 and 1973, and this number has risen quickly since (Institute of International Education, 2015). Many Asian nations, including China, Japan, Singapore, South Korea, and Malaysia, have made significant investments in their tertiary education institutions and are now competing for students with colleges in Europe and the United States. International student mobility is one of the pillars of higher education globalisation. The history of higher education may be traced back to the idea of students travelling across boundaries and pursuing knowledge in other nations (Timmis et al., 2019). UNESCO figures show that from roughly 2 million in 2000 to 4.6 million in 2015, the number of globally mobile students has more than doubled. Asia is at the heart of the global panorama of student mobility. Asia is receiving more attention since it is the largest source of international students worldwide and because of its rising popularity as a host region for these students due to its affordability.

Globalisation has had an impact on Malaysian higher education institutions, just like it has in any other nation with universities that draw foreign students. The Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education set goals for the proportion of foreign students (Mohamed, 2020). This demonstrates unequivocally how crucially important overseas students are to Malaysia's higher education system. According to Freeman (2019), Malaysia's higher education institutions place a strong emphasis on the internationalisation of higher education to increase the number of foreign students who enrol by directing offshore packages through the external subdivision of university grounds and authorised franchises. Malaysia has developed into a regional centre and, as a result, a steadily more popular study destination for international students drawn to studying abroad thanks to its world-class educational system and lasting worldwide standing (Mohamed, 2020). International students come from many nations throughout the world because they can afford it (Mohamed, 2020). An increasing percentage of international students from different nations must be accommodated each year due to Malaysia's expanding university population, which also reflects well on the country's reputation for higher education (Mohamed, 2020).

Since 1996, a steady influx of foreign students has been arriving in Malaysia (Mohamed, 2020). Notably, the majority of them are non-native *Bahasa Melayu* (Malay Language) speakers, and they arrive in their native tongue. Numerous things consequently happen that may prevent overseas students from adjusting to a new culture. Their usual way of life and their ability to communicate with those of other cultures or the locals may suffer as a result of their trouble adjusting to the new culture. As more international students enrol in Malaysian colleges, it is more important than ever to understand how they will adapt to the local culture. Talib (2020) asserts that transitioning to a new culture might be difficult and that one cannot manage it

without a lot of assistance to comprehend the new environment. Furthermore, numerous studies have examined characteristics associated with the degree to which international students engage in sociocultural adjustment; they acknowledge that social support is a critical component of studies of adjustment in international scholars (Shehata & Abdeldaim, 2020). These studies looked into the United States, Australia, and a few European nations. These topics, however, have typically been researched independently of one another. In the context of Malaysia, little thought has been given to this topic. Malaysia, a developing nation in Southeast Asia, is home to more than 33 million people of varied racial and religious backgrounds. Bumiputera (70.1 percent), Chinese (22.8 percent), Indians (6.6 percent), and others (0.7 percent). The Bumiputera, sometimes known as the "son of the land" category, is made up of both Malays and indigenous non-Malay people. This ethnic division between Bumiputeras and non-Bumiputeras is vital to Malaysia's "authority-defined social reality" and "everyday social reality," according to the government (Shamsul, 2010). As a result, in addition to *Bahasa Melayu*, or the Malay language, other languages like English, Chinese, Tamil, and Punjabi are also spoken in Malaysia. Regardless of religious and cultural celebrations, clothes, languages, and identities, Malaysians appreciate and celebrate diversity in the community as a whole.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

For this study, the quantitative approach was used to determine the impact of acculturation on interpersonal communication for the adaptation of East African University students in Malaysia. Quantitative research is typically considered to be a more scientific approach to doing social science research. This method fits deductive approaches, where a theory or hypothesis validates the variables, the problem statement, and the direction of the research questions. Phrasing the research questions and testing the hypothesis will determine how data will be collected and which type of statistical method will be used to measure the data.

