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Sociocultural Adaptation Challenges of International Students at a Higher Learning Institution in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Malaysian Higher Learning Institutions currently have more than one hundred thousand international students as a part of its pledge of internationalization of Higher Education. One of the core challenges for its international students is their sociocultural adjustments into the new environment. This study investigates the sociocultural adaptation challenges of international students in the host university. A total of 200 students were surveyed using a modified version of the sociocultural adaptation scale (SCAS). Using a quantitative approach, Exploratory Factor Analysis, ANOVA and T-test were performed to analyze the data. The findings show that the students face challenges in four aspects, namely language proficiency, academic adaptation, environmental adaptation and interpersonal adaptation. The results of the independent sample t-test show that, 'language adaptation' and 'academic adaptation' have more influence on the sociocultural adjustments of international students, while 'interpersonal adaptation' has little influence. In addition, results of the ANOVA show that the university campus and region of origin of the students influence the 'academic and 'environmental' adaptation of the students. Based on the findings, we suggest that Malaysian universities should encourage cross-cultural adaptation through improving their social support linkages with the locals and the people of different culture than their own.

Keywords: Sociocultural Adaptation, International Students, Higher learning Institution

1.0 INTRODUCTION

International higher education has become very vital as the gateway to better options. It offers more choices for individuals and creates a linkage among cultures (Sam, 2001). According to (Pandian, 2008a) some common reasons for scholars to study abroad are to possess higher quality education; train themselves in international work skills and to have multicultural relationships. Brown & Daly (2004), emphasis that increased globalization is forcing a rising number of international visitors to travel out of home country to continue their dream of higher education. Globally, United States of America ranks the highest as it receives the largest population of international students yearly (Nga, 2009). Countries like Netherlands and Germany (Rienties &

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Tempelaar, 2013), Canada (Guo & Chase, 2011), Australia (Sullivan, 2008), Taiwan (Lawrence, 2011), Romania (Ţirban & Stiegelbauer, 2012), are also popular destinations for international students in terms of higher education. For several reasons, international students choose to continue their higher studies outside their motherland. Some may perhaps wish to discover a new environment (Chuah *et al.*, 2013), while many prefer to check out a new educational method (Faleel *et al.*, 2012; Jani *etal.*, 2010), to experience a new culture than that of their own (Talib *et al.*, 2014; Yee & Mokhtar, 2013; Yusoff, 2011a). In fact, most of them carefully choose new destinations with the aim of better quality education and a better environment of learning than their own country (Arokiasamy & Krishnaveni, 2011; Faleel *et al.*, 2012; Rajab *et al.*, 2013).

Similarly, globalization has also had its effect on Malaysian higher education institutions. The Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education targets at escalating globalization through increasing the number of international students (Yusoff, 2011b). In this sense, international students have become an essential part of the higher education system of Malaysia. Nga (2009) stated that, higher educational institutions in Malaysia are stressing on the internationalization of higher education for accumulation of international signing up by directing offshore packages through external subdivision of university grounds and authorized franchises. With its first-class education system and a durable international status, Malaysia has become a regional hub and hence a progressively more widespread study destination for international students who are attracted to education overseas (Lee, 1999; Nga, 2009; Pandian, 2008; Yusoff, 2011a). Students come from different countries like-Indonesia, Iran, China, Yemen, Thailand, Bangladesh, Sudan, India, Nigeria, Libya, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Singapore (Talib *et al.*, 2014; Yusoff, 2011a). The growing number of universities in Malaysia requires accommodating a higher ratio of international students from various countries every year that also displays the reputation of higher education in Malaysia (Faleel *et al.*, 2012; Mahmud *et al.*, 2010; Malaklolunthu & Selan, 2011; Rajab *et al.*, 2014; Rajab *et al.*, 2013).

