

Exploring the Intercultural Marriage between Malaysian Women and African Men in Sarawak

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Abstract:

This research explored the experiences, perceptions and coping mechanism of intercultural marriage among Malaysian women and African men in Sarawak, Malaysia. The study is conducted through an exploratory qualitative mode of research. Snowball technique is used to identify participants and semi-structured interview and observation methods were used as the research instruments to extract data from the targeted intercultural marriage group. Data analysis was done using thematic analysis. The findings of this study indicated the potentials of cultural differences as well as the cultural similarities that existed among these intercultural marriage couples as major experiences. On the other hand, systematic racial discrimination through government policies and sometimes aided through media and individual or group of individuals were also indicated on the findings. The results provided support to the macro-sociological theory of social structure which served as lenses to this research. All of these will benefit society in general, especially the educators, counsellors, and training counsellors, caregivers and individuals who are planning to enter an intercultural marriage with African men and vice versa.

Keywords: Perceptions, Experience, Mixed Marriages, African Men, Malaysian Women.

INTRODUCTION

The world nowadays is a global village where everything is at its fingertips. This has led to an increase in the number of intercultural marriages around the globe. This chapter focuses on the importance of western education and how Africans grab the opportunity of it while migrating around the world. The origin of the research problem was based on the experience of the intercultural married couple and their family down to their positive and negative experiences. Thus, it leads to research objectives which are to explore the experience as well as the perceptions of intercultural marriage couples among Malaysian women and African men. In tackling this, three suitable research questions and research objectives were developed. However, the significance is to uncover some possible

counselling issues that might exist or arise from this type of marriage which will benefit counsellor themselves and trainee counsellors, educators, and those planning to venture into an intercultural marriage especially with Africans or people of a different culture. Some notable universities from the western world and Australia have part of their university set up as branch campuses in some Southeast Asia countries which Malaysia is one of the tops selected by most Africans. The purpose of setting up these branch campuses was to care for and provide the same Western education to Asian people who might be interested in studying at these universities but could not afford the cost of attending them in the western world. Africans in their quest for western

education (Nwauwa, 2020; Jeremy, 2017; Alexandra, 2017; Kanu, 2007), has seized the opportunity to come over to Malaysia in search of this western education as many of them could not afford to directly attend these universities in the Western world. The cost to acquire the same quality of western education with the same certificate is better and affordable in Malaysia compared to the Western world (Kaneko, 2020; Sarkaret al., 2019; Arunasalam, 2016; Pyvis et al., 2007). These have been trending throughout the whole of Africa for over two decades now from East African countries to West African countries (Sarkar et al., 2019). This made Malaysia to be seen all over African countries as a tourist and study hub because Malaysia is perceived to be a harmonious country where it is rare to see natural disasters or ethnic clashes happening among the citizens, despite that her citizen came from multiracial backgrounds mainly the Malay race, Chinese, and India race plus other smaller ethnic groups from the eastern part of the country (Azizan et al., 2020).

Malaysia is one of the countries in Southeast Asia mostly chosen as a base to attend western education by Africans and some other Asian countries like Thailand, Indonesia, Philippines, considering the country as one of the best tourist countries with a good security network, hospitality, and good ambience in Southeast Asia (Salman et al., 2012). Perse, this keeps increasing the number of African students in Malaysia, which most of them have had some relationships which lead them to marriages as soon as they are graduating. However, many others who do not have such arrangements will move back to their country of origin or thought of moving to another country in search of jobs and a better life. Malaysia government have some stricter rules for Africans as many of them who are studying here or even married is not officially permitted to engage themselves in any legal employment even

though most of them graduated and have stayed in Malaysia for more than five to ten years (Ramanand, 2018). In the very eyes of foreigners, Malaysia portrays itself as tolerant of multicultural, ethnicity and religious diversities, this can be seen in their tourist slogan "Malaysia Truly Asia" to woo people all around the world. However, Africans in Malaysia seem to be excluded from the actual meaning of this slogan (Jeremy, 2017). Well, for the sake of this study, attention will only be directed to the situation surrounding those African men who are been married to Malaysian women here in an East Malaysia state called Sarawak.

Sarawak is one of the 13 states in Malaysia and Kuching is the capital city. Miri is another notable city after Kuching as the capital of the State of Sarawak (Koh, 2018). This state was chosen because these are the major places where the targeted groups for this study mostly staying due to the concentration of foreign companies as well as foreign universities when you talk about East Malaysia (Lumayag, 2020). Furthermore, Kuching is not only the capital city but also the largest city followed by Miri as the second-largest city in the state of Sarawak which also happens to be an oil-producing city in Sarawak (Kuok et al., 2020). Miri has many international and local companies situated in it. It is also seen as a tourist city after Kuching. The city has a close border with Brunei Darussalam which attracts foreign expatriates from Brunei to live in Miri (Lumayag, 2020; Koh, 2018). Sarawak is one of the culturally rich states in the federation of 13 states of Malaysia (Haigh, 2020). Hence, Sarawak is situated in the eastern part of Malaysia.

The trigger to this issue was through a discussion from an African friend who engaged in an intercultural marriage with a Malaysian lady, his sharing was mainly based on perception as he shared that Malaysians like to see him and his wife when they are together with their children. However, they perceived negative reactions in form of dehumanization from

some Malaysians if they were alone on the street or when they are out relaxing without their children. As a result, there has been some consequence that arises between the interculturally married couple like it changes their personality to be harsh in responding to any member of the public who stared too much at them. It has also caused the couple to believe that they are being hated by some Malaysians, perhaps being seen as not compatible. Relatedly, this whole scenario agrees with the hypothesis conducted by Skinner & Hudac's (2017), mixed couple elicit disgust which leads to implicit dehumanization of such racially mixed couples and as well, this also tally with one of the findings in the research conducted by Singla et al. (2020), some people mistreat interculturally married couples through an implicit bias which occurs especially when it involves a person of colour. This is what left the couple with a question mark on how people see them as an interculturally married couple and has since then affect's them psychologically or left them with the feelings of being dehumanised. Hence, when talking about dehumanisation, it occurs as a systematic punishment targeted at a particular group, race or ethnicity through an unjust treatment (Fincher et al., 2016; Stevenson et al., 2015; Zhang et al., 2015; Kteily et al., 2015; Allport., 1954). Besides, those who are racially dehumanised are often aggressive, less compassionate, reduction in desire to integrate themselves into society and often lacks empathy in the long run (Nagar et al., 2017; Andrighetto et al., 2014; Martinez., 2014; Haslam., 2006).

Nowadays, there are growing numbers of mixed marriages in the western world as well as in most Asian countries (Stillwell et al., 2020; Osuji, 2013). The work of the previous researchers has focused on many topics like romance, cross-cultural acceptance and adaptation, cultural and religious influence in a mixed marriage, etcetera (Singla et al.,

2020). Despite the cultural diversity in Malaysia, systematic studies on mixed marriages, predominantly focus and emphasise intercultural marriages among Malaysians, like Malay Bumiputras (natives), Chinese, Indians and other minority ethnics who are also considered as Bumiputras (Jo-Pei et al., 2008). In another research conducted by Nagaraj (2009), one of the findings stated that there is a systematic discouragement of mixed marriages within the plurality of the Malaysian population, especially in Peninsular Malaysia compared to the East-Malaysia. Presently, as at the time of this research, there is limited research focusing directly

on intercultural marriages between Malaysian women and African men. Interestingly, this research is exploring the intercultural marriage experience and their

perceptions between these two distinctive groups from the perspective of couples. This I see to be a total novel in the field of counselling here in Malaysia. As such, there will be a whole lot of unexpressed cultural experiences such as food, language, emotional expressions, perceptions and many more that need to be explored within this targeted group. Nevertheless, this research will only focus on the exploration of cultural experience as well as the perceptions from the past to the present day of the participants' intercultural marriages.

