Food Acculturation of New International Students in the UK

by

Eshaby Mustafa

Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

School of Hospitality and Tourism Management

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

Supervisors:
Dr Anita Eves
Dr Hania Janta

©EshabyMustafa2016
Declaration

This thesis and the work to which it refers are the results of my own efforts. Any ideas, data, images or text resulting from the work of others (whether published or unpublished) are fully identified as such within the work and attributed to their originator in the text, bibliography or in footnotes. This thesis has not been submitted in whole or in part for any other academic degree or professional qualification. I agree that the University has the right to submit my work to the plagiarism detection service TurnitinUK for originality checks. Whether or not drafts have been so-assessed, the University reserves the right to require an electronic version of the final document (as submitted) for assessment as above.

Signature: ________________________________

Date: 9th of September, 2016
Acknowledgements

In the name of God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful.

It is the end of my PhD journey and there are so many people that deserve appreciation for the support and encouragement in the making of this thesis.

I would like to convey my heartfelt thanks to my supervisors; Dr Anita Eves, Dr Hania Janta and Dr Margaret Lumbers. You all taught me the meaning of intellectual integrity, rigor and perseverance. Thank you for your continuous support and encouragement. You made me a better person.

Thank you to all my research participants, without whom this thesis will never be completed; my colleagues in 78MS02; sisterhood for life- Effa, Huda and Fina; all the people at Surrey University especially the administration staffs in FASS. Thank you for your time and sharing information and knowledge with me.

This thesis is especially dedicated to my husband, Shahrulazwan Abu Bakar; and my three beautiful sons; Adam, Edriz and Nuh. This is my time away for you. This is my sweat, blood and tears. This is my love for you.

A special thanks to my siblings; my lovely sister Hasnariah, and all of my brothers for the never ending support and love.

Finally, to my late mak and abah. This is for both of you. I wish you were still here with me to witness this. I love you endlessly. Al Fatihah.

Thank you.
Abstract

The gradually increasing numbers of international students known as “sojourners” who stayed for a short period in the host country have received growing interest from academics, practitioners, and policymakers around the world. This was majorly due to the contribution from international students’ fees and spending, and from the unique and subsequent changes in the culture and practice of this student group. However, for the international students, migration became a turning point for their independent life in the new country. The experience was more challenging because it required a personal commitment especially on food provisioning responsibilities and the development of a new food choice system alongside the stressful academic roles and responsibilities. Therefore, the context of international students’ food adjustment experience or food acculturation received dedicated attention through this study.

Furthermore, this study aimed to explore the food acculturation process of new international students during the early phase of transition in the UK based on the life course perspective. The life course perspective takes into consideration the transition phase which is a very important turning point that influenced the food acculturation of the international students. Three objectives has been established for this study to explore the exposure, experience, and perception of new food choice in the UK; to identify the influences of life course perspective over food choice decision; and to examine the food acculturation process when adjusting and managing food provisioning practice at the early stage of transition.

Based on an interpretivist view, a series of qualitative approach was employed during the preliminary study and main data collection. The purpose was to allow access to the lived experiences of the students’ new food choice process. The preliminary study adopted was focus group discussions using a sample of ten existing international students and the study was
conducted from December 2012 until January 2013. The themes developed from the preliminary findings and the key issues generated from relevant literature were applied to develop the observation and interview protocol for the main study. Next, two qualitative inquiries of observed accompanied shop and in-depth interviews were applied for the main study using a sample of twenty new international students who just recently arrived at the UK. The main data collection began in October 2013 when the students first arrived and ended early of March 2014. The timeline allowed the occurrence of more food exposure and experience of new food choice, allowing patterns and changes of food acculturation to emerge over time.

The major themes identified from the preliminary study were the influence of life course perspective influences of new food choice, the food adjustment experiences, challenges and strategy, and food acculturation process during transition. The main findings concluded three main themes from the observed accompanied shop and in-depth interviews in accordance to this study’s objectives: (1) the exposure, experience and perception on the new food choice in the UK, (2) the Life Course influences on food choice decisions, and (3) the food acculturation process of international students.

The main findings showed that (1) migration was a turning point, which contributed towards the diverse representations of the international students’ exposure, experience, and perception of new food choice; (2) the reliance and support system of the new food choice decision from co-national friends and online friendship network; (3) the diverse challenges in managing new roles and responsibilities of food provisioning practice, including grocery shopping, food preparation and cooking, and consumption practices, (4) the importance of self-efficacy and acquiring of food provisioning skills and competencies for a positive food adjustment experience, (5) the influence of Life Course elements of personal and social factors, cultural
ideals, resources, and current context and trends in the food choice decision process, (6) the transformation of food choice process, which implicated a food acculturation process that includes integration, assimilation, separation, marginalisation, and a repertoire of strategies based on situational factors.

The key findings indicated that the adjustment experience in the early phase of transition greatly influenced the food choice decisions of the new international students. The main contribution of this study relies on the application of the life course Perspective in the study of food acculturation because of the consideration of migration as a turning point in the transition of food choices. In contrast to other studies on international students’ food choice and dietary acculturation, this study provides a valuable lens that includes the food choice process at the point of grocery shopping, preparation and consumption, which gave a wider context on the stages in food decision-making process.

This study contributes towards the body of knowledge on international students’ adjustment studies, the Life Course experience influence on food choice, and the food acculturation field. The results from this study can provide a better understanding on new food choice decision among the international students during their transition in the new country. Universities and other stakeholders such as local authorities and the public health provider may use these findings to support and develop strategies to improve the adjustment experience, which in turn, may attract more international students. Food providers such as restaurants, food manufacturers, food suppliers, retailers and specialty (ethnic) supermarkets can also benefit by understanding the challenges in food choice, accessibility to available food towards improving, strategising and incorporating plans that are personalised to the international students’ needs.
# Table of Contents

Abstract .......................................................................................................................... 4  
Chapter One: Introduction ......................................................................................... 13  
1.1 Introduction ......................................................................................................... 13  
1.2 The Context of the Study .................................................................................. 15  
   International students in the UK ........................................................................... 15  
   Food choice adjustment and challenges ............................................................. 18  
   The dietary acculturation context ....................................................................... 19  
1.3 Identifying Research Gap .................................................................................. 20  
1.4 Aims and Objectives ......................................................................................... 21  
1.5 Chapter Outline .................................................................................................. 22  
1.6 Summary ............................................................................................................. 24  
Chapter Two: Literature Review ............................................................................. 25  
International Students in the UK ............................................................................ 25  
2.1 Introduction ......................................................................................................... 25  
2.2 International Student Sojourners ..................................................................... 26  
2.3 International Students’ Adjustment ................................................................... 33  
2.4 International Students’ Food-related Issues ....................................................... 38  
   Perceived cultural distance .................................................................................. 39  
   Dietary acculturation of international students .................................................. 40  
2.5 Summary ............................................................................................................. 42  
Chapter Three: Literature review .......................................................................... 43  
Acculturation ............................................................................................................. 43  
3.1 Introduction ......................................................................................................... 43  
3.2 Definition of Acculturation ................................................................................ 43  
3.3 Acculturative Stress ............................................................................................ 45  
3.4 Dietary Acculturation .......................................................................................... 46  
3.5 Acculturation and Adjustment Models ............................................................... 49  
   U Curve Model .................................................................................................... 49  
   Sojourner’s adjustment ....................................................................................... 50  
   Berry’s acculturation strategies ......................................................................... 51  
   Relevance of Berry’ acculturation strategies ...................................................... 54  
3.6 Summary ............................................................................................................. 55  
Chapter Four: Literature Review ............................................................................ 56  
Food Choice ............................................................................................................... 56  
4.1 Introduction ......................................................................................................... 56  
4.2 Food Choice Decision-Making Process .............................................................. 56  
4.3 Food Choice Factors ......................................................................................... 57
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Preliminary Data Analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>Discussion Themes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>Preliminary Data Analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>Themes Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>Preliminary Findings and Discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>Summary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>The Exposure, Experience, and Perception of Food Choice upon Arrival</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>The Food Shopping Experience upon Arrival</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>Support in Food Choice Decisions upon Arrival</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>Food Choice upon Arrival</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>Summary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Life Course Perspective Influences in Food Choice Decision during Transition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>The New Roles and Responsibilities in Food Provisioning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>Skills and Competencies in Food Provisioning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>Body Image and Healthy Appearance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>Food that Conforms to Religious Beliefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>The Influence of Food Cost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>The Food Symbolism in the New Country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>Summary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>The Food Acculturation Process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>Transformation of Perceived Food Choice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>The Adjustment Strategies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Figures

Figure 1: The number & percentage of international students in total enrolment ..........................28
Figure 2: Share of international students (25-34 years old) with tertiary education ....................30
Figure 3: Berry's acculturation strategies .................................................................................53
Figure 4: Factors affecting food choice intake ...........................................................................67
Figure 5: Food Choice Identity Model .......................................................................................68
Figure 6: Eight dimensions of eating and drinking episodes ....................................................69
Figure 7: Proposed model of dietary acculturation ......................................................................71
Figure 8: The Life Course Perspective Model ............................................................................74
Figure 9: A conceptual model of food acculturation based on life course perspective ..............82
Figure 10: The research process ................................................................................................86
Figure 11: The Phase of Thematic Analysis ...............................................................................94
Figure 12: Redevelopment of Food Acculturation Model Based on Life Course Perspective ....275
List of Tables

Table 1- Examples of basic rules in human and food choice....................................................... 59
Table 2-Strategies for simplifying food choices .................................................................................. 64
Table 3-Key Concepts in the Life Course Perspective ........................................................................ 73
Table 4- strategies of inquiry for qualitative method............................................................................. 91
Table 5-The link between research objectives and research methods .................................................. 98
Table 6- Inclusion criteria...................................................................................................................... 102
Table 7- Focus group participants....................................................................................................... 106
Table 8- Main data collection schedule .............................................................................................. 108
Table 9: Integrating two piloted observation notes to develop observation checklist .......................... 111
Table 10-The accompanied shop setting............................................................................................. 113
Table 11- Observation and interview .................................................................................................. 114
Table 12- Observation and interview participants .............................................................................. 118
Table 13- Focus group discussion themes ......................................................................................... 125
Table 14- Integrating themes from focus group to guide the main study ............................................. 129
Table 15- Major themes from focus group discussion.......................................................................... 130
Table 16- Berry's acculturation strategies............................................................................................ 238
Table 17- The transformation of perceived food choice in the UK ..................................................... 239
Table 18- The adjustment strategies developed by international students ........................................ 246
Table 19- Changes in food choice and practice .................................................................................... 255
Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This aim of this study is to address the food acculturation process of new international students during the early stage of transition at the United Kingdom (UK). There are three objectives for this study. First, the study intends to explore the exposure, experience, and perception of food choice. Migration for the international students was the turning point in their life course, and this study focuses on the context of their adjustment experiences of new food choice in the new country during the transition. Second, this study attempts to elucidate the life course perspective influences (Furst et al., 1996) on the food choice decisions particularly by identifying the events and experiences during life course, personal and social factors, cultural ideals, resources, and current context and trends that influenced the construction of the students’ new food choice. Finally, the research examines the food acculturation process to manage the new food choice which includes the integration, separation, marginalisation, and assimilation strategies.

The context of this study is within three areas of focus: the international students, food choice, and food acculturation. The life course perspective concept developed by Furst et al. (1996) was applied to explore the influences and the significant components of life course experiences in the construction of food choice during the students’ early phase of transition. The study by Furst et al. (1996) includes three basic components in The Life Course model: the life course, influences, and personal system. It was explained in Sobal et al. (2006) that food choice patterns are often attributed to the factors (influences) of past experiences and current situation (the life course perspective), which shape a personal system when selecting food choice. Thus, the life course perspective concept was employed in this study because the theory presents the
important elements of experience, influence, and personal system of a new food choice construction during transition.

Food choice is a dynamic process and major changes including migration have become turning points that lead to disruption in food choice and undermined food habits and practice (Sobal et al., 2006). The disruption and changes in food habits after a migration may cause “dietary acculturation,” defined in Satia-Abouta (2003:74) as the “process that occurs when members of migrating group adopt the eating patterns or food choices of their new environment.” In this context, The Life Course experiences may be able to further point out how international students adapt to the new food choice and practices using an acculturation strategy, such as integration, separation, assimilation, and marginalisation.

Luedicke (2011:2) explained consumer acculturation in a more specific context:

Consumer acculturation not only exists as a process of adaptation on the part of the immigrants but also manifests as experiences, interpretations, and practices through which immigrant and indigenous groups adjust to one another’s consumption choices, behaviours, ideologies, and status ambitions.

It is important to note that acculturation is dependent upon specific context and that it should be measured with qualitative methods (Rudmin, 2009; Luedicke, 2011). Therefore, this study employs a qualitative approach in its preliminary stages, using focus group discussions, and the main data collection involves accompanied shop observation and in-depth interviews in order to achieve the research objectives. The focus group discussions were useful to establish and identify the key issues and challenges in food choice among the international students. The data from the preliminary findings were applied to guide the development of observation and
interview protocol for the main data collection. It was found that the accompanied shop observation and in-depth interview complemented each other in exploring the food choice decision made during grocery shopping and food provisioning tasks and consumption. It gave access to a more holistic view on the food choice decisions made during the transition of new international students.

The continuous growth of international students worldwide was found to be parallel with the numerous studies dedicated to them with the most commonly researched topic area on cultural adjustments and personal changes (Tirelli & Martinez-Ruiz, 2014). The literature on international students goes on more detail on the importance of food during the adjustment, for example, on (1) meanings attached to food such as emotional and physical sustenance, comfort, fulfilling, and sense of belonging (Brown, Edwards & Hartwell, 2010; Collins, 2008); (2) the dietary changes upon migration (Pan, Dixon, Himburg & Huffman, 1999; Alakaam, Castellanos, Bodzio & Harrison, 2015); and (3) resistance to change eating habits (Perez-Cueto, Verbeke, Lachat & Winter, 2009; Amos, 2014). Yet very few empirical studies have focused on the role of food and how transition influences the food adjustment of international students (Brown, 2009, Amos, 2014). The next section will discuss the context of this study on international students in the UK, food choice adjustment and challenges, and the acculturation context.

1.2 The Context of the Study

International students in the UK

The number of international students studying in the UK and their recruitment by British universities has steadily grown with a recent increase of 6% from 405,810 in the year 2009-
2010 to about 428,225 in the year 2010-2011 (UKCISA, 2012). In a more recent report on graduate students, there were nearly 200,000 international students studying for graduate degrees in the UK in the academic year 2012–2013 (UKCISA, 2014). The increase was accompanied by a significant contribution of international student’s market, valued at £14 billion in the UK economy based on their tuition fees and expenditure on services and goods (UKCISA, 2010; Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Conlon, Litchfield & Sadlier, 2011). Recently, there are 436,585 students from outside the UK coming to study in the UK in the year 2014-2015 with the number of Chinese international students exceeding other nationalities at 89,540 (UKCISA 2015).

International education is a major export industry at university level and international students have made valuable educational and economic contributions to the host country (Andrade, 2006; Brown, 2009). Being a financial asset to universities with a wide range of knowledge and skills and rich in heritage and culture, the international students have helped increase cultural awareness and appreciation to the country in which they are studying (Binsardi & Ekwulugo, 2003; Andrade, 2006). Adding to this, Berry (2006) stated that the international students’ stay is mutually beneficial because they bring a range of assets to the host country and in return gain higher education. Despite the significant contribution, the adjustment and transitional experience of mobile migration population including international students remain unclear (Li & Gasser, 2005; Perez-Cueto, 2009). The importance on the contribution from the fees and the outcomes of hosting international students made it critical to gain a clear understanding and the mechanism of the adjustment process in order to increase awareness and inform the type and delivery of pastoral and academic support needed to improve adjustment experience, which in return, may increase recruitment of international students in the future.
The steady increase of international students was accompanied by a growth of research dedicated to exploring their adjustment and transitional experience (Kim, 2001; Brown, 2009; Zhang et al., 2011). The nature of international student’s migration for the purpose of obtaining international educational credentials was described as “sojourning,” which is taking up temporary residence in another culture (Popadiuk, 2011). The literature on sojourner’s context highlighted international students cross cultural and intercultural experience (Landreman, 2003). Encountering host country’s different cultural environment often causes stress and tends to be overwhelming in the initial phase of sojourning (Brown, 2009; Gu, Schweisfurth & Day 2010). Previous studies by Zhai (2002), Andrade (2006), Gu et al. (2010), and Smith et al. (2011) found that international students were faced with many adjustment issues and challenges which included the general difficulties faced by other domestic students as well as the added stress of adjustment and acculturation.

One of the adjustment challenge mentioned is food related issues which has often been identified as one of the factors that negatively affected international students’ psychological and sociocultural adjustment during acculturation (Furukawa, 1997; Brown, 2009). The more positive food adjustment experience, on the other hand, received little attention (Moores & Popadiuk, 2011). Therefore learning more about international students’ positive and negative food choice adjustment during transition is the first research gap and would greatly add to the understanding of the students’ adjustment experience. The context on food choice adjustment among international students is presented in the subsequent section.
Food choice adjustment and challenges

Attending foreign universities in a country with different cultural background and practice means that international students have to not only manage common adjustment problems but also balance life in new social and educational organisations (Zhou, 2008). Among the international student’s adjustment and challenges widely discussed are English language proficiencies, academic concerns, culture shock, homesickness, new cultural experiences, building of new friendship, and challenges associated with daily living (Church, 1982; Hayes & Lin, 1994; Ying & Liese, 1994; Sandhu et al., 1994; Yang, Berning, Colson & Smith, 2015; Mori, 2000). A more recent ethnographic study by Brown (2009) discussed the adjustment and challenges in food habits and practices during the transition of postgraduate international students’ adaptation to life in England.

The reluctance and willingness to change eating habits after migration is influenced by a number of reasons: (1) familiarity with flavour and meal structure principles (Farb & Armelagos, 1980; Rozin et al., 2007), (2) food neophobia associated with consuming unfamiliar foods (Brown et al., 2010; Edwards et al., 2010; Hartwell et al., 2011), (3) cultural or religious dietary restrictions (Counihan, 1999), (4) acculturative forces (Pan et al., 1999), and (5) meanings attached to foods, comfort, and sense of belonging (Locher et al., 2005; Collins, 2008; Brown et al., 2010).

Several studies have claimed that the migration of international students could cause culture shock (Chapdelaine et al., 2004; Pyvis et al., 2005; Zhou et al., 2008), and the consumption of familiar and comforting food in the new culture was found to ease this symptom (Oberg, 1960; Garza- Guerrero, 1974). Food issues were mentioned only incidentally as among the aspects that international students found distressing (Furukawa, 1997; UKCISA 2010). Food became
greatly important in providing support both emotionally and physically, as found in Brown et al. (2010) in the study on meaning attached to food eaten in the new culture among international students in the UK.

To cope with the adjustment stress, the students’ new living environment has led to the development of specific strategies, including food procurement and purchasing strategies (Constantine et al., 2005). The process of adapting to the changes by “adopting or rejecting the eating patterns and food choices of the new environment” is explained as “dietary acculturation” in Satia-Abouta (2003:74). The context of dietary acculturation will be discussed in the following section.

**The dietary acculturation context**

Bochner (1972) contended that the role of international students is not just as students adjusting to common stress but also as foreigners with special cultural learning problems. As Redfield et al. (1936) pointed, the process of adjustment to the new culture and environment or “acculturation” is the process of changes that takes place as a result of two or more cultures coming into continuous or direct contact in the host country during the migration. Despite the substantial body of literature that address adjustment during migration, only a small portion has discussed the issue within the acculturation context (Poyrazli et al., 2011).

Furukawa (1997) noted that food can have the greatest impact on adjustment but the importance of meals and food has not always received prominence when considering the overall acculturation process that international students will go through. The move to a new country exposes migrants (including the international students’ sojourners) to the experience of acculturation when being exposed to the customs and culture of the host and this will affect
their dietary practice, eating patterns, and other food related behaviour including food choice (Lara et al., 2005; Edwards et al., 2010). Although factors leading to acculturation vary, the basic process of adaptation appears to be common to all migrant groups including sojourners (Berry et al., 1997). The course of acculturation, level of difficulties, and the eventual outcome of acculturation depend on the voluntariness, mobility, and permanence of the migration (Berry et al., 1997).

In a more focused note, Colby, Morrison, and Hadelman (2009) and Satia-Abouta, Patterson, Kristal et al. (2002) defined food related changes (food habits, practice, patterns, and setting) as dietary acculturation. The adaptation to these changes is not a simple, linear process but a very difficult, complex, and dynamic process critical in the development of food habits in a new context (Satia-Abouta et al., 2002). Studies on the process of acculturation, however, tend to focus more on the food habits after they have been established for some time (Perez-Escamilla & Putnik., 2007). Nevertheless, Brown et al. (2010) attested that international students’ food habits are affected by a significant culture shock during the first period of their study.

### 1.3 Identifying Research Gap

The previous section on the research context also indicated several research gaps within the literature on international students’ food adjustment and dietary acculturation studies:

1) Past studies on psychological and sociocultural adjustments mentioned mostly the negatively impacted adjustment experience (Furukawa, 1997; Pan et al., 1999; Brown, 2009; Perez-Cueto et al., 2009). Although there is an extensive body of research that seek to confirm the challenges of adjustment in the new country, **limited research has been conducted to represent the positive adjustment experience and the elements**
that contribute to it. This is a significant gap in the literature and this study will attempt to address these questions.

2) Little empirical research exists on the role of food in the academic sojourn of international students, although food emerged as a major category and was very important to international students (Brown, 2009). It remains unclear to what extent the international students cope with the different food and dietary environment, how they perceived the dietary changes during acculturation, and what the main determinants were for their food choices (Perez-Cueto, 2009). Therefore, the purpose of the current study is to fill the gap in the area of international students’ food choice perception, adaptation, adjustment, and food choice factors during transition.

3) The early phase of the acculturation process is an important aspect that is significant in the formation of new food habits during transition (Terragni, Garnweidner, Pettersen & Mosdol, 2014). More knowledge is needed to understand the acculturation process, especially the change in food habits during the students’ first phase after the migration (Terragni et al., 2014). Given this point, the present study intends to fill this research gap devoid of the knowledge about the influence and process of food acculturation of international students in the early phase of their transition.

1.4 Aims and Objectives

The central aim of this study is to explore the food acculturation process of new international students in the UK during the early phase of transition. The objectives established in order to address the aim of this study are as follows:

• To investigate the exposure, experience, and perception of food choices for new international postgraduate students at the early phase of transition;

• To elucidate the Life Course experience and factors that influence the food choices of the international students;
• To examine the changes of food choice system and food acculturation process within the first three months of the transition.

The first objective is to provide an explanation of the new food choice that the students were introduced to and what they were able to experience when they first arrived in the UK. The perception of the experience was investigated in order to view their acceptance or rejection of the new food choice. The next objective is to demonstrate the importance and significance of life course perspective factors and the influences on the construction of a new food choice system. The final objective is to identify the food choice changes and examine the food acculturation process executed within the first three months of the international students’ transition. The acculturation strategy conducted by the students in the process was also identified to facilitate better understanding on how the acculturation process was developed.

The subsequent section reviews the chapter outline and structure of this thesis.

1.5 Chapter Outline

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter introduces the context of the study, and the research aim and objectives.

Chapter 2: Literature Review: International Students in the UK

This chapter explores the literature review on international students in the UK in general. It explains the migrant group in general and the international student sojourners, adjustment challenges, and the food related issues and challenges faced which include the perceived cultural distance and dietary acculturation during the students’ transition in the new country.
Chapter 3: Literature Review: Acculturation

This chapter discusses the definition of acculturation. The acculturative stress and adjustment challenges are outlined followed by the context of acculturation and dietary acculturation. Also reviewed are the acculturation and adjustment models used in previous studies.

Chapter 4: Literature Review: Food Choice

This chapter discusses the food choice’s context. First, the food related behaviours are outlined with the main highlight on food choice. Next, the chapter discusses food preference and liking, food choice decision making process, food choice factors, the role of culture and food symbols, acculturation influence in food choice, and food strategy. Various frameworks and models adapted in previous studies on food choice processes are then reviewed. Finally, a proposed framework for food acculturation is presented.

Chapter 5: Methodology

This chapter includes the research design and methods employed for this research. It begins with the statement of aim and objectives, research process, and philosophy. The chapter then reviews the strategies of inquiry, the qualitative approach applied, and the research strategy. The process of preliminary study and main data collection are also presented and the chapter concludes with the limitation and summary of the study.

Chapter 6: The Preliminary Study

This chapter presents the findings from the preliminary study using focus group discussions. It will outline the process of implementing this method of inquiry to ascertain the context of the study on the international students’ food adjustment and the acculturation process during the transition.
Chapter 7: Research Design for the Main Study

This chapter will present the development of research design for the main data collection, which adopts a qualitative inquiry using accompanied shop observation and in-depth interview.

Chapter 8, 9, and 10: The Main Findings

These chapters will reveal the findings from the main data collection using observed accompanied shop and in-depth interview. Each chapter will answer the objectives set in the beginning, which are to (1) explore the students’ exposure, experience, and perception of new food choice upon arrival at the UK, (2) elucidate the Life Course experience and factors that influenced the food choice of the new international students; and (3) examine the food choice changes and the food acculturation at their early stage of transition.

Chapter 11: Conclusions

The final chapter summarises the findings as well as outlines the contribution of the study, limitation and recommendations for future research. The final conclusion and reflexivity will be presented at the end.

1.6 Summary

The first chapter provides the introduction to this thesis and the context of the study that includes the international students in the UK, their food choice adjustment and challenges, and the dietary acculturation context. From the previous studies that informed the research context, several gaps were identified and this research intends to address the questions addressed. The research aim and objectives are presented and ends with the chapters outline are included.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

International Students in the UK

2.1 Introduction

There have been an increasing number of people from every part of the world migrating and establishing temporary residencies in foreign countries under the influence of many factors, including globalisation and internationalisation (Berry & Sam, 1997, Li et al., 2005). Special research attention in migrant’s studies has increased, with academics, consumers and policy makers paying interest on the cultural adaptation, adjustment, and migrants’ behaviours (Tirelli & Martinez-Ruiz, 2014).

Three main groups of migrants were identified within adjustment and acculturation studies: immigrants, refugees, and sojourners (Ward et al., 1999). These groups’ adjustment issues and challenges can be distinguished by the mobility, permanence, and voluntariness of their contact with the new society (Berry et al., 1997; Ward, 2001). Following the complexity and varying results of migrants’ cultural adaptation and behaviour, Tirelli et al. (2014) stressed the importance to distinguish between permanent migrants (those who live for a prolonged period in a foreign country) and sojourners (those who engaged in relatively short term visits to a new nation). The international students’ population belonging to the sojourners group in particular represents the largest and the first group of people that communicate freely with other people from all over the world (Wang & Mallinckrodt, 2006).

The mobility of international students has been extensive and has changed the composition of student bodies in universities, largely due to the increasing number of students who studied abroad with the intention for an overseas qualification (Tafarodi & Smith, 2001; Hartwell et
al., 2011 & Tirelli et al., 2014). Financial dependencies on the tuition fees contribution from
the international students are very important to universities (Hartwell et al., 2011), which
justifies the need to assess and improve the adjustment challenges and experiences of
international students. The following section focuses on the international student sojourners,
considering their significant contribution to the host country.

2.2 International Student Sojourners

The term *sojourners* is often used to describe student visitors or temporary residents who live
in a different country anytime from one semester to many years where permanent settlement is
not the actual purpose of their stay (Church, 1982; Berry et al., 1997; Moores et al., 2011).
Besides international students, scholars, guest workers, diplomats, business and technical aid
personnel, troops stationed in another country, and missionaries are also included as sojourners
(Pedersen et al., 2011).

Students, especially from less developed countries, find that the demand for higher education
and qualification for work, expectation to raise the economic and social status, limited access
to education in their own countries, and globalisation have led them to seek educational
experiences in other cultures (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Li et al., 2005; Altbach et al., 2007).
Recent decades have seen an increase in the volume of international students worldwide,
almost four times faster than the total of international migration (King & Raghuram, 2013).
King et al. further added that students are desirable migrants because of the skills they bring
and their fee contribution and as a result, migration policies in the last decade appeared to be
tailored to attract more student migrants. Despite the importance of international students’
contribution in a host country, little research has been done in the UK compared to those in the
United States, Australia, and Canada (Mehdizadeh et al., 2005). The next section discusses the past, present, and future trends of international students market in the UK.

**International students market**

There were about 428,225 international students in the UK in the year 2010-2011, marking an increase of 6% from 405,810 in 2009-2010 (statistics from UK Council for International Student Affairs or UKCISA, 2011). UKCISA listed the top ten non-European Union (EU) countries that send their students to the UK as China (PRC), India, Nigeria, Malaysia, United States of America (USA), Hong Kong (Special Administrative Region), Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Thailand and Canada but the figures are not definitive because they depend on the definition of international students, whether it includes all students from outside the UK, or just those paying overseas fees, or those on student visas. UKCISA defines *international students* as all non-UK domiciled students including the non-EU students. Recent statistics reported that there are now 436,585 students from outside the UK coming to study in the UK in the year 2014-2015 with the number of Chinese international students exceeding other nationalities at 89,540 (UKCISA 2015).

Leonard et al. (2003) reported that there is no reliable, centrally located data on the demography of international students because the available data reported only voluntary fields on domicile and nationality. In a systematic review of acculturation experiences, Smith et al. (2011) reported more than 3.3 million international students worldwide in 2008 (based on the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development or OECD statistics report in 2010). The statistic also recorded that over half of all tertiary international students choose to study in the United States of America (USA) (19%), the United Kingdom (UK) (10%), Germany (7%), France (7%), and Australia (7%). A closer look at UNESCO’s Institute of Statistics or UIS in
Figure 1 below presents the number and percentage of international student’s total enrolment in the major English speaking host countries that attracted international students worldwide; United States of America (USA), United Kingdom (UK), Australia, and Canada (Choudaha et al., 2012).

Figure 1: The number & percentage of international students in total enrolment by hosting countries, 2002-2009 (UNESCO's Institute of Statistics)

In four leading countries, the past trends of international students’ recruitment indicated a growing size to 3.4 million students in 2009 from 2.1 million in 2002. The statistic also recorded 67% increase in Canada’s enrolment followed by 62% increase in UK, 43% increase in Australia, and 13% increase in the US enrolment from 2002-2009. However, according to Choudaha et al. (2012), the trend for these increases was affected by stricter and additional visa requirements to mitigate the abuse of student visa. In the UK, a point-based system was
introduced in 2009 whereby a higher education institution must be granted the status of *Highly Trusted Sponsor* through a government-approved accreditation before sponsoring international student visas (Choudaha et al., 2012). The current policy also requires students to provide proof of English with a tighter language requirement or test scores, evidence of funding, and close down post-study work, which added challenges for UK higher education institutions to attract more international students (Choudaha et al., 2012).

In 2010, the OECD (2010) released a report on future trends of higher education graduates between the ages of 25 and 34 in OECD and Group of Twenty (G20) member countries (42 countries in total). It was estimated based on available data that China and India will account for 40% of all young people with a tertiary education in G20 and OECD countries by the year 2020, whereas the United States and European Union countries will account for just over 25%. Figure 2 presents the current trend of international students’ enrolment in 2010 in comparison to the estimated international student percentage in 2020. The highlights of the OECD reports were that United States is expected to produce 11% of all those graduates in 2020 (down from 14% in 2010); India, which produced 11% of graduates in 2010, is expected to overtake the United States and produce 12% of the share of graduates by the end of the decade; the UK’s share should increase from 3% in 2010 to 4% in 2020; significant declines are forecasted for Japan (from 7% to 4%) and the Russian Federation (from 11% to 7%); and finally, in 2020, 6% of young graduates will hail from Indonesia.
Based on the OECD calculations, there will be more than 200 million 25-34 year-olds with higher education degrees across all OECD and G20 countries by the year 2020. In the UK, both government and universities have been engaged to improve the international competitiveness of the higher education offering (UKCISA, 2010), considering the important contribution of this population to the host country. One of the ways to consolidate this success is through
understanding the expectations of international students and improving the quality of all aspects of their experience while studying and living in the UK (Gu et al., 2010). The subsequent section discusses the contribution of this group to various sectors in the host country and the benefit gained in return.

**Contribution of international students**

Burslem (2004) commented that international students are vital to the current and future health of UK’s further and higher education and their contributions are perceived to be academic, cultural, as well as financial. A research paper from the Department of Business Innovation and Skills (BIS) estimates the total value of UK education and training exports to the UK economy in 2010-2011 is at £14 billion and could rise as high as £22 billion in the year 2020 and £26 billion in 2025 (Smith et al., 2011; Conlon et al., 2011). In real terms, these figures represent an annual growth rate of 4.0% per annum. Furthermore, international students in the UK make a significant contribution to the economy because they pay full tuition fees and spend on services and goods (Kelly et al., 2004). The economic dependence of universities on fees from international students makes it critical to reach a clear understanding of the issues that face students during their study abroad (Brown et al., 2010).

The UKCISA (2010) identified five positive impacts of international students. First, the international fee income enables colleges and universities to invest in additional, enhanced, or expanded facilities, and to offer specialist courses which would not be viable for the UK student market alone. International students help sustain the UK’s research base especially in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. This aspect accounted for over 40% of UK postgraduate students, with 50% of these doing full-time research degrees. Next, the money the students spend also sustains thousands of jobs across the UK economy, both in colleges
and universities, and in local economies. There is no cap on the number of international students who can be accepted; they are paying (at a minimum) full cost fees and facilities can therefore be expanded as numbers increase. Lastly, the UK benefits from the global connections which international students generate. Many of the main source countries are also key export markets (and foreign policy priorities) including China, India, and the USA.

Binsardi et al. (2003) noted several economic and non-economic benefits of having international students in the UK. The economic value of the UK international education industry is the contribution to the UK gross national profit and the significant non-economic benefits include the fostering of social and political tolerance, mutual respects between UK and non-UK, and the establishment of the foundations for future cultural and international business relationships. Adding to the view of non-economic impact, international students also contribute to the intercultural learning and an increased understanding of global issues and diversity (Andrade, 2006). Andrade added that they create international business and promote foreign policy interest. In some cases, international students may remain in the country after graduation to fill positions for which few nationals are qualified (Gray, 2003). For example, Australia is benefiting from the skills of foreign students who opted to stay in the country and work in the fields of information and communication technology and engineering (Andrade, 2006).

Marshall (2005) stated that universities in the UK do not practice the extensive fundraising of their US counterparts and where tuition fees are limited by the government, they are seeking to increase international students’ enrolment to bolster revenues and to remain competitive. Many institutions rely on international students as valuable source of income and with opportunity to recruit highly qualified graduates where skills shortages exist, Edwards et al.
(2010) highlighted the importance of improving the student’s experience and develop UK’s reputation as an appealing country for international students. Institutions cannot simply recruit international students and then expect them to adjust to the new environment, culture, and education system without appropriate support, program, services, and information to help them have positive experience, fulfil their goals, and return home as satisfied customers (Carr, McKay & Rugimbana, 1999; Lee & Wesche, 2000; Andrade, 2006). An understanding of international students’ adjustment issues and challenges is needed for such help and support to be provided, hence the growing research interest in this area (Zhai, 2002; Andrade, 2006).

2.3 International Students’ Adjustment

The next section discusses the most common issues faced by international students during cross-cultural transition as conceptualised by Searle and Ward (1990), as well as the psychological adjustments and sociocultural adjustments (Church, 1982; Ward et al., 1993b; Shih et al., 2000; Tseng et al., 2002; Smith et al., 2011; Rice et al., 2012). Psychological adjustment can be understood within a stress and coping model and mainly concerns affective responses, including a sense of well-being such as physical well-being and satisfaction with transition experience (Ward et al., 1993b; Ward, 2001). Sociocultural adjustment is based on behavioural responses related to how effectively as individual links to a new society, such as competence in managing tasks required for daily intercultural living (Ward, 2001). The study of the psychological and sociocultural experiences of this group is to promote a global intercultural understanding and it was claimed that student sojourners have probably become the best researched group in studies on cross-cultural travellers (Zhou et al., 2008). It is interesting to note that most previous studies presented the psychological and sociocultural adjustments of international students as a negative experience. Very few investigations considered the positive
and successful adjustment and the impact of life course experience and acculturation strategy on the students’ adjustment during transition. The study on the adjustment experience demands a better understanding on the life course factors that guide a more positive psychological and sociocultural adjustment. This justifies this present study’s context of international students’ adjustment experience based on the life course model.

**Psychological adjustment**

It is very common for new international students to experience psychological symptoms such as homesickness, loneliness, depression, frustration, feeling of alienation, isolation, the loss of status or identity, and feeling of worthlessness when they first move to new environment in a foreign country (Tseng et al., 2002). Zhang et al. (2011)’s systematic review on psychosocial adjustment identified the most frequently reported predictors of psychological symptoms, which are stress, social support, English proficiency, length of residence, acculturation, and personality. The study also found that international students with higher stress level had more psychological symptoms that those with lower stress level.

During transition, having greater amounts of social support and stronger social ties with host country’s community and co-nationals may lead to positive psychological adjustment, emotional well-being (Hechanova-Alampay et al., 2002), and overall satisfaction of adaptation experience (Kashima et al., 2006). One study found that international students had experienced less social support than domestic students, most likely because the former’s family and friends were at greater distance (Hechanova-Alampay et al., 2002). International students may need different types and levels of support depending on certain factors such as year in school, level of study (undergraduate or postgraduate), immigration status, age, gender, country of origin,
Learning a second language and concerns regarding English competency added anxiety to international students, and the aspect has become a stressor in both their academic and sociocultural life and increased pressure for students to succeed in unfamiliar educational environment (Chen, 1999; Smith et al., 2011; Rice et al., 2012). Shih et al. (2000) identified academic adjustment issues such as lack of proficiency in the English language, lack of understanding of the American educational system, and lack of effective learning skills for gaining academic success as main concerns for international students. Berman et al. (2001) explored international students’ perception of the use of English in their academic study and found that non-native speaking students perceived various language skills to be more difficult in their academic study than their native English-speaking peers. English language competency can also act as a barrier towards the students’ self-esteem in their study such as in assignment writing, in understanding lectures, in exams, and in their social skills interaction with the local people (Chen, 1999; Mori, 2000 & Smith et al., 2011). On the other hand, international students with sufficient use of English upon arrival were significantly better adapted than students with insufficient English skills (Hayes et al., 1994; Barrat et al., 1994). Due to this stressor, international students may have lower academic expectations, which may directly decrease their confidence and impose negative adaptation (Barrat et al., 1994).

Studies have found that the stress experienced by international students tended to centre on academic situations where academic demands were perceived as heavy with fast-paced instructor-student interaction, and the academic and social support mechanism available to international students was often not relevant (Constantinides, 1992; Wan et al., 1992). Ramsay
et al. (1999) found that first-year international students had difficulties understanding lectures in terms of vocabulary and speed because the tutors spoke too fast or gave too little input. International students may also find it difficult to adjust themselves to the new teaching styles, especially in the Western countries because the students recognised the need for the development of critical thinking skills and writing skills as very important (Aubrey, 1991; Andrade, 2006; Smith et al., 2011).

International students’ unmet expectations regarding quality of service provided by their educational institution also added to the stressor source and this has affected their depression level (Smith et al., 2011; Ward et al., 2001). Cultural variations, attitude, and values can render unique differences in students’ perception and reaction to academic stressors (Misra et al., 2004).

**Sociocultural adjustments**

In addition to the changes associated with language issues and academic concerns, international students are often faced with the need to adjust to a variety of cultural and social changes or sociocultural adjustment (Zhai, 2002). Searle et al. (1990) conceptualised sociocultural adjustment as the ability to fit in and to negotiate interactive aspect of a new culture. Sociocultural adjustment is best understood using the social learning model, where cross cultural contact, cultural distance, cross cultural training, previous cross cultural experiences, and length of residence in the new culture influence the adjustment (Furnham et al., 1982). Li et al. (2005) noted that sojourners who are socio-culturally adjusted are well prepared to cope with the challenges in their cross cultural experiences. The process of adjusting to the new culture socially and culturally requires learning and applying new cultural knowledge (Searle et al., 1990).
Among the sociocultural challenges of international students are experiencing culture shock, cultural fatigue, racial discrimination, difficulties in adjusting to new social or cultural customs, norms and regulations, differences in intercultural contacts or social activities, encountering conflicts between host standards (or values, world views, life styles) and those of home country were (Tseng et al., 2002). In another study, Zlobina et al. (2005) found that the length of residence in the new culture, immigration status, and perceived discrimination were the powerful predictors of sociocultural adjustment. Zlobina et al. (2005) particularly used a self-report questionnaire to survey 518 first generation immigrants in the Basque Country, Spain. Their further examination revealed that certain variables emerged as predictors of sociocultural adjustment despite the group of sojourners, its origin, or its destination (Ward et al., 1993a; Ward, 1996; Ward, 2001).

Positive cross cultural contact with the host nationals is critical for an effective adjustment in the new culture because it may enhance mutual understanding, gain cultural knowledge, establish a local support network, improve English proficiency, and promote appreciation and understandings of each other’s way of life (Amir, 1969; Church, 1982; Toyokawa et al., 2002). Studies by Selltiz et al. (1962) and Ying et al. (1994) found that sojourners who interacted more with host nationals expressed positive feelings and have better adjustment compared to those who simply formed social network among co-nationals. The quantity and quality of interaction with the host nationals provided opportunity for cultural learning and the acquirement of culture specific skills, leading to better adjustment (Searle et al., 1990; Ward et al., 1993b).

Social difficulty is also related to cultural distance between home and host culture and the greater the perceived distance is, the more cultural learning is needed to fit in (Furnham et al.,
Those who perceive greater cultural distance are likely to experience social difficulty during a transition process (Searle et al., 1990; Ward et al., 1993b).

Ataca et al. (2002) in their study found that the perceived discrimination among Turkish male immigrants in Canada was a significant predictor of sociocultural adaptation. Their study, however, is based on immigrants and thus cannot be fully applied to other migrant group such as sojourners. Sojourners probably have better status and acceptance among host nationals and therefore experience less discrimination (Zlobina et al., 2006).

De Araujo (2011) in a review on international students’ adjustment in the US revealed that length of stay was significantly related to adjustment issues. Other studies by Sodowsky et al. (1992), Abe et al. (1998), Wilton et al. (2003), Trice (2004), and Mittal et al. (2006) reported the length of stay in the host country influenced a desired acculturation, higher scores on adjustment scale, lower levels of psychological distress, frequent interaction with host nationals, and positive cross cultural experience. The following section discusses international students’ adjustment challenges on food related issues.

2.4 International Students’ Food-related Issues

In addition to the identified psychological and sociocultural adjustment issues and challenges, food emerged as an important and distressing issue during international students’ cross cultural transition (Furukawa, 1997; Pan et al., 1999; Brown, 2009). Food-related issues have been mentioned in previous adjustment studies, for example, differences of local and home country food (Pedersen, 1991; Sandhu, 1994; Lee et al., 2007), difficulties finding familiar food items (Mehdizadeh et al., 2005), difficulties getting used to local food (Tseng et al., 2002; Ward et
al., 2004), and finding food that conforms to culture and religious beliefs (Novera, 2004; Sherry et al., 2010). However, Brown (2009a) commented that food is usually mentioned only incidentally as one of the issues during the sojourn adjustment. The food-related issues identified in the adjustment studies mentioned above are not supported with further explanation and discussion and still, little is known about how food relates to positive adjustment experiences. A few examples exist of dedicated research examining food related issues during adjustment within several contexts, such as, perceived cultural distance, dietary acculturation, and food neophobia (Furukawa, 1997; Pan et al., 1999; Satia-Abouta, 2001; Papadaki et al., 2007; Kremmyda et al., 2008; Brown, 2009a; Edwards et al., 2010; Ruetzler et al., 2012).

**Perceived cultural distance**

Furukawa’s (1997) study was aimed to evaluate the influence of cultural distance on psychological adjustment of 211 Japanese high school and college students staying with a host family in one of 23 countries in the world. Ten domains were measured: climate, clothes, language, educational level, food, religion, material comfort, leisure activities, family life, and courtship. The results later indicated food as the greatest influential factor in the students’ emotional distress during the cross cultural experience. Furukawa concluded that students who live alone in a foreign community will therefore have to eat the food that is generally available and this certainly has great repercussions in the students’ life.

The perceived cultural distance which causes culture shock is defined by Oberg (1960) as the anxiety that results from losing familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse when an individual enters a new and strange culture. According to Garza-Guerrero (1974), one of the common symptoms of culture shock is the excessive preoccupation with food upon entering a new food culture. This behaviour is described by Gosden (1999) and Brown (2009a) as food
shock. This symptom is often mentioned by internationals students as a possible obstacle to adjustment. Hence, the practice of seeking comfort in familiar food that brings emotional comfort becomes a priority during adjustment (Brown & Aktas, 2011). Brown et al. (2010) conducted a study to uncover international students’ responses to the food they eat whilst abroad and the food they left behind. In the study, semi structured interviews were conducted with ten international postgraduate students at a university in the UK. The findings of the study indicated that the role and meanings of familiar and comforting food is very important to international student who experience food shock.

**Dietary acculturation of international students**

The study on sojourners’ adjustment has seen a growing research interest in migrants’ nutritional education program that considered dietary acculturation as the main determinant of food choices in the host country. Satia-Abouta (2002) defines dietary acculturation as the process in which immigrants adopt the dietary practices of the host country. For example, a study on the effect on dietary habits of Greek undergraduate students living away from home by Papadaki et al. (2007) found that the students decreased their weekly consumption of healthier foods when compared with students who continued to live at home. Findings from a second study on Greek students studying in Glasgow by Kremmyda, Papadaki, Hondros, Kapsokefalou, and Scott (2008) indicated that living away from home and having responsibility on food purchasing and preparation had a major effect on the dietary habits of the students. It was found that the students’ consumption frequency of fresh fruits, meat, and cheese had decreased and the consumption of snack foods increased (Kremmyda et al., 2008).
Pan et al. (1999)’s study aimed to evaluate the changes in dietary patterns following migration so that nutrition education program could be tailored to international students. Based on the sample of international students in local universities and junior colleges who have been residing in the United States (US) at least three months before the start of study, Pan et al. examined the eating pattern before and after migration using a questionnaire. The study found that majority of the students consumed more salty and sweet snack items chose American-style fast food when eating out, increased consumption of fats and sweets, increased consumption of dairy products, and decreased consumption of meat and vegetables after migration to the United States.

It was recognised that one of the reason that influences the rejection of unfamiliar foods and persistency in retaining traditional food habit is food neophobia, defined as the rejection of foods that are novel or unknown (Dovey et al., 2008). The extent of international student’s food neophobia experience over time was evaluated in a study by Edwards et al. (2010). A total of 226 international students took part in the 3 components of data collection using “Food Neophobia Scale” for measurement and it was found that Asian students were more neophobic than European and both groups became more neophobic over time. However, this study offers no explanation of how food neophobia affects the overall intercultural experience of the students, but rather indicated the influence of the length of time spent in the host country. However, Ruetzler et al. (2012) found that the duration of stay in the host country neither supported nor refuted the theoretical constructs related to food neophobia of international students’ adaptation and perception towards on-campus food service whereby no significant difference were found between the two variables (length of time and food neophobia). The results indicated that the length of stay had positively influenced the adjustment experience of
the on campus foodservice whereby the students who have been there the longest (more than a year) can fully adapt to the food and service available on campus.

Although the above studies aimed towards the physical well-being or physical health of international students through the understanding of dietary acculturation, they did not go to the extent of examining how the changes of food choices made by the students contribute to the adjustment experience. The studies identified the food consumed as a result of acculturation and no significant relation with psychological or sociocultural adjustment was evaluated.

2.5 Summary

This chapter introduces international students as the sojourners group and the trends and statistics representing the numbers of international students in the UK and the world in general. The international students’ adjustment challenges are then discussed by relating how stress may influence their overall adjustment experience. One of the most challenging experience mentioned in the studies on international students were the food-related issues. Perceived cultural distance and dietary acculturation were found to be the most common issues related to the dietary changes of international students. The importance of food during the transition period was recognised although very few empirical researches existed to explore this matter.
Chapter Three: Literature review

Acculturation

3.1 Introduction

The contribution of migrant population to the host country has led to the burgeoning importance of understanding the links between cultural context and individual behavioural development in the acculturation field (Sam et al., 2006). This adds to the growing body of literature and research interest within the cross cultural psychology investigating how people who have developed in one cultural context attempt to re-establish their lives in another during cross cultural transition, which help decrease stress and aid the migrants’ acculturation (Berry, 1997; Sam et al., 2006).

