

A COMPARATIVE LITERATURE REVIEW OF THE ACADEMIC AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE EXPERIENCES OF INTERNATIONAL CHINESE PHD STUDENTS IN MALAYSIA AND OTHER COUNTRIES

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ABSTRACT

Studying abroad is a major form of internationalization in higher education, providing students with opportunities for academic, cultural, and personal growth through immersion in diverse learning environments. It is crucial to address problems concerning international Chinese PhD students and the English language needed for their academic experience while studying in Malaysia. It is also essential to address gaps in the literature on the limited research unearthing international Chinese PhD students' academic and English language experience in Malaysia. This paper presents a comparative literature review on the academic and English language experiences of international Chinese PhD students. The primary objective is to understand the situational development of international Chinese PhD students' academic and English language experiences in different contexts, which involves the unique features as well as complexities of international Chinese PhD students and their experiences in their doctoral academic journey.

Keywords:

International Chinese students, academic experiences, English language experiences.

INTRODUCTION

International Chinese student enrolment worldwide has been steadily increasing over the past few decades, driven by factors such as China's growing middle class, rising demand for higher education, and increasing global mobility among Chinese students. According to data from sources such as the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), China has consistently been one of the largest source countries for international students. Chinese students are enrolled in various countries around the world, with popular destinations including the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, and countries in Europe and Asia (OECD, 2021). The number of Chinese students going to the United States for postgraduate education reached 123,182 during the 2021-22 academic year, up by 3.64 percent from a year earlier. Meanwhile, the number of students going to the United Kingdom for postgraduate studies in the 2021-22 academic year was 88,755, up by 6 percent from a year earlier (China Daily, 2023).

Though the numbers at these traditional host countries seem to be increasing, it is not as much as it could be. The reason lies in the increasing xenophobia against Asian students including Chinese students and parochial nationalism which discourage Chinese students from developing their education and career in traditional host countries (Mok, 2021; Soria, 2021).

The enrolment of international Chinese students in Malaysian universities has been steadily increasing in recent years, driven by factors such as Malaysia's growing reputation as an educational hub, affordable tuition fees, and cultural proximity to China (Cheng & Liu, 2021). International Chinese students represent one of the largest cohorts of international students in Malaysian universities. From the data released by EMGS from 1st April to 30th June 2023, 12,665 applications were received. An interesting fact is that, among these applications, 4,700 are from China, accounting for the largest proportion of applicants and three times more than the second one, which is

Bangladesh. In addition, 2,920 and 2,895 applicants applied for Master's and PhD programmes, respectively, amounting to 42% of the total applicants (Shanshan & Abdul, 2024).

International Chinese PhD students prefer to pursue their studies at English Medium Instruction (EMI) institutions overseas. However, it is not always easy for international Chinese students to achieve their academic goals in EMI educational institutions (Sun & Soden, 2021; Sun et al., 2022; Xie & Lei, 2021; Clark & Yu, 2021). International Chinese students with Confucian-oriented educational backgrounds usually face hardships in their academic and English language experience in English medium institutions when they continue their higher education abroad (Sun & Soden, 2021; Sun et al., 2022).

The purpose of this paper is to explore current literature on the academic and English language experiences of students pursuing doctoral studies at international institutions.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A comparative literature review methodology is adopted in this study as it involves systematically comparing and contrasting the findings, themes, or concepts from multiple studies on a similar topic or field. When exploring the academic and English language experiences of international Chinese PhD students, a comparative review can identify common academic challenges, language barriers, and coping mechanisms across countries like Malaysia, the United States, and the United Kingdom, while also highlighting the unique factors that shape these experiences in each region (Gough et al., 2021).

