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SUFFICIENCY ADAPTATION AND ACADEMIC  
PERFORMANCE: THE CASE OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS  
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**DOI:** 10.35631/IJEPC.747056**Abstract:**

Globalization has made it possible for international students to pursue their studies overseas. Malaysia is one of the leading destinations for these students to continue their studies, and this aligns with our vision to achieve the internationalization of higher education by the year 2025. This intense initiative has made our educational institutions recognized globally towards world prestigious educational hub. In relation to this, this article aims to analyze the international students' feedback on their experience in the self-sufficiency adapting process that has become the stakeholders' focus. The study uses the qualitative approach by utilizing the semi-structured interviews of 40 international students in the first year of their study in selected public universities. The findings of the study show a positive relationship between the students' self-sufficiency and their academic performance. The factors contributing to the different self-sufficiency adaptation of the students were discussed in the context of the recognition for the public university's reputation, current courses offered by the university, the courses' marketability, English as the medium use in the university teaching delivery, customers' satisfaction, and the guaranteed quality services coordination, and continuous accreditation recognition. The findings will become valuable information for future international students planning to further their study overseas. The findings can also be used as guidelines by the university's management in understanding the implication of self-sufficiency and sustainability on international students' academic performance.



## Introduction

Malaysia's higher education has expanded intensively to meet the globalization demand for comprehensive educational access at the international level. The Ministry of Higher Education has proactively intensified and made its university policy's internationalization one of the National Education Blueprint (MOE, 2018). A memorandum of understanding (MOU) is a strategic alternative to attract international students to pursue their studies in the country. The MOU shows the other countries' acceptance of our quality education as their primary education choice, proving that Malaysia has continuously shown its effort to create a competitive quality education at the international level (Berita RTM, 2016).

The central strategic internationalization policy includes the increment of international students' enrolment in our educational institutions, diverse courses offered to the international students and the rebranding of public and private educational institutions to achieve the targeted 200,000 international students' enrolment by the year 2020 (UKM, 2015). According to the *Berita Harian* Report (2020), the increased number of international students' enrolment in the education sector has drastically contributed to the nation's economic growth that has been illustrated in the average expenses of an international student pursuing his or her study in Malaysia about RM46,000 per year an amount that will generate the nation's income of RM7.2 billion per year (Bernama, 2019).

**Table 1: Total Number of International Students' Enrolment in Malaysia's Public Universities (2007-2019)**

Year	Total Number of International Students' Enrolment in Public Universities
2007	14,324
2008	18,485
2009	22,456
2010	24,214
2011	25,855
2012	26,232
2013	28,830
2014	27,042
2015	26,405
2016	25,824
2017	27,766
2018	30,341
2019	32,404

Source: <https://www.mohe.gov.my/muat-turun/awam/statistik> (Year 2007-2019)

Table 1 shows the Ministry of Higher Education's proof to realize the national higher education's internationalization policy by 2025. The Ministry of Higher Education Statistics has shown the increased number of international students' enrolment in the public universities from 14,324 students in 2007 to 28,830 students by 2013, and this number shows significant rise each year. The first term of 2019 has witnessed 32,404 international students enrolling in public universities (MOE, 2021a). The rise in the number of international students' enrolment in public universities shows that Malaysia's higher education system guarantees quality and standards at par with the other leading countries.

### Literature Review

The concept of international students encompasses a broad scope and has various definitions. According to Othman, (2021), international students refer to individuals who come to a country to continue their higher education, and these individuals are not originated from that country. Lewis (2016) and James-MacEachern & Yun (2017) define international students as individuals who have decided to pursue their studies overseas by crossing a country's border. The first study year of these students is crucial due to its various changes that the students have to go through and assimilate themselves to these changes (Newsome & Cooper, 2016; Othman, Awang & Mohd Suki, (2019a); Othman, Jupiter & Mohd Suki (2019b). Othman *et al.*, (2019a; 2019b) define the international students' first-year experience as a set of experiences involving emotion in life, and pressures due to the shock of the cultural differences. These social values have the potential to affect these students' academic achievement.