While studying in Malaysia, it can be a double-edged sword for international students as internationalization and globalization also come with challenges for international students. One such concern for either of undergraduate or postgraduates is the challenge of cross-cultural diversities they face (Mahmud *et al.*, 2010; Manjet, 2012). Moreover, cross-cultural communication has become more crucial to the achievement of better career options, employment and community living opportunities, or to advance education (Pandian, 2008; Sam, 2001).The hesitation in the new environment may cause frustration and disappointment. This could result from language challenges, cultural variances, lack of friendship and even loss of social support from the university. As a result, it gives rise to high level of nervousness, trauma, misperception and depression. These, undeniably, disturb the students' psychological and sociocultural comfort (Rajab *et al.*, 2013; Talib, 2010). Similarly, Faleel (2012) found that, international students might experience more painful adjustment to their life in the overseas as compared to their own nation or host students due to complications in adjusting themselves in a foreign culture. Coming to Malaysia literally means entering into a new social and educational environment where international scholars have to go under a difficult condition. It is considered as an obligatory process for them to deal with the dissimilarities between their personal cultural values, rules and customs and those of their hosts, to adjust themselves into this new academic system and social environment (Mahmud *et al.*, 2010; Yee & Mokhtar, 2013; Yusoff, 2011a).

This multi-dimensional scenario, can affect their goals, beliefs, feelings and motivation (Pandian, 2008).

The flow of international students flying to Malaysia has increased progressively since 1996 (Malaklolunthu & Selan, 2011; Pandian, 2008). Most importantly, the majorities of them is all non-native speakers of *Bahasa Melayu* (Malay Language) or have greater mother tongue influence. As a result, numerous issues unavoidably take place that may hinder the international students' adjustment to a new culture. This difficulty of adjusting to the new culture can have contrary effects on their regular living and communication with people from other culture or the locals (Manjet, 2012; Pandian, 2008; Selvaratnam, 1988; Talib *et al.*, 2014). As the number of global scholars entering Malaysian universities has escalated, the need to realize their cross-cultural adjustment to this country turns out to be more vital. According to Talib *et al.* (2014), adjusting to a different culture can be a challenging experience. Furthermore, there are substantial writings that have observed features related to the level of socio-cultural adjustment involvements by international students (Brisset *et al.*, 2010; Cemalcilar *et al.*, 2005; Chirkov *et al.*, 2008; Kashima & Loh, 2006; Li & Gasser, 2005; Ward & Kennedy, 1993; Yang, 2003). Furthermore, several studies acknowledge that social support is a fundamental aspect in international scholars' adjustment study (Chirkov *et al.*, 2008; Jung *et al.*, 2007; Lee, 2004; Sümer *et al.*, 2008; Toyokawa & Toyokawa, 2002). These researches explored the United States, Australia, and some of the European countries. However, these areas have generally been investigated in separation from each other. Not much consideration has been made to this issue in the Malaysian context. In Malaysia, a limited number of studies have been conducted on international students (Mohd, 2010; Pandian, 2008; Sirat, 2008; Yusoff, 2011a). Thus, the current investigation differs from other studies as it looks at how Malaysian universities can benefit from the successful sociocultural adaptation of their international students. To this end, this study focuses on the factors influencing the socio cultural adaptation of international students at a Malaysian University.

Ward & Masgoret (2004), found that, cross-cultural adaptation involves changing from one culture to another and contains the process of modifying ones' behaviour to fit in a new environment and surroundings or as a reaction to social determination. They also added that by accumulating adaptation process usually but not always include the rules, norms, customs, and language of the new culture. Besides, acculturative tensions often brings in emotional pain, feelings of hopelessness, strangeness, inferiority, isolation, apparent unfriendliness, and judgment (Podrug *et al.*, 2014; Simic-Yamashita & Tanaka, 2010). Moreover, difficult acculturative pressure experiences often remain within the person over a long period. By considering international scholars' acculturative pressure and their mental desires may be better assisted in the upcoming period (Sawir *et al.*, 2008; Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Yeh & Inose, 2003). As a result, it is important to find out the challenges faced by the international students while connecting with the host nationals and people who are culturally different from their own in Malaysia (Chuah *et al.*, 2013; Manjet, 2012; Pandian, 2008; Talib *et al.*, 2014; Yee & Mokhtar, 2013; Yusoff, 2011a). Therefore, this study attempts to fill this gap in adaptation literature to achieve a greater understanding of the factors that influence the socio cultural adaptation of international students at a Malaysian Higher Learning Institution. It aims to answer the following research questions:

1.   What are the factors that influence the sociocultural challenges of international students?

2. How do the chosen demographic characteristics, i.e. gender, course, region of origin, nationality, and time spent in host country, influence the socio cultural adaptation of the international students?

