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SOCIO-CULTURAL ADAPTATION IN JAPAN: HOW MALAYSIAN INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS DEAL WITH CHALLENGES?

ABSTRACT: International-level migration among young people is an effective way for students to be exposed to cultural diversity in order to develop global awareness, personal competence, intercultural skills, and prospective careers for the future. In addition, an individual with intercultural skills has an advantage in effective teamwork or collaboration with others in a multi-cultural workplace. The purpose of this article is to determine differences in level of four learning outcomes on the impacts of socio-cultural adaptation in Japan from the Malaysian international students' perspectives (N=245). Using the statistical method of Friedman test, analysis revealed significant differences in level of learning outcomes [$\chi^2(3, N = 245) = 480.173, p < .05$] with mean ranks of personal competence (2.27); intercultural competence (3.99); global competence (2.07); and skills competence (1.67). In addition, qualitative analysis through narrative method demonstrated that the struggles of adaptation issue significantly influence impacts on students' learning and development: independence, self-confidence, expanding world-view, psychological adjustment, understanding of cultural differences, self-cultural awareness, objectivity in making decision, and problem-solving skills. Individuals living abroad deal with various challenges and difficulties situations, such as new physical environment, difference in customary practices, difference in way of thinking, language barrier, cultural shock, lack of emotional support, and difficulty in maintaining own values and beliefs. The researchers believe that for a successful socio-cultural adaptation, individuals need to express their willingness to learn and accept other cultures through psychological, behaviour, and cognitive changes.

KEY WORDS: Personal competence, intercultural competence, global competence, skills competence, socio-cultural in Japan, and Malaysian international students.

INTRODUCTION

Globalisation is increasingly connecting global communities through activities such as business, education, tourism, investments, and culture. With advanced technologies and communication, social interaction and networking with other people becomes broader and it builds mutual respect/friendship with peers. According to S.M. Hamilton (2008), globalization is "*the worldwide integration of economic, technological, political, cultural, and social aspects between countries*". However, in the local context of a society, culture influences an individual's pattern of behaviour (action), thought, and feelings to respond to the environment. W. Gudykunst and Y.Y. Kim (1996) argue that "*we communicate the way we do because we are raised in a particular*

culture and learn its language, rules, and norms". Therefore, to demand global competition in the 21st century, professional workers, leaders, diplomats, businessmen, and youths need to have the knowledge, attitude, and skills to respond to the rapidly changing environment.

International-level migration among young people is an effective way for students to be exposed to cultural diversity in order to develop global awareness, personal competence, intercultural skills, and prospective careers for the future. In addition, an individual with intercultural skills has an advantage in effective teamwork or collaboration with others in a multi-cultural workplace. Individuals living in different environment require a greater cross-cultural adaptability such as foreign language skills, reduction of stereotype outlook, an

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open-mindedness towards different peoples and cultures, and appreciation of other cultures. According to M.M. Suárez-Orozco and D. Qin-Hilliard that:

[...] while human lives continue to be lived in local realities, these realities are increasingly being challenged and integrated into larger global networks of relationships [...] education's challenge will be to shape the cognitive skills, interpersonal sensibilities, and cultural sophistication of children and youth whose lives will be both engaged in local contexts and responsive to larger transnational processes (Suárez-Orozco & Qin-Hilliard, 2004).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Most works discuss the ability to succeed in the global context. Some scholars highlight specific approaches and identify main characteristics to become successful travellers, including R. Brislin (1981) who outlines three components of adjustment towards different social environment and people, including: (1) successful relationship with people from other cultures; (2) build positive feeling through cross-cultural interaction; and (3) the ability to accomplish tasks in an effective and efficient manner.

S. Black, M. Mendenhall and G. Oddou (1991) outline three skills to survive in a new cultural environment, which consists of self-maintenance, relationship with host culture, and positive perception about host environment and the social system. D.P.S. Bhawuk and R. Brislin (1992) also argue that to be successful in the intercultural context “*people must be interested in other cultures, be sensitive enough to notice cultural differences, and then also be willing to modify their behaviour as an indication of respect for the people of other cultures*”.