Trujillo, Mohammad & Salleh (2020) states that the international students' reasons to continue their studies overseas are because they want to get new experience, explore local culture and try new education system that is different from their country. Chen, (2017) identify the rejection factor as the internal factor originating from their home country's situation that may motivate them to pursue their studies overseas. The rejection factor refers to the programs offered that are better than the ones offered in their home country, the difficulties to enrol in the higher education institutions of their home country, the desire to discover foreign cultures, the unavailability of certain courses in their home country and the wish to gain new experience in foreign countries.

On the other hand, attraction factors are seen as an external factor from the countries where the international students plan to continue their study. The six factors of attraction are the vast knowledge on the countries they plan to go for their study, the suggestions from parents, close friends, agents and the international reputation of the countries they plan to go for their study, the reasonable study costs, the conducive learning environment, the strategic position of the countries they plan to go for their study, and the countries' complete infrastructure facilities and global network. Karakaya-Ozyer & Yildiz (2020) state that university/college students' satisfaction is mainly affected by these factors: the academic and the management of the university, the activities and life in campus, students' expectations, and demography. Thus, it can be concluded that these factors influence international students' satisfaction with the higher educational institute.

In addition, elements like experienced lecturers, good teaching quality, and comprehensive co-curricular designs also affect international students' satisfaction (Othman, Yusoff, Abdul Hamid, Jupiter & Awang, 2018a; Smith, 2020). A study done by Shavelson, Zlatkin-Troitschanskaia, Beck, Schmidt & Marino, (2019) showed that the lecturers' interest and

expertise in the courses taught are significant in determining the teaching quality. Also, Jupiter, Othman, Mohd Suki, Yusoff & Awang, (2018) stresses the importance of teaching approach because it can be one reason for the international students to feel neglected in class, which can be due to the lecturers' unconcern about the international students' poor command in English. Lecturers' expertise and passion in their teaching courses can be vital in their teaching quality (Othman, Awang, Yusoff & Jupiter, 2017). Kouba, (2020) claim that international students do not prefer group assignment due to the local students' unfavourable attitude towards them. The lecturers' delivery method in a class can also cause international students to feel ignored.

With this, a new program becomes a significant factor in attracting international students during the educational institution selection (Han, Gebbie & Appelbaum, 2015; Lee, 2016; Jupiter, Othman, Mohd Suki, Yusoff, Awang & Razak, 2017a; Shavelson *et al.*, 2019). From the international students' perspective, Malaysia is chosen as their study destination because of the international recognition on Malaysia's education program (Liew, 2012; Dora, Ibrahim, Ramachandran, Kasim & Saad, 2014; Jupiter *et al.*, 2018). The majority of international students choose a program with comprehensive learning content suitable and needed in the job market (Nilsson & Ripmeester, 2016).

According to Jupiter *et al.* (2018), international students are mainly attracted to the diversity of the programs offered, showing various study fields' flexibility. Contemporary programs become the key attraction for international students to decide which institution to attend. Generally, the international students will choose a program or a course with the comprehensive learning content suitable and needed in the job market (Noel, Levitz & Saluri, 2012; Glass & Westmont, 2014; Jupiter *et al.*, 2018). The students also prefer outside industries' involvement, such as attachment and hands-on industrial training as the value-added (Liew, 2012).

Next, effective communication is also one of the critical factors for international students to continue studying overseas (Li, Xie, Ai & Li, 2020). Most international students worldwide choose English as the language medium in selecting their study destination (Dora *et al.*, 2014; James-MacEachern & Yun, 2017; Jupiter *et al.*, 2017; Li *et al.*, 2020; Moreira & Gomes, 2019). The medium of teaching and learning instructions has always become the main factor for international students to choose a program and their oversea study destination (Gilakjani, 2015; Tran, 2020). Jupiter *et al.* (2017) and Zhang & Mi (2014) state that lack of proficiency in the English language has caused problems and stresses to the international students, and this is supported by Falcone's (2017) finding which showed that problems among the international students involved the use of the English language. Song (2019) found that the international students' English problems relate to comprehension, listening and speaking skills.

