

# Acculturation Strategies among Immigrants in Malaysia: A Comparative Analysis between Developed Western Countries and Developing Asian Countries

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## Abstract

As the rate of globalization grows, more people are moving out of their countries to find better employment or quality of life overseas. Since Malaysia remains an attractive destination for business growth and global expansion, thereby attracting increasing number of immigrant workers, this paper aims to study how immigrants, specifically from developed Western and developing Asian countries, adapt to the Malaysian culture. A qualitative research using semi-structured interviews was used to collect the data from ten participants who originates from Western and Asian regions. Drawing on Berry's (1997) acculturation strategies, the data was then analysed through a thematic analysis to identify how culturally adapted the immigrants are toward the host culture. The results reveal that Asians are more likely to integrate into the Malaysian culture as compared to the Westerners. This is due to the common values and beliefs shared by those residing in the Asian region. The implication of this study is to provide valuable insights for employers and Human resource management to be prepared for the common acculturative stress that their expatriates or foreign workers might experience in the work setting and address the needs of these foreign employees via effective acculturation programs.

**Keywords:** Immigrants, Acculturation, Acculturation Strategies, Developed Western Countries, Developing Asian Countries.

## Introduction

As a result of globalization, the demand for skilled labour has increased worldwide and caused many people to migrate to find better job opportunities (Li, 2008). For instance, the United Nations (2020) reported that there has been a growth in migration over the last two decades and up to 2020 and 3.6% of the world's population is made up of them. According to Zanabar

et al (2021), migration can be divided into two categories; economic and non-economic. Economic migration is driven by factors such as labour recruitment, unemployment, and wage information. On the other hand, non-economic migration is motivated by family unification, escaping war and the desire to experience new adventures. Generally, immigrants are bound to have cultural contact with the host country and will decide whether or not to adapt and acculturate with the host country's culture.

Malaysia is one of the biggest economic powers in Southeast Asia which makes it a good destination for immigrants to seek better wages and employment (Hirschmann, 2020). For instance, in 2019, it is estimated that 3.43 million immigrants are living in the country and the majority came from Indonesia and Bangladesh (Hirschmann, 2020; Ministry Of Home Affairs, 2019). Most of the immigrants in Malaysia are working as low-skilled workers as the country is heavily dependent on migrant workers (Tan & Khalidi, 2022). Tan and Khalidi (2022) further explain that almost half of the low-skilled workers in Malaysia were from other countries and these immigrants mostly work in the agriculture sector, construction sector and manufacturing sector.

A developed country could be defined as a country with advanced economic growth and safety (Majaski, 2020). The development of a country is evaluated by economic and non-economic factors such as gross domestic product (GDP), advancement of technological infrastructure, the general standard of living and human development index (HDI) (Majaski, 2020). Based on the criteria, developed Western countries are nations that are located in the western hemisphere (with an exemption for New Zealand and Australia) and countries with technologically advanced infrastructure and developed economies. Although people in these countries are considered as having a better quality of life Majaski (2020) claims that there are certain factors are affecting their decisions to move to developing countries. Howard (2009), in his study on factors affecting Westerners to Thailand, found that most of these Westerners moved to other countries such as Thailand due to the country's lifestyle, low living cost, local culture, and job opportunities.

On the other hand, Majaski (2020) defines developing countries as countries that do not have the same level of economic growth and industrialization as compared to developed nations. For instance, developing countries have an overall lower human development index as compared to developed nations. Meanwhile, Asian countries could be defined as nations that are located on the Asian continent with approximately 4.6 billion people, making it the most populated continent in the world (Nations Online Project, n.d.). In Asia itself, there are both developed countries and developing countries as well as least developed countries. A few examples of developed countries in Asia are Japan, Singapore, and South Korea (International Statistical Institute, n.d.) while a few examples of least developed countries are Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Myanmar (United Nations, 2020). Most of the other countries are considered as developing countries including Malaysia. According to the Ministry Of Home Affairs (2019), the majority of immigrants are from developing Asian countries such as Indonesia, Bangladesh, and Pakistan. These immigrants mainly came to Malaysia to get employment opportunities and they mostly work in low-skilled jobs (Tan & Khalidi, 2020).