M. Winkelman (1994) defines cultural shock as “*a multifaceted experience that results from the numerous stressors that occur when coming into contact with a different culture*”. G.M. Chen and W.J. Starosta (1996) also suggest six elements that allow one to be sensitive towards people from different cultural backgrounds: open-mindedness, empathy, self-esteem, suspending judgment, self-monitoring, and interaction involvement. S.L. Russo and

L.A. Osborne (2008) list five characteristics of a globally competent student, which are: (1) a broad knowledge of the world; (2) comprehension of international dimensions of his or her major field of study; (3) effective communication in a different language; (4) cross-culturally sensitivity and adaptability; and (5) global competencies throughout life.

M.J. Bennett (1986 and 1986) proposes a Development Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) to measure the progress of individual sensitivity towards cultural differences. The first three DMIS stages are ethnocentric consist of denial, defence, and minimisation; while the second three DMIS are ethno-relative, which consists of acceptance, adaptation, and integration. M. Gertsen (1990) proposes a model of intercultural competence that consists of three dimensions: cognitive, affective, and conative.

Cognitive dimension refers to awareness of cultural differences (behaviour, attitude, thought) and general knowledge about other people's cultures (communication, belief, norms, and values); *conative* dimension reflects an ability to effectively apply interaction with different communication style and avoid misunderstanding with foreign peoples; and *affective* dimension refers to interest about foreign cultures including acceptance and respect of cultural differences, positive attitude, and being unprejudiced towards other people and cultures.

C. Kelley and J. Meyers (1995) develop Cross-Culture Adaptation Inventory (CCAI) to measure the level of a person's potential to adapt when dealing with different culture and environment. The CCAI consist of four dimensions: emotional resilience, personal autonomy, flexibility and openness, and perceptual acuity. *Emotional resilience* – able to build positive feeling and; *personal autonomy* – abilities to maintain own identity and belief; *flexibility and openness* – willingness to accept different lifestyles and unfamiliar environment; and *perceptual acuity* – sensitivity to other people including verbal and non-verbal communication and interpersonal relations.

L.A. Braskamp, D.C. Braskamp and K. Merrill (2007) propose a Global Perspective Inventory (GPI) to measure a student's degree

of global competence. The GPI consists of three dimensions: cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal. *Cognitive* dimension focuses on one's knowledge and understanding of what is true and important to know. While, *intrapersonal* dimension refers to one's becoming more aware of and integrating one's personal values and self-identity into one's personhood; and the *interpersonal* dimension explains one's willingness to interact with persons with different social norms and cultural background, acceptance of others, and being comfortable when relating to other.

N.L. Kauffman and G.D. Kuh (1984) examine the impact of study abroad on personal development. Using the Omnibus Personality Inventory (OPI), the research found that the experience of studying abroad increased tolerance for ambiguity, self-confidence and a sense of wellbeing, interest in the welfare of others, and appreciation of cultural differences. T.D. Thomlison (1991) conducted a study on the impact of overseas study experience among American students attending Harlaxton College during the 1988-1989 academic year. A total of 174 students participated in the study and found that changes occurred in their attitudes, knowledge, beliefs, values, behaviours, open-mindedness, personal growth, and appreciation of other cultures.

T. Orahood, L. Kruze and D.E. Pearson (2004) conducted a study on the impact of an international experience on the career plan and job search of the Kelley School of Business (KSB) students at Indiana University (IU), by comparing students who studied abroad and those who did not study abroad. The finding indicated that students who had studied abroad were more open to international experience in their career plan. Students also mentioned about their study abroad experience and foreign language competency as qualification on resume and job interview while searching for work.

J. Jackson (2008) conducted a study among Chinese students who participated in a study abroad programme for 5 weeks in England. The finding reported that there are higher levels of intercultural sensitivity, socio-pragmatic awareness, higher awareness

of cultural differences, and empathy toward others. Some studies have examined the variance in length of programmes and student outcomes.

J.M. Neppel (2005) conducted a study to examine the effect of programme duration on the four learning outcomes: cognitive complexity, liberal learning, personal philosophy, and interpersonal self-confidence. Using the statistical method of Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA), the finding reported that long-term study abroad participants have a significantly higher self-assessment score in comparison to short-term study abroad participants.