The central aim of cross cultural psychology is to demonstrate the continuity and changes of the way human corresponds to the cultural influence in the new setting referred to as “acculturation” (Berry, 1997; Berry, 2005). The terms adjustment, adaptation, and acculturation have been used interchangeably within the studies of cross cultural transition but their core concept is similar: to evaluate the process of changes resulted from cultural interaction related to migration (Ward et al., 1999). The term acculturation and adjustment will be used interchangeably throughout this thesis.

3.2 Definition of Acculturation

The most commonly cited definition of acculturation found in the literature is by Redfield et al (1936 pg. 149).

Acculturation comprehends those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first hand contact with subsequent changes in the original culture pattern of either of both groups.
This definition, however, treats acculturation as a group level phenomenon whereas in more recent time, interest has grown in the study of individual level referred to as psychological acculturation. Redfield et al.’s definition does not admit the possibility of a single person acculturating (Graves, 1967; Arends-Toth et al., 2006; Rudmin, 2010). Lee et al. (2003) and Ma et al. (2004) referred acculturation as the process of overall adaptation on both individual and group levels (including cultural, psychological, socioeconomic, and political aspects) by selectively accepting and adopting aspects of another culture without completely relinquishing their own. This study agrees that the acculturation of sojourners including international students is possible and they can be selective in their acculturation strategy without having to fully assimilate to the new culture.

Acculturation and assimilation have been regarded as synonymous even though both derived from two different social sciences discipline, anthropology, and sociology. Anthropologists prefer to use the term acculturation because their concern is with how so-called primitive societies change to become more civilised following cultural contact with more enlightened group of people, whereas sociologists prefer to use the term assimilation which is directed to immigrants who gradually conform to the ways of life of the host nationals through interaction with them (Sam et al, 2006). Furthermore, it has been emphasised that assimilation is not the only kind of acculturation; it can also be reactive (resistance to change in both groups), creative (stimulating new cultural form not found in either of the cultures), and delayed (initiating changes that appear more fully years later) (Social Science Research Council, 1954; adapted in Berry, 1997).

Pedersen et al. (2011) argued that acculturation does not fully apply to sojourners living temporary in foreign environment because of the expectation of limited time living in the host
country and limited functional importance of integrating fully into the culture. This study stands on the perspective that sojourner groups including international students do experience acculturation and adjustment challenges similar to that experienced by other migrant group despite the length of stay in the host country. Moreover, their transition requires their commitment to their new location because they typically live in a country for a longer period, with a specific and goal-oriented purpose, such as obtaining an overseas qualification, and are usually inclined to adjust to some extent to local cultural norms (Gudykunst, 1998). Another term to explain acculturation of sojourners is the concept of adjustment introduced by Church (1982), whose term the acculturation concept from short-term visitors to include foreign environment (Pedersen et al., 2011).

For this study, the term acculturation will be used in a more general way as a mean of identifying the changes in developmental stage concerning the roles and responsibilities in personal and food provisioning during transition from family living context to living independently. One of the most important developmental stages experienced by the international students is emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000).

### 3.3 Acculturative Stress

According to Church (1982), although adjustment issues and challenges of international students remained essentially the same over the last thirty years, they can be very common even to new domestic students. However, certain circumstances have made the issues and challenges much greater for international students due to the added strain of learning cultural values and language in addition to academic preparation (Church, 1982; Misra et al., 2004). According to Hechanova- Alampay et al. (2002) the greater degree of challenges faced by international students often relates to cultural differences. Berry (1997) conveyed cultural
distance in the study whereby people can easily adapt to culture similar to their practice but find it hard to adapt to cultures where the language, religion, standard of living, and political system are different from their own.

When individuals face difficulties adapting to host culture, they experience *culture shock* (Oberg, 1960) because of perceived cultural distance, unsatisfying relations with host country nationals, poor language proficiency, predicted social difficulty, and reduced sociocultural adjustment (Church, 1982; Furnham et al., 1982; Ward et al., 1993b). The culture shock experienced was labelled by Berry (1970) and Berry, Kim, Minde, & Mok (1987) as *acculturative stress*. The issues and challenges of international students mentioned within both adjustment and acculturation contexts are similar, whereby the definition of adjustment issues and challenges are used interchangeably with acculturative stress (Zhang et al., 2011, Smith et al., 2011).

Starting the first year at university for international students increases the distance and reduces the contact with family and friends, which add the stress of managing changes in living arrangements, academic commitment, and friendship network while adapting to greater independence and responsibility in their personal and academic lives (Dwyer & Cummings, 2001; Dyson & Renk, 2006).

### 3.4 Dietary Acculturation

Acculturation is described as the process by which a racial, ethnic, or immigrant group adopts the cultural patterns of a dominant host as “acculturation” and the adoption of dietary practices as “dietary acculturation” (Sukalamakala et al., 2006). In Jamal’s (1996) study about ethnic eating among British Pakistanis, she viewed acculturation as the impact of migration and
resettlement on the consumption experience of immigrants in a new cultural environment. Some researchers used the term assimilation to study the changes in the consumption and behavioural patterns of immigrants after they moved from their country of origin to a new country (Jamal, 1996). In addition, dietary acculturation is a more reciprocal process as the host group may adopt some of the foods and dietary practices of the minority group (Satia-Abouta et al., 2003).

Food acculturation in the US has been associated with shifts from traditional diets of vegetables, meats, and whole grains to the more processed, high-fat, and sugary foods that are popular and easily available in the US (Unger et al., 2004). As people from more traditional societies enter a new community with greater food availability, there is often a nutrition transition leading to assimilation of the mainstream culture’s dietary patterns, which, in the US, means more total and saturated fatty acids and fewer complex carbohydrates (Lin et al., 2003). A study measuring acculturation among Japanese Americans in the US by Pierce et al. (2007) showed that the subjects who were more acculturated to a Western lifestyle were frequent consumers of cheese, salty snacks, and soft drinks but these studies do not indicate factors that contributed towards the changes.

Much of the works in dietary acculturation are concerned with the health status of various migrant groups (Romero-Gwynn et al., 1993; Pan et al., 1999; Satia-Abouta et al., 2001; Satia-Abouta, 2003; Kremmyda et al., 2008). Among the health related issues addressed within these studies were diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and other potential chronic disease as a result of poor unbalanced diet adopted after migration. In a study aimed to explore Mexican dietary acculturation patterns among immigrants in the US, Colby et al. (2009) reviewed several studies on this group and concluded that the increasing chronic diseases like obesity and
diabetes among Mexican-Americans may be linked to the changes in diet and lifestyle. In particular Colby et al. adopted an in-depth interview based on observation, field notes, and photographic documentation of a two weekends and one weekday activities and dietary intake of five Mexican families with similar characteristics. The findings attested that the acculturation challenges had resulted in poor dietary intake due to decreased availability, food displacement, cost, decrease in physical activity, and social barriers (Colby et al., 2009). However, it raised the question whether the health issues were genetically inherited since before the migration and no follow up investigation on the dietary habits were included to identify whether the food choice were habitual for a longer period of time.

Wahlqvist (2002) mentioned the possibility for measuring acculturation by determining a reference point and pattern for a particular food culture, which is useful when a population has migrated and established itself amongst a majority food culture. In this study on food and health consequences of Asian migration to Australia, it was found that Asians have contributed to the whole food chain, food processes, and technologies in Australia (Wahlqvist, 2002). Wahlqvist further mentioned that although the changes in dietary patterns due to acculturation may negatively affect the migrating population, changes could also be bi-directional, promoting positive dietary changes in the host population.

Lin et al. (2003) concluded that dietary patterns are greatly determined by cultural influences on perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes about food. In a study by Satia-Abouta et al. (2001), the authors found that the strongest predictors of acculturation to a Western diet were younger age, a higher level of education, employment outside the home, and a larger percentage of total life spent in North America. Sukalamakala et al. (2006) suggested that in order to intervene successfully in the study of dietary acculturation, it is important to identify socioeconomic,
demographic, as well as cultural factors and changes in food preference, procurement, preparation, and intake.

3.5 Acculturation and Adjustment Models

The research interest on acculturation has led to the development of acculturation models to depict the key factors impacting the process (Zhang et al., 2011; Smith et al., 2011). The models offer explanation on when the actual acculturation takes place and the type of acculturation strategy adopted to manage the new environment.

U Curve Model

Among the most popular adjustment models is the U Curve model introduced by Lysgaard (1955), which describes the overall changes in attitudes, emotions, and conducts during an acculturation process as a U Curve. Individuals start out with excitement and high functioning (euphoria) followed immediately by confusion and decreased competency (culture shock) and finally regained optimism and satisfaction by acquiring more knowledge of the new culture (Oberg, 1960; Gullahorn et al., 1963). Critiques of this model contend that there is little empirical evidence and support for early euphoria at the first stage of this model (Church, 1982; Ward, 2001; Brown et al., 2008). Furnham (1993) did not agree that culture shock emerges on the second stage and believed that transition is best understood as a process of change that will be stressful at first with more challenges existing upon arrival to the host country. Thomas and Harrel (1994) stated that the U Curve model is one dimensional and does not allow for personality differences as the factor affecting an adjustment.

Ward et al. (1998) tested the U Curve model to examine the cross cultural transition and adjustment of 35 newly arrived Japanese students in New Zealand. The research is a
longitudinal study using questionnaire that took place within 24 hours of arrival in the new country and at 4, 6, and 12 months in New Zealand. The findings contrasted Lysgaard’s cross sectional research which proposed that psychological adjustment were better in the first six months compared to the 6-12 months period. Ward et al. found that adjustment problems were found to be greatest at entry point and decreased over time and elevated level of depression occurred in conjunction with students’ overseas arrival. Ward et al. concluded that no findings from other investigations including theirs lend support to the U Curve model of adjustment. In the study on dietary acculturation, much of the studies rejected the linearity and prescriptiveness of the U Curve model and found that stress related to food was at its most intense at the very beginning of the course. The findings from Ward et al. (1998) justifies the importance to examine the food acculturation of international students in the early phase of their arrival because it is the most critical and stressful point in transition.

**Sojourner’s adjustment**

Church (1982) introduced the concept of “sojourner adjustment” that fully applies to migrants living temporarily in a foreign environment, such as international students. There is an ongoing need to refine dominant acculturation models in the general acculturation literature and apply them to international students as the vast number of acculturation models are related to immigrants and refugees (Smith et al., 2011).

The concept of sojourner adjustment derives from the theory of culture shock by Oberg (1960), explained as the difficulties adapting to cultures that are different from their own (Zhang et al., 2011). According to Arends-Toth et al. (2006), early theories and research on acculturation were also strongly influenced by the examination of the pathological symptoms accompanying culture shock but more recent approaches paid more attention to establishing the links of
acculturation models with current theories and clinical and social psychology models. It was argued that “shock” has no psychological or cultural theory, whereas stress has a developed theoretical frame (Yue et al., 2012).

It was found that international student living temporarily abroad have experienced difficulties due to cultural distance, sociocultural stressors, practical stressors (financial, accommodation and food), educational stressors, and English language proficiency (Furnham et al., 1982; Ward, 1991; Ward et al., 1993b; Chen, 1999; Misra et al., 2004; Poyrazli et al., 2007). These factors impacted on the international students’ psychological and sociocultural adjustment and despite the importance of the adjustment outcomes; there was no established measures of the sojourner’s adjustment concept to date (Pedersen et al., 2011). In an attempt to fill this gap in the adjustment literature, Pedersen et al. designed a study to develop Sojourner Adjustment Measure (SAM)–a scale used to assess the adjustment of American sojourners abroad and to examine psychological and sociocultural adjustment based on four positive and two negative hypothesised factors of the sojourner adjustment by Church (1982). The factors are (1) social interaction with host nationals, (2) cultural understanding and participation, (3) language development and use, (4) host culture identification, (5) social interaction with co-nationals, and (6) homesickness and feeling out of place. However, the six-factor model necessitates further research because the items established with the sample of American students may not be applicable to other groups.

**Berry’s acculturation strategies**

Ward et al. (1999) commented on Berry’s contribution to the development of acculturation theory through a sound conceptual base and a systematic and comparative analysis of empirical data. Earlier research by Graves (1967) has influenced Berry’s work on models of acculturation
that focused on the psychological and behavioural changes that an individual experiences as a result of sustained contact with members of other cultural groups. A major contribution to the study of psychological acculturation and acculturative stress is found in the conceptual analysis of acculturation strategies introduced in Berry (1997).

In an acculturation process, several strategies are possible depending on the factors relating to the process but commonly, two major dimensions arise upon making the decision on which acculturation strategy to practice, one being cultural maintenance and the other being contact and participation (Berry, 1997). The responses to these two dimensions are portrayed in four acculturation strategies: integration, separation, assimilation, and marginalisation. Individuals who value both cultural maintenance and intergroup relations are seen to endorse the integrationist approach, whereas those who value cultural maintenance but not intergroup relation are believed to adopt the separatist approach. Those who value intergroup relations but not concerned with cultural maintenance are assimilationist and those who do not value either one are said to be marginalised (Berry, 1997; Ward et al. 1999). Figure 3 illustrates the conceptual framework generated by Berry (1997) to explain how the responses of “yes” or “no” to the issues of cultural maintenance and contact and participation and the intersection of these factors will defined the four acculturation strategies.
Based on the acculturation strategies, a conceptual framework for acculturation research was developed but it only takes into consideration that the possible psychological experiences and changes will lead to complete adaptation (Berry, 1997). As for the four acculturation strategies, Ward et al. (1999) commented that many of the scale items are lengthy (typically eighty items) and that it involves multiple concepts rather than simple single notion statements. It also raises questions about the precision of the measurement in relation to the guiding questions and has implications for the development of alternative assessments instrument due to the instrument being culture-specific and might require additional efforts to test modifications to ensure cultural appropriateness. Ward et al. then developed two dimensions of host national and co-national identification and the four acculturation strategies in relation to psychological and sociocultural adaptation. The findings supported their hypotheses on the relation of
psychological and sociocultural context and the acculturation strategies (Ward et al., 1999). Many of the recent acculturation models were based on these contexts.

**Relevance of Berry’ acculturation strategies**

Ward (2008) commented that Berry’s acculturation strategies (integration, separation, assimilation and marginalisation) are considered as a process but the elements of the process are overlooked. For example, integration is mentioned as the most preferred strategy among sojourners, migrants, refugees, and indigenous people (Berry et al., 2006) but the model is yet to demonstrate the elements that could further clarify how one achieves integration, which are the elements stated in Ward et al. (2008:107):

What does integration really mean, and how is it achieved? Do people integrate by fusing their orientations to home and host cultures? Are their identities situational so that sometimes they are “traditional” and sometimes “modern”? Why do people assimilate or separate? Is it because they choose to or because they do not have the skills and abilities to integrate? How does marginalisation occur? Does it arise from constraints and deficits or is it a genuine option? Do acculturation orientations change over time? And more central to this discussion, are there different ways to conceptualise orientations to traditional culture and to the broader society?

Berry’s acculturation strategy also lacks in clarity over dimensional and conceptions over contextual factors, such as cultural features and social constrains that will affect the acculturation process and create differing acculturation trajectories (Lara et al. 2005; Castro, Marsiglia, Kulis, & Kellison, 2010). Furthermore, the wide variations of conceptualisations, measurements, and applications in acculturation have produced conflicting outcomes and conclusion (Lopez-Class, Castro & Ramirez, 2011). Hence this study proposes that food acculturation is best approached in qualitative methods to capture the complex influences of individual and contextual processes and to discover patterns of cultural adaptation that would inform a more grounded analysis of the acculturation process.
3.6 Summary

The chapter reviews the definition of acculturation and presents acculturation challenges and issues, contexts, and various models applied to understand the adjustment and acculturation process. The discussion on the adjustment challenges during the transition revealed that the international students’ challenges are similar to domestic student but the cultural difference made the stress greater. The dietary acculturation studies indicated the changes that occurred in the dietary patterns of sojourners and migrants upon the transition and indicated the complexity of food adjustment in the new country. The various acculturation models applied in various studies are presented. The relevance of Berry’s acculturation strategies namely integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalisation are discussed and the relevance of the model is explained at the end of this chapter. The following chapter discusses food choice context and the relevance of life course perspective.
Chapter Four: Literature Review

Food Choice

4.1 Introduction

Eating is a necessity in life for survival and health and it involves many different food choice decisions such as whether, what, when, with whom, how long, how, and how much to eat (Sobal et al., 2009). Specific food choices lay the groundwork for long-term food habits and the automatic, habitual, and subconscious food choice decision affecting every aspect including acquisition, preparation, and consumption of food (Furst et al., 1996). Migration and acculturation have been associated with food choice process because food-related experience is significant in the psychosocial adjustment of the migrants (Bowen & Devine, 2011). To put into context, this chapter discusses food choice, the role of food during acculturation, and the application and relevance of life course perspective to demonstrate the food acculturation process of international students.

4.2 Food Choice Decision-Making Process

Sobal et al. (2009) examined the complexity of food choice decision making whereby it is through the many aspects of social and behavioural sciences. For example, making food choice decisions requires complex considerations when deciding when to eat, either to snack first or not; where to eat, either at the comfort of own home or restaurant; with whom, either eating alone or with friends; and what to eat, either freshly made or readymade meal. All these pose a major challenge to the application of a single and simple theoretical model.

Sobal et al. (2009) also mentioned the three main social theories that can be used to examine food choice decision making, which are social behaviour, social fact, and social definition. The
social behaviour perspective takes a rationalist stance which assumes that individuals make decisions to optimise benefits and minimise cost (Sobal et al., 2009). For example, in Glanz et al.’s (1998) study on why Americans eat what they do, the value expectancy theory that grounded the social-psychological theories of decision making and behaviour were used to specify how people defined and evaluated the element of decisions making when performing a specific behaviour. When a person believes the nutritional value of the food is important in choosing whether to eat it and rates a food as highly nutritious; then there is a good chance that the food will be eaten (Glanz et al. 1998). Identifying those factors that are of importance to a person’s decision about performing a specific behaviour can lead to the development of interventions, products, and decisions aiding to promote healthy eating behaviours (Glanz et al., 1998).

4.3 Food Choice Factors

Food choice behaviours include several stages of processes like acquiring, preparing, serving, sharing, storing, and cleaning up (Sobal et al., 2009). Factors influencing these behaviours can be examined at many levels ranging from basic unlearned behaviours through psychobiological and socially reinforced preferences–through individual and culturally derived attitudes, beliefs and practices–to external economic and physical constrains on food acquisition, storage, and use (Shepherd et al., 1998).

Food choice decisions incorporate not only decisions based on conscious reflection but also those that are automatic, habitual, and subconscious (Furst et al., 1996; Blake et al., 2008). *Food habits* is a term that refers to the ways people make food choices and decisions based on experience on how to use, select, obtain, and distribute the food, that will then develop towards
attitude to foods (Khan, 1981; Kittler et al. 2004). These food habits are the reason why cultures and traditions persist so strongly because their practices are the foundation on which all food choice decisions are built (Pollard et al., 2002).

Rozin et al. (1986) mentioned the term *omnivore’s dilemma*, or *omnivore’s paradox* in Kittler et al. (2004), which is a process described as children’s evolutionarily beneficial survival mechanism to help them avoid ingesting noxious or toxic chemicals once they are adept and mobile enough to consider, pick up, and consume objects found in their immediate environment but outside of their parental guidance (Dovey et al, 2008). This process may result in two contradictory psychological impacts or predispositions: (1) attraction to new foods and (2) preference to familiar foods (Kittler et al. 2004). This supports children’s aversion to new food or food neophobia and preference to familiar, bland, sweet foods because they have the advantage of various food options but face challenges in identifying food that are safe to eat (Wardle et al. 2008). Children’s food preferences are developed by eating food provided to them but the clear preference for food containing both fat and sugar which increases the palatability of food is present in both children and adults (Kittler et al., 2004; Imai et al., 2009). This explains how food choices are learned in the earlier phases in life.

Many factors contribute to the behavioural influence over food choice decisions for an individual. In a study by Neumark- Sztainer (1999), several factors were perceived as an influence to food choice: hunger and food cravings, appeal of food, time considerations of adolescents and parents, convenience of food, food availability, parental influence on eating behaviours (including culture and religion of family), benefits of food (including health), situation-specific factors, mood, body image, habit, cost, media, and vegetarian beliefs.
With regards to explaining the dynamic process of food choice construction, Falk et al. (1996) studied sixteen individuals aged sixty-five years and older to learn how they chose food. The study found that the beliefs related to the appropriate food behaviour and expected characteristics of food and meals were formed during childhood and food choice situations were managed using strategies and repertoire such as routinisation, substitution, limitation, and limitation/avoidance (Falk et al., 1996). The study then concluded that food choice involved cultural, sociological, and psychological factors that varied within individuals and had different strengths among various group of people and for different foods. The food choice decisions of earlier generations were somewhat different than it is now and will change again in the future (Belasco, 2006).

To understand the basic global rules in comprehending human food choice and food intake, Mela (1999) listed some examples as shown in Table 1:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rule</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>If it is not available, it will not be eaten.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If it is available, it is likely to be eaten.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If there is no alternative, it will be eaten.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behaviour tends to be stable (familiarity breeds content). Past behaviour is a good predictor of future behaviour.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If learning can take place, it probably will.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If learning cannot take place, it won’t.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Context is as important as content.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived quality and intake reflect matching of expectations.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1- Examples of basic rules in human and food choice

The basic rules (Table 4.1) operate on human food choice and intake and represent an interactive outcome of many possible combinations sets of underlying forces. For instance, availability is not limited to physical and economical access and may take into account other variations such as food deserts or dietary intakes (Mela, 1999). Therefore, although availability
is not an issue even when food choice is expandable and readily affordable, cultural values and rules may still influence food choice decisions.

4.4 The Role of Culture in Food Choice

It was argued in an earlier study by Rozin (1996) that culture provides the strongest determinant of food choice and to some extent, the effects of culture reflect different dietary histories which will determine which food and food qualities are acceptable in terms of their sensory properties. In a later study, Rozin et al. (1999) at first mentioned that there is little substantial evidence on food attitudes in cross cultural context but later concluded that there are differences in the extent to which food functions as a stressor versus a pleasure.

Culture is perhaps the most obvious influence on food preferences and choice. It has strong historical antecedents rooted in unique combinations of environment (geography, climate, and range of native plant and animal species), ritual and belief systems (religious and secular), community and family structure, human endeavour (innovation, mechanisation, experimentation), mobility (exploration, immigration), and economic and political systems. All these aspects are integrated into a range of particular “traditional” and accepted rules of cuisine and appropriateness and “ideals” (Furst et al. 1996; Koster, 2009).

Nielsen et al. (1998) used a laddering interview technique to elicit food choice motives of consumers from the UK, Denmark, and France and found cross cultural differences in the degree to which health aspects, country of origin, and sensory characteristics were seen as important reasons for food preference. A study by Contento et al. (2006) found that food choice is deeply embedded in culture and that food carries many different meanings to an individual.
Understanding the motives that determine food choice, as pointed by Honkanen et al. (2009), is important for the successful design of promotional campaigns especially the development of effective food and health policies.

James (2004) investigated factors that influenced food choices among African American and found that the barriers to eating healthful diet are (1) no sense of urgency, (2) the social and cultural symbolism of certain food, (3) the poor taste of healthy foods, (4) the expense of healthy foods, and (5) lack of information. The dietary habits, food choices, and cooking methods of African American also evolved from a long history of slavery, persecution, and segregation (James, 2004). The aspect of eating, food preparation, and food purchasing are sometimes culturally defined and an individual may consciously or unconsciously participate in these activities to preserve traditions and maintain group identity (Kittler et al., 2001). This might explain the food choice among African American in James’s (2004) study.

Food choice has been seen as driven by biological, psychological, and cultural influence in the past but more recent models of food choice have included other environmental contributors (Devine, 2003). It was suggested in Popkin et al. (2005) that environmental factors bear significant influence on diet, physical activity, and obesity. Upon deciding food choice, immigrants often adopt stages of dietary acculturation in their new environment, for example, by preserving traditional foods, rejecting others, putting a new twist on traditional foods, and/or adopting dietary patterns of the host population (Franzen et al., 2009).

It was understood that when people from traditional societies enter the food system and adopt the Western foodways society, they enter a nutrition transition whereby they are typically becoming acculturated and chose to consume a diet higher in fat, which is considered as
improper in original culture but with greater availability and consumption in the new society (Nestle et. al., 1998). Nestle et al. also mentioned that most food choice behaviour studies focused on physiological and psychological determinants with less attention been given to cultural, historical, social, and demographical considerations. Cultural factors should be examined in more detail because they are the basis for food choice for most people and could define the ethnic group and provide rules and category for food that is considered acceptable or improper.

4.5 The Symbols of Food

In the book *Food and Culture* by Counihan et al. (2013), food is considered as life and life could be studied and understood through food. The symbols of food are far more important to many people than other objects or practices and they are considered to hold the key to any culture and present the dimensions of context for analysis (Counihan et al., 2013). James (1994) contrasted local identity to globalisation, suggesting how the global may re-establish the local food rather than replace it.

In the study of how food is connected to rituals, symbols, and belief systems, food “binds” people to their faith through “powerful links” between food and memory, reinforced religious conformance, and ethnic boundaries (Feeley- Harnik, 1995; Fabre- Vassas, 1997). The Buddhists follow a macrobiotic diet and lifestyle whereby food is grouped into the Yin (expansive) and Yang (contracted) state and diet is used to balance the environment, lifestyle, and constitution (Pollard et al. 2002). Other predominant types of food choice for personal eating include dieter, health fanatic, picky eater, restrictive eater, inconsistent eater, healthy provider, struggler, and partnership (Blake et al., 2003; Sobal et al., 2006).
Commensality is the concept used to describe eating with others and commensal eating reflects the structures of relationship and helps define the boundaries of classes, ethnic, religious, age, and sexual groups (Sobal, 2000; Sobal et al., 2003). Sobal et al explained that commensal circles or groups are built upon two perspectives: (1) cultural values which concern the pressures of social norms to eat with appropriate partners and having the proper or ideal meal, and (2) structural individualism where the effects of social isolation and fast pace of mass society act as a hindrance to commensal eating. Commensality among international students is important because it provides examination of how commensal eating may help their adjustment journey.

Every culture in the world has food system with its own patterns of symbolic meanings (Jamal, 1996). The consumption of food helps consumers express themselves and moreover, when an ethnic identity becomes a vital issue, ethnic food is recreated. Jamal’s study proved further that through eating ethnic food objects, the feeling of bonding and conformity is rekindled with their original culture. It was later concluded that ethnic foods have been consistently consumed since migration as learned habits helped shape the current food choice and create patterns that are resistant to change (Mennel et al., 1992; Jamal, 1996). Eating particular foodstuffs for migrants caused “memory of homes to linger, recreated in new localities through the medium of food (James, 1998:91).”

The roles of many kinds of social change including migration have been relatively neglected in food studies (Mintz et al., 2002). It is important to understand the role that all factors play in the food choice process and other aspects of dietary changes, as well as the extent of these changes in order to establish an environment of positive learning and healthy lifestyle for international students.
4.6 Food Choice Adjustment Strategy

When making food choices, people adopt a combination of strategies described as a repertoire (Sobal et al., 2006). Table 2 presents a list of strategies to simplify food choice as adapted from Falk et al. (1996) and Sobal et al. (2006).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Focusing on one value</strong>&lt;br&gt;(emphasize only on cost, taste, health, relationships, convenience or another value)</td>
<td>Eat the cheapest food whenever possible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Routinization</strong>&lt;br&gt;(standardized, systemized, routinized)</td>
<td>Eat cereal every day for breakfast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Elimination</strong>&lt;br&gt;(avoid, exclude, prohibit)</td>
<td>Never eat desserts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Limitation</strong>&lt;br&gt;(restrict, regulate, reduce)</td>
<td>Drinks only two cups of coffee everyday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Substitution</strong>&lt;br&gt;(replace, exchange, fill in)</td>
<td>Choose brown rice instead of white rice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Addition</strong>&lt;br&gt;(augment, include, enhance)</td>
<td>Eat a salad with every evening meal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Modification</strong>&lt;br&gt;(alter, adjust, transform)</td>
<td>Remove fats from meat and poultry</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Strategies for Simplifying Food Choices  
(Adapted from Falk et al. 1996; Sobal et al. 2006)

The strategies in Table 2 can be explained as follows:

(1) Focusing on one value discounts other values as less relevant and defines a food choice setting in a way so that values do not have to be negotiated;

(2) Routinisation standardises food choice decision-making processes or actual eating behaviours for a recurring situation into habits and automatic behaviours;

(3) Elimination excludes particular foods, food categories, eating location or eating patterns from all food choice options, or make exclusion for particular setting;
(4) Limitations restrict use of selected foods or ways of eating to simplify food choice decisions, but is more complex than elimination because it requires establishing acceptable levels and then monitoring adherence to those limits;

(5) Substitution of food or ways of eating to accommodate conflicting values by replacing one option with another that is more satisfactory (Sobal et al. 2006).

In a similar context, the above strategies echo Berry’s acculturation outcomes which lists integration, assimilation, marginalisation, and separation strategies (Berry, 1997).

Falk et al. (1996), Furst et al. (1996), Connors et al. (2001), and Sobal et al. (2006) explained that the behavioural plans, routines, and rules are the strategies developed to simplify food choices by eliminating the effort and time required when considering every food choice decision. Strategies that emerged from initial conscious food choice decisions for a specific situation eventually become less mindful when that situation repeats in future (Sobal et al., 2006). The multiple use of strategies and the personal set of strategies constitute a repertoire (Falk et al. 1996; Sobal et al. 2006). Repertoires may include the use of “one dominant strategy, simultaneous use of several strategies, sequential use of different strategies, and situational use of strategies to make food choice decisions (Sobal & Bisogni, 2009:S43).”

These strategies and repertoires are dynamic and responsive to other food choice processes; for example, new marriage or new health condition typically changes the influence of personal factors, resources, social context, and food context (Falk et al. 2000; Sobal et al. 2006). When their food choice strategy is satisfactory, it becomes automatised for a recurring food choice decision (Sobal et al. 2006). Some of the strategies adopted by international students have been arrangement for their family to send spices from home, replenishing food supply at regular
intervals by family member, and filling in their suitcases with spices upon arriving in the host country (Brown et al., 2010). These actions are due to the expensive prices of such spices and ingredients available in England, dissimilar taste and quality, and the fact that some are not available locally.

4.7 Conceptual and Theoretical Framework of Food Choice

The important role of food choices in symbolic, economic, and social aspects of life lead to increasing attention given to this area (Sobal et al., 2006). Sobal et al. added that food choices determine nutrients and substances into the body and subsequently influence health and thus create consumer demand for suppliers in the food system. Food choice process is dynamic and changes over historical time and individual time, involving a combination of physical and mental processes in the management of food and eating to meet an individual’s biological, psychological, and social need and thus requires several approaches to fully understand the process (Sobal, 1998; Bisogni et al., 2005). The number of publication on food choice factors has grown over the last ten years but they lack the investigation on the interaction between different factors that influence behaviour (Koster, 2007). The subsequent subsection discusses the studies that examine how food choice is constructed in everyday life using various approaches.

General approaches to food choice studies

Three general approaches have been widely used in studies of food choice process. The first approach is the application of existing models, theories, and frameworks that were developed to study other topics and then applied to examine food choice (e.g., theory of planned behaviour, health belief model). The second approach is the deductive development of new models to explain how food choice were made (e.g., studies by Nestle et al., 1998; Wetter et
al., 2001). The third approach is the inductive development of models using qualitative research methods to conceptualise how people think and engage in food choices (e.g., Furst et al., 1996).

Shepherd et al. (1999) developed a model to conceptualise factors that influence food choice and intake (Figure 4). The model categorises factors such as (1) related to the food, (2) individual making the food choice, and (3) the external economic and social environment within which the choice is made. Perceiving these sensory attributes in a particular food does not necessarily mean that an individual will or will not choose to consume that food. This model merely catalogues the likely influences and are useful in pointing variables to consider in food choice studies (Shepherd, 1999).

![Diagram](image)

**Figure 4: Factors affecting food choice intake**

*(Adapted from Shepherd, 1999)*

In another study that focused at gaining a theoretical understanding of identities related to eating, Bisogni et al. (2002) aimed to develop a conceptualisation of identity grounded in the ways people construct their life experiences through a grounded theory approach. Using the findings from semi structured interviews with seventeen middle-class white adults, the identity
in food choice model was developed (Figure 5). The model represents the representing variations of identities related to eating, including identities related to eating practices, other personal characteristics, and reference groups and social categories. For example, the aspects of the food and eating are related to three different identities: eating practices (e.g., picky or fussy eater, junk food junkie, hearty eater), other personal characteristics (e.g., values, personality, physiology, emotions), and reference group and social categories (e.g., interpersonal relationship and roles, group association).

![Figure 5: Food Choice Identity Model](Adapted from Bisogni et al. 2002)

The limitations of this concept (Figure 5) is that it does not signify culture, region, local food system, and socioeconomic status as the salient meanings assigned to the food eaten.

Bisogni et al. (2007)’s framework (Figure 6) lists eight dimensions of episode for understanding food choice: food and drinks, time, location, activities, social setting, mental
processes, physical condition, and recurrence. These dimensions allow for more refined exploration of relationships between characteristics within each context.

Figure 6: Eight dimensions of eating and drinking episodes

(Adapted from Bisogni et al., 2007)

This framework (Figure 6) is based on the findings of the situational nature of eating and drinking analysis of forty-two American adults using a qualitative 24-hour recall of food and beverage consumption. The conceptual understanding on these eight dimensions of eating and drinking episodes suggest approaches for researchers and practitioners to understand how people manage everyday eating at a time when traditional meal patterns are changing (Bisogni et al., 2007). However, this framework does not represent a wider, culturally different group and regional and historical differences in eating and drinking. The participants’ report may be different from actual experiences due to memory limitations or unwillingness to fully describe their food choice activities.
Dietary acculturation measures

Dietary acculturation is a multidimensional, dynamic, and complex process where immigrants may find new ways to use traditional foods, exclude other foods, and consume new foods (Pan et al., 1999; Lee et al., 1999; Satia-Abouta et al., 2002). It was suggested by Park et al. (2003) that acculturation research should focus more on changes in eating pattern or dietary habits because this is the practice that is unique and fundamental to most cultures and may change slower than any other aspects such as language and clothing.

In a review on dietary acculturation studies, Satia-Abouta et al. (2002) stated that there are three major approaches to dietary acculturation measures: the single item measures of general acculturation, acculturation scales, and food-based assessments. According to Satia-Abouta et al., the single item measure is quite general; it focuses on items such as length of residence and language proficiency and this may not provide specific information needed for designing health promotion programs. On the other hand, acculturation scales are more comprehensive because it measures several facets of exposure to the host country but does not typically include diet-specific acculturation indicators (Satia-Abouta et al., 2002). Satia-Abouta et al. suggested that the food based measures (food lists and dietary acculturation scales) are much more promising because they assess dietary acculturation by measuring eating patterns and therefore directly assess dietary acculturation, which is the adoption of the eating pattern of the host country, maintenance of traditional diets, or both. Notwithstanding, the food-based measures do not assess how the process of acculturation interrelates with the choice of food consumed in the new country, which is necessary for the design of effective dietary interventions.

Satia Abouta et al. (2002) then proposed a model of dietary acculturation shown in Figure 7 to explain the process by which racial/ethnic immigrant groups adopt the eating patterns of the
host country. This model posits that there is a complex and dynamic relationship of socioeconomic, demographic, and cultural factors with exposure to the host culture. These characteristics predict the extent of changes in attitudes and beliefs about food, taste preferences, food purchasing, and preparation and ultimately influence the changes in dietary intake (Satia-Abouta et al., 2002). The framework (Figure 7), however, is claimed to likely be incomplete and requires a quantitative, longitudinal studies to determine the relative importance of various determinants in influencing acculturation associated dietary changes and the impact of those changes on health status (Satia-Abouta et al., 2002).

**Figure 7: Proposed model of dietary acculturation**

(Adapted from Satia-Abouta et al., 2002)

Ayala et al. (2008) did a systematic review on acculturation and diet among Latinos in America and claimed that most research mentioned that the group consumed a less healthful diet due to
less access to healthy food, food insecurity, and low socioeconomic status. The unhealthy diet can be linked to the effects of migration and acculturation processes examined in terms of migrant’s country of origin, age of arrival, and years living in the United States. Ayala et al. reviewed the varied methods in which migration and acculturation are measured, including single measures of acculturation to multidimensional and bidirectional measures that were validated against dietary intake report such as food frequency questionnaire, 24-hour dietary recall, dietary screener and dietary behaviours (e.g. away-from-home eating, food preparation, shopping techniques and fat avoidance). Notwithstanding, the different influence of acculturation on diet and eating habits of the migrant group required further study especially concerning dietary acculturation strategies as this will help to better understand the role of food during acculturation (Satia-Abouta et al., 2002; Ayala et al., 2008; Hartwell et al., 2011).

**Life Course Perspective (LCP)**

The life course perspective (LCP) is a holistic approach that examines people’s life over time, and it represents a whole life analysis perspective that originated from the field of sociology (Wethington et al., 2009). Dubowitz et al. (2007) stated that the relationships between acculturation, life course experiences, and social and physical contexts are the factors important in daily life activity and especially central to the cultural phenomena of diet, food preparation, and eating. Devine et al. (1999) discussed how life transitions and changing environment are associated with ideals, identities, and roles in stimulating the reassessment of the importance of ethnic food consumption and the roles of food in the enactment of ethnicity during acculturation.
The life course perspective is an emerging framework in research and educational practice in food studies, especially nutrition. Wethington (2005) defines seven key concepts that are widely applied by researchers using the life course perspective shown in (Table 3) next;

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Example(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trajectories</td>
<td>Stable patterns of behaviour or health across time</td>
<td>Tobacco use, chronic disease</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transitions</td>
<td>Changes in social roles or responsibilities</td>
<td>Divorce, birth of first child, change in job responsibilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turning points</td>
<td>Transitions that are major changes in on going social role trajectories; life takes a different direction</td>
<td>Educational decision that affects career paths</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural and contextual influences</td>
<td>Events and externalities that shape and constrain the process of change and adaptation</td>
<td>The Great Depression, race, gender, neighbourhood factors that affect childhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timing in lives</td>
<td>The interaction between age or stage of the life course and timing of event or transition</td>
<td>Age at the time of a major event, such as the Great Depression, age of birth of first child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linked lives</td>
<td>Dependence of the development of one person on the presence, influence, or development of another</td>
<td>Influence of spouse on the other’s health behaviours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adaptive strategies</td>
<td>Conscious decisions that people make to improve their health or well-being or social norms that frame the way in which decisions are made to adapt to external changes</td>
<td>Changes in health behaviour, individual coping strategies, such as taking action, denial, avoidance, or reappraisal of the threat.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Table 3-Key Concepts in the Life Course Perspective |
| (Adapted from Wethington, 2005) |

The use of principles in the life course perspective briefly explains the translational research on food choice decision making that will bridge the gaps between basic research and practice (Wethington et al., 2009).
One early example to portray the complexity of food choice process based on life course perspective is by Furst et al.’s (1996) study, which used twenty-nine interviews to examine the food choice process among adults making grocery store food choice decisions. This study has developed a Food Choice Process Model using the data collected to present people’s life course experiences that have influenced their food choice. The model has resulted from a holistic approach that gained new insights into the food choice process as well as similar findings of influences and values that affected it. Figure 8 presents the conceptual model of food choice adapted from Furst et al. (1996), Sobal et al. (2006), and Sobal and Bisogni (2009),

![Conceptual Model of Food Choice Process](image)

**Figure 8: The Life Course Perspective Model**

*(Adapted from Furst et al., 1996; Sobal et al., 2006; Sobal & Bisogni, 2009)*

The conceptual model for food choice process represents the ways people simplify the task of making food choices by using individual sets of rules, categories, and meanings based on life
course experience (Connors et al., 2001). This conceptual model represents factors involved in food choice and is grouped to three major components: (1) life course, (2) influences, and (3) personal system. The arrows indicate the process leading to food choice behaviour. This model recognises the complex process of food choice by understanding the adaptive systems people develop to make that decision (Connors et al., 2001). The key elements in this framework which are life course events and experiences, influences, and personal food system are discussed next.

**Life course events and experiences**

An interesting key concept emerged from life course perspective is life course trajectories, transitions, timing, and context (Elder, 1985; Devine, 2005; Sobal et al. 2006; Sobal et al. 2009). Food choices are developed and changed over time and are shaped by the environment and life course that involves past and current food experience (Sobal et al., 2006). According to Elder (1985), life course perspective considers a person’s agency in determining food choice trajectory, accumulation of experiences over time, the anticipation of future, and the importance of changes in context at specific points in time.

Food choice **trajectories** provide momentum leading to habitual food selections that can affect how individuals adjust to life course transitions such as ageing and changes in health (Paquette et al., 2000). People decide their current food choice based on trajectories that are developed over the course of their lives, shaped by the context they encountered, and the past transitions they have made (Sobal et al., 2006). **Transitions** are shifts in people’s life such as migrating to a new culture and for international students, migration may represent transitions that become a **turning point** for the reconstructions of food choice patterns and for the establishment of new personal food systems (Sobal et al., 2006). **Timing** presents when a particular transitions or turning point occurs in the life course of an individual (Sobal et al., 2006).
Influences

There are five types of influences in the food choice process listed in (Figure 8): ideals, personal factors, resources, social factors, and context, which revolves around a person’s life course to shape particular food choices (Falk et al., 1996; Furst et al., 1996; Connors et al., 2001; Shepherd et al., 2006; Sobal et al. 2006; Sobal et al. 2009). These influences are discussed further next.

Ideals are established during childhood and can be defined as influences over food choice which are strongly held beliefs and attitudes about what should be (Falk et al., 1996; Furst et al., 1996; Connors et al., 2001; Shepherd et al., 2006). A perceived ideal meal varies from the strongly held beliefs and characteristics of food eaten to the beliefs regarding health and can be described as the standards people have learned through socialisation and acculturation (Falk et al., 1996; Sobal et al. 2006). Ideals are derived from cultural and symbolic factors which incorporate meanings people associate with food, such as social status (Furst et al., 1996). Sobal et al. (2006) mentioned that ideal normally represents normative gauges about what and how a person should eat. It is culturally learned through families and other institutions and it reflect the plans and expectations for food and eating. Ideals are standard that an individual uses to assess food behaviours as “right,” “normal,” “inappropriate,” or “unacceptable” (Sobal et al. 2009).

The second element of influences are personal factors, which can be explained as “an individual’s characteristics such as physiological factors (sensory or genetic); psychological or emotional characteristics (preferences, personalities, moods, phobias); and relational factors (identities, self-concept)” (Sobal et al, 2006:6). The factors reflect what is “salient and meaningful to an individual and includes need and preference such as likes/ dislikes, individual
food style, food centeredness and emotions, characteristics such as gender, age, health status, sensory preferences (or taste sensitivities), and state of hunger (Furst et al., 1996: 253-254)."

**Resources** are “tangible, such as money, equipment and space, as well as intangible, in the form of skills, knowledge and time” (Furst et al., 1996: 254). Individuals are aware of what resources they possess to make food selection and if they do not have existing resources, they will exclude those food choices that are not possible to construct (Sobal et al. 2006).

The third element of influences, the **social factors**, are “relationship roles, families, groups, networks, organizations, communities and other social units that provide opportunities and obligations for constructing eating relationship and food choice decisions” (Sobal et al. 2006: 6).

The final influence in the food choice process (**Figure 8**) is the **context**. Context includes (1) social environment such as economic conditions, government policies, and mass media, and (2) physical environment such as climate, physical structures, and other material objects that facilitate or constrain food choice decisions (Sobal et al. 2009). Throughout an individual’s life course, these context changes and a new food choice system must be reconstructed (Avery et al. 1997; Sobal et al. 2006).

**Personal Food Choice System**

Personal food systems include the processes of constructing food choice values based on the influences in particular situation (Furst et al. 1996; Connors et al. 2001; Sobal et al. 2009). The process of constructing these food choice values, classifying foods and situations accordingly, negotiating these values in food choice settings, balancing competing values, and developing
strategies, scripts, and routines for recurring food decisions are all part of personal food systems (Sobal et al. 2006; Sobal et al. 2009).

Food choice values in a personal foods system that represents considerations such as taste, cost, convenience, relationship, and others such as ethics, environment, and religion (Falk et al. 1996; Furst et al. 1996; Connors et al. 2001; Sobal et al. 2006; Sobal et al. 2009). (1) **Taste** is a value representing sensory perception like appearance, odour, flavour, texture, and other properties when eating and drinking; (2) **convenience** refers to time and effort considerations for a person to acquire, prepare, consume, and clean up after eating and drinking; cost represents monetary considerations and resources to spend on eating and drinking; (3) **health** is a value representing consideration constructed in relationship to physical well-being; (4) **relationship** represents how someone considers the interest and well-being of other people involved in a person’s social world; (5) other values represent those highly salient which will be considered in certain circumstances (Falk et al. 1996, Furst et al. 1996, Connors et al. 2001; Sobal et al. 2006, Sobal et al. 2009).

### 4.8 Relevance of Life Course Perspective

With regards to food acculturation studies, Bisogni et al. (2002) stated that food behaviour is shaped over a lifetime when forces such as psychological, social, cultural, economic, and biological forces interact with a person’s life course events, and the result is the individual’s preference including taste and other considerations such as convenience. Few researchers have focused on the role of life course events and experiences in shaping how an adult manages food and eating (Bisogni et al., 2005). A few food choice models include the contributions of life course experience to current food choice ideals, identities, and strategies in a food context but the assumptions that past experience helps form the current characteristics is often unstated and
not investigated (Devine, 2003). Sobal et al. (2006) summarised that the concept of life course and its components provide ways of conceptualising both dynamic and constant aspects of food choice decisions that are constructed with respect to past experience, present situation, and future expectations.

The process of food choice construction involves a process of examining, considerations, deliberations, and simplifying multiple factors that involve many forms of scripts, heuristics, and repertoires in food choice decisions (Falk et al., 1996, Bisogni et al., 2002). Therefore, it becomes more essential to study the combinations of factors involved and understand the connections in food choice processes rather than to have a single perspective on specific components (Sobal, Bisogni & Jastran, 2014). The Food Choice Process model (Furst et al., 1996) presents the concepts of self-identity and the personal food system that help inform the multiple factors that influence food choice decisions. Sobal et al. (2014:9) claimed that “the personal food system develops and changes over time and may be stable or dynamic depending upon a person’s circumstances, continually shaped by contexts, life events, and circumstances, so people’s cognitions and emotions related to food and eating develop and change over time.” The life course perspective application is proposed for this study because it provides multiple perspectives in the way people construct food choice decision, as well as considers the events, experiences, and situational factors and migration as a turning point in the context of international students.

Furthermore, the life course perspective concept was employed in this study because it enables the researcher to address the migration as a turning point in food acculturation and support the elements in the conceptual model as presented in Furst et al. (1996). Evidently, this study demonstrated that transition and turning point in the international students’ life course
following migration have a major impact on their food choice system. With the application of the life course perspective, the researcher was also able to (1) capture the food choice changes that occurred at a particular transition experience, (2) provide an opportunity to examine the impact on social, economic, and trends, and (3) contribute towards a framework of individuals and contextual influences in food choice decisions (Sobal et al., 2006). Based on the life course model, a person’s growth in aging and maturity over the lifespan, acquired experiences in food provisioning, perception of the future, the changing social, behavioural and cultural contexts were considered in the construction of food choice (Furst et al., 1996; Falk et al., 1996; Connors et al., 2001; Sobal et al., 2006).

4.9 Proposed Conceptual Model of Food Acculturation using Life Course Perspective

Figure 9 is the proposed conceptual framework for food acculturation based on the life course perspective (LCP). Food experience during transition may create a stressful or interesting experience for students as they continue being exposed to new foods and experience, and as they perceive, adapt, or reject the new food choice. The assumption is that international student’s transition influences the new food choice system and the food acculturation process in the new country.

