

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS'
EXPERIENCE, ADJUSTMENT AND ACADEMIC
PERFORMANCE IN MALAYSIAN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES

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PERFORMANCE IN MALAYSIAN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES

by

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HUBUNGAN ANTARA PENGALAMAN PELAJAR ANTARABANGSA, ADAPTASI DAN PENCAPAIAN AKADEMIK DI UNIVERSITI-UNIVERSITI AWAM MALAYSIA

ABSTRAK

Pada tahun 2011, Kementerian Pengajian Tinggi telah meletakkan matlamat untuk mencapai sasaran 200,000 pelajar antarabangsa melanjutkan pelajaran di Malaysia pada 2020. Jumlah penerimaan pelajar antarabangsa adalah selari dengan Indeks Prestasi Utama (IPU) pengantarabangsaan Pendidikan Tinggi Malaysia. Universiti-universiti awam Malaysia seperti Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), Universiti Malaya (UM), Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), dan Universiti Islam Antarabangsa Malaysia (UIAM) adalah tergolong dalam universiti-universiti terkemuka di Malaysia dan penglibatan mereka dalam mencapai matlamat tersebut adalah tidak terkecuali. Peningkatan jumlah pelajar antarabangsa sejak beberapa tahun yang lepas telah membawa perhatian universiti-universiti untuk memikirkan bagaimana menampung dan mengekalkan jumlah mereka. Usaha-usaha ini bagaimanapun bergantung kepada sejauh mana pelajar antarabangsa teradaptasi dengan persekitaran Malaysia. Lebih banyak masalah adaptasi boleh memberi kesan kepada pencapaian akademik dan ini boleh menyebabkan mereka membuat keputusan berhenti daripada universiti atau diberhentikan. Oleh itu, kajian ini mempunyai objektif untuk mengkaji (1) pengalaman-pengalaman yang berkaitan dengan tiga jenis adaptasi pelajar prasiswazah antarabangsa, merangkumi sosio-budaya, psikologi dan akademik, di Malaysia dan (2) kesannya terhadap pencapaian akademik. Pengalaman-pengalaman yang diuji adalah sokongan sosial, penguasaan bahasa Inggeris, persekitaran universiti, dan persekitaran umum kehidupan. Sejumlah 580 pelajar prasiswazah antarabangsa telah mengambil bahagian dalam kajian ini. Kajian ini menggunakan keratan rentas, kajian kuantitatif dan menggunakan teknik

'snowball'. Kebolehpercayaan komposisi untuk setiap pengukuran telah dikira untuk menentukan kebolehpercayaan dalaman. Kesahan diskriminan telah dijalankan untuk menentukan ketidaksamaan antara pengukur. Analisis '*bootstrapping*' telah digunakan untuk menentukan hubungan antara pengukur seperti di dalam cadangan kerangka konseptual. Keputusan menunjukkan setiap jenis adaptasi termasuk tiga dimensi sosio-budaya (usaha peribadi, empati budaya, kaitan budaya), psikologi, dan akademik dipengaruhi oleh persekitaran universiti. Selain daripada persekitaran universiti, keputusan menunjukkan bahawa: (1) adaptasi sosio-budaya (usaha peribadi) dipengaruhi oleh sokongan keluarga, sokongan pensyarah dan penguasaan bahasa Inggeris; (2) adaptasi-adaptasi sosio-budaya (empati budaya dan kaitan budaya) dipengaruhi oleh penguasaan bahasa Inggeris; (3) adaptasi psikologi dipengaruhi oleh sokongan keluarga dan sokongan pensyarah; (4) adaptasi akademik dipengaruhi oleh sokongan rakan, sokongan pensyarah, penguasaan bahasa Inggeris dan persekitaran umum kehidupan. Selain itu, adaptasi sosio-budaya (empati budaya), psikologi dan akademik didapati mempunyai kesan positif dan signifikan terhadap pencapaian akademik pelajar prasiswazah antarabangsa. Pada akhir kajian, beberapa implikasi teori, praktikal dan metodologi dibincangkan.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' EXPERIENCE, ADJUSTMENT AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN MALAYSIAN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES

ABSTRACT

In 2011, the Ministry of Higher Education has set an aim to project 200,000 international students studying in Malaysia by 2020. The receiving number of international student is aligned with Key Performance Index (KPI) of internationalization of Malaysian Higher Education. Malaysian public universities such as Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), Universiti Malaya (UM), Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), and International Islamic University of Malaysia (IIUM) are among the Malaysian top universities and their participation toward the accomplishment of the aim is not excluded. The growing number of international students since the last few years has brought the universities attention to think on how to better accommodate and retain them. These efforts however depending on how well the international students adjusted to Malaysian environment. More adjustments' difficulties could affect their academic performance and these may affect their decision to drop or being drop from university. Therefore, the present study has objective to examine (1) the experiences of international undergraduate students that related to three types of adjustments, including sociocultural, psychological and academic, in Malaysia and (2) its effect on academic performance. The experiences tested were social support, English language proficiency, university environment, and general living condition. A total of 580 international undergraduate students participated in the present study. This study used a cross-sectional, quantitative study and applied snowball techniques. Composite reliability for each measurement was calculated to determine internal reliability. Discriminant validity was performed to examine the dissimilarity between the measurements. Analysis of bootstrapping was utilized to examine the relationships of variables as in the