K. Kehl and J. Morris (2007) administered the Global-Mindedness Scale to 520 students that were divided to three different groups. The finding indicated that the length of programme significantly impact global-mindedness, whereby students who completed a semester study abroad program score higher than those who attended short-term study abroad and those who plan to study abroad; whereas, statistical analysis reported that global-mindedness score of students who plan to study abroad is higher than those who completed the short-term programme.

In order to contribute to a deeper understanding of international experience, this study represents a different demographic of study abroad participants, specifically the participation of Malaysian students in study abroad programme in Japan. The researchers believe the individuals with different cultural backgrounds will express difference in perception, feeling, and understanding about their life-changing experience while abroad. In addition, this study uses the Friedman test to measure significant difference on the following learning outcomes: personal competence, intercultural competence, global competence, and skills competence. This study also uses a narrative method as a qualitative approach to deeply explore the impact of socio-cultural adaptation in Japan. The narrative method allows students to share their meaningful stories through a different and more effective way.

METHOD

This study collected data through online surveys distributed to all Malaysian students studying abroad in Japan. A total of 245 Malaysian students who are pursuing their studies in various universities in Japan and enrolled as full-year academic abroad students completed the survey in 2011. The research design uses both qualitative and quantitative methods in order to gain more comprehensive data. This study has developed a survey instrument of self-assessment on the impact of study abroad programme on their learning outcomes. The ordinal scale was used as a measurement tool to measure their level of agreement on five points of scale from “not at all” to “very much”. In the first part of the survey, the questions asked the respondents demographic information: gender, age, university, field, place of residence, and prior experience abroad.

Personal competence consists of nine items that covers self-confidence, tolerant attitude towards people of different cultures, flexible in adapting to a new environment, maturity, self-reliance, friendliness, open-mindedness, self-esteem, and knowledge about other cultures. Intercultural competence consists of 9 items which explores the level of enjoying interaction with other peoples, positive attitude towards people from different cultures, appreciation of cultural differences, respect for other values and customs, understanding of host country cultures, self-cultural awareness, awareness about diversity of cultures, interest in learning about other cultures, and sensitivity towards other's feelings.

In term of global competence, the scale consists of 7 items covering global citizenship, ability to accept views from those from different cultures, willingness to work together people from different cultural backgrounds, interest in sharing and exchanging of views and perspectives, understanding of global issues, awareness of diplomatic relations, and alertness to global issues. Finally, skills competence that consists of 5 items: through measuring levels of critical thinking, self-evaluation, intercultural communication skills, desire to engage in international work, and

time management skills.

This study was conducted to explore the following research hypotheses. Alternative hypothesis: “*There will be a significant difference on the students' learning in terms of personal competence, intercultural competence, global competence, and skills competence*”.

On the Null Hypothesis. There will be no significant difference on the students learning in terms of personal competence, intercultural competence, global competence, and skills competence. In addition, this study also uses the quantitative method to further explain the impact of study abroad programme and to strengthen the research findings.

J.W. Creswell (2003) claims that “*a quantitative approach maybe the best approach for this type of research where the problem is one of identifying factors that influence an understanding of one outcome or the best predictors of outcomes*”. The researchers launched a “My Stories in Japan” journal and developed four open questions: (1) “*In what ways do you feel that the program has impacted your life?*”; (2) “*Describe any situations where you have psychology/adaptation challenges while in Japan?*”; (3) “*Describe the important aspects that you learned and understood about the host culture?*”; and (4) “*Describe any situations that developed your skills competence?*”.

THE RESULTS

The data descriptive analysis indicated that the strongest influence of study abroad programme on personal competence is related to their tolerance attitude towards people from different cultures, with a total 67% of students answered “very much” for the statement. In addition, the statement that students answered “very much” was a total of 66% students said studying abroad participation enhanced their open-mindedness regarding cultural differences; 53% said it influenced their self-reliance; and 45% said it enhanced their flexibility to adapt to the new environment.