The transition influence includes personal and social factors, cultural ideals, resources, and context. For example, personal factors such as the meanings attached to food eaten in the new country may influence the students to choose ethnic food, or that the lack or cooking skills may require the students to eat ready meals. Examining the factors that influence and the food adjustment strategy to manage the new food choice will provide a better understanding of how
the process of food acculturation is constructed. Upon making food choice decision, conscious and subconscious personal systems are developed based on the resources and value negotiation. The personal system leads to the execution of acculturation strategies depending on how the students value cultural maintenance and conduct the integration, assimilation, marginalisation, or separation strategy during the food adjustment.
Figure 9: A conceptual model of food acculturation based on life course perspective
The proposed model in Figure 9 explains how a food choice system is formed after the transition of international students. The life course experience concept considers the turning point in the international students’ life when migrating, where it influences how food choice decision is made.

The first bubble on the right of the proposed model explains the life experiences when migrating to a new country, where occurs a transition in life (e.g., moving from a family home to live independently); a turning point in an individual’s life (e.g., first time being responsible for grocery shopping and food preparation); the timing in life where a person migrating has to make responsible choices in life (e.g., ethical food concerns); and finally the new environment that will influence the perception on the food choice available.

The elements in the bubble life course perspective explains the food choices made during transition. The food perceived as ideal, the influence of personal and social factors, the resources and the context of new food are considered to determine the food choice in the new country.

Next is the stage where the food acculturation strategies are formed according to exposure, perception, and influence of the life course perspective elements in deciding the food choice. The strategies formed may include integration with new food, assimilation, marginalisation, and separation from the food available for the internationals students. The top bubble is the stage where a new food choice system is formed.

4.10 Summary

This chapter presents the context of food choice concepts. Overviews of the food choice processes, factors, and adjustment are presented. The new food choice construction is a challenge because it is a dynamic, multifaceted, and complex process that requires a different
approach to examine the process. The application of the conceptual and theoretical framework on food choice studies includes key concepts that will be applied to study life course perspective because the elements in this concept capture important events and experience such as migration and the influences of food choice decision in the new country. Life course perspective has three important elements: (1) the life course event and experience that includes the trajectories, transitions, timing, and turning point; (2) the influences of ideals, personal factors, resources, social factors, and other context; and (3) the personal food system. The chapter concludes with a proposed conceptual framework to explain the process of food acculturation based on the application of life course perspective. The next chapter outlines the methodology and research design for the present study.
Chapter Five: Methodology

5.1 Introduction

This chapter recalls the research aim and objectives as presented in Chapter 1 followed by the explanation on the research process in detail. After reviewing the aim and objectives and past studies on food choice process and dietary acculturation, it was concluded that the dynamic process of acculturation requires a multidimensional approach and meaning-making for a comprehensive understanding on the influences of life course experience on international students’ food acculturation. The life course experience lends an important insight on the transition phase that becomes the highlight for food acculturation experience of new international students. The research paradigm and the rationale of an interpretivist viewpoint guided the design and approach and the chapter also includes other viewpoints in food acculturation studies. The outline of the research approaches, strategies of inquiry, and analysis of the qualitative approach are then presented. The discussion on how the context of this study fits into the qualitative approach is provided. This chapter also presents the preliminary research method using focus group discussions, which includes the procedures and process of the focus group, and finally, the methods applied for the main study using the accompanied shop observation and semi structured interview.

5.2 Research Aims and Objectives

This study aims to explore the food acculturation process of new international students in the UK during the early phase of transition. In order to understand the acculturation phenomena in more detail, four objectives were established to help explore the research topic:

• To investigate the exposure, experience, and perception of food choices for new international students at the early phase of transition
• To elucidate the life course experience and factors that influence the food choices of the international students

• To examine changes in the food choice system and the food acculturation process during the transition

The following section outlines the research process of this study.

5.3 Research Process

Figure 10 illustrates the research process for this study. The data were collected via a qualitative approach using (1) focus groups discussions for preliminary study and (2) two phases of accompanied shop observations and in-depth interviews. The study was conducted at a university in South East of England using a sample of international students.¹

¹ The preliminary study used a sample of existing international students already in the UK, and the main data used sample of new international students only.
5.4 Research Philosophy

This study aimed to address the research question from an interpretivist point of view. Choosing a research methodology that is “how of research” necessitates not only practicalities but most importantly the philosophical solution to “why research?” (Holden et al., 2004). Research philosophy is a perspective to help researchers develop understanding and knowledge in order to collect data in an effective and appropriate manner (Johnson et al., 2010). A review of research philosophies is vital because it helps to (1) open minds to possibilities that may lead to the enrichment of research skills and (2) provide confidence that the right methodologies are applied (Holden et al., 2004). The philosophical ideas or paradigm influence the practice of research and need to be identified and these beliefs lead to embracing a quantitative, qualitative, or mixed method approach (Creswell, 2009).

A firm philosophical position allows researchers to match the philosophy, methodology, and the research problem. Science and research parameters of ontology, epistemology, axiology, rhetorical structure, and methodology are discussed across philosophical views of positivism, postpositivism, and interpretivism (Guba et al., 1998; Ponterotto, 2005; Miller et al., 2009). These views offer a perspective of human behaviour, assumptions about the nature of reality, and the researcher’s opinion regarding the ability of these concepts to be measured (Miller et al., 2009). The researcher’s philosophical assumptions will consequently affect the choice of methodology and significant impact on what to research (Holden et al., 2004).

5.4.1 Interpretivism

The methodology for this study is framed within the philosophy of interpretivism. The interpretivist position views that the world does not exist independently and that individuals and groups create realities based on social constructions and how they view the world (Grix,
According to Snape et al. (2003), an interpretivist emphasises the understanding and studying of people’s lived experiences in order to reveal the connections between social, cultural, and historical aspects of people’s lives and to see the context in which particular action takes place. Mere observation is not adequate for understanding social phenomena (Grix, 2010).

There is a need to understand the differences in human roles in life and an interpretivist has to adopt an empathetic stance by entering the social world and understanding it from the view of the research subjects (Saunders et al., 2009). Interpretivists support the view that there are many truths and multiple realities that exist within human experiences.

5.5 Rationale

This section discusses the rationale of the interpretivist’s view adopted in this study based on the literature. The major barrier towards acculturation research involves a persistent use of simplistic one-dimensional conceptualisations and measurement, which can be surpassed by framing under the “real world” approach, which includes analyses of the actual case of acculturation changes across multiple domains (Lopez-Class, Castro & Ramirez, 2011). Lopez-Class et al. (2011) commented that acculturation changes, when viewed under a comprehensive dimensional analyses, would provide a deeper understanding on the complexities of acculturation whereby some changes may occur faster than the other. Individuals and communities are constantly changing in the process of acculturation and the influences of life course events and experiences can compromise or accelerate the process. Therefore, acculturation studies require a methodology or approach that are responsive to the variations of populations and context that can demonstrate the dynamics of the acculturation process. In the area of food choice, different variables influence food choice
decisions after migration and the life course perspective warrants a multidimensional approach to uncover the dynamics of life course events and experiences in the food choice trajectories of the international students.

Within this study, the interpretivist paradigm informs the qualitative approach for exploring the life course experience and perception of the new food choice for the international students when they first came to the UK. Diverse cultural backgrounds, skills and competencies, as well as past experiences in food culture have brought different meanings in the students’ exposure and experience of the new environment. The students possessed different values, experiences, and meaning-making of food choice decision and therefore their acculturation experience were varied. The basic assumption behind interpretivism is that all individual actions are meaningful and in order to understand the actions, they have to be viewed from social context (Scott & Usher, 2010). The multidimensional approach and the interpretation of meanings behind individual’s actions is possible from an interpretivist’s stance, whereby the viewpoint pays interest in the understanding the different perspectives and meanings behind the food choice decision and acculturation changes within this study’s context, which is in contrast to a positivist’s interest in prediction and control (O’donoghue, 2006). The methodology that frames this study within an interpretivist’s paradigm and qualitative approach qualifies to serve the purpose of exploring the food acculturation process of international students.

5.6 Research Method

This study employed qualitative methods for the preliminary and main study. The preliminary study involved focus group discussions and a thematic data analysis. For the main study, accompanied shop observation and in-depth interview were adopted and the data were analysed using thematic analysis. The qualitative approach was considered appropriate to explore the
food acculturation process using the life course perspective model because such an approach fits with the purpose, aim, and objectives of the present study.

There are three research approaches: quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods. The approaches differ according to the following factors: (1) the researcher’s basic philosophical assumptions of the study, (2) types of research strategies used in the research, and (3) the specific methods employed in conducting the strategies (Creswell, 2009). Crossan (2003) argued that the distinction between qualitative and quantitative philosophies and research methods are sometimes understated and that triangulation or mixed methods in contemporary research is common. This study concerns the lived experiences of international students when deciding food choice in order to understand food acculturation process. Hence, a qualitative approach is considered the most appropriate to address the issue.

5.6.1 Qualitative research

Denzin and Lincoln (2000) in their *Handbook of Qualitative Research* offers the following definition of qualitative study:

> Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that makes the world visible. These practices ... turn the world into a series of representations including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. (2000:3)

The purpose of qualitative research is to explore the meanings people give to their experiences and highlight the importance of understanding phenomena from the perspective of the research participants (Beto et al., 2009). Qualitative methods may be more useful for exploratory study of beliefs, behaviours, or phenomena. It uses detailed, thick description and analysis of the quality of experience to represent human experiences (Guba et al., 1994; Miller et al., 2009).
General data using qualitative approach may be applied to individual cases to avoid ambiguity of generalisation imposed in a quantitative approach (Guba et al., 1994). The complex and dynamic process of food choice and acculturation are explored with the application of qualitative approach, framed within an interpretivist paradigm, which emphasises the understanding of the lived experiences and exploration of each international students’ interpretation of their actions, beliefs, experiences, and understanding of food choice and acculturation. The qualitative method also allows for further probing into factors that motivate the international students to procure certain acculturation strategy during their adjustment.

5.7 Strategies of Inquiry

This study employed a qualitative research strategy to explore food acculturation from the perspective of international students. The strategies of inquiry for qualitative research adapted from Creswell (2009) are shown in Table 4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategies of Inquiry</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Narrative research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ethnography</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Grounded theory studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Case study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Phenomenology</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Strategies of Inquiry for Qualitative Method

(Adapted from Creswell, 2009)

5.8 Qualitative Data Analysis

This present study employed thematic analysis to analyse the preliminary findings and the main findings. According to Holloway and Todres (2003), qualitative approaches are incredibly
diverse, complex, and nuanced (Holloway & Todres, 2003). The qualitative analytic methods, according to Braun and Clarke (2006), can be divided into two camps: (1) methods that stemmed from a particular theoretical or epistemological positions, and (2) methods independent on theory and epistemological approaches. Braun and Clarke further explained the methods tied to a theoretical framework has relatively limited variability in how the method is applied (e.g., conversation analysis or interpretative phenomenological analysis) or has different manifestations of the method from within the broad theoretical framework (e.g. grounded theory, discourse analysis or narrative analysis). Methods independent of theory can apply a range of theoretical and epistemological approaches (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

5.8.1 Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis is a systematic approach that allows a researcher to combine analysis of the frequency of codes with the meaning in context that requires interpretation (Joffe et al., 2003). Lieblich et al. (1998) and Boyatzis (1998) defined thematic analysis as one of various ways of analysing narrative material in a systematic manner and as a process of encoding qualitative information. Braun & Clarke (2006) referred thematic analysis as a method of identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns or themes within data. It was argued a lot of analyses that are essentially thematic but are claimed as something else, such as discourse analysis or content analysis, or not identified as any particular method at all where data were subjected to qualitative analysis for commonly recurring themes (Brawn & Clarke, 2006). At this point, it could be concluded that the difference between content and thematic analysis is all patterns or codes generated from the narrative are systematically grouped into themes, which consist of a list of codes or categories that represent themes revealed from the data that have been collected (Saunders et al., 2009).
This approach starts with **coding** the recurring patterns found in the information that describes and organises the possible observations and interprets aspects of the data (Boyatzis, 1998). Coffey and Atkinson (1996) described coding as a way of relating data to the ideas about the data. The themes may be initially generated inductively from the raw information or deductively from the theory and prior research (Boyatzis, 1998). The thematic analysis process necessitates the researcher’s judgement to determine whether the themes generated capture something important about the data in relation to the research question and represent some patterned responses or meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2006). To quote what quantifies as a **theme**, Braun and Clarke (2006) stated,

> As this is qualitative analysis, there is no hard or fast answer to the question of what proportion of your data set needs to display evidence of the theme for it to be considered a theme. It is not the case that if it was present in 50% of one’s data set item, it would be a theme, but if it was present only 47%, then it would not be. Nor is the case that a theme is only something that many data items give considerable attention to, rather than a sentence or two. A theme might be given considerable space in some data items, and little or none in others, or it might appear relatively little of the data set. Our initial guidance around this is that you need to retain some flexibility.

Gibbs (2002) explained the stages of using thematic analysis as follows: (1) deciding on sampling and design issues, (2) developing themes and code, and (3) validating and using the code (Gibbs, 2002). A more detailed phase a thematic analysis process is illustrated in **Figure 11** (Braun and Clarke, 2006).
Phase One: The data collected from the focus group discussion, observation, and in-depth interview were then transcribed. The process of transcription is an excellent way to start familiarising with the data (Riessman, 1993). The most important thing when transcribing is to retain the information needed in a way which is true to its original nature and the transcription is practically suited to the purpose of analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It is vital to be familiar with all aspects of the data and to immerse oneself with the depth and breadth of the content by repeatedly and actively reading the data. The aim is to search for meanings, patterns, and identification of ideas and to check the transcript back again against the original audio recordings for accuracy (Braun & Clark, 2006). The whole process allowed the researcher to approach the analysis with some prior knowledge of the data.
Phase two: This phase began by generating an initial list of ideas about what is in the data and by producing initial codes. Codes are features in the basic form of data that appear interesting to the researcher. They contain information that give meaning or can be assessed in a meaningful way to a particular phenomenon (Boyatzis, 1998). The coded data are then organised into meaningful groups which are different from the units of analysis or themes (Lieblich et al., 1998; Tuckett, 2005). Generating themes is the interpretative analysis of the codes identified. Coding can be done either manually or using software. For this study, the researcher manually coded the data. The interesting aspects in the data are highlighted and notes were written on the texts to indicate ideas, potential patterns, and themes. The themes development for the preliminary findings will be presented in Table 9 (see page 110).

Phase three: This stage involved listing out and collating the initial coded data and sorting them into potential themes. Braun and Clarke (2006) suggested tables and mind maps to sort the codes into themes. At this point there was a collection of potential themes, subthemes, and miscellaneous themes. All were kept for reviewing later for more refined themes to be emerged. Lieblich et al. (1998) indicated that researchers bring their own theoretical or common sense assumptions to the material they are attempting to synthesize and interpret to allow revision of the predefined categories or themes.

Phase four: This was the stage where the researcher combined, refined, and discarded some of the themes. The discarded theme either contained insufficient data to support the initial themes or that they were too diverse. There were two levels of reviewing and refining process of the themes. The first involved checking and reading all the coded data within a theme and observing whether they formed a coherent pattern. If some of the data did not work, a new theme was created or the data were discarded. The second level involved the researcher
considering the validity of the themes and whether they reflected meanings and accurately represented the theoretical and analytical approach. Because coding is an ongoing process, additional data were recorded, reviewed, and refined.

**Phase five:** This stage involved defining and naming the themes. The researcher identified what the themes were about and determined what aspect of the data each theme had captured (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Detailed analysis was conducted at this stage to identify the story behind the themes. This was the point where the themes were given a working title for analysis. As part of the refinement, some of the themes may came with subthemes to give a structure to particularly large and complex theme.

**Phase six.** This phase involved analysis and writing out reports on the fully worked out themes generated. This is when the themes were processed descriptively to generate coherent reports of the content. Braun et al. (2006) further explained this phase as telling the complicated story of the data in a way to convince the readers of the merit and validity of the analysis. It must provide concise, coherent, logical, nonrepetitive, and interesting account of the story that the data tell. In the analysis process, the sort of questions the researchers should ask in order to guide the analysis were “What does this theme means?” “What are the assumptions underpinning it?” “What are the implications of this theme?” “What conditions are likely to have given rise to it?” “Why do people talk about this thing in this particular way?” and “What is the overall story the different themes reveal about the topic? (Braun et al., 2006).”

Holding on to Lieblich et al. (1998) and Boyatzis (1998) definition earlier on, thematic analysis was applied for this study as the best approach to elicit and analyse the narrative of internationals students on their food acculturation. The thematic analysis approach emphasised
on encoding qualitative information, with patterns and indicators between forms that are causally related (Boyatzis, 1998). The process allowed themes that are directly observable in the information and themes underlying the phenomenon to be explored, thus confirming the appropriateness of thematic analysis for this study.

5.9 The Link between Research Objectives and Method

As mentioned earlier, the objectives for this study were

- to investigate the exposure, experience, and perception of food choices for new international students at the early phase of transition
- to elucidate the life course experience and factors that influence the food choices of the international students
- to examine changes in food choice system and food acculturation process during the transition.

To achieve the above objectives, the researcher developed a design for multi qualitative inquiry that integrated focus group discussions in the preliminary stage and two phases of observations and in-depth interviews for the main data collection. The preliminary study was conducted to ascertain the food related issues and experiences of the international students already in the UK. Findings from the focus group discussions explored how the students managed new food choice setting, experience, and perceptions, which clarified further the understanding on food choice and food acculturation. Findings at this point would guide the development of the research instrument for the main study. The linking between the research objectives and research methods is shown in Table 5 followed by an illustrative design to link how the themes emerged from the focus group discussions assisted in the development of the main data collection guide for observation and interview.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Objectives</th>
<th>Research Methods</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Investigating the exposure, experience and perception of food choices for new</td>
<td>Focus group discussion, observation, and interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>international students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elucidate the life course experience and factors that influenced new food choice</td>
<td>Focus group discussion, observation, and interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of international students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examine the food choice system and food acculturation process during transition</td>
<td>Observation 1 and 2 and interviews 1 and 2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: The Link between Research Objectives and Research Methods

The research design informed the framework that specified the type of information to be collected, its sources, and the data collection method. As shown in Table 5, the design for this study included multiple qualitative methods. The preliminary study was focused on gaining key indicators and familiarity with the subject area and on providing inputs for the next design in the main study (Kinnear & Taylor, 1996).

5.10 Preliminary Study Research Design

A preliminary study using focus group discussions was conducted to ascertain the food related issues and experience of international students when they first arrived in the UK. The earlier chapters of this study discussed the literature review that outlined the theoretical background related to international students, food choice, and acculturation. The constructs applied to the focus groups based on the literature included the adjustment challenges among international students related to the new food choice, the perceived cultural distance and dietary acculturation, the complexity of food choice construction during transition, the food acculturation strategy to manage adjustment, and the construction of new food choice based on the life course perspective.
The following section discusses in detail the research design for the preliminary study using the focus group and the steps involved in the focus group development. The objectives of the preliminary study were to review the factors related to food choice after migration in order to ascertain the importance of life course perspective influence in food choice process. It also served to identify any additional factors that could impact the food choice decision and acculturation process during the transition that were experienced by the participants. Results from the preliminary findings would facilitate the researcher to verify the connections between the transition and turning point in the food acculturation process. The findings will determine how the themes generated from the focus group discussion could be specified in the observation and interview design for the main study.

### 5.11 Focus Group

Focus group is a research inquiry technique that collects data through group interaction based on topics determined by the researcher (Morgan, 1996). Morgan indicated that the purpose of focus group is divided into three components: (1) It devotes to data collection; (2) it locates the group interaction as the source of data; and (3) it acknowledges the researcher’s active role in creating the group discussion. The participants for the focus group were selected on the basis of several criteria: (1) they would have something to say on the topic, (2) they are within the age-range, and (3) they have similar socio-characteristics and would be comfortable talking to the interviewer and each other (Richardson & Rabiee, 2001). The participants were also selected because of their knowledge of the study area (Burrows & Kendall, 1997). The type and range of data generated through the social interaction of the focus group are often deeper and richer than those obtained from one-to-one interviews due to group dynamics (Morgan, 1997).
The interaction among focus group participants facilitates an individual’s ability to explain or account for their attitudes (Ritchie et al., 2003). Compared to the survey method, the focus group is able to produce more in-depth information on the topic at hand (Ward et al., 1991). A survey limits what a respondent says about sensitive topics compared to what he or she reveals in a focus group (Morgan, 1996). Fern’s (1982) work found that each focus group participant generated 60% to 70% as many ideas as they would have in an individual interview but the strengths of a focus group is that it provides insights into the sources of complex behaviours and motivations.

Focus group discussion was applied for the preliminary study. The discussions’ themes were the students’ initial experience upon arrival, exposure and experience of the food choices in the new country, the challenges associated with food, as well as the food strategy developed during transition themes. The focus group discussion gave access to the international students’ food choice process and adjustment experience. The discussion session provided an opportunity for the researcher to understand and ascertain the experience and issues when deciding food choice. It also provided valuable insights and the findings were used to guide the accompanied shop observation and interview protocol for the main study.

5.12 Sampling Procedure for Focus Group

Sample size

The rule of thumb to determine the size of a focus groups is to select five to ten participants for each group and develop the themes until the researcher achieves a saturation point when all the range of ideas have been discussed and heard and no new information arise (Morgan, 1996).
This could be identified when the researcher analyse the patterns and themes of the data while the discussion was still going on.

Focus groups are typically composed of five to ten people, but a smaller group is favourable so that everyone can have an opportunity to share insights (Krueger et al., 2002). The industrial standard for focus group is to have between four to twelve persons (Kinnear & Taylor, 1996). If the group exceeds a dozen participants there is a tendency that some participants would be unable to talk because there is no sufficient pause in the conversation. For this current study, only ten students volunteered and two focus groups were arranged with five participants in each group.

Patton (2002) stated that the set criteria for sample sizes in qualitative studies are not of importance. What is more important is generating meaningful information from participants and to evoke the observational and analytical skills of the researcher during the focus group session. Given the need to explore the experience of international students at the early stage of their transition, the general guideline was followed and only international students with the inclusion criteria were selected.

**Sampling method**

Purposive and snowball sampling method were used to further recruit the focus group participants because at first, only four students volunteered and replied through the email sent via an international student subject group email list. The four international students then introduced other friends to join the focus group and finally six more people agreed to participate. For the focus group, the participants were recruited among existing international students with the inclusion criteria stated. Snowball sampling was applied because it was
difficult to get international students to participate in qualitative studies that involved interviews or discussion without any incentives.

**Inclusion and exclusion criteria**

For the purpose of focus group discussion, the sample included participants that fitted the criteria of inclusion. These inclusion criteria (Table 6) were specified to include only participants with the attributes that will make it possible to explore and understand the food acculturation of international students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inclusion criteria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Full time postgraduate international students,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Have been living in the UK for some time for the purpose of studying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Able to communicate in English</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 6- Inclusion criteria**

In the preliminary study, the international students who were in the UK for some years were included to enable the researcher to explore their experiences and perceptions towards new food choice in the new country when they first arrived. This inclusion was acceptable because it allowed the researcher to identify the issues and factors that have influenced the international students’ food acculturation. This was important because the preliminary study served to guide the protocols for accompanied shop observation and in-depth interview in the main study. The findings from the preliminary study can ascertain the life course perspective concept and establish the attributes of food acculturation of international students in the main study.

**Participant recruitment process**

An email about the study was sent out to international students through a subject group email list. Twelve students responded to the email. An information sheet with detailed explanation of the focus group, the purpose, criteria of voluntary participants, confidentiality issues, and
implications of participation in the study (risks and benefits) were sent to the students. The participants consent was sought to digitally record the discussion session and ensure confidentiality of the discussion.

After the information sheet was sent, only ten participants agreed to take part in the focus group. Two sessions were arranged on different dates and the respondents chose the date that best suited them. Five participants chose the first session and the other five agreed on the next. Because the participation was voluntary the students could withdraw any time or choose not to answer any questions that they might not feel comfortable answering. In the case of withdrawal, all interview material including audiotapes, transcript, and analysis would be destroyed and not included in the study. Nevertheless no participant withdrew at any point after giving their consent.

5.13 Data Coding and Data Saturation

The principles for determining sample size applied for this study were data saturation and literature search. Frequencies of data are rarely important in qualitative studies. One occurrence of a data often is all that is necessary and potentially as useful as many, to understand how international students make food choice decision and the food acculturation process. This is because this study is concerned with meaning making of the food choice of international students and not with making generalised hypotheses statements about the process. Hence, only a small sample was required for this study to assure that almost every important perception was covered. Towards this end, Glasser and Strauss (1967)’s concept of saturation was adopted where the number of participants for the study was considered sufficient when new data do not shed further light about the issue on food choice anymore.
However, the concept of saturation does come with its own critique. Dey (1999) suggested that researchers often close categories early as the data are only partially coded, thus making data saturation inappropriate. Instead, the concept should be more about discovering more and more data as they are being analysed and deciding when the newly discovered data do not add anything to the study. The researcher should know when to stop and cut data where necessary and when they have necessary information needed. According to Morse (2000), data saturation depends hugely on the scope of the study, the nature of the topic, the quality of data, and the study design. Lee, Woo, and Mackenzie (2002) stated that researcher’s expertise on the chosen topic and studies that use multiple method or longitudinal studies would require fewer participants.

**Coding and determining data saturation**

During the analysis of the focus group discussion and interview transcripts, manual coding was done immediately after each session in order to group the themes related to the purpose and objectives of this study. Although there are a range of both manual and software systems that will assist, but personally, the researcher find that manual coding worked best for this study. It allowed the researcher to become more engaged with the data. In the preliminary study, all the codes and themes manufactured from the first focus group transcripts were compared to the next in order to determine whether any new data emerged and deemed useful for the study. The preliminary themes were then used as a template for the subsequent data analysis of the focus group discussion. Data saturation was determined when no new data on the experience related to food issues emerged from the analysis.
For the main study, the similar method of thematic analysis was applied. The analysis was conducted right after the interview session and by the sixteenth interview, no new data emerged and saturation point was determined. The researcher then turn to the transcripts, reading them and using a yellow highlighter to note all the key themes. After all transcripts were read and highlighted, it was compiled into themes and documented using Word document. The researcher then began to organise them, throwing out some headings that do not seem appropriate for the objectives of this study, and collapsing some themes together and renaming them. The researcher continued to revisit the data (transcripts) to check that the headings were appropriately named. The researcher end up with a three column table with (left to right), list of key headings, subheadings, and then text that illustrates the key and subheadings (see Table 14 page 128).

5.14 The Focus Group Setting

The focus group was held at a university in South East of England where the participants were studying. The researcher was the moderator for the session. Two focus groups were held between December 2012 and January 2013. A private meeting room was booked for both sessions so that the participants would be more comfortable and relax. The focus group session lasted between 1 – 1 1/2 hours each. The discussions were audiotaped with the consent of the participants. The introductory session for the focus group started with explanation of consent details and confidentiality issues. Once the consent form was signed by all the participants, they were asked to fill out a demographic characteristics form and the discussion commenced.
5.15 Characteristics of Focus Group Participants

There were ten participants for the focus groups (five people per group): three male and seven female postgraduate international students from Asia (Thailand, Malaysia and China) currently living in the UK and studying at a university in South East of England. All five of the participants in Focus Group 1 (FG1) lived in the UK for more than three years and out of five participants in Focus Group 2 (FG2), three have stayed less than a year. All of the participants agreed to have the focus group discussion conducted in English and recorded.

At the time of study, three participants were married but only one was living with their spouse and family in the UK. The other seven participants were single and living on their own in shared houses or university accommodation. Four students were self-sponsored and others received funds from their government. Two participants had bachelor degree and eight students graduated with a master’s degree. Table 7 presents the demographic information for the focus group participants. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of the participants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Years in the UK</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amnee</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Thai</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natri</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Thai</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pontrip</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Thai</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mina</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Malaysian</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faza</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Malaysian</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elle</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Malaysian</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rina</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Malaysian</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seng</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ling</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hans</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Malaysian</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 7- Focus group participants*
5.16 Research Design for the Main Study

The main data collection method and design was developed based on a qualitative research approach. An accompanied shop observation and in-depth semi structured interviews were conducted in two phase over the period of three months to further investigate the themes developed in the preliminary study, the life course perspective that influences the students’ food choice during transition, the food adjustment challenges, the food adjustment strategy, and the food acculturation process. These themes guided the accompanied shop observation and in-depth interview protocol for the main study. The study adopted the same qualitative approach framed within an interpretivist’s viewpoint. It particularly addressed the food acculturation process of new international students in the UK during the early phase of transition.

5.17 Data Collection Method

The main study consisted of an observed accompanied shop and in-depth interviews with the new international students during the initial stage of their arrival and again three months after. The data collection began in October 2013 and ended early March 2014, using a sample of twenty new international students at a university in South East of England.

Both the accompanied shop and the in-depth interviews were conducted within two phase. Phase one took place when the students first arrived. The recruitment started during orientation week and the first session of accompanied shop observation began on the third week after the new international students’ arrival in October 2013. The second phase of accompanied shop and in-depth interview began end of January 2014 and ended the first week of March. The data collection schedule is presented in Table 8.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase one start (October 2013)</th>
<th>Phase two start (February 2014)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accompanied shop observation (ASO 1)</td>
<td>Accompanied shop observation (ASO 2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-depth interview (Int. 1)</td>
<td>In-depth interview (Int. 2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8- Main data collection schedule

5.17.1 Accompanied shop observation

Grocery shopping involves more than an act of buying; it is also a complex practice based on a range of associated experience (Thomas & Garland, 2004). In the study of shopping behaviour, it was noted that a method termed shopping with consumers (SWC) has enabled the researchers to create rich datasets and indicate shopping behaviour in specific contexts (Lowrey, Otnes & McGrath, 2005). The method generated text that “in conjunction with depth interviews, yields insights that may otherwise remain hidden from researchers” (Lowrey et al., 2005:176). Lowrey et al. (2005:177-179) listed several key guide when conducting SWC:

1) The first guide is recruitment followed by an initial one-to-one in-depth interview designed to establish rapport prior to the accompanied shopping;

2) It was essential to allow informants to shop as “naturally” as possible;

3) The process of taking notes during the trips should be explained beforehand so participants would not be alarmed during the actual trip;

4) The initial shopping trip began at a predetermined retail setting;

5) Interviews were designed to clarify specific questions the researchers may have had about the behaviours observed during the first shopping trip and to develop insights that may not have been evident during the first interviews but became salient once actual shopping behaviour was observed;

6) The second shopping trip, which used identical procedures as the first trip, although the shopping venue might change based on preferences of the participants;
7) It was desirable to become very involved with our participants up to a point but we refrained from influencing their actual purchases to the extent possible given a specific situation.

To avoid personal involvement that might influence actual shopping decision, the researcher must consciously try to remain neutral in terms of offering opinions (Lowrey et al., 2005). Lowrey mentioned that some considerations of the methods should be made. First, it is discouraged to use SWC as a standalone method because richer data can be produced with a combination of SWC with other methods especially in-depth interview. Second, there is a possible need for a similarity between the researcher and participant (i.e. gender or age): Third, the participants may become more relaxed and natural in their interactions when their behaviour seems to be less monitored. Finally, shopping with consumers obviously will incur a cost, both in terms of time and money.

Within this study, the observed accompanied shopping method followed the same procedure as SWC, only that it eliminated the guide to arrange an initial interview to establish rapport. Instead, the details of the accompanied shop were sent to the participants via email beforehand, with the information of the accompanied shopping procedures included. It is important to note that this study adopted the term accompanied shop observation because it is used more widely in the study of shopping behaviour.

Accompanied shop was intended as an opportunity to observe how the students do food shopping. During accompanied shop session, the researcher followed the participants while they shopped for food, observing and taking notes based on an observation protocol developed and focusing on their behaviour when deciding a purchase. Because some of the students chose
to do their food shopping at different stores, sites and times, the venue where the observations were conducted varied. The objective of the accompanied shop was to observe the students’ behaviour when making food purchase decision in a new food setting and environment. The focus was the specific behaviour conducted, such as being cautious over food product by reading labels, inspecting the food, asking the store employee for information about the food, and food purchase made confidently. For example, the action taken before purchasing a particular food product was recorded to allow information and meaning making about the behaviour.

Among the food shopping stores visited by the participants were Tesco, Sainsbury, Thai specialty shop, Mark and Spencer, and the Thursday market at the university. Although the places vary, it did not affect the purpose of the accompanied shop which was to observe the food shopping behaviour.

The grocery shopping observations were piloted earlier to assist in the development of an accompanied shop checklist. The shoppers for the pilot observations were new international students who volunteered for the main study but were excluded because their staying was not their first time in the country. However, the focus of the pilot observation was to observe the grocery shopping behaviour and guide the items of the observation checklist. During the pilot observation, the researcher used a note to report the shoppers’ behaviour. Among the checklist items generated from the pilot study are listed in Table 9.
Table 9: Integrating Two Piloted Observation Notes to Develop Observation Checklist

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pilot observation shopper one</th>
<th>Pilot observation shopper two</th>
<th>Accompanied shop observation item checklist</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Shopper spent 35 minutes for the shopping trip</td>
<td>1. Shopper spent 15 minutes for the shopping trip</td>
<td>1. Time spent for grocery shopping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Observed yogurt (item A), read the label, put it back, chose another brand which is cheaper.</td>
<td>2. Used a shopping list</td>
<td>2. Shopping list</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Picked up item B, not reading the label at all.</td>
<td>3. Picked up item A, B, C and D on shopping list</td>
<td>3. Reading labels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Tried to find meat aisle, seemed confused and asked the shop assistant.</td>
<td>4. Compared item E on list and different brand on promotion, picked up item on list.</td>
<td>• Checking for ingredients</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Found meat aisle, picked up item C (meat), smelled it, tried to feel using hand, looked at label, picked up another meat product (item D), and compared both item. Chose item D.</td>
<td>5. Went to frozen aisle, took out coupons, and picked up item similar on coupons.</td>
<td>• best before date</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Went to snacks aisle, picked up four variety of chips, not reading label (item E).</td>
<td>6. Checked list and compared to item in basket.</td>
<td>• Vegetarian/ vegan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Stopped by promotion aisle, picked up cleaning product (item F)</td>
<td>7. Seemed satisfied, no browsing, and went straight to cashier and paid.</td>
<td>• Halal/ Kosher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Went back to chill and frozen aisle, picked up frozen peas and frozen sausage (item G &amp; H)</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Health claims</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Browsed food on promotion, reduced to clear items. Picked up nothing.</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Diabetic, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Shopper went to cashier and paid for the items.</td>
<td></td>
<td>4. Inspecting item for colour, smell and condition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5. Comparing between food product; brand, price, preference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6. Promotional item (not intentional)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7. Purchasing based on coupons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8. Grab and go (familiar item)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>9. Purchasing based on recommendation by family/ friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>10. Seeking aid from shop assistant due to unfamiliar shopping aisle/ food item</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>11. Browsing around shop to get familiar with the food item sold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>New theme emerged:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Total spent/ budget for food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Online shopping behaviour</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

New theme emerged:
- Total spent/ budget for food
- Online shopping behaviour
An observation checklist was used to note and report the shopping experience as observed by the researcher. Among the items in the checklist were (1) the time taken for a purchase decision, (2) specific behaviour such as reading the labels, (3) comparing grab-and-go items (where participant did not bother to read the labels) and promotional item, (4) shopping list, and (5) duration of the shopping trip. These situational variables were selected because they can explain the students’ intention when buying a food product, what they had to consider before making food choice, and the reasoning of actual purchase or failure to make a purchase.

Two of the participants used online shopping to buy food, therefore, they were asked to bring along the online receipt to explore about their food choice. Although the method of grocery shopping was different, it gave a valuable insight as to why online shopping was used and how the students made decision on what food to buy.

Park et al. (1989) conducted an accompanied shop to study the effects of situational factors in store grocery shopping behaviour and found that store knowledge and time available for shopping impacted on grocery shopping experience. All participants for this study are new international students, thus they have limited store knowledge especially on the new food available as well as unfamiliar store layout and product positioning. The grocery shopping experience added to the richness of the data on food choice decision during the students’ transition.

**Accompanied shop observation setting**

The accompanied shop observation was conducted at a predetermined store where the internationals students did their grocery shopping. The list of the shopping observation venues conducted is shown in **Table 10**.
Table 10: The Accompanied Shop Setting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student/ nationality</th>
<th>Accompanied shop observation 1- venue</th>
<th>Accompanied shop observation 2- venue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 (Kuwait)</td>
<td>Online- Tesco</td>
<td>Online- Tesco</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 (Nigeria)</td>
<td>Online- Tesco</td>
<td>Online- Tesco</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 (Malaysia)</td>
<td>Tesco</td>
<td>Tesco</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 (Malaysia)</td>
<td>Tesco</td>
<td>Tesco</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 (Singapore)</td>
<td>Tesco</td>
<td>Thursday market (university),</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 (Malaysia)</td>
<td>Tesco</td>
<td>Tesco</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 (Brunei)</td>
<td>Tesco</td>
<td>Thai specialty shop, Chinese specialty shop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 (Brunei)</td>
<td>Tesco</td>
<td>Tesco</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 (Brunei)</td>
<td>Marks and Spencer Sainsbury</td>
<td>Marks and Spencer, Thai specialty shop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 (Saudi Arabia)</td>
<td>Tesco</td>
<td>Halal meat shop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 (Singapore)</td>
<td>Tesco</td>
<td>Thai specialty shop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 (Malaysia)</td>
<td>Tesco</td>
<td>Tesco,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 (China)</td>
<td>Tesco</td>
<td>Chinese specialty shop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 (China)</td>
<td>Tesco</td>
<td>Tesco</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 (Malaysia)</td>
<td>Tesco</td>
<td>Amigos (university), Thursday market(university)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 (Malaysia)</td>
<td>Tesco</td>
<td>Tesco</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 (Indonesia)</td>
<td>Tesco</td>
<td>Tesco</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 (Malaysia)</td>
<td>Tesco</td>
<td>Tesco</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 (Thailand)</td>
<td>Tesco</td>
<td>Tesco</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 (Brunei)</td>
<td>Tesco</td>
<td>Tesco</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.17.2 Semi structured interview

A semi structured interview was an opportunity to understand the students’ behaviour while making food choices during grocery shopping. The method allowed the participant’s actions to be translated into the form of contextual data fitting the objective of this study. The interviews were also to capture in-depth explanation, personal experience, issues, and perception as well as to deepen the meaning of the student’s food choice practice in the new country. The most widely used form of interview is the semi structured, which consists of a mixture of open-ended and specific questions designed to elicit both expected and unexpected
information and evolves in situ (Fetterman, 1998). According to Kvale (1996:70), the qualitative interview is “a uniquely sensitive and powerful method for capturing the experiences and lived meanings of the subjects’ everyday world.”

An interview guideline was developed from the focus group discussion themes and accompanied shop observation to explore more on the usage of the food bought, consumption, meaning making of the food choice decision, and other food related experience.

The interview took place after the signed informed consent was returned and accompanied shop observation was conducted. The time frame of two to three days after the accompanied shop was to allow the participants to make use of what they have bought. The interview data provided contextual information for the behaviour recorded during the accompanied shop, as well as the data required following the purpose of this study. Yin (2013) listed the strength and weaknesses of interviews and observation as in Table 11.

Table 11: Observation and Interview
(based on Yin, 2013)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of data</th>
<th>Strength</th>
<th>Weakness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Participant observation | • Immediacy- covers actions in real time  
• Contextual- can cover the study’s context  
• Insightful into interpersonal behaviours and motives | • Time consuming  
• Selectivity- broad coverage difficult without a team of observers.  
• Reflexivity- actions may proceed differently because they are being watch  
• Time consuming  
• Bias due to participant- observer’s manipulation of events. |
| Interviews | • Targeted- focus directly on topics  
• Insightful- provide explanations as well as personal views (e.g. perceptions, attitudes) | • Bias due to poorly articulated questions  
• Response bias  
• Inaccuracies due to poor recall  
• Interviewee only gives what interviewer wants to hear |
The interviews were transcribed by the researcher to enable a sense of closeness with the collected data throughout the main study. The interview data were transcribed verbatim by the researcher which enabled a sense of closeness with the collected data. The process of coding, sorting, categorising, and recoding of the data were constantly processed after all interviews.

**Interview setting**

The semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted after three to five days from the accompanied shop session. The reason was to allow the participants to make use of the food they purchased earlier and to make sense of how they managed their food choices. The interviews were mostly conducted at the researcher zone at the university’s library because the location provided a comfortable and quiet zone suitable for the participants and researcher. The room used was booked earlier at time slots agreed by both the participants and the researcher.

The interview began in October 2013 and ended in early March 2014. Each interview lasted between 60 to 90 minutes. The interview was recorded using a voice recorder and the researcher used notes to write some of the details (e.g., body language). The interviews began with the researcher explaining about the interview and asking permission to record the session. The participants were asked to fill in a demographic profile form which will be used to identify each of them. All the participants were given a pseudonym to protect their confidentiality.

All of the interviews were transcribed verbatim. There were altogether forty transcripts including twenty for phase one and twenty for phase two of the main data collection. The transcript was coded and analysed using thematic analysis.
The main study structure

The main study was conducted in between two time frames, at the initial stage of arrival and three months after, which captured and allowed changes and trends of food provisioning practice, new food choice system, and acculturation strategy to develop. The three months gap was based on literature that found that the most crucial period of transition was during the first three months of living in the new country. Hechanova- Alampay et al.’s (2002) study found that the adjustment among international students was lower than domestic students upon entry and three months into the semester. The study provides a very significant view that international students’ difficulty in adjusting were at its peak during the initial transition. Berkey, Rockett, Gilman, Field, and Colditz (2013) study on skipping breakfast and weight change in adolescents and found that excessive body weight increases over time. The study enabled the exploration on how the pattern of food habit over time can produce more significant factor on weight change. In another study, Cemalcilar and Falbo (2008) examined the cross cultural transition of international students in the US and found that during the time interval of twenty-one weeks between pre-transition and post-transition, most of the students’ experienced significant decline in their psychological well-being.

Following the purpose of this study, two phases of observation and in-depth interviews were conducted at the first stage of arrival and three months after living in the UK that allowed food adjustment experience to be compared with overtime.
5.18 Sampling Procedure for the Main Study

Sample method

Purposive and snowball sampling method were applied for the main study. Flyers and notices were sent to international students at concentrated areas such as the library, cafes, school foyers, and halls where orientations for new students were conducted. Consent from lecturers at the university was gained for opportunity to talk to new students in their classes about the research. As a result, a number of queries were made about the study via email. A quick respond for an appointment was made allowing the researcher to explain the study. The students were also asked to invite their friends to take part in the study. Twenty-two participants volunteered and agreed to be observed and interviewed for the main study.

Data collection setting

The main data collection consisted of two phases to allow comparison and identification of any changes across time between the initial arrival stage and three months after. The first phase was conducted a week after the students registered in October 2013. The second wave took place end of February 2014 after the first semester’s exam. The time interval in between the data collection was decided based on literature and it was expected that by that time the students have accumulated more experience of new food choice in the UK and allowed trends and changes in their food choice system and food acculturation.

Inclusion criteria

Proper selection of inclusion criteria will optimise the external and internal validity of the study, improve its feasibility, lower its costs, minimise ethical concerns, and ensure the homogeneity of the sample population, reduce confounding, and increase the likelihood of
finding a true association between exposure or intervention and outcomes. For the purpose of the study, only participants with the attributes in the inclusion criteria were selected. It was important to specify the criteria for participation so the purpose of the study can be accomplished. The inclusion criteria were similar to the participants for the preliminary study with additional description that all must be new international students who were first time in the country. New students’ experience was crucial because the issues faced during their stay reflected and helped explain the acculturation process. Students who have been in the UK before were excluded from this study because they are used to the new culture and environment and might not face similar issues and problems. It was interesting to study new students’ issues and experiences because they provided fresh perspective on the study area.

**Participants’ profile**

A total of twenty-two participants volunteered to take part in the main study but two students took withdrawal from their course halfway through the semester thus enabling the second stage data to be collected from them. Therefore, only twenty students’ data were included for analysis. All the twenty participants for this study are listed in Table 12.

**Table 12: Observation and Interview Participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonyms</th>
<th>Country of Origin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.Aisha</td>
<td>Kuwait</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.Neehu</td>
<td>Nigeria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.Lina</td>
<td>Malaysia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.Airil</td>
<td>Malaysia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.Zimi</td>
<td>Singapore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.Fasha</td>
<td>Malaysia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.IdIdayu</td>
<td>Brunei</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.Adam</td>
<td>Brunei</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.Ramia</td>
<td>Brunei</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>Name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
<td>--------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Addin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Naz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Kama</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Mei</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Jay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Habib</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Inna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Hanna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Dina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Suntra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Hannis</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In total, there were seven students from Malaysia, four from Brunei, two from China, two from Singapore, and one from Thailand, Indonesia, Kuwait, Nigeria, and Saudi Arabia respectively. Age range is from twenty-three to thirty-one years old. Fifteen female and only five male students were observed and interviewed.

5.19 Data Analysis of Main Study

In a qualitative study, the analysis begins at the very beginning and the researcher must constantly look for patterns to compare one against the other and analyse many patterns simultaneously to acquire in-depth understanding of the context being studied (Fetterman, 1998). A thematic component of analysis was used to compare, contrast, and generate themes to bring a clear context of the food acculturation process in this study. The data analysis began with transcripts reading, coding and rereading, and further coding, and then moved to grouping the codes into categories, and regrouping again into themes.

The process of generating themes was regarded as the “condensation or a reconstruction of the many tales told by the different subjects into a richer, more condensed and coherent story than
the scattered stories of separate interviewees” (Kvale, 1996:199). The researcher has to make “a carefully considered judgment about what is really significant and meaningful in the data” (Patton, 1990:406).

Along the process it was noticed that the themes were generated mostly based on the researcher’s interaction and interpretation of the data itself. It was a very complex process because most of the times, the researcher would associate and identify the connections with own experience.

The data analysis was continued until it reached data saturation, defined by Glaser and Strauss (1967) as when themes and categories in the data become repetitive and redundant, and no new information can be identified by further data collection and analysis. There were twenty transcripts at the end of the data collection in phase two but the analysis stopped at interview number 15 as it was found to be redundant. All data collected are presented using pseudonyms to protect confidentiality.

**Trustworthiness**

Lincoln and Guba (1985) described the trustworthiness criteria of qualitative study by generating terms and way of thinking of validity and reliability of a qualitative data. They viewed ensuring credibility as demonstrating confidence in the truth of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and suggested prolonged engagement, persistent observation, progressive subjectivity, and member checking as ways of ensuring credibility (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

**Prolonged engagement and persistent observation** is to “identify those characteristics and elements in the situation that are most relevant to the problem or issue being pursued” (Lincoln & Guba, 1986:304). For this study, the researcher is an international student herself thus she became the participant observer who had personal experience (engagement) with the area of
study (grocery shopping, food preparation, and other food adjustment experience). An international student is deemed to satisfy these two criteria. Guba and Lincoln (1989:238) further recommended that a researcher “record his or her a priori constructions—what he or she expects to find once the study is underway—and archive that record.” An in-depth study was conducted to gain details that can sufficiently add to the scope that was gained through the prolonged engagement. For example, the weight gain issue during the transition, as experienced by the researcher, was added to the scope of the main study.

**Progressive subjectivity.** Guba and Lincoln (1989:238) noted that “it is obvious that no inquirer engages in an inquiry with a blank mind, a tabula rasa.” The researcher was aware of her own personal adjustment experience, which was reflected upon when learning about other participant’s experience. However, Lincoln and Guba (1985:314) found that “the most crucial technique for establishing credibility is through member checks.” This is a continuous process, providing the researcher an “opportunity to assess intentionality” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 314) by presenting the data, interpretations, and conclusions to “members of those stake holding groups from whom the data was originally collected” (Guba & Lincoln, 1989:314). The participants in this study have the privilege to modify, delete, and add to their own interview transcript and the researcher’s findings about their experiences. By the end of the data collection, the participants were asked to give and were given the researcher’s contact number in case they wanted to be contacted in the near future. They were informed that they were welcome to give feedback, comments, or any additions to their statement. None of the participant contacted the researcher to make any amendments after the “member check” and this gave the implication that they were satisfied with the data shared.

**Transferability.** This refers to the degree of consistency, stability, and repeatability of the findings that can be transferred to different contexts, settings, or populations. In a qualitative
research, transferability cannot be specified because data interpretation is very subjective but sufficient information can be used to determine whether the findings would be applicable in a different setting.

**Ethical concerns**

The participant’s confidentiality and anonymity were protected throughout this study by using pseudonym in the transcript as well as in the final report. All the data collected and transcript were personally managed and kept in a safe and secured space. All files were password-protected to prevent unauthorised access. All of the participants were given informed consent form which contains the confidentiality, the right to withdraw, and the anonymity of the data. The data collection only began when the form was returned to the researcher. None of the participant’s name was disclosed or identifiable in the transcript or the final report.