The international students' poor pronunciation, speaking, and lack of confidence in interaction contribute to their ineffective communication skills (Gilakjani, 2015). It is shown in the study conducted by Song (2019), where the international students' poor command in the English language has negatively affected their learning. Also, the lecturers' use of the first language as the language medium in class has contributed to the international students' lack of understanding of the lessons. Nevertheless, international students' interest in learning the local language can be enhanced with the local community's help (Gresham, 2013; Arkoudis & Baik, 2014; Van Mol, 2019). The university can also make the learning of local language compulsory for international students.

One of the other reasons international students choose their study destinations is that the country's education system they choose to further their study should be better in quality and assurance than their home country (Othman, 2021). Feedback from the international students doing a university program is useful and gives good exposure to the new international students planning to continue studying (Othman *et al.*, 2018a). Online communication via email has become one of the mediums for the university to provide complete information that will attract future students to enrol in the university's programs (McInnis, James & Hartley, 2012; Candela, 2019). The university management needs to respond to international students' inquiries on the university's offered programs.

Creating cultural diversities for the image of an international university has become a priority for universities that have always encouraged the international students' enrolment (Lee, 2017; Podymov, Sorokina, Litvinenko, Kurnykina, Fabrikov, Maleko, Novitskaya & Novitskaya, 2019). International students from different cultural, ethnic, and religious backgrounds offer varied scopes and definitions. Therefore, their first-year study experience should be regarded as the time each new student has to go through emotionally and the tension they face due to cultural differences and social values that affect their academic performance. Table 2 illustrates the literature synthesis referred to discuss relations between the aspects of self-sufficiency and sustainability of academic performance

**Table 2: A literature Review of The International Students' Management**

Study	Contribution
Rajab, Abd Rahman & Shaari, (2011); Othman <i>et al.</i> , (2018)	The elements for the university's selection, (i) experienced lecturers, (ii) quality teaching, (iii) comprehensive co-curriculum design, and (iv) conducive learning environment.
Becker & Kolster (2012)	The definition of international students as individuals who migrate across borders to pursue their higher education is not citizens.
Cao & Meng (2012)	International students have problems in learning if they are not proficient in English.
Chen (2017)	The classification of the rejection's elements among the international students in pursuing their study overseas and identifying the selection factors causing this pursuit.
Dora <i>et al.</i> , (2014); James-acEachern & Yun (2017)	Most international students from all over the world tend to choose a country where English is used a medium of communication, which aligns with the recognition for English to become the language of the economy and international businesses.
Devi & Nair (2008); Newsome & Cooper (2016); Othman, Awang & Mohd Suki, (2019a)	The definition of international students' first-year experience as a set of experience to assist the self-sufficiency towards the permanency of emotional management in life. Self-assimilation stress from different cultural aspects and social values of the host country that affect the academic performance. Among the contributing factors is recognizing the university's reputation and continuous



	accreditation, students' satisfaction as the university's client, and its competitive programs.
Gabel, Dobel & Cerdin (2013)	Online resource assessment needs English proficiency and affects the ability to finish up assignments and sit for examinations.
Gilakjani (2015)	The language used for teaching and learning of a university can influence the international students' decision to choose a program and the study destination.
Glass & Westmont (2014)	Academic aspects act as the transformative element in bringing changes to the life of each individual.
Gresham (2013); Arkoudis & Baik (2014)	The host country's language is still used as the medium of instruction in teaching and learning, which causes the international students to have problems understanding the lessons taught in class.
Alghamdi & Otte, (2016)	Adaptation of self-sufficiency in the new academic environment to students' satisfaction towards the university's service.
Jupiter <i>et al.</i> , (2017)	The international students' motive to pursue their study overseas is to get new experience, learn more about the local culture, and try a new education system.
Jupiter <i>et al.</i> , (2018)	The contemporary and flexibility of education programs have become the key attraction for international students to continue their studies overseas.
Othman <i>et al.</i> , (2017a)	Lecturers' expertise and passion towards the course they teach are significant in determining the lessons' quality. The host country's education system is much better and more quality than the home country's education system.
Othman, Awang & Mohd Suki, (2019a)	Students' satisfaction, (i) the academic quality and the university's management, (ii) activities and campus life, (iii) students' expectations on the customers' friendly concept, and (iv) the international students' demographic background.
Kam (2014)	Local students distant themselves from the international students causing them not to like group assignment.
Kim (2015)	The ability to communicate affects international students' decision to continue their study overseas.
Kuo (2011); Gilakjani (2015)	The English proficiency criteria involve the comprehension, listening and speaking skills, pronunciation intonation, conversation style and lack of confidence in interactions.
Lewis (2016); James-MacEachern & Yun (2017)	The first-year experience is a crucial phase full of challenges, changes, and the need to have the