Based on the literature review, assimilation, integration, marginalization, and separation were identified as factors that affect the interpersonal communication of East African University students in Malaysia. The conceptual framework of this study was influenced by two scales: The Acculturation Scale for Asian International Students (ASAIS), and the Interpersonal Communication Competence Scale. Gu (2008) developed the ASAIS based on Berry's (1984, 1989, 1990) Acculturation Theory designed to measure the acculturative attitudes of Asian international students. The original scale contained 49 items and was constructed with four subscales that correspond to Berry's acculturation attitudes namely: integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization. The other part of the questionnaire is Rebecca Rubin's (1994) Interpersonal Communication Competence Scale. Independently, these two scales were applied in this study to analyse the impact of acculturation on interpersonal communication for the adaptation of university students of East African origin in Malaysia.

The questionnaire used in this study consisted of five sections, each of which investigates information about a specific topic. According to the allocated sections, the questionnaire carried the following sections: interpersonal communication, demographic information of the respondents, integration, assimilation, marginalisation, and separation, respectively. For this study, integration, assimilation, marginalisation, and separation were the operational definitions of acculturation. Interpersonal communication is an added contribution to the study to check its

effect on acculturation. The items used to measure this study for all the four variables were based on the measurement items mentioned in prior studies done by Gu (2008), whose study was about an acculturation scale for Asian international students' development and validation.

All the items in this study used a 7-point Likert scale, which is "strongly disagree," "somewhat disagree," "disagree," "neutral," "agree," "somewhat agree," and "strongly agree." The 7-point Likert scale has been used before in previous studies done by researchers such as Sledgianowski and Kulviwat (2009). The questionnaire had instructions that required respondents to indicate their choice based on responses provided in the checklist to show the degree of their agreement or disagreement.

Sampling

There are 546 registered East African students in Malaysia, according to a report from Immigration that was published in Education Malaysia Global Services (2019). Israel (2003) asserts that for a population size of 546, an appropriate sample size should be set at 240 to attain a precision rate of 5%. The precision rate for the current investigation is still about 5%. The questionnaires were emailed in stages to gather the 240 needed responses. First 400 responders received emails with research questionnaires in the first round. Following the response from the participants, to which 110 answered, the researchers proceeded to stage two by physically handing out 300 study questionnaires to participants. A brief statement explaining that the poll was exclusively performed for academic purposes and that the results were confidential was given to the respondents along with the questionnaires.

FINDINGS

To ascertain the role of interpersonal communication in acculturation for the adaptation of university students of East African ancestry in Malaysia, the study's findings were evaluated utilising Pearson's *r* correlation analysis method. Of the 260 East African University students who participated in this study, 164 (63.1%) were male, and 96 (36.95%) were female. More than three-quarters of the total respondents (46.2%) were between the ages of 31 to 40 years old, while 32.3% were 26 to 30 years old and 21.5% were below 25 "years old". None of the respondents belonged to the age group of 40 years and above. 156 (60%) of the respondents were enrolled in undergraduate degree programmes 56 (21.5%) were enrolled in Masters Programmes, 27 (10.4%) in Foundation courses, and 21 (8.1% PhD) programmes. Findings further revealed that 45 (17.3%) of the respondents were in their second year of study, 98 (37.7%) first year, and 9 (17.3%) third year of study and above. More than half of the respondents, 60%, were undertaking their degree, 21.5% masters, 10.4% Foundation and 8.1% PhD. The majority of the respondents (45.0%) were in the second year of study, 37.7% in the first year, and 17.3% third year and above. Lastly, 60% of respondents have lived in Malaysia for more than two years and 20.0% have lived there for one year only, 19.6% have lived there for more than three years, while only 4% have lived in Malaysia for less than a year.

The relationship Between Acculturation Status and Interpersonal Communication for the Adaptation of University Students of East African Origin in Malaysia

The variables of acculturation status (an independent variable) and interpersonal communication (a dependent variable) were compared using Pearson's r correlation analysis method, and the SPSS output for the Pearson's r correlation was generated. Results revealed a substantial inverse relationship between interpersonal communication and acculturation for the adaptation of East African university students in Malaysia. R for Pearson is 190. For the adaptability of university students of East African descent, the results demonstrate a statistically significant negative association between each acculturation status and interpersonal communication. This indicates that one of the variables is changing its direction.