**5.20 Summary**

This chapter discusses the research design for this study. Qualitative approaches using focus groups, accompanied shop observation, and in-depth interview were adopted to achieve the purpose of this study, which is to explore the food acculturation process of international students. Accompanied shop observation by the researcher allowed access to how the participants conducted grocery shopping by following and observing them while making food purchase. A shopping checklist was developed to guide the shopping session. In-depth interviews were conducted two or three days later to enable the gathering of contextual information on the observed food purchase and food adjustment experience since the international first arrived. After three months of living in the UK, the same process of data collection methods was repeated. This approach allowed time interval and it was expected that by this time the international students had experienced more food adjustment and established
a new food choice system. The sample for the main study included only new international students who were their first time living in the UK. Altogether, twenty new students volunteered to be the participants for the main study. The reliability and validity for this qualitative methods and ethical concerns were considered. The following chapter presents the findings and discussion for this study.
Chapter 6: Preliminary Data Analysis

6.1 Discussion Themes

Two focus groups were conducted to clarify the food choice experience and food acculturation process among the international students. The management of focus group involved a series of developing discussion questions and themes, participant recruitment, choice of setting, consent process, group discussion, interview recording, transcription writing, coding, and thematic analysis.

The literature review discussed the acculturation and food choice concept to help explain the context of the study. Several themes were developed from the focus group: food related experience, new food culture that they are being exposed to, food related issues, perception on their food choice, food choice decision, and strategies that the students practiced. The meanings attached to food and the role of food for the international students were also explored. The aim was to facilitate better understanding and clarify the food choice adjustment and challenges during the migration.

The themes for discussion in the focus group sessions were carefully predetermined (based on literature), phrased, and sequenced in the questions so that the participants could easily understand them. Open-ended questions were used in the discussion guide, starting with general questions followed by more specific and focused questions depending on the participants’ responses. The discussion themes are presented in Table 13.
The themes for the focus group discussion were developed from the literature review on food choice, life course perspective, and acculturation. At the beginning of the focus group discussion, the participants were encouraged to talk about their experience when they first arrived in the UK. This was to allow the researcher to gain insights on the food experiences, perception, and the challenges at the early stages of the international students’ transition. Previous studies on international students mentioned the food preference of familiar food that symbolised nostalgia and emotional attachment, sense of belonging to ethnic community, comfort, and fulfilling and emotional well-being (Brown et al., 2010; Collins, 2008). Hence, familiarity of the food was an important factor that guided the food choice of the international

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>DISCUSSION QUESTIONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Experience upon arriving in new country | • Tell us about your experience when you first arrived?  
• What was interesting/difficult when you first arrived?  
• Was there any food related issues that you experience?  |
| Food choice                        | • Describe your food habit.  
• What kind of food do you prefer?  
• How do you determine what food to eat?  
• How do you feel about the food choice in the UK?  
• How do you feel about being in charge of your own food choice?  
• How different is the food choice when you first arrive and now?  |
| Adjustment issues                  | • Can you accept/adapt to the new food choice?  
• How does that become an issue to you during your adjustment?  
• How did it make you feel?  |
| Adjustment strategy                | • Please explain how you manage the new food choice. (accept, reject, improvise)  
• How did the strategy work for you?  |
| Culture shock/homesickness         | • Did you experience any culture shock/stress/homesickness? What do you do to overcome it?  
• What do you missed most about your country or culture?  
• Does this affect how you adjustment?  |
| Support and facilities             | • What do you think about the support and facilities provided for international students?  
• If you ever used any support of facilities to help you adjust to your new life, please tell us about your experience.  
• If you never used any, please explain why.  |

Table 13- Focus group discussion themes
students. Furthermore, Brown et al. (2010) also found that international students experienced significant culture shock that affected their eating habits during the first period of their migration but it was not known whether the students in this study experienced the same. So the theme on food choice experience upon arrival was proposed to better address the issue.

The next theme was proposed to explore the food choice of international students and how they constructed food choice decisions based on the availability. The theme was also addressed to encourage the students to talk about the influence of their food choice in the new country after migration and the food preferred and unacceptable in the new country. Another purpose was is to explore the influence of migration over food choice and the changes in the food choice when they first arrived until the time of the discussion.

The adjustment challenge topic was proposed next. Studies concerning the adjustment issues of international students have often examined academic concerns and challenges, sociocultural issues, and language proficiency (Zhai, 2002; Brown, 2009; Wu et al., 2011). For example, an ethnographic study by Brown and Holloway (2008) found that students’ stress level is at its height when they feel homesick and lonely because of the challenges they have to manage, such as foreign language use, and unfamiliar academic and sociocultural environment. In another study, Wu et al. (2011) found the following elements challenging to international students: language skills, academic culture, and adapting to socio cultural environment. Studies concerning the dietary habits of international students found that poor diet quality and weight gain were associated with stressful adjustment experience and challenging adaption to host culture (Pan et al., 1999; Satia-Abouta et al., 2002; Papadaki et al., 2007). The discussion over this theme would allow the researcher to understand better the adjustment challenges related to food and what contributed to the matter.
The next theme explored the adjustment strategy practiced by the international student to manage and overcome the challenges. According to Furnham et al. (1986), adjustment is a culture learning model whereby international students never fully adjust but they can be strategic in what they learn and employ enough behavioural traits to get by without necessarily understanding or adapting the new culture. The adjustment strategies developed by the students need to be investigated because they give explanation for the need of the strategy in the first place, whether it is because the students cannot adapt to the new culture or because the feel that they need to integrate their food practice for a better adjustment experience. Berry (1997) mentioned the following strategies with respect to acculturation and adjustment: (1) cultural maintenance (to what extent are cultural identity and characteristics are important and their maintenance strived for); and (2) contact and participation (to what extent should they become involved with another cultural group, or remain primarily between themselves). Berry’s study also mentioned the four strategies developed for the two issues: assimilation, separation, integration, and marginalisation. The focus group discussion theme based on Berry’s study would guide the participants to discuss their life course events and experience that have influenced their food choice and their adjustment strategy.

Culture shock and homesickness among international students is associated with the negative feelings upon meeting the challenges and issues associated with adjustment. Lysgaard (1955) introduced the U-curve model to describe the process of adjustment, and the model proposes that culture shock emerges on the second stage. Much criticism has been addressed over this model, for example, disagreement as to when the stage of culture shock takes place (Furnham, 1993), but there is no denial that culture shock does exist at some point over the process. The notion of homesickness has also been addressed as an area of concern of international students in their adjustment process (Stafford Jr., 1980; Rajapaksa et al., 2002; Poyrazli et al., 2007).
The final discussion theme is support and facilities. This theme was suggested to explore the support and facilities provided by the host country to ease the students’ adjustment experience and the purpose was to reflect the function of the international office and local resources such as transport, food and accommodation, and overall environment that could help the students in their adjustment process. The participants’ experience in using the support and facilities provided will be discussed and the findings will contribute to improve the resources to aid their adjustment process.

6.2 Preliminary Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was applied for the preliminary study and both of the audio recorded focus group discussions were transcribed verbatim. The steps in conducting a thematic analysis (Braun et al., 2006) as presented in Chapter 5 were followed. The data analysis commenced with familiarising with the data. The transcribing was conducted by the researcher herself which allowed her to become familiar with the participants language and meanings. The transcripts were then read and reread to bring understanding of the data (Braun et al., 2006). Next, initial codes were identified using line by line coding and using colour highlights. The codes were then grouped to search for themes. For example, codes such as “enjoy,” “comfort,” “fulfilling,” and “home” were grouped under the theme “meanings of food.” Next, the themes were reviewed and refined and some themes that have connections such as “cost of halal food” and “cost of eating out” were merged under “the influences of resources” based on the life course perspective, which included budget as the influence over food choice. Finally, the themes were redefined and classified under appropriate themes. For example, “affordable healthy food” was changed to “healthier food options” and then changed again to “food adjustment strategy.” The development of the themes into observation and interview protocol for the main study is presented in Table 14.
### Preliminary study

#### Category from focus group discussions
- Co national friends- support and guide food choice upon arrival
- Perception on food choice availability
- Perception on new food choice
- Perception on British food
- Perception on familiar and ethnic food
- Willingness to try other food
- The influence of resources (based on Life Course Perspective)
- The influenced of personal factors (based on Life Course Perspective)
- Healthier food choice
- Meanings attached to food
- The changes in food choice during transition
- The food adjustment strategy
- Sharing food culture with others

#### Themes developed:
- LCP influence of food choice
- Food adjustment challenge
- Food adjustment strategy
- Food acculturation process

### Main data collection (phase 1)

#### Accompanied shop
- Grocery shopping behaviour through observation
- Reporting using a checklist and personal memo
- Notes on behaviour and specific action, strategies when doing grocery shopping

#### Themes for interview
1) Exposure, experiences & perception upon arrival, based on Life Course Perspective
2) Adjustment challenges and strategy
4) Food acculturation

#### Interview question guide
- Food related experience upon arrival
- Food related issues-difficulties/interesting
- Expectation of new food choice
- Perception on new food choice available.
- Food choice practice (daily food preparation; cooking, grocery shopping, eating out, unfamiliar food, other culture)
- Grocery shopping and the food purchased (based on accompanied shop checklist)
- How do you decide food choices?
- Acceptance/rejection of new food
- Strategy to help adapt to new food choices
- Home country food. (Homesick, ethnic/traditional meal, memories/symbol of food)
- Food provided around university-perception

#### New themes that emerged:
- Healthier food options and healthier lifestyle
- Challenges in grocery shopping
- Being independent and making responsible choices
- Trying to lose weight, maintaining health
- Halal food options
- Being cautious over label and claims
- Importance of cooking skills

### Main data collection (phase 2)

#### Accompanied shop
- Grocery shopping behaviour through observation
- Reporting using a checklist
- Notes on behaviour and specific action not on checklist
- Comparing behaviour between first and second observation using previous checklist

#### Topics for interview
1) Compare- experience during arrival and after three months in the new country
2) Food related issues
3) Perception on your food choices
4) Have you gained more food related experience and exposure? (more places to shop for food, eating and trying new food, more cooking, more eating out)
5) Grocery shopping and the food purchased (based on accompanied shop observation)
6) Perception on halal food and labeling claims
7) Changes in strategy when making food choice decision
8) Healthier food options and healthier lifestyle
9) Meanings attached to home country food and being homesick
10) Perception on overall food choice experience
11) Support from university and other sources

---

Table 14: Integrating Themes from Focus Group to Guide the Main Study
6.3 Themes Development

Previously, the first themes emerged from the focus group discussion are presented in Table 14. These themes are discussed by integrating them with the development of the observation and interview guide for the main study. In this preliminary study, the concepts of life course perspective and acculturation strategy were applied during the thematic analysis stage to understand the food choices of the international students. The major themes that emerged from the focus group discussions are presented in Table 15.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories/statements</th>
<th>Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| • Perception on food choice availability  
  • Perception on new food choice  
  • Perception on British food  
  • Perception on familiar and ethnic food  
  • The influence of resources (based on Life Course Perspective)  
  • The influenced of personal factors (based on Life Course Perspective) | 1) Life Course Perspective influence on food choice |
| • Willingness to try other food  
  • Healthier food choice  
  • Meanings attached to food | 2) The food choice adjustment challenge during transition |
| • Co national friends- support and guide food choice upon arrival  
  • Cooking  
  • Sharing food culture with others | 3) The food choice adjustment strategy |
| • The changes in food choice during transition  
  • The food adjustment strategy | 4) The food acculturation process |

Table 15: Major Themes from Focus Group Discussion
6.4 Preliminary Findings and Discussion

Four themes were developed from the focus group discussion: the influence of life course perspective on food choice during transition, the food adjustment challenges, the food adjustment strategy, and the food acculturation process. The sub question that may be explored in relation the these themes were experiences upon arrival, exposure, experience and perception on new food choice, food related issues, meanings attached to home country food, awareness on healthier food options, food preparation, managing food acculturation, other food culture, support during adaptation, and grocery shopping experience. These themes are discussed in detail subsequently. For the purpose of the analysis, all the international students in the focus group will be referred to as participants.

At the beginning of the focus group, the participants were encouraged to recall their experience when they first arrived in the UK. The move to the UK for the purpose of studying was not something unexpected because the students have applied and secured a place to study at least a few months ahead, which allowed them to make plans. Although most of the participants have stayed in the UK for more than a year, it was their first time in the UK. Most of them had different expectations depending on the information they received about the country.

Co-national support

The participants also mentioned about travelling with friends to the same destination, arriving early and attending orientation by the university, assistance by university volunteers, attending various programs for new and international students, and joining societies around campus. The students had a lot of help and support locating food from co-national friends who were already
in the UK. Guidance was also received during the orientation week and from the ethnic online group.

But I came with another family or colleague who was both teaching at the same university. So we travelled together, and we got the university to pick us up and drop us at another colleague who was doing a PhD at the time, so she...accommodated us for a few days... with the food and everything ... it was good. And there were lots of Malaysians there, so it was quite easy to... fit in...and they showed us everywhere... where to get halal food, where to eat, how to set up your password, ID and everything. (Mina, Malaysia, FG1)

For some of the information like...how to go to Tesco (to buy food), how to go to town, I can find many information from Thai...Thai Society website. (Pontrip, Thailand, FG1)

Some of the factors that facilitated the students’ adjustment were the support and dependence of co-national friends, information from websites such as Thai Society and Chinese Student’s Society, and workshops organised for new students by the university in helping with food related issues (e.g. where to eat and buy food). The significance of forming friendship network was demonstrated in Li and Gasser (2005), who examined whether contact with individuals from the host country, ethnic identity, and cross-cultural self-efficacy of Asian international students predict their sociocultural adjustment. The researchers found that contact with the individuals from the host country partially mediated an efficient sociocultural adjustment, unlike contact with the hosts. This issue can be investigated much further in the area of food adjustment in order to identify how a friendship network is formed with co-national or host country and how these factors contribute towards a positive food adjustment experience.

**Food availability & convenience**

Transition at the UK has exposed the students to new food choice and culture. The students made comparison between how different certain food experience was in the UK and those at their home. As the discussion moved further, the participants talked about their exposure to the
new food culture, lifestyle, and food choices in the UK. Probing was used to encourage the participants to expand their discussion on the food choice issue as there was a lot of interest in the topic, shown by the students’ excitement and taking turns to talk.

In the beginning, the participants discussed their perceptions of the new food choice setting in the UK and compared it to how easy and convenient it was back in their home country. Jamal (1998) revealed that the length of time spent in the host country would affect how food and meals are perceived, which explains why the experiences differed and made the discussion more interesting. Most of the discussion involved comparing the experiences in the UK and home country. For example, the participants recalled how convenient it was to get food in their home country anytime and anywhere. It was so easy that one participant felt she did not have to cook most of the time and that food was more accessible and cheaper.

I think in my country, or South East Asia, there is a lot of food stall along the way […] you can find any food at any time, even after mid night […] But here, there is no food stall …just Tesco open 24hours. So, it’s harder…hard to find the food. I think it’s very different from my country. (Pontrip, Thailand, FG1)

(I miss) not having to cook! If you feel like having anything at all (in home country)…you just go out, anytime […] it is more accessible, cheaper. (Mina, Malaysia, FG1)

The participants mentioned that the food businesses in their own country operated until late and it was not the same in the UK. The lifestyle in their home country food culture means food is always available and a few food businesses operated twenty-four hours, serving varieties of food at cheaper price. For the students, the convenience of similar food experience was significant during the transition.
Different food culture

Another participant recalled the memories of going to a *mamak*\(^2\) coffee shop in her home country and how she missed that occasion because most of the premises run twenty-four hours. She used to hang out at the coffee shop, eat and drink, or watch TV or live football but it was no longer doable here. She viewed places commonly visited by the locals including the bar as boring: “If you go to bar, you go to sleep.” The dissimilar culture of “hanging out” at the bar in the UK from her place to “hang out” in her home country was not very appealing.

I miss “Mamak”! […] It is like a coffee shop. It runs 24 hours. But you have coffee and you have bread and stuffs but you can just hang out and you can watch TV and you can watch football if it’s playing. In here you can’t get it. I think if you go to bar, you go to sleep. That’s it. (Rina, Malaysia, FG2)

The type of food eaten during lunch time in the UK was also mentioned and compared to home country food. All of the participants were from Asian countries and rice is the staple food in many Asian countries. This is the culture the participants have grown up with so lunch in their country was considered as “big” and the important meal of the day. The participants described that the meal for lunch is served in a fulfilling portion compared to the type of lunch served in the new country.

Because when we are back home…lunch is rice with meat and others. Like you have a full plate of rice and then you have like the green beans and all…it’s like very big. Like here, it’s like sandwiches and chips. So, I’m like…what? (Kat, 23, Malaysia, FG2).

Lunch in my country is quite big, important meal as well. But in UK, they don’t really have lunch time…just a…break time. So I think it’s different. (Ling, China, FG2).

One participant claimed that the British people liked unhealthy snacks. She described this situation on the basis of what she noticed at the local supermarket where people were buying large packs of chips, chocolates, and other types of snacks.

---

\(^2\) Mamak is referred to the Malaysian Indian Muslim community, famous for their 24 hours traditional coffee stalls selling affordable Malaysian food.
One thing I find interesting about British people is that they have very healthy meals but they have very unhealthy snacks. (Elle, Malaysia, FG2)

One participant commented that people eat less often compared to five or six meals a day in her country. Another scene was described as a “coffee culture” by one participant:

And they eat less often here as well. Back home it used to be like breakfast…then 10 o’clock…got something…and then lunch…and then got tea time…and then dinner…and then go ‘mamak’(coffee shop)! (Elle, Malaysia, FG2)

Instead of just eating, a lot of my time…drinking coffee…before lunch. (Hans, Malaysia, FG2)

The meal preparation time was very peculiar to one participant when she found that her Western flatmates cook around midnight. She experienced this when she first came here for her master’s degree a few years back. At that point, she perceived this as “Western culture” compared to her normal meal times.

I have Spanish flatmate when I studied Master…and it’s like they have different time for having their dinner. So they start cooking at 11 (at night)…or even like…even now…another flat…this is opposite flat, they start cooking at midnight. And they still have the sound of cooking…very loud, very noisy. I think 1 o’clock in the morning […] actually I’m eating like 6 or 7 or 8 pm, finished. But they start at 11. (Ammee, Thailand, FG1)

**Perception on British food**

The participants also discussed about the food available to them in the UK. Pies, fish and chips, salads, sandwiches, pizza, English breakfast, and sausages were described as British food. A few claimed that there is not much variety of food available and the texture of certain food was not appealing to them. A few participants described British food as bad tasting by using words such as “yuck,” “salty,” “bland,” and “no taste.” Some of the participants were not satisfied with British food because to them the tastes were unfamiliar and the preparation of the food (e.g., boiling) is boring.

British food is boring. It is just like salad or sandwiches or pizza…not much variety. (Mina, Malaysia, FG1).
First, its looks…it doesn’t look yummy. Kind of like…poor people food…and not taste nice as well. The sausage here…is like…so like…yuck! Not taste nice…salty. (Natreer, Thailand, FG1)

The British food is very bland. It is not too much taste […]Because they tend to boil a lot of vegetables…rather than…is just like…purely water boil with a little bit of salt is like…broccoli, beans and corns. It is just so…no taste. (Ling, China, FG2).

It was mentioned that adding condiments made British food more flavourful and therefore much more acceptable. One participant admitted she could accept British food but she had to add sauces so it gave more flavour. Another participant mentioned (1) adding condiments such as salt and vinegar into chips; and (2) adding chili, tartar sauce, mayonnaise, spices, paprika and crushed chili into her food. British food according to few was “bland” and the willingness to accept the meal was negotiated by adding some condiments.

I could eat…like…all British food…whatever. But I just have to put a dash of chili sauce then I’ll be done. (Rina, Malaysia, FG2).

If you eat the fish, I have to take all the sauces…the tartar…the mayonnaise…whatever and add flavour to it […] I have been converted to vinegar and salt to my chips! (Elle, Malaysia, FG2)

British food is very bland. It is not too much taste. You have to add in more…not really spicy but more flavour there. (Ling, China, FG2)

Studies by Cappelini et al. (2013), Brown et al. (2010), Brown (2009), and Jamal (1998) also showed that local food was perceived by international students and migrants as bland, boring, unhealthy, and tasteless. Brown (2009) found that the negative perception of the local food available was attributed by the dissimilarity of the original food culture and the food available in the new culture. This means that the greater the differences between their home food and local food, the greater the food shock is (Brown, 2009). The adverse reaction to local food mentioned by the participants who were mainly from Asian countries confirmed the importance of cultural distance in the degree of food shock experienced (Ward et al., 2001).
**Perception on familiar and ethnic food in the UK**

A few of the participants were used to spicy food but they claimed that the chili in the UK was not hot enough. One participant felt the chili sauce that she tasted here was too sweet. Even the chili that was sold in the supermarket was claimed as “not hot at all.” On the other hand, being able to find “bird’s eye chilli,” a type of chili that is very spicy but familiar in her home country, had made one participant very happy and she frequently used it in her cooking.

It’s like the chilli sauce…it is sweet chilli. I mean…what is this…what is this? I mean chilli is not supposed to be sweet. (Rina, Malaysia, FG2)

Even though you buy the chilli in Tesco…the raw one…it’s like 5 or 4 chilli hot…it is not hot at all. Even though it is chilli…it is different. (Ling, China, FG2)

I found bird’s eye chilli, though. Oh…that’s awesome! I’m so happy. It is still spicy enough. I’ve been putting it in my soups. (Elle, Malaysia, FG2)

Also discussed was the experience of having familiar ethnic or home country food in a restaurant or ready meals sold in supermarket. A few participants claimed that although ethnic or home country foods were available in the UK, the tastes were not similar to what they used to. One participant felt the Thai noodle’s taste was altered, not the same, and “strange.” It was believed the ethnic foods were different because some of the flavours were toned down.

They try to alter some in their main course, like the Thai, I think it’s the Thai noodle…but I don’t think they even have that in Thailand. It’s strange. (Mina, Malaysia, FG1).

I think it’s because they try to fused it…like…we love chili…you know? So they tone down on the flavouring (spiciness). (Rina, Malaysia, FG2)

One Chinese participant made plans to go out with her friends to try other ethnic food like Italian or English, but they would always ended up eating Chinese food. However, the experience was not favourable and she described the taste of Chinese food that she had as not the same and rubbish.
In Guildford, I would never choose to go to the Chinese restaurant because I only know one there but I don’t think it is Chinese food [...] it’s not the same at all. I find it’s not that decent, to be honest. It’s kind of British-Chinese food. (Ling, China, FG2)

The taste of Asian food available was not appealing and one participant who is not a good cook even claimed, “I think I cook better.”

I had Asian food a couple of times (in the UK) and I think I cook better and I don’t even cook Malaysian. (Elle, Malaysia, FG2)

Common phrases to express the taste of ethnic food they had in the UK were mentioned to indicate that the participants dissatisfaction with the ethnic food. The comments they gave included “it is strange,” “it is not the same,” “toned down flavour,” “it is different,” “it is not supposed to be sweet,” “not hot at all,” and “spicy enough.” The participants had the desire to consume ethnic and home country food, but what was available to them was only acceptable but not satisfying. The participants needed to negotiate the authenticity of these ethnic foods as they constructed their food choice.

**Willingness to try other food**

The willingness to try out other foreign food was also discussed. The participants claimed they were willing to try other ethnic food to have the experience. One participant expressed her willingness to try and perceived foreign food like the French would be expensive. Another participant tried an Indian meal and although she did not liked it; she was willing to experience other cuisine.

Yes…I mean if I have the chance to try other country food…I will. But...just once…if I don’t like it then I won’t have it anymore. Like for example...Indian food…I tried before here. And then I don’t like it so I stop having it. But other kind of food like for example French…I never tried. I’m thinking of trying once. (Natree, Thailand, FG1)

It was suggested that direct experience with the food available and confrontation with additional stressors in the new environment may lower openness to try new food (Brown,
As mentioned in Ward et al. (2001), cultural distance and dissimilarities of food will influence rejection of foods that are novel or unknown (Brown, 2010). However, one participant claimed that her choice to try different food were based on the influenced of online restaurant’s reviews.

So we go to London and stuff and we actually try different, different types of…and also we would go through TripAdvisor to find out where the best places to eat. (Rina Malaysia, FG2).

Although migration experience exposed the international students to new food choices, some of the foods were not totally unfamiliar to one participant. She claimed she was used to Western food back in her own country, so the food choice available now was acceptable and familiar to her. She felt that she did not have problem adjusting to new food choice in the UK.

Food wise…I think for me the problem was not so much adapting to UK culture because back home I used to eat quite a bit of Western food as well. And I like Western food and I can only cook Western food. (Elle, Malaysia, FG2).

The experience eating Western food in the home country made the process of adapting to food choice in the new country much easier. Exposure of Western food in Asian countries was referred to by Cappelini et al. (2013) as global consumer culture or GCC and this act as an acculturation agent where people are exposed to foods from other countries available in their own country. The experience tasting foreign foods allowed people who migrated to adapt better to the new country’s food.

**The influence of resources (money and time)**

The migration and turning point to a new life change the trajectory of food choice for the international students because they were responsible to consider their resources before making food choice decisions. Cost and convenience was a major influence because the most of the students were living on a strict budget. The cost of eating out was another topic discussed
among the participants. The type of food they choose to eat, food prices, and what was considered as value for money were negotiated before deciding what and where to eat. One participant considered eating out as “pricey,” so when she eats out with her friends, they tend to buy meal deal offers which to them is “value for money.”

I don’t tend to…eating out because I don’t feel the prices are worth it. But when we go out, we tend to look for the best deals. Price drives our choices quite a bit. I would love to go…like Jamie’s Italian or whatever just to try the food but I’m just thinking how much it could possibly cost me […] It’s too expensive to eat out here. (Elle, Malaysia, FG2).

It was also commented that the cost of halal food choice was expensive and where it was available, the availability was limited. This showed that fulfilling the dietary requirement based on personal and religious beliefs was complicated for the Muslim international students and the cost of halal food was a major factor that influenced the halal food choice.

So it’s really difficult for me to find it (halal food). Tesco have it but…it’s not much…it’s quite expensive. (Hans, Malaysia, FG2)

Looking at the prices of the (halal) chicken…I was like…’whoa’! Different!’ (Elle, Malaysia, FG2)

Pan et al. (1999) reported that Asian students’ lack of resources and limited time to prepare food caused them eat out less often; and when they do eat out, they selected fast food because it was cheaper and faster. Other participants mentioned wanting to try out other types of food and eating at famous or popular places but they have to reconsider the option because of budget constraint. The participant was a full time international student, sponsored by government with no disposable income. The limited resources in terms of budget limited their food choice.

I think it’s because we are not used to the food here [and] is quite expensive. (Ammee, Thailand, FG1)

The participants had to negotiate cost as a value, and so fast food like pizza and kebabs were likely be chosen as something within their limited resources of budget, time, and transport.

According to one participant, being a student also means more times are spent studying and no
transport of his own. Therefore, ordering fast food that included delivery service was a regular option for him.

We eat pizza a lot…if we are going to eat something. The pizza here is quite nice. And they are big and you don’t pay much. (Elle, Malaysia, FG2)

I think in UK, they have good delivery system somehow. Every place, every shop provides delivery service. When I first came here, I just call them. I want chicken…I want pizza or whatever. Because we didn’t have any car to go out […] we make time for our study (busy). So, that’s why I often used the delivery service. (Hans, Malaysia, FG2)

Another participant discussed how she made plans with her friends to eat other food like Italian, British, or French, but when they went out they always ended up eating Chinese food because of affordable price and convenient location.

We always end up with Chinese (food). I think depend on the location…and also price as well. I mean…sometimes French cuisine is very, very expensive and it is just not affordable for the students. (Ling, China, FG2)

However, cost was no object for some students who wanted to experience something special. One participant did not mind paying extra to eat at best places she reviewed on the internet because she felt that the experience would be more valuable to her.

But somehow me and my friends sort of like, we want to explore. So we go to London […] to find out where the best places to eat. Yes it sort of means you pay a bit more but I think my friends were sort of…like…wanting to experience. So that we sort of…ok…close one eye…pay! (Rina, Malaysia, FG2)

Limited resources are often considered before deciding on food choice and students have to exclude food that costs more money, time, facilities, or cooking skills (Sobal et al., 2006). Therefore it could be concluded that the participants had to negotiate budget constraint, convenient location, and the desire to experience something special before deciding food choice. Fast food and ready meals were options for them as the prices were affordable and convenient.
Personal factors

The participants had to renegotiate personal preference of ideal food because the ideal food choice and selection available to them were different and sometimes limited. For example, one participant who mentioned limited choice of restaurants that serve quality and variety of food affordable for students like her. She had to renegotiate her limited resources as a student and override her need for quality and variety of food.

I think they don’t provide very quality of food for us. We only have limited restaurants here…I mean…limited choice. And the same food every time that we go to the restaurants. So it’s not quality…that’s why. The price…not really different from others. Student likes to eat sandwich, pizza…because we don’t have other choice. (Ammee, Thailand, FG1)

One participant had to reconsider her state of hunger and choose anything conveniently available to her just to get some energy although she did not enjoy the food. She was exposed to common food such as sandwiches for lunch and perceived her option to satisfy hunger as limited.

Otherwise, here at the office and you feel hungry for lunch and just get a sandwich, it gets your energy up. But then you don’t enjoy it. I had to eat otherwise I have to starve or faint…can’t do my work. So have to force myself to eat even there’s…I don’t need much to eat. Whatever in Amigo’s or other places. (Mina, Malaysia, FG1)

Contrasting values that were important means that sometimes there was a need to override one factor over the other. For example, the participants who were required to eat halal foods due to personal religious beliefs constructed a simpler food choice process that allowed them to eat without compromising the halal ideal. One participant mentioned that she would choose vegetarian food to make her food choice simpler because she had to be really careful when choosing halal food, particularly by making sure that every single ingredient was halal. Another participant also constructed a simple food choice decision by having vegetarian food because she did not bother finding halal restaurants when eating out.
I don’t mind trying local food …because we have to make sure it’s halal […] sometime if it’s vegetarian… then I’ll just eat it. (Mina, Malaysia, FG1)

Usually I would just go for Indian food and vegetarian stuff because their vegetarian is good. (Rina, Malaysia, FG2)

The participants who required halal food or any other food based on religious beliefs had to negotiate the personal factor and dietary requirement when they migrated to another country where they were considered minority with different cultural background. For one participant, he prioritised his halal dietary requirement and if there was no halal food around, he considered being vegetarian which is permitted in his religion.

I think the first thing is…make sure if halal food is not here, so maybe I’m vegetarian right now. Might be… get protein…nutrition from egg, fish. Might be…I have to change my eating behaviour… pattern… somehow… yeah. That’s the point. But I don’t think halal food is not around, right? Just in case if that happens… might be I’m a vegetarian right now. (Hans, Malaysian, FG2)

A few participants mentioned that halal food influenced their food selection. An ideal food to some people might require conformance with their beliefs and religious practice. In this case, halal food was the requirement that reflected self-image and influenced the food choice for a Muslim.

Besides price and availability, one participant mentioned how she needed to always be careful and aware of ingredients in restaurant menus to make sure every ingredient was halal. This habit was practiced when she was eating out to choose a meal for herself. These situations limited the choice of places for eating out for the international students.

[…] we have to make sure it’s halal. Then […] picking at the stuff that you don’t put on the menu like white wine in the white sauce or all the small things […] that is always at the back of your mind. (Mina, Malaysia, FG1)
The participants were not able to maintain their food habit or practice due to limited availability or accessibility. They sought to find alternatives that were conveniently available to them and this made the food choice process more complicated for them.

Previous studies mentioned personal factors that establish personal food and eating identities which include physiological factors (sensory, genetic), psychological or emotional characteristics (preferences, personalities, moods, phobias), and relational factors (identities, self-concept) (Jabs et al., 1998; Bisogni et al., 2002; Sobal et al., 2006). These factors represent self-image as a specific type of eater and operate to shape specific food selections (Sobal et al., 2006). Personal factors that were important to the participants in deciding food choice—such as self-identity, cultural background, and religious belief—would sometimes restrict their food selection.

Ling from China tried to reconnect her Chinese roots and learned how to cook Chinese food when she moved to the UK. The strong identity tie helped shape her food choice, which was mainly Chinese food.

Actually, I myself don’t like the UK food at all. So I have to learn (to cook) Chinese food […] I’m from China. (Ling, China, FG2)

Another participant described herself as not in the age where she should be health conscious in her food choice and her priority was taste and flavour.

At the age I am now…I will like…leave it a few years then I’ll think about my health. I am more for taste and flavour now. (Rina, Malaysia, FG2)

The relationship with food and culture was also indicated by one participant who perceived assimilating eating patterns with the host country as “bad,” considering how strong the culture identity was within her.
Because our culture is very strong in us. Like we grow up having this type of food. To convert...is like...I don’t know...it is bad. (Rina, Malaysia, FG2)

It was acknowledged by Finkelstein (1999) that cultural background has very strong influence in eating behaviour. Furthermore, a study by Mintz et al. (2002) established the relevance of food and the food culture as markers of ethnic identity. Retaining the sense of ethnic identity may benefit the functioning of individuals within multicultural societies (Berry, 1997). Bisogni et al. (2002:129) defined the term identity as “the mental self-images that a person assigns to herself/himself based on everyday interactions with people, groups and objects,” which can reveal many cultural, structural, social, and individual meanings and that food serves as a tool that people can utilise as a means of confirming and reaffirming identity to one’s self and others.

**Healthier food choice**

The participants also discussed their exposure to the new environment in the UK where awareness of eating healthy was important. They admitted that they were eating better food in the UK because vegetables and other healthy foods were considered cheap and convenient. Their food preparation was also in a healthier way; the foods were either “baked” or “pan grilled,” using less oil. Healthier food preparation was perceived as good and saving money.

I have to say I’m eating more vegetables now...than before [...] I don’t want fried chicken anymore, I baked them. So it is healthier in a way. It saves money, it’s healthier. (Rina, Malaysia, FG2)

I’ve definitely change my eating patterns to be more healthy because I cook myself So my eating patterns have become a lot healthier and I definitely eat a lot more vegetables because it is so much easier to find green produce that you don’t have to necessarily cook here [...] so I can eat healthy without spending too much. (Elle, Malaysian, FG2).

The policy in the UK especially procedures and regulations for restaurant was also commented and it was considered beneficial for consumers.
I think in the UK, they are really concern…awareness of the healthier food is a little bit higher compared to our country. They are really aware…every restaurant must have their own…I mean procedure or regulations that they need to serve good food…healthier food. (Hans, Malaysia, FG2).

The nutritional value labels in the UK were perceived as clear and precise, something that was different compared to home country. The labels influenced one participant’s food purchase habit as they began to read nutrition labels more carefully. Awareness of free range and organic food was also mentioned and was described as “healthy” and more accessible in the UK.

I think the label for nutrition in this country is very clear. In my country, they don’t state that precise…I know. So…very strict…the expiry date before they definitely sell […] I think that’s a good point […] There are more choices of free range food like organic food compared to my own country…which is quite healthy. (Ling, China, FG2).

The healthier eating awareness in the UK guided and motivated the students to eat more vegetable and other healthy foods as well as healthy food preparation practice. Although cost value was very important to the students, it did not limit access to healthy foods like vegetables and fruits because these foods were considered cheap. One participant recalled how she needed to negotiate between the following two values in her food choice back home: cost or healthy foods. She described one food in her home country that is high in fat—the “nasi lemak”—which is made using rice cooked in coconut milk, eaten with other dish like fried egg and chicken for breakfast. The nasi lemak was far cheaper than salad so the tendency to eat healthier food was compromised by the cost. Hence the participant was eating more vegetables after she migrated here.

Whereas back home…you want to buy salad…is so expensive. Here, you can buy salad and everything for…like a pound […] eating healthy back home was like…you buy “nasi lemak” (rice in coconut milk) for $1.50 but salad for like…$5 or $6. Which one you’re going to choose? (Elle, Malaysia, FG2)
**Meanings attached to food**

Collins (2008) mentioned that sojourners such as international students use food as a medium to connect with their home country, particularly by creating familiarity and a sense of belonging in their lives. Food plays an important role in international students' attempts at establishing identities especially during transition, which allow them to connect with the host culture and country of origin.

It was found that familiarity of the taste of home country food influenced positive feelings for the international students. Their past experience of eating ethnic and home country foods established the ideal version of the taste and flavour which signifies the emotional meanings of food that the students carried with them. Words such as satisfying, fulfilling, enjoyable, and healthier as well as comforting were often mentioned to associate emotional attachment and memory of having something familiar, especially ethnic and home country food. One participant described having ethnic Thai food in the UK made her feel like she is home.

But it (eating home country food) is so comforting because it’s a bit familiar sort of…flavour…familiar experience…so to speak. Even though it’s not as nice as what you could get back home. So that what it makes me feel. (Elle, Malaysia, FG2)

[…] (Having a Thai meal) makes you feel like “Ah, home.” Ah…home or even…want to go home more. Yeah…it’s more satisfied […] It’s more healthy…more enjoy…more eating. (Ammee, Thailand, FG1)

Locher et al. (2005) talked about how food objects were associated with the relief of distress and manipulated to modify or change emotional states or feelings. The emotion and comfort felt when eating home country food reflected the social construction of some food objects as “comfort foods” (Locher et al., 2002). Locher et al. therefore suggested the importance of demonstrating how both the social and physiological dimensions of food must be considered in any efforts to understand food choice decision after migration.
One participant recalled trying to make a home country dish because she was feeling homesick. However, the food did not turn out so good that it made her miss her mother more. She felt if her mother was here, the dish would turn out better because her mum is a good cook.

I tried making Malaysian food a couple of times and the first thing I thought was I can’t cook as well as my mum (laugh). And then I miss my mum. (Elle, 25, Malaysia, FG2)

Elle’s (Malaysia) claim was similar to the findings in Collins (2008) study that examined the relationship between South Korean international students’ culinary consumption and the maintenance of national identity. The study demonstrated that although these students were living in New Zealand, they were simultaneously reconnecting with their pre-migration lives through the act of consumption and the recreation of Korean national dishes replicate a space reminiscent of home. The act of recreating ethnic home dishes displays a strong connection to the home country by preserving national identity through food.

The changes of food choice during transition

The participants’ role as students also indicated that they have shifting values because of their study commitment. One participant mentioned an integration strategy in her acculturation process because of her new role and she chose to eat ready meals although she preferred home style ethnic dishes. She valued her time as important and was willing to adapt to convenient food that was more easily available for her.

I tried the microwave oven halal kebabs…halal this…halal that. The kebabs are quite good …it’s very instant. But it’s good. (Rina, Malaysia, FG2)

One participant changed her eating patterns on the basis of her social context. She had to shift convenient value when she was having a meal on her own to a more quality meal when she went out with her friends. These shifting values needed to be negotiated and the food choice system was based on what the participant perceived as the ideal in those two situations.
Assimilation and integration strategy was developed by the participant as her life course now involved interaction with other social context.

I think when I am on my own, I tend to choose stuff that is easy to eat like sandwiches…you know? Stuff that I can carry and go if I am uncomfortable sitting by myself…that kind of thing. But with friends…I tend to choose proper meals where you could actually sit down and talk. (Elle, Malaysia, FG2)

The food adjustment strategies

The participants also discussed the strategies developed to make the adjustment better and how they adapted to new food choice. One participant claimed she was aware that food choice was going to be an issue for her during the transition. Although transition has not occurred yet, past experience of other people shaped her perception of food choice in the new country, allowing her to plan ahead and prepare for the situation. She brought food from Malaysia as a “backup plan” because she was not sure where to get them when she arrived. It was her first time in the UK so she considered it was important for her to bring Malaysian food just to give her enough time to find the food. Her strategy at this point was indicated by her choice to have familiar food brought with her.

I had one bag full of Maggi (instant noodle) and all the Malaysians rempah and stuff like that. So we had it all…we brought it all over here. So I was pretty much OK because I have them already. So it was the mean time for me finding out where to source from here…I had something like a backup. Even though it doesn’t taste like Malaysian because my ingredients are all different but at least you have that experience. […] For me I think…because we know already that it will be hard. So my parents send me over (food)…we were all prepared. (Rina, Malaysia, FG2).

The participants mentioned the need to prepare food independently, which they never did before. Transitions from living with parents to living on their own made them realise the need to manage everyday tasks and acquire certain skills to adapt to new food choice.

(Migrating) taught me to be more independent. I can actually cook now. […]But now you really, really want that food but it’s not available so you have no choice but to cook it. It teaches you to be independent and start doing things. (Kat, 23, Malaysia, FG2).
Acquiring cooking skill was important in the food adjustment process in order to be able to fulfill cravings of ethnic and home country foods and to be able to cook something they preferred. For a few participants, it was difficult in the beginning because they have never cooked before and had to learn and manage this skill independently for the first time in their life.

Yeah…because when I first arrived here, I don’t know how to cook, at all. (Ling, China, FG2)

Usually (now) I cooked by myself […] before this I never cook. (Seng, China, FG2)

Cooking skills was acquired because it enhanced the possibilities for the participants to have preferred food choice. This skill allowed them to adapt better to the new country. One participant mentioned how she wanted to eat certain food that was not available so she cooks.

But now you really, really want that food but it’s not available so you have no choice but to cook it. (Kat, 23, Malaysia, FG2)

Dissimilar taste of ethnic and home country food and new food choice is an issue for the participants because food was considered an immediate stress reliever. The international students can choose to cook food they were craving for like ethnic or home country food instead of buying ready meals. Through cooking, they were able to adapt to the new food choice better and they can choose to cook healthier meals. Brown (2009) mentioned that cooking could guarantee both emotional and physical sustenance.

Some participants claimed they cannot fully adjust or adapt to the new food choice cooking and this allowed them to have something they can enjoy especially ethnic home country dishes.

I cannot get used to the food here. Usually I cooked by myself. Home country food. (Seng, China, FG2)

I think it’s because we are not used to the food here, […] you used to your own food, so you like to cook […] like traditional Thai food. I like to cook by myself. (Ammee, Thailand, FG1)
The thing is I cooked by myself. So I will tend to cook Malaysian food. So I don’t think I will not eat any Malaysian food. (Faza, Malaysia, FG1)

One participant mentioned her cooking skill was limited and she ate the same food almost every day. However, she could adapt well to the routinisation of food choice.

Yes. I think we have several kind of food to choose. But here, because of our inability of cooking, I find myself eating the same (Thai) food almost every day. (Natre, Thailand, FG1)

The participants mentioned that sometimes the food they tried to cook did not taste the same even though they followed the recipe. One participant claimed it took her two years to finally cook something nice to eat, but she kept on trying. The familiarity of her mother’s cooking was also compared to her own when she tried to cook home country food. Nevertheless, the participants kept trying to perfect their skills on cooking ethnic and home country foods.

Yeah…actually it’s very strange…the taste is totally different even you follow the description or recipe very detail even like how many minutes exactly, OK…you need to put the salt…and you put sugar and everything…yes I did everything. But then it’s disaster! It takes me 2 years to get something which I feel is nice to eat. The first year, just keep trying. (Ling China, FG2)

Finding ingredients to prepare home country food was not an issue for them because there are Asian shops available. Although the available ingredients they needed were not the same, they were acceptable. One participant had her mother ship in supplies of spices so she would be able to cook Malaysian dishes. Asian shops were also available therefore finding ingredients were not a problem.

I have to order rempah (spices) from my mum. She shipped in some for me to try making Malaysian food. (Elle, Malaysian, FG2)

It’s very easy to find ingredients here. I found that if you go to the shop like Thai shop or Chinese shop, Asian shop, it’s like they have all the ingredients that I can used to cook […] but it is not exactly the same (taste), but, can (acceptable). (Ammee, Thailand, FG1)
Supplies for spices were also sent by family members on regular intervals to make sure there is sufficient supply for the participants. Although some of the ingredients were available locally, the tastes were different and not considered original and authentic.

One participant’s strategy was to bring some of the ingredients from home because she wanted to make Chinese food. Authenticity of the ethnic ingredients influenced her to bring dry food from her home country. She would fill her luggage mostly with food. It was found later that most of the ingredients were actually available in the UK, but the quality, variety, and authenticity of the ingredients had influenced her to bring them from home.

But it’s like…they also sell a lot of local…Chinese food but I have to say…the price is far too expensive. And the choice is quite limit. Even though some of the stuff…sell here, I still bring stuff from home. Every time I bring around 46kilos…is like 2 luggage…one is 23 kilos each. Actually 90% of the stuff is just the food. It’s not snack food. It’s like base of things…to cooking…sauce… spice…those things. (Ling, China, FG2)

**Sharing food culture with others**

Exposure to other cultures has allowed the participant to share their food with others. Living with other nationalities has provided opportunity to construct a food choice system influenced by social context. At the same time they could integrate to other culture and learn. Two participants described the events that allowed them to prepare ethnic food to their flatmates.

Living in the same flat, we have like…already in the same flat with other nationalities, sometimes we have like…join together. And then like…cooking our own dish…like…our nationality…and then we share together with another flatmate. So they cooking…everybody share culture by cooking our own dish and then join together to celebrate Christmas or nearly the end of the year that we need to move to another house. (Ammee, Thailand, FG1).

I have like four Chinese roommates and one French. So sometime we have like one night when everyone just cooks a bit of their home food. So my mum sends me…like…curry rempah (spices) and all that kind of stuff […] so for me to be able to contribute to those dinners. (Elle, Malaysian, FG2).
Experiences when sharing home country food with other nationalities have allowed the participants an opportunity to introduce their culture with others. It has also helped eliminate the feeling of homesickness because the participants were going through similar experiences with other students. They also had a chance to try prepare home country meal for the purpose of this special event and allowed them to make new friends and learn more about other cultures.

6.5 Summary

The preliminary study findings have ascertained the food related issues and adjustment experience based on the literature, such as the adjustment challenges among international students that relate with new food choice, the complexity of food choice construction during transition, the food acculturation strategy to manage adjustment, the construction of food choice based on the life course perspective concept, and the perceived cultural distance and dietary acculturation (unfavourable diet quality). The focus group involved a sample of ten international students who formed two focus groups, and the discussions took place at a university in south east of England between December 2012 and January 2013. The thematic analysis applied generated four major themes: the life course perspective influence on food choice during transition, the food adjustment challenges, the food adjustment strategy, and the food acculturation process. These themes will be used to guide the observation and interview protocol for the main study.

It was found that among the international students, the food choice decision was a complex process and the migration did impact the construction of the food choice process. The international students’ experiences when making food choice during their transition were faced with several challenges such as dissimilar food and culture, unacceptable taste, and lack of
cooking skills. The element in life course perspective that influenced their new food choice was very significant. Factors such as culturally ideal food availability and accessibility, resources (the cost of food and lack of cooking skills), personal factors (dietary restrictions, self-identity, healthier food), and the context of a new life in a foreign country with new roles and responsibilities in food provisioning practices all represent most of the elements in life course perspective. The acculturation strategy conducted—such as willingness to try new food, acceptance/rejection of British food, changes in food choice and habits during transition—demonstrates the international students’ acculturation adjustment and experience. Several unique emerging themes were also found, for example, (1) no established friendship with host country individuals were mentioned but co-national support was emphasised, (2) reference was made to acceptance of new food choice due to previous experience, (3) food choice decisions were made more complex due to lack of competencies in food provisioning roles, (4) the students embraced much of the new food culture and enjoyed their adjustment experience, (5) the dependencies of ethnic food were apparent due to increased availability and accessibility, (6) the cost of food was not an issue for some students because the new independent life was a chance to discover and try various food choice, and finally, (7) halal food choice was a major issue not only due to strict dietary regulations but the Muslim international students were constantly having to construct food choice decision at every stage. These constructs helped inform the elements to be investigated in the main study. The next chapter will present the data analysis for the main study.
Chapter 7: The Exposure, Experience, and Perception of Food Choice upon Arrival

7.1 Introduction

The life course perspective model explains how events and experiences that individuals have influence their food choice decision (Sobal et al., 2009). This chapter presents the findings from the main study and will include the exposure, experience, and perception of new food choices at the early stage of transition. The finding were based on the observed accompanied shop and in-depth interview conducted upon the students’ arrival at the UK. The stages of food choice decision during grocery shopping, food preparation, and cooking and food consumption were explored and presented to explain the food adjustment of the international students.

