

Motivation, Intercultural Competence and Learning Expectations: A Preliminary Case Study on Malaysian Students Participating in a Short-Term Mobility Programme

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ABSTRACT

In the landscape of global higher education, short-term cross-border mobility to advanced Asian nations like Japan serves as a vital driver for internationalizing student experiences and fostering intercultural talent. This study investigates the motivations, intercultural competence, and learning expectations of Malaysian undergraduates participating in such a program. The primary research objectives were to analyse the levels of motivation, intercultural competence, and learning expectations among the students, and to assess whether these factors varied by demographic factors such as gender, prior mobility experience, and ethnicity. Employing a preliminary case study design focused on a specific program cohort, data were collected via a structured online questionnaire from all 30 undergraduate students from several Malaysian public universities who participated in the Japan Educational Program 3.0 from November to December 2025. The findings revealed that participants exhibited strong motivation to improve their communication skills, enhance their intercultural understanding, and gain international experience. They also demonstrated a keen interest in understanding cultural differences and enhancing their intercultural competence. Participants anticipated academic and personal growth, with a particular focus on expanding their cultural knowledge and improving social adaptability. As a result, the study revealed a high degree of homogeneity, with no significant demographic variances found across gender, prior mobility experience, or ethnicity. This key finding underscores the universal appeal and inclusivity of the program, demonstrating that it equitably addresses the personal and academic development goals of a diverse student cohort. Overall, these exploratory insights underscore the value of short-term mobility programs in promoting intercultural competence and personal growth. It also highlights the potential of such programs to meet the academic and developmental needs of students, regardless of their demographic background, making them an effective tool for fostering intercultural understanding and global awareness.

Keywords: Motivation, Intercultural Competence, Learning Expectations, Short-Term Mobility, Academic Development, Preliminary Case Study

INTRODUCTION

Short-term outbound mobility has moved rapidly into the mainstream of the higher education sector as an internationalising curricula strategy and a mechanism of preparing students for enhanced graduate mobility. Because these programmes offer access to a desirable blend of intercultural learning, personal development and labour-market benefits, without the financial and temporal costs of extensive study abroad (Roy, Newman, Ellenberger & Pyman, 2019), they have recently attracted considerable funding from universities as well as governments seeking to promote participation in mobility schemes. Short-term programmes appear to promote a diverse array of outcomes, including deeper intercultural understanding, a broader outlook on life, benefits in terms of foreign language and professional development (Roy, Newman, & Lahiri-Roy, 2022).

Simultaneously, the empirical work has focused mainly on consequences and the antecedents of students' initial motivations, expectations and contextual factors remain relatively under investigated (Luo, Latukha & Panibratov, 2023). However, these antecedents influence not only who participates and how students interact with host environments, but also how students may understand any related returns. Erasmus and other similar programmes have recently been studied which show heterogeneous motives (academic, career, independence, fun or intercultural contact) and that expectations may not meet the reality of mobility, which then impacts on satisfaction and value (Antonova et al, 2020).

Public opinion is also shifting to understand that mobility is a continuous process rather than a transactional event. Such motivations and expectations may change over the course of a programme and even after and may be relevant to long-term academic and professional trajectories (Cuzzocrea, V., & Krzaklewska, 2022). This implies that even when engaging in transformative learning and identity-oriented pedagogies, two week programmes continue to lead to lasting changes in identity, teaching practice and future self orientations years later.

Background of Study

Globally, higher education institutions are shifting toward short-term outbound mobility programs as a practical framework for integrating international and intercultural competencies into undergraduate curricula. Unlike traditional, long-term exchange programs that often present significant time and financial constraints, short-term mobility serves as an accessible alternative for a broader student demographic (Ahamad et al., 2025; Natalya et al., 2021; Sletnes et al., 2025).

