

The Health Enhancement Impact Of Self Assimilation In Academic Achievement Amongst International Students In Malaysian Public Universities

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ABSTRACT

Malaysia is one of the countries that has become a choice of destination for international students to further their studies. Elements such as recognized international higher learning institution system, the intensive effort of student exchange programme, a calibre teaching team, contemporary and quality courses, an international consolidation with some other best learning institutions in the world together with the connection of regional cooperation are among the collected criteria to portray the ability of Malaysia in attracting more international students. Therefore, the objective of this research is to emphasise the factors that differentiate the first-year experience on self-assimilation as well as academic achievement among international students. The qualitative sampling method involved forty international students who participated voluntarily and data collection was conducted through an in-depth interview technique. The result has generated an understanding on international students' self-reflection through the nature of their excitement, needs and hopes. Among the factors that were identified were (i) education system in Malaysian Public Universities is seen as a prestigious study destination, (ii) education system Malaysian Public Universities are more comprehensive and versatile, (iii) the learning programmes in Malaysian Universities learning are flexible and dynamic, (iv) the development of the programmes are contemporary and market driven (v) the added value on the benefits using English as a learning and teaching medium in Malaysian Public Universities. Therefore, in examining the quality level of education, it is vital to consider the learning satisfaction among international students in order to have a continuum on the health enhancement impact towards self-assimilation in their academic achievement. The findings are valuable and are useful in showing the significant relevance to the international human resource management Malaysian Public Universities which are dependent on international students at high proportions and applicable in formulating various national higher education policies.

Keywords: Malaysian Public Universities, International Students, Health Enhancement, Self-assimilation, Academic Achievement

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INTRODUCTION

Higher Learning Institutions in Malaysia had experienced a drastic changed and bloomed to meet the global demand towards the vast access of education in international level (Ahmad and Buchanan, 2017). Due to that, education under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education in Higher Learning (MOHE) (Ministry of Education in Higher Learning, 2018) has been made as one of The National Key Economic Area (NKEA) in economic transformation programme. The Higher Education Strategic Plan drafted since 2007 with the vision of transforming higher education to transform Malaysia to an excellent international. This is in accordance with the second National Mission which is increasing the knowledge ability and the country's innovation to cultivate first class mindset. Efforts to intensify internationalization was made as one of the main aims of the strategic plan (Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, 2018). Among the strategies that were identified and successfully achieved include i) the

increment of the international student ii) the expansion of the course offering to international student and iii) rebranding public and private universities in order to achieve the enrolment of 200,000 people by the year 2020 (UKM Portal, 2015).

Table 1 below clearly shows how the Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia has undertaken various efforts in achieving the internationalisation trend of Malaysian Higher Learning Institutions by focusing on Malaysia as an educational glory hub the region by 2020. Statistics released by the Ministry of Higher Education have recorded an increase in the international students' enrolment at Public Institutions of Higher Learning in 2007 of 14,324 people, which in turn increased to 28,830 people in 2013 and continued to show an increase from year to year to 32,404 people in 2019 (MOHE, 2019). The number proved that the higher learning system in Malaysia with the highest quality and standards equivalent to developed countries.

Table 1: Total number of International Student Admissions at Public Institutions of Higher Learning in Malaysia from 2007 to 2019

Year	Total of International Students Admission Public Institutions of Higher Learning
2007	14,324

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2008	18,485
2009	22,456
2010	24,214
2011	25,855
2012	26,232
2013	28,830
2014	27,042
2015	26,405
2016	25,824
2017	27,766
2018	30,341
2019	32,404

Source: <https://www.mohe.gov.my/download/public/statistic> (Year 2007-2019)

The political stability issue, high educational quality, affordable learning fees, diversified cultures with society living in peace and harmony became the push factor to the international students to choose Malaysia as their learning destination (Irma Wani *et al.*, 2018c). Citing NTP's report in year 2015 showed the total numbers of international students being accepted into Higher Learning Institution in Malaysia had overshoot the set target of PSPTN 2007 which was 3.1 percent (RTM News, 2016). Meanwhile, according to a report by Bernama's (2019), the number of international students had increased drastically and it had contributed to the country's economic growth. This matter can be seen through the average expenses of international students who furthered their studies in Malaysia, and it was estimated to RM46 thousand per student per annum. This sum has generated an average of RM7.2 billion (Bernama, 2019). The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) is also seen as an alternative that attract the presence of international students to further their studies in this country. The MOU signed with other countries showed the acceptance on the quality of national education system, leading international students to consider entering Higher Learning Institutions in Malaysia as their top choice destination. Malaysia proves to continuously show commitment in materialising a quality education which is able to compete on an international level (RTM News, 2016).

