

# Enriching International Students' Experiences through Malaysian Amazing Arts, Culture and Heritage (MAACH) Programme

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## ABSTRACT

Malaysia aims to become the hub of international higher education. It is parallel with the current market trends that showed Asian universities are now becoming the main choice among international students to further their tertiary education. On becoming the best higher education provider, the Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education has tabled its own internationalisation plans and policies, expanding upon and going beyond the guidelines set out by the Malaysian government. Apart from that, the Malaysian government and its related institutions came out with plans, procedures, and resources to entice overseas students together with the efforts taken by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). The objectives of this study is to explore the factors behind migrating international students to Malaysia for higher study and examine the experiences that they face during studying at a Malaysian university. Third-country students choose Malaysia to further their higher education because of scholarships and grants, various initiatives, extended visas, high-quality education, social security, and rankings of universities. Additional appealing elements like tuition costs, ideological and cultural compatibility, language skills, job availability, and simple immigration procedures might affect their decision. However, the above-mentioned privileges are also certainly offered by other countries. Therefore, this research aims to comprehend the other justified reasons why international students decide to pursue their higher education in Malaysian universities, with a special focus on East-Coast universities. This research also makes an effort to analyze the experiences experienced by international students during their study period in Malaysia. The primary theoretical framework for discussing the findings of the study is the "Push and Pull factors" approach. Interviews were conducted with 25 international students enrolled in postgraduate programs at the East Coast universities in Malaysia. Education quality, world-class institutions, social security, the standard of living, simple application procedures, and Malaysia's amazing arts, culture, and heritage (MAACH) are recognized as major "pull factors" behind the decision of international students in choosing Malaysia as a higher education destination. Meanwhile, Social insecurity, political instability, educational opportunity and quality of the home country, personal choice, and job opportunity are found to be the major "push factors." The findings of this research offer prospective international students the best consequences they will experience when studying in Malaysia.

**Keywords:** Higher education, international students, Malaysia, amazing arts, Culture and Heritage (MAACH), push and pull factors.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

International students from third countries are a common occurrence in Malaysia's higher education sector, and their presence has taken on substantial political, social, cultural, and

economic significance. According to OECD (2013), nearly 0.8 million international students were enrolled in different educational institutions across the world in 1975 which increased to approximately 4 million in the present time. Teaching courses in English in non-English-speaking countries is one of the major considerations behind this proliferation. Because of this reason Malaysia, a member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), has experienced an increase in the third country nationals as students in higher education institutions over recent years. According to the report from MOHE 2011, Malaysia had 28.3 million multiethnic residents and 20 state universities, 50 private universities, six branch campuses of international institutions, 403 active private colleges, 30 polytechnics, and 73 public community colleges. These Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) provide a variety of tertiary degrees at reasonable costs. However, the number of students decreased after 2020 because of the Covid-19 pandemic all over the world. Despite high tuition fees, third-country nationals are attracted to Malaysia higher education institutions and according to MOHE (2011), more than a million students in 2011, of which about 93,000 were international students from more than 100 countries. Most of the ASEAN countries identify the advantages of foreign students and graduates as skilled migrants due to their innovation, language skill, contribution to social integrity, and meeting labor demand. Lerke, (2020) points out international education as a good foundation for intercultural learning and network expansion. According to the opinion of Blackmore et al., (2017), international education can be beneficial if the host country can accept foreign students into the labor market. Promoting the mobility of international students has been part of the ASEAN's relocation policies since 2013 whereby the MEB (Malaysia Education Blueprint) 2013-2025 aims to put Malaysia among the top one-third of the best education systems in the world beyond 2025 in line with the ASEAN adopted a (non-binding) resolution on the admission of third-country nationals to the territory of the member states for study purposes. As a member of ASEAN, the regulations on foreign students in Malaysia have been influenced by ASEAN law regarding this issue. A proposal on visa extension for six months for job seeking in Malaysia after the graduation of third county students was proposed by a parliamentary committee in March 2011. The Malaysian government has scholarship programs for international students. The scholarships and grants of about approximately 250 million Malaysian Ringgit for international students are provided by the Malaysian government. Third-country students choose Malaysia for higher education for a variety of reasons, including the strategies, actions, and resources the universities and Malaysian government have taken to actively recruit international students and welcome them in Malaysia, such as scholarships and grants, various projects, extended visas, etc. However, other factors like tuition costs,

ideological compatibility, language skills, job availability, simple immigration procedures, etc., may also affect a student's decision.

