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CROSS-CULTURAL ADAPTATION HELPS ATTRACT AND SUSTAIN INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

GEORGE TOWN, PENANG, 7 April 2016 - Cross-cultural adaptation is one of the important issues in promoting higher education and attracting international students to enroll in educational institutions in Malaysia.

According to PhD Researcher from the School of Educational Studies, Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), Azadeh Shafaei, educational institutions should look into the cross-cultural adaptation issue seriously, which can enhance the number of international students and increase their willingness to promote higher education in Malaysia.

"International students actually faced many challenges in terms of social and cultural aspect, and they encountered different kinds of stress and anxiety when they come to a totally new environment.

"Insight on international students is therefore important in planning policies for the universities; strategies need to be tailored to meet the students' needs and requirements," said Azadeh who hailed from Iran and has been living in Malaysia since 2008.

In presenting her working paper titled 'Sustaining Benefits of Higher Education Internationalisation through Cross-Cultural Adaptation' on the second day of the Global Higher Education Forum (GHEF) 2016, she cited that positive word of mouth is important to retain or even increase the number of international students for any higher educational institutions.

She further added, international students will start to promote the educational institutions once they are satisfied with their academic performance or experience in this context.

However, there are many underlying factors of academic satisfaction in general. In the context of international students in Malaysia, cross-cultural adaptation is a very important issue with regards to psychological adaptation.

"To achieve superior cross-cultural adaptation, complexity of universities and communication rules could be minimised by conducting special workshops or courses for the international students. Through these workshops, they are able to get familiarise with the cultural norms, university rules or even communication rules, so that they have a better picture and understandings of where they live," she explained.

Besides, international students also need social support once they come to a new environment, no matter in academic or non-academic matters at the university level. Therefore, knowledgeable and friendly staffs in educational institutions are crucial, so that they can share their problems and seek for advice.

Azadeh was among the 180 participants who attended the 3-day GHEF 2016 jointly organised by the Ministry of Higher Education, USM, and the National Higher Education Research Institute (IPPTN) in collaboration with UNESCO Bangkok, LH Martin Institute, University of Melbourne and Commonwealth Tertiary Education Facility (CTEF) held at a local hotel here.

Text: Loh Mei Fang (USM Internship Student)



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