LITERATURE REVIEW

The international students' concept covers a variety of different definitions. According to Chen, Li and Hagedorn, (2019), international students refers to individuals who came to a country with a purpose to further higher education even though they are not the citizen of that particular country. However, Lewis, (2016) and James-MacEachern and Yun, (2017) defined that international students as individual who have decided to further their studies abroad by crossing the border of a country. On the other hand, the first-year experience is an important period for every new student as this phase encompasses a lot of changes that required the need for self-assimilation (Newsome and Cooper, 2016; Irma Wani, Hasbullah and Norazah, 2019a). As for Irma Wani, Hasbullah and Norazah, (2019a), the definition of first-year experience for international students is a whole new set of experience. These involves emotion, stress due to culture shock and social values influencing the academic achievement.

Meanwhile, Trujillo, Mohammed and Saleh, (2020) stated that international students' who furthered their studies abroad gained new experience, deepen their knowledge

in local cultures and were adventurous in wanting to try a new education system which was different from their country of origins. Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) identified rejection as one of the factor which came from the internal situation of the home country that became the outcome to the acceptance of international students to further their studies abroad These included (i) programmes offered by respective Learning Institutions abroad that were better compared to their home country, (ii) having difficulty to secure a place in higher learning institutions in their own country, (iii) eagerness to explore the cultures and tradition in foreign country, (iv) preferred learning programme which was not offered in their own country and (v) the desire to gain new experience abroad. Meanwhile, the pulling factor seen as an external factor that comes from the destination country attracting international students to visit a particular country. The six categories of pulling factors are; (i) having deeper knowledge on the back ground of the host country (ii) suggestion from parents, close friends, agent including international reputation of the learning institutions' of the host country, (iii) affordable fee, (iv) conducive learning environment, (v) strategic location of host country, (vi) an extensive facilities with social networks.

Academic, plays an important role as a transformative element in bringing changes to each individual (rephrase) (Glass dan Westmont, 2014). Most of the international students agreed that one of their main goals to further studies abroad is to have a better future. Even so, the main aspect that international students need to consider is to adapt with the new academic environment (Hamad and Suzanne, 2016). In accordance, it is not a surprise where many of the international students face a lot of problems adjusting to the academic system in a new place. Research related to the students' satisfaction towards the education services by Singh, Jack and Schapper, (2014) found that the advantage of education services offered by the host country is the learning and teaching. The services cover the course assessment, course administration, the quality of lecturers, learning outcome and learning facilities which include library, accommodation and health facilities that were able to give satisfaction to the students throughout their study period. Karakaya-Ozyer and Yildiz, (2020) found out that university students' satisfaction was influenced by four factors (i) academic and universities administration, (ii) events and life in campus, (iii) students' expectation towards the universities and (iv) demography. Based on the explained factors mentioned above, those are prediction towards perception of international students

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in order to determine their satisfaction level towards higher learning institutions.

In this context, elements such as having experienced lecturers and good teaching quality together with comprehensive curriculum improved the level of satisfaction of international students (Irma Wani *et al.*, 2018b; Smith, 2020). The findings of the research by Shavelson *et al.*, (2019) showed that the expertise and passion of lecturers toward the course that they are teaching is significant in determining the teaching quality. However, according to Emehinola, (2020) the approach in delivering lecture is part of the factor that causes the international students feeling left out. This is due to the ignorance of some lecturers and the need to be more concerned towards the weakness amongst international students in mastering the English Language. The expertise and passion of lecturers toward their teaching course is significant in determining their quality in their teaching (Irma Wani *et al.*, 2017). On the other hand, a research done by Khanal and Gaulee, (2019) showed that international students were not keen to do group tasks given by the lecturer. This was due to the local students' attitude who created a gap with the international students caused them to dislike performing task in groups. The method of delivery during lectures is one of the factors causing international students feeling left out in class (Liew 2012; Yan, 2017).

Meanwhile, contemporary programmes are the main factor that attracts the interest of international students in choosing their learning institutions (Han, Gebbie and Appelbaum, 2015; Lee, 2016; Herlina *et al.*, 2017; Shavelson *et al.*, 2019). Looking from the international students' perspective, the choice to select Malaysia as their learning destination caused by the international recognition towards the learning programmes offered by the Higher Learning Institution in Malaysia (Liew, 2012; Dora *et al.*, 2014; Herlina *et al.*, 2018). Majority of the international students prefer to choose programmes with comprehensive learning and meet the demand of the market and employability (Nilsson and Ripmeester, 2016). According to Herlina *et al.*, (2018) the varieties of learning programmes being offered show the flexibility in other fields of study which have become the main attraction to international students to further their studies abroad. Contemporary programmes have become the main factor to attract attention of the international students in choosing their learning institutions. Usually, many of the international students would select programmes or courses that have the content of comprehensive learning to meet the demand of the market and employability (Noel, Levitz and Saluri, 2012; Glass and Westmont, 2014; Herlina *et al.*, 2018). The programmes offer courses involving external industries such as "attachment", "industrial training" in the form of "hands-on" making it added value which sparks students (Liew, 2012).