Various academic databases were used to search for literature, including Google Scholar, ResearchGate and Mendeley. Keywords and search terms included: "Chinese PhD students", "international students", "academic experiences", "English language experiences", "Malaysia" "higher education", and "cross-cultural experiences." The inclusion criteria were peer-reviewed journal articles, dissertations, and conference papers; publications in English, studies focusing on Chinese PhD students abroad, and literature published within the last 10 years. Non-academic sources (e.g., news articles, blog posts), publications not in English, studies focusing on undergraduate or master's students, and literature older than 10 years were excluded. Databases included Google Scholar (29 papers), Scopus (6 papers), ResearchGate (12 papers), Web of Science (5 papers), Mendeley (10 papers).

Thematic analysis was used to identify, analyse, and report patterns (themes) within the data. There were two main steps. First, the researchers familiarised themselves with the contents and generated initial codes systematically across the entire data set. Second, the researchers defined themes and selected vivid, compelling extracts leading to a final analysis of selected extracts.

ACADEMIC EXPERIENCES OF INTERNATIONAL CHINESE STUDENTS IN MALAYSIA

Academic expectations at Malaysian universities encompass a set of standards, goals, and requirements that outline the academic performance and conduct expected from students enrolled in various programs. In addition, students are expected to uphold academic integrity by avoiding plagiarism, cheating, and other forms of academic dishonesty. Malaysian universities often emphasise the importance of conducting high-quality research and scholarly work, especially for graduate students pursuing advanced degrees (Tan & Wong, 2023). Universities expect students to demonstrate critical thinking, analytical reasoning, and problem-solving skills through their academic coursework and research activities. Additionally, students are expected to communicate effectively, both orally and in writing, in academic settings and professional contexts (Tan & Lim, 2022).

The academic experiences of international Chinese students are influenced by a multitude of factors, including cultural background, educational system differences, language proficiency, and institutional support (Zhang & Liu, 2022). Recent research suggests that international Chinese students in Malaysia may experience academic pressure due to the rigorous academic demands and expectations. This pressure can lead to stress, anxiety, and concerns about academic performance. Some international Chinese students may struggle with developing effective study skills, time management, and academic strategies necessary for success in the Malaysian academic environment (Wang & Tang, 2023). Additionally, adapting to the research-intensive nature of academic programs in Malaysia may pose challenges for international Chinese students, particularly in conducting independent research, reviewing literature, and analysing data (Shanshan & Abdul, 2024).

Jiang and Li (2021) note that differences in educational systems and expectations between China and Malaysia can pose additional hurdles for Chinese students, requiring them to adapt quickly to new academic norms and methodologies. Zhang and Liu (2023) discuss the difficulties in adapting to different academic cultures, including unfamiliar teaching methods, assessment styles, and expectations for class participation in Malaysian universities.

Cultural adaptation is another important factor influencing the academic experience of international Chinese PhD students. International Chinese PhD students in Malaysia face academic cultural differences during their academic journey (Bahack & Addi-Racah, 2022). Chen and Liu (2021) discuss the challenges of cultural adjustment faced by Chinese students in Malaysian universities, including differences in teaching styles, communication norms, and social interactions. These cultural differences can impact students' confidence and engagement in academic settings, affecting their overall academic experience (Dong & Siti Maziha Mustapha, 2021).

The quality of advisory support and supervision provided to international PhD students significantly influences their academic progress and success. Effective supervision involves providing guidance, feedback, and resources to support students' research endeavours. However, some international Chinese PhD students in Malaysia have reported challenges related to mismatched expectations, communication gaps, and limited access to resources (Wang et al., 2022). These issues can hinder research productivity and delay academic milestones.

Balancing academic responsibilities with personal and family commitments can be challenging for international Chinese PhD students in Malaysia. The demanding nature of PhD studies, coupled with pressure to excel academically, may lead to burnout and mental health issues (Zhang & Yang, 2022). Students may struggle to maintain a healthy work-life balance, leading to decreased productivity and academic performance.

