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LEARNING MALAY FOOD & TABLE MANNERS THROUGH SIMULATION: SPICING UP THE TRADITIONAL TEACHING METHOD

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Abstract

The traditional way of teaching Malay food and table manners through only lecture classes restricts students' from truly appreciating the uniqueness of the Malays' eating culture, especially for non-natives. Thus, this innovation study was conducted to describe Malaysian health sciences students' experiences while participating in the simulation activity, as well as to learn about its usefulness in increasing student learning experiences. Following a classroom lecture on the topic of Malay Cuisine, a kenduri (feast) simulation involving ten traditional Malay table manners was conducted as part of in-class activity. An online survey was used to obtain feedback from 90 undergraduate students (Nutrition, n = 43, Dietetics, n = 19 and Optometry, n = 28), who enrolled in the course Multiethnic Cuisine & Etiquette as elective credits. Overall, students responded very positively to this learning activity. The results demonstrate that through peer-to-peer learning, this in-class simulation has enabled the majority of students to increase their knowledge (95.56%), understanding (97.78%), and interest (92.22%) in Malay food and table manners. This learning method has made both Malay (n = 56, 62%) and non-Malay (n = 34, 38%) students more appreciative of Malay culture. The findings show that in-class simulation is a useful and effective method for learning about Malay food and table manners resulting in a better learning experience.

Keywords: Experiential learning; Malay culture; Simulation; Table manners

Abstrak

Cara tradisional mengajar tentang makanan dan adab makan orang Melayu melalui penyampaian kuliah sahaja menyekat pelajar daripada benar-benar menghayati keunikan budaya makan orang Melayu khususnya bagi pelajar bukan Melayu. Justeru, kajian inovasi

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ini dijalankan untuk meghuraikan pengalaman pelajar jurusan sains kesihatan di Malaysia ketika menyertai aktiviti simulasi, serta mengetahui kegunaannya dalam meningkatkan pengalaman pembelajaran pelajar. Selepas kuliah mengenai topik Masakan Melayu diberikan di dalam kelas, sebuah simulasi kenduri yang melibatkan sepuluh adab makan tradisional orang Melayu telah dijalankan sebagai sebahagian daripada aktiviti dalam kelas. Tinjauan dalam talian telah digunakan untuk mendapatkan maklum balas daripada 90 pelajar peringkat sarjana muda (Pemakanan, n = 43, Dietetik, n = 19 dan Optometri, n = 28), yang mendaftar dalam kursus Masakan & Etiket Multietnik sebagai kredit elektif. Secara keseluruhannya, pelajar memberi respon yang sangat positif terhadap aktiviti pembelajaran ini. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa melalui pembelajaran rakan sebaya, simulasi dalam kelas ini telah membolehkan majoriti pelajar meningkatkan pengetahuan (95.56%), pemahaman (97.78%), dan minat (92.22%) terhadap makanan dan adab makan orang Melayu. Kaedah pembelajaran ini telah menjadikan kedua-dua pelajar Melayu (n = 56, 62%) dan bukan Melayu (n = 34, 38%) lebih menghargai budaya Melayu. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa simulasi dalam kelas adalah kaedah yang berguna dan berkesan untuk mempelajari tentang makanan dan adab makan orang Melayu yang menghasilkan pengalaman pembelajaran yang lebih baik.
Kata kunci: Pembelajaran berasaskan pengalaman; Budaya Melayu; Simulasi; Adab makan

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Simulation is a kind of experiential learning that adheres to student-centered and constructivist learning and teaching concepts. Simulations are instructional scenarios created by the instructors with the aim to provide students with an experience that is as near to the ‘real thing’ as possible. Simulations allow students to learn by doing rather than watching a demonstration or listening to a lecture. It is intended to stimulate students' deep learning process rather than normal surface learning (Phillips & Graeff, 2014) and has been recommended as a teaching approach to challenge students' misconceptions (McClintock, 2000). Simulation approach is also applicable in many disciplines for teaching the cultural component with reported benefits (Novieastari et al., 2012; De Jong & Warmelink, 2017; Kiourt et al., 2017).

