

SOCIAL EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT AND ITS INFLUENCE ON INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' ENGAGEMENT IN MALAYSIA HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract. In recent years, international students have commonly faced challenges related to cross-cultural adaptation. Existing research suggests that well-developed social support systems and high levels of academic engagement can effectively mitigate these issues. This study investigates Malaysian international students, aiming to examine the relationship between social educational support and student engagement, thereby offering insights for optimizing cross-cultural adaptation strategies. Utilizing simple random sampling, 381 participants were selected from a population of 53,000 Malaysian international students. The findings indicate that: (1) Malaysian international students report generally high levels of social educational support and student engagement; (2) Student participation in classroom activities, extracurricular settings, and virtual environments varies significantly by gender, nationality, and age, although virtual engagement shows no significant correlation with degree level; (3) Regression analysis reveals that family support, peer support, and technological support are significant positive predictors of student engagement, while lecturer support does not exhibit a statistically significant effect. The results provide empirical evidence to inform the development of targeted institutional support systems, offering valuable guidance for enhancing the cross-cultural adaptation of Malaysian international students.

Keywords: social educational support, student participation, international students, Malaysia

Introduction

The advent of globalization has facilitated the mobility of students across borders, enabling them to pursue education abroad and acquire knowledge and skills that may rival or surpass material wealth, power, and prestige, thereby contributing to societal progress. As of 2021, the global population of international students exceeded 6.4 million, a significant increase from 2 million in 2000. This rapid growth has raised considerable concerns regarding the quality of international students' academic experiences and the extent of their engagement in learning. Unlike their domestic counterparts, international students face a range of challenges associated with adapting to unfamiliar environments, including differences in lifestyle, language, and academic expectations. These factors may impose heightened academic and personal stress, potentially hindering the development of constructive learning habits and leading to diminished academic engagement and enthusiasm. Consequently, it is essential to prioritize the encouragement and support of international students in academic activities, which are critical for nurturing global talent. Learning participation is a key determinant of academic success in higher education and holds particular significance for international students. When students demonstrate high levels of engagement, they forge a personal connection to their educational journey through behaviors such as attending lectures, forming study groups, and participating in academic communities. These actions foster a sense of belonging, which may emerge through interpersonal connections, collaborative study, or peer interactions. This sense of belonging is

particularly vital for international students, as it helps alleviate anxiety and uncertainty in a new cultural context, thereby enhancing motivation, interest in learning, and the formulation of study plans. Such engagement promotes both immediate and sustained involvement in learning, ultimately leading to improved academic performance.

Social educational support, derived from various sources, plays a crucial role in fostering international students' academic engagement. According to Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, the microsystem-comprising interactions with parents, teachers, and peers-directly influences individual development. For international students, strong engagement with supportive social networks can significantly improve their learning environment and academic outcomes. Furthermore, in the current digital era, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) forms an essential component of the chronosystem, shaping students' developmental experiences over time. ICT has increasingly permeated the educational sector, offering students practical tools such as online courses, e-books, and mobile learning resources. International students, due to their heightened sensitivity to environmental changes, particularly benefit from support within their microsystem and chronosystem. This study focuses on Malaysian international students and aims to assess the long-term impact of social educational support on their participation in academic activities. Existing literature commonly classifies academic engagement into behavioral, emotional, and cognitive dimensions, or conceptual frameworks such as vigor, dedication, and absorption. For instance, access to adequate social resources reduced negative emotions among international students in Japan, thereby enhancing emotional engagement. Similarly, previous study reported that while cultural adaptation challenges negatively impact cognitive engagement, academic resilience strategies can restore student confidence, facilitating holistic engagement across all dimensions. Given the strong correlation between active participation and observable behaviors, recent research has increasingly focused on external actions as proxies for internal motivation, with common metrics including classroom behaviors such as reading, writing, and listening (Lane and Harris, 2015). However, focusing solely on in-class behaviors provides an incomplete picture of student engagement. For example, behavioral engagement into disengaged, passive, and active modes, demonstrating that interactions with teachers and peers significantly enhance learning outcomes.