	integrity to adapt self-sufficiency in the host country.
Liew (2012); Yan (2017); Dora <i>et al.</i> , (2014); Jupiter <i>et al.</i> , (2018)	Contemporary programs become the main attraction for international students' decision to select their study destination. Malaysia is chosen for its international recognition for the programs offered at higher educational institutions.
Mazzarol & Soutar (2002)	Rejection factor to study overseas (i) programs offered overseas better than the programs offered in the home country, (ii) the difficulty to get study offer from the home country, (iii) exploration of foreign cultures, (iv) the education program is not offered in the home country, (v) obtaining new experience in a foreign country.  Attraction factors are (i) knowledge about the background of the host country, (ii) suggestions from parents, close friends, agents and the university's reputation, (iii) reasonable study fees, (iv) conducive learning environment, (v) strategic locations, (vi) infrastructures facilities and social networking.
Nilsson & Ripmeester (2016)	The education program is selected mainly based on the comprehensive learning contents that meet the job market's needs and the job itself.
Noel, Levitz & Saluri (2012); Glass & Westmont (2014)	The undergraduates' marketability has become the credibility indication of a university and functions as the benchmarks in the international students' selection criteria.
Singh, Jack & Schapper (2014)	The advantages of the host country's education service include the course evaluation, course management, quality lecturers, learning outcomes, and learning facilities like libraries, hostels, and health facilities.
Yan (2017)	Factors causing international students' neglect are the lecturers' disregard of the international students' poor command in the English language and their rights to get knowledge.
Zhang & Mi (2014); Jupiter <i>et al.</i> , (2017); Falcone (2017)	Poor command in English has stressed the international students and affected their academic performance negatively.

Table 2 shows the findings of international students' management studies. Based on the table, the element of self-sufficiency adaptation among international students with the sustainability of their academic performance during their study period is an issue that has not been discussed. Thus, this paper tends to give a new perspective on this issue.

## Methodology

The study employed a qualitative approach, and an in-depth interview was conducted on 40 international students studying in four Malaysia's public universities. The respondents who volunteered for the study were in their first-year study. The public universities of the study, on the other hand, were chosen based on a case study, where each university is different based on location, the categorical status of Malaysian public universities, and the number of international students' admission. A preliminary study was conducted to obtain a suitable interview protocol and identify the social unit's background based on the environmental interactions within a particular community (Simons, 2009; Thomas, 2011). The study also adopted a semi-structured interview to give the interviewers the freedom to pose questions other than the questions developed by the researchers (Creswell, 2014; Flick, 2014). This method is relevant for exploratory research to gain in-depth responses (Seidman, 2006). Thematic analysis was used to analyze the interview data through coding process (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016; Babbie, 2017). The analysis led to the emergent themes, i.e., themes and subthemes, showing the empirical data through the study's respondents' narrative statements.

Table 3 shows the respondents' demographic profiles, namely, gender, age, and marital status. There were 28 males (70 per cent) and 12 females (30 per cent) involved in the study. About 40 per cent of the respondents aged between 21 to 22 years old (16 respondents); 25 per cent were 23 years old (ten respondents); and 20 per cent of the respondents aged between 19 to 20 years old (eight respondents)-the remaining 15 per cent aged between 17 to 18 years old (six respondents). For the marital status, most of the respondents were singles (90 per cent; 36 respondents), and only 10 per cent of the respondents were married (four respondents). The respondents were in their first year of study for undergraduate programs.