Participation in these programs is fundamentally shaped by student expectations and motivations, which generally span academic, socio-cultural, and personal dimensions. Academically, students seek new knowledge and skill sets; socio-culturally, they anticipate cultural exposure and networking opportunities; and personally, they aim to develop independence and self-confidence. These preemptive expectations heavily influence both their choice of destination such as selecting between high-income and low-income nations and how they ultimately perceive the value of the experience (Liu et al., 2024; Tangen & Henderson, 2023). While conventional views often favor longer stays, current research indicates that brief programs lasting only one to two weeks can still generate substantial perceived outcomes. These include enhanced intercultural communication, professional confidence, teamwork, and broader global perspectives (Ahamad et al., 2025; Natalya et al., 2021; Sletnes et al., 2025). However, post-mobility reflections frequently reveal a misalignment between student expectations and the actual reality of the experience. Through diaries, focus groups, and reflective journals, students regularly reassess their initial assumptions, noting that structured, systematic reflection is vital to truly making sense of their international experiences (Ahamad et al., 2025; Sletnes et al., 2025).

This dynamic is particularly critical when examining issues of equity and widening participation in higher education. Financial limitations, linguistic barriers, and social constraints historically exclude many students from conventional international opportunities. Consequently, well-designed short-term programs offer a strategic pathway to mitigate these inequalities, offering language learning and personal growth to less-resourced student cohorts (Iqbal et al., 2023; Kustenko & Kotyuk, 2018; Natalya et al., 2021). Understanding the interplay of motivation, expectations, and actual outcomes within specific program cohorts is therefore essential to refining future international allocation and institutional design.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Short-Term Mobility Programmes

International short-term mobility, typically ranging from one to eight weeks, has expanded significantly as a strategic alternative to traditional long-term exchanges. This format allows higher education institutions to pursue internationalization objectives with minimal institutional and personal disruption (Antonova et al., 2020). Literature indicates that these condensed programs function as intensive educational experiences that

attract a more socio-economically diverse student population, particularly low-income students who might otherwise be excluded from long-term study abroad due to financial constraints (Waters, 2022). Empirical evidence across various disciplines including healthcare, business, and regional education demonstrates that even brief programs lasting one to two weeks yield measurable outcomes, such as gains in discipline specific knowledge, professional competencies, and overall participant satisfaction (Elmokadem et al., 2024; Sletnes et al., 2025).

Student Motivation

Student participation in outbound mobility is traditionally conceptualized through the lens of push and pull factors (Shkoler & Rabenu, 2022). Push factors represent intrinsic drivers, including personal growth, academic advancement, and the accumulation of career capital, whereas pull factors encompass the external attractiveness of the host destination, city, or institution. In short-term programs, primary motivators consistently center on gaining international experience, seeking environmental changes, fostering social networks, and developing a cultural interest in the host country (Antonova et al., 2020; Robledo et al., 2025). For specialized or professional student cohorts, a strong academic interest in the specific program theme combined with the immediate opportunity for cross-cultural encounters serves as the primary driver for enrollment (Sletnes et al., 2025).

Student Expectations

Because of their compact nature, short-term mobility programs are frequently structured to be highly responsive to student expectations regarding targeted learning, cultural exposure, and future career pathways (Antonova et al., 2020; Elmokadem et al., 2024). A prominent expectation among participants is the enhancement of long-term employability and career clarity. Research suggests that a student's self-perceived gain in personal competencies during the program serves as a strong predictor of their confidence in post-graduation employability (Trapani & Cassar, 2020). Beyond career outcomes, undergraduates expect meaningful, substantive interactions with the local culture, language, and daily life of the host community. Aligning program delivery with these structural expectations is essential for maintaining institutional quality and program sustainability (Antonova et al., 2020; Chang & Chan, 2020).

Intercultural Competence

Extant literature confirms that abbreviated international stays can yield meaningful improvements in intercultural effectiveness. This development encompasses both cognitive attributes such as heightened self-awareness, cultural empathy, and tolerance and practical skills, including cross-cultural communication and collaborative teamwork (Blankvoort et al., 2019; Mahapatra et al., 2025). For students lacking prior international exposure, short-term programs function as a foundational introduction to alternative cultural frameworks. Notably, the intercultural benefits gained from these brief exposures can match the developmental trajectory observed in the initial stages of longer-term traditional exchanges, making them highly effective for early-stage student development (Waters, 1989).