A new food choice system was actively developed as the international students moved through life during migration. The continuance of food shopping practice or food preference during the migration, influenced by their upbringing in their home country, has led to constant patterns of food choice in the new country. However, the students were continuously being exposed to new food choices that required them to redefine and reconstruct a new way or system of making food choice decision since they moved to a new life, away from home and family. The trajectories in the new, foreign, and unfamiliar surroundings added the stress of constructing a food choice system. The following section presents the students’ exposure and experience during grocery shopping.
7.2 The Food Shopping Experience upon Arrival

For international students living away from home for the first time, their transition normally includes new experiences and responsibilities such as food choices when buying and preparing food or planning meals. The institutional orientation to academic and campus life, with added new responsibilities, can be overwhelming to international students upon arrival in the new country (Major, 2005). For example, it was observed the students in this study did not know exactly what to buy and were unsure of their purchases.

This is the first time I’ve ever done grocery shopping. I never bought things like meat, chicken, fish, or anything like that for myself. I mean, when I did food shopping before, it was just to buy snacks, drinks, or something like that. I never bought raw food. This is the first time for me. (Lina, Malaysia, Int. 1)

I don’t know what to buy...because I was not sure about what I can eat. It all seems strange... I didn’t buy anything for the first week. (Addin, Saudi Arabia, Int. 1)

I look around every aisle to see what is being sold because I don’t know what to buy and I am not sure what I can eat. I went there with my friend, the first time just to look at everything and we didn’t actually buy anything the first time. (Kama, Malaysia, Int. 1)

During the accompanied shopping, the students were seen carefully reading and rereading food labels, comparing simultaneous food products, selecting certain food products, and then putting them back on the display rack. As a result, most did not buy a lot of food and often it took them more than a minute to decide the food choice. A few students did not buy anything at all during the first accompanied shopping trip. It was reported in Hechanova-Alampay et al.’s (2002) study that a high sense of confidence in the ability or self-efficacy\(^3\) had facilitated a sojourner’s less stressful and positive adjustment. The international students were not confident that they have a clear and correct prior knowledge when they first came and this were found to be the case for new

---

\(^3\) Self-efficacy is defined as the level of confidence that individuals have in the ability to achieve certain tasks (Bandura, 1986).
sojourners in Hechanova-Alampay et al.’s study especially upon entry to the new country. However, it was suggested in their study that in time, as more understanding of the new environment and expected behaviours was gained, self-efficacy and the adjustment will gradually became salient.

**The shopping list**

In one study Thomas and Garland (2004) examined the shopping list and nonlist usage among the respondents identified to be responsible for grocery shopping. The study found that the use of a shopping list indicated that the shoppers had engaged in planning before they went for shopping. The students in this study were responsible for their own grocery shopping, thus their habit of using a shopping list can be seen an act of control over financial management and as evidence of a well-planned grocery shopping trip (Thomas et al., 2004). In another study, Ness et al. (2002) explored students’ food shopping behaviour and concluded that one of the challenges faced by this group was to allocate scarce financial resources to a series of competing obligations and passions, including food.

Using a list also had other advantages to the grocery shoppers in this study. For example, it was observed that the students who used a shopping list seemed more organised when purchasing food. They only bought food they really needed and in a quantity that was appropriate to last until the next shopping trip. The purchase amount was predictable and the students could avoid food wastage.

But if I go to actual store (without a list), I just browse every sector. So I just spend at the store, usually two hours. I only wanted milk, meat, and something, and when I browse each section, I will bring more stuff. So I end up like £170, £180, at the end. With a list, I know what I need, usually £50 or £40 only. (Aisha, Kuwait, Int. 1)
(Using a shopping list) makes things easier so I don’t forget things. It’s also a way for me to control my budget because if I don’t have a list that means I will buy the things I don’t need and left out the things I really need. What I do is to try and budget how much I need for a day's meal and then try to make how much for a week. I don’t want to waste anything. (Lina, Malaysia, Int. 1)

It was found that the students learned to prepare their shopping list based on their prior experience with grocery shopping, either with their mothers or with other family members. The food shopping task among the list users was systematic because they only went to the aisle where the listed food was located and the shopping duration was shorter compared to nonlist users. The list users were more confident, especially when identifying which food falls under which aisle or category. They were not seen browsing around the store pointlessly and their purchase decision seemed quick and effortless. The students explained during the interview that their past experience conducting food shopping has helped them prepare for the trip by making a list of food they needed. Their purchase comprised mostly raw food like vegetables, meat, and other ingredients to be cooked later.

She teaches me (how to choose food) like which fruit is good that can last for weeks, days, months and my mom taught me to improvise. (Hannis, Brunei, Int. 1)

I used to do grocery shopping because I am the cook in my family and we would go shopping almost every day. I would go with my dad. I will decide what is needed and he would help me carry the things. I know how to choose fresh fish, seafood and I know almost every type of vegetables and how much I needed to buy or which sauce or brand is the best. (Idayu, Brunei, Int. 1)

Basset, Chapman, and Beagan (2008) studied the use of grocery shopping list among shoppers in a family and concluded that the nonlist users were less predictable, more flexible, and had no budget constraints when they shopped for food. This discovery concurs with the present study in that most of the students who shopped without a list were found to frequently browse around the store, trying to locate and remember the food they needed to buy. It was later learned that the nonlist users bought more junk food and food high in sugar contents and often the foods they
purchased were unnecessary. Most of their food purchase decisions were guided by price (promotional and discounted price, reduced to clear price) or food that visibly attracted them.

I (have) no list. Actually I never I think about it. Sometimes I just wandering around and think about what I need…I will buy something, buy more because maybe I just saw it and just take it. (Jaycee, China, Int. 1)

Normally I don’t have a list and it was an impulse buy. Any discounted item or promotional things, I go for them first. (Kama, Malaysia, Int. 1)

As a conclusion, the students who used a shopping list and with previous shopping experience made a firmer food choice decision as a way to control their spending and avoid wastage. They bought less junk food, made plans on what to eat in the next few days, and purchased only the food or ingredients they required. The students who shopped without a list spent more money because their purchases were more impulsive, guided by ongoing promotions or food that has attractive packaging and discounted price.

**The food purchase**

During the first week of arrival, the students started to buy food with the help of new friends and based on the information provided by the university. It was the first time that most students had been responsible for food shopping and preparation. Students without basic cooking skills bought very little food and they did not mind going to the supermarket a few times during the week. Their purchase would normally consist of ready-to-eat and other convenient food. Although some foods were not familiar, convenience and cheap price were the major factors in the food choice decision. For some, finding preferred foods required trial and error. For instance, Addin (male, Saudi Arabia) showed willingness to try new foods before deciding which he liked the best:

I think the first thing I ever bought was pitta bread. I had that with tomato sauce because it was quite bland to eat it on its own. Once I bought this fish in olive oil and I tried to eat it with the bread but the taste was awful. At first I thought it was fish in chili but it was
actually fish in olive oil and chili. I didn’t read through the label and mistook it. Luckily I bought another can of fish in tomato sauce and it taste a lot better so I just throw the other one away. They were really cheap, for £0.49 per can. I bought the pitta bread because it was very similar to what I used to eat back home. The taste was slightly different but ok. (Addin, Saudi Arabia, Int. 1)

The students considered a lot of factors before deciding a food purchase, for example, time and resources, taste, food restriction, price and value for money. The time scarcity in between academic activities and food preparation therefore made convenient food the best option when the students first arrived.

The search for common, familiar food when the students first did grocery shopping was observed as they went to the international food aisle. More time was spent there and they seemed delighted when they found imported food from their home country. The students also shopped at the Asian specialty store at the town centre near to university. Instead of trying new foods, the students were making effort to search for and locate food they were familiar with.

(I bought) chili sauce from my home country because the flavour would be different. I do think that most East Asian people would know how different chili sauce is back home. Here they only have tomato sauce. I can’t change to tomato sauce, I mean after years having chili sauce, I can’t change now. Once in a while is fine. But not every day. We normally used chili sauce as dipping for sausages and bread, pizza. Oh and rice…now we use basmati rice. We would buy 10kg for £13. We would buy in large quantity because we eat rice every day. (Inna, Malaysia, Int. 1)

I find that it is easy to find the ingredients that I need. For example, I found this chicken sauce I bought the other day which I usually use in Brunei. I was really happy when I eat it and it made me feel like eating at home. (Idayu, Brunei, Int. 1)

The first few food shopping trips at the initial stage of arrival served as the chance not only to explore new food choices and learn about the local food available in the UK but also to search for familiar food from their home country. It was revealed that the students wanted to find something
familiar because everything else in the UK was new to them and need some adjusting to. Having food that comforts them made the students feel more at ease.

The students were observed to be more relaxed about buying different kinds of fruit and vegetables they have never seen or bought back home. Fruit and vegetables appeared a “safer” new food they could try and the prices were considered affordable, if not cheaper than back home.

I tried blueberries and it tasted good but I need more time to be familiar to them. (Mei, China, Int. 1)

I also see kind of…berry. Many kind of berries. The red one. I think raspberry? I tried them. Extremely sour. (Jaycee, China, Int. 1)

We really liked capsicum and used it a lot. Back home, it is really expensive so we never tried them before. (Inna, Malaysia, Int. 1)

I find myself buying vegetables that I never ate before. (Fasha, Malaysia, Int. 1)

It was hard to ignore that the students preferred to buy more sweet desserts and snacks. The choice of having ice cream and chocolate bars was often associated with “cheaper” price.

Back in China, this ice cream is very expensive than here. I used to eat but not a lot in China but here is very normal. (Jaycee, China, Int. 1)

They are super cheap and super tasty for example the Twix bar. (Fasha, Malaysia, Int. 1)

I am excited about the ice cream sold here like Haagen Dazs, Ben and Jerry because the price in Indonesia is too expensive. I like to try new things and sometimes I would try the snacks. I will buy different brand every time. (Hanna, Indonesia, Int. 1)

Locher et al.’s (2005:294) research suggests that “during certain times in a person’s life, such as when one is not feeling well, either emotionally or physically, concerns about over-consuming calories, fat, or sugar might be mitigated.” This may explain another reason besides their cheaper price—that ice cream, chocolates and sweet dessert or snacks were often bought and consumed by the international students at the initial stage of their transition.
However, the space to store their food supply was an issue, especially to students living in shared accommodation. The space for dry food, fridge, and freezer, all had to be divided between eight to ten other students at a time, making bulk food purchases quite impossible and causing the students to do several trips to the supermarket. Despite all the compartments and spaces provided, Kama (male, Malaysia) felt that it was no use because he claimed he did not have a lot of food.

Yes I have enough storage space. I don’t buy a lot of and only go shopping once a week. I don’t cook much and I don’t eat much. The space in the freezer, fridge, and cupboard in the kitchen was enough for me. Even if I have a bigger storage, I feel like I don’t need it because what I have now is more than enough. (Kama, Malaysia, Int. 1)

The students mentioned how difficult it was to carry the food back to where they live because most of them had no transportation and lived in university accommodation. This situation definitely limited their food choice because they needed to consider what they could carry before purchasing food. Using a public bus or taxi was an option but they still needed to carry the food to the bus stop and back to their room, not to mention the extra cost for the taxi fare, which was considered expensive for students.

I tend to buy in bulk. I don’t have a transport and I used a trolley to carry the stuff I bought. (Inna, Malaysian, Int. 1)

I do have to do bulk shopping once every week because it would be tiring for me to carry all those shopping back to the room. (Adam, Brunei, Int. 1)

Both Inna (female, Malaysia) and Adam (male, Brunei) mentioned buying food in bulk, although it was heavy, because it would be more difficult to carry the food several times if there were several shopping trips. So they decided to shop once a week and Inna used a trolley to help her carry her things. Food shopping was considered a “big” responsibility and they had to limit their shopping trips due to a packed class schedule. Inna and Adam bought cooking ingredients like rice, milk, chicken, egg, fruit, vegetables, and cooking oils and these foods were very heavy.
Carrying heavy loads and shopping in the cold weather made food shopping more challenging for Neehu (female, Nigeria) and Aisha (female, Kuwait), so they resorted to online food shopping. Neehu claimed she had a bad backache once after she walked and carried her food all the way to her room on the second floor at the university’s accommodation. Soon after, she decided to do online shopping and have her food purchase delivered instead. It was Neehu’s and Aisha’s first time conducting online grocery shopping in the UK.

When you are online, you can bring things out from the list and you can check with other stores like Sainsbury’s to be able to help with budgeting. You have better control. One other factor for ordering online is also the weather. Like, you think when it is going to start snowing. You don’t really want to walk all the way to campus. Even when they have cleared the roads, it is still kind of dangerous on some parts and you can’t imagine yourself walking down the path and then slipping. So you can just order, if it’s snowed or something. (Neehu, Nigeria, Int. 1)

Aisha, a participant from Kuwait mentioned earlier on, also believed that online shopping was a way to control her spending because her first experience conducting in-store shopping had her spent more than she could afford. The delivery charge for online purchases was not an issue because to her, it was worth it.

If I do online shopping, I have a list to go through. But if I go to actual store, I just browse every sector. So I just spend at Tesco, usually two hours. I end up like £170, £180 like that, at the end. So I do online shopping, I know what I need, usually £50 or £40 only. When I go to Tesco for shopping by walking, when I come back with heavy stuff and I come back by bus. So I took the bus and it cost me £2 or £3. So I decided why not pay the £5 charge and have the item for delivery. (Aisha, Kuwait, Int. 1)

Online grocery shopping was more convenient for Neehu and Aisha because they can consider buying more food. In one study by Wolfinbarger and Gilly (2004) on online shoppers among students and university staffs they identified that the attributes of online shopping included accessibility and convenience, sense of freedom, and control compared to offline shopping. This concurs with Neehu and Aisha’s reasoning for online purchasing, which helped them manage the challenges of food shopping.
7.3  Support in Food Choice Decisions upon Arrival

Rajapaksa and Dundes (2002) highlighted the importance of friendships and social networks support for international students in the United States during adjustment. It was mentioned in Church (1982) that in order for an effective adjustment in the new culture, it was critical to have a positive contact between sojourners and host nationals. Host national friends act as cultural informants about the host’s culture and language learning, and they offer the best route to adjustment in the new country (Brown, 2009). Conversely, Major’s (2005) study of social support during the adjustment of Asian international students in English-speaking countries uncovered that the co-national network offered a sense of cultural therapy, which played a more important role compared to host nationals, especially upon arrival. Co-national support provides coaching and mentoring to help the new students sort out priorities in order to begin their academic studies and adjust to university life, as well as a reference of values from the home culture (Major, 2005; Brown, 2009). The findings from this study concur with Major (2005) on the importance of co-national support during the arrival stage.

The online ethnic group and co-national support

Migration as a turning point for the new international students deprived them from the support system of significant other such as family members and friends back home. The presence of social support can help the feeling of lost, uprooted, and homesickness, and it can make them feel more supported and more in control (Church, 1982; Pedersen, 1991). It was found that many international students were inclined to being with people of the same nationality (Furnham & Alibhai, 1985). In the same way the focus group discussion in this study uncovered that most of the international students joined online ethnic or co-national social groups at the university, such
as the Thai Society, the Brunei Society, the Malaysian Society and the Chinese Student Society, when they first came. They joined the group by registering via email or social media. Updates, meetings, and discussions were conducted and arranged, offering information and other co-national support for the students. Ye (2006) in a study on online support networks in the cross cultural adaptation of Chinese international students in the United States found that online social groups had become another important source of social support for international students. These online ethnic groups, according to Ye, allow members who share the same experiences of living in a foreign country to help each other, offering valuable information about the new culture and providing understanding of the adjustment phase the international students are experiencing.

Although support from co-national may provide a sense of belonging and reduce social stress, it will limit interaction with host nationals and lead to the feeling of alienated and less well-adjusted (Hechanova-Alampay et al., 2002). Nevertheless, support from ethnic or co-national groups was important to the new international students at the beginning of the transition. They, too, joined online ethnic societies and made new friends with other co-nationals during their orientation week and in the meet-and-greet session organised by the ethnic society.

Most of the students’ first food shopping trip to the store was either with their co-nationals (those who came much earlier than them [sometimes referred by the students as “"seniors"])) and other co-nationals who were their flatmates or classmates. Shopping with the “seniors “offered the students important information on the food choice that was available for them to eat. It was observed that most of the food items purchased were recommended by the seniors who had consumed the food before. Students who shopped with other co-nationals (flatmates or classmates)
were found buying similar food to be shared later and often they imitated the food selections their friend bought.

I have three flatmates who are all from my country and we decided to share our food and cook together. We take turns to cook but we go shopping together. We decide together what to buy and how much we need. We bought the same thing every time. (Hanna, Indonesia, Int. 1)

I did actually shop with a friend of mine and he bought some chicken wings and I thought that is a good idea so I just buy some as well. (Jaycee, China, Int. 1)

I was unsure about the things I bought and just simply followed a senior to Tesco and bought anything he recommended. (Naz, Singapore, Int. 1)

Another perspective of co-national support was help and guidance from co-nationals with similar religious background and a shared faith. Some concerns identified from the interviews were (1) limited food choices that conform to their religion, (2) trust over food labelling claims such as halal or vegetarian and (3) the need to make extra effort to understand food ingredients. This resonates with Major’s (2005) study on Asian-born international student’s adjustment at a university in the United States, where halal food emerged as a major concern for Muslim international students and the support received from co-national friendship with similar faiths played an important role.

During the initial stage of their sojourn, the international Muslim students not only made friends with co-nationals but also developed a friendship network with other “senior” students who shared the same faith and religion. Most of the food choice of the international Muslim students in this study depended on the recommendation made by other “senior” Muslim co-nationals in order to purchase halal and other food permitted by their religion. It was learned that one of the most important recommendations made by their new Muslim friends was to choose food with the “V” symbol on the label, which represents food suitable for vegetarians. More information was
gathered on other halal food available and the locations where they were sold. The students explained that the food was considered “safe” for them to eat if it was suggested to them because to the new students, their “senior” Muslim student understood what they can and cannot eat because they shared the same faith and religion.

Brown (2009b) in a study of how Muslim international students found belonging through the Islam society found that one of the main reasons for interacting with a fellow Muslim was because of the need to seek for a common ground (such as avoidance of nonhalal food) and reassurance of shared values and practice such as fasting during the month of Ramadan.

I met a friend who is my senior (Muslim male) when I arrived here and he showed me around. I always ask him about certain food, whether he used to eat them or not and how he decides we can eat the food or not (halal). He told me to look for the “suitable for vegetarian” symbol and I will check for gelatine in the ingredient list. Once I found the recommended food, I’m confident to eat...I depended on my seniors a lot because I’m not sure about the food sold here. (Habib, Malaysia, Int. 1)

This friend I went shopping with was aware of halal food item available and he knows that I can only eat that. So I trust him and when he recommended the readymade sauce, I bought it without hesitating. (Kama, Malaysia, Int. 1)

The retention of food habits and co-national friendship networks were among the most accepted dimensions of international identity (Laroche et al., 1998). It was stated in Holloway et al. (2009) that creating a co-national network can help reduce stress related to food choice decisions upon arrival in a new country. In this study, both Habib (female, Malaysia) and Kama (male, Malaysia) made new co-national friends when they arrived, and their food choices depended mostly on the suggestions and guidance given.

Most of the international students in this study established friendship patterns among their co-nationals within a few weeks of their arrival, mainly with the purpose of getting support and
guidance on food choice. Although befriending a member of the host culture is important for a more fulfilling and enriching study abroad experience (Ward, 2001), this study found that the new international students were more likely to form a friendship with other co-nationals during their arrival phase to gain more confidence in interaction and decision making.

7.4 Food Choice upon Arrival

In Hartwell et al.’s (2011) study of international students’ food acculturation in the UK, they mentioned that migration involves changes in dietary habits due to shopping and ingredient availability, indigenous culture, and financial circumstances. In another study, Perez-Cueto et al. (2009) researched the dietary changes of international students in Belgium and found that 85% of the students changed their diet soon after arrival in the host country. Significantly, Edwards et al. (2010) and Edwards and Meiselman (2003) stated that most university students’ dietary changes occur in the first three months and within the first term of their study. In order to explore the dietary changes, the students’ food choices when they first arrived in the UK were explored.

The healthier food choice

Deshpande, Basil, and Basil, (2009) adopted the health belief model (HBM) to predict the likelihood of healthy eating among university students and concluded that food preference and independent eating decisions are established early and more independent eating decisions are made as people move through adolescence. Furthermore, the transition to independent living during university years marked an important event and a critical period for most people as they were facing their first opportunity to make their own food decisions (Deshpande et al., 2009). For some students, the transition from living away from their family home provided a way for them to “live
a healthier lifestyle,” “eat healthy,” “lose some weight,” and “try out new recipes” because they claimed it was impossible to do these at home. Being independent and responsible for food choice decisions helped the students control what, when, and how they eat. They have full access to a variety of food whereas back home, food decisions were controlled mostly by parents (Nicklas et al., 2001).

Brown (2009) noted that although organic food is known to carry healthful properties, its high cost has discouraged students from consumption. Regardless, it was observed that Adam (male, Brunei) bought mostly organic food that consisted of bread, milk, eggs, and vegetables during his first accompanied shop. When asked about his organic food purchase, he replied,

I think the difference is with me being a postgrad and I tend to think more about learning how to do things better. As an undergraduate I would think whatever I can eat, the bare minimum, that’s ok as long as I live. As a postgrad, I want to learn how to eat proper food. For me that is the benefit of having organic food. (Adam, Brunei, Int. 1)

He commented that his choice of having organic food just started when he came to the UK for his postgraduate course. He felt that as a postgraduate student, he now needed to think about eating responsibly and learn how to properly manage his food choices. With the opportunity to live independently upon arrival in the UK, he was gaining new life experiences and learning how to cook, a session which he regarded as a therapy against feeling homesick and academic stress. The cost of organic or any other food deemed healthy was worth the expense for Adam to practice healthy and responsible eating habits.

I like the idea that I would be able to cook the good stuff responsibly. (Adam, Brunei, Int. 1)

Similarly, Neehu (female, Nigeria) had more concerns pertaining to her food choice, which was a practice that started at an early age when she was in Nigeria. Neehu had to consider more values
based on information she gathered from documentaries and articles on food before deciding her food choice, implying that she took responsibility for her health and wellbeing.

What I’ll be concern about is number of calories, all these sweetness and things like aspartame causes some concerns. Calorie counting, nutritional values. I always check for this. I have been watching all this documentaries about food and what’s inside. I used to do the ready meals thing when I first got here. But then after sometime I realised it is not really good because I think it was based on an article I read…I can’t remember the issues but what I got from it is it was unhealthy. They were actually some things added to it like preservatives and all that. (Neehu, Nigeria, Int. 1)

Although Neehu was aware that her concerns about ready meals were important and she had to make ethical food purchases based on this knowledge, her new role as a full-time student meant she was on a strict budget and had limited time to prepare and cook her own food, thus the consumption of ready meals was unavoidable.

The new international students also defined some of the habitual practices of food choice and noted that the practices were learnt before their arrival. They were entangled in their parents’ food practices, and most of the concerns expressed with regards to food choice were anchored in parental practice. Hannis (female, Brunei), for example, referred to her own mother’s practices upon making food choices back in Brunei, which she never cared about before but had become her major concern now that she was living on her own.

I feel more independent. I am more aware of food preservative, organic food although I didn’t like the taste, MSG, reading ingredients…and I will do this also to my kids in the future. Before this my mom is doing all this and I just didn’t care. I’m sure she is particular about food. She always told me she doesn’t want MSG in food. She heard that MSG is bad. So I am now more particular with the food. (Hannis, Brunei, Int. 1)

Interestingly, Hannis tried to keep the healthy food habits she learnt from her mother in order for it to be habitualised for future life stages, such as when she has her own children. Furthermore, the opportunity of transition and independent living has provided a stage for her to recollect and put
into perspective other healthy eating practices conducted by her mother and other friends back in Brunei, although these issues were never a matter of concern to her before.

Lina (female, Malaysia) chose to have healthier food practice since her arrival and wanted to continue doing so for the next coming months because she claimed her eating habits back when she was still in her home country were unhealthy.

I know that if I go back to Malaysia in June for the summer holidays, I would go back to my old habit of eating all the time. I won’t be able to do this back home because I eat nonstop: dinner, supper, early morning, and late night. My aunt owns a restaurant and almost every day she would make us something and I will just eat and eat. (Lina, Malaysia, Int. 1)

Lina understood that the impact of her eating behaviour in Malaysia was not healthy. Living independently, she was now able to adopt a better and healthier food habit. The consumption of rice only, a staple in Malaysia, was now considered bad and Lina chose to substitute it with other types of carbohydrate, such as potato or pasta. She had also started to try other international cuisine such as Korean dishes. Korean dishes were deemed a healthier food choice because they consist of mostly wraps and salad.

I avoid eating rice and snacks and I go to the gym. I just had a little spaghetti last night. If I need carbohydrate I will eat just once or twice in a week and I eat potato or pasta. Lately I feel I don’t get tired easily and I am more active. There is improvement there, in terms of stamina. Now it’s much better. I can go on for days without rice. There is no temptation like before. (Lina, Malaysia, Int. 1)

Lina started to make plans of the food consumption for the next few days, which is a new habit for her. She made a budget for food, looked at the recipes of the food she wanted to make, listed all the ingredients she needed, and checked what she had in store and in the refrigerator before she went grocery shopping. Lina was generally aware of the opportunities to generate her own
healthier food choice and habits. The set of strategies and plans composed for the new food practices was about the need to cope and manage Lina’s adjustment to new life in the UK.

Another change, an increased consumption of vegetables and fruits since the move to the UK, was reported by the new international students. Adding more vegetables and eliminating unhealthy ingredients in their meals were evident mostly for students who cook their own food.

    Over here, I don’t use a lot of fat and oil. Like if I want to cook chicken, I would bake them and I don’t need oil for that. Most of the food I eat would be cooked in the oven. I can’t control the amount of fat and oil back home but over here, I could choose to cook using a healthy way. (Airil, Malaysia, Int. 1)

    Back in my country, olive oil is expensive but here it’s quite cheap. And it’s good for me too, I believed. For example chicken, I will use olive oil to cook it rather than vegetable oil. Olive oil is better. It is very cheap here, vegetables, fruits, more healthy! (Inna, Malaysia, Int. 1)

What constitutes “healthy” for the new international students was when they (1) cook their own food, (2) increase the addition of fruit and vegetables, (3) use fresh ingredients, and (4) adopt cooking methods that do not require oil or have the oil substituted with olive oil. The ability to cook influenced the increased consumption of healthy foods and the motivation to have a healthier lifestyle facilitated more exercise routine, paired with healthy food.

    I wanted to practice healthier lifestyle so I need to exercise more and eat healthily. I do have gym membership. (Hanna, Indonesia, Int. 1)

The extracurricular activities mentioned signals how responsible and health-concerned the students were about taking care of themselves now that they were living independently. To the students, a healthy diet does not only mean controlling what you eat but to balance it with an active lifestyle. A healthier food choice during the adjustment process made the formation of new food habits and practices more meaningful to the new students when taking full responsibility for their personal food provision.
Personal grocery shopping and food preparation in a foreign country was a new experience for the international students. It was easy to constantly choose to eat convenient food because of the need to prioritise between the role as a student and various other life practices, such as cooking and cleaning, within scarce time and resources. However, this stereotyping of university students eating fast food, ready meals, or eating out most of the time may be misleading because this study also found a different context of food choice among the new international student who chose a healthier diet and had less problems and challenges related to food. The students were competent in managing new food choices and they actively developed new food habits and adapted to the changes in the new environment.

**The unfavourable diet quality**

Several studies have mentioned that most of the dietary changes of international students involved unfavourable food choices. For example, Pan et al. (1999) in a study on dietary changes among Asian students in the United States before and after migration found the students’ consumption of fats, salty, and sweet snacks increased significantly. In addition, Papadaki et al. (2007) noted that students living away from home developed more unfavourable eating habits since starting university. Papadaki et al. further explained that moving away from the family home and taking responsibility for food preparation and purchasing for the first time were the reasons that affected this habit. Similarly, the convenience food availability in Canada has led to an increased intake of fat, sugar, and larger portion sizes that resulted from a higher consumption of snacks, fast food, and beverages among international students there (Amos & Lordly, 2014).
It was observed from the first accompanied shop that the international students purchased much food high in sugar content and junk food. In a study on adolescents’ intake of junk food, the term “junk food” was referred to as a “low-nutrient, energy-dense” food commonly eaten as snacks (Haye et al., 2013:524). The students’ food options also consisted of fast food and processed food like chilled ready meals and frozen food. Fast-food includes high amounts of sodium, sugar, cholesterol, and fat (especially saturated fat) but is low in vitamins A and C and dietary fibre content (French et al., 2000; Ebbeling et al., 2002). The food purchase decision could be due to the taste and convenience of the food, which is likely a powerful influence on the food decision processes of international students (Tirelli et al., 2014). In a study to examine the meanings of food among adolescent females, Chapman and McClean (1993) explained that eating junk food was normally associated with friends, being away from home, and independent living. Significantly, this study found that the unhealthy food purchases were mostly conducted by international students who were living away from their family for the first time and who lacked cooking skills. It was mentioned by Beasley, Hackett, and Maxwell (2004) that leaving home and learning how to shop and cook within a student’s budget might lead to adoption of poor eating habits.

For example, Dinah (female, Malaysia) bought mostly junk food because she was unsure what to buy and she liked the taste. She is the youngest girl in the family and has never conducted food shopping on her own. She used to follow her mother for grocery shopping back in her home country and would always add junk food to their purchase. Dinah decided to continue with her purchase despite being aware of how unhealthy the junk food was.

For me I think sometimes, like this (referring to the receipt), this is all junk food. I mean a lot of this is actually junk food. (Dinah, Malaysia, Int. 1)
Kremmyda et al. (2008) studied Greek students in Glasgow living away from home for the first time and found that majority of the students were having difficulties finding familiar food including fresh fruit and vegetables, and subsequently, their consumption of convenience food like microwaveable and frozen meals, takeaways, and other fast food increased rapidly during their stay. In this study, it was observed that fast food, snacks, instant food, and carbonated drinks were among the food choices when the students first came to the UK. It was the students’ first time living independently abroad and making food choice decisions.

I’ve been eating only fried (fast) food. It’s cheap and easy to get. (Hannis, Brunei, Int. 1)

I eat a lot of snack, biscuits and I drink Coke all the time. (Hanna, Indonesia, Int. 1)

That was all I had during the first week here, just instant noodle. (Ramia, Brunei, Int. 1)

The finding from Kremmyda et al. (2008) also echoes the food choices of one student, Mei (female from China), in this present study. Being in the UK for the first time with no food shopping or cooking experience and all her food previously prepared only by her mother, she faced a challenge of eating healthily when she first arrived. She found that when she was suddenly exposed to the variety of sweets and desserts in the British supermarket, she seemed not to be able to handle her cravings. Although eating sweet desserts or snacking were not a habit when she was in China, she revealed that she chose these food as the best, most convenient, delicious, and readily available. To her, consuming sweet foods and desserts was the most fitting in her situation because she lacked the experience for making food choice decisions independently and cooking her own food.

There are a lot of delicious things such as ice cream, chocolate, pure yogurt, chocolate…and cheese. Everything here, I just love the food. Chocolate, cookies, and other sweets are high in sugar but very delicious. I eat different kind of cookies I never found in my country. I have a lot of choices and I want to try everything.” (Mei, China, Int.1)

Sweet desserts and other sugary foods were also the food choice of a few students when they felt stress about their study or working on assignments.
I would have chocolate cakes, dessert, anything sweet when I study. When I am working on my assignment in the middle of the night, I would have a piece of cake or something else… I really like the taste. I always buy cakes and desserts. (Ramia, Brunei, Int. 1)

I put a jar of Nutella in my room and when I’m studying in the middle of the night, I would eat it scoop by scoop. (Fasha, Malaysia, Int. 1)

It was alarming to note how the consumption of convenient foods and ready meals have become almost a habit among the new international students mainly to those who lacked cooking skills.

I use a lot of ready meals, microwave food. It’s very convenient. (Jaycee, China, Int. 1)

I bought the halal frozen kebabs because I was too lazy to cook. I would buy sausages, marinated chicken, jerk chicken, nugget, fish finger, prawn tempura, mixed veggie, and burgers. They were a lot cheaper than fresh meat too. (Habib, Malaysia, Int. 1)

Food selection is an important consumer behaviour because the outcomes of food choice is linked to nutrition and have long-term consequences on an individual’s health and longevity, such as cancer, cardiovascular diseases, and diabetes (Deshpande et al., 2009). For example, concerns over ready meal consumption were expressed by Suntra (female, Thai) after she had a conversation with her health-conscious friend about nutrition, preservatives, and chemicals in food and how they may cause cancer. She continued to consume ready meals on a regular basis since before the transition but the discussion made her reconsider her food choice.

I started to think. Did I eat too many things containing chemical? And then I tried to choose the good things for me. But I have to balance health and convenience because I don’t know when I’m going to use it. And the readymade foods are the only thing I have in hand (when I am too busy to go and buy food)... I believed that if I become very good in cooking, I can cook many meal by myself and I may not need to use (ready meals) so I will avoid using this if not necessary. (Suntra, Thailand, Int. 1)

Hannis’s (female, Brunei) food choice affected her health when she first arrived admittedly because of the increased intake of fast food on a daily basis. After moving closer to the university, the new environment, without easy access to fast food outlets, allowed her to limit the consumption and she cooked her own food.
It’s more convenient but I realised I eat so much fried food I had like a little heart attack! Now I’m ok. I mean, not heart attack, more like heartburn. It was because of what I’ve eaten. I’ve been eaten only fried food. You know it’s cheap and it’s easy to get.’ (Hannis, Brunei, Int. 1)

Airil (male, Malaysia) was aware that he consumed too many carbonated drinks and expressed his concern over the sugar levels in each can. He was consuming a lot of these drinks before he came to the UK, but his intake increased due to the cheaper price since his arrival.

I drink a lot of these because they were cheap and always on promotion. I drink it almost every day before but I’m trying to cut down now because when I think about the sugar levels in these drinks, I got scared. Like Coke used to be my favourite and it is a habit since before I came to UK. Now I want to cut down to just a can a week or so. (Airil, Malaysia, int. 1)

A similar concern over sugar levels from cordial drinks consumed was also mentioned by Naz (male, Singapore). His fast food intake was also a concern because Naz had unlimited access to all of these food and drinks back home. Nevertheless, the transition to the UK provided him the opportunity to have more control over the situation.

I think I ate a lot of fast food back home but I can’t find halal fast food outlet here. I have access to fast food and takeaway food a lot because I received allowances from my parents. But over here, I don’t have access to that anymore (limited halal option) and my budget is tight so I am not having fast food or takeaways any longer. I am drinking a lot of water now compared to having cordial every time back home. I think I have consumed too much sugar and fat in my diet before. (Naz, Singapore, Int. 1)

All of these concerns over food choice and eating habits that could cost the students’ health in the future have raised an alarm, which then led to their personal awareness and increased responsibility for a better controlled food choice.

The students discussed the barriers to healthy eating, although they planned to cook their own meals. For example, Hannis (female, Brunei) expressed that cooking is a way to make sure the food she eats are healthy and fresh but she felt either the lack of time, or being too tired or lazy,
limited her ability to properly cook her food due a packed class schedule and assignments. Inna (female, Malaysia) was pregnant at the time of this study and eating healthy food was compulsory for her and her baby. It was observed she bought pre-cut and frozen vegetables, marinated meats and chicken, instant sauces, and more frozen food to make her cooking more convenient. These food purchase were claimed to save a lot of Inna’s time especially when she is in a hurry but still need to cook.

I was actually too lazy to cook at first. I started to buy (ready) food instead….Microwaved food…Sometimes the (ready meal) food is really bad, sometimes it’s good. Sometime just OK but I prefer cooking. Even though it’s simple (cooking) but its fine…tasty to my own taste bud. (Hannis, Brunei, Int. 1)

I use more frozen food because I’m always in a hurry and I don’t want to waste too much time cooking…The pre-cut vegetables are easier and a lot more when compared buying them whole. It’s faster…I do eat more fast food here. Like for example, pizza. Anything, really that I can prepare quickly. I know it’s not good, not healthy, but I have to. (Inna, Malaysia, Int. 1)

Blichfeldt and Gram (2013) highlighted that time constraints, the craving for unhealthy foods, and convenience are the reasons why unhealthy food consumption still happens in spite of students’ cooking experience and good intentions to eat a healthy diet. In Blichfeldt et al.’s study on female Danish and international students, they found that although the students knew how to cook, were good at meal planning, and understood which food was good for them, they still experienced obstacles to eating healthy food.

The food brought from home

Adding to the food choices of the international student when they first arrived in the UK, the students also depended on the food they brought from home until they discovered places to buy more food. Having food supplies from home that were enough for more than a week, justified why Naz (male, Singapore) and Addin (male, Saudi Arabia) did not purchase much, or nothing at all
during the first accompanied shop. Both Naz and Addin brought along dry food, instant noodles, instant drinks, or home food that their family members prepared for them. This strategy was also practiced by some of the focus group participants in the preliminary study.

My parent packed Milo and instant fibre drink when I came here and I had that for the first week…My sister-in-law had also packed chili paste with anchovies, and other instant food. That is all I had for the first two weeks. (Naz, Singapore, Int. 1)

I didn’t actually packed food but my parents were really concern and they were the one who packed for me…dry and instant food. I actually don’t mind if I don’t bring any food at all because I thought that I could find grocery shop around…I might not be able to find my way around for the first two, three days (but) at least I have something to eat until that. (Addin, Saudi Arabia, Int. 1)

Bringing food from home served the purpose of making it easier for the new international students because they had some food while trying to discover new places and find more food. In addition to instant food, the students also brought spices, instant pastes, and other dry ingredients for cooking. Food was a matter of concern not only to the students but also to their family members back home who packed the food for them. Having a food supply from home was just a temporary plan because the students began to purchase more food and prepare meals soon after arrival. In addition, due to packed classes and a lot of coursework assigned to them earlier in the semester, the students could not find time to cook proper food; hence they used the instant cooking ingredients brought from home to prepare something quick.

Neehu (female, Nigeria) claimed that she brought food from home not because she needed to but because it was like a treat for her to have something familiar from home. Although similar food ingredients and spices are available in England, bringing food from home is important because it serves the purpose of recreating familiarity and comfort for international students (Brown et al., 2010).
So you might as well bring it here and it’s cheaper for me instead and I can bring it in large quantities and not having to end up paying (more) getting them from here. But it’s like a treat, like you are treating yourself. The other snacks and junk food you can buy from here but you just want to have those (familiar) things as well. You can survive without them but you just want them around because you liked them not because you really need them. (Neehu, Nigeria, Int. 1)

It was obvious the students especially from Asian countries loved their spices. They have more shipped in by their family when their initial stock ran out. More time was needed to get used to the different and new cooking ingredients especially the foreign spices but the effort to start experimenting signalled openness to new food choice. Inna (female, Malaysia) perceived that the substitution of food ingredient was not acceptable and justified why she needed to bring food from home.

I know how to use the spices in several types of dishes and will not trade or use them in another because it will be a disaster. But when we came here, we have the chance to do this ourselves. I’m excited too but not to the point to change recipes or experimenting. And I do think this happened because the prices of spices are quite cheap here. (Inna, Malaysia, Int.1)

Most of the students who brought along dry food and spices with them actually planned to cook their own food, thinking these might not be available in the UK market. It was important for them to have authentic ingredients to be able to recreate food from their home country. International students valued frugality, authenticity, and simplicity of food and such supplies from their home country, available locally, were described as different, inauthentic, fake, and expensive (Brown et al., 2008). Thus it was crucial to have familiar food and authentic ingredients.

The perceived food choice during arrival

It was reported that the high cost and low availability of traditional foods, the perception of time to prepare traditional food and the convenience perception of new food choices were among the major barriers towards the retention of food habits when migrating to another country, therefore
resulting in openness and adaptation to British food (Papadaki et al., 2002; Verbeke & Lopez, 2005). Most of the new international students showed their willingness to try new food whenever possible, including local British food and other international food choices since their arrival in the UK. During the initial phase of their arrival, the international students had the chance to explore a lot of different new food but the perception towards the food facilitated the acceptance and willingness to try the food. At the beginning, the new food culture or lifestyle of the host country received more attention from the students.

I feel that their style of eating is different to us. We eat heavy meals like rice, meat. But over here, they eat simple food like chips, sandwich, and fruits. (Fasha, Malaysia, Int. 1)

Almost all of my flatmates were girls and I can see that they really watch what they eat, more salad, fruits, and yogurt…I don’t think they cook that much. I saw one flatmate heat baked beans and that was the only time I saw her in the kitchen. (Airil, Malaysia, Int. 1)

The students observed the eating habits of the local British people around them but never completely understood what constitutes an authentic British food. Sandwiches, salads, and pasta were mentioned as some food that their local British friends would normally eat. The students mentioned that they were not exposed to a wide array of actual British meals, just the usual fish and chips served at the university’s cafeteria. However, they were fascinated by the high consumption of snacks, smaller portions of food, and simpler food preparation (i.e. boiling, microwave or oven-grilled). Nevertheless Zimi (female, Singapore) claimed she could not accept or practice the food ways of her British flatmate because she claimed it was not “flavourful.”

I always watch how people here eat and I think their food is boring. For example my housemate, she is local and she would have a piece of bread with bacon, cucumber, and tomatoes and that’s it. I come from a country where we use spices a lot and we need something flavourful. I don’t think I can have like what she was having. (Zimi, Singapore, Int. 1)

Neehu (female, Nigeria) recalled her exposure to wider varieties of food while she was still in Nigeria and so the food choices available in the UK were not really foreign to her.
There’s nothing you found here that you can’t find in our country…When I came here I tried a few things and it is ok. There was nothing really new. Your mom has made them before so there was no surprise there. They may give it a fancy name like “shepherd’s pie” or something but your mom has made it for you before but it was not called “shepherd’s pie.” (Neehu, Nigeria, Int. 1)

The exposure to international food including Western style food, fast food, and other ethnic cuisine before the international students’ transition resulted in a less visible “food shock,” which according to Brown et al. (2010), is inevitable upon moving to a culturally dissimilar country. The intention to consume familiar food from their home country does not necessarily mean the students totally rejected the new food choice available in the UK, but rather was just a strategy to have comforting and fulfilling food due to adjustment stress during transition.

The food choice available around the university was also commented as being satisfactory and serving most of the students’ needs. The food are cheap, have acceptable taste and even caters halal food for the Muslim international students.

When I came here, the first month, I didn’t eat at home. I usually eat out. When I come to the university, I eat breakfast here, lunch. I found that the burger is more delicious here than back home so I go for it more and more, but not always. Other choices would be pasta, pizza. (Aisha, Kuwait, Int. 1)

The students mentioned having lunch around the university numerous times and the food choices mentioned were always sandwiches, burger, pizza, or fish and chips. The ultimate reason for the convenient, ready-to-eat food choice for lunch time was because they were rushing to another class after lunch and needed a quick bite. Although Asian style dishes (rice or fried noodles with meat) were served on certain days, it was not their first choice because to the students the dishes were “heavy meal” that can make them become sleepy and that they can make the meal on their own.
Jaycee (female, China) was very interested when she saw some vegetables at the supermarket during the accompanied shop and it was observed she took a packet and put it in her basket but put it back shortly after.

I’m thinking of doing that but no one recommends me…so, I just don’t know. I saw some very little cabbage, I don’t know (what’s it called)…Brussels sprout? Yes, it’s very cute, like little cabbage. Maybe I will try. I’m not sure myself. Do I know how to cook it? No! But I will learn. (Jaycee, China, Int. 1)

The fruit and vegetable market held once a week within the university and at the nearest town centre gave more options for students to buy fresh food. It was preferred because it was closer to student’s accommodation, had more variety and was cheaper. The market also offers familiar food and helpful and friendly sellers who can explain further on local British produce (such as different berries, apples, potatoes and tomatoes). The students mentioned that one of their first ever encounters with British local produce was during the weekly market shopping, where the students also had the chance to learn more about the food available.

I also shop at uni’s weekly market at the Student Union because it is close and some of the fruits and vegetables are different and they are cheaper and fresher. If I don’t know how to cook some vegetable, because I never use them, I just ask the market staff. They tell me “oh this apple is for cooking, this potato good for baking.” (Zimi, Singapore, Int. 1)

The opportunity to try English scones tea during “British tea time” with a friend impressed Suntra (female, Thailand) because she has never had the experience before. The breakfast items typically served, such as oats, milk, and pancakes were perceived as a healthy alternative to her normal “anything heavy” breakfast in Thailand. These were the new food choices for breakfast when Suntra first came to the UK. Despite the new choices, she felt most other food available was not acceptable.

I like some Western food like pasta but burger, no I don’t. It is oily. I like spicy food. The traditional Thai food, we have rice with side dishes. But here, people tend to eat bread, sandwiches with meat. It’s boring. With rice, we can have several dishes to go with it…different variety of side dishes rather than just bread and sandwiches with fillings. I
think they like to eat more fried food like chips and burger. It is very oily and I heard from my husband that the meat they used in their burgers is just something…it is not the pork meat, some kind of leftovers meat. (Suntra, Thailand, Int. 1)

The international students seldom mentioned forming friendships with British nationals when they first came to the UK, thus it was not surprising that they were not exposed to a wider range of English food. Neehu’s (female, Nigeria) perception of British food are all the food served at pubs.

I don’t think I would go if there was a restaurant that serves authentic British meal. I think it is mostly like all these pubs that have these meals. I think that is where you hear some authentic British meals. It is usually here in all these pubs. (Neehu, Nigeria, Int. 1)

Neehu shared the same view with Aisha (female, Kuwait), who felt there is a lack of availability of British restaurants.

Even when you go out and find British food, you don’t find a restaurant that is interesting. You can find each country’s restaurant but you can’t find this country’s authentic restaurant. (Aisha, Kuwait, Int. 1)

The perceptions of the new food choice in the UK were mostly formed based on what the students observed during the early stage of their transition. Though according to Mei, what she imagined was different to what she experienced so far.

Before I came here, I imagine a romantic, you know, candles, gentleman, and ladies at the table with delicious dishes. I don’t think too much because food was not my concern. I heard some people said there is not too much delicious food in the UK. The British people are not good at cooking. I just heard about them. I never realise it would be a problem. (Mei, China, Int. 1)

It is understandable that the students were not able to identify authentic British food due to the recency of their arrival, where everything was still new and unexplored. This study showed how diverse the exposure, experience, and perception of the new food choices were at this stage of transition. Although it was mentioned that most of the international students showed some willingness to try new food, Mei’s claim was the closest to being a neophobia.
I don’t think I am adventurous. I will only try something I already know. It made me feel safe. I don’t know how it tastes like. Maybe it will be a bad choice. (Mei, China, Int. 1)

The availability of new kinds of vegetables, fruit, meats, and seafood and the loss of familiar food and ingredients sometimes required the new international students to improvise some of their home country dishes. This practice allowed the continuance of traditional food choice as a mean of feeling connected with their home country. Although new food choices were embraced, the acceptance and adaptation of the new food were not without obstacles. For example, the preparation of salmon had to be asianised by Suntra (female, Thai) because it was not a common fish in Thailand and she did not know how to prepare them other than Thai style.

Recently I made a southern (Thai) style Keong Som and I put in pineapple and salmon. I only have salmon in my refrigerator and no other kind of fish. I also used the pineapple because I could not find any bamboo shoot. I can say that this Keong Som is the best dish I ever cook here. (Suntra, Thailand, Int.1)

The students were excited to try new food ingredients when improvising traditional dishes but sometimes the new taste could be too foreign to the students’ palate.

7.5 Summary

This chapter discusses the exposure, experience, and perception of new food choice at the early stage of transition. Using accompanied shop observation and in-depth interview, the findings showed that the new food choice exposure, experience, and perception had a major impact on the development of food choice process during purchase, preparation, cooking, and consumption. It was observed that at the beginning, the accompanied shop had become more of a familiarisation trip for the students and there were differences in the way the students conducted their food shopping (e.g., with or without a shopping list, food budget, purchase deals, and promotional food) and the confidence in making food purchase decisions.
This study highlights that the students with high self-efficacy in food provisioning practice had better adjustment experience and less strain when conducting grocery shopping. These students showed reliance on new co-national friendship network and online ethnic community to guide and support their food choice when they first arrived to the UK, signifying the trust, need of familiarity (same nationality and language), importance of retaining sense of belonging (to the ethnic community), and reaffirmed social identities. Resources such as space to store food and transport to carry food purchase played a role in food choice decision. Online shopping experiences facilitated the choice to do the same to minimise the challenge in grocery shopping.