Over the last several years, there has been a surge in the number of foreign students opting to attend institutions internationally for their further education. The choices for higher education destinations are influenced by factors like the choice of the university itself, which depends on the University's ranking, course rating and also tuition fees and living expenses. Lippmann, & Curtis, (2017) also assert some critical factors including personal reasons, institution image, country image effect and program evaluation which dominate their decision. It is not to be exaggerated to state that like other third-country nationals, international students are also attracted to study in Malaysia because of these factors as well as the strategies taken by the Malaysian government and universities. However, Heublein, (2014) contends on the issue of choice of higher education institution and describes it as an irrational process. On the other hand, according to Chininga, et al, (2019), the decision of making choice is a recurrent, complicated notion including three correlated elements: context, key influencers, and selectors. In addition, Malaysian universities appreciate the worth of the experience of cross-cultural students and the global influence of education and research. So, the students through strategic partnerships and exchange programs are very much significant. The society and culture of the host country's campus are predominantly influenced by the international students as well as the development of research and innovation in the host country is also affected.

The purpose of the study is to examine and discuss the factors that lead international students to choose Malaysia and Malaysian universities as their overseas higher education destinations. It also describes the gathered experiences of international students who migrated to Malaysia.

The researcher tried to find out feasible answers to the following questions:

- Q1. What are the factors behind migrating international students to Malaysia for higher study?
- Q2. What are the experiences they face during studying at a Malaysian university?

### **Literature on Malaysian Amazing Arts, Culture and Heritage (MAACH) Programme**

Higher Education's Global and Internationalization: A lot of studies have been conducted on the impact of internationalization and globalization on global education. According to Shahjahan (2016), higher education institutions can be considered the most international institutions in certain ways as knowledge is universal. Both globalization and internationalization highly impact higher education, however, these two are opposite concepts.

Hill (2008) describes globalization as a tumultuous circumstance as it overlooks and outstrips national borders which creates global trends and competition by putting significant impacts in the global knowledge economy, for instance research, enrollment of students, branches of schools, franchising, etc. Thus, Badry and Willoughby (2016) pointed out globalization as the patron of “corporatization” of universities changing spirit and nature to complete the global market effectively which turns the education sector into a source of trade in many developing countries. On the other hand, Morosini et al, (2017) describe internationalization is a way to create relations of global collaboration and mobility. In a nutshell, globalization is more about a competition where internationalization pays heed to strategic relations. In the discourse on the internationalization of higher education, the most stated topic is the physical mobility of students. The topic was discussed on a large scale after the second world war and assumed as a key to eliminating enmity among nations and creating mutual understanding and cooperation and became prominent in the 90s. Student mobility expanded widely in that period and the concept of internationalization of universities with substantial professional support, international strategies and policies became prominent. Under this circumstance of globalization and internationalization of higher education, external and internal environment play an important role in mobility. Teichler (2017) further continued that physical mobility and knowledge transfer are the factors of border crossing which is one of the main ideas of internationalization in Higher Education. Another concept mentioned by him is ‘diversification’ which indicates a changed direction of particular activities towards being more international. Le Ha (2013) states that internationalization of higher education has been geared up by globalization. Thus, the two-term ‘internationalization’ and ‘globalization’ are sometimes confusing and can be used alternatively. Knight (2017) defines internationalization as one of the ways of responding a country to globalization while maintaining the individuality of the nation.