Table 1: Correlations of the variables between acculturation status and interpersonal communication

		Acculturation	IC total
Acculturation	Pearson Correlation	1	-.082
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.190
	N	255	255
IC total	Pearson Correlation	-.082	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.190	
	N	255	260

For the adaptation of university students from East Africa's cross-cultural experience, there is a negative association between acculturation and interpersonal communication for several reasons. First off, the East African students in this study came from a minority culture that places less emphasis on self-reflection or self-assumption than the host society. Second, the interpersonal communication scale, according to Rubbin (1998), demonstrates that people occasionally communicate to improve self-learning, the process of gathering information about oneself to guide one's behaviour, as well as for convenience, just because it needs to be done and someone is nearby. Contrarily, acculturation refers to a continuous process that involves numerous particular and generic occurrences. Therefore, interpersonal communication cannot determine one's level of acculturation when interacting with a foreign culture. Third, research participants may require more time, which varies from participant to participant, to work on interpersonal communication while assimilating into the new culture.

The results of this study are in line with earlier research by Miao and Xiao (2020), which identified personality traits and social support as the two most important elements influencing mental health during acculturation. This is because acculturation is a state of mind that progresses through stages as a result of both internal and external stimuli. In addition to the acculturation process, each individual has his or her methods for adapting, which are influenced by a variety of elements ranging from personal traits to the larger environment. These methods can either produce positive and beneficial effects or negative and detrimental ones. Interpersonal communication is essential to one's social existence and the emergence of social interactions with others, according to Peng and Wu (2019). The researchers further assert that foreigners frequently find interacting with locals in their new nation to be stressful and disturbing. Since the majority of research participants have only lived in Malaysia for a year, they are still working on their interpersonal skills, which have little to do with acculturation.

The findings of this study are supported by a study by Arifeen (2013) about academic Sojourners, acculturation, and interpersonal communication: Path Analysis finding of his study. He discovered that several complicated factors, including language proficiency, acculturation motivation, and interaction potential, were negatively established in explaining engagement in interpersonal communication with the host society. Second, it demonstrates that the two most important underlying characteristics for explaining interpersonal communication were language fluency and interaction potential. This conclusion is also consistent with the findings that one of the informants' (foreign students) coping mechanisms for cross-cultural engagement is learning the local language. However, the findings indicated that the degree of interpersonal communication engagement had a detrimental impact on how complexly an immigrant perceives the host community during the acculturation process. Acculturation, the sole basic element, had a non-direct effect on perceptual difficulties. At the same time, perceptual complexity was not directly influenced by interaction potential. The word "adaptation" is frequently used to describe the general processes of blending into the larger environment, whereas the term "acculturation" stresses learning and acquiring the characteristics of the new culture or environment (Peng & Wu, 2019). As a result, it is the all-encompassing phrase used in the intercultural communication study field the most.

Interpersonal exchanges that bind sojourners to the host cultural context are the foundation of the acculturation process. The development of communication skills by East African-born university students in Malaysia is not only essential to all elements of cultural adaptation but also a sign of successful acculturation. In other words, their interpersonal and group communication processes determine how well these international students integrate into Malaysian culture. At the same time, their communication styles reflect the adaptive modifications that have already occurred. Because acculturation is a continual process that one must continue to go through while in Malaysia, it is notable that the relationships between the constructions of the acculturation model are flexible rather than fixed. The difficulties of moving and settling may differ from East African student to East African student. Depending on internal and environmental conditions, the way coping mechanisms are used may also vary. Different people certainly view different challenges differently. Wanda et al. (2018) asserts the building and maintaining relationships take time, especially for students who are in a foreign land. In order for the relationships to grow stronger regard- less of time and space they need a technological tool that they can depend on to help facilitate communication. This explains why owning and depending on a mobile phone aid in helping then navigate ways to be able to build their interpersonal communication skills within a limited time and space. Every immigrant has the arbitrary desire to fit in with Malaysian society. However, the various acculturation outcomes caused by the multi-layered environments separate them into several acculturative groupings.