Therefore, the objectives of this study are twofold: first, to assess the levels of social educational support and academic participation among international students in Malaysia; and second, to analyze the extent to which social educational support influences student engagement in learning activities. This study contributes to the literature in three significant ways: (1) Unlike previous research, it adopts Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory to examine social educational support within both the microsystem (family, peers, and lecturers) and chronosystem (technological factors) of international students, thereby addressing a gap in the current understanding of the support structures available to international students in Malaysia; (2) recognizing the limited research on international students' multi-contextual behavioral participation, this study incorporates indicators across three settings: within the classroom, outside the classroom, and in virtual environments; (3) building on existing evidence that demonstrates both direct and indirect positive effects of social media use on academic engagement, this research offers a comprehensive spatial analysis of international students' participation. Ultimately, the findings aim to inform policy and practice in Malaysian higher education, providing valuable insights for

enhancing social educational support systems and optimizing international students' academic engagement.

Literature review

Social educational support

Social support refers to both subjective perceptions and objective assistance provided to individuals, particularly those in vulnerable or transitional situations. Past study classified social support into five dimensions based on various perspectives: direction, disposition, description and evaluation, content, and social network. Expanding on this concept, a study defined social support as an individual's perception of both general and specific assistance received. Through interactions involving feedback and reassurance, individuals may strengthen their sense of being supported, thereby mitigating the potential negative effects of stress and adversity. Recent scholarship has increasingly emphasized the role of social actors in offering emotional, informational, and educational support within primary and secondary social contexts. The advancement of digital technologies and the widespread adoption of online communities have further broadened the channels through which individuals can access support. By expressing negative emotions on these platforms, individuals can receive emotional validation and empathy. Emotional support, in particular, functions not only to convey care, love, and respect but also provides both recipients and providers with a sense of safety and psychological comfort, creating opportunities for emotional expression and spiritual relief (Liu and Ma, 2018). Within this broader framework, social educational support is typically divided into two key categories: educational support and emotional support. Educational support encompasses tools, resources, and informational guidance intended to enhance students' learning experiences. When students perceive such support, they are more likely to engage actively, persist in their studies, and achieve improved academic outcomes (Luan et al., 2023). Emotional support, on the other hand, indirectly contributes to academic functioning by alleviating negative emotions commonly encountered in educational environments. It includes emotional encouragement, evaluative affirmation, and respectful acknowledgment. In goal-oriented contexts, one party's willingness to offer encouragement, respect, and affirmation fosters emotional support, which in turn facilitates acceptance and motivation (Meng and Dai, 2021).

International students, when adapting to unfamiliar cultural and academic environments, often experience psychological and social isolation. This isolation can deprive them of established support systems, leading to heightened behavioral stress, internal anxiety, and increased sensitivity to their surroundings. When students perceive sufficient social support, it can significantly reduce these emotional burdens, equipping them to better manage the challenges of cross-cultural adjustment. As such, cultivating robust social support systems is a critical strategy for enhancing international students' capacity to cope with acculturative stress (Scott English et al., 2022; Van de Velde et al., 2021; Shu et al., 2020). For example, a study by Luan et al. (2023) explored the coping mechanisms used by Chinese international students in Belgium to manage academic stressors, including academic competence, cultural shock, limited academic resources, and communication barriers, and found that access to social support played a pivotal role in overcoming these challenges. Similarly, Shu et al. (2020), in a study involving 276 international students, examined cross-cultural adjustment across general, interactive, and academic domains. The findings highlighted the critical role of social

support in enhancing adaptability, with emotional support identified as a key predictor of successful cross-cultural adjustment.

Student participation

Academic participation, a central concept in educational psychology, was originally employed to assess individuals' immersion in learning or work-related activities. Past study shows conceptualized academic engagement as comprising three interrelated dimensions: behavioural, emotional, and cognitive. Behavioural engagement refers to observable student actions in academic contexts, such as classroom participation and involvement in extracurricular activities, which reflect students' commitment and active involvement. Emotional engagement captures students' affective responses, including interest, enjoyment, and identification with learning, and is often evaluated through constructs such as "interest value," "utility value," and "cost value." Cognitive engagement involves students' investment in learning and their use of deep learning strategies, such as self-regulation and critical thinking. A complementary dimension, social engagement, has also gained prominence, emphasizing students' perceived institutional inclusivity and their interactions with peers, faculty, and other stakeholders—manifested in feelings of connection and belonging. This expanded framework, integrating behavioural, emotional, cognitive, and social aspects, acknowledges that students may engage differently across these domains. The dynamic interplay among these dimensions contributes to improvements in students' self-esteem, self-efficacy, and academic achievement.