proposed framework. Results showed that all types of adjustments including the three dimensions of sociocultural adjustment (impersonal endeavours, cultural empathy, and cultural relatedness), psychological, and academic adjustments were influenced by university environment. Other than university environment, the results showed that: (1) sociocultural (impersonal endeavours) adjustment was influenced by family support, lecturer support, and English language proficiency; (2) sociocultural (cultural empathy and cultural relatedness) adjustment was influenced by English language proficiency; (3) psychological adjustment was influenced by family support, and lecturer support; (4) academic adjustment was influenced by friend support, lecturer support, English language proficiency and general living condition. In addition to that, the sociocultural (cultural empathy), psychological, and academic adjustments were found to positively and significantly affect academic performance of international undergraduate students. In the end of the study, several theoretical, practical and methodological implications were discussed.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of International Students' Environment in Institutions of Higher Education

In the third Global Higher Education Forum (GHEF) 2011 held in Penang, Malaysia, Professor Emeritus Anuwar Ali, the Vice Chansellor of Open University Malaysia delivered a keynote address entitled "Internationalising Higher Education: Lessons Learned from Regional Hubs". In his address, Ali argued that one critical factor in higher education's internationalization is ensuring a positive learning environment. He postulated that a positive learning environment can be created by providing in- and off-campus facilities that help international students to perform better.

Policy makers, academicians, and staff at universities have been concerned about improving their supporting systems to help international students achieving success. Failure of higher education institutions to ensure a positive learning environment for international students reduces competitiveness for Malaysia as a hosting country, and Malaysia will lose its potential shared market to other regions. Doing well in in the international educational area is a national goal. Malaysia had captured 2 per cent of the total world market share of international students (Lim, 2009) but the goal of our government is to increase the number of international students at higher education institutions to 200,000 in by 2020 (Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, 2011a).

Malaysian government hope to attract and retain international students and it must improve the quality of higher education (Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, 2011b). Because international students are valuable consumers, the need to revise and improve

current pedagogy, methodology, and education-related systems has risen. Thus, our higher education institutions require constant updates and follow-up to par with new educational trends.

Some governments have allocated scholarships for talented students pursuing higher education abroad to achieve some objectives. One objective is for nurturing brainpower among its citizens; this is considered to be an investment in developing human capital. Another objective is to develop future diplomatic relationships with the host countries. International students can become middlemen between governments because these students are familiar with local issues and the related culture and commutation styles. Another objective is to develop a network for future international business purposes, and international students can contribute to this process. Thus, making the international students feel good at host universities is as important as the purpose of sending them abroad.

Cross-cultural experience is also a main goal of international students studying abroad (Huang, 2010) and this experience becomes a career asset for international students. Experiences gained are basically for self-development, building networks, future career and self-enjoyment. Common objectives to studying abroad are including accumulating international experiences, being independent, self-development, and building networks (Chirkov, Safdar, de Guzman & Playford, 2008; Neri & Ville, 2008; McDermontt-Levy, 2011). For instance, international students in Malaysia were found to study here to become more independent and seeking for more employment opportunities (Jani, Tat & Ngah, 2010).

In order for the students get valuable experiences abroad, their parents are making a large investment to support their children. However, the investment's continuance is depending on their children's academic performance (Asgarkhani, 2010). Thus, academic performance is an indicator that determines the successfulness of international students.

It is common that international students experience academic stress or difficulties. When students view their academic performance as a challenge, overcoming difficulties can be transformed into a sense of competence and higher capacity to learn (Whitman, Spendlove, & Clark, 1984). However, when academic performance is seen as a threat, the stress can be transformed into a feeling of helplessness and a foreboding sense of loss (Whitman et al., 1984). Sufficient difficulties during the adjustment process are indeed necessary to challenge students to learn. However, a large number of difficulties encountered during the acculturation process may affect academic performance of international students. Therefore, in helping international students to perform better, adjustment difficulties must be first determined so that direct measures can be taken to solve the problem.

1.2 Background of International Students in Malaysian Public Universities

Receiving international students is not something new to Malaysia and research about these international students has become an area of interest in Malaysia. The Ministry of Higher Education have granted Universiti Malaysia (UM), Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) and Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) the status of research universities. It is hoped that these universities could spearhead research activities at the highest level and achieve a world universities (Ismail & Musa, 2010).

