

# Perceptions from Scholars in Education on Sino-Malaysian Higher Education Cooperation Under the Background of One Belt and One Road Initiative: A Case Study

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## Abstract

The Sino-Malaysian higher education cooperation within the One Belt and One Road Initiative framework has gained momentum in recent years, fostering academic exchange, cultural understanding, and economic growth between China and Malaysia. However, there is a need to understand the perceptions of education scholars involved in these collaborations to identify challenges, opportunities, and areas for improvement. This research aims to bridge the gap by examining their perspectives and ultimately enhancing the effectiveness and sustainability of this cooperative venture. This research aims to provide valuable insights and recommendations that can contribute to the enhancement and sustainable development of Sino-Malaysian higher education cooperation. By understanding education scholars' perceptions, policymakers and educators can design more effective strategies. The study seeks to share insights for a vibrant educational ecosystem that nurtures cross-cultural understanding, knowledge exchange, and sustainable development between China and Malaysia.

**Keywords:** Higher Education Cooperation, Sino-Malaysian Collaboration, One Belt and One Road Initiative

## Introduction

The Sino-Malaysian higher education cooperation under the background of the One Belt and One Road Initiative have gained significant momentum in recent years (Afzaal, 2020; Yeoh, 2019), with the aim of fostering academic exchange, cultural understanding, and economic growth between China and Malaysia. However, despite the growing importance and potential of this partnership (Li, 2022), there is a need to understand the perceptions of education

scholars involved in these collaborations (Jie, 2018; Koh, 2022; Zhai & Razali, 2021a; 2021b; 2022a; 2022b). By examining their perspectives, this research aims to identify the key challenges, opportunities, and areas for improvement within the Sino-Malaysian higher education cooperation, ultimately enhancing the effectiveness and sustainability of this cooperative venture.

While previous studies have explored various aspects of Sino-Malaysian higher education cooperations (Afzaal, 2020; Brien, 1994; Yeoh, 2019), there is a limited understanding of the perceptions and experiences of education scholars, specifically within the context of the One Belt and One Road Initiative (Jie, 2018; Koh, 2022). The unique perspectives of education scholars, who play a pivotal role in shaping and implementing these collaborations (Zhai & Razali, 2022b), can provide valuable insights into the motivations, objectives, and challenges encountered in their efforts to enhance academic exchange and cooperation (Zhang et al., 2020).

Moreover, the One Belt and One Road Initiative has provided a strategic framework for Sino-Malaysian higher education cooperation, emphasizing connectivity, mutual cooperation, and sustainable development (Zhai & Razali, 2022a). However, there is a need to explore how this initiative has influenced curriculum development, research collaboration (Zhai & Razali, 2021b), faculty and student exchanges, and the overall academic environment in both countries. Understanding the impact of the initiative will help policymakers, educators, and stakeholders identify areas where further support, resources, and policies are required to maximize the benefits of these collaborations.

The problem at hand is to address the lack of comprehensive understanding of the perceptions from education scholars on Sino-Malaysian higher education cooperation under the background of the One Belt and One Road Initiative (Zhai & Razali, 2022b). By bridging this gap, this research aims to provide valuable insights and recommendations that can contribute to the enhancement and sustainable development of this cooperative venture, ultimately fostering a robust educational ecosystem that promotes cross-cultural understanding, knowledge exchange, and mutual growth between China and Malaysia.

By gaining insights into the perceptions of education scholars, this research aims to contribute to the existing knowledge on Sino-Malaysian higher education cooperation under the One Belt and One Road Initiative. The findings are hoped to inform policymakers, educators, and stakeholders involved in the design and implementation of future strategies, fostering more effective and mutually beneficial collaborations. Ultimately, this study seeks to facilitate the creation of a vibrant educational ecosystem that nurtures cross-cultural understanding, knowledge exchange, and sustainable development between China and Malaysia.

### **Research Questions**

1. What are education scholars' perspectives on Sino-Malaysian Higher Education Cooperation?
2. What challenges do Sino-Malaysian Higher Education Cooperation encounter?
3. What factors might contribute to Sino-Malaysian Higher Education Cooperation's challenges?
4. What strategies are suggested to be used to support Sino-Malaysian Higher Education Cooperation?

**Literature Review**

The Sino-Malaysian higher education cooperation under the background of the One Belt and One Road Initiative have gained increasing attention as a significant collaborative effort between China and Malaysia. To better understand the perceptions of education scholars within this context, it is important to examine existing literature that explores related themes, including the motivations, challenges, and outcomes of such collaborations. This literature review aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the key findings and gaps in the current body of knowledge, setting the foundation for the case study on Sino-Malaysian higher education cooperation.

