



Three Attempts, One Opportunity: MY JOURNEY TOWARDS SECURING THE SUMITOMO FOUNDATION RESEARCH GRANT

By Dr. Nur Wahida Zulkifli

THE JOURNEY TO SUCCESS

Securing an international research grant is often perceived as a journey that begins with a good research idea and ends with successful funding. However, my experience taught me that it is a continuous process of learning, reflection, and refinement. My journey towards securing the Sumitomo Foundation Research Grant was not achieved in a single attempt, but through three different applications, each providing valuable lessons that shaped the final proposal.

VALUE EXCHANGE : MALAYSIA - JAPAN

My first attempt was driven by my interest in understanding Japanese cultural concepts. I proposed a study related to *Ikigai* and kratom, as I was interested in exploring how cultural values influence health-related behaviours. Although the topic was meaningful, I later realised that the proposal might not have sufficiently demonstrated the connection between Japan's experiences and how Malaysia could learn from or benefit from those insights. The idea was interesting, but the alignment with the objectives and expectations of an international grant could have been stronger.

This first experience taught me an important lesson: having an interesting research topic is not enough. A successful international grant proposal needs to demonstrate a clear value exchange between countries, in which knowledge, experiences, or practices from one context can be meaningfully adapted to another.



“What can Malaysia learn from Japan, and how can we adapt that knowledge to our own cultural context?”

For my second application, I attempted to incorporate a more contemporary issue by focusing on digital health. Recognising the increasing importance of technology in healthcare, I developed a proposal centred on the development of a digital health intervention. Although the concept was innovative and aligned with current healthcare trends, the proposal was still unsuccessful. Looking back, I realised that the proposal focused more on creating an intervention than on exploring how Malaysia could learn from and adapt an existing successful approach from Japan.

Furthermore, the absence of a strong Japanese collaboration may have limited the international dimension of the proposal.

These two experiences changed the way I approached my third application. Instead of only asking, “What new intervention can I develop?”, I started asking, “What can Malaysia learn from Japan, and how can we adapt that knowledge to our own cultural context?”

DIGITAL THEMES & INNOVATION

For my third attempt, I decided to approach the application process differently. One of the first steps I took was to analyse previous successful Sumitomo Foundation projects. With the assistance of artificial intelligence tools such as ChatGPT, I reviewed the titles of past successful projects to identify common themes and research areas that received greater recognition. Interestingly, many successful projects were related to digital themes and innovation.

Based on this analysis, I explored potential digital health topics that could be adapted to the Malaysian

This project aims to explore how Japan's community-based digital health promotion approach can be adapted to the Malaysian context by incorporating cultural values and local considerations. The idea was not simply to transfer a Japanese programme to Malaysia, but to understand how successful and sustainable health promotion strategies can be culturally adapted to benefit our communities.

At this point, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to Associate Professor Dr Mohd Shahezwan for encouraging me to apply again. Honestly, after two unsuccessful attempts, I was already considering not applying again because preparing a strong

"Integrating Cultural Values into Digital Health Promotions: Adapting Japan's Kenkou Point Project for Malaysia."

context while maintaining relevance to Japan. During this process, I also utilised artificial intelligence tools such as ChatGPT for brainstorming and idea refinement to explore emerging digital health trends, possible research directions, and potential approaches for adapting Japanese healthcare innovations to the Malaysian setting. After considering several ideas, I finally developed the research concept: **"Integrating Cultural Values into Digital Health Promotions: Adapting Japan's Kenkou Point Project for Malaysia."**

proposal requires significant time, effort, and commitment. His encouragement reminded me that every application is a valuable learning opportunity.

I would also like to thank Prof. Tan Peck-Leong from Arshad Ayub Graduate Business School, Universiti Teknologi MARA, for sharing her experiences and motivating researchers to continue applying for grants. Her sharing session highlighted the importance of persistence and resilience in the research journey.