The employment of these immigrants in the Malaysian workplace setting is expected to promote creativity as multicultural organisations should possess better skills in problem-solving, and the ability to extract big meaning in dealing with complicated issues (Hassan, 2019). However, past researches have shown that despite the positive outcomes that could come with having a multicultural organisation, there are drawbacks to it as well. For instance, Ors and Sogancilar (2018) found that employers in multicultural organisations in Turkey faced challenges with their employees in terms of poor communication, different working style and expectation, and intolerance and ignorance towards diversity. Another study by Hassan (2019) found that more than half of the managers in multicultural companies found that certain of their employees view themselves as more “superior” compared to others. To reflect on their findings, some conflicts may arise between employers and employees as well as among colleagues in terms of a lack of understanding of the host country’s culture. As a consequence, if the immigrants or workers are not able to tolerate and adapt to the host culture, the quality of work and job performance of the employees will be affected negatively. This is demonstrated in Lu et al (2013) research on acculturation attitudes of Chinese immigrants in Australia. According to their study, immigrants that do not assimilate or integrate with the Australian culture have lower work engagement as compared to immigrants that do. These cases provide a point of departure for the need of analysing acculturation strategies within the Malaysian context. Thus, by identifying which acculturation strategies are used by immigrants, employers could help this group of people to cope and adapt to the host culture to ensure good job performance and also fulfil their quality of life. To this end, this paper aims to identify the acculturation strategies used by immigrants from developed Western countries and developing Asian countries in Malaysia.

In addition, past studies on acculturation strategies in the Malaysian context tend to focus on international students or Malaysians staying abroad rather than on immigrants staying permanently in Malaysia. For instance, only one study was found to investigate the intercultural adaptation of western expatriates in Malaysia. In that study, Firdaus (2013) found that all four of the expatriates interviewed had a relatively positive adjustment experience with acculturation, marginalization and isolation guiding their adaptation. Despite their positive adaptation, one participant was found to have negative perceptions and experiences of the Malaysian culture which results in a poor adjustment. The participant has difficulties adapting to Malaysians’ time management culture and the Malaysian cuisine does not fit his appetite. Firdaus (2013) found that this participant would usually isolate himself from the Malaysian culture. This is an indication of the separation strategy as proposed by (Berry, 1997). As highlighted, there is a lack of studies on cultural adaptation among Westerners in Malaysia. Hence, the present study aims to bridge the gaps and contribute to new findings regarding acculturation strategies used by immigrants from developed Western countries and developing Asian countries. Hence, the following research questions were formulated to compare the acculturation strategies between the two regions:

1. What are the acculturation strategies used by immigrants from developed Western countries in Malaysia?
2. What are the acculturation strategies used by immigrants from developing Asian countries in Malaysia?
3. How do the acculturation strategies used by immigrants from developed Western countries and developing Asian countries in Malaysia differ from one another?

### Literature Review

Acculturation refers to the process where a cultural “contact” happens between individuals of groups of different cultural backgrounds (Sam, 2006). Berry (1997) has proposed a framework namely, the acculturation strategies, to fully understand how an individual who already has their own cultural identity adapts to a new cultural context as a result of migration, or immigration. This framework suggests that when an individual comes into contact with a new culture, there are two issues that they have to take in mind when acculturating. The first issue is the degree of how much they want to maintain their own culture and the second issue is how much they want to participate with the host culture. When these issues are simultaneously considered, four acculturation strategies outcomes are generated as shown in Figure 2.1