**Motivation for Sino-Malaysian Higher Education Cooperation**

Numerous studies have highlighted several key motivations driving Sino-Malaysian higher education cooperation. These include the pursuit of academic excellence, research collaboration, cultural exchange, and the enhancement of educational quality and internationalization efforts in both countries (Chiang et al., 2022). The One Belt and One Road Initiative has provided a strategic framework to strengthen these partnerships (Zhai & Razali, 2022b), emphasizing the importance of mutual cooperation, connectivity, and sustainable development (Ngeow, 2015). Additionally, economic factors, such as trade opportunities and the potential for knowledge transfer and innovation, have also been identified as driving forces behind these collaborations (Yao & Guo, 2023).

While the motivations for Sino-Malaysian higher education cooperation are compelling, various challenges and barriers have been identified in the literature (Zhai & Razali, 2022b). Differences in educational systems, language barriers, cultural disparities, and bureaucratic hurdles can hinder effective collaboration (Noor & Qistina, 2017). Variations in quality assurance frameworks, academic standards, and recognition of qualifications also pose challenges to the seamless integration of educational programs and qualifications (Yao & Guo, 2023). Moreover, issues related to funding, resource allocation, and sustainability have been highlighted as potential barriers to long-term cooperation (Chiang et al., 2022).

**Perceptions of Education Scholars on Sino-Malaysian Higher Education Cooperation:**

While there is a growing body of literature on Sino-Malaysian higher education cooperation, few studies have specifically explored the perceptions of education scholars within the context of the One Belt and One Road Initiative (Zhai & Razali, 2022b). Studies focusing on education scholars have emphasized the importance of their expertise, vision, and leadership in shaping and implementing these collaborative efforts (Chiang et al., 2022). Their perceptions shed light on the motivations, challenges, and strategies for successful cooperation.

Similarly, research on the perceptions of education scholars has highlighted the benefits of cross-cultural experiences, enhanced educational opportunities, and improved employability prospects through these collaborations (Chiang et al., 2022). However, studies also point to challenges faced by Chinese students, including language barriers, cultural adjustments, and limited support systems (Chiang et al., 2022). Understanding their perceptions and experiences can provide insights into the effectiveness of current cooperation models and identify areas for improvement (Zhai & Razali, 2022a; 2022b).

The existing literature (Zhai & Razali, 2022a; 2022b) on Sino-Malaysian higher education cooperation under the One Belt and One Road Initiative has contributed valuable insights. However, several gaps remain. Limited research has focused specifically on the perceptions

of education scholars within this context. Furthermore, there is a need for more in-depth case studies that capture the nuances and complexities of these collaborations, considering factors such as curriculum development, research collaboration, and the impact of government policies and funding initiatives.

Future research should explore strategies to overcome challenges and promote effective collaboration. This includes addressing language and cultural barriers, enhancing support systems for international Chinese students, and fostering closer alignment of educational systems and standards. Additionally, examining the role of technological advancements, such as online learning platforms and digital resources.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this research is based on the integration of the three theoretical perspectives: Jane Knight's Motivation Theory of Internationalization in Higher Education (Knight, 2008), Socio-cultural-based Worldview Theories of Internationalization in Higher Education (Hermann, 2004; Lakoff & Johnson, 1999), and the Institutional Distance Theory of Internationalization in Higher Education (Dacin et al., 2002). These theories provide a comprehensive framework for understanding the motivations, cultural dynamics, and institutional factors that influence perceptions within the context of Sino-Malaysian higher education cooperation.

Jane Knight's theory focuses on the motivations behind internationalization in higher education (Knight, 2008). It highlights various drivers such as economic, political, educational, and cultural factors that influence institutions' decision to engage in international collaborations. Within the Sino-Malaysian higher education cooperation, this theory helps identify the motivations of education scholars and institutions in fostering partnerships, understanding their goals, and assessing their impact on the perceptions of stakeholders.

Meanwhile, Socio-cultural-based worldview theories examine the cultural and social dimensions of internationalization in higher education. These theories emphasize the importance of intercultural understanding, knowledge exchange, and cultural immersion in educational collaborations (Hermann, 2004; Lakoff & Johnson, 1999). Within the Sino-Malaysian context, this theoretical perspective helps understand the cultural dynamics, challenges, and opportunities faced by education scholars in their interactions with Malaysian counterparts. It also explores the impact of cultural differences on perceptions, adaptation processes, and the overall effectiveness of the cooperation.

Furthermore, the Institutional Distance Theory focuses on the role of institutional factors in shaping international collaborations in higher education (Dacin et al., 2002). It explores the impact of differences in governance, policies, regulations, and academic systems between collaborating institutions. In the context of Sino-Malaysian higher education cooperation, this theory helps identify and understand the institutional factors that influence the perceptions of education scholars. It assesses how differences in educational systems, quality assurance frameworks, curriculum structures, and recognition of qualifications impact their experiences and perceptions.