In parallel, research has increasingly investigated the relationship between cross-cultural challenges and academic participation. For instance, through a mixed-methods study of 20 students enrolled in an international online learning program, found that such initiatives foster greater appreciation for cultural and skill diversity, enhancing both the quality of learning and student outcomes. These collaborative international learning environments also promote cross-cultural awareness and stimulate deeper academic engagement. Similarly, in a qualitative study involving interviews with 12 Chinese international students, examined how language barriers, cultural cognition, and identity negotiation affect participation. The findings revealed that linguistic challenges, cultural discrepancies, and identity conflicts significantly hinder classroom engagement and reduce students' levels of social participation. In a separate study, scholars analyzed the impact of cultural shock on the academic participation of international nursing students. The study concluded that language barriers, an essential component of cultural shock, negatively affect both academic performance and engagement. However, the research also demonstrated that academic resilience strategies, such as adaptive coping and persistence, can mitigate these negative outcomes and enhance participation. These studies collectively underscore that international students' academic engagement, whether viewed through personal experiences or contextual challenges, is deeply intertwined with language proficiency and cultural adaptation.

Social educational support and student participation

The academic participation of international students is closely linked to their capacity to adapt to new environments. Students who demonstrate strong adaptive abilities are more likely to redirect their focus toward academic engagement. Thus, addressing the challenges international students face is of critical importance. In a qualitative study

conducted by Al-Oraibi et al. (2022) on the mental health of international students during the COVID-19 pandemic, interviews with 29 students and 17 staff members at a university in England revealed a decline in students' participation in academic tasks and activities as they adjusted to new teaching modalities and coped with social and institutional isolation. However, the study also emphasized that tailored institutional support, such as mental health counseling, academic exchange opportunities, and targeted academic assistance, can significantly enhance students' well-being and foster greater academic engagement. Within Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, individual behavior is shaped by interactions between personal characteristics and multiple environmental contexts, including schools and communities. Accordingly, it is essential to examine the determinants of these interactions within socially relevant settings (Luan et al., 2023). Prior studies have consistently identified lecturer and peer support as critical predictors of academic success for international students. For example, in a qualitative study involving interviews with 18 Chinese international students in Belgium, identified peers and lecturers as the two primary sources of social support that assist students in managing academic stress. Similarly, Shu et al. (2020) found that both lecturer and peer support positively influence academic adjustment, with emotional peer support serving as a key predictor of successful cross-cultural adaptation. Rönkkönen et al. (2022) further observed that international students place a high value on lecturer support. Lecturers serve as authoritative figures responsible for curriculum design and task assignment, while peers, sharing similar experiences, offer empathy and collaborative perspectives on knowledge acquisition. Both groups are therefore integral to international students' academic development.

Within the microsystem of individual development, family members, lecturers, and peers represent primary agents of influence. However, the role of familial support in educational outcomes remains contested. For instance, in their examination of classroom challenges faced by Chinese and Korean international students, identified teacher-student relationships as central to academic engagement but also recognized the positive influence of family support. Similarly found that family support not only alleviates cross-cultural stress but also enhances international students' social participation. In some instances, families contribute by assuming domestic responsibilities or providing emotional and financial support, thereby allowing students to concentrate on their studies. Conversely, Shu et al. (2020) reported no significant relationship between family support and cross-cultural academic stress. Investigating primary sources of social support among Malaysian international students, noted that parental support plays a limited role, largely due to geographical separation and challenges in maintaining familial networks (Shu et al., 2020). However, recent advancements in information and communication technologies have facilitated more effective interactions, enabling families to offer informational and emotional support despite physical distance (Criollo-C et al., 2021; Lin et al., 2015). Technological support, representing the chronosystem within Bronfenbrenner's framework, continues to play a pivotal role in individual development. In a study of 243 higher education students, demonstrated that integrating Transactional Distance Theory (TDT) and Behaviorist Learning Theory (BLT) into online platforms enhances both learning satisfaction and academic achievement. Mehrvarz et al. (2021), analyzing digital literacy among 319 Iranian university students, found a positive correlation between digital competency and academic performance. Similarly, both direct and indirect associations between social media use and international students' learning engagement.