ACADEMIC EXPERIENCES OF INTERNATIONAL CHINESE STUDENTS: SIMILARITIES WITH OTHER COUNTRIES

Through academic experiences, international Chinese PhD students are similarly expected by both educational systems of Malaysia and other parts of the world to adhere to academic integrity by avoiding any form of academic dishonesty such as plagiarism or cheating in any tests; implement high-quality research and scholarly work; foster critical thinking abilities, analytical reasoning, and problem-solving skills; communicate effectively in English (Lou, 2024; Gao & Zhang, 2021; Xing et al., 2022).

International Chinese PhD students experience similar academic pressure in both Malaysian educational institutions and that of other parts of the world. Such pressure can cause stress and anxiety about the development of academic strategies and time management. International Chinese PhD students tend to be challenged when adapting to the research-intensive nature of academic programs in Malaysia and other parts of the world. They face the same difficulties in conducting independent research (Li, 2020; Lou, 2024; Wang, 2021).

Academic writing in English can also be a common problem for international Chinese PhD students in Malaysia and other parts of the world (Zhang & Watkins, 2021). International Chinese PhD students are usually challenged by institutional expectations of structuring research writing with proper citations of authorised sources (Wu & Hammond, 2022). These students also find it difficult to compare and contrast research findings in their own research.

ACADEMIC EXPERIENCES OF INTERNATIONAL CHINESE STUDENTS: DIFFERENCES WITH OTHER COUNTRIES

International Chinese PhD students have unique academic experiences that vary significantly depending on the host country. This section explores the differences between the academic experiences of Chinese PhD students in Malaysia and those in other countries, such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and European countries.

Malaysia's cultural and historical ties with China can result in a more familiar and comfortable academic environment for Chinese students. Malaysia's bilingual (Malay and English) environment can ease the language transition for Chinese students, especially those already proficient in English (Zhang, 2023). The presence of a significant Chinese-speaking community can reduce language barriers in everyday life and informal academic settings. This is not true for other traditional host countries such as the United Kingdom, Australia, the United States of America and other European countries (Cena et al., 2021). However, these countries provide academic cultures that expose Chinese students to various teaching and research methodologies. The academic environment in these countries can be highly competitive, with rigorous expectations and performance pressure because the universities are highly ranked globally and provide extensive research resources and funding opportunities (Wu & Hammond, 2022).

In terms of social integration and cultural adaptation, shared cultural practices, festivals, and cuisine in Malaysia can help Chinese students feel more at home, facilitating social integration during their academic journey (Zhao et al., 2023). Established Chinese communities and student associations can provide strong support networks (Rahman et al., 2021). In other countries, exposure to a wide range of non-Chinese cultures can enrich students' global perspectives but may also pose adaptation challenges. Students might experience cultural isolation or discrimination, affecting their social and academic life (Wang & Liu, 2023). A study revealed that Chinese students in Northern Ireland felt unwelcomed and unrecognized in the learning environment as a result of their inability to fully understand English in the nonbelonging culture (Cena et al., 2021).

The academic experiences of international Chinese PhD students vary significantly between Malaysia and other countries. While Malaysia offers cultural familiarity and targeted support, other countries provide diverse academic environments, rigorous academic standards, and extensive research opportunities. When international Chinese PhD students obtain their academic experiences, they also encounter diverse English language experiences depending on the host country.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE EXPERIENCE OF INTERNATIONAL CHINESE STUDENTS

The English language experience refers to the multifaceted encounters, interactions, and learning opportunities that students undergo as they engage with the English language in various contexts, including academic, professional, social, and cultural settings. This encompasses both formal and informal experiences that contribute to individuals' proficiency, fluency, and communicative competence in English (Ellis, 2021).

The English language experience of international students involves the process of acquiring English language skills, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing, through formal

instruction, immersion, self-study, and exposure to authentic language use. The experience also includes engaging in structured language learning activities, such as attending English language classes, workshops, and tutorials, which helps them develop language skills and improve their knowledge of grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation (Ellis, 2021; Seng et al., 2023).