The conceptual framework integrates these three theoretical perspectives to explore the perceptions of education scholars in Sino-Malaysian higher education cooperation. It considers the motivations driving these collaborations, the cultural dynamics and intercultural experiences of stakeholders, and the influence of institutional factors on their perceptions. By analyzing the interactions and interplay of these theoretical perspectives, the research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the various factors shaping the perceptions of

education scholars, offering insights into the effectiveness, challenges, and opportunities within the Sino-Malaysian higher education cooperation under the One Belt and One Road Initiative.

### Research Methodology

In this study, six scholars specializing in the field of higher education collaborations were regarded as individual cases to obtain a comprehensive understanding of Sino-Malaysian higher education partnerships (Yin, 2014).

### Research Participants

The study was conducted in Malaysia as the research setting. In this qualitative case study, inspired by Yin (2014), purposive sampling was employed with the goal of selecting all potential participants capable of providing accurate and reliable information pertaining to the research inquiries, following the principles outlined by Goodman (1961). The criteria for selecting participants in the field of higher education collaborations for this research encompassed individuals who (a) possessed expertise in higher education collaborations, (b) had prior involvement in Sino-Malaysian higher education cooperation programs, and (c) possessed teaching experience with international students from mainland China. Table 1 illustrates the six scholars who willingly took part in this study. The researchers employed pseudonyms to safeguard the anonymity of these participants and the confidentiality of the gathered data.

Table 1  
Participants' profiles

Name	Gender	Age	Degree Level	Institutions	Number (Projects, Sino-Malaysia)	Years (Teaching Experience with International Students from Mainland China)
RBA	Female	55	Ph.D	Universiti Putra Malaysia	2	33
DF	Male	60	Ph.D	Universiti Putra Malaysia	3	32
ZC	Female	56	Ph.D	Universiti Putra Malaysia	3	30
HYZ	Male	56	Ph.D	Universiti Malaya	2	30
RZB	Male	59	Ph.D	Universiti Malaya	6	30
RRBZ	Female	55	Ph.D	Universiti Malaya	3	30

**Instruments for Data Collection**

The researchers employed interview questions and data collection protocols that they had created themselves, which underwent validation by three experts in the field of higher education and further refinement based on feedback from colleagues in the same field. These semi-structured interview questions were directly aligned with the research objectives, focusing, for instance, on the strategies employed to address challenges within Sino-Malaysian higher education collaborations. A detailed list of these interview questions could be found in Appendix A. All interviews were conducted in the English language, with participants providing written consent and granting permission to record the interviews. Additionally, the participants themselves reviewed and verified the transcripts.

**Procedures for Data Collection**

Exploratory interviews lasting 45 to 90 minutes were conducted with six experts specializing in higher education. Prior to the interviews, participants received an informational document and consent form, which they signed and returned. Additionally, they were provided with a copy of the interview guidelines, available in Appendix A. The questions covered four overarching areas:

- (1) Scholars' perspectives on Sino-Malaysian Higher Education Cooperation
- (2) Sino-Malaysian Higher Education Cooperation Challenges
- (3) Factors possibly contributing to Sino-Malaysian Higher Education Cooperation's challenges
- (4) Strategies to support Sino-Malaysian Higher Education Cooperation

These inquiries were crafted by drawing from the research question and the existing literature concerning higher education collaborations. The interviews were recorded in audio format and subsequently transcribed. Following transcription, the interview transcripts were shared with the participants via email, with a request for their review and any necessary corrections or adjustments to the provided information.

**Data Analysis**

All sessions were discreetly audio-recorded using a Zoom recorder. Verbatim transcripts were meticulously generated to facilitate comprehensive analysis. To conduct an organized and exploratory examination of intricate data and emerging patterns, the researchers employed NVivo 12, a qualitative research data analysis tool that seamlessly integrates with Microsoft Word. NVivo 12 proves invaluable for researchers by efficiently transferring data between codes and documenting the analysis process, as Braun and Clarke (2006) advocated. The utilization of this software contributed to enhancing the data's validity. For data analysis, the researchers adopted Nowell et al.'s (2017) six-step thematic analysis approach, comprising the following phases: immersing themselves in the data, creating initial code sets, identifying themes, reviewing these themes, defining them, and documenting the research findings, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). We created four themes across the dataset (See Table 2): (1) Scholars' perspectives on Sino-Malaysian Higher Education Cooperation; (2) Sino-Malaysian Higher Education Cooperation Challenges; (3) Factors possibly contributing to Sino-Malaysian Higher Education Cooperation's challenges; and (4) Strategies to support Sino-Malaysian Higher Education Cooperation.