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Cross-cultural adaptation is the bigger frame, which encompasses the current study. Cross-cultural adaptation remained in focus of researchers since the beginning of the 20th century (Kim, 2000). Generally, cross-cultural adaptation, some may refer it to as acculturation, is a concept describing a wide spectrum of individual's possible responses to a new cultural context ranging from complete adoption to complete rejection of the receiving social values (Lian & Tsang, 2010). Commonly, cross-cultural adaptation is an idea unfolding a wide field of individuals' feasible reactions to a fresh cultural setting ranging from wide-ranging acceptance to wide-ranging refusal of the acceptance of social principles (Lian & Tsang, 2010; Sullivan, 2008; Sullivan & Kashubeck-West, 2015). However, Ward *et al.*, (2001), have one noteworthy investigation on the adjustment progression of the international students that, cross-cultural adaptation is best in standings of psychological and socio cultural well-being and satisfaction with study abroad considerations. Hence, acculturation refers to changes in values, beliefs, and behaviors that result from sustained contact with a second culture (Lee, 2008). According to Berry and Sam (1997), acculturation has two features, psychological adaptation and socio-cultural adaptation. In a similar way, the current investigation focuses on the sociocultural adaptation of the international students in a Malaysian higher educational organization. Sociocultural adaptation can be selected by a social suitability or cultural learning outline (Spencer-Oatey & Xiong, 2006). As a result, socio-cultural adaptation is defined in relation to behavioral capacities, as an ability to set up into a condition or fruitfully bond with connections of the host culture (Ward & Kennedy, 1999; Ward & Rana-Deuba, 1999). The variables allied with it, control culture learning viewpoint and acquisition of social expertise in the host culture. For example, language proficiency, acculturation approaches, length of residence in a host culture and handling studies or work related matters (Searle & Ward, 1990; Ward & Kennedy, 1999; Ward & Rana-Deuba, 1999). Besides, lack of sociocultural adaptation can bring on physical and mental difficulties during interactions for the students (Shupe, 2007). Chirkov *et al.* (2008), cited by Yusoff (2011a), found the role inspiration to study abroad shows in the quick adaptation of international students in Canada has also includedsocial support in sociocultural adaptation in his study. In addition, different researchers have recognized certain key elements that affect sociocultural adaptation of international students. For instance, gender, time spent in host country, language proficiency, environmental adjustments, academic adaptation, interpersonal adaptation, etc. (Alavi & Mansor, 2011; de Araujo, 2011; Furnham & Bochner, 1982; Hendrickson *et al.*, 2011; Lee, 2004; Mohd, 2010; Pedersen, 2010; Rajab *et al.*, 2013; Wilson, 2011). Seeing these elements in relation to international students' adaptation would be supportive for modifying university social support programs.

Sociocultural Adjustment of International Students

According to Rathus and Nevid (1986), adjustment is a psychological concept that refers to the behaviour that permits people to meet the demands of the environment. Adjustment can also be viewed as transitional process that unfolds over time as students learn to cope with pressures of the new environment (de Araujo, 2011). In the current study, sociocultural adaptation among international students has been investigated. Sociocultural adaptation refers to specific cultural skills, the ability to negotiate the host culture, or effectively interact with the members of the host culture (Searle & Ward, 1990; Yusoff & Chelliah, 2010). Therefore, in this study sociocultural adjustment is the ability of the international students to interact effectively and adapt successfully with the social and the culture of the people in Malaysia. Sociocultural factors are the elements that are related to or pertaining to the combination or interactions of social and cultural habits. Some of these factors include social taboos, gender roles, religious conservatism etc. Successful acculturation can contribute toward the international students' quality of academic achievement, productivity and quality of life. Because of individual differences, international students' level of adjustment to a new situation differs. Some may adjust easily while others may find it very difficult to adjust to the circumstances (Faleel *et al.*, 2012). Hence, looking into the adaptation challenges offers a concurrent acceptance of the unpredictable situation in a new environment for an international student and the consistency of the sociocultural approach to adaptation (Yusoff & Chelliah, 2010).