Recently, the Ministry of Higher Education has set an aim for Malaysia to become a regional and international education hub. The Ministry wants Malaysian universities to compete globally in the international student marketplace (National Higher Education Strategic Plan 2, 2011). Participation of Malaysian top universities, which are consisting of Malaysian public universities into the realization of this aim, is not excluded. Thus, these universities must be able to cater the needs of a growing number of international students.

Computing the number of international students in Malaysian higher education institutions is one of Key Performance Indicator (KPI) the government uses to measure internationalization (Aziz, Siong, Tin & Abdullah, 2011). According to Ali (2011), about a 80,000 international students had enrolled in Malaysian universities, by the end of 2010. Recently, there were about 93,000 international students who were studying in Malaysia (NST, 2013). The number of enrolled international students in Malaysia are expected to reach 200,000 by 2020 (Ministry of Higher Education, 2011b), and this forecast growth has raised many issues related to student adjustment in Malaysian higher education institution.

The majority of the international students were motivated to study in Malaysia due to encouragement by their family members, relatives, friends and government policy while the main sources of information came from Internet, media, word-of-mouth, embassy/tourism offices, friends, and family members (Jani et al., 2010). Jani et al.'s study showed that younger international students choose to study abroad in Malaysia because they wanted to be independent, and to widen employment opportunities, while the older students chose Malaysia because of the political stability and affordable programme fees. Some difficulties faced by the international students in Malaysia reported were homesickness, financial, social support, and language barrier (Pandian, 2008; Jani et al., 2010; Mahmud, Amat, Rahman, & Ishak, 2010; Yusliza, 2011). Based on Jani et al.'s (2010) investigation on life satisfaction of international students in Malaysia, the highest score reported was for personal health and the least was for recreational activities. Alavi and Mansor (2011) also found recreational activities as problematic because their university provided them with limited sport facilities.

A primary research conducted by the British Council (2008) cited by Jani et al. (2010) on international student mobility in East Asia found that the perception of less discrimination and assist in settling were convincing in Malaysia due to the fact that Asian and Islamic culture was embedded in the society. However, these were not the only factors that

influenced international students to pursue higher education in Malaysia. The other reasons were international recognition of qualifications, competitive programme fees, the opportunity to make international contacts, political stability, and the affordable cost of living and tuition fees (National Higher Education Research Institute, 2009). However, even with all the positive factors drawing international students to study in Malaysia, universities must provide suitable services. The difficulties and stress for international students during their academic years in Malaysia must be managed in positive ways, and the most important service is to help students achieve their main goal for studying here, which is the academic performance.

1.3 Problem Statement

Becoming an educational hub is the aim of Malaysian government which has articulated with the seven thrusts created under National Higher Education Strategic Plan (NHESP) 2007-2020. In order to become an education hub, Ministry of Higher Education wanted to internationalize Malaysian higher education institutions, and the number of international students has been set as an indicator of the internationalization of higher education. However, the projected increase in international students' arrivals by 2020 have given rise to questions about how the professionals – the academicians and administrations – at institutions of higher education can create culturally appropriate services and programmes for them.

In 2008, Botswana's government was warned to reduce the number of students they sent to Malaysia after several reports were made that their students faced great acculturation stress in adjusting to the Malaysian environment (The Star, 2008). Adjustment to life in a new environment such as host country is a continuous and sometimes difficult experience that international students encounter in any part of the world. More difficulties experienced in a host country may result in lower academic, social or personal, and psychological

adjustment level and these difficulties can affect negatively international students' academic performance (Singh, Jack, & Schapper, 2012).

Some on-going research in internationalization of higher education has focused on the adjustment of international students in Malaysia. International students in Malaysia faced adjustment challenges with respect to culture, climate, and care (Mahmud et al., 2010); social support (Yusliza, 2010); academic, religious, personal, and social adjustment problems (Malaklolunthu & Selan, 2010); cost of living (Malaklolunthu & Selan, 2010; Asgari & Borzooei, 2014); social, recreational, curriculum, and method of teaching problems (Alavi & Mansor, 2011); multiculturalism, discrimination, academic, social support networks (Pandian, 2008); academic adjustment (Safahieh & Sigh, 2007); the environment (Desa, Yusoff, & Kadir, 2012; Yee, 2013); attitude (Desa et al., 2012), livelihood (e.g., transportation and immigration service, community condition), service, and facilities (Jani et al., 2010); festival, event, facility, and accommodation (Asgari & Borzooei, 2014).

The present study addresses these adjustment-related experiences and outcomes related to these adjustments. Based on previous findings with respect to the Malaysian higher educational environment, several difficulties were found (e.g., homesickness, financial, healthcare, sport facilities, culture, climate care, social support, cost of living, social adjustment, recreational, curriculum, method of teaching, multiculturalism, discrimination, academic, environment, and attitude). Based on these findings, the difficulties during adjustments can be categorized into several dimensions – social support; language or specifically the English language which is the medium language of instruction used for international courses in higher education in Malaysia; university environment; general living conditions; and its relationship with psychological, sociocultural, and academic adjustment.