The ability to communicate well is one of the main factors in influencing the result of the international students to further their studies abroad (Li *et al.*, 2020). Most of the international students from all over the world are inclined to choose countries that uses English language as a medium of communication (Chew, Russayani and Eam, 2010; Dora *et al.*, 2014; James-MacEachern and Yun, 2017; Herlina *et al.*, 2017; Li *et al.*, 2020). The language used in teaching and learning is the main factor that would influence the result of international students in choosing their programme and learning destination abroad

(Gilakjani, 2015; Tran, 2020). According to Herlina *et al.*, (2017) and Khanal and Gaulee, (2019) the difficulty to master the English language brings more drawbacks and tension to international students. This matter is supported from the result of a research conducted by Falcone, (2017) who claimed that difficulties faced by the international students involve the usage of English language. Song, (2019) discovered that the problems faced by the international students in mastering the English language covers the aspects of understanding, listening and verbal. The factor in inability to communicate includes enunciation, conversation style and lack of self confidence in interaction (Gilakjani, 2015). Khanal and Gaulee, (2019) research agreed that international students were having difficulties in understanding the lecturers if they are not competent to teach using English language. The medium of communication used by lectures in the teaching and learning was one of the contributors for the international students to understand the lecturer conducted by lecturers in class. However, the interest and desire of the students to learn the local language could be improved by the assistance of the local community (Gresham, 2013; Arkoudis and Baik, 2014; Van Mol, 2019). The universities implement, learning the local language of the host country as one of the compulsory subjects for international students.

Apart from that, the reasons that international students chose to further their studies abroad is due to the quality of the education system in the host country which is more stable compared to the educational system in their own country (Irma Wani *et al.*, 2017). The main feedback given by students who are studying in a university showed a beneficial experience in giving a new exposure to new students to study in that university (Irma Wani *et al.*, 2018b). Online communication through email was one of the modes used by the university in providing comprehensive information to engage the attention of future students in order to enrol into the programmes offered by the universities (McInnis, James and Hartley, 2012; Candela, 2019). Responding to emails is deemed important in clearing any uncertainties related to the programmes offered by the universities. Welcoming the arrival of international students, should be given a priority in creating a diversified culture that portrays an international level university (Gabel, Dolenand Cerdin, 2013; Podymov *et al.*, 2019).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A qualitative approach was used in this research whereby four Public Higher Learning Institutions of Malaysia had been selected according to the type of universities and location of the research. The research design employed is a case study which is to identify and investigate thoroughly, the background which happened through interaction of a social unit involving individual, groups, institutions or community (Simons, 2009; Thomas, 2011). As many as 40 international students were successfully interviewed using a set of interview questions. These questions were drafted through a thorough protocol interview conducted during a pilot study (Seidman, 2006). The use of semi structure interview proved to be effective. This is because researchers had the freedom to interview thoroughly without being restricted to the set of interview questions that had been constructed (Creswell, 2013; Flick, 2014). The findings of the interview gave answered which could be explored further.

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Data collection were gathered through a voice recording tape. The data was later transcribed and analysed using the coding method in order to identify the main themes of the study (Creswell, 2013; Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2016; Babbie, 2017).

Table 2 below lists the demographic profiles of informants that contain three main variables, namely gender, age and status, whether they are single or married. This research involved a total of 40 respondents of which 28 people were male informants of 70.0 percent and the remaining 12 people were female informants equivalent to 30.0 percent. Majority of the respondents were those who belong to the age ranging between 20 to 21 years, which was a total of 16 people who recorded a

percentage of 40.0 percent. Next the informants were aged 22 to 23 have recorded a total of 10 people which leads to a percentage of 25.0 percent. While the informants aged 19 to 20 recorded a total of 8 people equivalent to 20 percent and the informants aged 17 to 18 were 6 people equivalent to 15.0 percent involved in this research. The respondents consisted of those with a single status of 36 people which was 90 percent of the total participations. While the remaining 10 percent came from those with married status, which was 4 informants. All informants involved in this study were first year students who continued their studies in Bachelor's Degree.

Table 2: Demographic Profile of Respondents

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	28	70.0
Female	12	30.0
Age (Year)		
17-18	6	15.0
19-20	8	20.0
21-22	16	40.0
23	10	25.0
Status		
Single	36	90.0
Married	4	10.0

THE FINDINGS

The discussion was based on the influence of first year self-assimilation experience which was linked to the academic achievements amongst the international students, there were five sub themes that were identified (i) Malaysian Public Universities Educational System is a prestigious study destination, (ii) The Quality of

Educational Services of Malaysian Public Universities are more comprehensive and versatile, (iii) Flexibility and Dynamics of Public University Programmes in Malaysia, (iv) Course Development and Offering of Contemporary Study Programmes and Market Driven and (v) Benefits of using English Language as a Learning and Teaching Medium in Malaysian Public Universities.