My appreciation also goes to Dr Farhana Fakhira Ismail, who helped connect me with research collaborators from Japan. Establishing international collaboration was one of the biggest challenges throughout this journey, but it became one of the key strengths of the proposal. The collaboration not only strengthened the research methodology but also created opportunities for knowledge exchange between Malaysia and Japan.

This journey taught me that success in grant applications is not only about having a good research idea, but also about understanding the funding objectives, learning from past experiences, building strong collaborations, and having the courage to try again.

To fellow researchers, especially those who have experienced rejection, do not consider unsuccessful applications as failures. Each proposal is an opportunity to improve our ideas, strengthen our networks, and move closer to success.

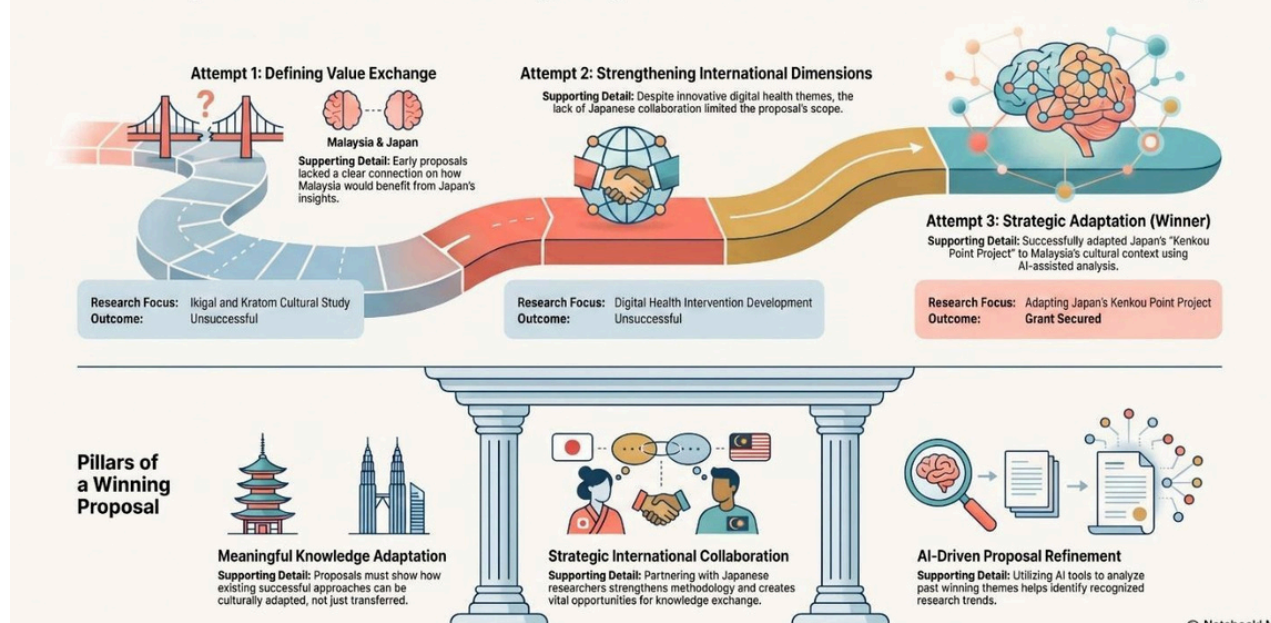
Finally, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to everyone who has supported me throughout this journey. Securing the grant is only the beginning; the next challenge is to successfully complete this research and generate meaningful outcomes for Malaysia and Japan.



Together with my research team, Dr Kamaliah Md Saman, Dr Farhana Fakhira Ismail, and Prof. Dr Shigeo Yamamura, we hope this project will provide valuable insights into adapting digital health promotion strategies across different cultural contexts. We sincerely seek your continued support, encouragement, and prayers as we embark on this research journey.

A P P R E C I A T I O N

From Rejection to Success: Navigating the Sumitomo Foundation Grant Journey



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