Finally, the perceived thought on the new food choices is presented, encapsulating the perception on the new food, why it was acceptable or rejected during the early stage of migration transitions. Overall, the students experienced less visible food shock due to previous experience in managing food provision. Although there were unfavourable food choice and an isolated case of extreme stress due to bad food habit, it was not superficial and was expected at the early stage of transition. The next chapter will discuss the Life Course influences of food choice for the international students.
Chapter 8: Life Course Perspective Influences in Food Choice Decision during Transition

8.1 Introduction

The transition from the comfort of living at home to an independent life in a different country for the first time marked an important event for most international students. The migration as a turning point to a totally new culture, unfamiliar surroundings, different food choices, and new friends are part of an overwhelming experience for the students especially during the initial adjustment stage at the new country. The new situation provides an array of diverse factors that influence the new food choice decisions. It was necessary to expand the knowledge on food preferences and the factors that influence the food choices of international students in order to provide effective and efficient support, as well as cater to the needs of the increasingly diverse population of international students (Brittin & Obeidat, 2011; Alakaam, Castellanos, Bodzio, & Harrison, 2015).

The life course perspective concept by Furst et al. (1996) was applied to analyse the influences of the new food choice for the international students. The life course perspective influences was divided into five categories: cultural ideals, personal factors, resources, social factors, and current context, which shape personal food choice process (Furst et al., 1996). The elements in life course perspective further clarified the influence of transition and turning point following the migration towards food choice decision. This is an important contribution to the body of knowledge in the acculturation study because it considers the turning point in life that will affect the later food choice decision. The following major themes of new food choice influences emerged from the analysis by applying the life course perspective: managing the new roles and responsibilities in food
provisioning (personal factor), skills and competencies in food provisioning (personal factor), concern over body image and healthy appearance (personal factor and cultural ideal), food that conforms to religious beliefs (social factor and context), influence of food cost (resources factor), and food symbolism in the new country (personal factor).

8.2 The New Roles and Responsibilities in Food Provisioning

The transition in the life course of international students has not only exposed a new, unfamiliar, and culturally different food choice, but also new living arrangements that required the students to (re)define and (re)develop a personal food choice system. The awareness of the new roles and responsibilities in food provisioning has become a personal factor that has made the students in control over the food choice decision. Sharma et al. (2009:440) in a study on the impact of residence (dependent or independent) on young adult eating behaviour among German students between the ages of 18 to 24 years old wrote that “the transition to tertiary study is a time of great change for young adults and often involves moving away from the family home, which itself provides new challenges for students as they become responsible for their own food choices, planning and preparation.” The students who had the least problem with unfavourable eating habits, according to Blichfeldt et al. (2013), were the students who were experienced cooks from home.

One unique measure found to positively correlate to adjustment is self-efficacy, explained as the level of confidence that individuals have in the ability to achieve certain tasks (Bandura, 1986), and in this study, the confidence to manage food provisioning tasks. The skills and self-efficacy acquired prior to new independent living away from home and the ability to master the techniques
in grocery shopping and cooking will determine whether the students can successfully self-cater (Blichfeldt et al., 2013).

It was found that Habib’s (female, Malaysia) had previously acquired cooking skills which allowed her to redevelop a new, personal food practices in cooking, try new recipes, and experiment with new food. However, the lack of grocery shopping experience made her more aware of the considerations before a food purchase decision was made.

I did watch how my mum and my sisters bargain to buy meat, chicken, and vegetables at the wet market⁴ but I never did it myself. I only helped them carry the things. It is different now because I have to think about what to buy, how much to buy, and what it will cost me. There are a lot of things that I need to consider before I decide what to buy. I guess in a way, having control over your own food and budget is really actually really complicated. (Habib, Malaysia, Int. 1)

It was difficult for Habib at first when she first arrived in the UK because she had to adapt to a totally new environment with unfamiliar food choice setting. She was lucky because she had brought along a lot of cooking ingredients and dry food from home, but enacting grocery shopping practice was a major challenge and it affected the accessibility to various food choices and her confidence to purchase new food, especially when it comes to understanding unfamiliar food ingredients.

Carrying the new role and responsibilities for food provision for international students who were novices was complicated because they had to start from scratch and gradually build their own food system and personal practice. Some of the students took for granted the chance to learn food preparation while living with family, mainly because it was not of importance at that time. Zimi (female, Singapore) and Aisha (female, Kuwait) for instance, had the chance to learn cooking at

---

⁴ An open market that sells live animals (e.g. poultry, fish, shellfish) fresh meat, fish, fruits and vegetables.
home but because they were used to being provided for, they did not feel they had the responsibility at that time.

My mum works so I learned from watching her cook during the weekends and it wasn't much. I don't feel like I needed to learn how to cook proper food because my mum is there and I feel lazy to cook sometimes. I think the whole family depended on my mum a lot and I was just helping her in the kitchen. I feel jealous at some of my friends who can cook better than me and that is why I feel I need to learn how to cook better, proper meals. (Zimi, Singapore, Int. 1)

I never cook before because I hate cooking. Back home, I stayed with my mother and in the kitchen I only talked and she cooked. I am really spoiled. Even for breakfast, my mom would pour milk and put cheese in my bread to eat. I was that kind of person. So now I want to do more and I told my mom. Now in my home, I would be second place as a cook but I’m going to be first soon. (Aisha, Kuwait, Int. 1)

Suntra (female, Thailand) made an effort to learn and practice more cooking when she came to the UK because she never had the chance to do so back in Thailand. Suntra was living with her husband’s family and her mother in law was in-charge of food preparation. Her mother in law might find it offensive if Suntra wanted to take charge of cooking so she just bought the groceries instead. The new independent living was a turning point for her and allowed her to manage personal food choice. Her effort made her husband really impressed by what she had accomplished when he came to visit shortly after her arrival to the UK.

I was not in-charge because mostly my mother in law will be responsible for the cooking and shopping. Actually I don’t cook at all back home so this is all new to me. I learn from YouTube and I have cookbook. Sometimes my mum also teaches me to cook. I would call her using Skype. Yes I am really proud of myself. Now I am able to cook for myself and to survive here. I cook for my husband when he came to visit me last week and he really appreciated it. (Suntra, Thailand, Int. 1)

Naz (male, Singapore) felt that food preparation skills and competencies were important at this time of transition and made the effort to learn and practice with his mother before the move to the UK.

I used to learn to cook a lot back home, helping my mom and all...Since I always spent more time in the kitchen with my mom, I know how to cook. I learn from watching her
cook and when they left, I cook all the meals since I’m the better cook...Because I have this experience, I feel I won’t have much problem here. I can cook anything I want with whatever ingredients I have. (Naz, Singapore, Int. 1)

Despite Naz’s effort and determination to prepare his own food and acquire more skills in cooking and food preparation, he had an issue with shared kitchen. Kama (male, Malaysia) similarly had the same issue whereby the shared kitchen at the university accommodation was dirty and it was a challenge to use it. Both Naz (male, Singapore) and Kama (male, Malaysia) expressed how disappointed they were with the condition of their kitchen. Although they were staying in different flats, the issue was similar.

I have to cook in my room because the kitchen is too filthy. Most of my flatmates did not clean the kitchen after they have used it...It was such in a horrible state and I would never be able to cook in that condition. So I just decided to cook in my room using the rice cooker. (Naz, Singapore, Int. 1)

I think my flatmates doesn’t know how to clean at all. Whenever I went to the kitchen, it smells really bad like something is rotting there. The cleaners even left a note one day stating that the kitchen was in a horrible state and we have to clean it ourselves...That is how dirty the kitchen was. I decided that from then on I will not cook in that kitchen. (Kama, Malaysia, Int.1)

Consequently, Naz decided to prepare his meal in his room, despite knowing the rules and regulations preventing cooking inside the room for the risk of fire. On the other hand, Kama made a drastic decision to move out from the university accommodation after two weeks of his arrival because the problem was too stressful. It was learned later during the interview that Kama did not purchase a lot of food during the observed accompanied shop session because he was not able to cook. He only purchased food that he could readily eat in his room like ready meals and cereals. It was very frustrating for Kama because he wanted to save some money by cooking his own food.

It was mentioned in Blichfeldt et al. (2013) that the feeling of distress at the early stage of transition is a common first reaction to change (primarily due to feeling alone in unfamiliar
surroundings), but will gradually be substituted with increasing confidence in the roles and practices as individuals engage in the construction of new habits and practice. For Mei (female, China), the turning point of moving away from home and starting to live independently, away from the care and provision of her parent, led her to feeling adrift in the beginning. She decided to start exploring and enjoying the food that was restricted in her home, as an act of subconscious manifestation of being defiant over the control of food choice by her parents. She also started to do simple cooking to prove to her parent that she is now an independent person.

When I am at home, living with my parents, when I eat sugary things and snacks too much, they will say don’t do that, it’s not good, not healthy for you and I will listen to them… But I will ask my parents about it (cooking). I will share information about this to make them feel that I have grown up and not their little princess anymore. I can cook and take of myself. They were surprised when they know I cook. (Mei, China, Int. 1)

The complicated food choice decision for Mei concurs with Blichfeldt et al. (2013). Mei mentioned it was very distressful that she had to seek counsellor’s advice in the beginning of her sojourn. It was not a great beginning for Mei who claimed she needed more help and the study conducted was also helpful to her.

The students who had previous experience of food choice decisions including grocery shopping and cooking were better at handling their new role in the new country. The experience had influenced most of their food choice decisions, and it was observed that the students confidently made food choice decisions during the accompanied shop. The skills and experience possessed were not only put into practice, but were gradually extended with new recipes tried and tested, different food practice developed (such as new cooking methods), and proper eating habits built (nutritionally balanced meal). The purchase of mostly raw food ingredients for cooking instead of the more common convenient food consumption among other international students in this study
indicated a preference for healthier and fresher food made from scratch. For example, Airil (male, Malaysia) and Idayu (female, Brunei) were previously responsible for food shopping and cooking the main meal for their family back home. Identifying and preparing the ingredients including vegetables and meats became an easy task because the students had done it before.

I have a normal buy of vegetables and eggs. If I bought chicken, I would need some preparation like cutting, cleaning. But the sausages and eggs…it will be simple task. Some things like seafood, prawns, I bought them…I often help my mum. I prepare food and shopping with her. So I am used to do this because there is only me and my mum at home. (Airil, Malaysia. Int. 1)

I always cook before I came here so I know what I need. I find that it is easy to find the ingredients that I need. (Idayu, Brunei, Int. 1)

Previous experience on food choice decision and provisioning skills have influenced Airil and Idayu’s meal planning and food choices, so they only bought the ingredients needed during the grocery shopping to avoid food wastage. They defined their prepared meal as something simple, fast, and requiring very few ingredients and that they were knowledgeable in handling certain foods. The meal planning and budgeting were done a week in advance. Often, they claimed their food purchases and meals cooked as “healthy” and “fresh” to justify a better food choice decision. Although they have only been in the UK for a week, they have already started cooking instead of buying convenience and consuming fast food. Developing a meal planning, using a shopping list, and setting out rules and guidelines for proper food preparation were a few of the extended competencies brought from home and continued during the transition, which showed a commitment to adapting to the role of personal food provisioning.

Accordingly, the adjustment to the food choices in the UK did not seem to concern the students with prior experience because the role and responsibilities concerning food provision were not “new” to them. Being able to practice food provision or self-catering at an early stage of transition
meant the everyday practices, such as grocery shopping and cooking, were carried out with minimum effort and the food choice decision process was simplified (Blichfeldt et al., 2013). The beginning of the transition implied to the students the importance of acquiring skills and competencies and self-efficacy in the food provisioning tasks. It was found that high self-efficacy was positively related to better adjustment and food provisioning tasks.

As a conclusion, the emergence of new international students who are well-versed and high in self-efficacy in the domain of food preparation and cooking in this study represents a more diverse population of international students with better food habits and practices during the transition period. This is in contrast to most studies that presented university students’ as a homogenous group with unfavourable food choice (such as Pan et al., 1999; Anderson et al., 2003; Marquis, 2005). The students’ competencies and prior experience in the role of self-catering contributed to a better and successful adjustment experience.

### 8.3 Skills and Competencies in Food Provisioning

According to Clear, Hazas, Morley, Friday, and Bates (2013), the transition from a guardian’s home to an independent living in a new country can be explained as a specific point of “transition in practice” especially for new international students. This is the point when they are able to shape competencies and ways of doing things for later life through the newfound responsibilities of provision and preparing food for themselves (Clear et al., 2013). Caraher, Dixon, Lang, and Hill (1999) used data from the 1993 Health and Lifestyle Survey of England to present findings on the relationship between cooking skills and food choice and found that poor cooking skills are a barrier to widening food choice and reduced the chance of healthy eating. For the international students,
cooking was considered the best way to fulfill cravings for home country food and to save more money compared to the cost of eating out. However, a general lack of specific cooking techniques and confidence to cook certain foods was a challenge. This section will continue to explore food provisioning skills and competencies as the resources that influence international students’ food choice decision.

The transition from living at home to independent living required the international students to undertake both the role in academic life as well as the responsibilities of food provisioning practices like grocery shopping and preparing and cooking. These are the responsibilities some of the students have never dealt with before. Furthermore, the challenge of undertaking the new role within an unfamiliar environment, new food choices to consider, and being inexperienced added the stress to the adjustment experience.

I am only at the basic (cooking) level. I want to cook because ready meals are more radiated in the microwave. So I wanted something easy and I can eat it as well. I never cook before because I hate cooking. Now I have learned three recipes and I use one for each day. I have seen other recipes online but it is very difficult and some ingredients are available so for now I will stick to these three. (Aisha, Kuwait, Int. 1)

I don’t know how to cook and this is my first experience cooking. I always cook using the pre prepared mix vegetables, add them together with chicken and turn them to soup or stew and have them with rice. I made this every day for more than a week. (Addin, Saudi Arabia, Int.1)

Aisha and Addin found that their lack of cooking skills meant they have limited food choice. It was difficult to imagine preparing and eating similar food for weeks but they were still determined to cook their own food for several reasons: to save money and to eat healthily. For example, Aisha admitted that in her first week in the UK, she would eat out every single day. She just recently decided to prepare her own food because she realised that outside food was unhealthy when one of her housemates fell ill after eating out. She discussed her concerns over unhealthy food choices
and decided to ask her mother to come and stay with her in the next few months to show her how to cook more dishes.

Similarly, Hannis (female, Brunei) also sought help from her mother who came and stayed with her for a week when Hannis first arrived to help her settle down. Support and guidance from her mother was meaningful and it made managing food choice easier. According to Vallianatos and Raine (2008), the migration experience is less stressful when there is a family member waiting for them or travelling and staying with them, with whom they could share the migration event and then not have to cope with the unknown, including new foods, by themselves.

Before this I didn’t know how to cook. My mom stayed with me when I first came here. So she taught me how to cut the beef. Because before this I never touch it before. Even fish. I was so scared to touch raw meat because I never tried it before. It was my first time. (Hannis, Brunei, Int. 1)

In the case of Jaycee (female, China), she was taking things easy when she first arrived and decided to depend on ready meals because she did not want to cook. She was used to being provided for at home in China where her mother took the responsibility of food provision for the family. Jaycee claimed she could do simple cooking but she refused to do so. It came to a point where Jaycee’s mother was worried more than she was about her eating habits in the new country.

Actually I can cook very simple food but I just don’t want to…Everybody tells me I should learn to cook but I just think its ok and I can survive anyway. I mean, without having to cook. I think at least there will be a supermarket so that I can buy food. So I wasn’t worried at first. My mum was worried about food. Because she knows me, I’m kind of lazy. Sometimes when we video chat, she will ask me ‘what are you going to eat for dinner, for lunch?’ Sometimes I just have to lie to her. Sometimes I just tell her I will go to my friend’s kitchen and eat. (Jaycee, China, Int. 1)
Jaycee claimed that preparing Chinese food was “too complicated” and making her stressed but she was not abandoning the food totally. She joined other Chinese students to make home country dishes on the weekends but on her own, she never made any Chinese-style dishes.

One of my friends, she really loves cooking Chinese dishes and every time she cooks it’s like thousands of bowls beside her. It’s all ingredients. I won’t do it. It’s too complicated for me. (Jaycee, China, Int. 1)

For Jaycee, priority number one for her food choice was convenience. She was aware that readymade and fast food is not healthy, yet convenient meals were perceived fitting with her new lifestyle and preparing food was considered too time consuming.

Cooking and preparing food was, to some students, a complex responsibility that required special skills and competencies to be able to produce something decent to eat. This was one of the barriers to cooking: the perceived difficulties of the task involved when it was actually not.

I have learned to cook just one or two dishes and that is enough for me. I mean if you can cook and know the basic to cooking, it would really help. I don’t have to know a lot of recipes to survive. I can cook whatever and it is more like trial and error. (Kama, Malaysia, Int. 1)

Some of the food available in the UK supermarkets were not familiar to Suntra (female, Thailand), who claimed to possess very limited cooking experience and knowledge of food, with most of the cooking ingredients bought by her mother in law while she was in Thailand. Determined to develop better skills, Suntra referred to the cooking suggestions printed on the food label to guide her food preparation, especially for unfamiliar ingredients.

I am not good at cooking and I don’t know what kind vegetables are good for a particular kind of dishes. I will look for the label and if it says this vegetable is best for salad and not suitable for cooking then I will just follow it. Like broccoli is good for stir fry and the Chinese leaf to make the soup. (Suntra, Thailand, Int.1)
The ability to develop personal food provisioning skills, especially cooking, was also a channel to relieve adjustment stress during the arrival phase. The new students enjoyed cooking even more when they came to the UK when it was a sign of independent living and freedom from parental control because they were able to choose their own food. Habib (female, Malaysia) explained that the cooking activity really helped with her adjustment and whenever she was under pressure from the amount of coursework and lessons at the university.

Whenever I feel stress, I would cook. Cooking helps me to relieve stress and when I feel this way; I would cook even when I don’t have a lot of time…It would be really satisfying after you have good meal and your stress just fades away. You sort of forget that you have other matters, other problems when you can enjoy your food. It works like therapy. It makes me feel more relax after eating something delicious, something comforting. I could focus better with a full tummy (Habib, Malaysia, Int. 1)

Similarly, cooking his own food also worked like a therapy during stressful times for Adam (male, Brunei). He admitted that although he had no prior cooking skills, the experience made a change in his life as a new international student and also a sign of independent living.

I don’t really cook at home and I don’t feel encourage to cook…I don’t feel comfortable cooking at home…I think coming here, I was more relax and started to ask my mum, how to cook this and that. And then I turned to searching for recipes, I don’t know, it just happened. I started to cook, testing recipes and I also baked. Cooking is like a therapy for me…But now I have a really good chance because everything is within my control, within my own time. It does make me feel good because you are focused when you cook and you don’t think about being homesick or about your stress or anything else. (Adam, Brunei, Int. 1)

Adam began to do more cooking when he arrived in the UK, learning most recipes from his mother who came and stayed with him for a week. He also watched and learnt new recipes from cooking shows on the internet by celebrity chefs like Gordon Ramsay. He made mostly Western main dishes, which he defined as a serving of meat with two side dishes of carbohydrates and vegetables. Adam suddenly became passionate about food plating and decoration, always taking photos of the finished dish and sending them to his girlfriend and family back home. Interestingly, it was very
common and popular among the new students to try out new recipes, take photos, and share them on social media, such as Facebook, Instagram, or WhatsApp. The following comments showed how proud Adam was with his cooking:

Here look at them (showing photos taken with mobile phone). I take pride in what I cook and this is why I’m taking photos of the dishes I made. I mean, I never cook before and to be able to do something special is really great for me. (Adam, Brunei, Int.1)

Cooking activity provided the opportunity for social interaction with other international students. Brown’s (2009) study mentioned the use of food as a social agent through cooking activities with co-national friends or sharing food with other nationalities.

I want to bake some cookies for my friends. And I cook cookies to share with my roommates and I think it will improve our relationship because I have a lot of chance to talk to them. (Mei, China, Int. 1)

However, cooking for others was considered stressful for Zimi (female, Singapore) because she felt she needed to please others with her food:

I feel quite stressful sometimes when I have to cook for others because I want to make sure they are really decent and delicious, and edible (Zimi, Singapore, Int. 1)

On the other hand, Habib (female, Malaysia) enjoyed cooking for friends and she added a lot of flavourings to make sure the food she prepared was tasty. It was common for Habib to cook for her friends at the weekend and most of the food bought during the accompanied shop was used to cook and entertain a friend who was coming to visit her. It was an activity Habib was excited about, that was to cook delicious meals and eat them with friends.

You know when you are cooking with your friend and sharing food, you just want to cook everything delicious and you use a lot of fat, salt and flavourings. (Habib, Malaysia, Int. 1)

Cooking a meal with extended and complicated recipes as well as other home-style food was reserved for the weekends, commonly with co-national friends, when they had more time to spend in the kitchen. It was considered too time consuming to prepare home-style food every day and
the choice of ready meals, fast food, take away, or eating out was the best option during weekdays when classes commenced. Nevertheless, the new students preferred to cook traditional ethnic dishes when they had friends coming over. The pride in sharing the authentic taste of their national dishes has become a symbol for self-identity and gave a sense of belonging.

I am really proud of Thai food and if I have friends over, I would cook Thai food for them. Thai food is very tasty and rich in herbs and ingredients that made it more tasty and people can experience a very new taste and very healthy. (Suntra, Thailand, Int. 1)

In order to have a warm, satisfying, and enjoyable meal during the short lunch break between classes the students had to prepare and cook the food in advance. It was common for the new students to prepare meals at the weekend and freeze them for two or three days in order to save time and budget.

I have more time during weekends and I would cook for two or three days ahead and freeze them for later use. I have to manage my time well so that I can study well and comfortable. When I cook in advance, that means I can rush home during lunch period before the next class and have something decent to eat. (Lina, Malaysia, Int. 1)

The strategy of making meals for more days at a time and freezing them allowed the students to enjoy a hot meal immediately after they finished their class without having to spend more time in the kitchen. The fridge and freezer usage therefore became very critical for the students to make home-made food on limited time and budget.

It was found that the obstacles commonly related to home food preparation and cooking was finding the traditional, ethnic ingredients. Idayu (female, Brunei) claimed it was easy to find ingredients in the supermarkets and ethnic stores but sometimes the flavour was different to her.

I found that some of the foods were available here, but in different flavour. They have baby clams here, in a can with crispy chili. It is not the same because the baby clam in Brunei is different. (Idayu, Brunei, Int.1)
Neehu (female, Nigeria) also found that the authentic Nigerian cooking ingredients available in the UK “tasted different” and claimed they should be more flavourful. Hence she brought varieties of food from Nigeria when she came to the country.

When I was coming from Nigeria, I have this big bag of black eyed beans. I know they were selling these in Tesco…I’ve tried it once and it takes a long time to cook and it tastes different. It’s just strange, I don’t know. I think even the chicken taste different. The chicken here is different from the chicken at home. The chicken at home has more taste. It’s delicious. (Neehu, Nigeria, Int. 1)

The reported findings about the perceived “different” taste of ethnic food ingredients or familiar food available in the host country in this main study echoed one of the themes that emerged in the focus group discussion during the preliminary study. This implicated the strong connection of sensory appeal of the ethnic food and acceptance of the food available in the host country.

Mehdizadeh et al.’s (2005) study on Iranian international students in Scotland stated that the least cultural problems appeared to be on issues like finding food items or ingredients that the students were used to. This is because ethnic food stores selling imported cooking ingredients are increasingly available and even local supermarkets have supplies of such ingredients. Vallianatos et al. (2008) found that the availability of ethnic food stores was like a haven for migrants where they can find the comfort of familiarity from the same food products with the same packaging as back home. The availability of ethnic food ranges in large supermarket chains attempting to meet the diverse population’s needs has made it easier to recreate ethnic traditional cuisine (Vallianatos et al., 2008). This means that the access to the authentic ingredients to recreate a home country meal was becoming much easier. It was found that if the home food ingredients were not available in the local stores, the students would learned to improvise the recipe in order to achieve the taste:

I can use replacement for example a particular vegetable that may not be available or common here. It would be some kind of new invention. (Suntra, Thailand, Int. 1)
Modifying the method of cooking and adding ethnic spices or sauces are introduced to make the dish more palatable and less foreign, thus changing the symbolic meanings of the food (Vallianatos et al., 2008). The improvisation process, according to Fischler (1988), means the food becomes more familiar, less threatening, and more acceptable. The individual connotations of new independent living, ethnicity, and religion were asserted by the students in their food choice during grocery shopping, eating out, and food preparation.

Perceived inadequacy of appliances for food preparation and food selection in local stores, cooking skills, money to buy food, and time available for food preparation are perceived as barriers to food preparation for a minority of young adults (Larson, Perry, Story & Neumark-Sztainer, 2006). The challenges of food preparation can be a real burden especially to the new international students due to these obstacles. Nonetheless, sufficient aid was received for food procurement with the help of new friends. Cooking appliances, for example, allowed the new international students to start preparing and cooking as soon as they arrived, and the tools were received from previous students who were leaving. Basic kitchen and dining utensils donated to Habib (female, Malaysia) was a start-up kit that encouraged her to cook. Having the cooking sets also gave ideas on making different food and made the task much easier.

The seniors left a lot of things (cooking sets) I can use and I didn’t buy anything when I first arrived. I only bought a new frying pan recently because I need a bigger one. Oh and a muffin tray because I want to try and bake a muffin. I saw one of my flatmate baked muffins and the smell is oh so good. So I decided to try. (Habib, Malaysia, Int. 1)

Addin (male, Saudi Arabia) bought a kitchen starter kit at the university when he first came. He wanted to do more cooking, hence the purchase. However, most of the kitchen starter kit bought remained unused. His plan to do more cooking was not working because he felt it was too time
consuming and he can only use the shared kitchen at certain times, based on his landlord’s regulations.

I bought a kitchen starter kit and it includes a lot of items: bread knife, can opener and others, corkscrew. I didn’t need all of it and some I don’t even know the function. I just used the pans. I bought this when I first arrived. I only bought a ladle. I have bowls and plastic container but I don’t have a plate. (Addin, Saudi Arabia, Int. 2)

International students were very excited to undertake their new role and responsibilities because it was a chance for them to personalise a set of habits and practices. It was noted how lively the students were when they discussed about their new food choices, their plans for food purchase, the kitchen utensils they bought, buying fresh ingredients, showing off photos of the food they had made, and discussing the exciting new recipes they wanted to try in the future. Overall, they were excited and expressed determination to practice cooking and they were looking forward to learn and develop this new set of skills. Although there were still a lot more to learn about managing food provisioning responsibilities, the students seemed to be eager and coping well with the task.

International students were less willing to try new foods because they could be in a negative mood state of anxiety, depression, loneliness, and stress which was found to be at the most intense at the beginning of the course during the transition (Ward et al., 2001). However, in this present study, the new international students showed willingness and acceptance of new foods and other international cuisines despite the unfamiliar taste, not only when they were cooking but also when eating out. Interestingly, the new international students not only practiced cooking the food they were familiar with (traditional home dishes) but liked to experiment other international food, such as Korean, Japanese, Italian, Chinese, and other Western dishes. Recreating traditional ethnic dishes was common, but the students admitted they enjoyed trying other international recipes the most because they never had a lot of opportunity to do so back in their home country. The choice
of food the students made ranged from the simplest of a dish to the most elaborate recipes. The freedom of living independently appeared to be celebrated through cooking.

Last night I made an Indian style fried noodle. (Airil, Malaysia, Int. 1)

I tried sushi, soba noodles, takoyaki which is the octopus ball and other Japanese food. I plan to make Jajangmyeon next. Its noodles in black bean paste. I watched a lot of Korean dramas and their food looked so good...(I went to) a Chinese style restaurant and I had roasted duck...Tinseltown, an American style diner and Charlie Choy’s in Woking and this place called Zaza Bazaar (both serving international buffet). (Habib, Malaysia, Int. 1)

The various international cuisine tried and tested by the students were sometimes influenced by their circle of new international friends. Habib (female, Malaysia) and Suntra (female, Thailand), for example, have formed friendships with other nationalities and the interaction led them to be more open and try other international cuisine. Although it was agreed that eating familiar traditional home food was comforting and fulfilling, and has helped alleviate loneliness. The act of preparing and cooking let the international cuisine show acceptance and appreciation towards other cultures around them and indicated a multiculturalism approach of adjustment. Interestingly, one international cuisine appeared to be the most popular choice when trying new food: the Korean cuisine.

I’m cooking Korean food now. I just made the Korean wrap thing and next I want to try clay pot noodle. (Lina, Malaysia, Int. 1)

I plan to make Jajangmyeon next. Its noodles in black bean paste. I watched a lot of Korean dramas and their food looked so good. (Habib, Malaysia, Int. 1)

She (Korean friend) bought the kimchi and I also bought too because I think it would be a good idea to try something new. So I tried and made a stir fry kimchi with meat. (Suntra, Thailand, Int.1)

I learn Korean dishes from them. It’s quite easy to find the ingredients and you just need to buy the Korean sauces and you can make them. For example the Korean curry, it’s very easy and delicious. (Mei, China, Int. 2)
It was believed that some students, largely those from South East Asia, were very obsessed with everything Korean including its cuisine following the recent influence of “Korean wave” or “hallyu,” Korea’s popular culture, which has reached an amazing level of popularity around the world (Lee, 2013). The trend of watching Korean films or drama regularly back in their home country evoked a fascination with the food culture and cuisine. Consuming Korean food was the closest personal experience of Korean culture for the students. Luckily, most of the supermarkets and the stores at the university sell Korean food ingredients, making it easier to make a Korean meal.

Inevitably, the biggest challenge related to food preparation and cooking is to prioritise between the various tasks as a student and personal life within the scarce time and resources (Blichfeldt et al., 2013). The experience of the new international students in managing their food preparation and cooking during the transition suggests the importance of acquiring competencies and skills to a successful adjustment to the new food choice and culture. It was also an opportunity for the students to freely express their creativity and variety-seeking instinct during their new life in the UK, away from parental and family control. Most of the students showed enthusiasm to prepare and cook a “proper” meal and showed it off to their family and friends back home. Significantly, the students felt proud that they were able to manage the new task, which was commonly perceived as a sign of maturity and independent living.

### 8.4 Body Image and Healthy Appearance

In the first interview, there was a concern over gaining body weight and how this may affect the students’ appearance. Similar problem can be seen in the study by Wardle, Haase, and Steptoe
(2006), among male and female university students where it was concluded that the perception of overweight and attempts at losing weight were highest among the group from Asian countries where body weights are generally low. It was suggested that local culture and norms could moderate the students’ attitudes to weight (Wardle et al., 2006). The students explained that their situation and living conditions before they came to the UK made it challenging to control what they eat. Therefore, the opportunity of independent living became a personal factor that influenced their decision to take control over food intake in order to lose weight.

I wanted to keep fit and lose some weight and I am able to do it now. If I am with my family, it is difficult to control because my mum or my sister always cook something delicious and although I want to lose weight, I would still eat because it was tasty. (Habib, Malaysia, Int.1)

Living under parental and family control meant that food choice decision in Habib’s (female, Malaysia) household was based on the family demands. The usual mean was often rice served with three or four other meat and vegetable dishes for every meal. Habib found it difficult to control what she ate because not everybody in her family shared the similar interest to lose weight. Freedom from parental and family control allowed Habib to be more in charge of food choice decisions and a healthy lifestyle.

Similarly Naz (male, Singapore) found it was the best time for him to avoid his unhealthy eating habits back in Singapore because he had limited fast food access at the beginning of his transition. Living on a student’s budget, Naz decided it was time to be in control of his food choices because of limited resources, which also turned out to be the best opportunity for him to lose weight.

My mom was concern over my eating habit because she would see me eating a lot of burgers and fried chicken before and she was worried that I will gain a lot of weight… now I am planning to cut on that because I could feel that I am gaining weight. I think this is the best time for me to control what I eat because I am in charge of my own food now and I can do what I want. (Naz, Singapore, Int. 1)
Fasha (female, Malaysia) used to stay at a boarding school which served meals at a fixed time and enabled her to control her eating. She commented that it will take a lot of effort for her to do the same when she moved to the UK because the cold weather made her hungry most of the time. In addition, she claimed she used to eat more food high in carbohydrate especially rice as it was staple food in her home country and it was a challenge for her to practice new food habits. In her effort to have a slimmer body, she was determined she should eat the way her British female friend eats. Fasha admitted that she observed her friend’s food choice and decided she should eat the same although she realised it would be difficult.

But the more I saw how people eat here, and to see how skinny they are, I guess it makes sense. I do feel like I need to eat this way to maintain a slim figure…I have to control what I eat and I can apply a healthy lifestyle here…It will take a lot of effort to have a healthy lifestyle and to control what you eat. But one thing for sure, I do envy how the people here looked so slim with their long legs and toned body, even the guys. So that is one thing that motivates me, to look like that. (Fasha, Malaysia, Int. 1)

Fasha was surrounded by mostly friends from Western countries (the majority were British and Greek). She concluded all of them had managed to maintain an ideal body weight due to their diet. Fasha aimed to change her diet, joined the gym to exercise, and watched her food intake more closely to achieve a slimmer figure. Fasha felt her new friends represented a good physical image, which motivated Fasha to make a wiser and healthier food choice and lifestyle compared to before she came to the UK.

Among the new international students in this study, Mei (female, China) had to manage one of the most challenging food choice decisions and was stressed about gaining body weight. The challenge was a contrast to how easy it was for her to make food choices during the observed accompanied shop. The food choices seemed stress-free and Mei took less than ten minutes to complete
purchases. It was surprising to learn the complications of her food choice decisions during the first interview.

I guess I have some eating problems because I was getting fat from the point that I got here. I have plans to lose weight so I think it will be better. No eat at all (for dinner) and go to Sports Park and do some exercise. Just eat less, as less as I can and do more exercise. I don’t know whether it will work or not but that is the plan. (Mei, China, Int. 1)

When she first arrived, Mei developed a habit of buying and consuming sweet food and desserts due to convenience and taste. Later, she admitted the habit had caused weight gain and she started to see a counsellor at the university. It was difficult for her to manage the problem and talk to anybody, including her parents and her new friends. The session with the counsellor helped her reconsider healthier eating options so she started to make plans to control her habit. Nevertheless, it was noted the choice to skip meals was not advisable as Mei might then have a nutritionally inadequate diet.

Jaycee (female, China) also mentioned regular purchase and consumption of her favourite ice cream and biscuit due to the cheap price and availability in the UK compared to China. She claimed that the choice of sweet food, ready meals, and fast foods was the cause of her weight gain since her arrival. To reconsider and change her eating habits was a challenge for Jaycee because she really loved and enjoyed treating herself to all these food, although she realised the negative effect of the habit.

Because back in China, this ice cream is very expensive than here. I used to eat but not a lot in China but here is very normal. I love Oreo and I just take it without hesitation. I have put on a bit of weight, I think. Because previously, I had a lot lasagne…these kind of things. I think if I had them once or twice is ok because I love them. I like cheese but if I keep eating them, I can put on weight. After eating it, I don’t feel very comfortable afterwards, with my stomach. It’s too full. It’s the cheese, makes you too full. (Jaycee, China, Int. 1)
Jaycee explained the consumption of convenient food increased significantly because of her refusal to cook. She claimed she was not a good cook and cooking was too complicated according to what she observed when her Chinese friend was in the kitchen. She was satisfied with her food choice: fast foods, ready meals, snacks and eating out, at first. However, the weight gain issues shortly after necessitated a decision to make some changes to her food choice, particularly by making more time and effort to cook fresh food and eliminating most of the convenience food from her diet.

It was found that the eating habits that caused weight gain and concern over body image among international students were generated since, before, or after the transition. It was postulated that food consumption (especially rice) and eating habits when the students were still in their home country contributed to this issue. After the transition, the international students claimed that the dependency on convenient food especially desserts and ready meals that have high sugar content (desserts, chocolates,) excessive snacking on chips, and eating more cheesy ready meals were assumed to be the cause of their weight gain.

When I came here, I gain weight. I use to always be 50kg. When I came here, now I’m 55kg! I didn’t cook and I eat out most of the time. I eat more junk food. (Aisha, Kuwait, Int. 1)

Aisha was having difficulties managing her studies because there was more coursework and she could not find time to consider her food choice. She was aware that she was not eating proper food that is nutritionally balanced, but she perceived that her time and resources were scarce (limited cooking skills) when she first arrived. Eventually, due to this issue, she gained weight at the early stage of her transition. In the literature, students are often represented as people who eat unhealthy diets and hardly engage in grocery shopping or cooking (Blichfeldt et al., 2013). The unhealthy
food habits as a student had even become a joke referred to as “the freshman 15 joke” (i.e., that freshmen students gain 15 pounds during their first year of studies) (Sharma et al. 2009). The term *Freshman 15* was coined in the US (Gores, 2008) and refers to the weight gained by university students in their first year of study. However, the amount of gained weight appears to be an exaggeration but the weight gain seems to be the beginning obesity issues in the future (Lowry et al., 2000).

During the early stages of the transition, the international students, mainly those who lacked cooking skills, were unaware of the adverse effect of regular convenient and fast food consumption. In the beginning, the international students felt the transition period was the chance to take control over personal food choice and generate a healthier lifestyle but the attempt for the formation of new food habits and practices did not come easily because the learning and habitualising process did come with obstacles. Other leading causes of unhealthy eating habits were revealed: the lack of time to carry out extracurricular activities, scarce resources (cost of preparing a meal is more than cost of convenient food), a passive lifestyle (e.g., laziness due to cold weather), and unhealthy snacking habits. Besides the time and resources constraints, one of the causes of overeating and unfavourable eating habits was the adjustment stress. It was found that people under stress choose to eat or overeat food that they normally avoid for weight control or health reasons, especially high caloric snack foods in an attempt to make they feel better (Oliver & Wardle, 1999; Zellner et al., 2006). Students are also vulnerable to weight gain in the first year of university because of changed lifestyle (Anderson et al., 2003) and due to increased stress in undertaking multiple roles and responsibilities of academic commitment and personal life (Racette et al., 2005).
The students claimed they were motivated to lose weight because not only it represents a healthy image but also good appearance. Deshpande et al. (2009) in a study on Canadian university students reported that healthy eating can (1) provide a healthy appearance in terms of weight, skin and physique, (2) provide positive feelings, and (3) prevent diseases. The students needed to carefully select and plan to generate a food choice system and eating habits that would best fit their lifestyle without neglecting the nutritional needs based on their requirement. Making healthier food choice and taking more exercise may help to ward off weight gain in later life, but engaging in meal skipping and nutritionally inadequate diets would compromise health (Wardle, Haase & Steptoe, 2006).

8.5 Food that Conforms to Religious Beliefs

In a study on how social, cultural, and economic factors determine food consumption patterns in Arab countries, Musaiger (1993) highlighted that religion has a noticeable influence on food choice. Moreover, the impact of religion was greater than economic or any other factors on people’s food habits (Musaiger, 1993). The impact also depends on the religion itself and to the extent of how devoted the followers were to the teachings of their religion (Bonne, Vermeir, Bergeaud-Blackler, & Verbeke, 2007). In their study on halal food determinants in France, Bonne et al. (2007) mentioned that most religions forbid certain foods; for example, pork in Judaism and Islam, or pork and beef in Hinduism and Buddhism. One of the religions governed by rules and custom with food prohibitions is Islam, where Muslim has to follow a set of dietary prescription or “halal dietary laws” (Regenstein, Chaudry & Regenstein, 2003).
It was agreed that the fundamental challenge for the Muslim international students in a non-Muslim country was locating halal and sourcing other food permitted by their religion (Hopkins, 2010; Novera, 2004). Novera (2004) found the Indonesian postgraduate students in Australia complained about the difficulties in finding halal food because the Muslim’s halal practices were not always understood or appreciated in Australia. Hopkins (2010) used data from the narrative of twenty-nine Muslim students attending a British Higher education institution to understand their experiences, where the complexity of finding halal food was mentioned as one of the challenges and students had to travel many miles to get halal food.

The personal factor when identifying oneself with Islamic beliefs carried very meaningful influence on the halal food choice that conforms to it. Adhering to the halal rules and regulations, restrictions, and permitted food choice is not an issue where majority of people followed the same set of rules. The migration of the Muslim international students to the UK, where only minority were Muslims, was a major turning point in their Life Course because halal food accessibility and availability were perceived to be a challenge and the students may need to reconsider their halal food choice.

However, this study found that the halal food, although quite limited, was available around the university and it was not actually the major issue for the Muslim students. The “suitable for vegetarian” option is an alternative, with most of its features allowed in the Islamic laws. Most importantly, the trust issue on the halal food claims was found to be the biggest challenge due to perceived complexity of the preparation and handling of halal food. It was mentioned that the concern over the availability of halal food started even before the migration but it was later found
that halal food like chicken, meat, frozen food, ready meals, and the range of vegetarian food options were sold at the supermarkets and stores around the university area. Fresh halal food was even served at various food outlets in the university. Nevertheless, it was admitted that being in a non-Muslim country, the students were unable to fully trust the “halal” and “suitable for vegetarian” claims on the food label.

The issue here is people who handle halal meat is not a Muslim therefore they don’t know how to prepare food in halal way. I am sure about the supplier who supplies halal meat and other halal food but once it is prepared and mixed with non halal material and food, then we can’t eat it. The process was to comply with halal regulations. (Addin, Saudi Arabia, Int.1)

For example, Addin argued that the halal food prepared by a non-Muslim was not properly treated within the halal regulation and he had doubts about purchasing halal food in the supermarket. He had to find other stores selling halal products that were run and managed only by Muslims. He felt it was the safest way to be sure the food conforms to his belief as a Muslim. It was not sufficient that a halal label was clearly stated on the food. He searched more about halal food through the internet and from his landlord, who is a Muslim. Although there is a halal food store located a few miles away, he was willing to travel by bus to purchase food. It was very important for Addin to be sure that the food he consumed complied with Islamic law and he was not willing to compromise.

The halal dietary laws determine which foods are “lawful” or permitted where the consumption of alcohol, pork, blood, dead meat, and meat that has not been slaughtered according to Islamic rulings is prohibited (Regenstein et al., 2003). Although there was some availability of halal food, there were alternatives, like the vegetarian food range. Food that is suitable for vegetarians is allowed because it does not contain any meat or ingredients of meat origin. The Muslim students
were not vegetarians, but it was one of the best and safest food choice for them. However, they needed to be careful about “suitable for vegetarian” claims and labelling because it might still contain alcohol, another restriction in the Islamic law.

I don’t know whether they have halal food here or not so I have to search around and being a first year student I did feel kind of lost at first. I did ask some seniors and they showed me how and what food to buy and that really helps...Once I bought a cheese...but I accidentally bought cheddar cheese with whiskey. I didn’t realise this but after I put it in my basket I was thinking that I’ve heard about what whiskey and it struck to me that it is a kind of alcoholic drink. So I just put it back in the rack and bought normal cheddar and mozzarella cheese instead. (Zimi, Singapore, Int. 1)

A few students mentioned similar incidents, that they had purchased food suitable for vegetarians but had to give the food away because of its alcohol content. It was agreed the Muslim students needed more time and information to put trust on the halal food labelling in the UK. For Idayu (female, Brunei), halal food was very important to her.

If it doesn’t have any halal labelling then I would prefer not to buy it. I think my strategy from the first day is to stick to what I am used to, familiar item. (Idayu, Brunei, Int. 1)

It was mentioned that cooking and selling halal food around the university is a common practice among Muslim students (Hopkins, 2010). The concern over halal food claims led the decision for the students to cook their own food made from scratch so they know exactly what ingredients go into their food. Lina (female, Malaysia) accidentally bought and consume a non halal chicken that was mistakenly placed at the halal section. Since then she had been very careful about her purchases, taking more time to read labels and inspecting food during the observed accompanied shop. She decided to cook her own food and spend more time practicing her cooking skills to help expand her halal food choice. Furthermore, cooking offered the opportunity for Lina to eat the foods she liked and to share them with others. Her efforts paid off when she received compliments on her cooking and was motivated to do more cooking.
I don’t have any (halal) issue now because I know what food to buy and what I can and cannot eat. I cook almost everything so I don’t have any issue with that as well. (Lina, Malaysia, Int.1)

Another concern involving halal food was when the students dined out. Through information received from the online ethnic group and seniors, the new international students discovered that they have more food choices for consideration. Outlets and restaurants serving halal food around the university, and the nearest town area, were available. Despite having more options, Naz (male, Singapore) still doubted how the halal food was prepared and served.

There was an issue with some restaurant that serves halal meat. For example the equipment used is mixed with the one used to handle pork. So we can’t eat it if we feel that the preparation does not comply with halal requirement...after a few times (dining out), I started questioning the issue when I saw them using the same food tong to pick up pork and halal chicken. So I try not to eat at whichever restaurant that serves halal meat together with pork. (Naz, Singapore, Int. 1)

Students who decided to dine at restaurants that did not serve any halal food had the choice to order seafood or vegetarian meals. Fish, seafood, salad, pasta, and pizza were among the foods that the Muslim students chose when dining out. However, ordering a dish permitted by Islamic law on the menu was a problem for Adam (male, Brunei) because there was no detailed description of the dish, which included the food garnish.

I would opt for pizza, salmon, or any seafood if I’m not sure. (Once) I ordered spaghetti carbonara but it came with bacon bits and it was not mentioned in the menu (Adam, Brunei, Int. 1)

Choosing a place to dine out was also a dilemma for the international students. Hannis (female, Brunei), for example, hesitated when her friends invited her to a restaurant in the town center because there was a bar serving alcoholic drinks inside, even though the restaurant claimed they served halal food. Hannis opted not to dine there anymore because she had more doubts regarding the restaurant’s halal food preparation (alcohol content in food and same utensils to handle halal and non halal food).
According to Bonne et al. (2007), self-identity can be interpreted as a label people used to describe themselves and as a reflection of the extent that a person sees him or herself fulfilling the criteria for a societal role. It was found in that the meanings attached to halal food choice was a strong determinant to self-identity as a Muslim international student in this study, where eating foods that meet the religious prescriptions was considered to be an expression of the Islamic religion. For example, having accidentally served bacon, a strictly prohibited meat in Islam, was seen as a threat to his self-identity for Adam (male, Brunei). The experience made Adam become more careful when dining out; he ensured the restaurant staff’s awareness of his food restrictions before placing an order.

I ordered spaghetti carbonara but it came with bacon bits and it was not mentioned in the menu. It just says that it contains carbonara sauce and nothing else. I was surprised when it has bacon bits all over it. I told them but they said that I still have to pay for it so it’s ok. I just didn’t eat it. But in the end I found that they actually deduct the price. Honestly it was very surprising to be served that because I wasn’t expecting that at all. (Adam, Brunei, Int. 1)

On the other hand, Naz (male, Singapore) felt that his flatmates were being disrespectful to his belief, according to his kitchen sharing experience.

I just feel that it was so insensitive of them because they know I am a Muslim and I can’t eat pork but they don’t care. (Naz, Singapore, Int. 1)

The experience of both Adam and Naz made them realise it was not easy to practice their food choice and express their belief as a Muslim during the early stage of their adjustment. It was more comfortable to be around their co-national circle of friends because their food choice was respected and understood. Adam has then decided to prepare his own version of “restaurant-like” food with fancy ingredients and food plating to redeem his limited halal choice when dining out. Naz cooked and prepared food in his own room to minimise the chances of contaminating halal food with
others. With respect to dietary acculturation, Adam and Naz tended to retain their halal dietary habits despite the challenges of their practice.

The religious associations attached to halal food consumption make the food choice decision a priority among the Muslim consumers (Bonne et al., 2007), despite the perceived availability of halal food in the UK.

They (cafeteria in the university) were selling pork too so we decided we won’t go there anymore. After that event, we discussed a lot about the food that we can and can’t eat and we have set strict choice. It limits what we can have but we have to make sure that it was really halal and permitted. I find that some of my friends and seniors don’t really care about this issue but I know how I feel and I will not be influenced by them. (Kama, Malaysia, Int.1)

Kama decided not to compromise his identity as a Muslim especially when there are other halal food choices available. The location of the café was conveniently located within the university and often visited by his other Muslim friends because there are halal foods served. The decision to patronise places that serve only halal food limited his options, but peer pressure (from Muslim co-nationals who still eat at the cafeteria) did not influence Kama’s halal food choice.