**Table 3: Demographic Profiles**

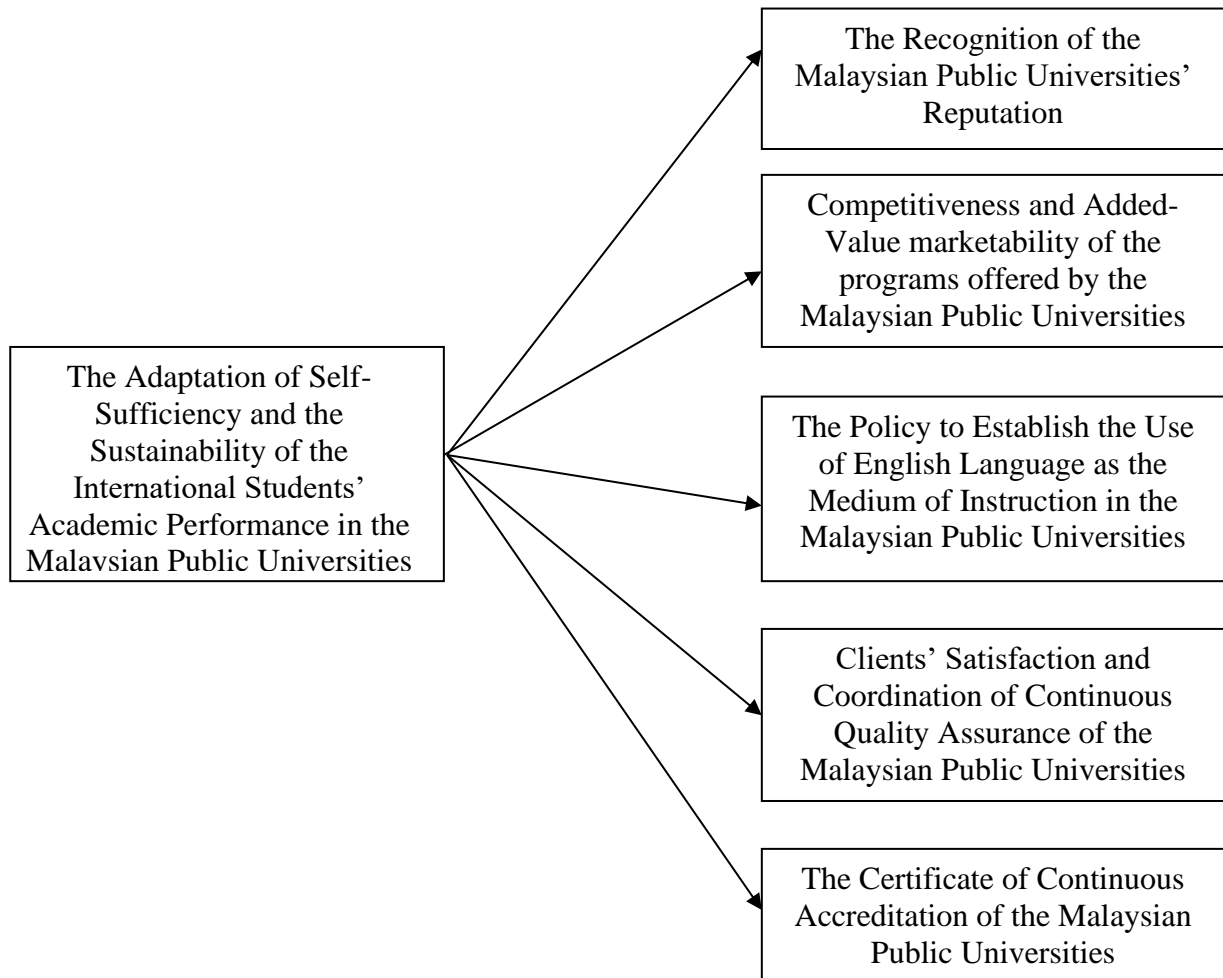
Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	28	70
Female	12	30
Age		
17 – 18 years old	6	15
19 – 20 years old	8	20
21 – 22 years old	16	40
23 years old	10	25
Marital Status		
Single	36	90
Married	4	10