In preparation of becoming a culturally competent practitioners, cultural awareness is promoted among health sciences students to ensure cultural competency. Specifically for nutrition and dietetics professionals, it is crucial to understand how food plays a role in their clients' culture, beyond just the type of food and the amount that they consume. It is because one of the most important factors influencing their diets is their ethnic and cultural background.

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Incorporating cultural differences has been demonstrated to result in more effective nutrition or dietary advice (Burrowes, 2004).

Food and culture-related courses have begun to be incorporated into nutrition and dietetics curricula, recognising the need of developing future professionals who are knowledgeable about eating patterns and dietary behaviours across cultures and ethnic groups. The course Multiethnic Cuisine & Etiquette was introduced at our institution with the aim to teach students how cultural aspects of various ethnic groups influence food habits and choices. Malay Cuisine is one of the topics covered in this course as Malay is the dominant ethnic group in Malaysia.

Malays typically are Muslims who speak the Malay language and follow the Malay culture's traditions (Federation of Malaya Constitutional Commission, 1957). The Malay culture is rich and unique. The Malays have their own cuisine and eating customs when it comes to food. However, modernity has led some aspects of the culture not practiced anymore including traditional Malay table manners. The conventional way of teaching Malay food and table manners through lectures only has several drawbacks. In lectures, students are often more passive as they are focusing more on the presentation or busy taking additional notes. During lecture class, Malay students, who are native to this culture may face boredom and pay less attention believing they are knowledgeable about it while the non-Malays might find it less enticing knowing simply the facts without experiencing it.

A traditional Malay *kenduri* (feast) is one of the best occasion settings to see how a traditional Malay table manners being practiced. However, the traditional style of holding a *kenduri* is hard to find nowadays, except for those living in *kampung* (traditional village). While it is challenging to get students to experience the fusion of Malay food and traditional table manners, it is considerably more difficult, if not impossible, to bring a large number of students to do so. For that reason, simulation has an advantage of bringing in the 'situation' without having to bring the students out. This diminishes the impossibility of bringing a large group of students to experience the culture outside classroom.

Hence, this in-class simulation was designed and executed as a teaching innovation study with the aim to improve students' learning experiences on this topic. Data collection was conducted to fulfill the objectives of describing the students' experience while participating in this simulation activity, and to learn about the usefulness of the in-class simulation method for

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learning Malay food and table manners.

2.0 MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1 Participants

A total of 90 health sciences students (Malay, n = 56, non-Malay, n = 34) from 3 undergraduate programmes (Nutrition (Year 3), n = 43, Dietetics (Year 2), n = 19 and Optometry (Year 1), n = 28), who enrolled in the course Multiethnic Cuisine & Etiquette (semester 1, academic session 2019/2020) participated in this study. This elective course is mainly for nutrition and dietetics undergraduates, but occasionally taken by students from other programmes. The in-class simulation took place right after the delivery of the lecture topic, Malay Cuisine. Students have been informed earlier regarding this activity and few students were selected as volunteers in preparation for the activity. Students were randomly divided into 10 groups with 9 students per group and the instructor made sure that each group had a good mixture between the Malays and non-Malays.

2.2 Simulation Design

The afternoon *kenduri doa selamat* (thanksgiving feast) was chosen as the setting for the simulation activity hence a simple afternoon tea snack was planned. Some other utensils and equipment were used and prepared for each group for the simulation include *saprah* (square piece of clothes laid on the floor where food is served), small bowls for handwashing, jugs, food tongs and disposable plates and cups. All the non-disposable utensils for the activity and ingredients needed in preparing the drink were obtained from the nutrition and dietetics cooking laboratory.