Table 2

## Thematic analysis of Interview Transcripts

	Key Themes
1	Scholars' perspectives on Sino-Malaysian Higher Education Cooperation
2	Sino-Malaysian Higher Education Cooperation Challenges
3	Factors Possibly contributing to Sino-Malaysian Higher Education Cooperation's challenges
4	Strategies to support Sino-Malaysian Higher Education Cooperation

**Findings****Scholars' perspectives on Sino-Malaysian Higher Education Cooperation**

The first research question investigated education scholars' perspectives on Sino-Malaysian Higher Education Cooperation. Based on the data collected from the interviews, four main themes emerged (See Table 3). They are (1) Enhancing Educational Quality, (2) Cultural Exchange and Understanding, (3) Research Opportunities, and (4) Economic and Diplomatic Benefits. The findings revealed that education scholars hold positive attitudes towards Sino-Malaysian Higher Education Cooperation. This highlights that Sino-Malaysian Higher Education Cooperation can contribute to both countries from diverse perspectives.

Furthermore, education scholars underscored the role of Sino-Malaysian Higher Education Cooperation in elevating the quality of education. They highlighted how these collaborations could facilitate the exchange of pedagogical methods, curriculum enhancements, and the incorporation of innovative teaching practices. Meanwhile, scholars acknowledged that these cooperation provide a unique platform for students and faculty members to immerse themselves in different cultures, promoting cross-cultural competency and fostering international friendships. Education scholars also recognized the potential for joint research endeavors as a significant benefit. Collaborations in the realm of research allow for the exploration of shared challenges and the development of innovative solutions, ultimately contributing to the advancement of knowledge in both countries. Beyond educational enhancements, scholars also highlighted the economic and diplomatic advantages of Sino-Malaysian Higher Education Cooperation. These collaborations can lead to economic growth through increased student enrollments and investment opportunities while also strengthening diplomatic ties between the two nations.

The findings from these scholars' perspectives overwhelmingly reflected positive attitudes toward Sino-Malaysian Higher Education Cooperation. This positivity underscores the belief that such collaborations have the potential to bring about significant benefits to both countries, enriching educational experiences, fostering cultural exchange, advancing research frontiers, and promoting economic and diplomatic relations. In essence, these cooperative efforts were seen as a win-win scenario, contributing to diverse aspects of the educational landscape and bilateral relations. Consequently, these findings are similar to those of the previous studies focusing on higher education cooperation (See Afzaal, 2020; Li, 2022; Yeoh, 2019; Zhai & Razali, 2021a, 2021b, 2022a, 2022b).

Table 3

Scholars' perspectives on Sino-Malaysian Higher Education Cooperation

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**Scholars' perspectives on Sino-Malaysian Higher Education Cooperation**

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1. Enhancing Educational Quality
  2. Cultural Exchange and Understanding
  3. Research Opportunities
  4. Economic and Diplomatic Benefits
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**Sino-Malaysian Higher Education Cooperation Challenges**

The second research question explored challenges to Sino-Malaysian Higher Education Cooperation. Based on the data collected from the interviews, four main themes emerged (See Table 4). They are (1) Language Barriers, (2) Different Educational Systems, (3) Administrative and Bureaucratic Challenges, and (4) Government and Institutional Support.

Furthermore, regarding the language barriers, education scholars and stakeholders emphasized that the differing languages of instruction in China and Malaysia could lead to communication challenges. These language disparities were seen as potential stumbling blocks, affecting effective teaching, learning, and collaboration between students and faculty members from both nations. The need for language support and proficiency development emerged as a pressing concern within this theme.

Another significant challenge revolved around the divergence in educational systems between China and Malaysia. Scholars pointed out that variations in curriculum structures, evaluation methods, and accreditation systems could create confusion and hinder the seamless transfer of credits and academic recognition. Bridging these educational disparities emerged as a critical aspect of fostering successful cooperation.

Specifically, education scholars also highlighted the administrative and bureaucratic complexities involved in cross-border collaborations. These included navigating intricate visa and immigration procedures, handling legal and regulatory requirements, and managing logistical aspects of student and faculty exchanges. The intricacies of cross-border educational initiatives often required a substantial investment of time and resources, posing challenges to the efficiency and fluidity of cooperative efforts.

Furthermore, a recurring theme in the discussions centered on the need for consistent government and institutional support to address challenges. Scholars noted that successful cooperation often depended on clear policies, financial support, and institutional commitment. The absence of robust support systems at the governmental and institutional levels could hinder the sustainability and effectiveness of collaborative initiatives.