This study aims to uncover the experience as well as the perception of intercultural marriage and possible coping mechanisms on intercultural differences among Malaysian women and African men. There have been several studies conducted by previous researchers, but none has focused

on intercultural marriage experience and perception from counselling and psychological viewpoint between a Malaysian woman and African men as at the time of this research has been carried out. As such, this will be the first research

on the intercultural experience and perception of mixed marriage couples between Malaysian women and African men in Sarawak from a counselling point of view. Given this, this research is expected to present some positive cultural experiences and perceptions as well as some counselling issues and challenges that might arise from this type of intercultural marriage. In specific, the outcome of this study will be beneficial to the caregivers, the counsellors, and the trainee counsellors whose jobs are to emotionally take care of others, especially when it is an issue concerning intercultural marriages. Educators and every other related field whose job is to systematically transfer knowledge are not left out among the benefactors of this research and finally, to Malaysian women who are planning to enter an intercultural marriage with African men and vice versa.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the past before 1960, interracial marriages especially the ones involving black African American descents and White-American descents were seen as complete cracks in social norms (Spickard, 1989 p.7). Previous researchers from the western world have investigated how mixed marriages among Black, White, or Asian couples have been treated through an obvious displaying of undesirable attitudes in the forms of implicit bias (Watanabe et al., 2020; Skinner et al., 2018). Intercultural marriages around the world have been perceived as a turn-off or disgust to society, this was according to a hypothesis conducted by Skinner & Hudac's (2017), using verbal, emotional and facial expression as measuring tools. One of the vital outcomes from their experiments shows that there is a high sexual disgust relating to black men who married a white woman.

In addition to this, Mixed marriages have often been perceived and referred to as problematic and ambiguous to handle by governments considering their

miscegenation and confusion of identity (Mitrayani, 2019; Buggs, 2017). According to the research conducted by Bialik (2017), interracial couples were mostly perceived as less compatible only when a partner is an African American descent. Contrarily, intercultural marriages are also seen as a vital factor and a greater source for socio-cultural integration that maintains stability within societies marked by high racial diversity (Andrei et al., 2020; De Hart, 2015). Intercultural marriages are also known and referred to as cross-cultural marriage, mixed marriage, interracial marriage, interethnic marriage, out-marriage, and biracial ties (Stillwell et al., 2020; Moret et al., 2019).

Racially mixed couples according to Andrei et al. (2020), signified a vital part that helps to ensure cohesion within societies that are known to have high cultural and religious diversities. Besides, People who are from a small racial group will likely not be marrying an individual who is from the same racial group due to the imbalanced ratio of men and women from the same ethnic group, this was according to Sowa-Behtane (2020), however, factors like place of residence and high educational background have also been identified as causes for mixed marriages in the same research.

Relatedly, cross-cultural marriages existed as a result of the quest for new knowledge through cultural exchange and intercultural adaptation (Djurdjevic et al., 2016).

Research conducted in Zimbabwe by Wisdom et al. (2015), shows that the perceptions of the community towards African men and White women marriages give a negative impact on the marriage relationships which might lead to divorce. In China, according to research conducted by Joseph et al. (2017), Intercultural married couples' experiences are dominated by typical Chinese cultural and religious influence which overruns the foreign spouse in

everything and leaves them to be in the shadows of themselves in their marriages.

In Malaysia, the perception and experience surrounding mixed marriages are not different from that of other parts of the world. Since pre-colonial time as documented throughout her history, Malaysians have engaged in mixed marriages within the Malay race, Chinese and Indian and other smaller ethnic groups found in the East of Malaysia and considering as Bumiputras status (Joe Pei et al., 2008). Nowadays, the number of cross-cultural marriages has increased drastically compared to the past, especially in Sabah and Sarawak, this was described as grossly problematic according to Pue et al. (2013). In another research by Alexandra (2017), the role of media negative characterization of Africans in Malaysia had led to the whole of African race being subjected to prejudice and racially discriminated by locals who domiciled in rural areas and grossly depends on the media as their only source of information. However, there are still individuals who are interested to know and learn more about Africans and their culture. Among them are the ones that ended up marrying Africans or at least becoming friends and business associates. As such from the past literature review, this dissertation will focus on experiences and perceptions of intercultural marriage couples among Malaysian women and African men considering it from a counselling and psychological viewpoint.

Theoretical Concepts

There are many available theories from social scientists to explore intercultural relationships. Most of these theories try to explain why people of distinctive races engage in various relationships with others whose races are completely different from theirs. From a theoretical angle to explain the reason for intercultural marriages among Malaysian women and African men. This dissertation will be

adopting the Theory of macro-sociological theory of social structure founded by Simmel, a classical structuralist from the time of antiquity.

As such, according to Blau et al. (1982), Weber's classic cultural theory in sociology talked about social institution and advancement in the form of social or cultural values alignment, as shown by the protestant idea. However, contrary to this idea, Simmel's classic structural theory emphasized social life, to be an individual association in the form of structural characteristics like size or numbers which cut across boundaries of intercultural groups. Also, Simmel was seen as a structuralist whose abstract ideas are often related to the assessable dimension of collectivities and ways to social association based on the background of social and psychological contents.

Subsequently, a macro-sociological theory was created based on Simmel's idea of social structure which emphasizes the needs of individuals associated with others (Blau 1977). Therefore, this is concerned with the influence of social structure on people's interpersonal relationships. The size distributions of a population among various positions along different ranks are conceptualized as the foundation of social structure (Blau, 1977). Given this, the number or size of a group in each society is a vital component of a social structure. In another context, the macro-sociological theory of social structure is the range to which different social or cultural differences are related. For example, how closely race and class are related will show how often ethnic boundaries can cohabit. This is a deductive theory in which concepts about the social implications of certain contextual factors are scientifically deduced based on basic assumptions and interpretations.

In other words, the macro-sociological social structural theory focuses and emphasises how people of distinctive culture and race are more likely to marry

or engage in a relationship or cohabit with someone who has a similarity in family, culture and social background as well as similarities in socioeconomic status. This Theory further stresses the selection of companion through a perfect similarity in terms of culture, educational attainment, age, interests, social status, work interest and even hobbies, this was according to Brewer et al. (1968) on the social structural theory where 'similarities' was highlighted as one of the major desires for social and intercultural relationships among distinctive ethnic groups. Hence, this study will adopt this theory as the lens to view the intercultural marriage that exists between Malaysian women and African men.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This research adopted an exploratory case study of qualitative methods of research. Research design is a process used by researchers to conduct a scientific study, this includes several methods and techniques used in answering and resolving the research questions and research objectives (Creswell, 2017; 2014; 2007).

Research Instrumentation

Semi-Structure Interview

A semi-structured interview was adopted as it is good for accessing in-depth knowledge and the personal experiences of participants, besides, it is the most famously used in qualitative studies (Braun et al., 2016; McArdle et al., 2012). To explore the experiences of participants, an exploratory questionnaire was formulated to willingly access the participant's experiences. Before the main interview, there was a pilot testing on the accuracy and quality of the questionnaire formulated, this was to ascertain that the already formulated questionnaire is good enough to access the experience and perceptions that will in return answer both the research question and research objectives of this study. Following the

pilot testing, some of the questions were reconstructed to ensure that the questionnaire was appropriate and strong enough to extract the necessary information needed from these participants. At first, five main questions were generated and structured in an open-ended pattern, besides, each of these questions has other sub-questions that dig more into the details of every given idea (Creswell, 2017; Creswell, 2007). However, there were a few more questions that have surfaced as the result of participant's sharing. These makeup questions were also helpful to ascertain details of participant's sharing during the interviewing session.