2.3 The Menu

Two types of Malay *kuih* were ordered by the instructor from an outside caterer, *kuih ketayap* (sweet-type) and *kuih karipap* (savoury-type) with the cost of RM0.50 each. *Kuih* is referred to bite-sized delicacies ranging from sweets to savoury snacks (Kamaruzaman et al. 2020). *Kuih ketayap* is a pandan (screwpine leaves) flavoured rolled crepe filled with grated coconut and palm sugar (Figure 1). It is sweet and aromatic. *Kuih karipap* is a savoury-type *kuih* also known as curry puff (Figure 2). It is a small deep-fried pie with curry filling (usually potatoes). Traditionally, *kuih* is prepared to be consumed outside mealtime for special occasions. In the modern days, *kuih* can be enjoyed at any time of the day, more commonly as a breakfast, morning or afternoon snack, or as dessert (Raji et al., 2017). As for the drink, the popular Malay hot drink, *Teh O* (sweetened hot tea) was prepared by the student volunteers prior to

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the start of the simulation activity at the cooking laboratory.

Figure 1: *Kuih karipap*

Figure 2: *Kuih ketayap*

2.4 Instructions

After all of the students had gathered in their respective groups, two representatives from each

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group were asked to bring food and drink, as well as other utensils and equipment, to their respective groups. Before the simulation began, the instructor briefed the students on the following Malay table manners (Figure 3): 1) Laying off *saprah* on the floor where food and drink are served on it; 2) Manner of seating on the floor; men should criss cross their feet in front of them – *bersila*, while women should fold both their feet on one side – *bersimpuh* (normally on their right side); 3) Serving the food in the plate; 4) Wash hands before and after meals; 5) Reciting the prayer – *doa makan* before meals; 6) Invite the more senior ones to start eating first and prioritise them to help himself/herself first to show respect; 7) Use the right hand to eat, take and pass food to others; 8) Eat slowly and avoid chewing food loudly; 9) Manner of drinking; sip hot drink slowly and do not blow into the cup; 10) Clean and tidy up the eating area after meal (normally by the women). The non-Malay students were encouraged to imitate their Malay peers in the group during the simulation. Students were also encouraged to ask questions and share their own experiences.

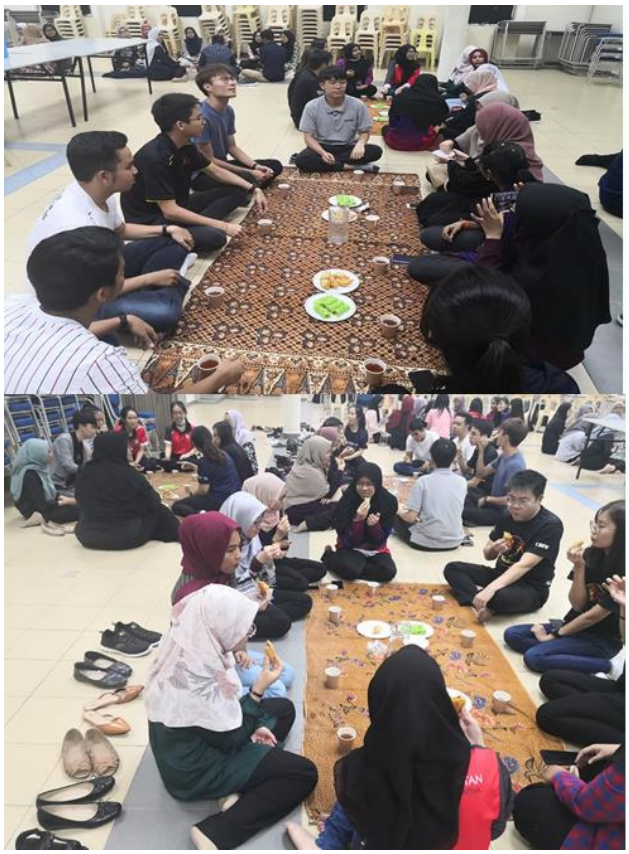

Figure 3: *Students undergoing the Malay food and table manners simulation. The kuih and hot drink are served in plates and laid on saprah. Men and women are eating while sitting on the floor in the bersila and bersimpuh positions respectively.*