Adjustment difficulties related to the host environment may influence academic performance among international students. Therefore, the present study examines how adjustments to these difficulties affected academic performance of the international students. International student who faced adjustment problems may exert psychological stress, lower academic performance and potentially drop out from university. There were cases reported by a Malaysian public university that international undergraduate students dropped from university due to inability to perform in academic (see Appendix E). The worst case reported in Malaysian news was the suicide of an international student (The Star, 2008), which was an outcome clearly antithetical to the Malaysian government's intentions to retrain, attract and increase the number of international students studying in Malaysian universities.

By investigating the variables related to academic performance, the results of this study could be essential in helping Malaysian universities to improve their systems and services to retrain and help cater to the needs international students during their candidatures in Malaysia. Delivering the correct services to international students could help them adjust faster and achieve academic performance. In doing so, international students will have more motivation to stay until they finish their studies, and spread good news about Malaysian universities' reputability through word-of-mouth to future students in their home countries.

To sum up, it is critical to identify factors that influence students' adjustments which including social support, English language proficiency, university environment, general living conditions with the international students' performance in academics in order for Malaysian universities to better accommodate, recruit, and retain more international students in the near future.

1.4 Research Objectives

Generally, this study has aims to confirm: (1) the relationship of international students' experiences toward adjustments level and; (2) to confirm the influence of adjustments toward academic performance of international students.

Specifically, this study has several objectives as below:

- i. To examine the relationship between three dimensions of social support (family, friends, and lecturer) and the level of psychological, sociocultural, and academic adjustment;
- ii. To examine the relationship between the level of English language proficiency and the level of psychological, sociocultural, and academic adjustment;
- iii. To examine the relationship between university environment and the level of psychological, sociocultural, and academic adjustment;
- iv. To examine the relationship between general living conditions and the level of psychological and academic adjustment;
- v. To examine the relationship between the level of psychological, sociocultural, and academic adjustment with academic performance.

1.5 Research Questions

In order to accomplish the above objectives, the present study will answer the following research questions:

- i. Do three dimensions of social support (family, friends, and lecturer) relate to the level of psychological, sociocultural, and academic adjustment?
- ii. Does English language proficiency relate to the level of psychological, sociocultural, and academic adjustment?

- iii. Does university environment relate to the level of psychological, sociocultural, and academic adjustment?
- iv. Do general living conditions relate to the level of psychological and academic adjustment?
- v. Does the level of psychological, sociocultural, and academic adjustment affect academic performance?

1.6 Significance of Study

The present study provided an understanding on how social support, English language proficiency, university environment are linked with psychological, sociocultural, and academic adjustment. In addition, general living conditions were examined with respect to psychological and academic adjustment. This study extends a research model by adding newly found elements from the latest research to ‘university environment’ measurements items. New items including orientation programmes, multimedia systems, sport facilities, and transportation were found to be emergently important today and are included as part of the university environment’s measurement. Additionally, the local climate has been deemed to be an important element and is added to the ‘general living condition’ measurement. The present study seeks to enhance understanding of how academic performance among international students could be influenced by the three types of adjustment: psychological, sociocultural, and academic.

In practical terms, the present study seeks to provide findings that will help Malaysian Higher Education institutions to cater more effectively to international students by providing better services. Subsequently, this will lead to an improvement in a positive learning environment for international students and provide recommendation for policy makers in improving service quality for Malaysian higher international education to attract, retain, and

receive international students in the near future. A stable inflow of international students will help Malaysia grown and prosper as an educational hub and later on, create more quality in higher education, improve more employment opportunities for Malaysians, and enhance national income growth.

1.7 Definition of Key Terms

- Academic performance in the present study is defined as successful in achieving a satisfactory academic result. A 2.00 Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) is considered to be passing in Malaysian universities.
- Academic adjustment in the present study reflects the ability of the international students to adjust to academic demands of the host university through the acquisition of academic cultural knowledge.
- Acculturation is referring to subsequent changes in the original patterns of either or both groups when groups of individuals having different culture come into continuous first-hand contact (Redfield, Linton, & Herskovits, 1936).
- Acculturative adjustment is the sojourners' process of acculturation and adjustment (Wang, Heppner, Fu, Zhao, Li, & Chuang, 2012).
- Acculturation stress can be defined as stress related to adjustment to a new lifestyle, resulting from an encounter with new cultural paradigms (Berry, 2003).
- Adjustment can be defined as a dynamic process involving the person and environment directed toward an achievement of the adjustment between the two (Anderson, 1994).
- Ecological perspective is referring to the relationship between an individual and his or her environment, and the interrelation between the two, accounting for interactions

among and between the various sub environments in individual experiences (Bronfrenbrenner, 1979).