In terms of intercultural competence, of those responded (N=245), the significant impact of studying abroad revealed that a total of 87% students agreed with “very much” score that studying abroad enhanced their awareness about diversity of cultures; while

79% of students felt that it enhanced their respect towards people with different values and customs; 72% enhanced their appreciation of cultural differences; and 67% influenced their satisfaction in learning about others cultures.

In terms of global competence, a total 67% of students felt the study abroad programme enhanced their willingness to work together with people from different cultural backgrounds; 64% said it contributed to their awareness about the importance of diplomatic relations between Malaysia and Japan; 59% said it enhanced their acceptance towards people of different religions and values; 55% said it enhanced their acceptance of different perspective; and 54% said it increased their interest in exchanging views and ideas with people.

In terms of skills competence, of those responded (N=245), a total 51% of students agreed that study abroad had enhanced their desire to engage in international work; 47% said it enhanced their understanding of their own strengths and weaknesses; and 45% said it increased their foreign language ability. Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics of variables.

A Friedman test was conducted to determine whether there was a significant difference on levels of four different aspects of learning outcomes. Based on the Friedman test, which evaluates differences in medians among the four learning outcomes of study abroad programme, there is significant difference [$\chi^2(3, N=245) = 480.173, p < .05$]. Kendall's coefficient of concordance

(Kendall's W) a strength of relationship index and it is ranged from 0 to 1. The Kendall's W test indicated that Kendall's coefficient of concordance is .653, indicating stronger differences relationship among the four learning outcomes. Mean ranks indicated that impact of study abroad programme on intercultural competence = 3.99 had a higher score than personal competence = 2.27; global competence = 2.07; and skills competence = 1.67. Table 2 shows the result analysis of the Friedman and Kendall' W test.

Next, this study conducted a follow-up test, also known as post-hoc test, to evaluate comparisons between pairs of medians. Multiple comparisons test using the Wilcoxon test was conducted to examine pairs of group medians that contribute to the differences. The result found that all pairwise comparisons were significant at the .05 alpha level after controlling for the Type I errors using the Bonferroni method: intercultural competence – personal competence ($z = -13.570, p = .000$); global competence – personal competence ($z = -2.708, p = .007$); skills competence – personal competence ($z = -6.897, p = .000$); global competence – intercultural competence ($z = -13.558, p = .000$); skills competence – intercultural competence ($z = -13.550, p = .000$); and skills competence – global competence ($z = -5.349, p = .000$).

The Boxplot graph indicated significant difference among all medians that intercultural competence had a higher median than personal competence, global competence, and skills competence.

Table 1:
Descriptive Statistics

Variables	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Personal competence	245	38.3878	4.65100	26	45
Intercultural competence	245	48.3755	4.87695	33	55
Global competence	245	37.7755	4.65562	25	45
Skills competence	245	36.1469	5.60690	15	45

Table 2:
Friedman and Kendall's W Test of Variables

Variables	Ranks		Test Statistics ^a		Kendall's W Test
	Mean Rank	Chi-Square	df	Asymp.Sig	Kendall's W ^b
Personal competence	2.27	480.173	3	.000	.653
Intercultural competence	3.99				
Global competence	2.07				
Skills competence	1.67				