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2.5 Survey

In order to learn about the students' experience and the usefulness of this simulation activity, an online survey form was administered to them after the simulation. The survey consisted of 16 statements related to their experience taking part in this simulation for learning Malay table manners to be rated on a five-point scale (1- strongly disagree, 2- disagree, 3- neutral, 4- agree, 5- strongly agree). The statements surveyed are characterised and grouped into five clusters – Knowledge Acquisition (KA), Peer-to-peer Learning (PL), Participation Experience (PE), Emotion (E) and Culture Appreciation (CA). Only for the Culture Appreciation cluster, the statements were constructed slightly differently in the use of the words 'my own culture' and 'other culture' to specifically differentiate the responses from the Malay and non-Malay students respectively. Additionally, students were given the opportunity to provide personal feedback on the activity.

3.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 The Average Cluster Score

The average scores of students' responses based on the five clusters surveyed are shown in Figure 4. Overall, students responded very positively to this learning activity. Emotion cluster obtained the highest average score of 4.56, followed by Peer-to-peer learning (4.43), Knowledge Acquisition (4.41), Culture Appreciation (4.41), while Participation Experience cluster has the lowest average score of 4.40. Overall, all clusters have relatively high scores (4-Agree and 5-Strongly Agree) with none of the clusters scored below the average of four. These positive results suggest a beneficial use of in-class simulation for learning Malay food and table manners.

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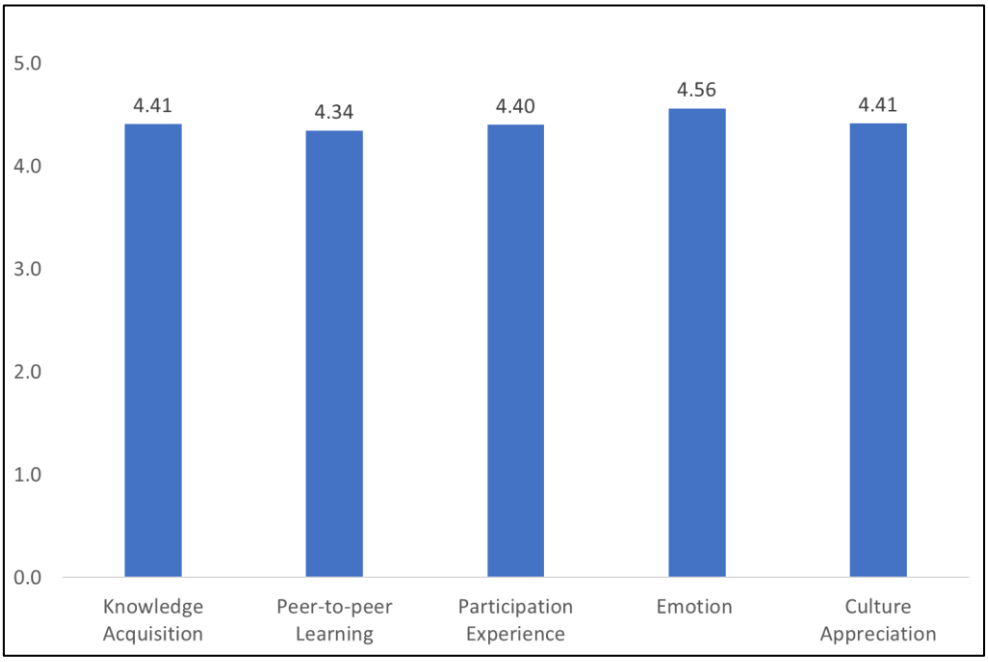

Figure 4: Average cluster score of students' responses (n=90)