Bonne et al. (2007) found that the Muslims retained their halal food habits because of personal relevance attached to halal food regardless of perceived availability or preference for convenience. Muslims are willing to devote considerable time and effort to obtain halal food because eating halal food is a means for an Islamic devotion and a sign of identity reserved to the Muslim community (Bonne et al., 2007; Bonne & Verbeke, 2008). Moreover, the religious associations attached to halal food made the food choice decision more complex and important for the Muslim consumer and lead to a different decision making process (Bonne et al., 2007). The Muslim students will not simplify their halal food choice but constantly search for alternatives that are
allowed by the laws of Islamic teachings. It might be an overcomplicated system to others, but the act that is in accordance to the laws for the Muslim was meaningful and a sign of devotion because Islam to them is “the way of life.”

The concern over availability, consumption, and preparation of halal food in the UK was apparently a challenge for the Muslim international students, who potentially limited their food choice. The students took a lot of effort during the earlier phase of their arrival in the UK to explore a wider halal food choice, including by travelling to halal food stores, by online researching unfamiliar food ingredients (especially for vegetarian options), and by being cautious over halal claims and halal food served in restaurants. The students were influenced by recommendations from friends on the purchase of halal and vegetarian food, and accepted invitations to dine out at restaurants serving halal food. It could be concluded that the halal food context was very complex and the students were reluctant to fully trust the halal claim on the label and the halal food preparation at restaurants during the early phase of their arrival.

8.6 The Influence of Food Cost

During the accompanied shop, it was observed that the international students compared food product and price, took snapshots of food prices, labels and symbols and made some sort of calculation. It was later revealed that the students tried to figure out how much the cost was in their local currency. It was also obvious the students were confused about foreign denominations at the checkout counter. The observation implied that cost of food was a major concern for the new international students.
I was excited about the price. At first I was converting the price to local rate, I mean yes looking at the price is like just £1 but if I convert it will be like 5 times more. Onions for example, 3 for £1 was too expensive for me. That’s unacceptable. Even now when I am buying food, I tried to say, oh it’s just a pound but the actual price in the local rate would still be at the back of my head. It is still as complicated as the first time. (Fasha, Malaysia, Int. 1)

Similarly, online shoppers also made price comparison using the comparison tool provided on the web page and calculated the amount in their local currency. Price of food also guided their food choice because of the strict student’s budget and it was observed that they cancelled a few food items to reduce the total cost. Both online and in store shoppers seemed stressed over the cost of food during the initial stage of their arrival, where almost everything was considered expensive.

I was converting the actual cost to local currency and found it was too expensive to buy a lot of things at Tesco…So I will find out the price and go shopping where the items are the cheapest. That is very important to me. The only thing that I don’t mind spending some money is on chocolates. I love chocolates. (Kama, Malaysia, Int. 1)

Spending more on comfort food or ethnic traditional food ingredients was considered acceptable because of the importance of the food and the rarity. The costs of dining out were also added to the budget and the students did not mind paying extra because they did not eat out often. The purchase of promotional food or discounted items was another way of saving money, based on Inna’s (female, Malaysia) experience:

So I bought the promotion item. If it wasn’t on promotion, half price, I will not buy them because they are expensive to me. One more, I will also try to consider the quantity I am getting with that price. (Inna, Malaysia, Int. 1)

Preparing a food budget and meal planning was conducted by a few students in order to control their spending. Only ingredients needed were purchased in advance to avoid food wastage. Zimi (female, Singapore), however, found it difficult to plan ahead sometimes because she was not sure what would be available. She decided what to cook based on what she managed to buy cheaply,
mostly “reduced to clear” items (food nearing its sell by date). During the accompanied shop, she stopped by the “reduced to clear” section first to find a bargain and bought some squid.

    When I saw the squid sold in Tesco I suddenly remembered that dish and decided to make it. (Zimi, Singapore, Int. 1)

The students considered fish, seafood, and other shellfish as “luxury” foods, which they can only afford when the price was reduced, whereas back in their home country, these foods were among the cheapest. This was an issue for the Muslim students because fish and seafood were permissible in Islam, but the cost was a barrier and limited their food choice.

    I used to look at the variety of fish and seafood sold at the fishmonger stall in Tesco but I think they are really expensive. I am permitted to eat fish and seafood if they were no halal meat but if the price is like this, I can’t. If there is no halal meat sold in Tesco I would become a total vegetarian. (Kama, Malaysia, Int. 1)

Kama (male, Malaysia) reconsidered his preferences due to the cost and excluded food that was beyond his budgetary limitation. It was an interesting observation that Kama was showing a willingness for dietary restraint (becoming a vegetarian), which was influenced by the price of halal and other food that he was allowed to eat.

One way to make sure there was enough money to cover other expenses including food was to make a budget and pay for the necessities first. Most of the international students had never had responsibility to pay any bills before they came to the UK. Airil, for example, made a list of food he needs, paid his rent in advance, did not bring money to class, and cooked his own food. The experience of grocery shopping and cooking with his mother back in Malaysia informed the systematic and well-planned budget planning for Airil when constructing his personal food choice system.
I have to control everything I spend. Food is important so I have to be careful about the things I buy and I have to make sure they don’t go to waste and I only buy the things I need. (Airil, Malaysia, Int. 1)

On the other hand, Neehu (female, Nigeria) had no previous experience or responsibility for food choice decisions. She was totally dependent on her mother to make all the decision, and her spending on food was based on how much money she had left. For that reason, planning a budget did not come naturally for Neehu, but the cost of food did not seem to matter because she purchased more food compared to other international students.

I’m not really able to know how much exactly I have spent. It’s just based what I have on my account. So budgeting doesn’t really work for me now. I noticed that when you are shopping with your family, you never really have a budget or anything. Like when I go shopping with my mom. But now when you have no food and you know you have a list, you have a limit and you start planning. But when you are with your family, there is really no plan. (Neehu, Nigeria, Int. 1)

The cost of food was observed to be one of the significant decision-making factors when making food choices. The students were aware of their budgetary limitations and cautious over their spending during grocery shopping. They would convert the price to their local currency, which therefore made the food seem expensive compared to the price of food in their home country. However, with proper planning using a shopping list, setting a budget and constructing a meal plan for a whole week, for example, the students were able to control their spending on food.

8.7 **The Food Symbolism in the New Country**

The food that people eat is the most powerful symbol of who they are and increasingly exerts many roles in human life (Fox, 2003; Verbeke & Lopez, 2005). Food is central to individual identity and food traditions reinforced identity (Hartwell et al., 2011). However, there has been little focus in the literature on the international students’ experience despite the important role and meanings
attached of food in the context of cultural identity and overall quality of life (Brown et al., 2010). The emotional feelings when consuming familiar food brought back nostalgic memories of home, family bonding, maternal love, and cultural belonging, which imply the emotional attachment that home country food brings and asserts a strong association between cultural identity and food choices (Jamal, 1998; Locher et al., 2005; Counihan et al, 2013). This section will explain further the food symbolism and the meanings attached to the food choices, and the strong influence of these foods over the food choice decisions of the new international students’ during the initial stage of their transition.

**Comfort food**

A study on comfort food preference across age and gender explained comfort food as high-calorie foods that people consume when stressed, believed to relieve negative moods and evoke a state of pleasure (Wansink, Cheney & Chan, 2003). Locher (2002:442) offered his definition of comfort food as “any food consumed by individuals [frequently food with high sugar or carbohydrate content], often during period of stress, that evokes positive emotions and is associated with significant social relationships.” Wagner, Ahlstrom, Redden, Vickers & Mann (2014) in a recent study on the myth of comfort food argued that mood effects can occur even in the absence of comfort food but the effectiveness and significant improvements that comfort food provides are not discounted.

The physiological basis for eating comfort food relates to the elevated mood and satisfaction when palatable foods are consumed, or initiated cravings often for food with seemingly addictive qualities (Wansink et al. 2003). Apart from mood and cravings, another example provided in Wansink et al. (2003) is “stress,” which also can disrupt normal eating patterns and cause an
increased tendency for fat, salty, and sweet food consumption. For both Hanna (female, Indonesia) and Kama (male, Malaysia) the stress during the adjustment caused unhealthy choice of comfort food.

I study at the library until midnight because I have a lot of coursework and I would feel hungry after that…because when you feel hungry you will eat heavy meals before you go to sleep. I know I will also eat a lot of rice when I'm stress, heavy meals. (Hanna, Indonesia, Int.1)

I need to get something sweet when I feel stress. I will only buy chocolates, chocolate drink, and ice creams. I always eat chocolates when I feel stress about my studies or when I get homesick. (Kama, Malaysia, Int. 1)

Locher et al (2005) examined the social constructions of some food objects as “comfort food” to explain the social construction and relationship between emotion, memory and food preference. The study found that “familiar foods are consumed in order to relieve the feeling of distress and anxiety; new foods cannot fulfil this need” (Locher et al., 2005: 291). The new international students admitted that their food choice defined some meanings and reflected the feeling of comfort which helped alleviate adjustment stress. (In this study, the students mentioned stress when doing assignment, coursework or revision.) Consuming comfort food meets the need of immediate distress relief, implying a role for food in an individual’s social life (Locher et al., 2005).

Addin (male, Saudi Arabia) used the comfort of having familiar food to ease the stress of his studies. During the accompanied shop, Addin browsed the “World Food” aisle in the supermarket to look for an ingredient needed for an ethnic recipe for soup and seemed excited when he found it. The soup represents maternal love and for Addin, it transformed the meaning of familiar food into an emotional well-being for him.
I really like making anything soup base because that is how my mom used to cook at home. She would make soup, porridge and this used to be my ultimate comfort food especially when I don’t feel well. I guess I miss her taking care of me by making cooking something that I like. I feel stress about my studies and when I came home, I made this dish and I feel much better. Although it is not the best soup but it made me feel good and relax because I am having something familiar. (Addin, Saudi Arabia, Int. 1)

Cappelini and Yen (2013) studied the changes of food consumption patterns across time for Chinese students in the UK and found that recreating ethnic home country dishes was a practice adopted to satisfy cravings and managing adjustment related stress. Ethnic dishes were favoured because the “home experience” coming from the familiar aroma and taste of the food helped relieved those feelings. Students would go to the extent of searching for online resources on cooking (recipes and demonstrations) and video-calling family to get recipes for comfort foods and other ethnic meals (Cappelini et al., 2013). According to Jamal (1996), the experiences of recreating the meal were often challenging but they allowed participants to transform unfamiliar ingredients and dishes into a familiar one. For example, Kama (male, Malaysia) remembered his mother’s cooking and tried to recreate a “curry rice” recipe. However, he had to eliminate some authentic ingredients because they were not available, thus creating a dissimilar taste.

My mom’s cooking is my comfort food but I can’t make the actual food here because the ingredient is not the same. Even I try making it I know the taste is not the same, not the taste I am familiar with. I remembered when I made the curry rice, I was feeling happy because I finished a coursework on time and suddenly feel like eating something from home. (Kamarul, Malaysia, Int. 1)

Adam (male, Brunei) tried to avoid Bruneian food because it would make him more stressed because of homesickness. He realised this while eating ethnic food at a restaurant, which made him suddenly miss home.

My plan is to change the way I eat, the food I used to eat. Instead of the common things I used to have back home, I wanted to try and prepare (other) food on my own. (Adam, Brunei, Int. 1)
Since his arrival, Adam decided to try and cook different food he normally had in Brunei. He felt that eating familiar food would make him miss his family more. This was also evident during his accompanied shop, where it was observed that he bought more foreign herbs and food ingredients (i.e. rosemary, thyme, tarragon, coffee syrup), which he claimed to be used later in a “Western” style dish he was preparing. Avoiding familiar, home country food helped minimise the feeling of homesickness for Adam.

Similarly, Dinah (female, Malaysia) also felt more homesick when she had Malaysian food because it made her realise she was not at home anymore. She mentioned crying over the phone, talking to her mother and admitted nothing was helping with her homesickness, not even the presence of her sister in the UK, who studies in the same university.

Food doesn’t make it better. It’s making it worse! (Dinah, Malaysia, Int. 1)

The search and effort to consume comfort food became a strategy to manage adjustment stress and sometime as a cure for homesickness, but not for every student. Food was considered an immediate distress relief (Locher et al., 2005), a cure capable of providing temporary emotional well-being that everybody can get access to. The turning point of migrating to another country with new roles and responsibilities as a student and first time being in control over personal food provisioning made it necessary to find comfort in any way possible, Food was the ultimate comfort and cure for the international students because of its ability to make the students feel better almost immediately after consumption.

**Staple and ethnic food**

Mennell et al. (1992:58) stated that “in food consumption as in anything else, it is widely assumed that ‘habits,’ ‘behaviour,’ and ‘preferences’ acquired in childhood shape those of adulthood –
creating patterns that are resistant to change.” Brown et al. (2010) added that it would be a struggle for sojourners to break away from habituated food choices because food habits and practices represent a central element of culture and are the least open to change. This is illustrated in the study finding that follows.

Habib (female, Malaysia), for example, claimed that she must eat rice every day in order to stay focused. It was comforting and important to have the rice dish because she felt it was difficult not to consume the food she never failed to eat everyday of her life.

I have to eat rice almost every day still. The first few weeks were when I feel like eating rice every day… I remembered I did try once not to eat rice for a whole day and I find myself not being able to focus on my task and when talking to other people, I wasn’t paying attention. Maybe it is like addiction, I don’t know. (Habib, Indonesia, Int. 1)

Habib’s claim echoed Adam’s (male, Brunei) comments about the “must have” staple because it felt “weird” breaking away from the habit of having rice with every meal in Brunei. However, Adam has just started learning to cook and most of his food choice was not local Bruneian food but more towards Westernised dishes consisting of meat, starch, and vegetables. In order to make the taste more familiar and fulfilling, Adam always used rice as the starch instead of the common potato or pasta. Even when eating out, he would choose restaurants that serve rice.

I have to have rice every day. It feels weird if I don’t have it for two or three days. I would begin to ask, where’s my rice? Although I would eat out, I would still have to eat rice. Even when I am cooking Western style cooking, I would still have rice with them. (Adam, Brunei, Int. 1)

The serving of a proper meal consisting of rice with accompaniments, such as vegetable and meat dishes, is practiced in many food cultures in the South East Asia including Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei. The students described how they would still feel hungry even after a meal unless they ate a proper rice dish. No other staple and no matter how tasty other foods were, it was
never a complete or satisfying meal without rice. As for Habib and Adam, the feeling of an incomplete and unsatisfying meal without rice was expected because the practice was habitual and it was not easy to neglect or abandon. Coping and adapting to the new food choices was not easy and acceptable to most South East Asian students, particularly at an early stage of transition. The continuance of learned food habits and practices since childhood allowed them to be in a “comfort zone” in an unfamiliar surroundings. Incorporating home country foods with the new food choices made it easier for the students to accept the new food choice. Notwithstanding that breaking a routine eating habit was not favourable, the desire to seek for variety in food formed a basis for new food preferences, a mixture of both worlds.

The students’ lack of cooking skills to recreate a home country meal did not prevent them from searching familiar and ethnic food. Moreover, ethnic restaurants around the UK are abundant and the cause of this was explained by Verbeke and Lopez (2005: 824), who stated that “awareness and trial of ethnic cuisine has increased in the past decades as a consequence of the growing international trade, globalization, migration and tourism.” Furthermore, the convenience-oriented lifestyle and the desire for familiar, healthier, flavourful cuisine among ethnic minorities have resulted in the growth of ethnic foods restaurants serving prepared foods, and the ethnic food option has helped develop a comfort level among the students (Verbeke et al., 2005). The symbolic meaning of having ethnic food was like “experiencing feelings of bonding and conformity with the original culture (Jamal, 1996:225).”

The new international students mentioned the chance to dine at ethnic restaurants located nearby the university. There were plenty of ethnic restaurants available: Middle- Eastern, Chinese, Indian,
Malaysian, and Thai food, just to list a few. Fasha (female, Malaysia) discussed her first experience dining at a Malaysian restaurant, which was very exciting for her:

I went to “Matahari” (restaurant) after one senior invited me to come along with her. When I got there, I saw their menu was mostly Malaysian style, Asian style. I was very excited and even the restaurant had a halal certificate. It was wonderful and their food was really delicious and made me feel like home. (Fasha, Malaysia, Int. 1)

Fasha was already missing food from her home regardless of the recency of her arrival in the UK. She was craving for certain Malaysian cuisine but her inability to cook proper food meant she was unable to recreate the dish. The adjustment stress from having to manage a lot of tasks as a student and the new roles and responsibilities in managing personal life were very overwhelming to Fasha. However, the availability of a Malaysian ethnic restaurant gave some comfort to her so she enjoyed a memorable time having familiar, comforting Malaysian food.

Riddell, Ang, Keast, and Hunter (2011) conducted a study on the influence of living arrangements and nationality on nutrient intakes and food habits among young adults. The study found that home country foods bring comfort through familiarity in an unfamiliar environment. The comfort of familiar food helped alleviate the feelings of homesickness, form a link with the past, ease the shock of entering the new culture, and serve to maintain ethnic identity especially to the new international students during the early stages of their sojourn (Brown, 2009; Pan et al., 1999; Kalcik, 1984). Brown’s (2009) study attested that the food students eat is of great importance both emotionally and physically and the consumption of home country food is driven by the desire to feel sated in both aspects.

**The nostalgic food and commensality**

Most of the students referred to the consumption of comfort and ethnic food during the arrival stage as a recollection of nostalgic memories of food eaten in the students’ home country. Their
quality times with family were mostly spent around food, eating, and celebrating. In a study by Jamal (1996), the recollection of childhood and traditional food consumption frequently symbolised the warmth of a family life and the eating experience often functioned as a mean of recreating an imaginative past.

Having Brunei food could help because it makes me feel like I’m in Brunei. That’s how I feel, like I’m two three seconds in Brunei. Just eating, that’s how I feel. It’s a nice feeling.’ (Hannis, Brunei, Int. 1)

Hannis (female, Brunei) spent most of her weekends together with her Bruneian friends when she first came to the UK. Their main activity was cooking and eating ethnic Bruneian food together and it was an opportunity for her to release her stress in the new, foreign environment. It was a very relaxing session for Hannis, yet powerful enough that made her imagine she was back in Brunei where everything was normal and familiar. As Locher et al. (2005) explained, food can become a nostalgic object with the power to manipulate emotional states and feelings.

I was missing my parents a lot when I first got here. So I would cook food we used to eat at home because I wanted to feel at home, you know. I want to have something familiar to make me feel like I was still in our house, having a meal together. I just realised this now how much I'm missing them at that time and how cooking those food made me feel better. When I'm cooking some of my mum's favourite dishes that’s when I'm missing her (Lina, Malaysia, Int. 1)

Being in unfamiliar surroundings when she first arrived, Lina (female, Malaysia) made her mother’s favourite dish which suddenly made her feel better. It was not the taste of the food but the memories and recollection of moments with her family while eating the food that brought a good feeling during her stressful times.

I also brought with me a plate that I always use so whenever I eat using that plate, it reminds me of home. My dad suggested me to bring the plate so I won’t be homesick and it worked. Sometimes I would prepare a meal and eat while chatting with my dad and other family members online and it does feels like eating at home. I feel like I am there with them, eating together. (Idayu, Brunei, Int. 1)
It was not an easy adjustment for Idayu (female, Brunei) fitting in the new environment because she was very close to her father and had never stayed away from her family home. She had her own strategy by having virtual moments together using video call, particularly through Skype. Idayu made her father’s favourite food and ate it while both of them talked online like they would normally do back in Brunei. Idayu felt she needed some “normality” because it was her first time living on her own and away from her family.

Suntra (female, Thailand) felt that by cooking Thai food strengthened her identity ties with her home country and it made her proud to be a Thai. She was aware of Thai food popularity in the UK and it made her feel special that she could make the dishes. Suntra chose to make Thai food more whenever she prepared her own food, although she claimed she did not cook much and it was the first time she took charge of food choice decision.

There is some kind of connection between me and my home country and as I said, my familiarity with the taste of the food is the reason why I do this kind of cooking every day. I am really proud of Thai food and if I have friends over, I would cook Thai food for them. Thai food is very tasty and rich in herbs and ingredients that made it more tasty and people can experience a very new taste and very healthy. (Suntra, Thailand, Int. 1)

Sometimes when making a certain Thai dish, it reminded Suntra of her mother and sister whom she rarely saw back in Thailand because she was living in another province with her husband and mother in law. She mentioned that both her mother and sister were very good cooks with their own style of Thai cooking. Suntra practiced making their favourite dish and planned that when she goes back to Thailand in the summer to recreate the meal for them. She seemed to be a little sentimental when she talked about her own family, perhaps missing them more than ever now that she was even farther away in the UK and eating their favourite food.
The memory of food back in the home country often revolved around having a meal with family and friends. Inna (female, Malaysia) had an interesting way to explain the food she missed the most:

I was craving for “char kue teow” when I first came here. I remembered having the noodle every morning for breakfast, freshly fried by the road side vendor. Cheap, fast and tasty! The smell is so nice. I was craving a lot for home style breakfast like nasi lemak, roti canai and others. I guess the breakfast here is too bland; toast, butter, jam and cereal among others. Not enough “kick”. (Inna, Malaysia, Int. 1)

The food culture for breakfast back in Malaysia was compared to the breakfast served in the UK and it made Inna imagine herself in familiar surroundings. Inna still remembered the smell of the food and the scenario of the hawker’s food stall and it made her crave for it more. It was a feeling of disappointment for her that the similar experience was not available.

Neehu (female, Nigeria) bought goat’s meat at a butcher in London but the meat did not taste like the meat at home. Neehu defined eating goat’s meat as something both common and celebratory and recalled the time when her family was presented a goat for Christmas. The culture of presenting food as a gift reminded Neehu of her home country.

In Nigeria, someone give us a Christmas gift, like a goat, yes! It’s not that we are living in the middle of the village or something. We actually live in the city and someone who works for a company put a goat in a pickup truck, ties it up and brings it to the house for cooking. Here, I can’t find goat to eat. I miss goat’s meat. There is so many meals that I missed. We found some goat meat once in an Asian market. It was in London and the butcher said it was goat meat. But when we got back, I said, this is not goat’s meat because it doesn’t taste like goat’s meat. It was just normal beef. But he sold to us and we were so disappointed. (Neehu, Nigeria, Int. 1)

Neehu mentioned a list of food in Nigeria that she was missing and she regularly tried to search for similar food at African groceries in the UK. She claimed that there is a wider variety of food in Nigeria because there are a lot of different food cultures, but most ingredients that she found in the UK were not the same. The limited availability of authentic traditional food in the host country...
is the reason why international students brought food from home and requested family members to send food to them.

Cooking to relieve stress due to study revision right before exam actually helped Habib (female, Malaysia) in feeling better. The rewarding feeling to have home-made, delicious food meant she could concentrate much better.

When I was back in Malaysia, if I have exam the next day, I would cook during midnight before it, eat and then go to sleep. No more study after that and I would go take the exam more relax. (Habib, Malaysia, Int.1)

It was the same stress-free feeling that Habib was looking for whenever she had too much coursework in the beginning of her academic life. She cooked and made something delicious even in the middle of the night because it reminded her how helpful it was to do that and claimed the stress just fades away.”

The influence of family members in food choice decision sometimes reminded the students about the love and caring intention, wanting nothing but the best for them. Mei remembered how her mother taught her about vegetarianism. When she had trouble with an uncontrolled intake of food that was high in sugar content, Mei finally had the courage to talk to her mother about the problem and they discussed about being vegetarian. She had strong beliefs that her new choice of food is much more ethical due to her mother’s advice. Observing her mother’s practice as a vegetarian reminded her of Buddhism philosophies and way of life.

I remember some Buddha philosophies and I do have beliefs about them especially about what they do in their life; what they eat, what they drink. Their body and mind is pure and I ask (my mother) how they do this. I know they don’t have dinner at all. They don’t eat meat to pure their body. I think this is good for me so I try hard…Before this I’m not a vegetarian but I want to practice this lifestyle because it’s good and the most important thing is that my mum is a vegetarian and she taught me a lot about being vegetarian, all the
advantages and how the body will change. So she gave me a lot of influence and confidence to do the same. (Mei, China, Int. 2)

Brown (2009) in the study on the role of food and food adjustment strategy of international students mentioned that communal eating with other co-nationals played a central role in maintaining social relationships. Cooking and eating home country food together with other co-nationals was a popular activity among the new South Asian international students (Malaysia, China, Brunei and Thailand). Discussion over the adjustment to new surroundings and other things was common during these communal eating sessions. Adam (male, Brunei) recalled how eating together with other Bruneians at a gathering reminded him of being with his own family.

It is very comforting and fulfilling. I feel so at home because usually my cousins and I would eat those food and having good times and I miss those moments. So when I do eat these foods they sort of bringing back memories being around my family. (Adam, Brunei, Int. 1)

Vallianatos and Raine (2008) in a study on immigrant women’s food consumption and identity in Edmonton, Canada, mentioned that by continuing to consume both every day and celebratory foods, is like recalling families and friends left behind, helping to preserve transnational relationships and enacting companionship with those back home. Abandoning traditional culinary practices is equated with losing a sense of belonging to a community, family, and religion (Gabaccia, 1998).

Students also cook together with other co-nationals during weekends and when celebrating birthdays and other events to produce international as well as home country dishes. The effort made to keep the culture of eating together reminded the students of being with family.

If I have a friend coming over, or it’s a friend’s birthday, I will make something special like a Western food for example. For my housemate’s birthday the other day, I made lasagne and another friend’s birthday, I made grilled chicken. (Zimi, Singapore, Int.1)
The cooking session with co-national friends during the early phase of arrival helped the international students to rehearse and affirm cultural and national identities, as exemplified in a study by Bochner, Mcleod, and Lin (1977), not to mention expanding their food choice. However, Suntra (female, Thailand) preferred eating on her own because it was easier for her.

I just cook alone and eat alone. Because I am not a socialising person and although I know I am not too busy but I know I have to eat, study, sleep and prepare for my studies, go back home and my life is just like that. I don’t have time to socialize. My flatmates are younger than me and I don’t like their behaviour, certain characteristics and they always make a mess in the kitchen and I don’t like that. It is very annoying. So I prefer to eat alone. (Suntra, Thailand, Int. 1)

Although Suntra favours having friends over and cooking some Thai dishes, she claimed it was not something she would do often. She did not miss having meals together with friends much now that she has her own family. The different lifestyle between her and her housemate’s limited the social interaction among them.

8.8 Summary

This chapter discusses the influences of life course perspective on food choice decisions during the early stage of transition. The cultural ideals, personal factors, social factors, resources, and current context during the life course were explored to illuminate how the factors during migration influenced, changed, or developed the international students’ food choice system. The major themes derived in this chapter were the new roles and responsibilities, skills, and competencies in food provision, concern over healthy appearance, food that conformed to religious beliefs, the influence of food cost, and the food symbolism to the international students. These themes helped explain how in life course perspective, the experience of migration for the new international students influenced the construction of a new food choice system in the early stages of their transition.
The international students’ new food choice decision process was based on several factors which significantly affected their food choice decision process. The new roles and responsibilities was perceived to be more difficult with the added adjustment stress of academic and new environment. The previous experience on food provisioning skills and competencies acquired was associated with a culturally ideal food choice and a better adaptation to the new environment.

The food provisioning practice, which had been a routine in home country, was problematic in the new setting due to unfamiliar ingredients, time constraint in food preparation, challenges in resources during food preparation, issues with shared kitchen, and availability of convenient food. The concern over healthy body image and appearance was expressed and the students claimed that their eating habits back home and of the food choices since their arrival may have caused this problem. The accessibility and availability of halal food was perceived to be limited at the beginning but the students was exposed to and explored more halal food choices and other foods that were permitted in Islam was found sufficiently available.

Managing the cost of food was complicated, causing unplanned and unnecessary food purchase. Food carried several meanings and the diversified food choice among the students was influenced by their different circumstances. The findings indicated how preference towards certain food was developed, the emotional influence that food evoked, and how food was used to aid the uncomfortable adjustment experience. The factors that influenced food choices and eating habits during transition; the personal and social factors, resources, culturally ideals and current context of migration and new independent life, were interrelated in the construction of new food choice
system. Exploration and understanding of these factors have provided a window to the wider implications and complexities of food choice during the transition of new international students. The following chapter discusses the changes of food choice and food practice that lead to food acculturation.
Chapter 9: The Food Acculturation Process

9.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the changes associated with food acculturation during the second phase of accompanied shop and in-depth interview conducted with the same international students three months after living in the UK. The transformation in the perception of new food choices, the adjustment strategies, and the changes of food choice and practice that occurred were investigated in order to explain the international students’ food acculturation in the UK.

The length of time spent in the UK since the arrival of the international students brought a new perspective to the development of personal food choice system during the transition. It was mentioned in Chapter 8 that the food choice decision making process and food provisioning were difficult in the beginning due to several factors, such as time and resource scarcity, limited availability of ethnic food ingredients, limited accessibility and availability of certain food, lack of skills and competencies and unacceptable taste of new food. All these factors influenced the food choice decisions and led to food acculturation among the students.

Dietary changes are common among international students when they assimilate to the customs and culture of the host country (Edwards et al., 2010). Several studies have reported the adverse effect of dietary changes in the early phase of migration, which involved undesirable health outcomes such as weight gain and the development of chronic diseases (Pan et al., 1999; Collins, 2008; Satia-Abouta et al., 2002). However, the diverse representations of international students’ exposure, experience, and perception of the new food choice as presented in previous chapters (Chapter 5 and 6) bring to light other context of new food choice and positive food acculturation
experience. The following section discusses the findings from the second phase of accompanied shop and in-depth interview on food acculturation. The following three major themes associated with food acculturation will be presented: (1) the transformation of perception on new food choice, (2) the skills and competencies developed, and (3) the changes in food choice and food practice of the international students.

Finally, this chapter will discuss the changes in food choice and other food provisioning practices that corresponded to the acculturation strategy explained by Berry (1997) (see Chapter 3: Figure 3), presented again in the next Table 16:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 1. Is it considered to be of value to maintain cultural identity and characteristics?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 2. Is it considered to be of value to maintain relationships with other groups?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 16- Berry's acculturation strategies**

Berry’s (1997) acculturation strategy explained.

**Integration**: Individuals who maintain their original cultural identity while exhibiting behavioural characteristics of the host culture.

**Separation**: Maintain their culture of origin while rejecting the host society’s norms and behaviours are said to adopt a separatist position.

**Assimilation**: Individuals who progressively abandon their original culture in favour of host culture traits.

**Marginalisation**: Seek neither to maintain original cultural traits nor adopt host culture’s behaviours.

---

5 The acculturation strategy developed and explained in the following sections will be in Bold and Italic
9.2 Transformation of Perceived Food Choice

At the beginning of the transition, the international students expressed concern over the adjustment and adaptation to the new food choice. They perceived that there would be limited accessibility and availability to familiar food. Some students did express their worry that they might not be able to adapt well to the food choice available in the UK but in the second interview, it was claimed that the food choice decisions was much easier and the students gained confidence to explore much wider food options at various food suppliers, including local farmer’s markets and international ethnic supermarkets. Table 17 below summarized the transformations of the perceived thought on the food choice in the UK.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Findings 1: Transformations of perceived food choice in the UK</th>
<th>1st accompanied shop and interview (arrival stage)</th>
<th>2nd accompanied shop and interview (3 months after)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Limited familiar food choices: mainly readymade and convenient food</td>
<td>Explored more varieties available in various places; chose mainly healthier options.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived cooking to be complicated</td>
<td>Cooking is easy and can produce more satisfying meals.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resist new food due to unfamiliarity</td>
<td>Willingness and acceptance of new food due to increased confidence.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brought ethnic food from home because perceived difficult to find, different taste, expensive.</td>
<td>Ethnic food is easily accessible and available. Ethnic food brought remained unused. No replenishment required.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong symbolism and connections of food eaten in the UK as comfort food, national, ethnic, or personal identity and memories of home and families.</td>
<td>Students do not relate food to homesickness, memories, or other symbolism, but discuss more about positive experiences in food choice.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 17: The Transformation of Perceived Food Choice in the UK
According to Airil (male, Malaysia), the migration did not mean his total adaptation to host country’s food but the enactment of food provisioning will make a lot of difference and provide more food options.

You know, it’s a Western country and they eat different food here. I was not sure I could adapt and get used to eat bread and potato every day. You have your mum or your sister cooking for you back home but now you have to prepare it yourself. I feel kind of worried about it. But the fact is you are not eating bread every day. You have a choice and even if you want to eat rice every day, you can. Just fry an egg and eat it with soy sauce with rice and you’re good. It doesn’t have to be too complicated. (Airil, Malaysia, Int. 2)

The similar impression of halal food availability concerned the students when they first arrived. Although the Muslim students had to follow strict Islamic halal food laws and regulations, halal food was found to be easily available in most supermarkets, even at the convenience stores around the universities. One student, Fasha (female, Malaysia), mentioned that there were more food choice, including readymade and alternatives to halal food available, although she was aware her lack of cooking skills might limit her options. The three months she had spent in the UK allowed her to discover and experience more food choices.

I am not a good cook and my family was worried I will not eat enough. I know I can’t cook much but there is plenty of available food which is ready made and you could eat that. I have to be careful because I eat only halal food. But there is vegetarian option as well. That is something I never expect. (Fasha, Malaysia, Int. 2)

The integration of personal food choice of halal option and the acceptance of new food choice that still conformed to the Muslim’s beliefs contributed towards a positive adjustment experience for Fasha. Migrating to the UK was perceived difficult at the beginning, but (because it is a non-Muslim country where halal food choice was limited) it was later found that various other food choices that conformed to Islam was available.
The international students also brought along some food from their home country especially spices and dry food when they first arrived at the UK. It was revealed later during the second interview that after three months, most of the food supplies still remained unused.

I have with me a large pack of chilli powder, curry powder, and other instant pastes. I don’t know how to cook using these spices and that’s why I still have plenty of them left. I do think that some of the things I brought with me are not necessary. It just made my bag heavier. (Lina, Malaysia, Int. 2)

I know at some point I will miss some Singaporean food so I have instant paste to make some of the dishes I really like. In the end, I feel that some of the food I brought was wastage because I didn’t use them at all. When I cook, I don’t use the instant paste and I only use basic ingredient instead. (Zimi, Singapore, Int. 2)

The perception that ethnic ingredients might not be available in the UK changes when the students discovered more varieties of specialty and ethnic food stores selling imported food products from their home country.

I find that the food I brought with me is available here especially at the Thai shop in town centre. It was the same brand and even though the price is expensive, I was so excited to find them and I know that if some things ever run out, I don’t have to ask my sister to send them to me. (Habib, Malaysia, Int. 2)

Authentic ingredients to prepare and cook home country food were available in most supermarkets and ethnic food stores. As the international students continued to discover more food stores, they realised that the food brought from home or having some food shipped in when the supplies run out was not necessary.

Sharma et al. (2009) suggested that students living outside home take more responsibility for their diet because they need to undertake the role of preparing their own food. In one study on convenience orientation as food motivation among college students, Marquis (2005) found that convenience-oriented students were less likely to possess cooking skills or to be introduced to cooking at home. Cooking was perceived to be a complicated task that requires complex
ingredients. Concordant with the finding, Jaycee (female, China) had the same views in the beginning when she first arrived and refused to cook her own food. She claimed the **marginalisation** strategy at the beginning of the transition by abandoning the food she used to eat back home and ‘surviving without cooking’ implicated that she was not ready to take the food provisioning responsibility. Despite the firm belief she could live on convenience food at the beginning of the transition, she commented in the second interview that she became bored and felt her food choice before was mundane.

\[
\text{We always order pizza, almost every day and...it doesn’t feel nice anymore. (Jaycee, China, Int. 2)}
\]

It seemed to be quite typical for the students not to try new food they were unsure of when they first arrived and thus it was perceived the food choice was limited. Zimi (female, Singapore), for example, tend to make the same food choice almost every time when she first came to the UK. The situation has now transformed whereby she bought and consumed a wider variety of food especially vegetables she never had before.

\[
\text{I think there are a wider variety of foods that I am trying now. When I first came here, it was very limited to vegetables and fruit so I feel almost like a vegetarian. (Zimi, Singapore, Int. 2)}
\]

The length of time spent in the UK served more opportunity for the international students to be exposed to various food choices but Mei (female, China) admitted she was more confident with her choice of familiar, healthier, and acceptable food. It was not easy for Mei to **integrate** and adapt to new, unfamiliar food and she was aware that this **separatist** strategy limits her food choice. However, she perceived her food choice to be better and more manageable now compared to when she first arrived.

\[
\text{I think (the confidence) it’s because of the familiarity of the product and the taste. What I want is to be healthy so I choose the things that can help me achieve my goal. I just stick}
\]
to what I’m familiar with (for now). So I just choose the things that I like and I'm comfortable with. (Mei, China, Int. 1)

The students continued to (1) engage with food provisioning tasks, (2) perceive improved accessibility, and availability of more food options, and (3) accept new, unfamiliar foods after three months in the UK. It was found that although food preparation and cooking was perceived time consuming and complicated task especially for students who lacked cooking skills at the beginning, they gradually practiced more cooking, acquired more skills, and increased food provisioning competencies three months into their transition. The students’ perception that readymade and fast food was the best option when they have limited time to prepare food was soon found mundane. They now began cooking simple food, which was more satisfying and considered healthier.

The strong connections of food and its meanings symbolised the feeling of comfort, national, ethnic, and personal identity and memories of family and home country. When this topic was brought up in the second interview, the students admitted that it was not an issue anymore and the students can adapt to the food choices and practices in the UK. Furthermore, the redeveloped skills and competencies in cooking allowed them to make any food want, which made them feel excited.

It is not an issue anymore because I can find Thai shop and Thai ingredients. When I first came here, I was afraid I couldn’t eat the food here or I cannot find the ingredients that I needed for my cooking. But now I guess I'm used to it and everything is ok. (Suntra, Thailand, Int. 2)

I am satisfied with the food I'm eating now. Now that I'm cooking my own food, I feel much better…I don’t have any issue. I can eat everything and now I find it is very interesting to cook your own food. (Jaycee, China, Int. 2)

I am more satisfied eating the food I made than eating shop bought food because sometimes the taste is not good and you already spend a lot of money. I feel like I am more independent now and I’m ready to live on my own. (Neehu, Nigerian, Int. 2)
Despite the complexity and diversified perception on the new food choices, the students admitted they are now beginning to integrate to more new food choices. They perceived it would be difficult to accept and chose separation from unfamiliar new food when they first arrived but the change in time allowed the exposure to more variety of food, developed acceptance and preference to new food choice and consideration to healthier food options. In relation to acculturation, students who practiced separation and marginalisation at the beginning related more to new food choice while continuing tradition practice and they began to integrate the old and new for a positive adjustment experience. The food choice decisions which mostly relied upon recommendations from co-national friends at the beginning of the sojourn was now based on the students own research and it was found they were making more independent food choice decisions. It is concluded that the lack of exposure and experience made the perception on new food choice decisions seem complex at first but gradually became an enjoyable experience for the new international students. The integration strategy practiced during the three months after the students’ arrival, generated acceptance of more new food choices, improved their food choice decision, and developed a significantly better perception on the transition experiences.

9.3 The Adjustment Strategies

Deciding on food choices during grocery shopping and cooking was a complicated task during transition from living at home to independent living because the students’ enactment of being in transition and the food habits they brought from home may differ profoundly in a different environment (i.e. different country, food or resources) (Blichfeldt et al. 2013: 277). Students who acquired skills and competencies in food provisioning before they came to the UK seemed to have more confidence with the new roles and responsibilities in the new environment. However,
students who lack the skills gradually developed a personal food choice system by learning more about grocery shopping and cooking skills. The adjustment strategies that conformed to the integration, marginalisation, separation, and assimilation strategy in food acculturation are discussed next.

Within the three months after arrival, the students formed several adjustment strategies in the food area which improved their experience and adaptation to the new food choice. This section explores the strategies practiced by the international students when making food choice decision, as discussed during the second phase of the accompanied shop and interview. Table 18 summarises the findings on the adjustment strategies developed by the international students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Food acculturation</th>
<th>1st accompanied shop and interview (arrival stage)</th>
<th>2nd accompanied shop and interview (3 months after)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme 2; The adjustment strategies</strong></td>
<td>Inexperience grocery shopping. Very little of no purchase made. Longer shopping trip.</td>
<td>Pre-planned shopping trip. Used a list and budget plan. Shopping more systematic, shorter time but efficient.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Students who lack cooking skills;</strong></td>
<td>The new role of food provisioning tasks was complicated</td>
<td>Regular practice and habitualising the food provisioning tasks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Purchase decision based on what was familiar</td>
<td>Purchased based on value for money. Used coupons and tried new food that was on offer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Convenient food choice (ready meals, fast food) due to time constraint to cook</td>
<td>Better time management Practiced simple cooking that can speed up process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cautious over food choice, trust issues on labeling, claims and food ingredients</td>
<td>Made regular purchase of familiar food with labeling, claims &amp; ingredients that the students trusted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reliability and dependencies on co-national’s food choice recommendation</td>
<td>Made own research and more independent food choice decisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Food purchase was very limited but consists of more convenient food due to lack of cooking skills</td>
<td>Improved cooking skills and purchase amount increased because healthier food ingredients bought</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Saving budget on food through cooking | Saved budget through dieting and not eating out
---|---
Eating and preparing food alone | Improved social and cooking skills through social gatherings with friends

Table 18: The Adjustment Strategies Developed by the International Students

Grocery shopping was observed to be more of a familiarisation trip during the first accompanied shop (i.e. observing store’s layout and reading labels to understand the ingredients). In the second trip, the students demonstrated more confidence in food choice decision because more food was purchased and they conducted a much shorter shopping trip but efficient. The students developed skills and competencies in grocery shopping such as using shopping list as a guide, preparing meal and a budget plan, which helped ease their food purchase decision.

I feel more confident with my shopping now. I have prepared a list in advance, so I know what to buy and where it is situated. It can be time saving and you can just take and go away and I have spent less than half an hour. (Jaycee, China, Int. 2)

It was mentioned in the first interview that Habib (female, Malaysia) used to follow her family for grocery shopping back in her home country but was never in charge on her own. It was complicated for Habib to make food purchase now because she had to conduct independent grocery shopping in a foreign country with most of the food choices unfamiliar at the beginning of her transition. Simultaneously, the grocery shopping activity grew on her and she enjoyed doing it more by exploring and purchasing food in various places including the local markets at the university in the town centre nearby and discovered more international food stores. She experienced more local British produce of fruits, vegetables, fish, and seafood. Habib’s redeveloped competencies in grocery shopping influenced and integrated her new food choice, whereby she bought wider varieties of food and had total control of the types and quantity of food purchased including her spending.
I used a list so I know how much to buy. Sometimes I buy different so that is not on the list but I know what is inside so I can try. Now I also use a budget because I don’t want to overspend. (Habib, Malaysia, Int. 2)

The second stage of accompanied shop and interview also captured a more positive experience in developing and constructing new skills and competencies when managing the new food choices among those who were not very well-versed in the food provisioning practice. It was claimed that these students were more confident in their grocery shopping and food preparation because they had managed to habitualise the food provisioning task within the three months stay in the UK.

Yes I think I am more confident because I know what kind of food that I want to buy that I often buy. I spend less time doing shopping and I know where the item is placed. I already know what type of food I'm going to cook. (Suntra, Thailand, Int. 2)

I know what I buy every week but before I go shopping, I will check my fridge, cupboard or what is in the kitchen… I buy the same thing every week so that is easier.’ (Mei, China, Int. 2)

The task of grocery shopping and cooking increasingly became a routine for the “novice” students, therefore the food choice decision were regularly preplanned and reciprocated, which made the decision-making process much easier. Blichfeldt et al. (2013) described the situation as the “habitualisation” of newly developed food patterns, which in turn, meant that everyday food decisions were accomplished without much effort or elaborate decision making.

Several other factors influenced the food purchase and food choice at this later stage, such as being more knowledgeable about the unfamiliar food available in terms of taste and application in cooking, better time management allocated for food preparation and cooking, and in Suntra’s (female, Thailand) case, coupon promotions from the supermarket during the second accompanied shop. The coupons were rewards sent to her through a supermarket’s loyalty program that she joined, consisting of monthly cash voucher and discounted coupons. It influenced Suntra to make
more food purchase based on the coupons offer although the food was not needed. This was a change in the way Suntra’s purchases were based upon, because it was mentioned in the first interview that she only bought familiar food she needed. The value for money coupons influenced Suntra’s integration strategy to add new food choices.

It’s good to use the coupons to save some money. For this one, the coupon encourages me to buy (sweet potatoes) and I have to think of the menu or recipe to cook it. (Suntra, Thailand, Int. 2)

The students simultaneously developed a systematic food choice decision process based on the lessons learnt from previous experience when they first arrived. Neehu (female, Nigeria) stated the skills acquired and considerations made within the three months of her sojourn, in order for the food provisioning practice to become more manageable, improved and speed up cooking process, and simplified food choice decisions.

As a new student, you have to think about your studies first but if you can manage your food, then you can focus more on your studies…But if you are a good cook then you can make everything simple and quick. (Neehu, Nigeria, Int. 2)

The students also made meal planning and cooking schedule in order to manage their time better. Having food prepared in advance was still a practice after three months into the transition because it was the best way for them to have more homemade, satisfying meals although they were busy with their studies.

I will prepare two day meals so I save more time…Or sometimes I will cook during dinner time and save it until lunch and dinner tomorrow. (Mei, China, Int. 2)

The students were more cautious about the food claims, labelling, and ingredients of the food before they made a purchase and spent a considerable amount of time before making food choice. Few months after their arrival, it was admitted they were more relax when carrying the tasks of food provisioning. They made regular purchase of certain food that did not require them to check
the labels all over again. Kama (male, Malaysia), for example, claimed that he made more purchase because he can trust the food claims more.

I think after a few times buying the same brand or product, you don’t read the ingredients anymore. I was very cautious when I first came here, do you remember? I was constantly checking the product using my phone at the store and carefully selecting things that I can eat. I feel more confident now. (Kama, Malaysia, Int. 2)

The students’ reliance of food purchase and consumption recommendations from co-national friends when the new students first arrived influenced their separatist strategy in the beginning, purchasing only the food felt familiar, reliable and safe to them. It was found that they gradually did their own research and information gathering on the new foods available in store and food outlets. The effort revealed that the new international students started to integrate and made more independent food choice decisions.

I have bought some food that I never bought or eat before and that was something I discovered by myself after careful reading and understanding of the ingredients. I also find myself to be more knowledgeable about new food and ingredients because of the habit of reading the food labels. (Naz, Singapore, Int. 2)

I would have done some research on the place (restaurant). That is what I always do before I decide to buy or eat somewhere. (Kama, Malaysia, Int. 2)

Blichfeldt et al. (2013) mentioned in their study that the new responsibilities of grocery shopping and cooking within a student’s budget normally involve constantly establishing new habits and practices. In accordance to this some alterations to the newly formed food choice system was necessary in certain situations. Adam (male, Brunei), for example, is now practicing new habits during his grocery shopping, (such as comparing the prices of food in different store, identifying food n offer or discounted prices, product positioning, and buying the same product to ease decision-making. This showed that he was more competent in food purchase decisions now compared to when he first arrived.
I definitely spend less after getting to know the price in different stores (ASDA, Tesco, and Sainsbury’s). I read labels more, and look for 2-for-1 prices and so on. I also try to see which ones are more popular based on packaging, where they’re situated on the shelves, etc. I always tend to stick to the same brand I’m confident with. (Adam, Brunei, Int. 2)

The amount of food purchased in the second accompanied shop increased, and it was observed that more cooking ingredients were purchased compared to readymade foods. The students revealed that they spent more on food because the frequency of cooking increased significantly. The first few grocery shopping were more like a familiarisation trip to learn about the new food available, therefore not much food were purchased. In the second accompanied shop, the students increased their purchase because they knew exactly what they needed.

I cook more so I bought more fresh and raw ingredients. I don’t think I was eating healthily during the first few months I came here. I bought whatever I feel like eating. But now I am practicing a healthier lifestyle so I only bought healthy food. (Fasha, Malaysia, Int. 2)

I bought a lot more stuff now. So I bought everything that I need once a week. But now I am more confident about the item I needed so I don’t need to browse around anymore. (Kama, Malaysia, Int. 2)

The cost of food, however, was a burden to some students and they decided to control their food intake, eliminate certain food from their diet, or not eat out in order to save money. It was mentioned in the first interview that cooking their own food was perceived to be saving money, but it was later found in the second interview that the students also practiced other strategies to control their spending on food.