Observation method

Tapping into the perceptions, an observation method was used during the interviewing session. This was necessary to ensure a good triangulation of this research work. Besides, this is to ascertain some exact meanings of certain issues through participants body language, gestures and facial expressions such as, fake or real smiles, hair pulling, awkward moments, pauses in between narrations, all of these were all observed to give reflexive moments like personal thoughts, ideas, speculation, impression and many more which are to be related with the topic in which the participants were sharing at every given time (Creswell, 2017; Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Creswell, 2007).

Field-Notes

A Field note was also taking along the line while all the participants have been interviewed. This was essential in documenting important things like my reflective ideas, thoughts, and personal reflections during and after the interview. Most of these were taken into consideration after clarification and ascertained that it has a link to the topic in discussions. This ensures credibility and a clearer explanation of every interpretation given to the experience and perception during the couple's early marriages and beyond (Wisdom & Chiwaze, 2015).

Population and Sampling

A snowball technique was used for this study, given that, this study is about exploration in an intercultural marriage among the targeted group in Sarawak. Hence, Samples was drawn through a referral from the participants that have been initially interviewed until a saturation point was reached through the answers provided by these participants (Charmaz et al., 2020; Creswell, 2017; 2014; 2007). 5 participants were interviewed from the targeted group, 2 of them were male from African background while the other 3 were females who were Malaysian and representing some of the major ethnicities found in Sarawak. That is the Iban, the Bidayuh, and the Chinese background. All the participants are married and still in their marriages at the time of this study. Efforts were made to interview any participant from this targeted group who was a divorcee or a widow. However, non was available as it is quite rare to this targeted group and no one knows any married couple within this group that is divorced or a widow. This was necessary to see the experience and perception from the eyes of these interculturally married couples from these ethnicities here in Sarawak.

Inform Consents

The five participants who took part in this study were given informed - consent to sign showing total acceptance before the interview was granted. Informed Consent, according to the Council for International Organizations of Medical Sciences (CIOMS), is "a decision to engage in the study conducted by a knowledgeable person who has obtained any relevant information and has fully understood the information and has considered it before arriving at a point of not been subjected to coercion, unjustified influence, harassment or intimidation (Andanda, 2005, p. 16).

In respect to the above paragraph, a code was generated and given in the replacement of the participants' names to ensure confidentiality, due to the sensitivity related to the participants'

situation. Furthermore, confidentiality was essential in answering questionnaires related to research matters and disclosure of sensitive issues. This is to ensure to the utmost level that the participants were safe from any subsequent issues that may arise.

Ethical Issues

As an investigator, my primary ethical concern ought to be to honour the independence and dignity of all my participants. I must defend and encourage these privileges in the cause of my research work. 'As psychologists appreciate the dignity and self-worth of everyone alike, with openness to the complexities of assumed power or control over others, and will pay careful attention to people's rights, including privacy and self-determination' (British Psychological Society, 2010, p.8). This could be more complicated than it seems because it is impossible to determine how survey participants will react. When a person's physical well-being is jeopardized, it is usually straightforward to recognize; but, when a person's emotional well-being is put in jeopardy, it is more difficult to identify.

I am mindful of the issue whereby interviewing participants about sensitive subjects could trigger unpleasant memories and emotions in participants who have had negative experiences. Any disadvantaged people, for example, who have had negative interpersonal experiences, may be upset because of the research. This discomfort may be visible mostly during interviewing as well as later, whenever the respondent left the location of the interview. As a result, I minimize all interventions which could make participants feel bad. 'Psychologists must be aware of the possible consequences of their treatments, for instance, the risk of unintentionally causing person anxiety, the risk of 'normalizing' inappropriate behaviour, or the risk of instilling self-doubt' (British Psychological Society, 2010, p.11 & p.12).

To address participant discomfort during the interview's session, the following actions were taken. Initially, before the interview session, I clarified and explained in detail the main purpose of inviting them to partake in my exploratory study in my request letter to them. Besides, I detailed clearly that all participants must be interviewed separately whether or not they are couples, the reason was based on the facts that they were all coming from a different ethnic backgrounds which must make them hold different views and opinions on every issue that was discussed in the interviewing session. All data given as information was handled with the strictest confidence by me and my supervisor. 'We as the researchers must abide by the ethics by respecting the privacy of all the participants and will guarantee that participants cannot be identified' (British Psychological Society, 2010, p.9). This has to do with individual privacy, as they would probably be worried if they found out that their responses to the questionnaire were made available to the members of the public. 'People can maintain confidentiality and ensuring the information or data gathered on people is properly anonymized and cannot be tracked back to them through other people, even though the respondents are unconcerned about a possible breach of confidentiality.' (British Psychological Society, 2010, p.9.).

Even after acceptance, they can decide whether to continue with the research at any point during the interviewing session and will not be forced against their wish. Before the interview began, I obtained informed consent from them to guarantee that participants' interests were upheld. It entails handing them a printed sheet detailing the protocols and then telling them to endorse it. Then, during the interviewing process, I was on the lookout for signs of discomfort, I also planned to stop for a while to encourage the participants by inquiring how they felt and what they wanted to do or postpone the interview if the participant was

distressed. At the real session, there was an occasion when one of the participants was emotionally overwhelmed, this made me paused the interview for a while to allow the participant to take a break and regain herself before continuing. Another participant also felt alike on the side of Malaysia, especially when addressing the issues concerning government policies towards foreign spouses particularly Africans and their complicated circumstances in Malaysia. This had influenced their intercultural marital partnership. Acknowledging the complicated situation as well as the participants' emotional condition, I stopped for a few moments by not posing any more questions and just waited for them to calm down.

Finally, just after the interview session. I was mindful that it may have a serious effect on the participants' mental wellbeing, as well as their present relationships, and also relationships with others. Given this, I did everything I could to enhance the situation by given them my contacts, like my phone number and my email address to feel free by contacting me should in case they may want to ask me any questions been agitated in their minds. Besides, I also made available to them the handphone number of my superior in case if they needed more clarification on any bothering issue(s) that my answers to them does not seem to be satisfying; Also, I gave each of the participants the address and contact information of the nearest counselling offices around the city. Perhaps, they might be willing to talk to someone more specialized about the kind of issues they are facing because they participated in my research work.

I trusted the above supporting tools to have helped, should any of them experience any psychological disturbances after my interview with them. Although, since after the interview, no one ever called me or my supervisor regarding any emotional disturbance to date. Besides, credit will be given to the use of the work and ideas of

other authors. The 7th edition APA style of referencing will be adopted for proper citations in the use of scholar's work and ideas. In the findings of this study, honesty in the interpretation of data will be the watchword to avoid bias in the style of reporting. There will be triangulation and multiple views of reporting in this study, contrary findings will be made known and the report of this study will follow practical guidelines in publishing or disseminating it through a website and copies will be made available to the key participants and stakeholders at the final reports of this research represented (Creswell, 2017; 2007; Vivar et al; 2007). A conflicting interest will be declared if there is any at the time of conducting this research. This work will be published not more than once by a publisher and the funders of this research work will be made known as regards to those that will directly benefit from this work.