International students are also expected to utilize English language skills in real-life situations, such as participating in conversations, giving presentations, writing essays or reports, and engaging with English-language media (e.g., books, films, websites, social media) (Du & Faridah, 2024). In doing this, they gain exposure to diverse English language varieties, accents, and registers through interactions with speakers from different linguistic backgrounds, multicultural environments, and global communication platforms (Ellis, 2021; Seng et al., 2023).

In acquiring language skills, they need to overcome language barriers, difficulties, and challenges encountered during the language learning process, such as vocabulary acquisition, grammar rules, pronunciation, comprehension, and language anxiety. By integrating language learning with cultural understanding and awareness of English-speaking communities' customs, values, and norms, students would not only improve their language but also gain intercultural communication competence (Ellis, 2021; Seng et al., 2023).

ENGLISH LANGUAGE EXPERIENCE OF INTERNATIONAL CHINESE STUDENTS IN MALAYSIA

As Chinese language (Putonghua or Mandarin) is officially used as the language of instruction in the educational system in mainland China, mainland Chinese students tend to have hard times in Malaysian academic studies (Sung, 2022). Yeboah (2021) argued that international Chinese PhD students in Malaysia face many English language challenges caused by linguistic, psychological, and learning environment factors.

Linguistic factors include lack of vocabulary, pronunciation, insufficient knowledge of grammar rules, reading, and oral presentation (Burhanuddin & Indallah, 2021). Students with inadequate vocabulary are not able to convey their thoughts precisely. Their sentence organisation is weak which results in confusion, ambiguity, and misunderstandings (Thao & Trung, 2022). Their poor grammar leads to their incompetence in conveying the intended meaning or message clearly and effectively (Khasawneh, 2021). A qualitative study shows that international Chinese PhD students exhibit a low level of willingness to communicate in Malaysian academic environments (Ma et al., 2022).

Psychological factors, like anxiety, fear of mistakes, lack of confidence, hinder Chinese students from using English appropriately. Due to poor English language learning environment, limited learning resources, and low participation in English activities, Chinese students find it quite difficult to speak English eloquently. These learning environment factors are indicated by inadequate opportunities for Chinese students to speak English in and outside lessons, lack of a focus on language improvement in the curriculum, and an input-poor environment outside class. For Chinese students, they are not able to use English efficiently as they are not fully exposed to English language (Lee & Wong, 2023).

The English language experience of international Chinese students in Malaysia encompasses various aspects of language acquisition, learning, proficiency development, and cultural integration within the Malaysian academic and social context. This experience is shaped by a combination of formal language instruction, exposure to English in academic settings, social interactions with peers and faculty, and engagement with local culture (Huang & Chang, 2023).

International Chinese students in Malaysia engage in language acquisition and learning processes as they immerse themselves in an English-speaking environment. This includes attending English language classes, participating in language workshops, and using English in various academic

and social settings. Language learning strategies such as vocabulary acquisition, grammar practice, and language drills are commonly employed to enhance language proficiency (Wong & Tan, 2021).

Similarly, Chen and Tan (2021) found that international Chinese students actively engage in academic and social interactions in English within the Malaysian university context. Classroom discussions, group projects, and extracurricular activities provide opportunities for students to practise English, collaborate with peers, and build interpersonal relationships. These interactions contribute to language development and social integration.

The English language experience involves using English language skills in academic lectures, discussions, presentations, and written assignments. International Chinese students actively engage with English through coursework, research projects, and interactions with faculty and peers. Continuous exposure to English in diverse contexts contributes to the development of language proficiency and communicative competence (Chen & Lim, 2022).

International Chinese students in Malaysia encounter various challenges in their English language experience, including language barriers, cultural differences, and academic demands. Language learning strategies such as language immersion, language exchange programs, and peer tutoring are employed to overcome these challenges and enhance language skills (Huang & Chang, 2023). Additionally, students may seek support from language support services and participate in language enhancement activities offered by universities.