I am on a strict diet now and I have managed to cut the cost of food. I eat less and no carb at all. I can manage the cost much better since I decided to go on a diet. I became very disciplined and getting used to not eating too much. (Lina, Malaysia, Int. 2)

I cook my own food now so I won’t go to any of these outlets because I want to save money. The same amount of money spent on a certain meal at Pizzaman for example, could be used to buy a whole week’s vegetables for me. I can save money. (Zimi, Singapore, Int. 2)

This is why I don’t spend more time going out and eating out…my budget is less because I don’t spend on food outside. (Mei, China, Int. 2)
Sometimes the students did not feel competent enough to develop a personal food practice hence the reliance on convenient food. Jaycee mentioned she enjoyed her freedom so she tried to take on the role as an independent person and started to take care of everyday life practices such as food preparation and cooking. She was proud of her accomplishment and shared them with her parent.

I cook very simple food that I learned by myself. Oh I was so excited. At first I took photos of everything I cook and send it to my family, my friends. My dad said to me, oh you are a better cook now than your mother. I know it’s just flattery but I was so happy. I think I'm proud of myself because I can cook now. It does prove I can take care of myself now. (Jaycee, China, Int. 2)

The international students mentioned that they started to try more cooking because of the influence from friends. Sharing cooking activities made it more interesting and gave confidence to improve their skills. Neehu (female, Nigeria), for example, changed her preference of readymade and convenience food at the beginning to preparing her own food from scratch. She admitted that her friend motivated her to try and practice more cooking.

It really helps if you cook with someone else, with friends. So I have this friend and although she is from another country and we decided to cook together. This is when I started to cook for myself and when she is around, I develop this confidence to try cooking. I think because of this I was thinking, ok I have cooked at home so let me try it here. So I go around looking for ingredients and cook. Before that I never tried. (Neehu, Nigeria, Int. 2)

One of the challenges in developing skills and competencies in managing new food choice is to keep the practice habitual and make food choice decisions much simpler. Constructing a food choice system increasingly became important and has improved the students’ way of managing food choice.

Yes I am better at cooking now. When I'm at home, my mum prepares everything and I don’t need to do anything. But now I need to worry about what I eat, what should I do today, what should I eat for lunch, what I need to prepare, I have classes so I need to prepare early and everything else, I need to consider them. Cooking must be done as fast as possible so I can saves time and do something else that I want to do. (Mei, China, Int. 2)
In developing new skills and competencies, some students preferred to have somebody to guide them because they were not confident to do it themselves. Aisha (female, Kuwait) had her mother to come and stayed with her after the New Year and she took the chance to learn more about cooking. It was a struggle but Aisha was determined to take control of the new role. Her mother’s involvement in introducing several easy menu and recipes also helped Aisha to integrate between ethnic dishes and Westernized food.

She also made me a pasta dish and which took around 20 minutes to prepare but when I tried to make it, it took me more than an hour. It was really just three steps but I can’t follow it. When she was cooking it was like she cut things and directly cooks them. For me I need to cut it first, put them in bowl, get everything ready then only I can start to cook. I still struggle with it but I’m much more confident now. If I practice more I can be really good. (Aisha, Kuwait, Int. 2)

It was found that there were several celebrations and events in between the students’ arrival and the second interview. They were more traditional dishes being prepared to celebrate these events and most of the students prepared traditional home dishes to be shared among co-national and international friends. Mei, who often avoided any social contact with other people, had joined more gatherings which positively improved her social and most importantly, cooking skills.

I planned to have a social gathering during the holidays with my friends, cooking and eating. (Mei, China, Int. 2)

We would have a gathering and I will have a bunch of my friends coming over and we cook home country food or I will cook with my other housemates. (Zimi, Singapore, Int. 2)

The finding suggests that it gradually became more important for the international students to acquire and practice more skills and competencies in food provisioning. Students with previous experience in food choice decision including grocery shopping and cooking before they came to the UK found it harder to keep practicing mainly because it became a mundane yet demanding role. However, the students who just started to develop food provisioning skills found the
experience to be enjoyable and it made them proud to be able to manage their new life in a much better, proper way. The food choice decision made required less effort and was a much simpler process due to the development of habitual practices and a more organised system of food shopping and preparation.

The adjustment strategies practiced by the international students helped ease their acculturation experience during the transition. The students made a lot of improvements by acquiring and developing skills and competencies in food provisioning. A few strategies remained constant during the three months of their stay because it was working well for the students and made food choice decision a simplified process. For example, they shopped only for familiar food and repeatedly prepare the same dish. They gradually developed cooking skills in order to eat healthier food and save money. As a conclusion, the findings indicated that the food choice decision was a process that constantly redeveloped, and requiring planning and strategising to acquire more skills and competencies in food provisioning. The process helped eased the adjustment stress, boost integration to the new food choice, and create a positive acculturation experience. The next section explains the food acculturation and dietary changes that occurred within three months after the arrival of the international students.

### 9.4 Changes in Food Choice and Food Practice

In the study on dietary changes of Asian students in the US, Pan et al. (1999) highlighted changes in eating patterns (skipping meal, unhealthy snacks) and the consumption frequency of food groups (increased consumption of fats and sweets and decreased consumption of vegetables). Similarly, Liu et al. (2007) found that there was an increased consumption of snack food and reduced
consumption of fresh food among college students in China and these conditions were related to perceived stress and depression. Furthermore, Asian students in the UK changed their diets by substituting local foods or skipping meals because preparing traditional home food was too time consuming (Hartwell et al., 2011). Pan et al. (1999) mentioned that certain traditional dishes remained intact and at the same time, food from other cultures was incorporated by substitution, addition, or modification. Loomes and Croft (2013) mentioned that international students faced additional challenges when adapting to a different country and culture and are therefore are more prone to stress, anxiety, and depression.

Based on the studies mentioned, this section will explore in detail the changes in food choice and expand it by including the changes in food preparation and cooking practice, as mentioned by the international students in the second interview three months after they first arrived at the UK. Finally it will conclude the students’ adjustment and their food acculturation experience. Table 19 summarises the findings relating to the changes in food choice and food practice of the internationals students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Findings 3: Changes in food choice and practice</th>
<th>1st accompanied shop and interview (arrival stage)</th>
<th>2nd accompanied shop and interview (3 months after)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Theme 1; Cooking and food preparation practice** | **Students who lack cooking skills:** Prepared simple food that require less cooking | Developed more cooking skills  
Made fresher food from scratch  
Tried new recipes |
| | **Students with cooking skills:**  
Cooked more home style dishes  
Tried more new recipes  
Cooked with friends | Chose simple and convenient meal  
Home style dishes “too complicated”  
Too lazy to cook  
Prefer to cook alone |
| | **Re-creation of simple ethnic dishes** | Re-creation of more complicated ethnic dishes due to improved skills |
| | **Not being able to cook because shared kitchen was dirty** | Improved kitchen condition  
Able to cook properly  
Tried more recipes |
| **Theme 2;** | **Needed to eat rice every day. Satisfying and fulfilling.** | **Substituted with potato, pasta, bread**  
**Able to adjust well with new choice** |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Changes in food choice</th>
<th>Not feeling complete without having rice.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unfavorable food choice caused weight gain (consumption of sugar and sweet foods)</td>
<td>Became a vegetarian. Organic food choice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concern over ethical food and chose organic products</td>
<td>Concern over value for money, Bought cheaper, discounted foods.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skipping breakfast</td>
<td>Increased breakfast consumption but replaced traditional breakfast item with quick-fix meals such as oats, toast and eggs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excited about independent life</td>
<td>Weight control through dieting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chose food that was restricted/controlled back home</td>
<td>Controlled intake of high carbohydrate food (rice, noodle, bread).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular consumption of dessert and sweet food</td>
<td>Reverted back to parents’ food choice in home country.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concern over appearance and body weight</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 3: No changes</td>
<td>Prepared and consumed the same food over and over again.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepared and consumed the same food over and over again. Cooked food and freeze for later use</td>
<td>Prepared and consumed the same food over and over again. Cooked food and froze for later use.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concern over the trust of halal food handling and preparation</td>
<td>Concern over the trust of halal food handling and preparation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not being exposed, experience and identify authentic British food.</td>
<td>Not being exposed experienced, and able to identify authentic British food.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 19: Changes in Food Choice and Practice**

The new international students practiced multiple strategies when they construct food choice decisions. The combination of strategies was described in Falk et al. (1996) as a repertoire, where multiple strategies are used simultaneously, sequentially, or situationally. For example, the students marginalised their food choice during weekdays where more convenient food were chosen, and integrated more new food into their recipe when preparing food in the weekend because they had more time to spent for cooking. The next section will discuss the international students’ food acculturation strategies and their enactment of food provisioning three months after their arrival.

For international students who lack cooking skills, it was perceived that cooking was complicated at first because the task required too much ingredients and took a lot of time. Due to these reasons, the students felt discouraged to cook and started to *marginalise* their food choice indicated by not
having any ethnic dishes or by assimilating to the new food choice. However, it was learnt in the second interview that the more the student practice cooking, the simpler it became and the students were able to enjoy cooking much more. It was found that the students integrated and used more new foods when cooking. Through this, the students managed to totally eliminate ready meals and convenient food from their diet.

I never think much about food because I can’t cook much but I’m starting to enjoy doing it. If I have more time I would try new recipes. Even I eat something simple that I make, I feel satisfied than buying the ready food. The cost of ready food can be used for two or three days cooking. I have to think about the time because I can’t cook when I have class. I love to cook during weekend and I will find time to make something especially for dinner. (Aisha, Kuwait, Int. 2)

I bought more food to be cooked. I don’t have ready meals anymore and I cook by myself now. I think cooking is not that troublesome as I had expected. I just put everything in the pan and I think it’s more convenient. (Jaycee, China, Int. 2)

It was noted that during the second accompanied shop that the food purchase increased with more fresh ingredients bought. The students admitted they were doing more cooking now compared to when they first came here. Addin (male, Saudi Arabia), for example, improved his food choice decisions skills and became more competent in grocery shopping and meal planning.

I think it was much better than the first two months. I’m confident about my grocery shopping. Not much choice but I’m confident about what I needed. Before this…I don’t know what to prepare and just see what is in the fridge. Now I cook a lot and keep it in the fridge for at least two days and its saving time. (Addin, Saudi Arabia, Int. 2)

Students who lacked cooking skills were found to be separatists with monotonous food choice in the beginning. They were highly dependent on the instant food supply brought with them when they came to the UK. The second interview revealed more frequent cooking practice using fresher ingredients where the students integrated simple ethnic meal with Western dishes. Suntra (female, Thailand) chose to make both Thai and Westernised meals as she learnt more cooking. She planned to bake in the future and bought baking ingredients. Preserving food that was familiar and at the
same time trying out new and unfamiliar recipes while developing new method enabled a much more interesting session because the students can try something they never did before. The intention to prepare food for her daughter, whom she never cooks for before, motivated Suntra to try new recipes and integrate her food choice.

I cook something really easy and most of the time its Thai food. I don’t cook much Western food like spaghetti or steak but if I did, it will be something really fast and simple like canned soup, macaroni and cheese or readymade sauce. My daughter is coming this April. I planned to cook for her when she comes soon. I never cook for her before, rarely; because my mother in law is the one who cooks for us back in Thailand. But now I have a chance to cook a meal for my family. I have tried some recipes that I think she will like. I have to cook balance meal and for breakfast, lunch and dinner. If on my own, I only cook something simple and fast but maybe it has to be rice with different other meats and vegetables for my family. (Suntra, Thailand, Int. 2)

In accordance to Hartwell et al. (2011), preparing home dishes like rice required too much effort so the students substituted this with other food that required minimal or no preparation at all. The preparation of traditional home country dishes such as Asian style of meal consisting of rice or noodle with several meat and vegetable accompaniment was abandoned, and the students assimilated to the common practice perceived simple and quick. It was revealed in the second interview that some students were not as enthusiastic about food provisioning as they were when they first arrived in the UK. The recreation of home style dishes which was frequently practiced was now considered “too complicated to prepare,” according to Airil (male, Malaysia).

I think nowadays it’s all about eating something easy and not too complicate to prepare. Thinking about it, it’s not about being lazy but you are alone so you don’t have to eat something special every day. Back home it used to be white rice with three or four other accompanied dishes like meat, fish and vegetables. (Airil, Malaysia, Int. 2)

Similarly, Fasha (female, Malaysia) opted to limit her intake on meat item because it was difficult to prepare and substituted with the much easier vegetable options.

You can see from the food I bought that I don’t eat much now. Sometimes having just cereal is enough. (Fasha, Malaysia, Int. 2)
The independent living during transition stage changed the way the students viewed life because personal food provisioning responsibilities demanded individual commitment and enactment to make the adjustment work. Airil (male, Malaysia), who was very excited and started to cook his own food since his arrival, felt that cooking required too much time commitment and he was not able to habituate the food practice.

I was too lazy to cook and would choose to prepare something quick to prepare and eat. I used to cook… and trying out a lot of recipes before (when I first came to UK) but now, it’s all about making something speedy. I cook on my own and I don’t want to spend a lot of time cooking anymore. No more cooking with my friends on the weekend as I was too lazy. (Airil, Malaysia, Int. 2)

It was found that the international students corresponded to a separatist strategy when they first arrived, whereby they preferred to recreate ethnic style dishes because the food offered comfort and more satisfying feeling. Ethnic food familiarity and taste were among the important factors that influence food choice decisions reported in Furst et al. (1996) and Devine et al., (1999). More accessible and sufficient availability of authentic home food ingredients facilitated and influenced home or ethnic food choice which to some students was the culturally ideal food during transition. The students were found to continue re-creating ethnic dishes throughout their stay. More ethnic ingredients were available locally and the students improved their cooking skills, thus the recreation of the ethnic dish was made easier.

It was like normal stuff like rice and chicken. Not strange things but home style meal like Jollof rice. The other time I made big plantains, which was nice. Then I made beans porridge for my friends. (Neehu, Nigeria, Int. 2)

Abandoning traditional food and assimilating to new food choice meant the students would lose the comfort of familiar, fulfilling, and more satisfying feeling from the food. However, in the situation of migrating to a new country, the students sometimes felt it was necessary to assimilate to the new food choice because of pressure from time, resources, and availability constraint in
ethnic food choices. Kama (male Malaysia) found that he was able to assimilate and abandon the habit of eating rice (a staple in Malaysia) every day. Kama, who claimed being incomplete without having rice every day, managed to gradually replace it with some other energy-dense foods. He explained,

Not much rice included in my food. I always have rice, every day, and every meal but now I didn’t have rice as much. It used to be that if I don’t have rice, it feels like I'm missing something for the day. I know rice is the staple food but now I'm eating pasta, bread, noodles and sometimes, rice. It was hard at first, but after a while, I can get used to it. (Kama, Malaysia, Int. 2)

Naz (male, Malaysia) mentioned he had some problem with the shared kitchen at the university accommodation he was staying because it was always dirty, so he decided to cook in his room and used the food he brought from home. This signifies a separatist strategy which limited his food choice. After three months, the situation changed and Naz was now able to fully utilise the kitchen, practice cooking, try more recipes, cook proper food, integrate his food choice, and develop a food system and meal planning.

It will take longer time and more ingredients but now that I have the opportunity to use the kitchen, I choose to cook food I missed from home. When I use to cook in my room using the rice cooker, choice was limited and I will try to make something as easy as possible and I can’t cook a lot because I only have a small rice cooker…I have learned more recipes and I can practice more cooking (Naz, Singapore, Int. 2)

When Mei (female, China) first arrived in the UK, she had problems accepting new foods and made unfavourable food choice of food that used to be restricted by her parents at home, which led to weight gain and stress. Unable to recreate the food back home or make a proper meal due to lack of cooking skills and perceived time constraint, the separation strategy worsened the situation but she finally had the courage to speak to a counsellor and her mother about the problem. The support received made her gradually change her food choice and influenced by her parents, Mei
decided to practice vegetarianism. She reverted to making meal commonly prepared at home that
to her, signified a healthier option.

I cook every day because I want to avoid eating snacks. Even though I just have potato and
onions but I still want to cook. I think my eating habit is a little bit different from others
because when I'm at home, my parents were not like other parents. They just eat like boiled
potatoes with nothing because they think it’s healthier and I'm starting to do that now. I
sort of change back to the way my parents taught me. My parents, their choices and decision
may have influence me. (Mei, China, Int. 2)

Although some students perceived organic food as costly and average in taste, Mei, on the other
hand, thought that the organic food option was healthier, reasonably priced, and the taste was
acceptable. Now that she is a vegetarian, she began using more organic food. The changes
improved her lifestyle and she was coping well with the new food choice.

Actually I started to buy organic foods because of my parents. They think this is very
important and a part of life. I know that before I came here but I didn’t practice but now I
just start. I think if I change the way I eat, I can improve my health. I enjoy doing this
because it is very interesting, you know to have something that you are doing with your
food, eating organic food and finding out more about it. (Mei, China, Int. 2)

It was interesting that Adam (male, Brunei), who bought mostly organic food when he first came
to the UK, was now more concerned about purchasing food that is value for money. There was
less organic food purchase and he began to go to supermarkets and food chains that were perceived
as “low cost.” One of the factors explained was pre occupation with academic matters that changed
his priority in food choice. In addition to decreased consumption of organic food, Adam’s cooking
was less complicated compared to when he first arrived (made mostly restaurant style dishes).

I tend to just go and get whatever seems decent and low cost (no more organic food), but I
wouldn't say my diet has been any healthier than last time. I've been feeling a bit pre-
occupied. Recently I've just been cooking simple food like baked chicken and omelettes. I
occasionally eat out in the weekends, and recently I've been ordering takeout at least once
a week. Cooking at home has been as simple as I can manage. (Adam, Brunei, Int. 2)

Similar to Pan et al.’s (1999) study, breakfast is the most commonly skipped meal among the
international students. In the first interview, the students admitted they skipped breakfast often due
to not having time to prepare anything because they were rushing to class. In the second interview, it was found that the breakfast consumption increased, with the traditional breakfast items back home *integrated* with simpler, more convenient, quick-fix meals such as cereals, toast, or eggs. It was found that the integration of food choice for certain mealtime especially during breakfast contributed to the increment.

I would have either oat or egg for breakfast and the same for evening meal. It’s totally different from the normal breakfast I would have back home. (Lina, Malaysia, Int. 2)

When I wake up, I would have a chocolate drink and bread. (Kama, Malaysia, Int. 2)

The students also commented it was less common for them to skip other meals but often, lunch and dinner were at odd times due to engagement with academic work. It was admitted that improved cooking skills and meal planning contributed to the positive adjustment and food provisioning management.

I never skipped any meal but the time may not be fixed. (Suntra, Thailand, Int. 2)

I don’t skip meal but I find myself eating at different times because I was too busy. (Naz, Singapore, Int. 2)

Certain food choice and practice remained constant since the international students first arrived. The students prepared food in large portions and froze them for later use. They would eat the same food for a few days by reheating when needed.

I will cook a lot, for two or three days and freeze them. I have intentions to make more home style cooking now. (Naz, Singapore, Int2)

Students who were only able to cook something simple tend to make the same dish repeatedly. It was found that Kama (male, Malaysia), in the second interview, revealed that he learnt a few more recipes since he came to the UK and he made the same dish daily. The *routinisation* of food preparation simplifies the food choice decision (Falk et al., 1996).
I have this habit if I made a dish; I would make the same over and over until I'm sick of it. It was soup and fried rice for almost a month, the pasta with chicken and now soup. When I cook it was normally for the one or two day’s meal. Each time I want to make a new dish I will make sure that it is a simple menu. (Kama, Malaysia, Int. 2)

The concern over body image and healthy appearance was an issue for the students since the start of the transition. To overcome this issue, the students were found to learn a better, healthier way to cook food and consumed more vegetables and fruits, which was believed to provide them with the nutrients needed. In addition, the students did more exercise by joining the gym, which was practiced since their arrival and still continued. Those who claimed they were trying to reduce weight in the first interview were still cautious about their food intake.

I have plans for weight control so I try not to eat more meat, noodles, rice. Actually my body needs it so maybe I just eat bread in the morning and only a little meat. (Mei, China, Int.2)

The choice of eating out enabled the international students to experience other food choice and sometimes helped ease the cravings for ethnic home dishes. It was mentioned in the first interview that the Muslim international students had some issues when deciding to eat out because the availability of halal food choice was limited. It was found later in the second interview that the Muslim students were still facing the same issue. However, since their cooking skills had improved, they were able to try more recipes and prepare halal food on their own.

I wasn't really aware of this issue when I first came here. I just thought that if it is halal then that’s it. I never thought of how the food is handled, how it is served or anything like that. Now I’m much more aware and careful especially when the place also serves pork and we can see how the food was prepared. Even when they do wear plastic gloves, it must be that the food don’t touch each other and that is the most important when I consider eating out. (Naz, Malaysia, Int. 2)

The ongoing concern over halal food’s availability and authenticity implicated how strongly the Muslim students felt towards retaining their religious practice and beliefs in Islam. The effort to revitalise the halal requirement was perceived vital and of importance especially during transition.
The influence of personal factors in retaining identity as a Muslim without compromising halal food reflected the *separatist* strategy during acculturation.

Several studies mentioned the perception towards British food to be bland, convenient, fast food, and not spicy (Jamal, 1998; Brown, 2009a; Cappelini et al., 2010; Brown et al., 2010). However, it was unclear what constituted a British meal and therefore, the international students in this study were not able to identify and express their perception on British food experience. It was mentioned in the first interview that the students were able to observe the food that their British friends prepared and consumed, or tried some food (i.e. shepherd’s pie) that was thought to be British but was commonly prepared in their home country, but still these experiences were uncertain to them. It was found that the international students were still unaware about British food during the second interview. As explained by Neehu (female, Nigeria) and Aisha (female, Kuwait) they did not understand the element that embodies British food. Aisha therefore concluded that food was not a strong identification of the British culture.

As an international student, I do find it difficult to identify what exactly is traditional British food. There was one time I asked a friend and even she couldn’t tell me what it is. You hear things like fish and chip is the traditional British food but you don’t actually know what it means. I don’t know what their food is. Is it jacket potato? It might just be some basic meal, maybe just fish finger, I don’t know. (Neehu, Nigeria, Int. 2)

I never tried British food yet because I'm not sure what their food is. You could find Chinese or Japanese restaurant but I couldn’t identify British restaurant. I don’t think food strongly part of the British culture. I don’t know about it. (Aisha, Kuwait, Int. 2)

Some of the food choice strategy remained unchanged because it was acknowledged that it was an important factor that influenced the food choice decision. The length of time spent in the UK (three months into the transition) may be too short to acculturate or impose any changes to these food choices and practices.
9.5 Summary

The food acculturation of new international students three months after their arrival was discussed. The findings revealed that the adjustment journey after the migration for the new international students generated contrasting and differences in food choice and food provisioning, practices. Three major themes emerged that explained the changes in food provisioning such as grocery shopping, food preparation, and cooking practices. The international students practiced integration, marginalisation, separation, and routinisation strategy in the adjustment to new food. The repertoire of acculturation strategy practiced informed that the international students also performed multiple strategies in constructing their food choice but they did not fully assimilate to the host country’s food because of limited exposure and experience of the British’s food culture and friendship network.

It was found that the students who lack cooking skills at the beginning of their sojourn began to learn cooking to improve their skills and competencies. Students who can cook were having difficulties habitualising the practice and commitment issues towards cooking every day thus chose more convenient food as the easier option. The students’ confidence to try and learn about the new food increased and they made more independent food choice decisions. Accessibility and availability of ethnic food were perceived better compared to when they first arrived. The grocery shopping was more systematic with preplanned shopping list and budget set in advance, and the trip was shorter but more efficient based on the food purchase and using coupons to save money. The students who lacked cooking skills made effort to learn to cook from friends and families, which made the task more enjoyable and less complicated. They also made regular purchases of
familiar food, making the food choice decision easier. Cooking, dieting, and not eating out was practiced to save money.

Students also joined more cooking activity as a medium to socialise and share their food with others. The preference over unhealthy food consumption due to stress was substituted with organic vegetarian food. In addition, students chose more value for money food that was on offer of discounted price and students began to shop at low-cost supermarket chains. The students replaced traditional food item during meal time especially breakfast with more simple dishes. Concerns over healthy appearance made the students continued their diet and healthy lifestyle, and they also began to abandon staple food which was considered a necessity when they first arrived. Finally, it was found certain practices of food choice were maintained simply because the strategy helped them adjust better. The food acculturation indicated that the integration of food choices was the commonly practiced acculturation strategy and the students were not fully assimilated to the new food choice after three months into transition. The last chapter will present the contributions, recommendations for future research, limitations, and conclusions.
Chapter 10: Conclusions

10.1 Introduction

This chapter concludes the main findings of this study and its relevance to the aims and objectives to explore the food acculturation process of new international students in the UK. This chapter begins with an overview of the aim and objectives, research questions, and the methodology employed. This will be followed by the contributions, recommendations for future research, limitations, and conclusions.

10.2 Overview of the Findings

This study aimed to explore the food acculturation of international students. In order to understand the food acculturation phenomena in more detail, the following three objectives were established to help explain the process through the Life Course of new international students:

- To investigate the exposure, experience, and perception of food choices for new international students at the early phase of transition
- To elucidate the Life Course experience and factors that influence the food choices of international students
- To examine changes in the food choice system and food acculturation process during the transition

The next section will present how the findings from the main study supported each of the objectives.
10.3 The Exposure, Experience, and Perception of the Food Choices Available in the UK

The first objective of this study was to investigate the exposure, experience, and perception of food choice for new international students at the early phase of transition. The findings revealed the food choices during grocery shopping, food preparation and consumption exposure, and experiences of the international students during the first stage of the data collection. The key highlights of this study indicated that the prevalence of food related challenges and adjustment strategies employed to manage food choice decision were diverse and dependable upon self-efficacy, previous skills and competencies acquired before the transition, and the enactment of food provisioning practice.

During the first accompanied shop and in-depth interview, the international students were very anxious, careful, and cautious as they explored the new food more before making food choice decisions. Some of the perceived thoughts of new food choices were formed before the transition. The food choice decision when the students first arrived relied heavily on the recommendations, habits, and practices of other co-national friends in the UK, previous food provisioning experience, and the availability of familiar foods. The British food and culture experiences were very limited and friendship network with the locals were almost non-existent.

The new international students’ migration became a turning point from the comfort of family home where food was commonly being provided for to independent living and managing personal food provisioning practice in a new country.
Chapter 6 highlights the experiences of food choices and practices of new international students and the variations of food purchased, preferred, prepared, and consumed, indicated by the students’ enactment in food provisioning. It was found the students made healthier food choices, purchased ethical food, had unhealthy food habits, experienced ethnic meals, integrated new foods into their diet, and relied upon the food brought from home. Most of the findings were in line with previous studies on international students’ food choices (Pan et al., 1999; Collins, 2008, Brown et al., 2010). However, the influence of healthy appearance, ethical food choice, continuance of food habits back home, resistance to abandon home food, and perception towards British foods are the themes requiring further study and comparison across time in order for more significant patterns to appear.

10.4 Elucidating Life Course Perspective on Food Acculturation

The second objectives of this study was to elucidate the life course perspective. It was found that the students’ personal, social, cultural ideals, and resources (money and skills) were strongly related to their food choice decisions. Migrating to the UK required the students to redefine and redevelop their food choice process, which was found to be complicated at the beginning of the sojourn because the food habits and practices in the past were not adequate or sufficient in the present life transition. The students had to reconsider the factors concerning their new roles and responsibilities in (1) personal food provisioning, (2) skills and competencies acquired, (3) body image and healthy appearance, (4) food that conformed to their religious beliefs, (4) the food cost, and (5) the symbols of the food eaten in the new country.

The new roles and responsibilities explained the personal factor influence on the food decision process. The international students acknowledged the responsibilities over the independent and
personal food choice and food provisioning practice that they have to manage besides the demanding roles as full time students. At the beginning, it was obvious that the students who previously handled food provisioning matters back home were able to manage better than those who were less experienced. This was evident through the execution of confident grocery shopping, food preparation, and cooking since they arrived at the UK. “Novice” students, however, were found trying to become familiar with the tasks and new food choice, constructing new patterns in food choice and practice, and developing food choice system. Therefore mastering these strategies were crucial for successful transition and management of the new roles and responsibilities in food provisioning.

The skills and competencies practiced and acquired in the new country determined the students’ food choice accessibility and availability. With the resources to cook and recreate ethnic dishes as the culturally ideal food choice during transition, the students were able to cope with the adjustment stress better. Those who lacked cooking skills, on the other hand, resorted to convenient factor in food choice decision, which led to unfavourable food habits, weight gain, and occasional stress and low mood.

The personal and social factors when considering healthy appearance and body image influenced healthier food habits, dieting, healthy lifestyle, and controlled intake of certain foods. The students found it difficult to practice these strategies back home. The opportunity to control and manage personal food provisioning influenced and enabled the internationals students to have better control over their food choice decisions.
The study found the Muslim international students experienced complication identifying and deciding halal food choice when they first arrived. The students expressed concerns over trust issues relating to halal food choice, which limited the variations of new food choice accessible to them. It was perceived that food choice was a major challenge during the transition besides academic stress because the students were inexperienced, and because of the different food culture and limited accessibility due to life course perspective factors. For example, the Muslim international students had to limit their food choice because of strict dietary regulations of halal food. The personal factor of retaining a Muslim identity through the choice of food that conformed to Islamic belief influenced their food choice. The dietary restrictions and preferences in relation to familiar foods was very significant during the initial stage of the transition and kept individuals from experimenting with unfamiliar foods (Mintz and DuBois, 2005; Messer, 2007). The situation of migrating to a foreign country somehow disconnected the international students from various identities they were attached with (e.g. national, ethnic, religious, family ties identity) and made it increasingly difficult to form and sustain meaningful personal and social identities. Consuming particular food object became self-help behaviours during transition to manage the adjustment challenges.

Having the limited budget as students was found to be of importance when deciding food choice whereby the students were very cautious over their spending on food. They only bought the necessary food based on the meal planning. However, the students mentioned the difficulties in managing their budget which limited their food choice. The ability to manage resources within constrained allocation contributed towards the increased consumption of the cheaper options of convenient foods.
The meanings attached to food consumed during the transition brought different symbols to the international students. The personal, social, and culturally ideal foods influenced the continuance of familiar and ethnic food, which is considered an immediate relieve for adjustment stress. It was found that the comfort foods, the staple and ethnic foods, and the nostalgic foods symbolised emotional attachment, comfort, personal identity, and sense of belonging (Collins, 2008; Brown et al., 2010). Findings on the preference and choice to have foods that symbolised important meanings during the transition revealed why the new international students were reluctant to change their food choice at the beginning of their arrival.

Finally, the findings indicated that the life course perspective influences such as personal and social factors, cultural ideal, context and resources were able to elucidate in more detail on how the food choices were constructed during the transition. The new environment, roles and responsibilities, skills and competencies in food provisioning, healthy appearance, halal food choice and food that symbolized important meanings were the influences identified based on the life course perspective.

10.5 The Changes in the Food Choice Decisions that Reflect Food Acculturation

Managing a food choice system in a new country came with great challenges for the international students, mainly during the shaping and redeveloping of personal eating and cooking habits with other food-related concerns. This added to the stress and the struggle as the students undertook the new role and responsibility of constructing their personal food choice system. Nevertheless, the students were enjoying their time and generally were aware of the opportunities and challenges
that their new independent life brings. As Blichfeldt et al. (2013:287) stated, managing personal food provision during life transition requires a person to possess the right skills and competencies and using them in the right way so that “one does not need to reinvent solutions anew every day.” Nevertheless, the demands of constant enactment on food provisioning to ensure its success proved to be complicated based on the findings from the second accompanied shop and interview three months after the students’ arrival.

The findings from the second phase of data collection three months after the students arrived in the UK were aimed to explain the food acculturation process and experiences of the new international students. Diverse experiences were identified to contribute to various acculturation practices and repertoire by the international students. This suggests that it was important to review the acculturation experiences at the point of transition from the context of new international students because migration is a turning point in the life course the most crucial and stressful factor when adjusting and coping with academic and personal life. Constant changes and redevelopment of food habits and practices based on the life course experiences compared to when the international students first arrived indicated that the major challenge of food provisioning was to habitualise the practice and make the process of food choice decisions less complicated and without much effort.

The integration of new food choice with personal preference of home foods was the most popular strategy among the new international students who lacked cooking skills. This was different compared to when the students first arrived where it was found they strived to make home-style dishes because it was considered too time consuming. The students were also selective in their
acculturation strategy whereby a set of repertoire or multiple strategy were practiced, depending on the situation. The more the students practiced cooking, the better they were at it and were able to modify the cooking techniques and use simpler ingredients, which made the experience more enjoyable. The increased attempts to try new recipes led to the acceptance of new food choice and other international dishes. It was found the students had more subtle views on food choice than the stereotypical option of unhealthy food choice and food that was not allowed at home due to the acquirement of new skills and competencies.

The students who were well versed in the food provisioning task were found to prefer convenient food over cooking fresh food after three months because they felt lazy, and the commitment required them to habitualise the task which was too demanding for them. However, they did not abandon home style dishes at all; rather they chose the simplest dish as possible or used food ingredients that were the easiest to prepare like vegetables. The traditional food item for breakfast were found replaced with ready-to-eat meals such as toast, eggs, oats or cereals, thus reducing the habit of skipping breakfast. The staple food consumption which was the hardest to break free from was substituted with the commonly available energy-dense food such as potato, bread, and pasta. These findings indicated the importance of time management and meals planning to enable the students make proper, healthier, and better food choice within the time constraint as full time students.

The students were also found to revert to food choices back home because it was deemed healthier when they had problem relating to unfavourable food choices. It was found the students tried to
imitate the food that was served by their family and realise the food choice back then was always the best and there were solid reasons why certain food were restricted in their home.

As a conclusion, the demanding task of food choice during transition required the students’ full commitment, ability to habitualise the tasks in food provisioning, ability to integrate new food choice and preferred food, and constant changes in every situation to ensure a successful adjustment experiences.

10.6 Contributions of Study

Contribution to empirical knowledge

This study on food acculturation of new international students in the UK contributed several concepts to the life course model. The following figure (Figure 12) shows the new components of food choice system based on the findings from the main data collection.
Figure 12: Redevelopment of Food Acculturation Model Based on Life Course Perspective

*Original proposed model development in Figure 9*
The redeveloped food acculturation model consists of the following elements: In the first stage, the migration as a turning point in the life course perspective marked an important event and changes in food choice process: Time interval between arrival and three month living in the UK exposed the international students to more new food choices and allowed the experience and adjustment to the new food setting and culture. The students became more efficient in managing the roles and responsibilities in food provisioning. Their self-efficacy increased and the students acquired more skills and competencies in managing personal food provisioning. The students were also becoming independent in making personal food choice decision.

The next elements is the life course perspective influences in the new food choice decision, which reconfirm the elements suggested by Furst et al. (1996) although some factors are more salient than the others. The key indicator is that not all the foods available are accessible; they are facilitated by situational factors such as dietary restriction, food preferences, resources, and the context of a foreign country.

The next element is executing the food acculturation strategies most appropriate for the new situation, which are integrating the old (home foods) and new foods; assimilating to the new food choice; marginalising neither old nor new food; or separatist, that is choosing only home food and not accepting the new. The international students were selective in their strategies, which are a repertoire or sets of strategies, particularly by combining any of the acculturation strategies developed by Berry (1997) that was the most appropriate and within the capacity of their life course factors. The factors are skills and competencies, resources, ideals, context, and personal and social factors.
The final element is the construction of new food choice system, indicating the acculturation process employed in managing food choice decisions. The food acculturation process includes enactment and habitualising the food provisioning tasks, retaining the traditional home foods, accepting the new food choice, or reverting back to food habits and practices learned at home.

The redeveloped food acculturation model presents the understanding of the food choice process at the early phase of transition. This study found that after living in the UK for three months, the international students experienced food acculturation, although with limited and almost no direct host country contact (only one student mentioned forming a friendship pattern with a local British). The international students managed to learn about the new food choice setting through continuous exposure and personal experience.

The life course perspective indicated how the adjustment and acculturation process occurred through the conceptualisation on how food choice decisions influenced and formed during the transition. The notion of influences in food choices such as personal and social factors, resources and cultural ideal, bears similarities to the model employed in Furst et al. (1996).

However, it was found that the past experience of food provisioning had major influence in dictating the food choice and food practice when in the new country. The lack of skills and competencies, rather than adjustment stress, contributed more towards the unfavorable food choice. For example, the increased of skipped meal due to time constraint reported in Pan et al. (1999) was not prevalent in this study whereby the ability, skills, and competency to prepare a much simpler meals meant the students rarely missed any meal time. Furthermore, the cooking and food purchasing skills acquired before migration allowed the students to choose familiar, fresher, and healthier food ingredients. Depending on the experience, skills and
competencies acquired, the students became selective in the enactment of food provisioning and acculturation strategy, and they **developed a repertoire** based on their situation.

Interestingly, it was revealed that the **new roles and responsibilities of managing personal food provisioning** in a new independent life were diversely perceived by the international students. On one side, the international students believed it was the opportunity to be in control of a very important personal decision of food choice, and started to consider ethical food consumption and concern over healthy and body appearance. It showed a level of maturity, freedom, and the demanding commitment of food choice responsibilities. On the other hand, the freedom and being in control to make decisions also meant they were now able to choose unhealthy foods that were often restricted in their home and explore new food choices.

The students perceived that **the availability of culturally ideal and healthy food in the UK was acceptable** but there were several factors that influenced access to these foods, such as having supply of food from home, availability of ethnic food stores, high cost of imported ethnic food ingredients and organic food, healthy food labelling and campaigns, availability of ethnic restaurants, ability to recreate home style dishes, and affordability of healthy food such as vegetables and fruits which was considered cheap in the UK. However, it was found that there was **limited accessibility to available foods due to situational factors** such as dietary restrictions due to dieting, health concerns, and conformance to religious beliefs. Therefore it was identified that marginalisation and separation strategy were often executed when it came to consideration of these food choices. For example, the Muslim students were not able to try more new foods because they have a strict halal food regulation, therefore, preference over home cooked dishes using only items they were confident of. Within the three months of their
stay, it was found that the concern over the authenticity of halal foods remained an issue and as complex as the first stage of transition to the Muslim international students.

**In methodological views**, the observed accompanied shop, paired with in-depth interview and the adoption of life course perspective concept in a longitudinal study, provided a more holistic approach on food acculturation process. The methods employed enabled the explanation and gave meaningful context of each stage that required food choice decisions which were during grocery shopping, food preparation and cooking, and consumption.

**In theoretical views**, Holstein and Gubrium (2007) mentioned that the studies on change during the life course often centre on transition. A valuable key concept of life course perspective is that it is a holistic approach to examine the lives of people over time. Research using the application of the life course perspective is focused on “examining stability across time in attitudes and behaviours, factors that lead to change in stable patterns, and the interplay of personal and social factors that are associated with both stability and change in relationship to larger societal, economic, and historical contexts” (Wethington & Johnson-Askew, 2009:2)

The findings support the theory of **acculturation strategy** whereby it was learned that the international students made conscious decisions to improve their personal self-efficacy, skills, and competencies in food provisioning in response to independent life in a new country. This study supports that during transition of new life in a culturally different environment, a person will either integrate, assimilate, marginalise, or separate themselves in order to adjust themselves to the new context. The new life of international students demanded changes and commitment in roles and responsibilities, resources, and context that are disruptive to the usual or established personal food systems, and this leads to the reconstruction of food choice pattern
and consequently, food acculturation. A sojourner may actively consider the most appropriate strategy in constructing the new pattern by learning to adapt, reject, or adjust to the new food choice available. The highlight of the acculturation strategies was that this study was able to indicate that the students developed a repertoire in their acculturation strategy based on the different situational factors of influence in the construction of food choice. The combination of acculturation strategies showed that the international students were constantly adjusting and adapting to the various food choice setting.

**In practical views,** the findings from this study may assist the university in constructing a more relevant policy and services that support the food adjustment and differential needs of international students with the consideration of the recency of their arrival. Identifying the key influences in shaping food choice may improve healthy eating among international students. The findings may inform the international students support centre and students’ counsellors on the food-related challenges faced by the international student during the early stage of their transition especially on the adjustment stress concerning food provisioning tasks, undertaking the new roles and responsibilities of a new independent living, and guidance and support in managing a healthy lifestyle. The food suppliers and providers in and around the university may benefit from this study through the understanding of the availability and accessibility of healthy, affordable, and preferred foods, dietary restrictions and other life course influence that may limit the accessibility to wider food choices in the UK. It will assist in providing food choice that serves the diverse needs of every international student. The study also benefits other international students (upcoming and existing) in their orientation on food provisioning with particular focus on addressing the differences in the new culture and create awareness on the expectations.
10.7 Limitations

The purpose of the preliminary study was to ascertain the food-related issues and experience of international students when they first arrived in the UK. Through the focus group discussions, the participants were able to contribute towards the purpose on this study but a few limitations were identified. First, the focus groups were only represented by a sample of international students from three countries. Considering that the focus group sample was homogenous (all were international students) and that they were selected based on the inclusion criteria, the responses were accountable and significant. Furthermore, the representations of international students from countries with perceived cultural distance (Malaysia, China, and Thailand) were significant. Cultural distance between home country’s dietary patterns and eating habits and Western culture facilitated the degree of food shock experience by the participants. However, the representation of international student from countries with similar dietary practice (Western or European countries) could enrich the data on the food adjustment challenge using additional insights from this group of international students. Next, food adjustment and food acculturation process requires more in-depth study in order to provide a significant academic contribution to the knowledge of food acculturation. An in-depth interview will provide better understanding of personal experience, perception, and personal factors that influence new food choice construction.

A number of limitations need to be acknowledged in the main study. First, the study was not extended throughout the whole academic year, and no trend or pattern of food choice and the enactment of food provisioning over a longer period of time was provided. A prolonged observation and regular interval interview may contribute richer data on the patterns and trends on the food acculturation process over time. However, the purpose of this study was only to indicate the food experience and acculturation within the early phase of transition.
Next, this study did not include the visualisation of the kitchen condition or equipment used in developing skills and competencies in food provisioning. The observation on the students’ resources will lead to a better understanding on the challenges associated with cooking equipment or kitchen condition. The researcher was able to get the participants to explain this matter over the interview and the data given were sufficient for the purpose of this study. It was believed a more detailed investigation by observing the food preparation and cooking in the students’ own kitchen will allow access to the skills and competencies development, food storing, food wastage and the kitchen provision may provide an extended context of the food provisioning practice.

No access over the international students’ spending when eating out, actual food budget, food wastage, and meal planning that gives detail over monetary constraint of a student can be reviewed. It was observed that the students were being cautious about their spending during the grocery shopping but they mentioned that the cost of food was acceptable.

There was no post migration follow up to explore whether the international students were able to retain the developed food provisioning skills and competencies. A pre and post migration studies would enrich the knowledge on food acculturation process. Lack of a prolonged study however does not affect the purpose of this study which focused on the early transition phase.

Although the findings from his study was not aimed to be generalised to the whole international students population or other migrant group, they do contribute to the extend knowledge on sojourner’s adjustment experiences in food acculturation.

This study was represented by a sample concentrated on more Asian international students. It could also be done with more representations from more various nationalities. For instance
those international students who have similar Western dietary practice could be investigated. Furthermore, it would be interesting to examine how acculturation influences the dietary habits of the local domestic students and observe if these students, too, experience food acculturation.

Finally, this study also takes into consideration that the researcher is a Muslim therefore there was a possibility of an influence over the behaviour of Muslim participants when making food choice. However, the researcher has taken necessary steps in explaining the objectives of this study, with the main objective to explore the food choice process based on the factors that was important to them when making decision. It was important to allow the participant to be aware of what the researcher is exploring to avoid unnatural reaction and behaviour due to the influence of the researcher background and avoid unnecessary perception that was not important for the study.

10.8 Recommendations for Future Research

Previous studies have focused on the unfavorable food choice constructed at an early stage of transition but this study found that the lack of skills and competencies in food provisioning significantly determined the students’ food choice. Students who possessed the skills and made better, healthier options. Therefore, a further exploration on the food provisioning preparation that the international students engaged with before the migration may shed light on the strategy to improve their adjustment experience during the transition.

The concern over halal food preparation and accessibility deserves more attention especially in the investigation on the part of food providers, restaurants, and supermarket chains that deal with halal foods. A study on the level of engagement and understanding on halal food preparation may alleviate the Muslim international students’ concern and trust issue.
With regards to the methods applied, which are purely qualitative, a positivist’s approach may add more information for the studies already done. It is possible to say that a quantitative method could generalise the findings to a wider sample that could be used in future studies.

Finally, the lack of understanding on the British food and culture requires more investigation. A further research on the international students’ British food experience may contribute to the knowledge on British food and acculturation strategy of assimilating to the host country’s food and culture.

10.9 Final Conclusion

The lived experience of new international students when they first arrived in the UK was explored. This study concentrated on the food choice decision at every stage of food provisioning including grocery shopping experience, food preparation and cooking, and consumption practices. Drawing on the findings from the accompanied shop observation and in-depth interview, a very diverse presentation of student food choice exposure, experience, and perception during transition was explored. It was also revealed the food choice decisions during transition were greatly influenced by the personal, social, cultural ideal, and current context and trends in the life course experience. It was also found the international students selected strategy varied depending on the current situation when making food choice decisions. The new international students not only came across as novices, free from parental control for the first time, but they were also well-versed and confident in their food choice decisions, and had the least problem when adjusting to the new environment at the beginning of their sojourn.

This study extends the body of knowledge on food acculturation and adjustment experience studies that has, to date, highlighted the unfavorable food choices among international students at the beginning of their sojourn (e.g. Satia-Abouta et al., 2002; Papadaki et al., 2007; Brittin
& Obeidat, 2011). This findings from this study extends the body of knowledge on food acculturation literature; they are significantly important for understanding international students’ adjustment experience and this could benefit the university in providing ample and efficient support to new international students. The findings can also benefit food suppliers and providers in serving the needs of international students as well as benefit upcoming and existing international students in the awareness of the requirement and expectation during transition for a positive adjustment experience.

10.10 Reflexivity

I started this research with an interest in the topic on culture and food, and after further consultations and deliberations, I decided to delve deeper and more concentrated on acculturation and food. Conducting the literature review was not an easy task at first because being an international student from Asia, having a critical mind was a little uncommon. I gradually began to see a bigger picture of the scope of this research and finally found a fit within the context of international student, food choice, and acculturation.

This research represents the experience of international students in managing food choices in a foreign country, which is something that I could relate with the first time I came to the UK in 2006 for my Masters. It was interesting to capture those experiences at the early stage of transition because that was when the reality kicked in for the international students: the new roles and responsibilities, personal and independent enactment on food provisioning practice, commitment and demand of managing personal life, being away from family and home country for the first time, and exposure to unfamiliar environment, foods, and culture. The level of anxiety, awareness, and depression were at its highest at the initial stage, and it was only the best time to capture the adjustment experience.
The preliminary study conducted gave me confidence on the topic I have chosen, although I find myself not being connected and getting a full grip of the whole methodology yet at that time. The focus group discussion was the most interesting session because I found that although I belong to the same homogeneous group as the international student participants in the study, our views were so different and the experience vary greatly. The ethnographic inquiry did not come to my perspective until the last stage. It seemed that the accompanied shop observation and the in-depth interview approach complemented each other, gave access to a wider food choice decision situation, and provided meaning-making to the acculturation strategy developed. By adopting both the observation and interview, and as an international student myself, I was already conducting an ethnographic study. It was a challenge to conduct the observation as some of the students decided to ask my opinion on their food choice. Even during the interview, I had to regularly probe the answer to their reply of “you know” because I was considered part of them and that I would understand their meaning.

Again, it was challenging to analyse all data from the preliminary study and the two-phase main study due to its qualitative nature because substantial time was needed and the process was very complicated and rigorously meticulous. I was moving back and forth with the interview transcript and found that I had submerged myself within the story of the participants. The findings have allowed a clarification on the adjustment issues concerning the acculturation practices among the international students.

This research has proved to be the most adventurous roller coaster ride I have ever been on and if I ever have to do it ever again, I would because as it had made me a better, wiser person. I am still fascinated with the world of food choice construction and acculturation even more than
when I started and will continue to do research within a similar context. I find myself gaining more confidence and I know what every Asian international students should know, that it is ok to be critical because everybody has a mind of their own. Finally, it is of great hope that this study will help other international students to make better food choice decision and gain a positive adjustment experience in the future.
REFERENCES


Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (2000). The only generalization is: There is no generalization. Case study method, 27-44.