- International student is an individual who temporarily reside in a country other than their country of citizenship in order to participate in an international educational exchange as students (Paige, 1990).
- Psychological adjustment in the present study is the emotional expression often described as psychological well-being, depression, stress, mental health concerns, or emotional satisfaction and physical symptoms.
- Social support can be defined as verbal and non-verbal communication between recipients and providers that helps manage uncertainty about the situation, the self, and the other or the relationship and functions to enhance a perception of personal control in one's life experience (Albrecht & Adelman, 1987, p.19)
- Sociocultural adjustment in the present study is describing the ability to study, live and interact with the new environment through acquisition and application of cultural knowledge skills.

1.8 Organization of Remaining Chapters

This thesis was organized into five chapters. The first chapter contains the background of the study, overview of international students' issues in Malaysian public universities, problem statement, research objectives, research questions, the significance of conducting this study, and definition of terms that were applied in this study.

Chapter two presents a compilation of literature reviews with regard to the variables tested in the present study. In addition, the underlying theories behind the understanding of variables' interrelationship were also elaborated. In the end of this chapter, there are sections of gap of studies, proposed framework and the development of hypotheses.

Next, chapter three presents the research design and methodologies used to conduct this study. The chapter discusses the participants involved, questionnaire design, data collection procedures, and data analysis techniques.

In chapter four, the statistical analyses and results were presented. There are several sections in this chapter including response rate, restatement of hypotheses, several analyses, and the summary of results.

In the last chapter (Chapter 5), the discussion and conclusions were presented. Sections in this chapter including the recapitulation of the findings, discussion of findings, implication of research in term of theoretical, methodological and practical contribution, the limitation of study, recommendation for future study and the conclusion.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

International students potentially face many challenges in adapting to a new environment. These adjustments often arise from the differences between host culture and the dominant host culture, which may be associated with psychological, sociocultural, and academic settings. Adjusting better to a new environment often leads to a better academic performance for international students.

The intent of this study is to examine academic performance of undergraduate international students as a result to adjustment processes. To begin, an in-depth review of extant literature on adjustments related theories; international student's experiences and the outcome of adjustments (academic performance) were presented.

At the end of literature review, several hypotheses to be tested in the present study were presented, and a theoretical framework was developed.

2.2 Adjustment Definition

Adjustment involves attitudinal and emotional adjustment of sojourners to the host culture and socially integrating an individual into the social integration of the new culture (Thomas & Althen, 1989). Many researchers have used adjustment as term when the groups focused upon were sojourners, local students, and even employees in companies. Anderson (1994) defined adjustment as a dynamic process that involves the person and environment and is directed toward achievement of the adjustment between the two. Most of the time, adjustment was discussed for groups of newcomers such as, new intake students, new employees, new international students, and expatriates. The term of "adjustment",

“adaptation” and “acculturation” often used interchangeably, however, the contextual differences exist because “adjustment” and “adaptation” can be fit into all newcomers’ group, while “acculturation” is a process of adjustment of newcomers from a different culture into the host culture. Tesoriero (2006) explained that “adaptation” is neither the assimilation of two worldviews into one melting pot nor a process of substituting one worldview for another. In another view, “adaptation” is referring to the outcome of adjustive processes while “adjustment” means dynamic and interactive processes in a new academic environment (Young & Schartner, 2014). In addition to the interchangeably terms, Rudmin (2009) define “acculturation” as a second-cultural acquisition. However, Rudmin’s (2009) view is not supported as one’s native skills will not be replaced, but will be extended in the acculturation or adjustment process (Tesoriero, 2006).

Recently, acculturation and adjustment have been combined to form a new term called “acculturative adjustment”. Acculturative adjustment reflects upon a sojourners’ process of acculturation and adjustment (Wang, Heppner, Fu, Zhao, Li, & Chuang, 2012). Regardless of the new term, many previous studies have applied “adjustment” or “acculturation” term rather than “acculturative adjustment” in investigating international students’ process of adaptation in host countries. In the present study, the literature review about adjustment referred to previous studies that have applied the terms of “adjustment”, “adaptation”, and “acculturation”.

2.2.1 Dimensions of Adjustment

Three dimensions of adjustment (social, cultural, and academic adjustments) are necessary to be discussed when the focus of the study is on international students (Bang & Montgomery, 2013). Three dimensions of adjustment that university can help support students in the transition process to university life, which are including academic adjustment,

social adjustment, and psychological adjustment (Yau, Sun & Cheng, 2012). In the context of international students, social and cultural adjustments were often categorized into one variable, named as 'sociocultural adjustment' (e.g., Ward & Chang, 1997; Ward & Kennedy, 1999; Li & Gasser, 2005; Swami, 2009). Both psychological and sociocultural adjustments were often explored when it is related with international education (Wright & Schartner, 2013). Most previous literature in the field of sojourners' adjustment (e.g., Ward & Kennedy, 1993; Huang & Brown, 1996; Ward et al., 1998; Ramsay, Baker, & Jones, 1999; Li & gasser, 2005; Spencer-Oatey & Xiong, 2006; Li, Chen & Duanmu, 2010; Janjua et al., 2011; Wang et al., 2012; Yau, Sun & Cheng, 2012) discussed these three dimensions, which are psychological, sociocultural, and academic adjustment. Therefore, the present study attempted to investigate on these three dimensions of adjustment.