In unveiling these challenges, it became evident that Sino-Malaysian Higher Education Cooperation, while holding great promise, were not devoid of intricate hurdles. These themes underscored the necessity for deliberate strategies to address language disparities, harmonize educational systems, streamline administrative processes, and cultivate unwavering governmental and institutional support. Despite the presence of these challenges, the commitment to overcoming them shone through in the determination of education scholars and stakeholders to realize the full potential of these collaborations. This recognition serves as a valuable foundation for devising comprehensive solutions and forging a more seamless path toward successful Sino-Malaysian Higher Education Cooperation. Consequently, these findings are similar to those of the previous studies focusing on higher education cooperation (see Afzaal, 2020; Li, 2022; Yeoh, 2019; Zhai & Razali, 2021a, 2021b, 2022a, 2022b).



Table 4.

## Sino-Malaysian Higher Education Cooperation Challenges

**Sino-Malaysian Higher Education Cooperation Challenges**

1. Language Barriers
2. Different Educational Systems
3. Administrative and Bureaucratic Challenges
4. Government and Institutional Support

**Factors Possibly Contributing to Sino-Malaysian Higher Education Cooperation's challenges**

The third research question investigates the factors possibly contribute to Sino-Malaysian Higher Education Cooperation's challenges. Based on the data collected from the interviews, three main themes emerged (See Table 5). They are (1) Cultural and Linguistic Factors, (2) Institutional and Structural Factors, and (3) Resource and Funding Issues.

Specifically, the fundamental element affecting these collaborations is the intricate tapestry of cultural and linguistic diversity. Scholars pointed out that the stark contrasts in culture, traditions, and languages between China and Malaysia could create significant challenges. Language disparities, in particular, were highlighted as a pervasive issue that could lead to miscommunications, misunderstandings, and hindered interactions among students and faculty members from both countries. Cultural differences also played a role, affecting expectations, teaching styles, and collaborative approaches. Bridging these cultural and linguistic gaps emerged as a critical aspect of overcoming challenges in this domain.

Another substantial contributor to challenges lay in the differences in institutional and structural aspects of higher education systems between China and Malaysia. Scholars pointed to divergent curriculum structures, evaluation methods, accreditation systems, and administrative procedures as sources of complexity. These differences could result in confusion, bureaucratic hurdles, and hindered cooperation. Aligning these institutional and structural aspects posed a substantial challenge, requiring careful consideration and strategic planning.

Furthermore, scholars also highlighted financial constraints, unequal resource distribution, and disparities in infrastructure and technological capabilities as potential barriers. Resource limitations could affect the quality of education, research opportunities, and the overall effectiveness of collaborative initiatives. Addressing these resource and funding disparities became pivotal in establishing equitable and sustainable cooperation.

In dissecting these factors, it became evident that the challenges within Sino-Malaysian Higher Education Cooperation are deeply rooted in the interplay of cultural, linguistic, institutional, structural, resource, and financial dynamics. Recognizing these complexities is the first step toward devising comprehensive strategies to address these challenges effectively. It is crucial to acknowledge that while these factors may pose hurdles, they also offer opportunities for growth, innovation, and the development of resilient collaborations that can transcend these challenges to achieve mutual success. Consequently, these findings are similar to those of the previous studies focusing on higher education cooperation (see Afzaal, 2020; Li, 2022; Yeoh, 2019; Zhai & Razali, 2021a, 2021b, 2022a, 2022b).

Table 5.

Factors Possibly Contributing to Sino-Malaysian Higher Education Cooperation's challenges

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**Factors Possibly Contributing to Sino-Malaysian Higher Education Cooperation's challenges**

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1. Cultural and Linguistic Factors
  2. Institutional and Structural Factors
  3. Resource and Funding Issues
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**Strategies to Support Sino-Malaysian Higher Education Cooperation**

Based on the data collected from the interviews, the findings presented strategies are suggested to be used to support Sino-Malaysian Higher Education Cooperation: 1. Enhanced Communication and Collaboration; 2. Faculty and Student Exchange Programs; and 3. Government and Institutional Support. These findings align with the conceptual framework by the Jane Knight's Motivation Theory of Internationalization in Higher Education, Socio-cultural-based Worldview Theories of Internationalization in Higher Education, and the Institutional Distance Theory of Internationalization in Higher Education. Based on the extensive data gathered through interviews, our findings have illuminated several strategies that are proposed to bolster and support Sino-Malaysian Higher Education Cooperation. These strategies hold great promise in fostering successful collaborations between the two nations.

Our findings emphasize the importance of fostering robust communication and collaboration mechanisms. These mechanisms can bridge language and cultural gaps, facilitate knowledge sharing, and enhance the overall effectiveness of cooperative efforts. Aligning with Jane Knight's Motivation Theory of Internationalization in Higher Education (Knight, 2008), this strategy recognizes the motivation to engage in internationalization efforts driven by the desire for knowledge exchange (Hermann, 2004; Lakoff & Johnson, 1999), intercultural learning, and improved educational quality (Dacin et al., 2002). Moreover, it aligns with Socio-cultural-based Worldview Theories of Internationalization in Higher Education, as it underscores the significance of cultural dynamics in shaping internationalization initiatives.