At the postgraduate level, international Chinese students in Malaysia often face challenges related to language proficiency, particularly in English, which is the primary language of instruction in many Malaysian universities (Li & Xie, 2021). Language barriers can impact their ability to comprehend lectures, engage in discussions, and produce written assignments, potentially affecting their academic performance.

The English language experience of international Chinese students in Malaysia is a dynamic and multifaceted journey characterized by language acquisition, learning, proficiency development, cultural integration, and academic and social interaction (Hor & Jusoh, 2021). Through engagement with English in various contexts, students enhance their language skills, adapt to cultural differences, and navigate the challenges of studying in a multicultural environment. Understanding and supporting the English language experience of international Chinese students is essential for promoting academic success, cultural exchange, and cross-cultural understanding in Malaysian universities.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE EXPERIENCE OF INTERNATIONAL CHINESE STUDENTS: SIMILARITIES WITH OTHER COUNTRIES

The English language experiences of international Chinese students share many commonalities across various countries, including Malaysia, as these students often face similar linguistic, academic, and social challenges in adapting to English-dominated academic environments.

In Malaysia, studies highlight that Chinese students struggle with both spoken and written English due to differences in linguistic structure and academic discourse expectations (Gao & Zhang, 2021). Similarly, in the United States and Australia, students report significant challenges in academic writing, understanding technical jargon, and coping with the fast pace of English-speaking classrooms (Wang & Brubaker, 2022). For example, a study by Liu (2023) showed that international Chinese students in the UK face difficulties in expressing critical thinking in English, a skill that is highly emphasised in Western academic settings.

In Malaysia, while there is a notable Chinese community and cultural similarities that ease some aspects of adaptation, the English language remains a critical hurdle. According to Tan (2022), international Chinese students in Malaysia face difficulties integrating into academic and social circles where English is predominantly spoken, despite Malaysia's multilingual environment. This finding is echoed in studies from the UK and Australia, where Chinese students often struggle with

feeling isolated due to language barriers that impede their participation in both academic and extracurricular activities (Wang, 2020). A global comparative study by Zhou et al. (2023) found that international Chinese students in countries such as Canada and Australia experience similar challenges in understanding local idiomatic expressions, humor, and informal conversational styles, all of which impact their social integration.

In Malaysia, universities often provide English language support programs specifically designed for international students, which include academic writing workshops and language courses (Lim & Lee, 2021). This mirrors practices in other countries such as the UK and Australia, where universities offer language support services tailored to help international students adjust to the demands of English-medium education (Evans & Morrison, 2022). According to Liu (2023), these support mechanisms are crucial in helping students build confidence in both academic and social settings.

A key coping strategy across different countries is the use of digital language-learning tools. In Malaysia, students frequently rely on mobile apps such as Duolingo and Grammarly to improve their grammar and vocabulary (Wang & Chen, 2021). In Australia and the USA, students use similar apps to supplement their learning and refine their academic writing (Liu, 2023). This reliance on technology highlights a global trend in how international Chinese students approach language learning.

The role of institutional support in helping international students navigate English language challenges is widely recognized in the literature. In Malaysia, universities have taken steps to provide tailored support services for non-native English speakers, such as English language workshops, one-on-one tutoring, and academic writing centres (Tan, 2022). These services are designed to improve students' language proficiency and reduce the stress associated with academic demands in a second language.

A study by Evans and Morrison (2022) on international students in Australia and the UK similarly highlights the importance of institutional support in bridging the language gap. In both regions, universities offer similar services, including preparatory English courses, tutoring, and peer mentoring programs, which help students acclimatize to the academic language expectations. Research suggests that these support mechanisms are critical to students' academic success and overall language improvement (Zhou et al., 2023).