3.0 METHODOLOGY

The current study uses a quantitative method. 200 international students (49 Undergraduate and 151 postgraduate) who are enrolled at a Malaysian Higher Learning Institution participated in this study. In all, 148 are male (71.5%) and 57 were female (28.5%).The students are from different countries, namely, 7.55% from Bangladesh, 1.5% , Indonesia, 25 %, Iran , 16% Nigeria, 11.5% Pakistan, 7% Yemen, 3.5% Sudan, 8.5% Iraq, 5.5% Libya and 5% India. They also identified a variety of different languages as their native languages (Arabic, Balochi, Bengali, Fulain, Hausa, Hindi, Urdu, Indonesian, Mandarin, Panjabi, Pashto, Persian, Sudanese, Tamil and Yoryba). Their average length of stay in the campus is 2 to 3 years (66%). They are from different faculties within the university. The questionnaires were distributed to those who agreed to participate in the study and returned upon completion to the researcher. Simple random sampling was used to collect data from different respondents. This study used the Sociocultural Adaptation Scale (SCAS) (Searle & Ward, 1990; Ward & Kennedy, 1999), a tool that can be easily adapted according to the features of the sample and demonstrated reliability and validity (Searle & Ward, 1990; Ward & Kennedy, 1993, 1999). Moreover, this scale has been used in Malaysia by few researchers to investigate different aspects related to social adjustments of international students (Awang *et al.*, 2013; Ina Suryani *et al.*, 2012; Mohd, 2010; Yusoff, 2011a). Thus expanding upon these studies, this study looks into some factors that affect the sociocultural adaptation of international students at a higher learning institution in Malaysia.
Demographic information for the study included gender, nationality, academic status, region of origin, English speaking level, total time spent in Malaysian university. The questionnaire consisted

of 21 items adopted from the study by Simic-Yamashita and Tanaka (2010), and with an addition of 4 questions relevant to the current context of the study, added by the researcher. Therefore, the total number of items was 25. A pilot study was done before the main data collection. The following data analyses are the results of that pilot data. For the current study, quantitative method was used to analyze the data. Data was analyzed using the SPSS 18.0.

4.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

To ensure the reliability of the statistics, two separate tests were done, namely Cronbach's Alpha and KMO and Bartlett's test respectively. The tests verified that the Cronbach's alpha of each measurement was above 0.70. This meant that all of the measurements are reliable to continue further investigations. The Cronbach Alpha for this study is 0.759 for 25 items. Again, the KMO indicates the ratio of the squared correlation between variables to the squared partial correlation between variables (Field, 2013). The KMO statistics varies from 0 to 1. KMO for this data was 0.71 which is very good (values over 0.5 are measured as suitable), indicating that the sample size for this analysis is suitable. The approximate Chi-Square obtained was 894.889 (df. = 300) and it was statistically significant (P<.001), indicating that correlations between items were sufficiently large for the factor analysis. Therefore, these results suggest that we should carry on with a factor analysis for these data.

Exploratory Factor Analysis

Factor analysis was conducted to identify the factors that influence the sociocultural adaptation challenges of international students. Students' answers on the 25-item sociocultural adaptation scale were subjected to an exploratory factor analysis (Principal Axis Analysis, oblique rotation). A loading of 0.40 was used as the limit for insertion. An initial analysis was run to obtain eigenvalues for each factor of the data. Five factors had eigenvalues over Kaiser's criterion of 1, in combination clarified 42.09% of the variance. However, factor 5 included only one item, which is not satisfactory to retain and is less than threshold value of .40. The scree plot was ambiguous, and showed inflections that would justify retaining either three or four factors. The interpretability of factors is given. Table 4.1 explains the four factors retained in the final analysis. The retained factors explain 36.78% of the variance. The results of the exploratory factor analysis indicated that the 21 items were visibly loading on four factors, thus providing additional realistic support to the earlier readings. Factor loadings after rotation and the correlation interpretation are presented in Table 4.1 and 4.2 respectively.