As a dynamic product of environmental change, technology serves as a crucial enabler of academic growth and engagement within Bronfenbrenner's ecological system.

The research objectives of this study are: (1) To assess the levels of social educational support and student participation in learning activities among international students in Malaysia, (2) To analyze the impact of social educational support on the academic participation of international students in Malaysia.

Materials and Methods

Sampling technique and survey tool

This study adopts a simple random sampling technique to ensure equal selection probability and enhance the representativeness of the sample (Noor et al., 2022). The target population comprises approximately 53,000 international students enrolled in Malaysian higher education institutions, primarily from East Asia, and studying in both public and private universities, with a concentration in social sciences and business disciplines. Based on sampling table, a statistically appropriate sample size of 381 participants was determined. This sample size ensures methodological rigor while maintaining research efficiency. The probability sampling approach effectively reduces selection bias and strengthens both internal and external validity, allowing for a robust examination of the relationship between social educational support and student learning engagement. This sampling method aligns with established standards in quantitative research within the field of educational studies. This study employs a quantitative research design using a structured survey methodology, in line with recent trends in higher education research concerning social support and academic engagement. Survey methodology has proven effective in gathering reliable demographic and quantitative data, particularly when implemented using validated sampling procedures and well-designed instruments. The primary research instrument in this study is a questionnaire designed to assess the levels of social educational support and student participation in academic activities among international students in Malaysia. The questionnaire comprises three sections: demographic information, social educational support, and student participation. It was developed based on existing literature and previously validated instruments, with adaptations to suit the current study's focus and to improve content validity. Data will be collected through an online survey, which facilitates rapid distribution and response collection, enhances cost-efficiency, and significantly reduces the time required for data gathering (Andrade, 2020).

Questionnaire

The social educational support section of the questionnaire is adapted from the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) was developed, which originally comprises three subscales, family, friends, and significant others, with four items each, totaling 12 items. In this study, the scale has been modified to better reflect the educational context by replacing the "significant others" dimension with "lecturer" and "technology." The revised scale consists of four subscales: lecturer, family, peer, and technology support, with five items each, resulting in a total of 20 items. The revised scale demonstrated high internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.891. Furthermore, the questionnaire was reviewed and revised by experts in the sociology of education to ensure content relevance and clarity. For instance, the original item "In

times of trouble, technology has always taught me how to solve problems” was revised to “Technologies such as social media, online platforms, and artificial intelligence have always taught me how to solve problems,” thereby enhancing precision and contextual relevance. The student learning participation questionnaire consists of three subscales: “In the Classroom,” “Out of the Classroom,” and “In Information Communication Technology,” each containing five items, totaling 15 items. The internal consistency of the scale was confirmed with a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.874. These subscales were also reviewed and refined by experts in the sociology of education. The “In the Classroom” subscale is primarily based on the behavioral engagement component of the University Student Engagement Inventory developed. The “Out of the Classroom” subscale is adapted from the “Beyond-Class Engagement” subscale of the Higher Education Student Engagement Scale was proposed, while the “In Information Communication Technology” subscale draws upon “Online Engagement Scale.” Additionally, recognizing the increasing accessibility of artificial intelligence in academic contexts, the ICT subscale incorporates items assessing students' use of AI tools for functions such as summarizing content and providing feedback. This integration ensures a comprehensive measurement of students' engagement with technological learning tools.