Internationalization of Higher Education: ASEAN and Malaysia in most of the literature on internationalization of higher education are found to give emphasis on Canada, the USA, the United Kingdom, and Australia, - the predecessor of internationalization of higher education. To draw in international students, several nations have embraced the internationalisation of their educational institutions. As a consequence, many international students now choose to pursue higher education in ASEAN nations. The majority of the literature groups the study along with more general categories, such "ASEAN" or "Asian nations," for instance. In ASEAN, more institutions (61%) have internationalisation policies than in other regions of the globe, which are lower than ASEAN. Additionally, the

internationalisation policies of many ASEAN organisations clearly distinguish between actions taking place inside the ASEAN framework for regional cooperation and globalisation in general. The ASEAN nations have created their own internationalisation plans and policies, building on and going beyond the guidelines set out by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

**Push-Pull Model:** The push and pull model is inspired by the work of Ernst Ravenstein (1885), who argued that migration is affected by push and pull factors. The push factors are mostly related to the degrees of oppression, frustration, inequalities, and severe economic situations that are pushing the migrants to migrate to an appropriate destination. While the pull factors can be perceived as something that has to do with the destination countries. The pull factors, therefore, manifest the gains that the individual believes can be achieved in the destination countries, such as job opportunities, freedom of choice, education, healthcare, and freedom of movement. Moreover, Ravenstein contributed to this model by formulating laws and regulations related to migration. The essence of his contribution emphasizes that migration is affected by the host countries in terms of economic development. It is still crucial to note that economic factors reinforce migration. This perspective refers to the opportunities and gains that many migrants would like to achieve when they migrate to developed countries. The push-pull model enables an understanding of the reasons why migrants are leaving their countries of origin. It can also be considered multidimensional because it combines different substantive factors such as economic, political, cultural, and social. According to Maringe, & Carter (2007), this model has evolved to include the significance of the rational decision-making role, which allows the individual to select between either staying in the country of origin or migrating to the destination country. Maringe and Carter's argument illustrates reasons for migration which include factors that are connected to the home countries and the destination countries. Maringe, & Carter (2007) consider various factors that affect the individual's decision to migrate. These factors are connected to the destination countries that the migrants intend to migrate to and the gains that they believe they will achieve when migrating. Additionally, some factors are related to the obstacles that the migrants might encounter while migrating. These obstacles include migration laws and regulations, the physical distance from their home countries, and personal factors. Maringe, & Carter introduced the so-called 'plus', 'minus' and 'zero' in order to illustrate the process of migration. The 'plus' refers to certain factors that motivate the migrants to migrate. In other words, it refers to the gains. While 'minus' refers to the factors that do not encourage the migration process. The 'zero' set is related to indifferent factors that certain individuals may find positive and other individuals may find negative. It relies on personal factors. Thus, the set of 'plus', 'zero' and 'minus' are related to the

individual's evaluation and calculation. In other words, the same variable and factor can be interpreted differently in the origin and destination countries depending on the personal reasons of the individual. Maringe and Carter's analysis concerning intervening obstacles can be divided between the migrants' origin countries and the destination countries. It clarifies that in the origin countries, there are obstacles that prevent people from migrating. These obstacles include the costs of the trip or migration, poor health, and the geographical distance between the origin countries and the destination countries. Additionally, migration policies constitute a major intervening obstacle that has intrinsic effects on the migrants in the destination countries. This paper looks at Malaysia as a typical migration destination that has attracted thousands of foreigners. This is relevant and reminiscent of Uysal, Li & Sirakaya's model concerning the factors (including economic gains) that influence migrants in choosing their destination countries. According to Maringe and Carter, migrants used to estimate the advantages and disadvantages of a potential destination country in terms of job opportunities, education, legal status, and social life. However, some migrants find out that they have not taken into consideration the difficult circumstances that they might encounter in their destination countries. This will be explicitly developed by analyzing the views and experiences of the interviewees. The push and pull model is an influential model that has made remarkable contributions in terms of understanding the factors that cause migrants to make decisions concerning migration. However, it does not reveal the influence of migration and how it affects both the destination and the origin countries.