^a Friedman Test

^b Kendall's Coefficient of Concordance

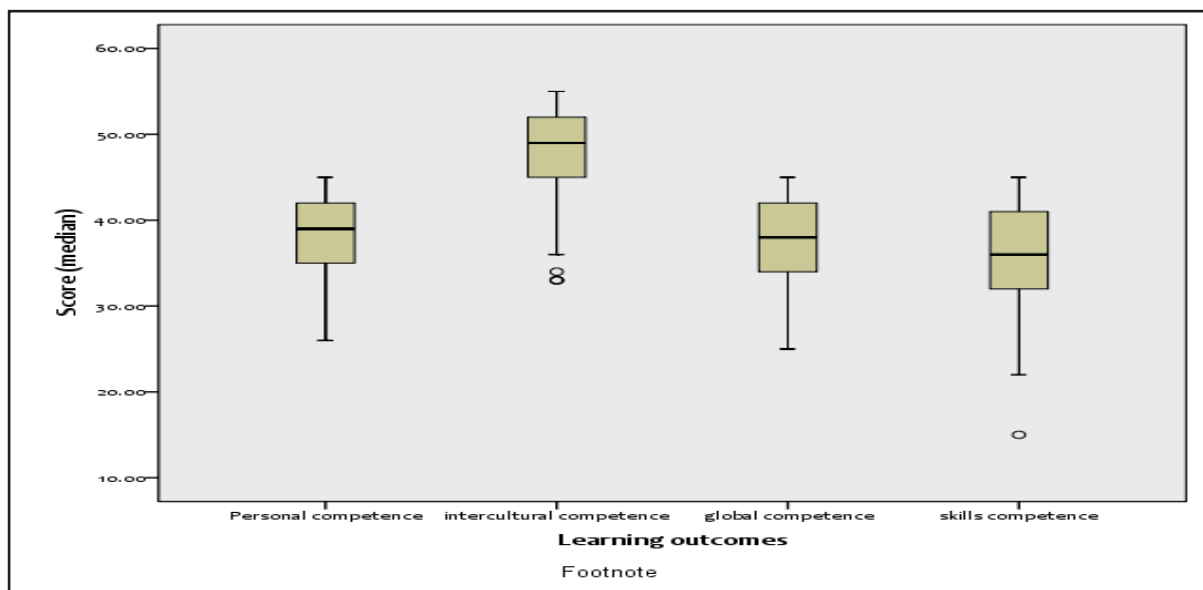


Diagram 1:
Boxplot Graph

Table 3:
Pairwise of Intercultural Competence to Personal Competence

Pairwise		Ranks			Test Statistics ^a	
		N	Mean Ranks	Sum of Ranks	z	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)
Intercultural competence – personal competence	Negative Ranks	1 ¹	1.50	1.50	-13.570**	.000
	Positive Ranks	245 ²	123.00	29888.50		
	Ties	1 ³				
	Total	245				

^a Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test

** Based on negative ranks

¹ intercultural competence < Personal competence

² intercultural competence > personal competence

³ intercultural competence = personal competence

Table 4:
Pairwise of Global Competence to Personal Competence

Pairwise	Ranks			Test Statistics ^a		
		N	Mean Ranks	Sum of Ranks	z	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)
Global competence – personal competence	Negative Ranks	128 ¹	112.89	14450.00	-2.708*	.007
	Positive Ranks	90 ²	104.68	9421.00		
	Ties	27 ³				
	Total	245				

^a Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test

* Based on positive ranks

¹ global competence < personal competence

² global competence > personal competence

³ global competence = personal competence

Table 5:
Pairwise of Skills Competence to Personal Competence

Pairwise	Ranks			Test Statistics ^a		
		N	Mean Ranks	Sum of Ranks	z	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)
Skills competence – personal competence	Negative Ranks	155 ¹	120.36	18656.50	-6.897*	.000
	Positive Ranks	65 ²	86.98	5653.50		
	Ties	25 ³				
	Total	245				

^a Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test

* Based on positive ranks

¹ skills competence < personal competence

² skills competence > personal competence

³ skills competence = personal competence

Table 6:
Pairwise of Global Competence to Intercultural Competence

Pairwise	Ranks			Test Statistics ^a		
		N	Mean Ranks	Sum of Ranks	z	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)
Global competence – intercultural competence	Negative Ranks	244 ¹	122.50	29890.00	-13.558*	.000
	Positive Ranks	0 ²	.00	.00		
	Ties	1 ³				
	Total	245				

^a Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test

* Based on positive ranks

¹ global competence < intercultural competence

² global competence > intercultural competence

³ global competence = intercultural competence

Table 7:
 Pairwise of Skills Competence to Intercultural Competence

Pairwise	Ranks			Test Statistics ^a		
		N	Mean Ranks	Sum of Ranks	z	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)
Skills competence – intercultural competence	Negative Ranks	244 ¹	122.50	29890.00	-13.550*	.000
	Positive Ranks	0 ²	.00	.00		
	Ties	1 ³				
	Total	245				