Research questions

1. What are the levels of motivation, intercultural competence and learning expectations, among Malaysian undergraduates selected for a short-term mobility programme to Japan?
2. Do demographic factors (gender, prior mobility experience, ethnicity) significantly influence students' motivation, intercultural competence, and learning expectations?

Research objectives

1. To analyse the levels of motivation, intercultural competence and learning expectations among Malaysian undergraduates selected for a short-term mobility programme to Japan.

2. To analyse whether motivation, intercultural competence and learning expectations differ by demographic factors (gender, prior mobility experience, ethnicity)

RESEARCH METHODS

This study adopted a preliminary case study design utilizing a quantitative survey approach. A case study framework was selected to allow for an exploratory, in-depth investigation of a specific, bounded cohort within its real world context, which justifies the localized sample size. The focal case of this research was the Japan Educational Programme 3.0, a short-term outbound mobility initiative that took place from 29 November 2025 to 5 December 2025.

The target population consisted of undergraduate students from several Malaysian public universities who were enrolled in this specific program. Purposive sampling was employed to select participants based on their direct involvement in the mobility cohort. Out of the entire program intake, a total of 30 undergraduate students participated in the study. Because the sample captured 100% of the active participants in this specific cohort, it represents a total population sampling within the bounded case, making the data highly representative of this particular exploratory context. Data were gathered to examine the students' motivation, intercultural competence, and learning expectations. Data were collected using a structured online questionnaire developed in Google Forms. The questionnaire consisted of four sections:

- Section A: Demographic information to look at gender, age, university, programme of study, prior overseas experience.
- Section B: Motivation (5 items) to measure student's motivation to join the mobility programme.
- Section C: Intercultural competence (4 items) to assesses students perceived intercultural awareness and skills.
- Section D: Learning expectations (3 items) to measure student's expectations regarding learning outcomes from the programme.

All items in construct Motivation (M1-M5) and Intercultural Competence (C1-C4) were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly disagree to 5 = Strongly agree). Meanwhile construct learning expectation (E1-E3) were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Very low to 5 = Very high).

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design. Cross-sectional studies collect data from participants at one point in time to describe the prevalence of selected variables and examine associations between them. These designs are suitable for assessing levels of attitudes, knowledge and competencies in a defined population and exploring relationships without making causal claims. Data collection was carried out in one phase. Before departure to Hokkaido, Japan, a self-administered online questionnaire (Google Forms) was distributed to all participating students through institutional communication channels (WhatsApp). Students completed the survey voluntarily prior to the start of the programme.

In addition to the primary survey data, secondary data were obtained through library research, including journal articles, books and reports on student mobility, motivation, learning expectations and intercultural competence. These sources were used to support the theoretical framework and to contextualise the discussion of findings.

Quantitative data from Google Forms were exported to statistical software for analysis. Following standard recommendations for cross-sectional studies, analysis focused on describing the sample and examining associations between variables, rather than testing change over time. Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means) to summarise demographic characteristics and levels of motivation, expectations and intercultural competence. Correlation analyses to examine relationships among the main variables. Group comparison tests independent-samples t-test to explore differences in motivation, expectations and

intercultural competence by demographic factors such as gender or prior international experience and ANOVA for ethnicity factors.