2.2.1.1 Psychological Adjustment

Psychological adjustment is related to emotional expression and often described as psychological well-being, satisfaction, depression, stress, mental health concerns, or emotional satisfaction and physical symptoms (Searle & Ward, 1990; Zhang & Goodson, 2011). As an alternative to interpret psychological adjustment, Ward and Kennedy (1993) suggested that researchers examine the framework of stress and coping. This framework is predicted and explained by the reaction made by the international students when they face difficulties and life changes in a host country. In their research, Gutierrez et al. (2007) explained that coping strategies are sort of adaptation. In their study, these coping strategies were believed to be stimulus-specific toward biological goals such as social network maintenance, status attainment, and self-preservation. For instance, international students may want to develop a new social network, achieve a certain level of academic performance, and increase the positive look on their resume for the sake of their future after graduation. In

order to comply with their goals, the students simultaneously build up their psychological needs.

Yeoh (2012), in a qualitative study on international students at the University of Tasmania, discovered that students had a lower psychological well-being. Homesickness, loneliness, depression and anxiety were the manifestations of the lower psychological well-being. The study found that the international students neglected to have proper meals on time due to a hectic life. The students also indicated that they coped with psychological problems by seeking support from peers, supervisors and family. Thus, psychological adjustment was basically geared towards issues of emotional state, which were expressed in either positive or negative ways.

2.2.1.2 Sociocultural Adjustment

According to Black (1988) and Black and Stephens (1989), sociocultural adjustment consists of functionality in performing tasks, adaptation to social living condition, and adaptability with host-country nationals. Searle and Ward (1990) later claimed that sociocultural adjustment was the acquisition of specific cultural knowledge skills and the ability to fit into the host culture by interacting with their members in social circles. Though both explanations are different, the context is still the same. By combining the definitions and fit into the initial context based on this study, sociocultural adjustment achieved when international students able to study, live and interact with the new environment through acquisition and application of cultural knowledge skills (Black, 1988; Black & Stephens; Searle & Ward, 1990).

Sociocultural adjustment typically shows linear improvement with time. Berry (1999, p. 16) stated that sociocultural adjustment is “predicted by cultural knowledge, degree of contact, and inter-group attitudes”. Sociocultural adaptation can best be understood from a

cultural learning or learning-social cognition framework (Ward & Kennedy, 1993). With respect to sociocultural adjustment issues, international students often report difficulties in adjusting to a new living environment. Some difficulties experienced when trying to make a good living environment are managing personal finances, independently interacting with people outside of their familial and professional circle, making independent judgement about people, and managing hospitalizations and illness alone (McDermontt-Levy, 2011). Furthermore, McDermontt-Levy (2011) suggested that managing personal matters alone is more difficult in the host country than managing themselves in their home country, resulting in disappointment among international students who may have relied previously upon their parents or family.

Yan and Berliner (2013), for instance, discovered that international students face many difficulties in adjusting to new sociocultural environment. In the Malaysian context, though Malay and English are the most commonly spoken official languages in government and private institutions, in daily life, races such as Chinese, will speak either Mandarin or Hokkien, and Indians will speak either Tamil or Malayalam. Realizing this situation, when races in Malaysia speak English with their accents, misunderstandings are created for the international students (Mahmud et al., 2010). International students may not understand local jokes and humour in the early phase of adaptation. Consistent with this finding, increased social interaction with local students was associated with higher-level sociocultural adjustment (Pedersen et al., 2011). International students will understand the host culture better as a result of new friendships in Malaysia through participation in social gatherings and events. Regular gatherings involving international students with administrative presence in any clubs, associations, or faculties in the universities could even help them adjust effectively (Galloway & Jenkins, 2009).

Sometimes, in social events, some rules or protocols are unwritten or practiced consistently such as the way to address their lecturers by name or status (Myles & Cheng, 2003). In Malaysia, people address those who are senior friends as brother and sister, lecturers as Mr, Ms, or Doctor, and older people as uncle and aunty. These addresses can be confusing and challenging for international students to adapt to, especially for those who have come from Western countries. Additionally, results from one study indicated that international students who come from large power-distance cultures, such as Asian cultures, tend to feel more comfortable if the authorities or societies provide them with clear and well-organized rules to reduce social ambiguity (Hung & Hyun, 2010).

In fact, social ambiguity does not only emanate from local rules and regulations, leading to challenges in dealing with people in authority and unpleasant people. Yusliza (2010) found that international students reported problems in dealing with people in authority. This problem often happens in collective cultures, and this could probably be due to perceived fear or having to respect authority (Joy & Kolb, 2009). Fear of sharing their problems with others may worsen international students' sociocultural adjustment.