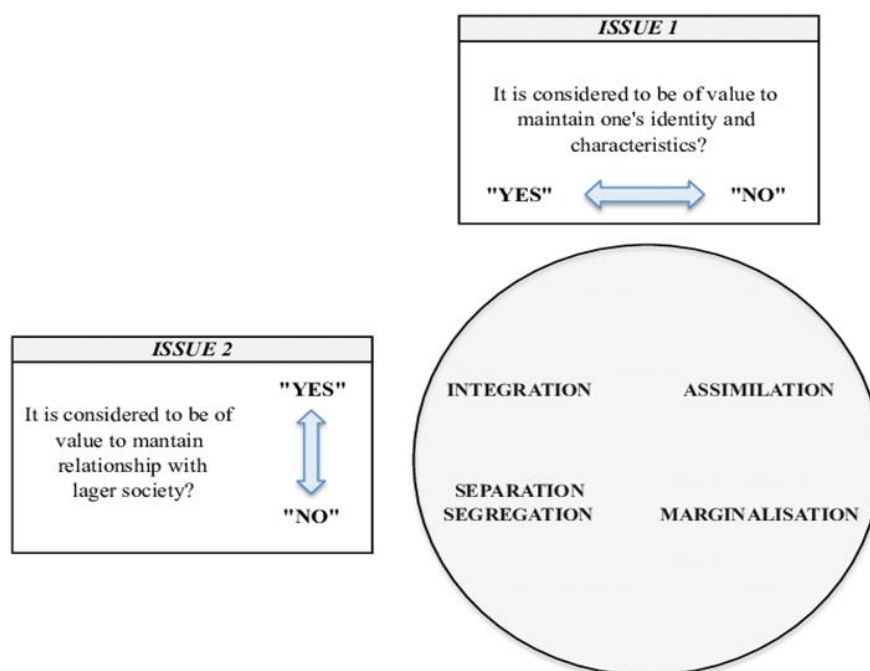


Figure 2.1: Acculturation Strategies by Berry (1997)

From the figure, Berry’s (1997) first acculturation strategy is assimilation. To elaborate, when immigrants decide not to maintain their cultural heritage and wish to be more involved with the host culture, they will adopt the Assimilation strategy. On the other hand, when immigrants maintain their cultural heritage more than trying to participate with the host culture, separation strategy is being adopted. However, if immigrants opt to not only maintain their cultural heritage but also actively interact with the host culture, then the integration strategy is used. There is a balanced degree of wanting to maintain their cultural integrity and wanting to participate with the larger part of society. Finally, marginalization strategy is adopted when an immigrant loses interest in maintaining their cultural heritage and is also uninterested in interacting with the host culture. It is important to note that when immigrants first come into contact with the host culture, the immediate strategies used are assimilation and separation, but this could change later on (Berry, 2005). However, Berry (2005) states that most of the time immigrants are not able to freely choose which strategies they would like to adopt. The dominant group or the host culture therefore, plays a huge role in one’s acculturation strategy.

Role of culture is further elaborated by the work of Hofstede (2011), Hall and Hall (1990) and many others. The present study finds itself closely connected to the work of these scholars as their cultural dimensions approach helped to explain one's behaviour. According to Smith and Bond (2020) cultural dimensions refer to the degree where one cultural group or society is different from the other in terms of psychological characteristics which include beliefs, values, behaviours, personality, and self-construal.

### **Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions**

Hofstede (2011) categorises 6 different cultural dimensions that each country's culture practises:

- i. Power Distance
- ii. Uncertainty avoidance
- iii. Individualism vs Collectivism
- iv. Masculinity vs femininity
- v. Long-term vs short term orientation, and
- vi. Indulgence versus restraint

The first dimension, power distance, refers to unequal allocation of power between individuals of a culture. For instance, when a society has a high power distance, there is a norm of accepting unbalanced power from both the people that are superiors like leaders, and subordinates. The second cultural dimension is uncertainty avoidance which touches on a culture's acceptance towards uncertain and ambiguous situations. A country that has a weak uncertainty avoidance, tends to accept whatever that comes their way and is fine with risk while a strong uncertainty avoidance country would need a more detailed structure to feel comfortable. Moving on, the third dimension is individualism and collectivism. A culture that is more individualistic would only prioritise their nuclear family and very close circles but a collectivistic culture emphasises the importance of the harmony of the bigger group and signifies on belonging to a specific organisation. The fourth cultural dimension that was proposed by Hofstede (2011) was masculinity vs femininity which involves a society's principle towards gender roles. A "feminine" country is more likely to highlight the importance of being caring and emphatic for both genders while a "masculine" country stresses on competition and appreciation towards the strong party. Long term versus short term orientation is the fifth cultural dimension. This dimension shows whether a culture values the past or present when facing challenges of the future and at the same time whether there are black and white rules for everything or not. In other words, short term orientation cultures consider that events from the past are more important while long term orientation puts importance in the future. Moreover, short term orientation cultures are more likely to have detailed regulation of what is good and evil while long term orientation cultures believe that it all depends on the situation. The final cultural dimension is indulgence versus restraint. Indulgence culture allows the freedom for society to get the satisfaction of human desires of having fun while restraint culture controls and regulates the society from them through strict social norms.