Data Analysis

Background of Analytic Method

Thematic analysis was used to examine the data from the semi-structured interviews. Thematic analysis, according to Boyatzis (1998), is a method for encoding qualitative data that requires an explicit "code" such as a list of themes or a causal model of indicators. The process of putting data in order and organising it into themes is referred as thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This entails the researcher reviewing and rereading the data to spot trends. These recurring patterns generate a set of codes that represent various parts of the research goals and interviews conducted (King, 2004). They are directly related to the study's purpose (Elliot, 2018) and help to establish the themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Before detecting themes in the data, a process called coding is carried out. There is a distinction between a code and a theme in that the latter is the result of coding (Elliot, 2018). Six steps are suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006) for conducting thematic analysis: Step one - Familiarising

with the data; Step two - Generating initial codes; Step three - Searching for themes; Step four - Reviewing themes; Step five - Defining and naming themes; Step six - Producing the report.

Thematic analysis was used to examine the data from the semi-structured interviews. According to Boyatzis (1998), thematic analysis is a method for encoding qualitative data that uses an explicit "code" such a list of themes or a causal model of indicators. Thematic analysis, according to Braun and Clarke (2006: p. 79), is "a tool for finding, analysing, and documenting trends within data, to be used with qualitative data, is thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is the method of placing data in order and organising it into themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This entails reading and re-reading the data for the researcher to spot trends. These recurring trends result in a list of codes that interpret different aspects of the research goals and interview questions (King, 2004). They are explicitly related to the study's objective (Saldana, 2021) and help to define the themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Before identifying themes in the data, a process called coding is carried out. The distinction between a code and a theme is that the latter is the product of the former (Saldana, 2021). Six measures are suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006) for performing thematic analysis: The first phase is to familiarise yourself with the information. Phase two will be creating the initial codes, while phase three, is to look for themes. Phase four entails going over the themes again, and phase five is identifying and describing themes; Phase six is writing the report.

In using thematic analysis according to Braun et al. (2006), there are six phases to properly implement thematic analysis, these phases are known as:

1. **Familiarization** – This is common to qualitative research where researchers are expected to get their selves familiarised with the data

collected by reading through it repeatedly while paying attention to the meaning of words and as well as the contents of each sentence structure. In the case of audio-visual data, researchers are expected to listen and watch the audio-visual tapes over and over and at the same time do the transcripts of the audio-visual data. As a result of doing this, researchers will be able to get themselves familiarised with the contents of the overall data in form of words, sentence structures, content and meanings as well as the choice of words by the participants. In a nutshell, researchers are expected to be well acquainted with the participants choice of words, contents, meaning and sentence structuring in an explanation of their views over a particular issue.

2. Generating initial code – The building blocks of analysis under the thematic style of qualitative research are through coding. Coding means highlighting and identifying phrases, words, sentences and deriving short labels as themes to represent these data that has been identified based on meanings, patterns, expression and contents.

4. Generating themes - This phase will begin with the creation of themes after a long list of coding of data has been generated and collated. The focus will then be on the patterns among the already generated codes and themes start to be derived from these codes based on the content representation. These themes are broader than codes and, in some cases, a theme might be formed by a combination of codes that will have a direct representation of the data to resolve the research questions.

5. Reviewing themes – In this stage, the already generated themes will undergo scrutiny to be sure they suit and well representing the data, themes that are found inappropriate will be

discarded or change into other themes that will be carrying and conveying an exact content representation of the data. The vital thing to do under this stage is to make the themes more useful in answering the research questions, therefore, the already generated themes can be split, combined, discarded or even form new themes hence it will give the best outcome in data representation and resolves the research question.

6. Defining and naming themes – Now that the themes are ready, it is important to name and explain to the audience the meaning of the themes. By naming and defining the themes, it consists of giving a concise and thorough explanation of what each theme means and how it represented the data and at the same time will help to answer the research question. Each refined theme will be representing a particular area of the data collected for this study.

7. Writing the report – In this stage, the outcome of the data analysis of this study will be produced in form of text writing and image presentation if any, in a thematic style of academic writing. This will require an introduction to the research question, research objectives and as well as research methodology. The thorough analysis of this study using the themes will lead to findings which will be reported under this section following and approved guidelines in a qualitative study. However, in the thematic analysis of report writing, the aim focuses on convincing the audience to believe in the findings from the analysis of the data from the complicated stories of the participants, hence, it must be organised, concise and coherent, logical, interesting and free from repetition before it can serve the full purpose of a qualitative research report using thematic analysis.

Trustworthiness

In ensuring credibility to this study, A semi-structured interview is used alongside observation and a field note was also be taking for the persistence to ascertain that participant experiences and perception will not be quoted out of context. In addition to the triangulation of this study, the initial formulated questionnaire for the semi-structured interview was first tested and reconstructed following the pilot testing that was conducted on two participants in an intercultural marriage, but they were not eligible as the main participants because their husband was of African descent, but they were not Africans, rather, from Papua new guinea. Finally, to ensure my ultimate use of the triangulation, the outcome of this research work was being taken to the participants to get their views and comments for my final necessary adjustments in the areas where their experience and perception was not fully represented (Creswell, 2017; 2007; Vivar et al; 2007).

RESULT

A. Preparation of the Data

The data were extracted through semi-structured interview, which was tape-recorded as well as transcribed to the best of my ability prior handing it over to certified transcribers. I double-checked the transcripts against the recording after getting them from the professional transcribers. The data was kept confidential by removing the participants' names and replacing them with codes at the start of the transcription process.

B. Coding the Interviews

Even though the data in this study came from the semi-structured interview transcripts, the thematic analysis was not entirely produced inductively utilising the data-driven technique as I worked on my research questions. The behaviour, feelings, and thoughts relating to experiences of intercultural marriage were coded from the data. During the code creation process, I applied the software named Quirkos to administer the data. The

Quirkos is a qualitative analysis software that provided me with a one-of-a-kind experience that keeps me connected to my dataset. Data were first integrated into the software using a code to represent each participant. To annotate my codes, I simply drag and drop text onto a created bubble that represents my codes and later themes as the analysing process continued. These bubbles were data-driven created codes and themes prior and as well as during analysis. This qualitative software also gives room for data comparison which makes it easier for a researcher to easily view participants responses to a given interview question. Grouping of codes and possible merges of these codes was also possible. As such, creating and collapsing of themes when necessary was made possible using this software, before arriving at the final themes which have been fully refined to give an accurate answer to the research questions. The detailing of these coding and themes and how it undergoes different phases will be discussed in the next paragraphs.

Coding Phase One

I worked systematically through the complete data set, one transcript at a time, giving full attention to each data item and identifying the experience of intercultural marriage during the stage of developing the initial codes. The feelings and thoughts of the Participants relating to their experiences of intercultural marriage. Coding was accomplished by highlighting prospective themes and ensuring that all data extracts were coded before combining the extracts into each code. Data from additional participants were used to construct distinct and comparable codes connected to the research questions as part of this stage's process.

There were EIGHT (8) codes at the beginning that were based on the experiences of intercultural marriage couples among Malaysian women and African men in Sarawak., which was to answer the Research Question One. They

were *Generic or Genuine Love, Cultural celebration and Similarities, Differences and the difficulties in culture, Identity, Food and Language, Intercultural Experience Through Visiting, Surviving, growing thicker skin and Effects of government policies and possible advice.*

There were THREE (3) codes at the beginning that were based on the perceptions of intercultural marriage couples among Malaysian women and African men in Sarawak which was to answer Research Question Two. They were *Perceptions, Spouse, in-laws, and extended families and Racism.*

There was only ONE (1) code at the beginning that was based on the participants coping with their intercultural differences in an intercultural marriage among Malaysian women and African men in Sarawak which was to answer the Research Question Three. It was *Overcoming the difficulties and accepting the differences.*

Coding Phase Two

After sorting all the different codes into prospective new codes based on the behaviours, feelings, and thoughts that were mentioned the most frequently by all participants, I used a coding reduction procedure in this phase. During this phase, a sequence of behaviours was also coded. Some codes were grouped and renamed into new codes, Certain codes were kept, while others were eliminated. Furthermore, some codes were merged, hence two different codes were more coherent as a single theme.