To conclude, sociocultural adjustment of international students basically revolves around issues of ability to live, interact and study in a new environment that applied cultural knowledge.

2.2.1.3 Academic Adjustment

The third type of adjustment is academic adjustment. Academic adjustment is an important issue for international students because educational culture differs from country to country (Janjua et al., 2011). Janjua et al. (2011) defined academic adjustment as the fit of a learner into an academic environment. Baker and Siryk (1984) argued that academic adjustment is the degree to which students can adapt to academic demands as reflected in

their engagement with materials, behaviour, and efforts toward their study. Young and Schartner (2014) defined academic adjustment as the ability to adjust with academic life which including the styles of teaching learning at host university. By integrating the three views into the context of present study, academic adjustment is defined as the ability of the international students to adjust to academic demands of the host university through the acquisition of academic cultural knowledge (Baker & Siryk, 1984; Janjua et al., 2011; Young & Schartner, 2014). Acquisition and ability to adjust to academic demands could help international students understand the lectures given in class, express ideas, understand and be able to finish assignment requirements, and know how to utilize lecturers' consultation hours. The academic grade of the students is a direct impact of success in adjusting academically these academic demands and requirements (Crede & Niehorster, 2011).

In Huang and Brown's (1996) study, which identified the perceptions of first-year international graduate students in United States toward academic adjustment, participating in class discussions and class presentations, understanding the American educational system, and communicating in English language were among the several most frequently cited problems. Participating in class discussion involved demonstrating effort given by the international student to communicate and work effectively with others (Guzman & Burke, 2003). The effort is crucial in determining the ability of the students to share their ideas with their colleagues. Sharing ideas between the students in class could foster the dissemination of knowledge, avoid ambiguity in understanding academic work, and help them to learn from other's mistakes. However, for those international students not possessing higher fluency in English, the effort to share ideas requires a bold attitude, so that they are not shy and able to ask the lecturers directly when they do not understand the lecture given (Skyrme, 2010).

Previous researchers have shown that a model used in the process of academic adjustment reflected the students' ability to do meet instructors' expectations, class dynamics,

and class assignment formats (Wang, 2009). Wang (2009) indicated that the quality of an assignment often reflected the quality of classroom instruction and instructors' characteristics. In Malaysian university academic teaching, lecturers sometimes do not depend upon single resources to teach students. Students need to be independent in seeking resources that are related to their study. Creativity and critical thinking are implemented in most examination questions, and thus, students need to read more and to display their intellectual thinking in written papers. While a high quality of classroom instruction is achieved, student themselves must accomplish assigned tasks within the timeframe given.

In Myles and Cheng's (2003) study, a lecturer noted that international students always sought consultation even after class time was over. More effort is needed for a lecturer to consult students who do not well understand written English. Neri and Ville (2008) found that a greater understanding of the expectations and demands of lecturers and better time management skills were keys to academic success among international students in Australia. An understanding demonstrated by lecturers toward their students can be reflected in the ability to respond to a culturally mixed group in classroom (Ramachandran, 2011). Better time management skills are categorized as part of a conscientious personality. In a study of part-time students from 20 institutions from four regions in United States, MacCann, Fogarty, and Roberts (2011) found that time management mediates the relationship between conscientiousness and students' academic performance.

Recently, Janjua, Malik, and Rahman (2011) conducted a study of international students' learning experiences and academic adjustment in Pakistan, and they produced several meaningful findings about problems in adjustment. The findings included difficulties in understanding the assessment system, an ability to cope with different teaching styles, difficulties in completing group assignments, and a lack of confidence and ideas to share in

class. The international students added that home students and lecturers did not welcome their contributions very much.

To conclude, academic adjustment of international students revolves upon issues related to the degree of adaptability into new academic demands of the university through academic cultural knowledge.

2.2.2 Acculturation

Acculturation is often being discussed by many studies of the international students' adjustment (Bang & Montgomery, 2013). A number of studies define acculturation in various ways (Berry, 2009). Ward and his colleagues (Searle & Ward, 1990; Ward & Searle, 1991; Ward & Kennedy, 1992) defined acculturation as a “process” and “state” developed from first-hand contact with the host culture. Acculturation occurs when groups of individuals having a different culture come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original patterns of either or both groups (Redfield, Linton, & Herskovits, 1936). Roysircar-Sodowsky and Maestas (2000) define acculturation as an adaptation of an individual to the dominant or mainstream culture. Anthropological studies have established that both groups, the dominant and non-dominant group, would change and become acculturated in larger society, which has been shown in four intercultural strategies (Berry, 2008).