### **Hall's Cultural Dimensions**

Another cultural dimension that has been referred to by many researchers is Edward Hall's cultural dimension. There are three dimensions that he proposed which are context, time, and space. According to Hall (1976), there are two types of cultural context, high and low. Hall

states that a high cultural context would communicate explicitly and directly while a low cultural context is the opposite whereby the society is used to communicating implicitly and uses non-verbal communication. The second dimension is time, known as monochronic and polychronic time (Hall and Hall, 1990). A country that practises monochronic time would often focus on a task at a time and prioritise finishing their tasks first while in a country that follows polychronic timing, tend to multitask and often put primary emphasis towards building relationships with their partners. The last cultural dimension formulated by Hall is space. He explains that certain cultures have a bigger need for personal space as compared to others (Hall and Hall, 1990). Due to that, there are cultures that are high territoriality and low territoriality. Countries that are highly territorial would have societies that put great importance on ownership and often these are countries that are low in context. Meanwhile, countries that are lowly territorial have lesser boundaries towards ownership and are less materialistic. Low territoriality cultures also tend to be high in context.

Hofstede and Hall's cultural dimensions are partly implemented in the present study to help in the data analysis. As all societies and cultural groups have different cultural dimensions, acculturative stress may occur to an immigrant who just moved to another country or culture as they might face difficulty in adjusting to the new culture.

### **Methodology**

The present study conducted a qualitative thematic analysis using interviews to investigate the acculturation strategies used by immigrants from developed Western countries and developing Asian countries in Malaysia. Merriam and Tisdell (2015) explains that qualitative research is used when researchers are more concerned about understanding how individuals interpret their experiences, how they perceive their worldview, and how they attribute to their experiences. Therefore, qualitative research in the present study aims to gain in-depth understanding on how the immigrants' experiences have shaped their choices of acculturation strategy.

In terms of sampling technique, the present study employed purposive sampling since the immigrants were purposely chosen from the Western and Asian countries. Purposive sampling occurs when a researcher chooses a specific sample to gain insight from the said sample (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). For the sample size of this study, five participants were chosen from developed Western countries and another five from the developing countries, making it a total of 10 participants. Patton (2014) states that if a researcher would like to find in-depth information from the participants, a small sample could be valuable. For instance, in their studies on cultural adaptation and acculturation strategies, Firdaus (2013) and Lamar (2018) have chosen 4 and 13 samples respectively. Similarly, the number of participants selected for the present study is between the range, and therefore, is believed as a sufficient amount for qualitative research. The immigrants were interviewed about their demographic profiles and cultural experiences in Malaysia. They were given pseudonyms to protect their identities. Table 1 presents the participants' information including their country of origin, age, occupation, marital status, and length of stay in Malaysia.

Table 1

*Participants' Information*

Pseudonym	Origin Country	Age	Occupation	Marital Status	Length of stay in Malaysia
Luke	New Zealand	56	Entrepreneur (Oil and Gas)	Married to a Dutch	24
Jonathan	New Zealand	33	Company Managing Director (Oil and Gas)	Engaged to an Iranian	11
Simon	New Zealand	53	Engineering Entrepreneur	Married to a Malaysian	29
Alex	United Kingdom	48	Financial Advisor	Single	5
Clary	Canada	60	Entrepreneur	Married to a Malaysian	20
Lucy	Philippines	47	Advertising Industry	Married to a Malaysian	10
Klarissa	Indonesia	47	Team Manager in IT Industry	Married to an Indonesian	17
Riana	Indonesia	23	Public Relations Officer	Single	15
Arjun (Dr)	India	43	Senior Lecturer in Dentistry	Married to a Malaysian	13
Krishna	India	49	IT Industry	Married to a Malaysian	22