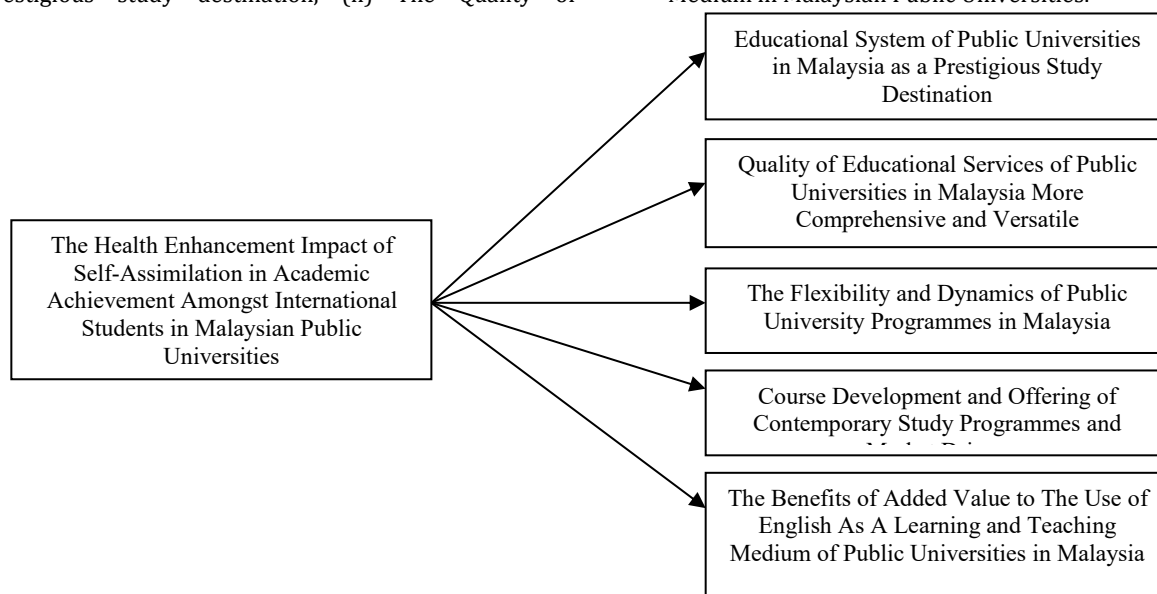


Figure 1: The Health Enhancement Impact of Self Assimilation in Academic Achievement Amongst International Students in Malaysian Public Universities

MALAYSIAN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM IS A PRESTIGIOUS STUDY DESTINATION

Based on the feedback on self-assimilation in academic achievements, 19 distinctive international students

discussed the pros and cons of studying in the public universities in Malaysia. Generally, the feedback about the first-year international students self- assimilation experience was more directed to the positive reaction

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was associate to the advantage of the educational system in public universities in Malaysia.

Table 3: Self Assimilation for First Year International Students Based on Educational System of Public Universities in Malaysia as a Prestigious Study Destination

University 1	University II	University III	University IV
International Student 1	International Student 12	International Student 18	International Student 28
International Student 5	International Student 13	International Student 19	International Student 29
International Student 6	International Student 16	International Student 20	International Student 32
International Student 8	International Student 17	International Student 21	International Student 37
International Student 10		International Student 23	International Student 40

International Students 13 and International Students 21 stated that the educational system that they have received in the first year of university was effective and systematic. The learning and teaching taught during the class was easy to understand compared to the educational system back home (Azizah, Hamidah and Roziana Shaari, 2011; Liew, 2012; Harvey, 2012; Chelliah *et al.*, 2019; Rakhshan dehroo and Ivanova, 2020; Smith, 2020). From the statement given by the International Students 13 and International Students 21, it clearly showed that their choice to further their studies in the Public Universities in Malaysia had changed their views towards the advantage of furthering their studies abroad. The views of both groups of the international students on the implementation of the learning and teaching systems in the Malaysian public universities were incline towards the knowledge which covers theory and practice and comprehensive personal development. As for International Students 21, he/she explained that he/she was able to communicate in the English language better inside and outside the classroom. This matter is highlighted through the interview statement below:

"To further my studies in Malaysia was a big step in my life. Initially, I was not confident if I can make this big change in my life. The encouragement and support from people around me gave me the courage to take the challenge to further my studies in Malaysia. Throughout my studies here, I have learned a lot of things especially from the learning and teaching aspect. The education system in the public universities in Malaysia that implements the balance of theory and practice was far different from my place. Being in a foreign place has helped to open my eyes to embark on a dynamic academic life journey." (International Student 13).

"As for me, the advantage was the system which has been implemented in the public universities in Malaysia which was directed towards self-development and also future career prospects. This can be seen through the programmes offered. Not only that, the reputation of the Malaysian Public Universities as public universities cluster is one of the best in South East Asia has proven the success of attracting more international students to study here. Another advantage is that, we can speak in English language every day, communicating in English language with the lecturers and even with classmates inside and outside class." (International Student 21)

The experience they have gone through has developed students' academic development especially for first year students in determining their future career (Irma Wani *et al.*, 2018b). These findings coincided with the research conducted by Trujillo, Mohammed and Saleh, (2020) stated the three main elements (i) ranking (ii) accreditation and (iii) reputation of a university are some of the main criteria's which were taken into consideration

before international students made their final decision in choosing their destination to further studies abroad. The statement of International Student 13, it clearly showed that good teaching quality, suitable co-curriculum design together with experienced lecturers and teaching team increase students' satisfactory level in deciding which Higher Learning Institution in the host country (Hamad and Suzanne, 2016; Herlina *et al.*, 2017; Poon, 2019).