Chirkov (2009), in his paper of “criticism and potential ways to improve acculturation psychology”, has suggested a modified definition of acculturation and highlighted several the definitions of several researchers that should be considered to be good definitions. One possible suggested definition was that “individual acculturation (in contrast to group acculturation) is a process that is executed by an argentic individual (it is not a process that happens to an individual) after meeting and entering a cultural community that is different

from the cultural community where he or she was initially socialized” (Chirkov, 2009, p. 94). Chirkov (2009) stated that acculturation involves a deliberate, reflective, and, for most part, comparative cognitive activity of understanding the frame of references and meanings with regard to the world, others, and self that exist in one’s ‘home’ cultural community and which one has discovered in a new cultural community. The context of interactions, both physical and symbolic, with the members of the ‘home’ and new cultural communities will emerge in the process. Chirkov (2009) added that acculturation is an open-ended, continuous process that includes progresses, relapses, and turns, which make acculturation practically impossible to predict and control.

Others have attempted to define acculturation as well. Weinreich (2009) suggested that the term “enculturation” should replace “acculturation”. Enculturation means acculturating individual to socialize to various cultural elements of new cultural communities and not choosing either to accept or reject “home” and “host” culture. Berry (2009) argued that as long as individuals were involved in two distinguishable cultural groups in contact, then acculturation (not simply enculturation) processes would be involved. This was because enculturation is a process of becoming a competent member of, and identifying with, one particular culture (Berry, 2007). Moreover, Berry (2009), in his cultural transmission framework, argued that Weinreich (2009) had defined the term enculturation sans the involvement of an individual in two acculturation processes in culture contact situations.

Berry (2009) critiqued Rudmin’s (2009) definition, in which Rudmin defined acculturation as second-cultural acquisition. The justification was this definition would return to a unidimensional or assimilationist view of the process of acculturation, as acculturation would become simply taking on another culture. From Berry’s perspective, this viewpoint entirely ignored the complexity of process, which necessarily involved working out how to live with (and between) two cultures. If acculturation were to be redefined in terms of only

one single direction, this is culture acquisition, then the core meaning of the concept would be lost. Thus, the view of acculturation Rudmin (2009) proposed is similar to that of Roysircar-Sodowsky and Maestas (2000), as they believed acculturation is one –way interaction.

Because the concept of acculturation came into psychology from the discipline of cultural anthropology, the definition of acculturation that best applies to the present study is that which Redfield et al. (1939) proposed because acculturation is to be distinguished from culture change, of which acculturation is but one aspect and assimilation, which is at times a phase of acculturation (Berry, 2009). Acculturation is a two-way interaction, resulting in actions and reactions to contact situations, and in many cases, most change take place in non-dominant communities. However, all societies of settlement (particularly their metropolitan cities) have experienced massive transformations following years of immigrants (Berry, 2009).

2.2.2.1 Types of Acculturation

One type of acculturation is psychological acculturation, which has been categorized into two dimensions (Berry, 1997; Ward & Kennedy, 1994). The first is related to the values, ideologies, beliefs and attitudes that defined a culture. The second is related to behavioural aspects such as how an individual learns and adapts to external aspects of the dominant culture. During the acculturation process, international students may face changes such as (a) physical changes such as a new place in which to live and a new type of housing, (b) biological changes such as becoming more susceptible to a new disease or gaining a new nutritional status, (c) economic changes such as an economic recession that may raise inflation and thus food prices in the market, (d) social relationship changes such as interacting with people from different racial backgrounds, (e) psychological changes such as

experiencing depression or anxiety, and (f) cultural changes such as linguistic or language medium and educational adjustment (Berry, 1997).

All the changes indicated are the experiences commonly faced during a transition into a new environment. Educational transition among students can bring risks to international students in a form of their academic and well-being (Tuominen-Soini, Salmela-Aro, & Niemivirta, 2012). These have been often associated with negative outcomes such as decreased academic values and interests, decreased mastery goals, increased stress, and lower academic achievement.

2.3 Acculturation Stress Theory

Acculturative stress exists when adjustment experiences cause problems for the acculturation of individuals with variations in the level of adaptation (Berry, 2009). In a more comprehensive definition, acculturative stress can be described as a specific kind of stress directly related to the process of acculturation (Berry et al., 1988; Sandhu & Asrabadi, 1994; Roysircar-Sodowsksy & Maestas, 2000) that occurs when physical and psychological resources are depleted (Prendes-Lintel, 2001). Because international students come from a wide range of social, cultural, academic, linguistic, and religious background, they tend to become mentally drained and psychologically exhausted (Dora, Ibrahim, Ramachandran, Kasim, & Saad, 2009). When psychological resources are exhausted, psychological stress is induced which is exhibited the form of feelings of powerlessness, marginality, inferiority, loneliness, perceived alienation, and discrimination (Sandhu & Asrabadi, 1998). Acculturative stress is stress related to adjustment to a new lifestyle, resulting from an encounter with new cultural paradigms (Berry, 2003). In this case, stress originated from acculturative stressors.