Results and Discussion

Descriptive statistical analysis

As presented in *Table 1*, this study collected data from a total of 381 international students enrolled in Malaysian higher education institutions. Of these respondents, 181 were male (47.5%) and 200 were female (52.5%). The sample included students from seven countries: China (n=194, 50.9%), Bangladesh (n=57, 15%), Indonesia (n=46, 12.1%), Nigeria (n=34, 8.9%), Yemen (n=23, 6%), Pakistan (n=15, 3.9%), and India (n=12, 3.1%). In terms of age distribution, 38 students (10%) were aged 18–22, while 214 students (56.2%) fell within the 23-31 age range. The remaining 129 students (33.9%) were older than 31. Regarding educational attainment, 122 students (32%) were pursuing a bachelor's degree, 187 (49.1%) were enrolled in master's programs, and 72 (18.9%) were doctoral candidates. To assess the levels of Social Educational Support (SES) and Student Participation (SP), the study employed descriptive analysis based on mean scores from a five-point Likert scale. According to *Table 2*, the mean scores for each SES dimension were as follows: Lecture Support (M=3.746, SD=0.789), Family Support (M=3.806, SD=0.807), Peer Support (M=3.785, SD=0.806), and Technology Support (M=3.784, SD=0.766). All mean scores exceed 3.41, indicating that students perceive a high level of SES across all dimensions. The results indicate that the total level of SP among Malaysian international students is high. The mean for In the Classroom is 3.795 with a standard deviation of 0.789, the mean for Outside the Classroom is 3.784 with a standard deviation of 0.793, and the mean for In Virtual Environment is 3.715 with a standard deviation of 0.753. These results indicate that the levels for all three dimensions of SP in this study are above 3.41. The positive scores suggest that international students in Malaysia perceive a high level of student participation across the three dimensions: In the Classroom, Outside the Classroom, and In Virtual Environment.

Table 1. Demography profile of respondents.

Category	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative percent
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Gender				
Male	181	47.5	47.5	47.5
Female	200	52.5	52.5	100.0
Distribution of international students				
China	194	50.9	50.9	50.9
Bangladesh	57	15.0	15.0	65.9
Indonesia	46	12.1	12.1	78.0
Nigeria	34	8.9	8.9	86.9
Yemen	23	6.0	6.0	92.9
Pakistan	15	3.9	3.9	96.9
India	12	3.1	3.1	100.0
Age				
18-22	38	10.0	10.0	10.0
23-31	214	56.2	56.2	66.1
Above31	129	33.9	33.9	100.0
Degree level				
Bachelor	122	32.0	32.0	32.0
Master	187	49.1	49.1	81.1
PhD	72	18.9	18.9	100.0

Table 2. Descriptive statistical analysis.

Items	N	Minumum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
LS	381	1.0	5.0	3.746	.7893
FS	381	1.0	5.0	3.806	.8067
PS	381	1.2	5.0	3.785	.8061
TS	381	1.2	5.0	3.784	.7658
IC	381	1.0	5.0	3.795	.7893
OC	381	1.0	4.8	3.784	.7930
IVE	381	1.0	5.0	3.715	.7529

Multivariate normality test

Normal distribution is essential for many statistical procedures in inferential analysis. According to previous study, data that conform to a normal distribution allow for the valid use of means in hypothesis testing. Methods for assessing normality include skewness, kurtosis, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, and the Shapiro-Wilk test. This study employed skewness and kurtosis to evaluate the normality of SES and SP data. As shown in *Table 3*, the four dimensions of Social Educational Support, which include Lecture Support, Family Support, Peer Support, and Technology Support, have Skewness values of -2.090, -2.001, -1.961, and -2.114, respectively, with Kurtosis values of 4.045, 3.711, 3.613, and 4.064. The three dimensions of Students Participation, namely In the Classroom, Outside the Classroom, and In Virtual Environment, have Skewness values of -2.012, -1.983, and -1.317, respectively, with Kurtosis values of 3.880, 3.697, and 2.194. According to the acceptable range for skewness is between ± 3 , while studies suggest that the acceptable range for kurtosis is between ± 7 . Therefore, the data in this study meets the criteria for normality and can be used for further analysis.

Table 3. Normality test results.

Items	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
LS	-2.090	.125	4.045	.249
FS	-2.001	.125	3.711	.249
PS	-1.961	.125	3.613	.249
TS	-2.114	.125	4.064	.249
IC	-2.012	.125	3.880	.249