Other than those advantages being mentioned above, another benefit obtained by the international students was the wide social network through new friends in the host country (Lee and Ciftci, 2014; Arkoudis and Baik, 2014; Krishna, 2016; Irma Wani *et al.*, 2018a; Van Mol, 2019). The statement from International Student 5 who perceived that the local community in the host country was approachable and open minded in establishing good friendship. The benefit of wide social network indirectly gave an advantage for the international students to speed up the foreign environment assimilation and with that they were able to share their academic knowledge (Lewis, 2016; Lee, 2017). Below was the dialogue quote referring to the advantage being discussed above:

"The advantage to be here as an international student is, I can meet with so many people. I can meet with local students as well as international students. Not forgetting the new environment here, the surrounding atmosphere in the university. I am unsure how to express it, but they are so friendly, and I like it." (International Student 5).

However, some of the feedbacks received from the international students stated the disadvantages to further study abroad. This was because there were also problems or shortcomings faced by the international students regarding self-assimilation (Sawir, 2014; Thomas and Sumathi, 2016; O'Malley, 2017; Li and Zizzi, 2018; Suh, Flores and Wang, 2019). Some of the problems and shortcomings encountered by the international students was the dilemma in handling communication in the English language or Malay language which is the official language in this country (Kuo, 2011; Zhang and Mi, 2014; Gilakjani, 2015; Martirosyan, Hwang and Wanjohi, 2015; Freeman and Li, 2019). According to International Student 40, this situation happened when lecturers who tend to conduct their lectures in Malay language even with the presence of international students in the classroom.

This is the main issue that needs to be resolved as it involves international students. When the Malay language used as the medium of communication in teaching, the risk for international students to not comprehend the lecture is worrying. Thus, this is the critical aspect that would affect the academic achievement of the international students. Another problem faced by international students is the incompetence of the local students communicating in the

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English language when they communicate with each other. This matter was a critical problem to international students especially when they wish to use the information in their studies with local students (Zhang and Mi, 2014; O'Malley, 2017; Freeman and Li, 2019). From the statement given above, this clearly proved that the usage of the English language by lecturers in teaching and learning played a very important role (Liew, 2012; Kim, 2015; James-MacEachern and Yun, 2017). Below is an original interview quote that refers to the problems and shortcomings mentioned:

"When lecturers use the Malay language as a medium of communication in their lectures, I found that this method creates difficulty for me to understand the content of the lectures. This was a main problem faced by the

international students like me. That was not all, most of the students here do not speak English language fluently and when I asked them (in English), they explained something that was not clear and did not answer my questions." (International Student 40)

QUALITY OF EDUCATIONAL SERVICES OF PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN MALAYSIA MORE COMPREHENSIVE AND VERSATILE

Table 4 below, it showed 27 international students who agreed that there were differences related to the education system in the host country, Malaysia and their country of origin. The differences are explained in three aspects of (i) academic, (ii) medium of communication and (iii) the standard of the education system.

Table 4: Self Assimilation of First Year International Students Based on Comprehensive and Versatile Quality of Educational Services in Malaysian Public Universities

University 1	University II	University III	University IV
International Student 2	International Student 11	International Student 18	International Student 26
International Student 3	International Student 14	International Student 19	International Student 28
International Student 4	International Student 15	International Student 20	International Student 30
International Student 5	International Student 16	International Student 22	International Student 31
International Student 6	International Student 17	International Student 24	International Student 33
International Student 7		International Student 25	International Student 35
International Student 8			International Student 39
International Student 9			International Student 40

Through the feedbacks presented by International Student 6 and 15, the differences in education system in the host country, Malaysia and the home country can be seen through the duration of study given to complete their studies, the type of study programme offered, course evaluation through examination, practical skills implemented and applied learning and teaching facilities.

"The education system in Malaysian Public Universities is different from our education system in Brunei Darussalam. For example, there are many courses and subjects being offered in Marine Biology, Counselling Psychology, Family and Children. Basically, these subjects and courses are not available in my country." (International Student 6).

"In this country, there are many examinations and this type of approach is important to assess the students. For example, even though you have not completed assignments well either individually or in groups, and quiz, regular assessment is made through final examination. That means, if you are brilliant in the final examination, you could continue your next studies. And if you fail in the final examination, it is compulsory to resit the examination. But when I studied here, I need to have a balance between my assignment such as quiz, assignments and final examination. The examination in my country of origin is determine by the final examination while the Malaysian Public Universities Courses assessment covers quiz, assignments and final examination. Therefore, I prefer the assessment system in Malaysia because it is comprehensive." (International Student 15)

Based on the statements of International Student 6 and International Student 15, there were similarities with the results of a study conducted by Ross, Ta and Oliaro, (2020). According to Ross, Ta and Oliaro, (2020), educational services offered by a country includes the aspects of learning and teaching containing elements of complete and latest course evaluation, high standard examination system, dedicated, quality and experienced workforce and able to provide perfect learning facilities

to students. The education system of a country follows the changes of time to ensure that it can achieve a better level in the future. These changes in the education system allows every university to improve the quality of educational services they offered (Aldamer and Gulcan, 2004; Liew, 2012; Kam, 2014; Irma Wani *et al.*, 2017).