3.2 Detail Score of Each Cluster

As presented in Table 1, for Knowledge Acquisition cluster, most students agreed and strongly agreed that the simulation activity has allowed them to be more knowledgeable (KA1) (Malays, 96.43%; non-Malays, 94.12%) on subject matter. Interestingly, all non-Malay students (100.00%) are agreeable to the statement that this activity has increased their understanding about Malay food and its table manners (KA2). For item KA3, while majority of students (Malays, 80.36%; non-Malays, 76.47%) agreed and strongly agreed that their misconceptions about Malay food and table manners were corrected by undergoing this simulation, around 20% of students, Malays and non-Malays alike were neutral on this. Defined as inaccurate or wrong belief, a misconception is frequently the result of incorrect thinking or flawed understanding on something. Misconceptions are not unusual, particularly in the context of culture, an individual is more likely to have one if he or she has never been in the situation, is not a part of the culture, or is not completely exercising the culture. It is possible that this small subset of students had been exposed to or being very familiar with all the Malay table manners simulated in this study, thus they found nothing that is inconsistent with what they had been told or experienced previously. Nonetheless, the result shows that many students are agreeable on the benefit of the simulation activity and highlights the role of familiarity in correcting inaccurate information and misconceptions (Swire et al. 2017).

Table manners vary greatly across cultures, including what to eat, how to eat, when to

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eat, and where to eat (Zhang 2013) and peer-to-peer learning was enabled during simulation to aid learning. This was manifested by the survey results for Peer-to-peer Learning cluster in which majority of the students of both groups agreed and strongly agreed that they were able to execute peer sharing (PL1) (>92%), asking questions without hesitation (PL2) (>82%), and imitate one another during the simulation (PL3) (>85%). In addition to guidance from instructors, incorporation of peer-to-peer learning has many advantages to enhance learning process. Peer-to-peer learning is a 'two-way reciprocal learning activity' that benefits both the student who teaches and the student being taught (Boud 2001). It has the potential to enhance students' attitudes toward learning, keep them engaged and provide a more individualised learning experience. In order to offer students with the greatest possible learning experience, this technique has been proposed in higher education settings (Zhang & Bayley, 2019).

All items in Participation Experience cluster have 97-100% of Malay and non-Malay students rated 4 and 5 on all the surveyed statements. This implies that the simulation activity successfully imposed a positive learning experience by permitting the students to experience the Malay food and table manners for themselves (PE1), allowing them to continue practicing on certain unique table manners (PE2) that require skill for example, sitting in the *bersila* or *bersimpuh* positions for the men and women respectively that could be quite challenging to do, leading to increased interest in the simulated subject matter (PE3). Simulation is a good approach to experiential learning. Students get a better understanding of a topic when they participate in experiential learning opportunities. Experiential learning is defined as a process in which the student acquires new information and transforms it through an experience (Kolb & Kolb 2005). It is a method of active learning in which students "learn by doing" and reflect on their experiences. Experiential learning has been used in higher education in a variety of disciplines and has been shown to improve students' knowledge of subject matter when compared to students who only attended standard lecture classes (Hakeem 2001). Consistent with our results, experiential learning activities were reported to well-liked by students and have been demonstrated to improve academic performance (Leal-Rodriguez & Albort-Morant, 2019; Rosier et al., 2016).

As depicted by the results from Emotion cluster, learning about Malay food and table manners through simulation is well liked by 92.86% of the Malay students. The enjoyment of participating in this activity was manifested by students from both groups (E1). While only third fourth of non-Malay students (76.47%) reported totally liking this activity as part of learning, all of them (100%) really enjoyed taking part in this simulation (E2). The majority of students also

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indicated that participating in the simulation was a meaningful and valuable learning experience (E3) and that they would suggest this activity to others (E4) (Malays, 96.43%; non-Malays, 94.12%).

Furthermore, most students acknowledged that the simulation offers a cultural appreciation value. Results from the Cluster Appreciation cluster showed that by participating in this simulation, they had learned something new about the Malay culture (CA1) (Malays, 87.50%; non-Malays, 97.06%) and it has taught them more about the culture (CA2). Interestingly, 100% of students from the Malay and non-Malay groups completely agreed that this activity has increased their appreciation of the Malay culture (CA3).