In brief, based on the raw transcript data, the process of analysing the similarities and differences of the codes for each sample assisted in identifying the right codes. The same procedure was followed throughout the sub-sample. Following that, a series of assertions that discriminated the data samples was written, rewritten, and constructed.

Table 1: Examples of Codes Reductions in the Coding Phase Two

No	Codes in the Coding Phase One	Codes Reductions in the Coding Phase Two
1	<i>Generic or Genuine Love, Cultural celebration, and Similarities, Differences and the difficulties in culture, Identity, Food and Language and Intercultural Experience Through Visiting</i>	Grouped and renamed into, <i>Cultural Differences and Similarities Adaptability</i>
2	<i>Perceptions</i>	Retained, and reworded into proper code, <i>Society's Perceptions.</i>
3	<i>Spouse, in-laws and extended families</i>	Collapsed into each other and combined into <i>Racism.</i>
4	<i>Racism</i>	Retained
5	<i>Overcoming the difficulties and accepting the differences</i>	Subsumed under broader categories, which is <i>Accommodating and Accepting the Differences</i>

Coding Phase Three - The Identification of the Themes

The data coded in the previous step resulted in a list of five codes, to answer three research questions. This step ended with a review and refinement of the codes that had been established during the process to form a theme. There were THREE of them at this point that

identified for Research Question One, TWO (2) themes were for Research Question Two and only ONE (1) Theme identified for Research Question Three. Table 2 below explains the new coding of the coding phase three that was constructed based on the previous six codings of the coding phase three. Please see table 2 for more details.

Table 2: Coding Phase Three

Previous Coding Phase Two	New Coding Phase Three
1 <i>Cultural Differences and Similarities Adaptability</i>	<i>Cultural Differences and Similarities</i>
2 <i>Society's Perceptions, Racism</i>	<i>Racism</i>
3 <i>Accommodating and Accepting the Differences</i>	<i>Accommodating and Accepting the Challenges</i>

The first theme, 'Cultural Differences and Similarities Adaptability' was changed into the more explicit theme in a sentence, Cultural Differences and Similarities. On the other hand, the second theme was refined to Racism, and the third theme, Accommodating and Accepting the Differences was refined to Accommodating and Accepting the Challenges.

Theme One - Cultural Differences and Similarities

Cross-cultural contacts are exemplified by intercultural marriage, which represents the similarities and differences of various cultures (Sun et al., 2021; Stillwell et al., 2020; Singla et al., 2020; Osuji, 2013; Jo-Pei et al., 2008). Cultural differences and similarities can be a different view as well as the similarities in attitudes, languages, foods, customs, and phrases that are considered special to members of a particular group, race, or ethnic origin (Sun et al., 2021; Osuji, 2013). Although these gaps and closeness in culture can help to build an intercultural marriage and make it livelier, however, it can also contribute to several other issues in an

intercultural marriage if not properly handled among the couple.

For instance, participant 'A' from Sarawak (female) shared that "Sweeping the floor, normally, Chinese culture prefers to sweep the house from front door to the back door, the meaning in Chinese culture is to retain and accept good lucks coming into the house. However, my husband often sweeps the house from the back door to the front door unrealising this, Haha... I have tried correcting him several times, but he still does it his way somehow. So, I was like whatever lah... If I want to sweep, I will sweep from the front door to the back door and if he wants to sweep, he is free to sweep whichever way pleasing to him, I believe since he is not Chinese the cultural belief will not be against him, so through this means, we understood each other and move on".

In another example to justify the cultural differences that existed between these couples, participant 'A' from African background (Male) shared that "in my culture, when you wake up early in the morning everyone greets each other or even when someone goes out and comes

back later at home whoever meets you or sees you coming back will greet you and welcome you back again to the house. This shows that a home is a sacred place where if you leave for somewhere even if it's for a short while, whenever you are coming back to the same house, anyone at home will have to welcome you back to the house with greetings which you are mandated to respond. It's like a good feeling that you are finally back to a safe place called 'home'. This is different from my wife culture and sometimes I felt like it's unacceptable, like my wife sibling, I will see her coming back from work and will greet her several times, but she would not reply or respond to my greetings, she will pretend she didn't hear me. This I see to be weird in my wife culture, but she already explained to me that it is normal in her culture, however, for me, it is abnormal but for purpose peace to reign in my family, I must ignore and accept their style Haha..."

Again, another sharing from participant 'B' from Sarawak (Female), goes like this "when we newly got married, my husband said, their culture as husband and wife is to eat from one designated plate and the plate is not just any plate but a special kind of plates and this was necessary as husband and wife. At first, he introduced this, it was fun we are eating together, at the same time and from the same plate. But then, at the same time, I started feeling like we are dragging food together as if the food was not enough Haha..., this made me feel a bit awkward like I started thinking what about if we suddenly have a visitor while we are eating like this? People might think we do not have enough food to share and that is why we were eating the little portion from one plate Haha... So, because of this feeling, I told my husband I cannot continue with this culture, and he understands my feelings and we stopped it".

On the other hand, the similarities in the cultural background of these two races were echoed in the following responses from the participants:

Participant 'B' from African(male), shared that about his cultural similarities with his wife: "Umm... many things are similar. Like they have harvest festival which they called 'Gawai' and in my culture, we also have the same harvest festival which we call 'Iriji' or 'Afiaru' and again in my culture when one is about to marry a new wife, she wakes up early in the morning to clean up everywhere and cooks for the husband or for the whole family members depending, they also do same here".

In another example on cultural similarities, participant 'B' from Sarawak(female), shared her cultural similarities as: "Umm... my husband is family-oriented, he cherished and believed in our family so much and this same attitude we as Bidayuh also cherished and believe in a family so much, so ya..., we have a similarity here Haha..."

Participant 'A' from African(male) also shared his cultural similarities with his wife especially on their cultural celebration as: "My wife main cultural celebration which is known as 'Chinese New Year' portrays same meaning with my celebration with my main cultural celebration, which is the new yam festival or harvest festival, these two festive portrays same meaning which is to unites family from far and near, it is a happy moment that everyone in the family enjoys it".

Theme Two – Racism

It must be fun to appreciate somebody who is not from your race, community, identity, religion, or something else. Hence, the couple is open to each other's points of view, seeing the world from a different angle and possibly connecting themselves from their differences. Regrettably, it is not so since discrimination persists deeply in our culture, and interracial couples still encounter racism. In an ideal world, love supposed not to know limits. However, some people might be judgmental towards an interracial couple, as such, interracial couples must face these challenges

together while fostering understanding and support for each other's experiences.

Being in an intercultural marriage does not mean there will not be any conflicts just like other marriages do have but couples in an intercultural marriage should be asserting their beliefs, values and other cultural differences as main causes of conflicts, although, there are ways to resolve these issues hence love still to exist among couples. Discussing the hurts openly with your spouse will help to reduce the awful feelings from hateful speeches or derogatory statements encountered outside from members of the public or even from family members.