Internal values and exterior behaviours, when combined, hasten the integration process for university students of East African descent, leading to the development of effective interpersonal interactions. These pupils are of strong character who overcome obstacles and think that taking the initiative to make changes is effective. By studying the Bahasa language, getting involved with the community, and being open to learning more about and better understanding Malaysian culture and people, they appear to be improving their circumstances concurrently.

CONCLUSION

Those divided East African university students lack both urgent motivations and access to cultural integration, despite their subjective wish to assimilate into Malaysian society. They do their research using the ethnic origin theory, and they are supported by friends and family. They are constrained within ethnic social networks, and the beliefs and interests they pursue on a personal level align with those of the ethnic community. This acculturation happens when people prioritize preserving their native culture and consequently engage with people from the host culture.

Most of the East African students who have been integrated into Malaysian universities are among the groups of students who are most eager to study there. They identify with Malaysian culture as well, even though their society often places a lot of importance on keeping their East African ethnic language and culture alive. Their attitude has been influenced by the host culture's consuming habits, and their ideals are becoming more and more in line with popular taste. When some of them take up professions and marry locals, it is predictable that the more they stay in the nation, the more they will identify with the host culture.

When East African university students are pressured to fit in with the new culture, when the new culture restricts their participation, when they try to integrate into the new culture but are rejected, when they try to maintain their own cultural identity but fail, and when their culture views returnees with suspicion, their marginalisation could worsen. Berry (2019) connected unfavourable acculturation experiences to sentiments of exclusion and segregation.

These acculturation attitudes increase the likelihood that people may perceive their intercultural encounter as dangerous. As a result, pupils who feel excluded from Malaysian culture are more likely to experience significant levels of stress. Confusion, restlessness, and disappointment are some of the traits of marginality, which Stonequist defined as being psychologically situated between two worlds (Pierce, 2020).

According to the current paradigm of acculturation, it is a multifaceted and complex process in which international students retain elements of their home cultures while assimilating the attitudes, norms, values, and behaviours of the host society. Acculturation demonstrates how the cultural identities of international students are fluid and form over time. To put it another way, while they build their cultural identities, they must constantly strike a balance between preserving their heritage and simultaneously assimilating foreign practices to live and succeed in school in their new nation.

To understand what is taught in class and hence progress academically, moving to a university in a foreign nation necessitates cultural adaptation. Students require assistance navigating the campus, learning new social skills, translating academic jargon, and locating resources. International students combine several identities while pursuing new academic goals and living independently for the first time. Students can make the transition easier by adjusting to campus life and following new norms. According to Kim's theory of intercultural adaptation from 2001, a major factor in the process of acculturation for immigrants is interpersonal communication with the host society. They gradually absorb the laws, customs, and language of modern cultures more quickly as a result of this. In the process of acculturation and adaptation, communication serves as a source of socialization and social learning.

Overall, there are a lot of changes in the social and cultural landscape of global cities such as Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia, with an increasing number of new students who eventually decide to work and live in the city after their studies. It is vital to promote intercultural adaptation and intercultural friendship among international students to make them feel more confident, content, and integrated within their host country. Acculturation and interpersonal communication play a significant role in the adaptation process of international students and in supporting their well-being and how they feel content and confident. Findings from this study support the importance of understanding acculturation and the development of interpersonal communication for international students with others, host nationals, and multinationals as important in connecting cultural moulding and negotiation and improving their social identifications for their adaptation in Malaysia. Therefore, the guidance of the Ministry of Education in Malaysia has enabled the process of integrating these university students of East African origin to be able to adapt to Malaysian society.

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