Do Adjustment Problems Hamper International Students’ Academic Achievement?

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Abstract - The Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE), Malaysia, has gone global with the intention to recruit international students. The Ministry has reported that there are about 100,000 international students pursuing tertiary education in Malaysia as of 2014, out of the 200,000 target set to be achieved by the year 2020. The IHLs, in short, are now playing an important role in contributing to the income of the nation. However, literature gleaned from other countries, report that many international students face adjustment problems which includes among others, grasp on the English language, adapting to the local culture, managing finance, and curriculum of respective universities. Hence, this paper intends to first, identify the adjustment problems of international students studying in Multimedia University Malaysia through survey method. Second, it aims to discuss the relationship between the adjustment problems and the academic performance. Finally, this paper provides recommendations for Malaysian universities and MOHE in relation to the objectives above.

Keywords - Academic performance, adjustment problem, financial difficulties, international students, placement, university

I. INTRODUCTION

Currently, Malaysia has achieved a world ranking of 11th in terms of total international student population with almost 100,000 international students enrolled at Malaysian universities. The Education Minister, Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, announced at Education Nation Conference 2011 that the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) aims to attract at least 200,000 international students by 2020.

While many Malaysian universities are offering various programmes for the international market, there is a lack of measurement to ensure the smooth adjustment of these international students. Some of them were reported to have involved in accidents, drug overdose, suicides and death (Nigeria Newsday, 2014). Therefore, this study aims to
identify the adjustment problems faced by the international students studying in Multimedia University and find their correlations with the academic achievements through cross sectional quantitative survey using MISPI developed by Porter (1977).

II. LITERATURE REVIEW
Psychologically, adjustment takes place when an individual tries to sustain the balance between themselves and the surroundings (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2014). There are many theories and models of adjustment. U-curve of culture shock is one of the earlier studies that describes people’s patterns of adjustment (Lysgaard, 1955). It begins with the feeling of fascination and exhilaration with the surroundings. Then, due to some mismatches in the new social environment, one somewhat feels lonely and unhappy; finally, as it becomes more familiar and comfortable, one begins to feel better adjusted again.

Oberg (1960) introduced the term culture shock: honeymoon, crisis, recovery and adjustment. As the sojourners enter a new culture, the initial honeymoon stage of enchantment, fascination, enthusiasm and admiration is experienced. Later, dissimilarities in language, concepts, values, familiar signs, and symbols lead to crisis and feelings of inadequacy, frustration, anger, and anxiety. Recovery takes place when crisis that is being resolved. During the adjustment stage, with occasional worry and tense, the sojourner begins to benefit from the new cultures.

Oberg’s U-curve was extended to W-curve include adaptation and adjustment as people re-enter their home cultures (Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963). The adaptation process requires the same adjustment process that shows an initial stage of elation, followed by confusion and depression, and gradual improvement (Furham & Brochner, 1986).

Adler (1975) proposed a five-stage model of the experience of culture shock that broadly follows the U-curve of sojourner adjustment but, in fact, resembles a W-curve. This model measures student morale versus their attitudes during their pre-departure, time in culture and re-entry.

Looking at all the theories discussed above, obviously the phenomenon of adjustment difficulties demand the attention of Malaysian universities concerning how to best facilitate the international students in realizing academic success through identification of related adjustment problems.

A. Research Objectives
The objective of the study is to identify and answer the following research questions:
- What kind of adjustment problems are experienced by the international students while studying in Multimedia University?
- What are the relationships between adjustment problems and the academic achievement of the students?

III. RESEARCH METHOD
The descriptive and correlational methods are employed.
A. Research Design
The quantitative non-experimental research method used focuses on gathering information through structured survey questionnaires were administered to the international pre-university and undergraduates. The adjustment problems were trimmed down to 11 categories, and research questions and hypothesis were formed to collect the numerical data and statistics in order to seek precise measurement and analysis of the adjustment problems and academic achievement of the participants.
B. Population and Sample
The population consists of Multimedia University pre-university and international undergraduates from the 2013/2014 with 381 sample size.
C. Data Collection Instrument and Procedures
Michigan International Student Problem Inventory (MISPI) is used to measure the adjustment problems
encountered by the undergraduates. CGPA are used to measure the students’ academic achievement. This survey questionnaire was administered to the students face to face personally, despite the additional work.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE I ADJUSTMENT PROBLEMS</th>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number CGPA</td>
<td>381</td>
<td>2.3746</td>
<td>0.83471</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admission Selection</td>
<td>381</td>
<td>1.7164</td>
<td>0.52260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orientation Service</td>
<td>381</td>
<td>1.7277</td>
<td>0.58874</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Process</td>
<td>381</td>
<td>1.8911</td>
<td>0.62620</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Personal</td>
<td>381</td>
<td>1.7124</td>
<td>0.58196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living Dining</td>
<td>381</td>
<td>1.9197</td>
<td>0.62310</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Services</td>
<td>381</td>
<td>1.7953</td>
<td>0.65779</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Services</td>
<td>381</td>
<td>1.3845</td>
<td>0.51399</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Language</td>
<td>381</td>
<td>1.6542</td>
<td>0.54459</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Activities</td>
<td>381</td>
<td>1.6052</td>
<td>0.54678</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Aids</td>
<td>381</td>
<td>1.9284</td>
<td>0.72089</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Placement Services</td>
<td>381</td>
<td>1.7902</td>
<td>0.67059</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valid N (listwise)</td>
<td>381</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From Table I, Financial Aids has the highest mean (1.9284) of all. It is followed by Living and Dining problems (1.9197) and Academic Process problems (1.8911). The Religious Services (1.3845) score the lowest and indicates least problem of all. The other seven problems are quite close in the scores (1.6052-1.7953) obtained but still of very minor problems.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE II</th>
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<tr>
<td>CGPA</td>
</tr>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Freq</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cum. Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0.00-1.99</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>25.7</td>
<td>25.7</td>
<td>25.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.00-2.66</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>33.6</td>
<td>33.6</td>
<td>59.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.67-3.32</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>26.5</td>
<td>26.5</td>
<td>85.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.33-3.66</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>95.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.67-4.00</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>381</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