Responses from these participants below reflected the underlying issues:

Participant 'C', from Sarawak (female), shared "There is this Iban radio station 'YFM' that ever make jokes on air concerning black people, that they are carrying 'drugs' using their local girlfriends or wives, and the person from the radio station said the Black men will first call the local people for love and after that, they will be using them to carry drugs. And this person generalised it like it is all black people doing this. So, they started making these jokes on air from their station, off course, all the Iban community that listens to this station will be hearing this and their mind will be twisted to black people and make them all look bad because of what he said on the radio about them. For me, I see it as been racism because you cannot because of one person's bad attitude, you condemn the entire black race. The name of the guy who commits this crime is 'Ricky Wangga' which the Iban people translated to 'Gigi Tangah' and some of the Iban people when they come to our shop, will start calling my husband 'Gigi Tangah' imagine a radio station instead of educating their local people on good things rather they are busy making them start hating black people, this is racism. 'Gigi Tangah' in the Iban language means like ladder steps. This

name is like a derogatory name given to Black men just to put them down and create more people to hate them. These people that make this joke if it were to be a Chinese man or a Malay man who commit this crime, can they do this type of joke for their people to hate the Chinese or the Malay men? The answer is 'no' but because it's black man, they people they don't like, that's why...".

In addition to the above, participant 'B' from Sarawak (Female) shared that "The government policies here systematically removed the position of a husband from the foreign spouse against the natural way of marriage which gives more power to the husband and allows them to work and take care of their families. In my case it is not the same, I do most things here because I am the only one working and the burden is too heavy on me, who do I blame this to... my husband who is not permitted to work or the government that restricted him? Can you see what I am saying here? All of these are done systematically through the government policies in the name of protecting us their citizen, but then they are killing us their citizen slowly and trying to force our marriage to break up because of harsh policies like this."

Again, a sharing from participant 'B' from African background (Male): "I ever picked up my daughter from school and she said to me "Papa, my friend said I am anak negro" Haha.. it was funny the way she asked the question and the look on her face, I wanted to explain to her but been a child in her age might not fully understand what racism all is about. So, I just tell her to ignore it, but she still can feel that there is something wrong with such statements if not why would she be asking me about it with such a look on her face. Another one on a different occasion she said to me that "my friend from the school said my hair has expired because my hair is curly and does not look like their hair, so they said it had expired" Haha... All these bothers her and that is why you see her complained about it to me each day it happens."

In another sharing on the theme of racism by participant 'B' when she was sharing on her experience visiting her spouse home country: "My overall experience was awesome I must say, far higher than my perceived expectations. Before we embark on the journey, I always think I am going to the jungle with mud houses and probably a desert-like they are being portrayed on the television all over the world. In short, media houses everywhere in the world are evil, I don't know why the entire world hates them to the extent of portraying them as bad as anyone can imagine. I was disappointed that I did not see anything like what I normally watch on the news or documentary, all I saw was modern houses even with American and European latest model houses everywhere even till the rural area, I mean their kampung 'villages' no wild animals are roaming around anywhere as to what we keep seeing on the news. The people were respectful to each other, rich in culture and have respect for elderly people, their food was tasty, nice and I get to try another new menu that my husband never cooked before which they called 'Nkwobi' made from cow tail and legs. I eat this menu every day throughout my stay because of how tasty the dish was, for about a month or thereabout Haha..."

In support of the visiting experiences, participant 'C' from Sarawak (female) also shared that: "The first thing that always comes to my mind is the common people in my husband's country home, the community, how respectful they are to each other, and visitors like me. They are too friendly and it's like everyone I see have these humorous behaviours. Like I said earlier, my country is far from treating people like this, seeing them makes me understand that Malaysians are not friendly at all even though they always claim it. They are not when you compare the level of respect and friendliness with that of my husband which is the Igbo tribe from Nigeria. Everyone talks freely, everyone is so polite, and they are all open-minded and it's as if everyone is a

comedian because they all can make each other laugh easily".

Theme Three – Accommodating and Accepting the Challenges

In every marriage, it is vital to become close with your partner and share your weaknesses. This is particularly true for interracial couples, as one partner might have had to deal with difficulties that the other has not. An intercultural marriage doesn't need to fail as a typical result of the racial differences and difficulties but the inability of an intermarried couple to handle some of these differences and reluctance to speak about the pressures on one or both may cause an interracial marriage to fall apart. It may be beneficial to refrain from assuming that love, and only love, can overcome all issues in an intercultural marriage, this might not be all true, every married couple must learn and practise good interpersonal skills to deal with challenging situations sensibly.

Let me have some views of the participants and what most of them have said about this. Participant 'B' from Sarawak (female) shared about her been married to her spouse for 13 years despite all challenges while she was the only one who is legally working in these 13 years of her marriage. Her views on this were:

"Understanding each other, I realized both of us was adapting to our difficulties and accepting each other and willing to choose the most easily and preferable pattern to approach each cultural difficulty we had".

On the other hand, participant 'B' from African background (male), also shared that: "I live here in my wife country and everyone around here does the same thing, so I just have to adjust myself to their culture because I cannot change it but I can change myself on how I see it and gradually adapt to it and another thing is through tolerance and understanding with my wife, I try to understand her and to do that which makes her happy even if I do

not like it but for peace sake in my family, I have to do it”.

Somehow, in the same way, participant ‘A’ from Sarawak (female), also shared how she overcome challenges in her marriage for seven (7) years as: “At first in our earlier marriage, some of these things were causing us problems but then we always talk about it and will understand each other as from a different background, so we slowly keep adapting and tolerating

each other on these things till date. Basically, It’s like our rules are when anyone is doing house chores or something, you are free to do it your way and if I am the person doing it, I will do it my way Haha... so, no need to quarrel about it. But when it comes to eating manners with chopsticks, hmm... that one we really cannot accept it as Chinese, but my husband already learned it and never do it again, Haha...”.

Table 3 summarise the codes constructed during the four phases of the coding process.

Table 3: Coding Phase One, Two, and Three

No.	Coding Phase One	Coding Phase Two	Coding Phase Three
1.	<i>Generic or genuine love</i>	1. <i>Cultural Differences and Similarities Adaptability</i>	1. <i>Cultural Differences and Similarities</i>
2.	<i>Cultural celebration and similarities</i>	2. <i>Society’s Perceptions, Racism</i>	2. <i>Racism</i>
3.	<i>Differences and the difficulties in culture</i>	3. <i>Accommodating and Accepting the Differences</i>	3. <i>Accommodating and Accepting the Challenges.</i>
4.	<i>Identity, food, and language</i>		
5.	<i>Intercultural experience through visiting</i>		
6.	<i>Surviving</i>		
7.	<i>Growing thicker skin</i>		
8.	<i>Effects of government policies</i>		
9.	<i>Perceptions</i>		
10.	<i>Spouse in-laws and extended families</i>		
11.	<i>Racism</i>		
12.	<i>Overcoming the difficulties and accepting the differences</i>		

DISCUSSION

This study examines the intercultural marriage experiences among Malaysian

women and African men, as well as their perceptions of intercultural marriage and coping mechanisms on their intercultural differences. In other words, this thesis will

discuss in detail the past, present and possible future experiences among these interculturally married people and their perceptions towards their marriages and how they were able to accept their challenges. The major participants in this study are mainly from two backgrounds of race, namely, the Sarawakian found in the eastern part of Malaysia and African. The results from this study are like that of earlier researchers in the western world and Asia, who looked at how intercultural marriages between Black, White, and Asian couples were viewed through the outward show of negative perceptions in the form of implicit bias and have been seen in world over as a turn-off or a source of disgust to the societies (Chuang et al., 2020; Skinner & Rae, 2018; Skinner et al., 2017; Osuji, 2013; Jo-Pei et al., 2008; Spickard, 1989 p.7).