OC	-1.983	.125	3.697	.249
IVE	-1.317	.125	2.194	.249

The impact of social educational support on student participation

From Table 4, the model's R-squared value is 0.818, indicating that Lecture Support, Family Support, Peer Support, and Technology Support can explain 81.8% of the variation in Student Participation. When the model was subjected to an F-test, it passed the F-test (F=422.598, p<0.05), suggesting that at least one of the variables among Lecture Support, Family Support, Peer Support, and Technology Support has a significant impact on Student Participation. From Table 5, it can be observed that by taking Lecture Support, Family Support, Peer Support, and Technology Support as independent variables and Student Participation as the dependent variable, a multiple linear regression analysis was conducted. The resulting model formula is: Student Participation = 0.492 – (0.013*Lecture Support) + (0.311*Family Support) + (0.218*Peer Support) + (0.348*Technology Support). Among the predictors, Lecture Support does not significantly influence Student Participation (p>0.05). In contrast, Family Support, Peer Support, and Technology Support all have significant positive effects (p<0.05). Based on the standardized coefficients, Technology Support has the greatest impact (β=0.379), followed by Family Support (β=0.357) and Peer Support (β=0.250). the findings suggest that while Lecture Support does not significantly affect Student Participation, Family Support, Peer Support, and Technology Support play crucial roles in enhancing the engagement of international students in Malaysia.

Table 4. Results of ANOVA test of multiple linear regression test of SES and SP.

Model	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Regression	153.504	4	38.376	422.589	.000 ^b
Residual	34.145	376	.091		
Total	187.649	380			

Note: a. Dependent variable: SP; b. Predictors: (Constant), TS, FS, PS, LS.

Table 5. Multiple linear regression results of SES and SP.

Model	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	.492	.082		6.028	.000		
LS	-.013	.041	-.015	-.323	.747	.228	4.389
FS	.311	.037	.357	8.418	.000	.269	3.716
PS	.218	.038	.250	5.689	.000	.251	3.980
TS	.348	.040	.379	8.719	.000	.256	3.900

Note: a. Dependent variable: SP.

This study found that international students in Malaysia perceive a relatively high level of social educational support, particularly in terms of family, peer, technological, and lecturer support. These findings align with previous research by Saoula et al. (2023), which also reported a generally high perception of social educational support among students. This suggests that Malaysian universities have established comprehensive and effective support systems to meet the needs of international students. Notably, this study revealed that students perceived the highest level of support from their families. Prior research has shown that family support can significantly reduce students' dependence on maladaptive coping mechanisms, such as internet addiction and alcohol consumption. When families provide adequate emotional and practical support, students are more likely to experience fulfillment in their daily

lives, thereby reducing reliance on the virtual world. Moreover, in the face of academic and personal stressors, family support serves as both a source of emotional reassurance and practical guidance, mitigating anxiety and promoting resilience. The study also indicated that international students benefit from a high level of peer support, which constitutes a crucial element of their social support system. According to group socialization theory, peers play a fundamental role in the socialization process, with peer groups representing one of the most influential environmental factors shaping students' behaviors and cultural integration (Grusec and Davidov, 2021). For international students, peers not only provide emotional companionship but also serve as conduits for cultural transmission, helping them to identify with shared values and navigate social norms.

Technological support was also perceived to be high among international students. The value of such support extends beyond addressing daily logistical challenges; it has brought about transformative changes in academic development (Akour and Alenezi, 2022; Strielkowski, 2022). For instance, technology has helped alleviate the cognitive burdens associated with language barriers and differing educational systems, thereby facilitating smoother academic adjustment. Lecturer support was another significant form of social educational support identified in the study. In the context of international education, lecturers play a multifaceted role, not only as transmitters of knowledge but also as facilitators of cross-cultural adaptation. They contribute to institutional support systems that foster students' academic and emotional well-being. Lecturer support includes both academic guidance and emotional encouragement, promoting the development of strong lecturer–student relationships that are conducive to student success (Aedi, 2024). In addition to these findings, the study revealed a relatively high level of student participation among international students in Malaysia across three dimensions: in the classroom, outside the classroom, and in virtual environments. This aligns with findings by O'Brien et al. (2024) as well as Mulyono and Saskia (2021), all of whom observed high engagement levels among international students. High classroom participation suggests that students are adapting effectively to Malaysia's educational methods, which often emphasize interactive and inclusive pedagogies. Culturally responsive teaching practices and open classroom environments likely encourage students to share their perspectives and engage more actively.