Data Analysis and Findings

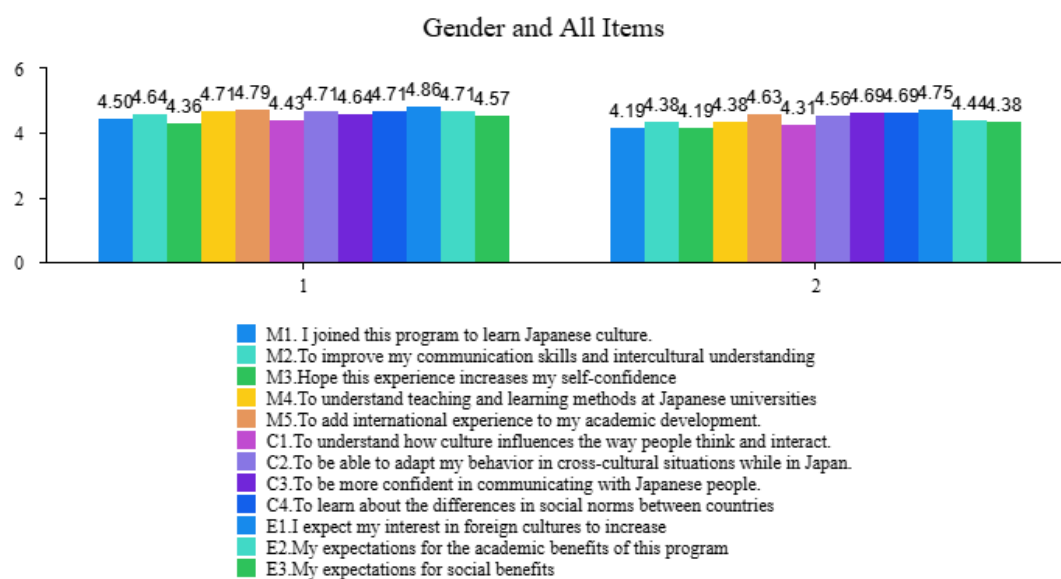
Descriptive analysis on demographic focuses on variables such as gender, ethnicity, university affiliation, year of study, and past involvement in mobility programs.

Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	14	46.67
Female	16	53.33
Ethnic		
Malay	16	53.33
Chinese	9	30.00
Indian	5	16.67
University		
UniMAP	22	73.33
UTHM	6	20.00
UMPSA	2	6.67
Year of Study		
2	17	56.67
3	7	23.33
4	6	20.00
Participation in Mobility Program		
Yes	11	36.67
No	19	63.33

According to the table, females made up 53.33% of the study population, while men were 46.67% of that group. This gender sample showing an even balance between male and female participants. It appears from this distribution that the findings are not affected by gender. Most of the participants belong to the Malay ethnic group (53.33 percent). After that come Chinese (30.00%) and Indian participants accounted for 16.67% of the cohort. This varied ethnic mix mirrors general demographic patterns throughout our region hence it provides a varied cultural point of view. By far the majority of respondents, 73.33% to be exact, came from UniMAP; UTHM had smaller representation, 20% and UMPSA accounted for only 6.67%. This finding may

suggest a particular demography in these institutions. It could certainly influence the generalization of our results to other universities. Most students were in their second year (56.67%), with third and fourth year following at 23.33% and 20% respectively. The dominance of second-year students may suggest they are more engaged or aware of opportunities like the one under study, a fact likely to influence their responses. About two-thirds of respondents in the survey (63.33%) had never previously been involved in mobility programs; 36.67% had prior overseas mobility experience. This is important for understanding different levels of exposure to international learning situations and their possible impact on participants' motivations and expectations.