The other distinction obtained was the medium of communication in the university. Feedback received from International Student 33 stated that the education system in the home country did not use the English Language as the medium of communication but uses the local language instead (Martirosyan, Hwang and Wanjohi, 2015; Hu, 2016). However, when he furthered his studies in Malaysian Public Universities, English language and Malay language were used as the medium of communication for teaching and learning in the classroom.

"The difference with my country is definitely the language because here, there are subjects whereby the lecturers tend to use the Malay language to replace the English language as the medium of communication just because there are many local students in the classroom. This made it difficult for me to understand every detail presented by the lecturer. This is because the language spoken at home or at school is my mother tongue. So, this made it difficult for me to understand as well as communicate in the English language." (International Student 33)

Following to the statement given by the International Student 33 showed that the usage of the medium of communication in delivering knowledge in universities was the main issue that must be taken into action by the management. According to Irma Wani *et al.*, (2018b), the full use of the English language must be adhered by every lecturer the presence of international students in their courses. The lecturers' commitment in facilitating every knowledge imparted should be understood by both local and international students. These concerns brought about changes of perspective especially in enhancing the

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understanding and interest of international students. According to Zhang and Mi (2014) and Freeman and Li, (2019) the way of imparting knowledge that denies international students' misunderstanding of the mother tongue as well as the lack of communication was of the factors that leads to international students often feeling being left out while in the lecture hall.

However, there were a handful of international students who expressed positive views when referring to the differences between the Malaysian education system and their country of origin. In their view, the higher education system of this country is much better compared to the education system in their country of origin (Liew, 2012; Singh, Jack and Schapper, 2014; Shapiro, Farrelly and Tomas, 2014; Hamad and Suzanne, 2016; Irma Wani, Herlina and Norazah, 2019b). International Student 22 through his statement praised the Malaysian Public University for successfully maintaining a good image, moving towards developing the university progressively and always striving to place the country's higher education institutions on par with universities in developed countries. This view was highlighted through the statement of International Student 22 as follows:

"Yes, there is a big difference in Malaysia. I think in Malaysia, in terms of education is more advanced and at

Table 5: Self-Assimilation of First Year International Student Experience Based on The Flexibility and Dynamics of Malaysian Public University Programmes

University 1	University II	University III	University IV
International Student 1	International Student 13	International Student 18	International Student 27
International Student 3	International Student 14	International Student 19	International Student 29
International Student 4	International Student 15	International Student 20	International Student 32
International Student 5	International Student 16	International Student 22	International Student 34
International Student 6		International Student 23	International Student 36
International Student 7			International Student 37
International Student 9			International Student 38
International Student 10			

Table 5 showed a total of 24 international students unanimously agreed by stating that the course syllabus offered by Malaysian Public Universities were one of the most comprehensive syllabuses and equivalent to a world-class university. This matter was highlighted the original statement by International Student 7, 20 and 29 below:

"It is as a fun thing because I just enrolled in this university and I am sure this will be an easy thing if I study well. The syllabus in my programme abides to every detail. It is relevant and coincided with future career prospects. I am thankful that I chose this programme in this university." (International Student 7)

"I think the syllabus of the courses in this university is very good. Since I took the business programme, the syllabus that was being taught has met today's business needs. So, what I will do is to study hard and will practice what I have learned here after graduation and use it the best I can when I return to my country." (International Student 20)

"I think there is no problem since I am a new student. But come to think of it, I may find it a little bit hard in the next semester. However, I think I still can manage to follow through because my lecturers are friendly and helpful." (International Student 29)

Based on the three statements given by the international students above, they had given positive feedback by supporting the elements of a dynamic and quality

par with western countries such as Britain and the United States. What I meant is the image of the universities here are good and famous especially from the facilities provided." (International Student 22)

From the statement given by International Student 22 this clearly showed that the existence of an effective and systematic education system were two important elements that international students should consider before deciding to further their studies abroad. The sustainability of a university in maintaining a good image was said to be able to have a positive impact and the main drive of the choice of study destination (Herlina *et al.*, 2018; Irma Wani *et al.*, 2018a; Irma Wani, Herlina and Norazah, 2019b; Trujillo, Mohammed and Saleh, 2020).