Table 4.1 Correlation Interpretation of the Factors retained

	Language Proficiency	Academic Adaptation	Environmental Adaptation	Interpersonal Adaptation
Eigenvalues	4.073	2.128	1.564	1.422
Variance%	16.293	8.513	6.257	5.689
Accumulated variance %	16.293	24.806	31.063	36.752

Table 4.2 Correlation Interpretation of the Factors retained

Items	Language Proficiency	Academic Adaptation	Environmental Adaptation	Interpersonal Adaptation
Face difficulty in understanding the accent (English) of the Malaysians.	0.487			
Communicating with people of a different ethnic group.	0.425			
Face difficulty to speak English rather than my own language.	0.441			
Face difficulty to change my (verbal behaviour) tone and accent when a cross-cultural interaction requires	0.422			
Understanding what is required from you at university.		0.491		
Coping with academic work.		0.540		
Following rules and regulations		0.594		
Expressing your idea in class		0.494		
Dealing with staff at the university(administration)		0.523		
Face difficulty to communicate with people from other country when I am in Malaysia.		0.449		
Making yourself understood to others			0.622	
Getting used to the pace of life			0.626	
Using the transport			0.471	
Living away from family members overseas/independently from your parents			0.464	
Going to social events/gatherings/functions			0.404	
Dealing with the climate			0.487	
Dealing with people staring at you				0.507
Talking about yourself with others.				0.447
Making friends in Malaysia.				0.547
Understanding jokes and humor				0.444
Adapting to local etiquette				0.470

Based on Tables 4.1 and 4.2, the findings indicate that four factors were retained, namely Language Proficiency, Academic Adaptation, Environmental Adaptation and Interpersonal Adaptation. The four factors are explained below:

Language Proficiency

Factor 1, explains 16.293% of the variance. It consists of four items (1, 2, 4, 25) related to language and communication adjustments. This factor was named as 'Language Proficiency.' The items that retained within the factor, (face difficulty in understanding the accent (English) of the Malaysians, communicating with people of a different ethnic group, face difficulty to speak English rather than my own language and face difficulty to change my (verbal behaviour) tone and accent when a cross-cultural interaction requires) show that, one of the most common challenges of international students includes difficulties in language proficiency. Here the item retained with 0.487 factor loading, this tells us that the most common challenges are with understanding the English accent of the locals. This might be that regional accents are different due to mother tongue influence and so sometimes it might be difficult to understand their spoken English and vice versa. Again, most of these international students are from different countries within Asia and Africa. Other researchers also reported that, Asian and African international students show lower levels of language proficiency (Bektaş, 2004; Chou, 2014; Lian & Tsang, 2010; Manguvo, 2013).

Academic Adaptation

Factor 2, explains 8.513% of the variance. It consists of six items (3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9) related to academic adjustments of the international students. This factor was named as 'Academic Adaptation.' The items retained within the factor, (understanding what is required from you at university, coping with academic work, following rules and regulations, expressing your idea in class, dealing with staff at the university (administration) and face difficulty to communicate with people from other country when I am in Malaysia.), evinces that, it is not surprising to see international students facing academic adjustment difficulties in a different academic system. The item retained with 0.540 and 0.594 factor loadings (See, Table 4.2) show that, international students coming into a new academic environment face challenges to cope with their peers from other cultural backgrounds, which also includes the host nationals. They even face challenges to follow the new instructions and rules of the institution. This is similar to the findings of Mesidor and Sly (2015) that, international students might immediately identify that they are diverse from others in the class in respect to beliefs, culture and language. Therefore, we can conclude that language and cultural differences are major challenges for adapting to a new academic environment in a foreign university.

Environmental Adaptation

Factor 3, explains 6.257% of the variance. It consists of six items (11, 13, 14, 16, 17, 18) related the day-to-day life and social practices. This factor was named as 'Environmental Adaptation.' The items retained within this factor, (making yourself understood to others, getting used to the pace of life,

using the transport, living away from family members overseas/independently from your parents, going to social events/gatherings/functions, dealing with the climate), show that, internationals students coming into a new society face challenges in relation to survival due to cultural and language differences. Regular social communication and support is needed for environmental adjustments. The items retained with 0.622 and 0.626 factor loadings show that (See, Table 4.2), international students face challenges while interacting with other nationals and when getting used to the differences in the living standards of the locals. According to Podrug *et al.* (2014), international students need to suit to the social and cultural abilities to deal with daily social circumstances of the host culture (Podrug *et al.*, 2014). And this would work with adequate social support (Rajab *et al.*, 2013).

