

## Completion Report

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Developing and establishing a successful social interaction and a lasting interpersonal relationship with people from a host country is crucial in ensuring a meaningful experience for exchange students. Social interactions influence how they understand and feel about their experience. Additionally, the quality of interpersonal relationships derived from social interactions is important for the student's overall health and well-being. However, given the 'high context' of Japanese culture, and the generally 'shy' nature of Malaysians, challenges can be expected by Malaysian exchange students during their stay in Japan. This study examines the challenges faced by Malaysian exchange students in developing and establishing successful social interaction and lasting interpersonal relationships with their Japanese hosts. Data were collected through focus group discussions and interviews which involved 10 students from a public university in Malaysia who had recently participated in the student mobility programme in Japan.

It can be concluded that having clear intentions is very important in establishing any kind of social interaction between Malaysian exchange students and the Japanese. In the case of Malaysian exchange students in Japan, besides getting assistance concerning important and official matters, very often the intention for initiating social interaction with the Japanese is to improve their Japanese language skills. On the other hand, according to research participants, the aim of the Japanese students when establishing a social interaction with the exchange students is to fulfil their craving for knowledge about the exchange students' home countries while some of them may be interested to study abroad. This study also confirmed several factors that contribute to the unsuccessful social interaction such as language barriers, the Japanese traditional way of thinking, the 'shy nature' of Malaysian and Japanese, and the attitude of students who do not appreciate the relationship. Despite these barriers, some Malaysian students have successfully established good social interactions and developed lasting interpersonal relationships with the Japanese by improving themselves according to the requirements as follows. First, the students must improve their language and communication skills. Second, the exchange students need to be more extroverted and have a friendly disposition before leaving for Japan. Third, to build a long-lasting relationship, both parties need to understand each other better and be more open to accepting and appreciating differences.

To summarize, in general, students who participated in the mobility programme in Japan described their experience as mainly positive, but they also had to face myriad challenges to enjoy their full experience as exchange students. Therefore, this study is a source of reference for future exchange students to understand potential challenges ahead and how they can prepare themselves to navigate through these. Mental preparedness would enable them to focus on their potential experience as a process of learning to live in a foreign land, rather than adapting to it.

Publication of the Results of Research Project:

Verbal Presentation (Date, Venue, Name of Conference, Title of Presentation, Presenter, etc.)

Thesis (Name of Journal and its Date, Title and Author of Thesis, etc.)

Book (Publisher and Date of the Book, Title and Author of the Book, etc.)

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