**The Push and Pull Theory:** The classic theory of push and pull factors can impact the decision of students studying abroad. A lot of data on the decision-making process of international students can be provided by the theory. The "push and pull" theory of population migration was first introduced by an American expert named E.S. Lee in the 1960s by determining two factors "push" and "pull". Later, these three factors combine into population mobility. The students have to face at least three different phases while taking decisions for higher studies related to the three factors. The chronological order of students' decisions for the higher study includes deciding to study abroad rather than at home which is dominated by "push factors", then choosing the destination influenced by the "pull factors" and finally selecting a particular institution which is dominated by additional "pull factors" that make the institution more preferable. Ahmad and Buchanan (2016) indicate while choosing a study destination, pupils from China, India, Indonesia, and Taiwan also have to experience these three stages influenced by 'push' and 'pull' factors. The interaction of push and pull factors impacts the decision of students for higher education abroad. They indicate 'push factors' as

home country aspects as well as 'pull factors' as host country features. According to Dago and Barussaud (2021), the "Push" factors and the "Pull" factors can inspire students to study abroad and influence the students' decisions.

The Push Factors: To make international learning decisions "push factors" play an important role. First of all, the decision is associated with the selection of where to study—home or abroad. At this stage, the "Push" factors are very important. Ahmad, Buchanan and Ahmad (2016) show that choosing international education over local is the initial attempt of the students for higher studies which is influenced by 'push' factors. To be specific, as students are not satisfied with the quality of education in their own country, they look for the global standard of higher education. Some students who do not get access to local universities are "pushed" from their home countries. The lack of relevant study opportunities at home universities especially in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East makes pursuing higher education very tough. In the majority of the related studies, students' expectations of experiencing a new culture and developing their own personality as well as the expectation of international experience for being positive for future careers are found. And this is related to personal factors also. The anticipated global standard of education and range of global or multicultural experiences that they assume to have abroad in comparison to their domestic countries compared to that in their native countries push the students. LeBoeuf, Shafir and Bayuk, (2010) figure out that the students take their own decision, however, the immediate family members influence them while taking decisions. In making a final decision recommendation of parents, relatives, friends and other "gatekeepers" play as a key factor. Among the "push factors" mentioned by Larbi and Fu (2017) are improved employment opportunities, language proficiency advancement, and exposure to a foreign culture. Medium of teaching is a key factor in enrollment of international students. The Malaysian universities offer highest English taught courses in ASEAN which is preferable for international and exchange students and thus makes Malaysia becomes participant in the international education market. English-speaking environment is an important factor to international students to study abroad. However, the authors indicate pull factors including host country's academic reputation, cultural difference and geographical distance from home country, living cost, tuition fee, program suitability and so on.

The Pull Factors: In the Second stage, the "Pull" factors dominates the preference of the destination. "Pull" refers to those features which make the selected country more preferable to international students. According to Rodriguez González et al. (2011), the host country's academic reputation, cultural diversity, physical distance from the home country, cost of living,

tuition fees, and programme appropriateness are the pull factors that make the destination more preferable. According to Dima (2002) Financial status can affect the students' decision to study abroad. Higher fees decrease the number of applicants. To intrigue international students reducing tuition fees is one of the best ways. The number of students decreased after 2010 because of the tuition fees introduced by Malaysia in 2011 for the non-ASEAN and the third country students. When families decide to send their children studying abroad, tuitions fees and living expenses play the most important role. International scholarships and fellowships, establishing new international partnerships and collaboration impact the stature of the education system of a country implicitly. The Malaysian government has scholarships programs for international students. Approximately 50 million Malaysian Ringgit in scholarships and grants to international students are provided by the Malaysian government. However, the number of scholarships is not enough for international students for instance Asian students with poor financial backgrounds.

The Third stage is about selecting an institution which also includes some “Pull” factors. This usually considers the global status of institutions, market profiles, a resource used, promotion and marketing, and so on. Lam et al. (2011) classifies ‘push’ factors as personal growth, language and career and ‘pull’ factors as college, physical geography and culture. In addition, they include visa issues and money as ‘structural “factors. To decide higher education destination, reputation of educational institutions plays a crucial role. The global status and ranking of the universities are the most dominating factors to draw attention of international students. Before choosing an institution student look into reputation, past experience, and marketing activities. Furthermore, factors like academic status, quality of teachers, academic opportunities are also crucial. A study conducted among students from four countries by Hazelkorn (2007) conveys that the status of institutions is considered as the most important factor in taking decision. According to Papademetriou and Sumption (2013) students’ choice of study destination depends on the immigration policies of the host country. Immigration policies such as job opportunities and citizenship impact the decision in studying abroad. The selection of a nation or university may be impacted by restrictions on visa applications, employment opportunities throughout the study period, and/or a lack of resources for academic, social, and linguistic support.