Independent-samples t Test				
	Gender (Mean $\pm$ S.D.)		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i> Value
	Male (<i>n</i> = 14)	Female (<i>n</i> = 16)		
M1. I joined this program to learn Japanese culture.	4.50 $\pm$ 1.02	4.19 $\pm$ 1.11	0.800	0.431
M2.To improve my communication skills and intercultural understanding	4.64 $\pm$ 0.84	4.38 $\pm$ 0.89	0.846	0.405
M3.Hope this experience increases my self-confidence	4.36 $\pm$ 1.01	4.19 $\pm$ 1.11	0.436	0.666
M4.To understand teaching and learning methods at Japanese universities	4.71 $\pm$ 0.47	4.38 $\pm$ 0.89	1.334	0.195
M5.To add international experience to my academic development.	4.79 $\pm$ 0.43	4.63 $\pm$ 0.62	0.816	0.421
C1.To understand how culture influences the way people think and interact.	4.43 $\pm$ 0.94	4.31 $\pm$ 0.87	0.351	0.728
C2.To be able to adapt my behavior in cross-cultural situations while in Japan.	4.71 $\pm$ 0.47	4.56 $\pm$ 0.81	0.614	0.544
C3.To be more confident in communicating with Japanese people.	4.64 $\pm$ 0.84	4.69 $\pm$ 0.79	-0.149	0.882
C4.To learn about the differences in social norms between countries	4.71 $\pm$ 0.47	4.69 $\pm$ 0.48	0.154	0.878
E1.I expect my interest in foreign cultures to increase	4.86 $\pm$ 0.36	4.75 $\pm$ 0.77	0.473	0.640
E2.My expectations for the academic benefits of this program	4.71 $\pm$ 0.47	4.44 $\pm$ 0.51	1.535	0.136
E3.My expectations for social benefits	4.57 $\pm$ 0.65	4.38 $\pm$ 0.62	0.849	0.403
* $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$				



An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare the mean scores of responses between male (*n* = 14) and female (*n* = 16) participants across various items measuring motivation, intercultural expectations,



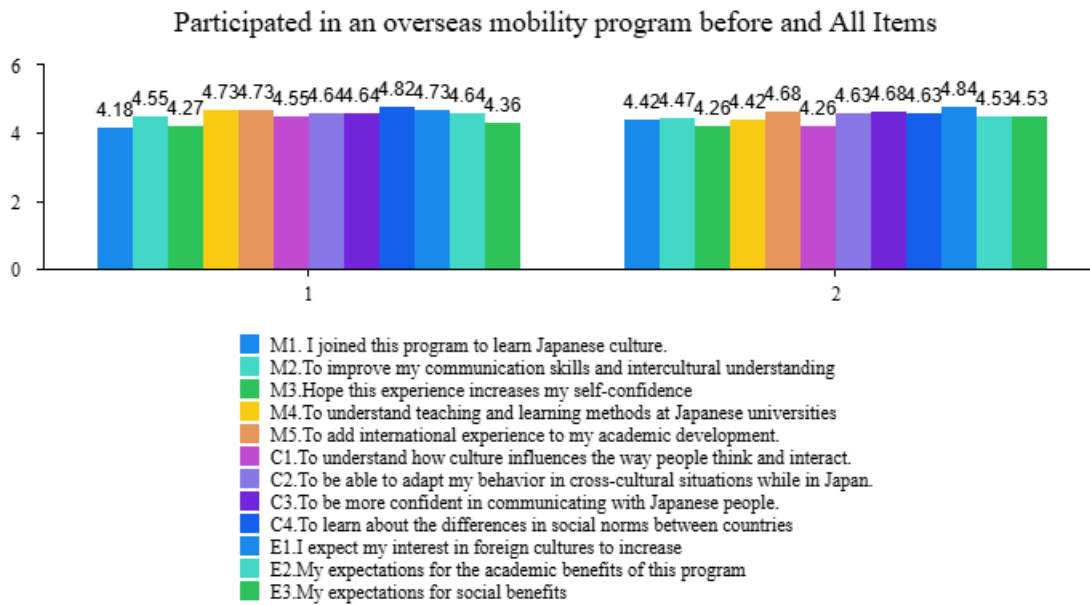
and learning benefits. The results indicated that there were no significant differences between the gender groups for any of the tested variables, as all p -values exceeded the 0.05 threshold.

For item M1 ("I joined this program to learn Japanese culture"), the mean score for males (4.50 ± 1.02) was slightly higher than that for females (4.19 ± 1.11), but this difference was not statistically significant ($t = 0.800$, $p = 0.431$). Similarly, for M2 ("To improve my communication skills and intercultural understanding"), the male mean score was higher than the female mean score (4.64 ± 0.84 and 4.38 ± 0.89 , respectively), yet the difference remained statistically insignificant ($t = 0.846$, $p = 0.405$).