Again, the results of this study have lent support to a macro-sociological theory of social structure which stresses the needs of people who are socially and culturally connected (Blau 1977). As such, the size of a group in a society is an important aspect of its social structure. This theory, "macro-sociological theory of social structure", founded on the classic idea of 'Simmel' the structuralist is the lenses to this current study. On the other hand, is the range of social or cultural inequalities to which they are associated. Like, how closely a distinctive race is in terms of cultural and social structure can get them on to likely be in romantic relationships or cohabitate as one family not minding their differences. Moreover, according to Fu et al. (2000), similarities in cultural background and cultural values or belief systems will certainly attract such distinctive individuals to enter an intercultural marriage with each other. The study disclosed that these participants who engage in intercultural marriages had many things in common like their demographic data in terms of age, religion, academic attainments shows and more in terms of cultural celebrations and similarities.

The result of this thematic analysis revealed the potential worth of the experience and perception put together with the coping mechanism in cultural differences and difficulties of an intercultural marriage that exist among Malaysian women and African men. In general, the themes pinpointed the area to which experiences and perceptions of interculturally married couples among Malaysian women and African men can be explored and possibly highlighting the coping mechanism to which intercultural difficulties were accepted among the said couples.

Research question one(1) was concerned with the experience of intercultural marriage couples among Malaysian women and African Men in Sarawak. The findings indicated the potentials of cultural differences of the interculturally married couples as well as the cultural similarities that existed among them. Let's first have a look at what brings them together which are the similarities in culture as indicated by the macro-sociological theory of social structure.

The findings indicated that the cultural celebrations of these couples have some things in common like the 'Gawai' in Sarawak and 'Iriji or Afiaroru' in Igbo tribe from Nigeria, both of these celebrations were described to be the same as yearly harvest festivals and the methods to which the celebrations are carried out are also described to be same as it involves rituals and spiritual enchantments to the gods who the people believed to permit the chief priest to usher in the festive season.

Based on the previous scholars, a good example of a cross-culture can easily be seen or noticed among interculturally married people (Sun et al., 2021; Stillwell et al., 2020; Singla et al., 2020; Osuji, 2013; Jo-Pei et al., 2008). In another example, 'Chinese New Year' celebration was also said to give the same meaning as the 'New yam festival' performed in the same eastern part of Nigeria or even Christmas celebration as the value was

attributed to the celebration that unites the family from far and near as well as being a happy season where there will be an exchange of gifts among family members. Normally, everyone in the family enjoys this common celebration.

The similarity in cultural celebrations continues, however, other similarities which might have easily made this intercultural marriage possible was, couples were found to have similarities in their demographical data like their age was seen to be in peer-group and religion background was also seen to be tallied among these couples and their educational attainment level was another thing that is very similar among these intercultural couples.

In contrast, the differences were seen as the difficulties among couples which most of the couple admitted having been causing them problems at the initial stages of their marriage. This was carefully managed based on dialogue and openness among couples. Somehow, love must have been the only ingredient that would have giving room for dialoguing about their differences and being open to each other while trusting and believing in themselves as the only people who can settle their differences as they knew they were coming from a different background.

The findings also indicated Racism as the key theme to checkmate **research question 2** which concerned with perceptions of intercultural marriage couples among Malaysian women and African men in Sarawak. It was obvious that the perception of Malaysian women who married an African man is mostly on the negative side as participants shared their ordeal after their marriage to African.

These often come from three (3) different dimensions like (a) Systematically racial discrimination through some government policies and (b) through media houses while (c) from individuals or groups of

people relating to the spouse families or members of the populace.

(A) The systematic racial discrimination of foreign spouse was stronger when it is a male foreign spouse than a female foreign spouse as some of the local female spouses honestly agreed that their government was in an ideal sense trying to protect them against some foreign male spouse who might not be genuine in their action in getting married to the local women. This might be because of many things that might have gone wrong in the past among intercultural married couples in other countries like the western world (Adler et al., 2020; Lewandowski et al., 2001; Osuji, 2013). Hence, the government might be curious and taking proper measures to checkmate such and to prevent the occurrence of such things in Malaysia.

However, Female participants who are Malaysian citizens described their government policies to the foreign spouse as harsh and systematically stripped off power in the family which was naturally given to man by God in every marriage. These policies range from the kind of visa that is made available to the foreign spouse which the participants said was boldly written that they the spouse are not expected to engage themselves in any legal employments and to some who admitted that after much persuasions to the immigration department about changing their visa to something that might allow them to work and stay with their family, the immigration body then decides to give them another visa which allows them to work but only on one selected company or their self-owned business. So, meaning to say options to choose jobs or engage in different activities that might lead to the spouse making a double income was systematically removed. The consequences of this said working visa also lingered to the company where these foreign male spouses were attached, as their company bosses were made to understand the conditions to which they were allowed to work only in such companies. As a result

of this, participants shared that their bosses now overuse them while paying them less of their imputes to the company knowing too well that these foreign male spouses have no option and cannot easily leave the company as their visa to stay with their families who were Malaysians was attached to the said companies.

However, according to the Malaysian immigration portal, a residence pass which is also known as permanent residence (PR), is issuable to any foreign national who falls into different categories as stated and specified under Regulation 16A immigration regulation 1963. Among these categories were a foreigner who is married to a Malaysian citizen with family and have stayed together for five (5) years is eligible to get a residence pass or permanent residence (PR) while a citizenship application is not available for a male foreign spouse, however, it is made available to only a female foreign spouse. Although, this might slightly be different from East Malaysia Sarawak as the government from this region operates a different immigration policy.

The two male African participants whose marriage have lasted between 7 and 13 years respectively shared that they have been long applied for permanent residence (PR) since after they attain 5 years in their marriage. They also admitted having undergone series of interviews from different bodies as well as police screening against crime since day one of their arrivals into the country. Frustratingly, they are still waiting for the approval of the application for over 8 and 2 years respectively since after their application.

(B) Racism through media houses as shared by participants who are directly subjected to abuses and discriminated by the members of their in-laws and friends who were locals and even customers too. Findings from this dissertation indicated that the role of some media houses grossly contributed to the damages caused to African in Malaysia as most of these media houses are described to directly or

indirectly uses words that are derogatorily in nature to portray Africans and generalised them as been bad people and sometimes references are made to the colour of their skin to put them down to even showing only the negative area of their countries and portrayed it as uncivilized, place where hunger and disease are killing and ravaging people. Participants expressed their emotions and the harm that racist acts from media houses had caused them. They claimed that this made them feel dehumanised and mistreated as if they are second-class humans made by God and that this is how they felt each time they come across these on television, radio, or in the newspaper whereas, it was not so.

Correspondingly, these findings directly supported the previous research conducted here in Malaysia according to Alexandra (2017), the role of negative media portrayals of Africans in Malaysia has resulted in the entire African race being subjected to prejudice and racially discrimination by locals who live in rural areas and rely heavily on the media for information. In other words, Malaysian media houses are one of the most significant sources of racial discrimination against Africans in Malaysia, whether through systematic or direct means.

(C) Racism through individuals or as a group of individuals. Miscegenation who are products of multicultural marriage were not left out in the phase of these racisms as many of them often comes back home from schools and even from worship places complaining about bullies and abuses from their school mate, classmates, peer groups or even friends and age mates who call them all sorts of derogatory names like 'Anak Negro' or 'Anak Tambi' (a child of a black slave or a child of a black Indian). Some of them also complained about their hair as it is often referring to as expired hair because it looks tangled and curly different from typical Malaysian straight hairs. All of these has direct or indirect effects on the

personalities of this miscegenation and it can damage their self-concepts and as well self-confidence if not carefully managed.