^a Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test

*Based on positive ranks

¹ skills competence < intercultural competence

² skills competence > intercultural competence

³ skills competence = intercultural competence

Table 8:
 Pairwise of Skills Competence to Global Competence

Pairwise	Ranks			Test Statistics ^a		
		N	Mean Ranks	Sum of Ranks	z	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)
Skills competence – global competence	Negative Ranks	143 ¹	114.26	16339.50	-5.349*	.000
	Positive Ranks	71 ²	93.88	6665.50		
	Ties	31 ³				
	Total	245				

*Based on positive ranks

^a Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test

¹ skills competence < global competence

² skills competence > global competence

³ skills competence = global competence

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

This part discusses the particular experience associated with impact of socio-cultural adaptation among six students, with different lengths of time while studying in Japan. Based on responses, the researchers concluded that the ability to adapt to social and cultural differences reflected a change in way of thinking (thoughts) and behaviour. Most students felt that exposure to different social environment and culture has a positive impact on: enhancing their personal abilities, expanding their world view, expanding their knowledge, improving their foreign language ability, increasing their appreciation of own beliefs, and developing critical thinking and analysis of information.

The students mentioned that they learn to manage their own life better, as the time away from family requires them to work

independently, explore the world around them, and to try to survive in the new social environment. Students said that self-reliance is not only faced during the learning process, but they also learn to manage their daily activities like cooking, housework, *et cetera*. Meanwhile, through observation and participation, the students believe that studying abroad in Japan reflected their point of view about their home country (Malaysia).

N.L. Kauffman and G.D. Kuh (1984) suggest that “*immersion into another culture, not just superficial contact, can challenge students to acquire a more sophisticated, complex view of themselves and the world*”. According to the students:

I believe that my views on life have changed a lot since I came here. It almost felt as I am not the same person anymore, with a different set of beliefs and ways of

thinking and analysing things (statement of the student A, 10/7/2011).

I believe if I haven't been abroad I will not experiences all the hardship. I believe that I had some bonus (advantages) such as language ability, the ability to handle pressure and communication skills not only with Japanese people but also with other foreigners that I had met during my studies in university and college. I also were able to contributed to the society in Japan by participating in building mosque, helping the students associations, and be an example to my friends and family in Malaysia. Lastly, I valued most what I had gain from the education in Japan such as analytical skills, accuracy, and engineering skills (statement of the student B, 15/7/2011).

I don't believe Japan changes me so much or maybe it did but I don't know. But Japan did open my eyes, especially in their passion for work. There are also many business opportunity in Malaysia that I did not know until I came to Japan. Many changes can be made to improve our services in Malaysia, especially in public transport. I can see the difference in attitude of worker in Malaysia and Japan (statement of the student C, 27/7/2011).

It can't be denied that my life changes since I start studying in Japan but I think most of them are positive changes. For instance, I learnt to manage myself by own, cook for a meal by my own, manage my financial by my own, and many more. It taught me to be more independent. What I like the most is the change in term of my gratitude towards being a Muslim. Living in a non-Muslim country taught me to be grateful of being born as a Muslim (statement of the student D, 5/8/2011).

They were also questioned about their experience in dealing with psychological challenges while in Japan. As the following quoted stories show, students struggle to deal with feelings of depression, despair, anxiety, and stress. Hardship and difficulties while being abroad provide greater opportunity for students to learn how to manage their emotions, to think of a solution, and how to take action. The researchers believe that ability to solve problems directly increased their responsibility, self-efficiency, be more objective, higher self-confidence, and an ability to make their own decisions. According to the students:

I am currently struggling with mild depression for a number of reasons I wouldn't go into here; but I always tell myself that I can deal with them, that I am strong and can be stronger, and always try to be grateful and think of others. It feels much better when you have friends with whom you can talk about problems; I don't

usually open up about my problems but listening to my friends problems is a way for me to put my problems into perspective, and make me feel that I am not alone (statement of the student E, 15/8/2011).