FLEXIBILITY AND DYNAMICS OF PUBLIC UNIVERSITY PROGRAMMES IN MALAYSIA

A study by Irma Wani, Herlina and Norazah, (2019b) stated that the diversity of programmes offered includes a dynamic course syllabus and the flexibility of the programme was an important factor often used as a benchmark by international students in making choices to further their studies at universities in a host country.

syllabus of study courses in Malaysian Public Universities. Meanwhile, there were international students who claimed that they did not have any problems with the course syllabus offered. The situation facilitated by the lecturers were known for their friendliness and helpful in providing assistance when needed. Therefore, the comprehensive syllabus elements of the course are seen to have a positive impact on the assimilation of the first year experience of international students in Malaysia (Harvey, 2012; Liew, 2012; Kam, 2014; Irma Wani, Hasbullah and Norazah, 2019a).

MARKET DRIVEN, COURSE DEVELOPMENT AND CONTEMPORARY COURSE PROGRAMMES

The diversity of the programme offered in Malaysian Public Universities is parallel with the status of universities in the country which was recognised as having various types of universities such as comprehensive, research universities and technical universities (KPT, 2018). Referring to the history of the establishment of Malaysian Public Universities in the early phase of independence till the present has shown that the development of courses was comprehensive and parallel the current job market (Abd Hair, Zaimah and Izzurazlia, 2012; Boado, Hu and Soysal, 2017; Irma Wani *et al.*, 2019a; 2019b).

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Table 6: Self-Assimilation of First Year International Student Experience Based Market Driven, Course Development and Contemporary Course Offering Programmes

University 1	University II	University III	University IV
International Student 1	International Student 11	International Student 19	International Student 27
International Student 2	International Student 12	International Student 21	International Student 28
International Student 3	International Student 15	International Student 22	International Student 30
International Student 5	International Student 17	International Student 24	International Student 31
International Student 6			International Student 33
International Student 7			International Student 36
International Student 8			International Student 39

For international students from other parts of the world, the diversity of the programmes offered by Malaysian Public Universities is the best opportunity whereby students are able to follow the programmed of their interest as well as being able to obtain a degree in the career prospect that secures a job (Nilsson and Ripmeester, 2016; Hamad and Suzanne, 2016; Irma Wani *et al.*, 2018b; Smith, 2020). Through the next sub-theme which was the Course Development and Offering of Contemporary Study Programmes and Market Driven, a total of 22 international students agreed that the catalyst for the selection of Malaysian Public Universities as their destination of studies was due to the variety of study programmes offered. Based on the interview statement by the international students, it indicated that most of the programmes offered by Malaysian Public Universities were not available in their own country or were not competitive in terms of structure and content of the programmes.

The results obtained were similar to the study by Herlina *et al.*, (2018) who found that the image, reputation and variety of programmes offered were able to influence the results of the international students in choosing the country of furthering their studies. From the statement given by International Student 7, 12 and 31 below, explained clearly that programmes offered in Malaysian Public Universities are more career-orientated. This matter was highlighted from three original statements below:

"After receiving letter of offer from Malaysian Public University, my eyes were set on the study programmed offered. I was excited because I got the course I was interested in. In my country, the constraints faced by local students is that most programmed are not offered due to lack of expertise in terms of experienced lecturers. (International Student 7)

"Honestly, programmes offered in Malaysian Public Universities are much better compared to the programmes in my country. In here, the diversity of study programmes

further guarantees the future especially for the increasingly dynamic job market. So, that is why I chose Malaysian Public Universities as my study destination." (International Student 12)

"In my opinion, the diversity of programmes offered in Malaysian Public Universities is one of the factors why many international students came here. For example, back in my hometown there is a lack of critical programmes involving the field of engineering. But here, there is faculty offering variety of engineering programmes." (International Student 31)

The statements given by International Students 7, 12 and 31 have supported some of the results of studies conducted by Liew (2012), Nilsson and Ripmeester, (2016) and Hamad and Suzanne, (2016), where the existence of new course diversity offered in the host country is a contributing factor to the decision of international students to pursue their studies abroad. Furthermore, the programmes offered are more focused on the prospects of the market-ability of the workforce after graduation (Azizah, Hamidah and Roziana Shaari, 2011; Noel, Levitz and Saluri, 2012; Nilsson and Ripmeester, 2016; Irma Wani *et al.*, 2018b; Rakhshandehroo and Ivanova, 2020).

BENEFITS OF THE VALUE-ADDED OF THE USE OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AS A LEARNING AND TEACHING MEDIUM OF COMMUNICATION IN MALAYSIAN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES

A lot of universities in the world are using the English Language as the medium of communication in teaching and learning process so that universities are more competitive and prestigious (Madge, Raghuram and Noxolo, 2015; Irma Wani *et al.*, 2017; Irma Wani *et al.*, 2018b; Song, 2019). A total of 36 international students submitted their perspectives of their decision to pursue studying abroad added value to English proficiency as a medium of communication that can ultimately be utilised in future careers.