Beyond the classroom, international students were found to be highly engaged in academic and social activities, demonstrating strong intrinsic motivation and a willingness to deepen their learning experiences. Malaysian universities often provide extensive extracurricular opportunities, including student organizations, cultural festivals, and events such as International Week, all of which offer valuable platforms for cross-cultural exchange and integration. In virtual settings, student participation remained high. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Malaysian universities rapidly adopted online education platforms, to which international students have since adapted. The availability of digital learning resources and flexible learning modes has enabled students to effectively engage in remote learning. Their proficiency in navigating online educational tools and platforms illustrates strong self-regulation, time management, and adaptability, qualities that are increasingly essential in the digital age. The study also found a significant positive correlation between family support, peer support, technological support, and student participation. These findings suggest that emotional and material support from parents, peers, and instructors can enhance students' enthusiasm for learning, prompting greater time and energy investment in academic

activities. Technological support, in particular, appears to elevate student engagement by increasing academic motivation and interest. The digital transformation of education has enriched learning materials through multimedia and interactive tools while also facilitating more dynamic communication between students and instructors. Moreover, the advent of personalized learning through real-time feedback mechanisms has empowered students to tailor their learning strategies, allowing for more flexible and self-directed educational experiences.

Family support was also found to significantly promote student participation. According to humanistic psychological theory, individuals possess both deficiency needs and growth needs. When families fulfill students' basic emotional and material needs, students are better positioned to pursue higher-level goals such as academic achievement and personal development with a sense of confidence and security. Peer support plays a similarly vital role. Bandura's observational learning theory posits that individual can learn by observing others' behaviors and outcomes. When students witness their peers achieving academic success, they are more likely to emulate those behaviors, increasing their own investment in learning and enhancing their academic performance and innovation capabilities. Interestingly, the study found that lecturer support did not have a statistically significant impact on learning engagement. One potential explanation is that international students may receive limited practical support from their lecturers due to communication challenges, particularly language barriers. Additionally, many international students intend to return to their home countries upon graduation and may thus place less value on the academic or career guidance offered by lecturers, perceiving it as less relevant to their long-term goals.

Conclusion

This study investigates the level of social educational support and student participation among international students in Malaysia. The findings reveal that these students generally experience a high level of social educational support. Among the various types of support, family support was perceived to be the strongest, followed by peer support, technological support, and lecturer support. In terms of student participation, the results also indicate a high level of engagement. Among the different participation contexts, classroom participation ranked highest, followed by participation in extracurricular activities and virtual environments. Based on these findings, several recommendations are proposed. First, Malaysian universities should actively expand support channels to strengthen the interaction between students and their families, as well as between families and institutions. This would help ensure that students continue to receive comprehensive emotional, academic, and practical support. Enhancing family involvement can also improve parents' understanding of their children's academic progress and increase their capacity to provide effective guidance. Additionally, universities should consider establishing diversified channels for parental consultation and feedback, such as regular forums or helplines facilitated by university administrators or counselors. These platforms can promote experience sharing among parents and enable the timely refinement of support strategies.

Second, to address the digital divide and improve students' technological competence, universities should provide systematic technical training. This training should include guidance on the use of learning management systems, online conferencing tools, and collaborative platforms. Regular technical support workshops

and online tutorials should be offered to enhance digital literacy and learning efficiency. Furthermore, institutions should develop self-service digital resource libraries, which include user manuals, video tutorials, and frequently asked questions to assist students in resolving technical challenges independently. Universities are also encouraged to promote the use of interactive technologies, such as virtual reality classrooms and online discussion forums, to foster greater student engagement and interaction. This study also acknowledges several limitations. The sample size was relatively small, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to the broader population of international students in Malaysia. Future research should aim to expand the sample size to improve the statistical robustness and accuracy of the results. Moreover, the use of a simple random sampling method may have resulted in the underrepresentation of certain subgroups and increased the homogeneity of the sample. Future studies are encouraged to adopt stratified sampling techniques, especially when analyzing populations differentiated by factors such as gender, age, or geographic origin. Stratified sampling can enhance the representativeness of various subgroups and improve the overall validity and reliability of research outcomes. Furthermore, this study relied primarily on a quantitative survey method, which may have overlooked the subjective experiences and emotional dimensions of international students' academic and social lives. To address this limitation, future research should consider incorporating qualitative methods, such as in-depth interviews or focus groups. These approaches would provide richer insights into students' personal narratives and emotional responses, thereby complementing quantitative data and offering a more comprehensive understanding of the international student experience in Malaysia.

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Conflict of interest

The authors confirm that there is no conflict of interest involve with any parties in this research study.

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