Interpersonal Adaptation

Factor 4, explains 5.70% of the variance. It consists of five items (19, 20, 21, 22, 24) related to different ways and means of personal communication. This factor was named as 'Interpersonal Adaptation.' The items retained within the factor (dealing with the climate, dealing with people staring at you, talking about yourself with others, making friends in Malaysia, understanding jokes and humor, adapting to local etiquettes) show that, ability to communicate and understand cultural norms of other ethnicity may lead to the emotional state of segregation and nostalgia. The items retained with 0.547 factor loadings (See, Table 4.2) highlight that, international students do not find it easy to make friends with the host nationals, and might effect their mental state leading to loneliness and helplessness. Similar findings were observed in the study by Choo and Singh (2013), which was conducted in Universiti Sains Malaysia.

On the other hand, in some past researches (Ward & Kennedy, 1999; Duranto, 2003), analyses of the SCAS gave rise to two factors, one is cognitive and the other, behavioural adaptation. On the other hand, Chen (2009), discovered that three factors were retained for Chinese migrants in Singapore, that relate to their sociocultural adaptation, namely, social, physical and cultural adaptation. Again, Simic-Yamashita & Tanaka (2010), revealed three factors, i.e. academic, survival and interpersonal adaptation. In the present investigation, four factors were found to influence the sociocultural adaptation challenges of the international students, i.e. language proficiency, academic, environmental and interpersonal adaptation. The factor that was not reported in previous studies is 'Language Proficiency.' It involves items related to language and communication adjustments and explains 16.29% of the total variance. Thus, 'Language Proficiency' can be stated as of one of the most important challenges that influence sociocultural adaptation of international students in the Malaysian Higher Learning Institution. From Table 4.2, it can be seen that the items retained under 'Language Proficiency' include 'difficulty in understanding of the English accent of the host national's and in 'conversing with people of other nationalities of different ethnic background than their one'. This relates to the difference of mother tongue influence. This finding supports the results of Ward & Kennedy (1999) where they mentioned that, language proficiency matching to the new setting are solutions to adjusting and adapting more speedily into the different culture. To resolve the 'Language Proficiency' adjustment challenges it is essential to sort the language skills of the International students coming into Malaysian Higher Learning Institution.

One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and Independent Sample t-test

One-way Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was applied to examine whether some of the demographic variables affect the extracted sociocultural adaptation factors by means of Factor Analysis. ANOVA was followed by a post hoc procedure using Hochberg's GT2 subtests to validate the differences among groups. Post hoc measures are used for exploring data when the investigator does not have exact theory about the data prior to the analysis. Hochberg's GT2 subtest is used when groups in the entire sample significantly vary in proportions (Field, 2013), which is the case in the present investigation. Further, two t-tests were used to determine any differences between genders and the courses taken in perception of the four factors of cross-cultural adaptation. The results are presented in Tables 4.3, 4.4, 4.5 and 4.6, respectively.

Table 4.3 Region of Origin

Names of Countries	Language Proficiency	Academic Adaptation	Environmental Adaptation	Interpersonal Adaptation	Overall Adaptation
Bangladesh (N=15)	M=3.55 SD=0.68	M=3.46 SD=0.53	M=3.39 SD=.80	M=3.48 SD=.66	M=3.47 SD=0.11
Indonesia (N=21)	M=2.89 SD=0.49	M=2.61 SD=0.52	M=2.70 SD=.80	M=3.05 SD=.42	M=2.81 SD=0.17
Iran (N=50)	M=3.29 SD=0.66	M=2.98 SD=0.54	M=2.91 SD=.56	M=3.05 SD=.54	M=3.06 SD=0.06
Nigeria (N=32)	M=3.14 SD=0.71	M=3.20 SD=0.54	M=3.25 SD=.54	M=2.95 SD=.71	M=3.14 SD=0.10
Pakistan (N=23)	M=3.26 SD=0.77	M=3.21 SD=0.71	M=3.09 SD=.70	M=3.09 SD=.69	M=3.16 SD=0.04
Yemen (N=14)	M=3.77 SD=0.82	M=3.14 SD=0.62	M=3.42 SD=.71	M=2.90 SD=.50	M=3.18 SD=0.14
Sudan (N=7)	M=3.71 SD=0.82	M=3.50 SD=0.17	M=3.40 SD=.53	M=3.57 SD=.69	M=3.55 SD=0.28
Iraq (N=17)	M=3.53 SD=0.51	M=3.72 SD=0.53	M=3.25 SD=.44	M=3.62 SD=0.62	M=3.53 SD=0.07
Libya (N=11)	M=3.23 SD=0.78	M=3.02 SD=0.72	M=3.35 SD=.71	M=3.57 SD=.77	M=2.28 SD=0.03
India (N=10)	M=3.03 SD=0.83	M=2.38 SD=0.99	M=3.00 SD=.65	M=3.08 SD=.45	M=2.87 SD=0.25
ANOVA(F) Sig.	1.910 0.053<p	6.772 0.000<p	3.332 0.001<p	3.272 0.001<p	3.653 0.003<p