When I was in my second year in technical college, I had to attend lot of class and examinations to collect credits for 16 subjects. I also had to finish my experiments from 1.00 pm to 7.00 pm. I had experience repeating my electronic experiment 7 times in day because of the oscilloscope reading I not persist and redraw my graph. That year was my busiest year and tiring one. I had a little feeling to give up and when I feel pressured I just go back home sleep early and continue the next day like usual. After I slept I will forget the tiredness of the day before. I sometimes I talk to my lecture about my conditions. They understood and always helped me by giving good grades because I had work hard and that became my strength to finish my study (statement of the student F, 25/8/2011).

Sometime I feel anxious that I can't understand perfectly what the Japanese said. I just pray to God (Allah) to give me strength and try my best to brush up my Japanese (statement of the student A, 10/7/2011).

I don't usually have homesick but I do have stress. I felt stress when I'm around Malaysian friends who talk like Japanese. I felt stress when I'm in at cafeteria surrounded by Japanese friend and when I couldn't read anything on the menu. In the first week here, I cried just because I couldn't read the work pork or Mirin on the food label. I was very stressed. Indeed this has given a lot challenge to me. I believe this as a great obstacle for me and I have to face it (statement of the student B, 15/7/2011).

Meanwhile, the analysis reported that study abroad programme increased their understanding about host culture and social environment. Students mentioned that study abroad participation increased their understanding of why the Japanese react and behave in a certain way. Most students have positive impressions of host culture and environment, where they expressed that Japanese culture have good ethics, work culture (especially punctuality and discipline), healthy lifestyle, and safe place. Responses indicated that they have a more positive attitude; respectful of other people, and learn to appreciate of cultural differences.

I think I managed to increase and improve my understanding on how Japanese in particular and people of any other different nationalities in general behave and think and also how Japanese society and politics work. I also managed to improve my

understanding on other religion (or lack of it), developing a mindset of liberalism and greater tolerance of others (statement of the student C, 27/7/2011).

My experiences increase my understanding about Japanese lifestyle. Buddhism and Shinto are said as Japanese religion. However, most of them do not have religion and if they have, they are not practising. Therefore, they like to assimilate others culture or religious celebration like Christmas or Valentine Day, even though they do not even know the meaning behind that celebration. Japanese are known as well-mannered people. They are in term of time punctuality and discipline. However, one thing that makes me feel sad is that, drinking alcohol until they get drunk has become as a part of their culture; they start to behave crazily, some of them fall asleep in public space, and some get into self-accident (statement of the student D, 5/8/2011).

I learned that some of Japanese cultures are really good. They are always punctual and serious attitude during on work. Most of their environments are clean and their public transports are great too with no vandalism. The services provided also really make me satisfy with Japanese. However, sometimes I cannot cope with them, their culture is different from me, for example their food, social style, working style, and how they overly care for private privacy (statement of the student E, 15/8/2011).

I've been staying in Japan more than a year, and one of Japanese rule that I respect most is the way they separate the rubbish. It might be quite troublesome for somebody to separate any rubbish in their house, but I think it is effective way to support recycle program in the country. Everybody follow the rule and somehow I learnt to not be a "rules breaker" even when I came back to Malaysia (statement of the student F, 25/8/2011).

Most of the Japanese foods use less cooking oil. Their drink is not as sweet as in Malaysian peoples. They use bicycle as one of the main transport and the usually walking a lot to go to the railway station. That is why Japanese keep fit notwithstanding of their age. I really hope that Malaysian change the unhealthy lifestyle in the future (statement of the student A, 10/7/2011).

Crime and accident in Japan is very low. I think it is because they had been taught how to think about other people since they were little. I felt safer when being on the highway in Japan compared to being on highway in Malaysia. Also do not lock my house whenever I go out even for 2-3 days. I had never been robbed before (statement of the student B, 15/7/2011).

Finally, students also felt that study abroad programme impacted their skills competencies such as resourcefulness, problem-solving skills, communicating in a foreign language, and

time management. The researchers concluded that the challenges during their time abroad reflected the students' understanding of their own strengths and weaknesses; and in some situations caused them to improve their own abilities and skills to be a better person.