Other motivational items related to academic and personal development, such as increasing self-confidence (M3) and understanding teaching and learning methods at Japanese universities (M4), also demonstrated no significant differences between male and female participants, with p -values ranging from 0.195 to 0.666.

Regarding cultural expectations and social adaptability, items such as C1 ("To understand how culture influences the way people think and interact") and C4 ("To learn about the differences in social norms between countries") similarly yielded no significant gender differences ($p = 0.728$ and $p = 0.878$, respectively). Furthermore, expectations regarding cultural, academic, and social benefits (E1, E2, E3) followed the same non-significant pattern, with all p -values consistently above 0.05. Overall, these findings suggest that male and female participants shared highly similar perspectives and expectations regarding the mobility program.

Independent-samples t Test				
	Participated in an overseas mobility program before (Mean $\pm$ S.D.)		t	p Value
	Yes ($n = 11$)	No ($n = 19$)		
M1. I joined this program to learn Japanese culture.	4.18 ± 1.17	4.42 ± 1.02	-0.588	0.561
M2. To improve my communication skills and intercultural understanding	4.55 ± 0.93	4.47 ± 0.84	0.216	0.830
M3. Hope this experience increases my self-confidence	4.27 ± 0.90	4.26 ± 1.15	0.024	0.981
M4. To understand teaching and learning methods at Japanese universities	4.73 ± 0.65	4.42 ± 0.77	1.111	0.276
M5. To add international experience to my academic development.	4.73 ± 0.47	4.68 ± 0.58	0.209	0.836
C1. To understand how culture influences the way people think and interact.	4.55 ± 0.82	4.26 ± 0.93	0.833	0.412
C2. To be able to adapt my behavior in cross-cultural situations while in Japan.	4.64 ± 0.92	4.63 ± 0.50	0.019	0.985
C3. To be more confident in communicating with Japanese people.	4.64 ± 0.92	4.68 ± 0.75	-0.155	0.878
C4. To learn about the differences in social norms between countries	4.82 ± 0.40	4.63 ± 0.50	1.119	0.274
E1. I expect my interest in foreign cultures to increase	4.73 ± 0.90	4.84 ± 0.37	-0.490	0.628
E2. My expectations for the academic benefits of this program	4.64 ± 0.50	4.53 ± 0.51	0.570	0.574
E3. My expectations for social benefits	4.36 ± 0.67	4.53 ± 0.61	-0.676	0.504
* $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$				



n this study, an independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare the mean scores of participants who had prior overseas mobility experience ($n = 11$) with those who did not ($n = 19$); of scores achieved from each item tested. In the case of the latter however when all p -values exceeded 0.05, there were no significant differences between the two groups at any single item. For item M1 ("I joined this program to learn Japanese culture"), the mean score ("I joined this program to learn Japanese culture"), the mean score of those with prior mobility experience resulted in a slightly lower average value of 4.18 ± 1.17 than those without (4.42 ± 1.02), but this difference was not statistically significant ($t = -0.588$, $p = 0.561$) again. Similarly, for M2 ("To improve my communication skills and intercultural understanding"), with means of 4.55 ± 0.93 for those with prior experience and 4.47 ± 0.84 without there was no significant difference ($t = 0.216$, $p = 0.830$). Other items such as M3 ("Hope this experience increases my self-confidence") and M4 ("To understand teaching and learning methods at Japanese universities") also showed no distinction between the two groups, having p -values of 0.981 and 0.276 respectively. Cultural understanding and social adaptation items (C1, C2, C3, C4) also did not show significant differences, with p -values ranging from 0.274 to 0.985. More over expectations for cultural, academic, and social benefits (E1, E2, E3) showed only similar results, where no significant differences based on prior mobility experience could be found and p -values stood above 0.05.