ENGLISH LANGUAGE EXPERIENCE OF INTERNATIONAL CHINESE STUDENTS: DIFFERENCES WITH OTHER COUNTRIES

Malaysia is a multilingual country with English widely used in education, business, and government alongside Malay, which creates a more inclusive language environment for international Chinese PhD students. The significant Chinese-speaking population in Malaysia means that Mandarin and other Chinese dialects are commonly spoken, which can ease the transition for Chinese students but may also reduce the necessity for English proficiency in daily life (Hu & Zhang, 2024). Moreover, Malaysian universities may have moderate English language requirements for admission, with additional support programs available to help students meet language standards. While English proficiency tests like IELTS or TOEFL are required, the score thresholds may be slightly lower compared to institutions in English-speaking countries (Zhou et al., 2023).

In traditional host countries such as the United Kingdom, Australia, the United States of America, and other European countries, English is predominantly spoken. As such, students are required to have a higher level of English proficiency as it is the primary language for all academic and social interactions (Zhang & Gu, 2023). The necessity to use English in all aspects of life accelerates language acquisition but can be challenging initially for Chinese students with lower proficiency levels (Lim & Lee, 2021). Universities in English-speaking countries often have higher

IELTS or TOEFL score requirements for admission, reflecting the need for strong English proficiency for academic success.

The availability and structure of language support services also differ between Malaysia and other countries. In Malaysia, universities often provide tailored English language courses for international students, but these courses may be more limited compared to the extensive English for Academic Purposes (EAP) programs offered in countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom (Wang & Chen, 2021). For example, in the UK, universities often require international students to complete intensive EAP programs before starting their degree courses, whereas in Malaysia, such requirements are often more flexible or less comprehensive (Gao & Zhang, 2021).

Another key difference is the level of English language proficiency required for academic success. In Malaysia, the requirements for English proficiency may be more relaxed compared to Western countries. For instance, many Malaysian universities accept students with a lower International English Language Testing System (IELTS) score compared to universities in the UK, the US, or Australia (Tan, 2022). This leniency can make it easier for Chinese students to gain admission to Malaysian universities, but it may also mean that students face greater difficulties once they begin their academic programs, as they may not have developed the same level of academic English proficiency expected in more demanding English-speaking environments.

In contrast, universities in English-speaking countries typically have stricter entry requirements regarding language proficiency, requiring higher IELTS or Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) scores (Zhou et al., 2023). This ensures that students are better prepared for the rigors of academic writing and communication, but it also means that Chinese students face greater initial barriers to admission in these countries compared to Malaysia.

The relationship between language proficiency and social integration also varies. In Malaysia, the existence of a significant Chinese diaspora means that international Chinese students can often rely on Chinese as their social language, which may reduce the necessity of mastering English for social interaction. This situation contrasts sharply with countries like the US or Australia, where Chinese students must use English in nearly all social settings (Wang, 2020).

Research by Liu (2023) shows that Chinese students in English-speaking countries often report feeling socially isolated due to language barriers, as they struggle to engage in informal conversations, understand humor, and participate in extracurricular activities. In Malaysia, however, Chinese students may feel more comfortable integrating socially with the local Chinese community or other international students, but this can slow their overall English language development (Lim & Lee, 2021).

Moreover, the quality and accessibility of English language support can vary significantly in Malaysia due to differences between public and private institutions. Some private universities in Malaysia offer robust language support, while others may provide only minimal assistance. In contrast, in countries like Australia, institutional support for international students is often standardized and comprehensive, offering services like writing centers, English workshops, and peer support programs to ensure students meet the high academic language demands (Evans & Morrison, 2022).

The reliance on technological tools for language learning also presents notable differences. In Malaysia, Chinese students often use digital tools such as mobile apps (e.g., Duolingo, Grammarly) to supplement their English language learning (Wang & Chen, 2021). These tools are commonly used to compensate for the less intensive language immersion compared to countries like Australia or the US, where students are more likely to be fully immersed in English-speaking environments and may rely less on technology and more on face-to-face language practice (Zhou et al., 2023).