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Table 1: Detail response analysis for each item of each cluster

Cluster	Item Code	Survey Statements	Malay (n = 56)			Non-Malay (n = 34)		
			Total item responses of scores 1 (strongly disagree) and 2 (disagree)	Total item responses of score 3 (neutral)	Total item responses of scores 4 (agree) and 5 (strongly agree)	Total item responses of scores 1 (strongly disagree) and 2 (disagree)	Total item responses of score 3 (neutral)	Total item responses of scores 4 (agree) and 5 (strongly agree)
			N (%)			N (%)		
Knowledge Acquisition (KA)	KA1	I gained more knowledge on Malay cuisine and table etiquette by doing this simulation.	0(0.00)	2(3.57)	54(96.43)	0(0.00)	2(5.88)	32(94.12)
	KA2	I gained a better understanding on Malay cuisine and table etiquette by doing this simulation.	0(0.00)	2(3.57)	54(96.43)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	34(100.00)
	KA3	This simulation has corrected my misunderstandings/ misconceptions about Malay cuisine and table	0(0.00)	11(19.64)	45(80.36)	1(2.94)	7(20.59)	26(76.47)

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		etiquette.						
Peer-to-peer Learning (PL)	PL1	This simulation has allowed peer sharing about the topic.	0(0.00)	4(7.14)	52(92.86)	0(0.00)	1(2.94)	33(97.06)
	PL2	This simulation has allowed me to ask questions to my friends without hesitation.	0(0.00)	8(14.29)	48(85.71)	0(0.00)	6(17.65)	28(82.35)
	PL3	This simulation has allowed me to imitate the Malay table etiquette from my friends who are experienced.	0(0.00)	4(7.14)	52(92.86)	0(0.00)	5(14.71)	29(85.29)

Table 1: Detail response analysis for each item of each cluster (continued)

Participation Experience (PE)	PE1	This simulation has allowed me to have first-hand experience on the Malay cuisine and table etiquette myself.	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	56(100.00)	0(0.00)	1(2.94)	33(97.06)
	PE2	This simulation has allowed me to keep trying out on the Malay table etiquette until I can do it correctly.	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	56(100.00)	0(0.00)	1(2.94)	33(97.06)
	PE3	This activity has increased my interest in Malay cuisine and table etiquette.	0(0.00)	1(1.79)	55(98.21)	0(0.00)	1(2.94)	33(97.06)

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Emotion (E)	E1	I like this in-class simulation as part of learning.	0(0.00)	4(7.14)	52(92.86)	0(0.00)	8(23.53)	26(76.47)
	E2	I enjoyed taking part in this in-class simulation.	0(0.00)	3(5.36)	53(94.64)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	34(100.00)
	E3	The chance to undergo the simulation was a meaningful experience in learning about the Malay cuisine and table etiquette.	0(0.00)	4(7.14)	52(92.86)	0(0.00)	3(8.82)	31(91.18)
	E4	I favour and would recommend my other friends to experience this simulation.	0(0.00)	2(3.57)	54(96.43)	1(2.94)	1(2.94)	32(94.12)
Culture Appreciation (CA)	CA1	I learned something new about my own/other culture.	1(1.79)	5(8.93)	49(87.50)	0(0.00)	1(2.94)	33(97.06)
	CA2	This activity has taught me more about my own/other culture.	0(0.00)	3(5.36)	53(94.64)	1(2.94)	5(14.71)	28(82.35)
	CA3	This activity has made me more appreciative of my own/other culture.	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	56(100.00)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	34(100.00)

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3.3 Comparison of Responses between Malay and Non-Malay Students

Mann-Whitney U tests were performed to see if the student ratings of several aspects of the simulation activity differed between Malay and non-Malay students. The results of the tests are presented in Table 2. Although the majority of students responded positively to the in-class simulation activity, as evidenced by the high percentage of them scoring 4 and 5 for all clusters (Table 1), the tests reveal that, despite being natives of this culture, Malay students are more enthusiastic about this activity than non-Malay students. Significant differences in student responses between Malays and non-Malays were identified for 12 of the 16 surveyed items with higher median response for Malays compared to the non-Malays.