One-way ANOVA					
	Ethnic (Mean $\pm$ S.D.)			<i>F</i>	<i>p</i> Value
	Malay ($n = 16$)	Chinese ($n = 9$)	Indian ($n = 5$)		
M1. I joined this program to learn Japanese culture.	4.38 $\pm$ 0.96	4.22 $\pm$ 1.20	4.40 $\pm$ 1.34	0.067	0.935
M2. To improve my communication skills and intercultural understanding	4.56 $\pm$ 0.63	4.44 $\pm$ 1.01	4.40 $\pm$ 1.34	0.089	0.915
M3. Hope this experience increases my self-confidence	4.38 $\pm$ 1.02	4.11 $\pm$ 1.05	4.20 $\pm$ 1.30	0.184	0.833
M4. To understand teaching and learning methods at Japanese universities	4.56 $\pm$ 0.73	4.33 $\pm$ 0.87	4.80 $\pm$ 0.45	0.668	0.521
M5. To add international experience to my academic development.	4.75 $\pm$ 0.58	4.67 $\pm$ 0.50	4.60 $\pm$ 0.55	0.165	0.849
C1. To understand how culture influences the way people think and interact.	4.38 $\pm$ 0.89	4.22 $\pm$ 0.97	4.60 $\pm$ 0.89	0.277	0.760

C2.To be able to adapt my behavior in cross-cultural situations while in Japan.	4.81 ± 0.40	4.33 ± 1.00	4.60 ± 0.55	1.542	0.232
C3.To be more confident in communicating with Japanese people.	4.81 ± 0.40	4.33 ± 1.32	4.80 ± 0.45	1.119	0.341
C4.To learn about the differences in social norms between countries	4.63 ± 0.50	4.78 ± 0.44	4.80 ± 0.45	0.430	0.655
E1.I expect my interest in foreign cultures to increase	4.94 ± 0.25	4.56 ± 1.01	4.80 ± 0.45	1.139	0.335
E2.My expectations for the academic benefits of this program	4.63 ± 0.50	4.44 ± 0.53	4.60 ± 0.55	0.366	0.697
E3.My expectations for social benefits	4.50 ± 0.63	4.22 ± 0.67	4.80 ± 0.45	1.448	0.253
* $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$					

The researcher conducted a one-way ANOVA across all items measuring participants' motivations, cultural expectations or program benefits in order to compare the means of different ethnic groups' responses. All the one-way ANOVA outcomes indicated that no significant differences existed between ethnic groups for any items tested. The p-values were all greater than 0.05. For instance, in the case of item M1 ("I have joined this program in order to learn Japanese culture"), the mean scores of the three groups were 4.38 ± 0.96 for group 1.0, 4.22 ± 1.20 for group 2.0 and 4.40 ± 1.34 for group 3.0. The F-value is 0.067, $P=0.935$ which means here there is no significant difference at all, likewise with M2 ("To improve my communications skills and intercultural understanding"), the mean scores for these three groups were 4.56 ± 0.63 , 4.44 ± 1.10 and 4.40 ± 1.34 respectively, indicating a P-value of 0.915, that is to say no significant differences. Likewise, M3 ("Hope this experience increases my self-confidence") and M4 ("To improve one's understanding of the teaching and learning modes in Japanese Universities") showed no significant differences across ethnic groups with p-values 0.833 and 0.521 respectively. Cultural understanding and social adaptation items (C1, C2, C3, C4) yielded no significant differences either among the ethnic groups, with p-values ranging from 0.655 - 0.760. For cultural, academic and social benefits expectations (E1, E2, E3) all yielded p-values far above 0.253.

DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSION

The analysis of participant motivations, intercultural competence, and learning expectations demonstrates a strong and positive attitude towards the short-term mobility program to Japan. Participants show high levels of enthusiasm for the opportunity to engage with the program, reflecting both personal growth and academic development (Sakharova et al., 2017) This enthusiastic engagement is supported by findings that highly motivated participants derive greater fulfilment from such experiences, while their strong curiosity fosters tolerance and alignment with program goals.