From Table 1, there are five Western participants whereby three participants are from New Zealand, one from the United Kingdom and Canada respectively. They mostly own their own businesses and work in various fields such as Oil and Gas, Finance and Human Resources. As presented, four out of five Western participants are married and three of them are married to Malaysians while one is married to a Dutch. Meanwhile, the average length of stay of the participants is around 17 years. As the average length of stay of the participants is more than a decade, it could strengthen the findings of the study as their shared experience can be considered as reliable and valid. Furthermore, there are five Asian participants whereby two participants are from Indonesia, two from India and one from the Philippines. Two of them work in the IT department, one works in the advertising industry, one works in the education sector, while another one works in public relations. Similarly, four out of five Asian participants are married and three of them are married to Malaysians while one is married to

an Indonesian. The mean length of stay of the participants is 15.4 years. Since the average length of stay of the Western and Asian participants are more than 10 years, their interview data is believed could strengthen the research findings.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

A semi-structured interview was conducted to collect the data. There are a few protocols that were planned beforehand such as the duration and location of the interview. The interview questions are divided into two sections; 7 demographic questions and 15 acculturation questions. Semi-structured interviews were conducted individually with a mix of close-ended and open-ended questions. These questions were accompanied by follow up questions such as 'why' or 'how' to further explain or clarify the shared information (Adams, 2015).

The first step that was done to collect the data was to approach participants that fit the criteria of the study which are immigrants from developed Western countries and developing Asian countries that are currently residing in Malaysia. Participants were searched from Facebook groups and Council Chambers of Commerce from Western and Asian countries in Malaysia. Personal acquaintances from friends and families were also reached out. After contacting them and informing them of the study, the participants were asked to fill in a consent form to get their approval on the interviews and the data that will be used in the study. This is to ensure a smooth data collection process without ethical issues. After the interviewees have consented, the interview questions were distributed so that they would have an idea of what the interview was about. After distributing the questions, a suitable date and platform were arranged for the interviews to be conducted. The average duration of the interview was around 30- 45 minutes, and it was conducted using online platforms such as Microsoft Teams and Zoom due to their friendly functions and the recording feature. The interview sessions were then recorded for easy access to the data and for the purpose of data transcription. Finally, after the interviews, the data was transcribed to assist in the process of data analysis. After transcribing the data, the recording of the interviews was listened once more to ensure that the transcriptions were error free. To further ensure that the interview was accurately transcribed, five peers were asked to review the transcriptions while simultaneously listening to the interview. After acquiring and transcribing the data, we then proceeded to the analysis stage. Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis framework was adopted and adapted which includes six steps; familiarization, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining naming themes, and producing the report.

### **Discussion and Findings**

Throughout the interviews, the participants shared on the challenges faced in Malaysia as well as the acculturation strategies that suit them best.

#### **Acculturation Strategies employed by the Western Participants**

For the Western participants, they were asked if they feel more connected with Malaysian culture or their origin culture. It was found that three out of the five Western participants have integrated both their and Malaysian cultures into their identity. One of them used the separation strategy while another participant used the marginalisation strategy. Based on Berry's (1997) acculturation framework, an individual that comes into contact with another culture can choose if they would maintain their origin cultural heritage and/or be more involved with the new culture. In fact, there are four strategies of acculturation that an



individual can choose from when coming into contact with a new culture, which are assimilation, separation, integration and marginalisation.

As discussed in literature review, Assimilation is when one deserts their origin culture and immerses themselves in the new culture. Separation is when one does not involve themselves in the new culture and maintains their origin culture. Further, integration is when one maintains their origin culture and at the same time is involved in the new culture while marginalisation is when one does not consider both cultures part of their identity.