IV. RESULTS

From Table II, many of the respondents (33.6%) obtain CGPA between 2.00 to 2.66. The other 26.5% obtain between 2.67 and 3.32 of CGPA. About 9.4% score 3.3 to 3.66. Only 4.7% manage to get 3.67 to 4.00. However, 25.7% fail to score a minimum of 2.00.

Fig. 1 Academic Process, Placement Services,
The multiple regression analysis indicated that the following tested variables were significant at p<0.05 - a 95% degree of confidence. The beta value (standardized coefficients) of Academic Process (β=-1.15), Financial Aids (β=0.186) and Placement Services (β=0.167) indicate these independent variables are related to CGPA. The other eight independent variables are found not to be significant. The scores are also used to evaluate the relationships between the 11 categories of adjustment problems and CGPA. The results show there is significant correlation between 3 categories of adjustment problems and CGPA. Hypothesis 3 (The academic process problems are significantly related with the academic achievement) was accepted at p<0.05. Hypothesis 10 (The financial aids problems are significantly related with the academic achievement) was accepted at p<0.05. Hypothesis 11 (The placement service problems are significantly related with the academic achievement).

This study examined 11 categories of adjustment problems and their relationships to academic achievement. Results revealed that three adjustment problems (academic process, financial and placement services) are significantly related to academic achievement while the other eight are not significantly related.

Firstly, the academic process system in Multimedia University is exam-oriented with 40% on coursework and 60% on final examination. Students are subject to sit for quizzes and tests frequently. Most of them went through a system with less frequent assessments as well as light weight syllabus in their home country. Secondly, compulsory class attendance post difficulty as culturally, they are quite relaxed with punctuality. Next, the writing of term paper is a big challenge as they have lower proficiency in English language. The competitive grading system in the university compared to a lenient one in their home country made it worst. The students also lacked in understanding on the assessment criteria. Besides, they were not getting sufficient help from lecturers and academic advisors. With classes of between 50 and 200 students, they get little help from the lecturers. Their free times often do not match the faculty members’ availability. These students find it difficult to connect and interact with faculty members as they were said to be unfriendly and racist, leading to very limited interaction.

The financial aids post a difficulty to these students. Most of them are self-sponsored or privately funded. Some governments only sponsor students doing degree courses from the public universities. Others only sponsor those studying certain courses like engineering and information technology. The fees charged to international students are doubled the fees paid by the locals. Besides, these Middle Eastern students receive limited amount of money since their families have bigger financial commitments. They could not even work part time to ease their financial burden because of Malaysian immigration work restriction.

Also, as a result of the exchange rate, the money they received is lower in value and limited their purchase of goods.

The placement services of the international students present the biggest problem to their academic achievement. Many of the Middle Eastern countries are politically unstable. It causes many uncertainties politically and economically, leading to worries of being jobless once they graduate. They also lack the connection and assistance from their own education ministries. Not only that, the difficulties and failure they face in academic have caused them to repeat the subjects they failed or change their courses and have to extend their stay in Malaysia. Some switch to other universities and have difficulty due to the new Malaysian policy whereby they have to return to their home country and wait for the offer between six months and a year before they are issued the new student visa.

It is difficult for the international students to stay, get a job and or become the citizen of Malaysia. Malaysia has strict
VI. LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Limitations

Firstly, this study focuses only on international students from Multimedia University, thus the result cannot be generalized to other group of students or universities. Secondly, the data is obtained only through quantitative method and limited to structured questionnaires. This study obtains a one-time data from students.

B. Recommendations

In terms of academic process, students should understand the learning system and academic demand of the university or country they are going to study at by going through the university websites. Comprehensive information can also be provided by the university all year round. The faculty members could be exposed to different culture and learning system of international students so that they are more perceptive towards differences. The exam-oriented system could be changed towards a more comprehensive assessment system with field work, forum, discussions or presentations. Ongoing remedial classes can also be conducted for the ones who are weak in language skills. The government could collaborate and make arrangement to develop bilateral relations with their counterparts on education.

As for financial aids, the students could check the expenses needed for the whole programme in order to be financially adequate before enrolling themselves into the university. They could avoid exchange rate transaction that causes them to lose the value. The university could make available websites with sponsorships of education from governments or private organizations. The government could allocate grants for undergraduates’ researches and projects. The work restrictions could be revised for students to enable them to work on part-time basis not more than 15 hours a week.

The placement services should require the greatest attention. The students must be trained with soft skills as this could help boost their confidence in securing jobs once they graduate. The university must set up alumni, organize career fair and invite the international companies to link the students and the companies from their home countries.

VII. CONCLUSIONS

The findings gained from this research have revealed that most international students studying in Multimedia University do not have many adjustment problems. They are affected mainly by academic process, financial aids and placement services. They are found to lack the preparation in both academic and financial.

Coming from countries which are mostly politically unstable, they feel uncertain about the future. These deserve exceptional consideration form the university to plan and implement effective adjustment processes for each adjustment difficulties.

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REFERENCES

(Arranged in the order of citation in the same fashion as the case of Footnotes.)