The establishment and expansion of faculty and student exchange programs emerged as a crucial strategy. Such programs provide tangible opportunities for individuals to immerse themselves in cross-cultural experiences, fostering mutual understanding and cooperation. This strategy aligns with the principles of the Institutional Distance Theory of Internationalization in Higher Education (Hermann, 2004; Lakoff & Johnson, 1999), as it recognizes the importance of bridging institutional gaps to facilitate collaboration. By enabling students and faculty to traverse these distances, these exchange programs contribute to reducing the institutional barriers that can impede cooperation.

Our findings underscore the critical role played by governmental and institutional support in sustaining and enhancing Sino-Malaysian Higher Education Cooperation. This strategy aligns with Jane Knight's Motivation Theory of Internationalization in Higher Education by recognizing the importance of institutional motivations for internationalization (Knight, 2008). Institutions that receive adequate support are more likely to engage in internationalization efforts with enthusiasm and success (Knight, 2008). These theories provide a comprehensive framework for understanding the motivations, cultural dynamics, and institutional factors that influence perceptions within the context of Sino-Malaysian higher education cooperation, which explains the effective measures to support Sino-Malaysian Higher Education Cooperation.

By adopting these strategies, Sino-Malaysian Higher Education Cooperation can overcome the challenges identified in our research, ultimately leading to more robust and fruitful collaborations. These strategies resonate with established theoretical frameworks and build upon the insights gained from previous studies, reinforcing their relevance and applicability. As education and cultural exchange continue to be pivotal in the global landscape, these strategies pave the way for deeper, more meaningful, and enduring partnerships between China and Malaysia. Furthermore, these findings align with previous studies in this field (see Afzaal, 2020; Li, 2022; Yeoh, 2019; Zhai & Razali, 2021a, 2021b, 2022a, 2022b).

Table 6.

Strategies to Support Sino-Malaysian Higher Education Cooperation

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**Strategies to Support Sino-Malaysian Higher Education Cooperation**

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1. Enhanced Communication and Collaboration
  2. Faculty and Student Exchange Programs
  3. Government and Institutional Support
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### Discussion and Implications

This study delved into the perceptions of education scholars regarding Sino-Malaysian higher education collaboration. Through a thorough analysis of the data while aligning with Jane Knight's Motivation Theory of Internationalization in Higher Education (Knight, 2008), Socio-cultural-based Worldview Theories of Internationalization in Higher Education (Hermann, 2004; Lakoff & Johnson, 1999), and the Institutional Distance Theory of Internationalization in Higher Education (Dacin et al., 2002), it becomes evident that scholars hold optimistic views on Sino-Malaysian higher education collaboration.

Scholars have articulated several advantages associated with Sino-Malaysian higher education collaboration, including: (1) Enhancing Educational Quality, (2) Cultural Exchange and Understanding, (3) Research Opportunities, and (4) Economic and Diplomatic Benefits. Scholars have asserted that these collaborations act as a driving force for enhancing the quality of education while simultaneously nurturing cross-cultural exchanges that foster a deeper mutual understanding between the two nations. Additionally, they have highlighted that these collaborations open doors to enhanced research opportunities, benefiting both parties involved. Furthermore, beyond the scope of education, these partnerships possess the potential to yield valuable economic and diplomatic advantages.

However, when discussing the challenges facing Sino-Malaysian Higher Education Collaborations, scholars have identified several obstacles, such as: (1) Language Barriers, (2) Different Educational Systems, (3) Administrative and Bureaucratic Challenges, and (4) Government and Institutional Support. Scholars have pointed out that the differences in languages can indeed pose challenges to effective communication and collaboration. Similarly, the variations in education systems and standards can lead to difficulties. Furthermore, they have suggested that navigating administrative procedures in both nations can be a complex endeavor, and the lack of sufficient support from governmental and institutional bodies has the potential to significantly impede progress.

Furthermore, scholars have also explored potential contributing factors to these challenges, including: (1) Cultural and Linguistic Factors, (2) Institutional and Structural Factors, and (3) Resource and Funding Issues. Scholars have observed that cultural disparities and language differences have the potential to result in misunderstandings. Furthermore, they believe that variations in the structure and organization of educational institutions can pose challenges.

Additionally, they posit that insufficient resources and funding may serve as impediments to effective collaborative efforts.

Finally, scholars have put forward strategies to support Sino-Malaysian Higher Education Collaborations, which encompass: 1. Enhanced Communication and Collaboration; 2. Faculty and Student Exchange Programs; and 3. Government and Institutional Support. Scholars have emphasized that the promotion of open and effective communication channels between institutions plays a pivotal role in fostering cooperation. They have also highlighted the significance of encouraging faculty and student exchanges, as it nurtures a deeper connection between the two education systems. Additionally, they have posited that the success of these collaborations critically relies on ensuring robust support from both governmental and institutional bodies.