*Low: M=1-2.33, Moderate: M=2.34-3.66, and High: M=3.67-5.00; N=200

Results of the ANOVA show that all students from the different countries have a moderate level of sociocultural adaptation based on the region of origin (See, Table 4.3). The adaptation subtypes revealed significant differences for 'Language Proficiency' (F=1.910, p<0.053), 'Academic Adaptation' (F =6.772, p<.001), 'Environmental Adaptation' (F=3.332, p<0.001), and 'Interpersonal Adaptation' (F=3.272, p<0.001). "Overall Adaptation" also shows significant differences for all the adaptation subtypes in terms of region of origin (F=3.653, p<0.003). Here, 'Academic Adaptation' is

the most influential subtype among the four. This might be because of students coming from different educational systems than that of the host nation's system. Interestingly, Hochberg's GT2 test for academic adaptation revealed that international students from Iraq (M=3.72) are well adapted while students from India (M=2.38) are least adapted compared to other countries. The overall adaptation for each of the countries is moderate with the exception of Libya (M=2.28).

In addition, ANOVA was also performed for the period of study in the university campus to check if length of stay (See, Table 4.4) of the international students influences the sociocultural adaptation types.

Table 4.4 Period of study in the university

Years Spent	Language Proficiency	Academic Adaptation	Environmental Adaptation	Interpersonal Adaptation	Overall Adaptation
0 to 1 (N=38)	M=3.57 SD=.59	M=3.45 SD=.51	M=3.43 SD=.55	M=3.40 SD=.59	M=3.46 SD=0.04
1 to 2 (N=48)	M=3.16 SD=.73	M=3.01 SD=.75	M=3.12 SD=.67	M=3.04 SD=.73	M=3.08 SD=0.19
2 to 3 (N=66)	M=3.23 SD=.67	M=3.02 SD=.59	M=2.45 SD=.61	M=3.06 SD=.58	M=3.07 SD=0.03
4 to 5 (N=39)	M=3.17 SD=.70	M=2.47 SD=.78	M=3.04 SD=.64	M=3.15 SD=.61	M=3.08 SD=0.04
5andabove (N=9)	M=3.06 SD=.41	M=3.24 SD=.56	M=3.28 SD=.48	M=3.36 SD=.66	M=3.23 SD=0.08
ANOVA(F) Sig.	2.556 0.040<p	3.646 0.007<p	4.128 0.003<p	2.545 0.041<p	3.338 0.002<p

*Low: M=1-2.33, Moderate: M=2.34-3.66, and High: M= 3.67-5.00; N=200

The overall adaptation for 0 to 1 (M=3.46) years revealed that students staying within this time span have more influence over sociocultural adaptation. On the other hand, the adaptation subtypes ANOVA results show that length of stay influences sociocultural adaptation the most on 'Environmental Adaptation'(F=4.128 , p<0.003). Ward & Kennedy (1999) mentioned in their study that, times spent in a new culture is one of the most important aspects of successful sociocultural adaptation; it is usually low at the beginning then develops in the initial phases until it reaches a raised ground. Thus, this finding helps us to understand that the students who had lived in Malaysia for longer period are likely to differ in adjusting to Malaysian everyday social practices and cultural values. This is similar to the findings of Yusoff (2010), where he looked at the adjustment procedure by the international undergraduate students in Universiti Sains Malaysia.

4.4 Independent Sample Test

T-test was performed to compare the sociocultural subtypes with the gender (See, Table 4.5) and the courses of the students (See, Table 4.6).