Expectation and Experience: Expectations refer to a cultural emphasis on the future standard of life and financial security. The availability of job opportunities and the possibility of emigration is also included in expectations. Students studying in abroad want to serve on the basis of qualification and merit as well as expect to be assured that it will make them more



potential for finding employment. A study by Wiers-Jenssen et al., (2020) in Japan finds that mobile students seek for and have more work experience abroad than non-mobile students did. If the expectations and choices, set before leaving the domestic country, are fulfilled then it is a satisfying experience for the students. Contact with local culture is very important for international students for studying abroad. Culture refers to the interpretation of human behavior which encompasses beliefs, values, norms, and social practices. Gu et al., (2010) show that students expect to have a new cultural experience. It is obvious that international students belong to different cultures, languages and religions, cultural and social backgrounds which vary from the host cultures. In this case, it refers to Malaysian Amazing Arts, Culture and Heritage (MAACH) Programme, such as traditional cultural arts activities. It is very common that students may find alienated and outsiders in the host country. Some of their important values are likely to be ignored in the host country and vice versa. Wu et al., (2015) find out that the sense of loss can be created from the differences in values, and belief attitudes between the host and domestic country which may create a huge pressure on the student. The international students' experiences can constitute an intermingle of factors including their family and personal history, previous experience of mobility, and personality which impact on life satisfaction of them. Life satisfaction refers to the individual's contentment with life, aspirations, and achievements. Studying in another country will have implications for different domains in life. Abeuova and Muratbekova-Touron (2019) state that studying abroad may appear as a self-realization project for the student which can make them more open-minded.

## **2. RESEARCH DESIGN**

**Study Area:** The biggest corridor in Malaysia has been called East Coast Malaysia and includes Kelantan, Terengganu, and Pahang. In Malaysia, it is the corridor with the fastest growth. It has for public universities including Universiti Malaysia Pahang, Universiti Malaysia Kelantan, Universiti Malaysia Terengganu and Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin. This is combination of comprehensive, focused and Malaysian Technical University Network-MTUN universities with a clear emphasis. With 10337 students enrolled in 25 foreign programmes, there are more than 60 different nations represented. To perform the study, the researcher purposefully chose the overseas students who are remaining and attending these colleges.

**Method:** The researcher selected universities located on the east coast, of Malaysia as the area of his study. To gather the purposive information related to the factors and experiences of the migrated students from all over the world to these universities, the

qualitative method was selected as the most convenient to conduct the study. To analyze the correlation between theory and research qualitative research is a feasible and empirical method. Guba & Lincoln (1994) state that qualitative research is an interpretive and naturalistic approach.

### **3. DATA COLLECTION METHOD**

**Interview:** The interview method was chosen by the researcher for facilitating the data collection from the respondents. The researcher found semi-structured interviews as the appropriate method for data collection. The advantage of a semi-structured interview is that it allows the participants to express their thoughts freely and which makes provides rich and direct information to the researcher. According to Szombatová (2016) through the semi-structured interview, the researcher can gather qualitative data according to his need. Zhang and Wildemuth (2009) mentioned a semi-structured interview as a combination of the structured and unstructured interview where the researcher is flexible to ask not only the predetermined open-ended questions but also questions that arise from the answers of the respondents. A list of pre-determined open-ended guided questions was prepared before conducting the semi-structured interview to meet the objective.

**Sampling / Participants:** The sample for the study was selected through a purposive sampling technique. According to Karatas et al., (2015), this is a nonrandom technique that allows the researcher to select people who can and are interested to provide information according to their knowledge and experience. The participants were selected deliberately through homogenous sampling who possess some common characteristics. According to Etikan, Musa & Alkassim (2016), in this sampling researcher selects participants who commonly have particular characteristics, for instance, the respondents may share a similarity in terms of ages, cultures, jobs, or life experiences. They also focus on the relationship between the homogenous characteristics and the research topic. The participants for the study were selected based on their homogeneous characteristics.