Taken together, the findings of this study identified several advantages associated with Sino-Malaysian higher education collaborations, including the enhancement of educational quality, cultural exchange and understanding, increased research opportunities, and potential economic and diplomatic benefits. These collaborations are seen as a means to elevate education quality while fostering cross-cultural understanding, expanding research horizons, and offering broader advantages beyond academia. However, challenges exist, including language barriers, differences in educational systems, administrative complexities, and insufficient support. These challenges can be exacerbated by cultural and linguistic factors, institutional differences, and resource constraints. To address these issues, the findings of this study provided strategies such as enhancing communication and collaboration, promoting faculty and student exchanges, and securing robust government and institutional support to facilitate successful Sino-Malaysian higher education collaborations.

Moreover, this study addresses a research gap within the existing literature on Sino-Malaysian higher education collaborations (Zhai & Razali, 2020, 2021a, 2021b, 2022a) by delving into scholars' perceptions in this context. Previously, the examination of scholars' perspectives on Sino-Malaysian higher education collaborations was absent. As a result, this research seeks to validate the impact of (1) Cultural and Linguistic Factors, (2) Institutional and Structural Factors, and (3) Resource and Funding Issues in the context of Sino-Malaysian higher education collaborations, thus contributing significantly to the theoretical advancement of Jane Knight's Motivation Theory of Internationalization in Higher Education (Knight, 2008), Socio-cultural-based Worldview Theories of Internationalization in Higher Education (Hermann, 2004; Lakoff & Johnson, 1999), and the Institutional Distance Theory of Internationalization in Higher Education (Dacin et al., 2002).

### **Limitations and Implications for Future Studies**

One limitation of this study pertains to the relatively small and potentially homogeneous sample of scholars, which may restrict the generalizability of findings. Future research endeavors could enhance their robustness by expanding to a larger and more diverse participant pool, thereby ensuring a broader spectrum of perspectives. Additionally, this study primarily relied on qualitative interviews, possibly introducing response bias or limiting the depth of understanding. To mitigate these concerns, future investigations might consider employing mixed research methods or quantitative approaches to provide a more comprehensive insight into scholars' perceptions. Furthermore, it's crucial to acknowledge that the findings of this study are context-specific to the Sino-Malaysian higher education collaboration context. It is plausible that similar collaborations in different regions could yield different results. Finally, considering the rapidly evolving landscape of international education

collaborations, it's imperative to recognize that the relevance of these findings may diminish over time, emphasizing the need for ongoing research in this dynamic field.

In considering implications for future studies, several avenues of research emerge. First, a longitudinal approach could be adopted to comprehensively assess how scholars' perceptions of Sino-Malaysian higher education collaborations evolve over time, concurrently examining the shifting landscape of challenges and benefits associated with such partnerships. Second, there is potential for valuable insights through comparative research encompassing a range of international education collaborations, facilitating the identification of commonalities and distinctive features within these partnerships. Such an approach would illuminate best practices and potential pitfalls in cross-border educational initiatives.

Furthermore, future research could delve into the roles played by individual institutions within these collaborations, exploring their strategies and contributions, thereby providing a more nuanced understanding of the overall success or challenges faced. Additionally, there is a promising avenue for investigation into the impact of government policies and support on the outcomes of Sino-Malaysian higher education collaborations. This research could determine whether policy adjustments can effectively address the challenges identified in the current study.

Lastly, expanding the scope of research to encompass the perspectives of students and alumni engaged in these collaborations offers a holistic view of their influence on education quality and cross-cultural experiences. This multifaceted approach to future research can contribute significantly to a deeper understanding of international education collaborations and their dynamic nature.

## **Motivations & Contributions**

### **Motivations:**

The pursuit of international collaboration in education, particularly in the context of the One Belt and One Road Initiative (OBOR), has seen significant momentum in recent years. This initiative has ushered in a new era of global academic exchange, cultural understanding, and economic growth, particularly in the case of Sino-Malaysian higher education cooperation. The motivation behind this study lies in the recognition of the multifaceted significance of this collaboration and the need to comprehend the perspectives of scholars in the field of education engaged in these partnerships.

One of the primary motivations for this research is to gain insights into the current state of Sino-Malaysian higher education cooperation. By understanding the dynamics and intricacies of this collaboration, it is possible to identify the existing challenges, the untapped opportunities, and areas that require improvement. This understanding forms the foundation for enhancing the effectiveness and sustainability of educational partnerships between China and Malaysia within the OBOR framework.

The study aims to offer recommendations that can serve as a valuable resource for policymakers, educational institutions, and stakeholders involved in Sino-Malaysian higher education cooperation. By examining the perceptions of education scholars, the research seeks to inform the design and implementation of more effective strategies that align with the needs and aspirations of those actively engaged in this partnership.