Table 7: Self-Assimilation of First Year International Students Experience Based on the Benefits of the Added Value of the Use of English Language the Medium of communication in the Teaching Learning and in Malaysian Public Universities

University 1	University II	University III	University IV
International Student 1	International Student 11	International Student 18	International Student 26
International Student 2	International Student 12	International Student 20	International Student 27
International Student 3	International Student 13	International Student 21	International Student 28
International Student 4	International Student 14	International Student 22	International Student 29
International Student 5	International Student 15	International Student 23	International Student 30
International Student 7	International Student 17	International Student 24	International Student 31
International Student 8		International Student 25	International Student 32
International Student 10			International Student 33
			International Student 34

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			International Student 35
			International Student 36
			International Student 37
			International Student 38
			International Student 39
			International Student 40

The statement given by International Student 4, 15, 25 and 30 had agreed that in order to increase the level of English proficiency, they need to communicate in that language. Among the forms of communication conducted was to join debate activities and through individual oral presentation individually in the classroom. This scenario also showed that majority of the students tend to use the English language as their medium of interaction in the study and knew the importance of the English language at a University level. This can be seen in the statement below:

“For me, to improve English proficiency is by communicating in English language with anyone even if your vocabulary is wrong. Eventually, it will improve the level of English proficiency when communicating with others.” (International Student 4)

“The only way to improve English proficiency is to speak English with people who are speaking the language. Maybe the person is also learning, and it may help to improve their English because by doing so it benefited us too.” (International Student 15)

“We can improve our English proficiency by learning more in English. What I mean is improve your skills in communicating in English with other students. For example, debating and helping other students analyse things in English.” (International Student 25)

“Definitely you need to learn and understand. You need to learn basic English and how to communicate well. That is not all, you also must improve your grammar from time to time.” (International Student 30)

However, International Student 40 emphasized that other than communicating with classmates using English, reading English books, revision and learning from the internet like YouTube could also improve the English language proficiency. International Student 40 also stated that other initiative such as joining English Club is the alternatives for him to improve the level of his English proficiency. This can be seen in the statement below:

“Actually, I myself is trying to improve my English skills. I just joined English Club, so I use it as a way to improve my English skills. I read a lot of books, novels and now I watched videos in YouTube on how to improve my English proficiency and also a video where a debater speaks, a world-class debate winner. So, I see how they speak English and I used the resources I mentioned earlier to improve my English language skills.” (International Student 40)

The results of the statements given by the international students above have shown that as an international student, English language skills in written and oral form are critical and considered among the main preparation before furthering their studies abroad (Zhang and Mi, 2014; Gilakjani, 2015; Martirosyan, Hwang and Wanjohi, 2015). Meanwhile, the implementation and the use of a language in teaching and learning process in a university is one of the main factors in influencing students’ decision to further their studies abroad (Abd Hair, Zaimah and Izzurazlia, 2012; Dora *et al.*, 2014; Lewis, 2016; Herlina *et al.*, 2017; Irma Wani, Herlina and Norazah, 2019b; Nghia, 2019; Trujillo, Mohammed and Saleh, 2020).

CONCLUSION

The results of this research findings contributed to the gap in the literature of the management of international students with regards to self-assimilation of first year experience in academic achievement by giving a health enhancement impact while studying in a host country. The feedbacks given by international students on the education system offered by Malaysian Public Universities is valuable and organized. The feedbacks were a balance of both theory and practical in the teaching and learning systems which were different from their own country. Therefore, academic development is shaped through the theoretical and practical balance which determines future career prospects for international students. This further increases the level of academic satisfaction among international students in the host country.

Good teaching quality, appropriate curriculum design as well as experienced lecturers increase the level of students’ satisfaction with the selection of Higher Education Institutions in the destination country. Negative perspectives from some international students regarding the use of the Malay language as the medium of communication in the lectures resulted from local students who were not proficient in speaking English. This issue is seen to be the cause of the problems faced by international students, especially when they attend lectures where the number of local students is high. This results to lecturers using the Malay language to ensure that the majority of local students understand the subject taught. Having a good command in the English language is an important factor in influencing the first-year experience of international students, especially in the effort to achieve academic excellence. The advantage of mastering the medium of communication provides an added value in improving foreign language skills, especially English which is the compulsory language of teaching and learning for international students in Malaysian Public Universities. Most of these international students showed interest in choosing a destination country that uses English as medium of communication. Although their level of English proficiency is not very good, a strong commitment has encouraged international students to continue to strive in improving their English language.

Even though they are still studying in the first year and have not faced the challenges of the entire course of study, the findings revealed the perspectives of international students on the dynamics of the syllabus of the courses of study offered in the study programme as comprehensible. However, the feedback received showed a positive attitude and excitement of international students coupled with the presence of lecturers showed an approachable attitude in providing assistance to make the learning process easier. The characteristics of lecturers like having extensive experience, having good teaching quality and appropriate curriculum syllabus design can increase the level of students’ satisfaction of the programme but it can also increase the level of satisfaction of the entire education system in a university.

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Having a good self-implication in the programmes provided in this country portrayed a health enhancement impact in academic achievement and self-development among international students. The vast variety of programmes offered by the universities in this country provides many options when compared to universities in the home country of the international students. Therefore, it has become a major starting point for international students in their decision to further their studies abroad.

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