Table 4.5 Gender

Gender	Language Proficiency	Academic Adaptation	Environmental Adaptation	Interpersonal Adaptation	Overall Adaptation
MALE N=143	M=3.25 SD=0.70	M=3.14 SD=0.63	M=3.104 SD=0.61	M=3.21 SD=0.65	M=3.18 SD=0.04
FEMALE N=57	M=3.27 SD=0.68	M=3.14 SD=.74	M=3.12 SD=0.68	M=3.23 SD=0.65	M=3.19 SD=0.04
T-test Sig(P)	-0.242 0.809>p	-0.593 0.554>p	-0.200 0.842>p	1.132 0.248<p	-0.731 0.650<p

*Low: M=1-2.33, Moderate: M=2.34-3.66, and High: M=3.67-5.00; N=200

The test does not indicate much significant differences in terms of the overall adaptation. However, interestingly, the result also tells us that the 'Interpersonal Adaptation' (t=1.132, 0.248<p) has a slight influence on the sociocultural adaptation of the international students. Both male and female students have a moderate level of adaptation while going through interpersonal adaptation process. On the other hand, the overall adaptation in terms of gender shows a negative value that means that although at individual level, interpersonal factors might have some influence but at the overall level, it does not make much difference. This result   is also supported by previous investigations by Abdullah *et al.,* (2015) and Mustaffa & Ilias (2013), who found no significant differences in the process of overall adjustments between male and female international students studying at University Putra Malaysia and Northern University of Malaysia. This might be because both male or female students have to go through the similar process in terms of sociocultural adaptation after coming to Malaysia.

Table 4.6 Course of Study

Course	Language Proficiency	Academic Adaptation	Environmental Adaptation	Interpersonal Adaptation	Overall Adaptation
Undergraduate	M=3.15 SD=0.61	M=3.02 SD=0.67	M=3.03 SD=0.70	M=3.09 SD=0.70	M=3.07 SD=0.60
Postgraduate	M=3.29 SD=0.72	M=3.12 SD=0.66	M=3.13 SD=0.60	M=3.17 SD=0.65	M=3.18 SD=0.60
t-test Sig(p)	1.207 0.229<p	0.896 0.375<p	-0.977 0.330<p	-0.756 0.451<p	-0.954 0.345<p

*Low: M=1-2.33, Moderate: M=2.34-3.66, and High: M=3.67-5.00; N=200

For 'Language Adaptation' (t=1.207, 0.229<p) and 'Academic Adaptation' (t=0.896, 0.375<p), the tests show that there is an influence of courses but the overall adaptation (t=-0.954, 0.345<p) shows that the influence is not so significant. Again, if we look at the values separately, the Postgraduate students (M=3.29) are better adapted at the level of Language than the Undergraduate students (M=3.16).The overall adaptation for Postgraduate students (M=3.18) is higher than the Undergraduate students.

5.0 CONCLUSION

The purpose of this article was to address the factors influencing the sociocultural adaptation challenges of international students at a Higher Learning Institution in Malaysia. . This study revealed that sociocultural adaptation is an important feature of international students' lives in a new environment where, cross-cultural communication plays a vital role to ensure the sociocultural adaptation of the students. The article highlights four factors that influence the sociocultural adaptation of the international students, namely 'Language Proficiency', 'Academic Adaptation', 'Environmental Adaptation' and 'Interpersonal Adaptation.' These are related to challenges with English language and dissimilar cultures, which affect the international students' sociocultural adaptation. The results revealed that, due to differences in mother tongue accents and tone, the international students face challenges in communicating via English Language with others who are regionally different from themselves. They face challenges at interpersonal level when attempting to make friends with the local as well as other students. The length of stay of an international student influences the environmental adaptation but with the passage of time, the adaptation level becomes better. Likewise, it can be realized that, despite of their gender or region, it is very much likely for the international students to face sociocultural adaptation challenges due to mother tongue influence and different cultural atmosphere. Therefore, international students might require different categories and stages of social guidelines depending on such factors. Hence, to sustain an excellent academic result and to encourage more contact with local and students of other nationalities, and for better adaptation, a suitable guideline such as that of social support from the university could be provided. As this study was limited to a single university in Malaysia, it is also recommended that implementing the same methodology in a broader sample and setting, would provide a better understanding of the needs of international students, for better sociocultural adaptation, at higher learning institutions in Malaysia.

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