The characteristics were: they were an international student that has the active status of study in that particular university, their current status should be active studentship, registered at university or institute in East Coast universities in Malaysia, and currently physically residing in East Coast universities in Malaysia. Considering those criteria, the potential students were contacted through mobile, messenger, and WhatsApp for participating in a face-to-face interview. The students who showed their interest and provide a schedule were selected finally.

Thus 5 respondents were interviewed in this qualitative interview. Though the researcher tried and was interested to conduct more interviews adverse covid-19 situations, social distancing, respondent's availability and time constraints made the list limited to 25. The respondents are anonymous and came from all over the world to East Coast universities in Malaysia, Malaysia for studying 2 years for master's and Ph.D's programmes at East Coast universities in Malaysia University. Among them, 10 were male and the rest 15 were female.

**Materials and Devices:** While conducting the research study few materials and devices were used to get the information from the respondents. These were the consent forms, android mobile to record the interview with due permission of participants, a laptop to store and summarize data and convert information from audio to visual and in written form, headphones, and the guided semi-structured interview questions. The guided questions were divided into 3 sections which included the background of the respondent in the first part, interview questions related to their migration to East Coast universities in Malaysia, Malaysia, and the factors of home and host country in the second part, and questions related to their experiences, challenges and required skill in the third section.

**Data Collection:** Both primary and secondary sources were used to get the data. The researcher's in-person interviews with foreign students served as the major source, while secondary data were gathered through publications in books, journals, and internet sources. The respondents' agreement was obtained by the researcher in order to conduct the study. Statistical analysis of quantitative data was performed using the Microsoft Excel application.

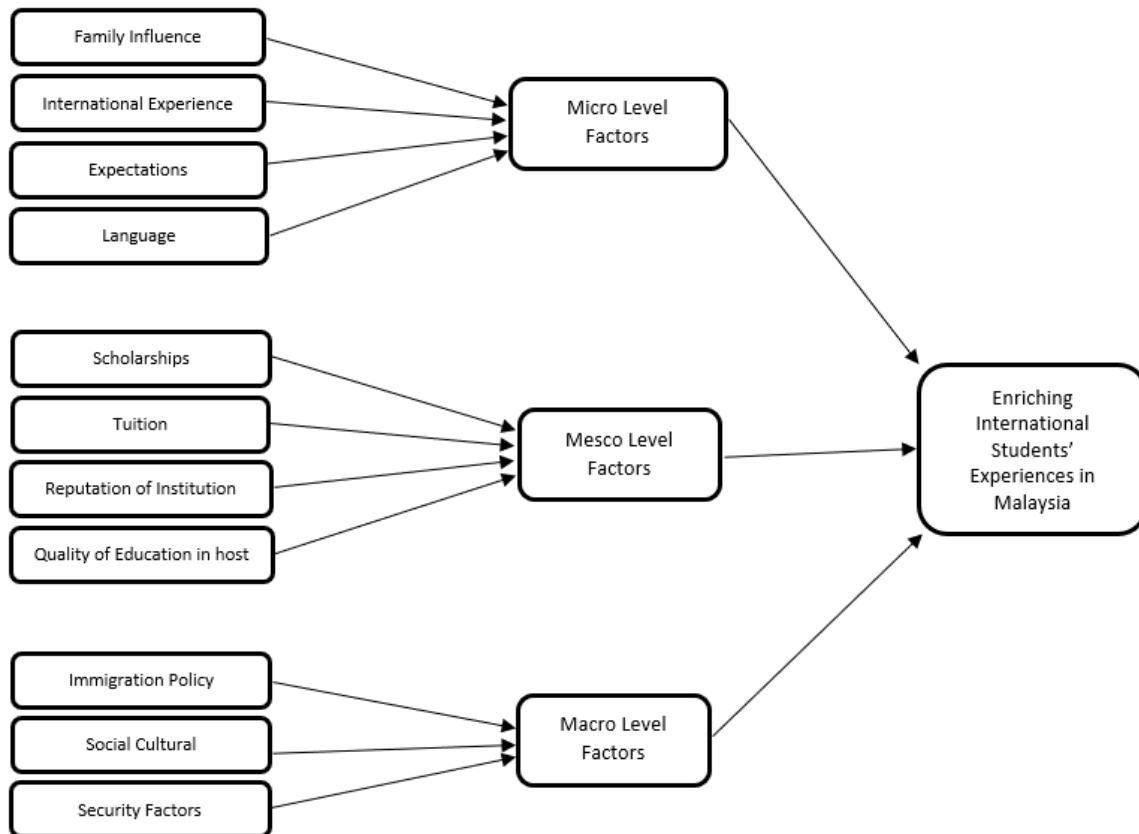
**Procedures** Preparatory works for the interview and materials were ready then the respondents communicated their schedules. They shared the approximate duration of the interview so that they prepared for the session and selected the place of the interview. Also shared that the session will be recorded. After having a consensus with respondents, the researcher confirmed the schedule and the place. At the scheduled time the interview was conducted in a friendly environment where the respondents enjoyed their freedom of giving opinions. Before starting the interview, the researcher briefed the research title and objective and confirmed the signing of the consent paper. The whole interview was recorded. Thus 25 interviews were conducted and stored for interpretation and descriptive discussion.