From the interview, it can be deduced that Alex, a British citizen, is found to be in the separation stage. He states that he is very much attached to his origin culture. Alex emphasised that he has the freedom to do activities that he is used to back in the United Kingdom. Alex admits that he could still do these activities in Kuala Lumpur where he is currently residing. However, Alex reveals that if Malaysia were to become more religiously conservative, he would immediately return back. This is because, one of the activities that he refers to is having a drink and if Malaysia were to ban the consumption of alcohol, it would affect his social life. Therefore, Alex would rather go back so that he does not have to change his lifestyle. From the interview, he does show interest to become much more connected to the Malaysian culture. Although he shows to be using the Separation strategy at the moment, it can potentially shift to Integration as he does have a genuine interest to the Malaysian culture.

In another case, Jonathan from New Zealand is found to be using the Marginalisation strategy. He mentions that he has left some of his cultural beliefs from New Zealand and gained some from Malaysia. For example, he found Malaysia to be very dirty but after some time he realised that New Zealanders, in general, tend to clean compulsively. Despite Jonathan's claims that he left certain cultural beliefs from New Zealand and acquired some Malaysian ones, he does not truly feel connected to both cultures. Further, Jonathan explains that when going back to New Zealand, the people there can see that he is not a "true" New Zealander but here in Malaysia, the people still consider him to have a New Zealander's mindset. This affects his own identity as he does not feel connected to both countries' cultures. As a result, Jonathan is allowed to pick and choose the cultural beliefs that resonate with him the most through his experiences.

Finally, the other three participants, Clary, Simon and Luke demonstrated the Integration strategy. Both Clary and Simon are married to Malaysians and have been residing and working in Malaysia for more than two decades. They feel connected to both their origin culture and the Malaysian culture as they were brought up in their respective countries and at the same time, they now have Malaysian families that they have a bond with. Meanwhile, Luke has integrated with the local culture because he has adapted some of the Malaysian cultural beliefs and ways to his own identity but however, still has the same cultural values as a Westerner. This is influenced by the fact that he is married to a Dutch who is also residing in Malaysia. One of the most prominent ways that show he has integrated himself into Malaysian culture is when he has become completely accustomed to the Malaysian working style of working longer hours. Luke also emphasised that although he is "Malaysianized", he is aware of his boundaries because he is still considered a guest in the country. Additionally, when asked if he feels connected to the New Zealand culture or the Malaysian culture, he

explains that he has integrated not only New Zealand and Malaysian culture, he has also included the Dutch culture from his wife as part of his self-identity.

### **Acculturation Strategies Employed by the Asian Participants**

From the interview data, four out of five of the Asian participants were found to integrate with Malaysian culture while one participant was found to adopt the Marginalisation strategy. Both participants from India namely, Krishna and Arjun, Lucy from the Philippines as well as Klarissa from Indonesia were seen to have integrated into the Malaysian culture. Krishna explains that he has accepted both the Indian culture and the Malaysian culture as part of his identity and one of the reasons why it was easier for him to integrate with the Malaysian culture is because his wife's family welcomed him as one of their own. This corresponds to Berry's (2005) framework where he explains that if a society accepts diversity of immigrants, they are most likely to integrate with the culture. Similarly, Arjun praises that the good part of Malaysia is that an immigrant can still protect and preserve their own identity but at the same time blend with the majority of society. He especially emphasised that Malaysians show respect towards his culture and vice versa which makes it the best practice of Malaysians. The reason why it is easier for these two participants to adapt to the culture is mainly because the Indian race is one of the three majority ethnic groups in the Malaysian population. Moreover, it is important to note that these participants are also married to Malaysian Indians. Thus, it is easier for them to integrate with the culture as both cultures are similar to one another and they have a good support system that helps them get used to the Malaysian culture.

Meanwhile, Lucy shares that she has also integrated both the Philippine and Malaysian cultures as part of her identity, specifically on the cultural values that both cultures shared. She explains that she does not follow or practise Filipino traditions as well as the Malaysian ones but she feels connected to both cultures when it comes to family values. Klarissa also shows that she still preserves her own culture and simultaneously adapts into Malaysian culture as part of her identity. She highlighted that she could not change her background and how she was thankful for the way she was brought up which is instilled as part of her identity. She also appreciates the Malaysian culture and adapts to it as she believes that people need to be respectful and sensitive when interacting with people from different cultures.