While it was anticipated that the non-Malays would be more thrilled to experience a different food culture, the contradiction could be justified by the rapid urbanisation and modernisation experienced by the Malaysian society in general including the Malay communities. Food consumption patterns have changed, as well as eating practices (Poulain et al. 2015). Some of the traditional Malay table manners are no longer practiced by the Malays. For example, traditionally, meals are enjoyed while sitting on the floor, however, in today's Malay houses, the dining table is more commonly used. The traditional style of holding a feast or *kenduri* is also not common anymore. This traditional Malay *kenduri* simulation might have brought back childhood memories for them, perhaps memories of staying with their grandparents or other relatives at the kampung. Hence, justifying the Malay students to be more agreeable that this in-class simulation has increased their knowledge (KA1) and understanding (KA2), enabled them to experience the traditional Malay food and table manners first-hand (PE1) and let them to keep practicing on the skills (PE2), boosting their interest (PE3), while allowing peer-to-peer learning through experience sharing (PL1), demonstrating and imitating (PL3). This simulation has also made them know about (CA2) and appreciate their own culture (CA3) more. Compared to the non-Malay students, the Malays considered the simulation to be more amusing (E1 & E2) and they are more likely to recommend it to others (E4).

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Table 2: Mann-Whitney U test results for the difference of responses between Malay and non-Malay students

Item Code	Groups	N	Average Rank	Rank Sum	U	p
KA1	Malay Non-Malay	56 34	50.00 38.09	2800.00 1295.00	700.0	0.016*
KA2	Malay Non-Malay	56 34	50.52 37.24	2829.00 1266.00	671.0	0.007**
KA3	Malay Non-Malay	56 34	49.14 39.50	2752.00 1343.00	748.0	0.069
PL1	Malay Non-Malay	56 34	50.96 36.50	2854.00 1241.00	646.0	0.004**
PL2	Malay Non-Malay	56 34	47.50 42.21	2660.00 1435.00	840.0	0.310
PL3	Malay Non-Malay	56 34	50.89 36.62	2850.00 1245.00	650.0	0.005**
PE1	Malay Non-Malay	56 34	51.59 35.47	2889.00 1206.00	611.0	0.001**
PE2	Malay Non-Malay	56 34	52.93 33.26	2964.00 1131.00	536.0	0.000**
PE3	Malay Non-Malay	56 34	49.81 38.40	2789.50 1305.50	710.5	0.025*
E1	Malay Non-Malay	56 34	49.79 38.44	2788.00 1307.00	712.0	0.018*
E2	Malay Non-Malay	56 34	51.29 35.97	2872.00 1223.00	628.0	0.002**
E3	Malay Non-Malay	56 34	48.42 40.69	2711.50 1383.50	788.5	0.117
E4	Malay Non-Malay	56 34	50.02 38.06	2801.00 1294.00	699.0	0.015*
CA1	Malay Non-Malay	56 34	47.16 42.76	2641.00 1454.00	859.0	0.388
CA2	Malay Non-Malay	56 34	52.36 34.21	2932.00 1163.00	568.0	0.000**
CA3	Malay Non-Malay	56 34	53.86 31.74	3016.00 1079.00	484.0	0.000**

* Significant at $p<0.05$
** Significant at $p<0.01$

4.0 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, in-class simulation is a useful and effective approach for learning about Malay food and table manners, leading to an enhanced student learning experience. By engaging students in hands-on activities, they are better able to connect the knowledge learned during

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traditional lecture class to real-world situations. *Kenduri* simulation has the benefit of being able to accommodate any number of students, large or small, at the minimum possible cost as conducted in this innovation study. The setting is very flexible and can always be substituted for other kinds of *kenduri* for common Malay occasions such as *Khatam Al-Quran* (completion of recitation of the Holy Al-Quran under the guidance of a teacher), *aqiqah/cukur jambul* (thanksgiving for the birth of a newborn child by slaughtering an animal), *bertunang* (engagement) and others. The Malay food served to the simulation participants can always be customised to suit the chosen *kenduri* setting. However, the cost for food and other preparations, on the other hand, will be determined by the type of *kenduri* to be simulated. Lastly, *kenduri* simulation can be applied in various fields where Malay culture is being taught, as well as in non-academic events to promote Malay culture and heritage.

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