**Data Summarize, Result, and Interpretation** When the interviews were completed the voice records of the interviews were copied from mobile to laptop. Thus, the audio information was stored on the laptop. After conducting all the targeted interviews, the researcher tried to interpret the audio and transcribe the interviews accurately. Microsoft Excel software was used

to summarize the information of the respondents. The research questions were coded as RQ1 and RQ2 with subdivision and the respondents were coded as Anonymous1 to 25.

#### 4. DISCUSSION

As the nature of choosing a higher education institution for higher study is complex (Briggs, 2006; Soutar & Turner, 2002), a lot of push and pull factors are found. Among those the major push factors from the home country were social insecurity, people's perception of labor division, corruption, law and order, job scope and satisfaction, crimes, conservativeness and social discrimination, adverse urban life and family issues influences, as well as personal career motivation, acted main force to migrate in Malaysia. The pull factors identified by Lam et al. (2011) that make the destination more appealing include the academic standing of the host country, the cultural and physical distance from the home country, the cost of living, the cost of tuition, and the appropriateness of the programme. Malaysia as a receiver country there are a lot of attractiveness and pull factors which include social security, calmness, and peaceful life, the highest quality of education system with world-ranked public renowned universities, an easy application process with comparative fewer tuition fees, favorable visa processing, recognition of the western degrees and diversification of advanced knowledge. The interaction of push and pull factors impacts the decision of students to higher education in Malaysia (see Figure 1). To decide higher education destination, the reputation of educational institutions plays a crucial role. Though East Coast universities in Malaysia are located in northern Malaysia with harsh weather, the reputation of East Coast universities in Malaysia university and their international fame encourage them to migrate here as their study destination. To be specific, as students are not satisfied with the quality of education in their own country, they look for a better quality of higher education (Lee, 2017).



**Figure 1:** Model of factors affecting international students' experiencing of study in Malaysia

This study analyzes Micro-level factors (Family Influence, Gaining International Experience, Expectation, Language, etc.), Meso-level factors (Scholarships, Tuitions, Reputation of the Institution, and Quality of Education in host country), and Macro-level factors (Immigration Policy, Security Factors, and Social Culture) to find out the factors influencing international students to study in Malaysia. It is obvious that international students belong to different cultures, languages, and religions which vary in Malaysia. Students expect to have new cultural experiences. After migrating the students experienced real Malaysian life, society, and culture. Contact with local culture is very important for international students for studying abroad. By the influence of push and pull factors, international students arrive in Malaysia with certain expectations. The availability of job opportunities and the possibility of emigration are included in the expectations. If the expectations and choices, set before leaving the domestic country, are fulfilled then it is a satisfying experience for the students which makes the students settle in the host country. International students' first-hand experience of Malaysian life, society, and culture influence their future plans regarding careers and life. The absence of labor division and equal respect for all people despite their race, origin, religion, ethnicity, and

gender, the diversified culture of cross-continent, calm and peaceful life, and social security inspires them most to lead their plan to stay in Malaysia as their future destination. Though the study expenses and living cost is comparatively higher than the other ASEAN countries and obviously very high compared to third world countries. Again, the students are considering the expenses as an investment so that after completing academic education they will manage a job and thus secure their life in Malaysia and their future generation.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