Finally, Riana was seen to employ the Marginalisation strategy because there are certain elements of the Indonesian and Malaysian cultures that she does not resonate with. Despite the fact that she frequently uses and code switches to the Malay language, which is a common indicator that one has adapted to the Malaysian culture, she does not feel connected to the Malaysian culture or the Indonesian culture. To further elaborate, she mentions how she feels more inclined to the Westerners' way of thinking. This is because she was brought up in an environment where everyone in her circle grew up abroad and has a much more of an open mindset. Although she has been living in Malaysia since the age of 8 and went to public schools, her close friend and educators were brought up overseas and thus, they have a Westerner's ideology. In specific, Riana was brought up in such an environment that groomed her to become more open to other opinions and does not believe in the patriarchy. However, in terms of mannerism and etiquette, Riana still holds on to the Indonesian and Malaysian culture as it is heavily based on Islamic practices.

The employment of such a strategy could be explained by the fact that Riana is a Third Culture Kid (henceforth TCK). According to Pollock (2010), a TCK is when a child was brought up outside of their parents' origin country. Fail et al.'s (2004) study on TCK found that the participants either experienced multiple cultural senses of belonging or not at all which leads them to marginalise from their home country and origin culture. Similarly, Moore and Barker's (2012) study on TCK's cultural identity discovered that although TCK were able to switch between multiple cultural identities, it does not necessarily mean that the TCK will feel any sense of belonging to all cultures that they have experienced with. In the same vein, although Riana went to a public school in Malaysia and speaks the Malay language fluently, she was brought up with friends and educators that grew up abroad, thus blended her identity as a more multicultural person that does not fully include Indonesian and Malaysian culture.

### **Comparison between the Western and Asian Immigrants' Acculturation Strategies**

As analysed and discussed above, it is apparent that Asian participants are more likely to maintain their heritage culture as well as integrate with the Malaysian culture as part of their identity and development. This is due to the fact that there is a smaller cultural distance between Malaysia and the other Asian countries. Indonesia and the Philippines are neighbouring countries to Malaysia and share a lot of similarities; not only in terms of languages and cultural context, but also in terms of core cultural values such as family values of collectivism. Besides that, Indian participants are able to adapt to the Malaysian culture effortlessly as the Indian ethnic group is one of the majority groups in the Malaysian population. More specifically, most Malaysian Indians' ancestors came from the south part of India (Kaur, 2001) and Indian participants in the present study came from Andhra Pradesh and Chennai which are regions that are located in the southern part of India. This makes it easier for the participants to adapt with the Malaysian culture, specifically following the Malaysian Indian culture. Moreover, the participants were welcomed from the community which became a factor for them to adapt to the culture much more swiftly. This relates back to Nesdale's (2002) study where he found that immigrants that did not receive support from the host culture are more likely to face acculturative stress. Thus, since the Indian participants are welcomed into the society, they were able to integrate with the culture with no hindrance.

On the other hand, there were three Western participants who chose to integrate the Malaysian culture into their character. The participants that have integrated into Malaysian culture have lived in the country for over two decades and as previous studies have shown, the length of stay in a country would ensure a better adaptation to a country's culture. For instance, Miglietti and Tartaglia's (2009) found that immigrants that have stayed longer in Italy are able to adapt much easier to the culture as they are more likely to be familiar with it and are used to interacting with the locals. Moreover, two of the participants who are married to Malaysians seem to be more connected to the Malaysian culture as Malaysians themselves are part of their family tree. This corresponds with Yu and Wang's (2011) research, as they found that Chinese immigrants in Germany that married local Germans are found to easily integrate with the host culture.