A key motivating factor for participants is the improvement of communication skills and intercultural understanding. Many students expressed that enhancing their ability to communicate and interact across cultures was a central reason for participating (Niehaus et al. ,2019) This reflects the widespread recognition of the value of intercultural competence in today's interconnected world. Alongside this, there is a strong expectation that the program will increase participants' self-confidence, with many seeing it as a chance to build not just their cultural knowledge but also their personal growth.

On the intercultural competence side, participants expressed significant curiosity about thinking and interaction differences that stem from culture. The excitement in trying to learn about different cultures highlights a strong recognition of the importance of cultural learning, especially in a globalized world. Participants also ranked highly the importance of the program regarding communicating and collaborating with Japanese people, learning their social norms reflecting an emphasis on more practical intercultural skill-building within a realistic context. Studies about this kind of collaborative program gave support to the view

that the learning process was primarily motivated by value-oriented expectancy and that cross-border activities can serve as powerful factors in promoting student motivation (Soong et al., 2017).

Expectations for learning outcomes were also important, with participants expressing a general interest in learning more about foreign cultures (Soong et al., 2017). There was a strong expectation that the program would create more interest in other cultures. Expectations for both academic and social benefits were significant as well, although varying somewhat. Although most students have high academic expectations, several also expressed more moderate expectations, particularly with regard to the social benefit that they are hoping for.

Overall, the results indicate that participants see the short-term mobility program as a beneficial opportunity for both personal and academic development (Manning, 2022). These findings fit the reasons for participating including working on communication skills, gaining international experience, and increasing self-confidence very well into the purpose of the program. Likewise, the interest in intercultural learning and expectations of both academic and social benefits are all very high and further indicate the program as a relevant locus for students to meet personal, academic, and intercultural development needs and goals.

Data analysis indicated that the participants' motivations, intercultural competence and learning expectations were not significantly influenced by either gender or ethnicity. This indicates that participants of the program regardless of these demographic characteristics had similar aspirations and expectations.

Results showed that males and females had similar motivations and expectations related to the program. Both genders displayed similar interest in learning about the Japanese culture, improving their communication level, and gaining international experiences. The results suggest that gender does not shape the motivations to join the program or expected benefits. It seems that it has less to do with gender and some of it has more to do with individual interests and external factors as well. Interactivity will be an especially crucial element for participants, who are able to engage with the program and express application of personal and educational development (both the excitement and the engaged Application of learning have been seen in similar exchange studies where the cultural background of the students varied significantly, (Soong et al., 2017).

The analysis which explored whether prior participation in an overseas mobility program influenced participants current motivations and expectations for example those that had not travelled before versus those that had) showed no significant difference between the two groups. The motivations expressed by both groups were not much different from one another in that all of them wish to experience Japanese culture, improve their communicative ability, and learn about the academic ways of the Japanese universities. It also suggests that general motivations to engage in this program stem from wider pursuits that incorporate cultural learning and personal growth, as opposed to a previous background of international travel. This shared motivation corresponds with research showing that students from demographic backgrounds as diverse as ours chase mobility mainly to gain measures of cultural experience as well as academic knowledge and career opportunities (Baranova et al., 2020; Soong et al., 2017).

The analysis for ethnic differences showed that there were no significant differences in the motivation or expectations of participants from different ethnic groups. Despite the racial make-up of participants either Malay, Chinese or Indian, their motivations and what they hoped to gain from the experience, both personally and academically, were almost identical. It indicates that desire to learn about other cultures is not isolated to a single race. Rather it seems to be something we all have in common there furthering the universality of the program more than anything.

To summarize this research reveals an underlying motivation of Malaysian undergraduate students involved in a short-term mobility to Japan. The students especially wanted to master communication skills and gain international expertise and intercultural competence. It was seen to be a great opportunity for personal and academic development. Motivations or expectations of participants were not significantly affected by demographic factors, including gender, mobility experience, and ethnicity. These findings indicate that the program has wide appeal in new groups, where a community of practice can emerge around cultural learning



and personal growth. In general, this research highlights those students do experience academic and intercultural development through short-term mobility programme.

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