Being the president of MSAJ Kansai taught me a lot about the importance of resourcefulness and people skills; prior to holding this position, I am a very introverted person with little peoples skills, hence I found the job to be very hard and stressful, as I have to deal with lots of people which stressed me a lot, but I slowly learned to cope with it and now, even though I am still very introverted, I think I can manage to deal with people better now (statement of the student C, 27/7/2011).

Discussing in English with Japanese people is sometimes a very boring and difficult task. Japan does not have the environment to practice English, because they rely more to their language. Moreover, because of Japanese pronunciations is lesser than English, they could not pronounce some English words properly. I was forced to use the "Japanese-English" to match up the spoken English words if every time if I want to speak English with the Japanese (statement of the student D, 5/8/2011).

I have to manage my time wisely to do homework and reports (statement of the student E, 15/8/2011).

I just start speaking and writing in Japanese around 6 years before. Even today my Japanese is not really good. There are many words in Japanese with the same sound but with different meaning. You have to understand all the sentences in order to guess which words are being said. Even though it is already 6 years I learned Japanese, most of it just revolve around everyday conversation. So, when I came to Japan, it is really difficult at the first time to catch up what they are speaking because the speed is fast and many words which I do not know being used. Some lecturer do not tolerate which this kind of problem. They will say everybody understand so you should understand too, but he did not count the fact that I am not Japanese. When submission was being made, usually we will hear comment from lecturer such as your grammar is wrong, you write like kindergarten student, and many more. If I can say but I can't, I will say to them let use English instead of Japanese, it will be fair to me but maybe not for most of them (statement of the student F, 25/8/2011).

DISCUSSION

This study focused on the impact of study abroad programme on personal competence, cross-cultural adaptation, global competence,

Table 9:
Dimension of Socio-Cultural Adaptation

Dimensions:				
Individual	Attitude	Knowledge	Skills	Social Environment
Own value and belief.	Contact with others.	Cross-cultural knowledge.	Problem-solve ability.	Complete basic necessity.
Emotion stability.	Active interaction with others.	Cross-cultural awareness.	Critical-thinking.	Support and accept from others.
Self-motivation and purpose.	Intercultural behaviour.	Cross-cultural understanding.	Interpersonal skills.	Secure environment.
Positive thinking/perception.	--	Intercultural communication.	Self-knowledge.	--
Physical and psychology healthy.	--	Self-cultural awareness.	--	--

Source: Rahimah (2011)

and skills competence. The result found that study abroad participation influenced student's personal changes, ability to adapt different environment, global competence, and skills competence. Using the Friedman test, the result concludes that there are statistically significant differences in all medians of intercultural competence (3.99), personal competence (2.27), global competence (2.07), and skills competence (1.67). Students reported greater gains in cross-cultural abilities than other learning outcomes. Therefore, the researchers decide that the alternative hypothesis is supported and null hypothesis is rejected.

For a deeper understanding of the impact of study abroad programme on student's learning and development, the researchers use a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. Qualitative analysis indicates students improved their personal abilities, psychological adjustment, intercultural ability, and skills competencies. Furthermore, based on the result, the researchers attempt to construct a dimension of socio-cultural adaptation that comprised of the following five components: (1) individual, (2) attitude, (3) knowledge, (4) skills, and (5) social environment.

See table 9. The dimensions proposed that to have a successful cross-cultural adaptation, individuals need to express their willingness to learn and accept other cultures through psychological, behaviour, and cognitive changes.

The dimensions proposed that to have a successful cross-cultural adaptation, individuals need to express their willingness to learn and accept other cultures through psychological, behaviour, and cognitive changes.

CONCLUSION

Individual components as internal strength (core individual) reflect the individual's reaction toward peoples and environment relating to self-motivation and purpose, positive thinking, physical and psychological health; attitude components relate to intercultural relations, tolerance of others, self-confidence, appreciation of way of life of other cultures, and positive perception toward others belief and values; knowledge components relate to ability to understand cultural differences, self-cultural awareness, and communication between cultures; and skills components consist of problem-solving ability, critical-thinking, decision-making ability, interpersonal skills, and self-knowledge. Additionally, the researchers also emphasise the social environment aspect as an important component associated with external factors that refer to universal needs (human basic needs).

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