### **Contributions**

The research outlined in this manuscript holds the potential to make significant contributions in several key areas. By examining the perceptions of scholars in education, this research

provides a unique perspective on the experiences, challenges, and opportunities encountered in Sino-Malaysian higher education cooperation. These insights offer a nuanced understanding of the human and academic dimensions of these collaborations.

The primary contribution of this study lies in its potential to enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of Sino-Malaysian higher education cooperation. By shedding light on the concerns and aspirations of education scholars, the research empowers stakeholders to adapt and improve their initiatives, ultimately leading to more fruitful partnerships. Another significant contribution is the promotion of cross-cultural understanding. The study seeks to identify ways in which educational collaborations can facilitate not only academic exchange but also deeper cultural appreciation and intercultural competence between China and Malaysia. This is vital for fostering enduring relationships and mutual growth.

The research contributes to the broader objectives of sustainable development by emphasizing the importance of cooperative ventures in education. By nurturing an educational ecosystem that encourages knowledge exchange, cultural understanding, and economic growth, it paves the way for lasting benefits for both nations, aligning with the principles of the OBOR Initiative.

In conclusion, this study's motivations and contributions center on the need to comprehend the perceptions of education scholars involved in Sino-Malaysian higher education cooperation under the OBOR framework. The ultimate aim is to foster a dynamic educational partnership that not only enhances academic exchange but also builds bridges of cultural understanding and contributes to the sustainable development of both China and Malaysia.

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## **Appendix A. Semi-Structured Interview**

### **Section 1: Background Information**

- 1.Can you share with us your educational background? Please provide details about your academic qualifications, degrees earned, and any relevant certifications.
- 2.Could you share your professional experience in the field of education? Please highlight specifically your roles and responsibilities related to higher education.
- 3.Have you been involved in any projects or initiatives focused on Sino-Malaysian higher education cooperation? If so, could you elaborate on your role and the outcomes of those initiatives?
- 4.What areas of expertise do you possess in the context of Sino-Malaysian higher education cooperation? How have you developed these areas of expertise?
- 5.Can you provide examples of your successful collaborations or partnerships in the realm of Sino-Malaysian higher education? What were the key factors that contributed to their success?
- 6.In your opinion, what are the current challenges or barriers faced in promoting Sino-Malaysian higher education cooperation? How do you suggest addressing them?
- 7.What opportunities do you see for further enhancing Sino-Malaysian higher education collaboration? Are there any specific areas or initiatives you believe should be prioritized?
- 8.How familiar are you with the policies and regulations governing Sino-Malaysian higher education partnerships? Could you discuss any experiences or knowledge you have in navigating these regulations?
- 9.Have you conducted research or published any works related to Sino-Malaysian higher education cooperation? If yes, please provide details about your research focus and any notable findings.
- 10.How do you stay updated with the latest developments and trends in Sino-Malaysian higher education cooperation? Are there any specific resources, conferences, or networks you rely on?

### **Section 2: Perceptions on Sino-Malaysian Higher Education Cooperation**

- 11.What is your overall perception of the current state of Sino-Malaysian higher education cooperation?
- 12.What are the key benefits or advantages you see in this cooperation?
- 13.What are the main challenges or limitations you observe in this cooperation?
- 14.How would you assess the impact of Sino-Malaysian higher education cooperation on the quality of education in both countries?
- 15.Are there any specific examples or initiatives that you believe have been successful in this cooperation?

### **Section 3: Collaboration and Exchange Programs**

- 16.How effective are the current collaboration and exchange programs between Chinese and Malaysian higher education institutions?
- 17.What are some examples of successful collaborative programs you are aware of?
- 18.What are the key factors that contribute to the success of these programs?

19. What improvements or changes would you recommend to enhance the effectiveness of collaboration and exchange programs?

#### **Section 4: Cultural and Language Considerations**

20. How do cultural and language differences between China and Malaysia impact higher education cooperation?

21. Are there any specific strategies or approaches that you believe can help overcome these cultural and language barriers?

22. What role does intercultural competence play in facilitating successful cooperation between Chinese and Malaysian institutions?

#### **Section 5: Future Directions and Recommendations**

23. How do you envision the future of Sino-Malaysian higher education cooperation?

24. Are there any specific areas or sectors where you think more focus should be placed in the future?

25. What recommendations would you provide to policymakers and institutions involved in Sino-Malaysian higher education cooperation?

#### **Conclusion**

In the future, can we follow up with further questions via email or phone call to get clarification on your thoughts and comments about your perceptions on Sino-Malaysian higher education cooperation

Thank you so much for your valuable time.

We really appreciate your thoughtful comments, and we enjoyed our conversation.