Moreover, this type of racism has also been described to be present in adults as most adult individuals or even group of individuals normally see mixed married couples of Malaysia and African as not compatible and most times reference will be made to the women who is a Malaysian as one who because of the size of the manhood and went into the marriage with an African man. Sometimes, it is laughable as to why would some people come up with such a derogatory idea just to hurt the feelings of others. Most participants also shared that enduring all of these for a long time has made them sensitive and easily flare up on any little issues that happen now around them because of accumulated grievances from all kinds of racism they have experienced since after their marriages. They likewise said it makes them have less confidence in anything that concerns Malaysia like the government or the people as they believed that their interest as a multicultural married couple will not be properly represented.

Research question 3 is concerned with how do multicultural marriage couples able to cope with their intercultural differences among Malaysian women and African men in Sarawak? The theme representing the findings to answer this research question is: Accommodating and accepting the challenges.

Partner's understanding their norms and values, habits, and worldviews will help interculturally married couples to have a relationship that is built on a good rapport (Sias et al., 2018; Romano, 1997). Intercultural relationships are known with differences among the partners which appears through their belief system, attitudes, values, and communication styles (MarshaWinggins, 2004; Sias et al., 2018). An intercultural married couple who understand that they are coming from different cultural backgrounds is quick to

learn from each other's cultural differences (Romano, 1997). Hence, their differences continue to surface and causing them problems, a quicker approach must be followed to manage their challenges emanating from the differences.

Previous research has suggested many ways to dealing with cultural differences in an intercultural marriage. Under certain conditions, one spouse needs to submit to the other's cultural traditions and relinquishes his or her view, whereas, in some couples, each partner compromises by giving up some element of their culture to maintain peace and reduce conflicts. However, according to some scholars, a complete denial of differences, is the best way of coping with cultural diversity in an intercultural marriage (Sias et al., 2018; MarshaWinggins, 2004; Romano, 1997). In the quest for neutral ground, couples might simply give up their views and relinquished their beliefs. Others seek consensus to achieve a win-win situation. This style emphasises mutuality and versatility, but each partner maintains the aspects of his or her culture that are essential to their well-being.

In the current research, the situation on how intercultural marriage couples among Malaysian women and African men are not different. Findings indicated that most participants engaged in constant dialoguing with each other around their cultural differences and difficulties. This they said has played the most vital roles since ever they have been in their marriage. Many of them admitted having been in love with their partners which makes it possible to be willing to compromise and give up their views on certain issues challenging their marriages.

While some also shared that tolerance among one another, was another vital behaviour that has helped these couples as most participants admit having relinquished their views on certain issues to embrace their spouse views to allow peace to reign in their homes. Mostly, the

African male spouses are found to be the ones who are most tolerant and willing to adopt and adapt to the views of their Malaysian spouses. The reason might not be farfetched, perhaps, because of their conditional marriage visa and other issues surrounding it and their working condition for those who were permitted to work. Although, their compromises were willingly accepted on the basis that they want peace in their marriages.

Findings also revealed that having an effective communication skills was another strength that helped couples to navigate in the line of their differences. This includes the use of gestures and demonstrations, to some, their humour attitudes during communicating plays a vital role and these were mostly found to be present in the African spouses.

Again, all these findings are no different from four (4) means of conflict resolution proposed among interculturally married people which are consensus, compromising, elimination and submission (Romano, 1997). These might not be specific, but these suggested styles for coping with marital disputes are worth considering for intercultural couples.

Study Implications

Countries considered to be developed countries around the globe today accommodated and integrated people from various backgrounds. Therefore, for Malaysia to be great, recognised and possibly join developed countries in the nearest future, her government must not shy away from these simple truths to accommodate people from diverse backgrounds.

In an intercultural marriage between Malaysians and people from all over the world, peaceful coexistence is encouraged. This will improve Malaysia's foreign relations with the rest of the globe. On the other hand, if intercultural marriages are not encouraged and properly managed, it may be disastrous to Malaysia as a country in the nearest future in terms of conflicts

that will be arising from interculturally married people as well as miscegenation.

In addition, couples who are already existing as intercultural marriage couples in Malaysia or to those willing to be interculturally married in the nearest future should never relent or give up on their dreams. Problems are meant to arise from all angles as a matter of your differences, however, always remember that there are also strengths that come from your diversity as interculturally married couples.

Recommendation

In light of some of my limitations in this study, I propose that future research be conducted in similar areas, such as investigating the major causes of intercultural marriages among these targeted groups, particularly from the perspectives of widows and widowers, divorced, and, most importantly, from the perspectives of Malay race members who did not participate in this study due to one reason or the other.

Again, it could be interesting to suggest that further research be performed to investigate the impact and impacts of 'Marital sex' among these targeted groups. This could aid in the discovery of additional essential information about the intercultural marriages that exist in Sarawak between Malaysian women and African men.

Limitation of the study

This research work has some limitations. The first limitation is unwillingness from the government body responsible for issues concerning marriages (Jabatan Pendaftaran Negara) to release official data of Sarawakian who are interculturally married to Africans and data related to divorced rates among this targeted group in Sarawak. This would have enabled me to come up with an accurate figure of these couples available here in Sarawak and possibly been able to tell at what rate if any, or, either high or low in the divorce rate of this targeted

group. And the second limitation of this study is as regards the participant from a particular ethnic that vehemently refused to partake in this study to give their intercultural marriage view from the perspective of that ethnicity that they represent. No matter how many times I tried to convince any of them to participate in this study, they all refused and thereby making it difficult to explore their experience from the perspective of their ethnicity.

The third limitations are the time frame, as this study was conducted within a stipulated period of about three (3) to four (4) months. This created many hassles and lots of sleepless nights because the researcher trying to incorporate all components of this study to make it a perfect system. Finally, the fourth limitation of this study is from the interviewing question as there has not been any previous research conducted on these targeted groups, therefore it is a bit difficult to understand what their challenges might be to develop accurate interview questions that might straight access their experience and perceptions. Therefore, all the semi-structural interview was formulated single-handedly from beginning to the end.

Conclusion

There is already a constant increase in intercultural marriages across the globe because of enormous changes in various aspects around the globe, such as tremendous innovation in technologies over media equipment, transportations, political and economic reforms (Sun et al., 2021; Foley, 2020; Al-Dawood et al., 2017). The fact is, the world is now considered to be a global village in the phase of the rapid and constant expansion in the number of sophisticated technologies around the globe. As such, people from different diversities are constantly going to be meeting up and thereby causing the intercultural marriage to be happening.

Malaysia as a country is not exceptional in this whole scenario. Hence, her government should be prepared to accommodate people from different diversities all over the world. As a matter of facts, there is strength in diversities (Lawless et al., 2020; Bardhan, 2020; 2011; Deshpande et al., 2010; Janssens et al., 2005). Countries that are deemed advanced nowadays have all welcomed and blended individuals from various nationalities all around the world. To be great, recognised, and maybe join advanced nations in the nearest future, Malaysia's government must not shy away from these fundamental truths to accept individuals from various origins. Furthermore, a harmonious coexistence is admonished in an intercultural marriage among Malaysian and other diverse backgrounds all over the world. This will strengthen the international relation between Malaysia and the rest of the world. On the other hand, it might be detrimental for Malaysia as a country in the nearest future if intercultural marriages are not positively encouraged.

In addition, couples who are already married in an intercultural marriage in Malaysia or who wish to marry in an intercultural marriage in the nearest future should never lose up on their goals. As an interculturally married couple, problems are bound to surface from all sides as a result of your differences; yet, never forget that your uniqueness also brings you strengths.

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