Despite the tuition fees introduced by Malaysia for non-ASEAN and third country students after 2010, International students remain attracted to Malaysia because of certain reasons. The chronological order of students' decisions for higher study includes deciding to study abroad rather than at home which is influenced by "push factors", then choosing the country dominated by the "pull factors" and finally selecting a particular institution which is dominated by additional "pull factors" that make the institution more preferable. The introduction provides the objectives of the research which discuss the factors influencing international students who migrated to Malaysia and especially in the universities in Malaysia along with their experiences gathered during their current academic period. Through the qualitative approach and the interview with 25 international students of the selected University, a good number of factors were shared by the respondents which were analyzed and discussed to address the student's migration from other countries.

The purpose of this study is to examine the factors that influence international students' experiences through Malaysian Amazing Arts, Culture and Heritage (MAACH) programme. According to the results from in-depth interviews, all the propositions we put forward at the beginning of the study are supported. Gaining international experience (micro level factor), expectations (micro level factor), reputation of institutions (the medium level factor) are the three most important factors affecting international students as it relates to choosing Malaysian institutions. These factors also demonstrate the importance of both the micro level and the meso level factors, and Malaysian institutions can focus on these factors to improve the publicity strategy and meet the target students' needs. In general, this study helps Malaysian institutions better understand international students' choice of destination. A large number of data collected from different types of international students reflect their current ideas. This information can help Malaysian institutions improve their strategies and communication mechanisms to attract more international students to Malaysian universities.

The result of the study shows that better and secured life, higher education and international degree, professional integrity, high standard of education, the possibility of settling in ASEAN etc. mainly motivates international students to study in Malaysia. It finds out unemployment, job opportunity, corruption, political unrest, social insecurity, discrimination etc. as the major push factors for international students which make them leave their home country. Additionally, students' decision-making must take into account factors like improved employment possibilities, linguistic advancement, and exposure to other cultures. Strategies, measures, and tools were taken by the universities and Malaysian government to actively recruit international students and welcome them to Malaysia including scholarships and grants, different projects, extended visas etc. play an important role behind third-country students choosing Malaysia for higher studies. The study points out that the easy application process, the reputation of the university and standard of education, social security, peaceful environment, equal opportunity, easy visa process etc. play as the main pull factors for international students to choose Malaysia as their destination. Western life standards, absence of discrimination and labor division, and the possibility of permanent residency are also some factors mentioned by the participants. These factors both clearly are related to the expectation and experience of the students studying in Malaysia which may impact the future planning of their life and career. Though the students face some challenges during living in Malaysia. It is very common that students may find alienated and outsiders in the host country. Some of their important values are likely to be ignored in the host country and vice versa. Language, weather, food, culture, high living expenditures, time variation, introverted people etc. are some challenges mentioned by the participants. However, the overall experience of the international students in Malaysia is positive and up to their expectations. If the expectations and choices, set before leaving the domestic country, are fulfilled then it is a satisfying experience for the students.

To overcome the challenges, the respondents mention some recommendations which include Malaysian language proficiency, driving, technical knowledge, a positive attitude towards all jobs, professionalism, and punctuality. Mastering these skills can help the students to adjust to the new socio-cultural condition which may cause their self-realization of themselves. Studying abroad may appear as a self-realization project for the student which can make them more open-minded. To conclude it can be said that the push factors of the home country and the pull factors of the host country facilitate a positive trend of student migration from other countries to Malaysia. Moreover, the personal motivation of students for eastern life, academic and professional degree, and Malaysia's welcoming and favorable

migration policies to international students are also dominants to choose to study here and migrate for settled down after completing their studies.

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