As mentioned earlier, the length of stay in a country indeed will have an influence on acculturation strategies used by immigrants. This explains Alex's Separation strategy as he has only lived in the country for 5 years which is the shortest stay as compared to the other participants. However, this does not mean he will keep to his own heritage and not socialise

and partake in the Malaysian culture. This shows that given a bit more time, he will most likely integrate with the host culture as he finds positivity in the culture and Malaysians who are constantly welcoming him. Meanwhile, the two youngest participants, Jonathan from New Zealand and Riana from Indonesia are both Marginalised from their origin and Malaysian culture. This could be due to the fact they do not put emphasis on cultural beliefs and values as part of their identity and philosophy. For instance, Jonathan expressed that no matter where he goes, he does not fit in as he describes himself as multicultural in the sense that he picks and chooses which cultural values that resonate the most with his own identity and it does not matter where those values came from geographically. Meanwhile, Riana mentioned that she feels more attuned to the Western culture and way of thinking as a result of her upbringing and the Indonesian and Malaysian culture does not influence her self-identity except in terms of etiquette and mannerism. In other words, both participants justified that their self-identities are not truly influenced by cultural aspects. Similar finding is reported in Lamar's (2018) study on acculturation strategies of graduate students immigrants in the United States as she found that immigrants who chose to Marginalise do not put cultural values and beliefs as part of their self-identity. Her participants explain that although they understand the cultural aspects of both their origin and host countries, they do not employ those values as part of their individuality.

### **Conclusion**

The present study aims to discover which acculturation strategies are being used by the Western immigrants from developed countries and Asian immigrants from developing countries. Due to the advancement of technology and globalisation, it is foreseeable that most people would have the freedom and choice to start a new life in a completely new country. Malaysia has become a home for some foreigners as Hirschmann (2020) states that the country is advantageous for them to seek better wages as well as employment opportunities. However, every country has their own cultural beliefs and values that might not be aligned with individuals immigrating to the respective country. This may impose certain challenges that the immigrants have to face and they must choose how to adapt to the new culture. Similarly, immigrants working in the Malaysian setting might face cultural differences and difficulties that would definitely affect their job performance. Therefore, it is important to discover how these immigrants acculturate to the new environment.

It can be concluded that Integration is the most used strategy used by both Western and Asian participants. Most of the participants that have integrated would often bring out values of tolerance and accepting a specific culture as it is a way to adapt and accept a culture. This finding is aligned with Tahir and Ismail's (2007) study on cross-cultural challenges and adjustment methods of expatriates in Malaysia. They found that participants who are more tolerant and optimistic about the host culture can easily adapt and would find themselves to be in a much more tranquil state. Moreover, Tahir and Ismail's (2007) found that when the immigrant has experienced working in other countries that are similar to the Malaysian context, it is easier for them to adapt as they could predict what would happen. Similar finding is also observed in the present study. Since most of the Western participants in the current study have had experience working in other countries, such as the Middle East, they were prepared to expect Islamic practices to be implemented in Malaysia given the majority Muslim populations. Hence, they were not surprised on certain regulations or cultural norms of wearing modest clothing and hygiene of food implemented in Malaysian. Moreover, as the

immigrants in the current study have planned to live in the country for a long period of time, the need to integrate is much greater so that they are able to reside in the country without difficulties. However, a different finding was reported in Falavarjani and Yeh's (2018) study whereby Iranian university students are more likely to separate themselves from the Malaysian culture. This is because Iranians have a perception that they are not likely to continue residing in Malaysia after their studies, hence, it is not that important for them to associate with the Malaysian culture.

From the discussion it is evident that this research is beneficial to immigrants that are planning to move to Malaysia. Tahir and Ismail (2014) found that expatriates that were informed and educated about Malaysian culture, would not experience as much culture shock as compared with other expatriates that came without prior knowledge. Thus, as there is a limited amount of research done on immigrants' acculturation strategy using Berry's (1997) acculturation framework in the Malaysian context, especially toward Western and Asian immigrants, the current study will greatly contribute to the current literature on cultural adaptation in Malaysia. As a result, this study will help future immigrants from both Western and Asian countries, as well as authorities in working institutions to be more aware of the potential challenges that their employees might face in the Malaysian setting.

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