In English-speaking countries, while technological tools are also used, students are more likely to engage with native speakers and receive feedback in real time through classroom participation and interaction with peers. The use of technology in these countries often supplements

rather than replaces real-world language practice, which is more available in fully English-speaking environments (Evans & Morrison, 2022).

The English language experiences of international Chinese PhD students vary widely between Malaysia and other parts of the world. While Malaysia offers a bilingual and culturally familiar environment with moderate language requirements, other countries provide a more immersive and rigorous English language context. Understanding these differences can help institutions better support Chinese PhD students in developing their English language skills and succeeding academically.

THE INFLUENCE OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE EXPERIENCES ON ACADEMIC EXPERIENCES

In line with the growing reality English plays a major role in internationalisation of higher education, more and more higher education institutions have been incorporating the English language into their academic curriculum. The emergence of EMI across the educational sector is a dominant trend in internationalised higher education, which indicates the practical use of English in academic settings. Although there may not be any strict English language requirements at some institutions, the need to use and improve English for students to enrol in EMI programmes is obvious (Galloway & Rose, 2021). Moreover, the demand for Chinese PhD students to use English language in their research has been on the rise (Wu & Paltridge, 2021).

Language learning strategies have been found to improve academic achievement and language proficiency in foreign language learning. Research also stressed that effective learning strategies used by learners in foreign language learning is associated with better academic achievement (Seng et al., 2023). Zhang and Wang (2023) highlight that while many students possess basic English skills, they may struggle with academic English proficiency required for higher education. Common challenges include difficulties in academic reading, writing, speaking, and listening, as well as adapting to the nuances of English language usage in academic contexts (Chen & Li, 2022; Huang & Charanjit, 2024).

According to Zhan et al. (2021), proficient English writing skills are essential for Chinese PhD students, enabling them to effectively compose their dissertations and reports in English and share their research findings with the academic community. The English language experience significantly influences academic outcomes and employability prospects for international Chinese students. Wang and Chen (2023) found a positive correlation between English language proficiency and academic performance, highlighting the importance of language skills in achieving academic success. Furthermore, proficient English language skills are essential for accessing job opportunities and advancing career prospects in international contexts (Liu et al., 2021).

Chinese students studying abroad were found to meet academic obstacles due to their inadequate English language proficiency (Li & Zhang, 2022; Cheng & Liu, 2021). Jiang and Phusawisot (2023) discovered Chinese PhD students at a Thai university experiencing high level of English language difficulties (Jiang & Phusawisot, 2023). Zhao and Wang (2022) highlight language barriers as a significant hurdle, impacting students' ability to comprehend lectures, participate in discussions, and write academic papers in English.

To overcome these English-related academic challenges, several approaches are taken. Wang and Tan (2023) describe language enhancement programs designed to improve students' English proficiency through intensive language courses, workshops, and tutoring sessions. Additionally, Liang and Wong (2022) highlight the importance of mentorship and academic advising in guiding students through their doctoral studies and providing personalized support.

The English language experience is a significant aspect of international Chinese PhD students' academic journey in Malaysian universities. Wang and Liang (2023) emphasise that

proficiency in English is crucial for academic success in PhD programs, as students are required to engage with academic literature, communicate their research effectively, and participate in scholarly discussions. However, Huang and Chang (2022) found that language barriers can impede students' academic progress, particularly in writing and presenting their research, highlighting the need for targeted language support services.

CONCLUSION

The comparative review demonstrates that while international Chinese PhD students share similar struggles globally, the contextual factors of each host country—such as the linguistic environment, institutional support, and cultural integration—significantly influence their academic and English language experiences. Malaysia offers a unique case where the blend of linguistic flexibility and cultural proximity creates a more supportive academic environment compared to Western nations. Future research could explore how these contextual differences shape the long-term academic success and well-being of international Chinese students, as well as the effectiveness of various institutional interventions aimed at improving their experiences.

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