## Results

This paper discusses the findings of the relation between the adaptation of the international students' self-sufficiency and the sustainability of their academic performance during their study years in Malaysian public universities (Year 1 to Year 3). Figure 1 illustrates the five elements affecting the international students' academic performance and the assimilation challenges of their private life. The elements are



(i) the recognition of the Malaysian public universities' reputation, (ii) competitiveness and added-value marketability of the programs offered by the Malaysian public universities, (iii) the policy to establish the use of English language as the medium of instruction in the Malaysian public universities, (iv) clients' satisfaction and coordination of continuous quality assurance of the Malaysian public universities and (v). the certificate of continuous accreditation of the Malaysian public universities.



**Figure 1: Academic Performance in the Malaysian Public Universities**

### **Recognition of the Malaysian Public Universities' Reputation**

Most of the respondents said that the Malaysian' public universities' reputation had affected their adaptation process in the university. About 22 respondents shared that their self-adaptation process happened fast because they feel proud (self-enhancement) to study at a university with an international reputation. The positive feeling that they have has changed their perspective in handling any self-adaptation challenges in a foreign culture. The respondents see the experience as something meaningful and need to be appreciated. Hence,

the respondents' faith towards the quality education they receive, and the beliefs towards the bright prospects, have helped the respondents to achieve sustainability in their academic performance. Table 4 shows the number of respondents for this element and their codes according to the university.

**Table 4: Number of Respondents of the Study and their Codes According to University**

University A	University B	University C	University D
Respondent 1	Respondent 12	Respondent 21	Respondent 32
Respondent 4	Respondent 13	Respondent 22	Respondent 33
Respondent 6	Respondent 14	Respondent 24	Respondent 35
Respondent 9	Respondent 16	Respondent 26	Respondent 37
Respondent 11	Respondent 18	Respondent 27	Respondent 38
	Respondent 20	Respondent 29	

Table 4 illustrates the number of respondents who agreed that the university's international reputation is a positive factor for their self-sufficiency adaptation. Respondents 4 and 12 shared their personal experience when they were asked about the indirect effects of the university's stable, systematic, and pro-active system on students' welfare international students quickly adapt to the new environment (Harvey, 2012; Jupiter *et al.*, 2018). Among the issues raised by the respondents affirm their decision to study in Malaysia, and it relates to the Malaysia public universities' reputation as a comprehensive university, the governance of international students, as well as the management of the international students' welfare from the first day they arrive in the country. The following responses show these issues.

Respondent 4 said,

*"As an international student, I have faced with foreign and new experiences from the first day I arrived in this country. Nevertheless, I feel lucky because the university has systematically arranged the course registration flow and my accommodation, making me feel stable and always guided to adapt to the new environment. The service provided by the university reflects its reputation as the best university in Southeast Asia. I don't feel regret to choose this university because a good start will end with good results. I believe the university's systematic and friendly management will leave a positive impact on international students and eventually will produce quality graduates."*

Respondent 12 stated,

*"Initially, I felt that the orientation week organized by the university for new students took a long time to end. However, it leaves a great effect on my confidence as an international student. We were forced to mingle and adapt fast with the orientation week's activities involving the university's teaching and learning system. We were also asked to blend with the local students. Thus, I have overcome the cross-cultural aspects that I assumed difficult all the while. My English is getting better because I have to communicate with my lecturers and friends constantly. Also, the university's compulsory courses have taught me the general knowledge, different from the faculty's courses. I feel the system matched the personal development of quality graduates."*

The responses show that the university's orderly and friendly system becomes a dominant factor to influence international students' attitude to move progressively towards excellent academic performance in the first year of their study (Rajab, Abd Rahman & Shaari, 2011;

Liew, 2012; McInnis, James & Hartley, 2012; Othman *et al.*, 2018a; Othman, Yusoff, Abdul Hamid, Awang & Jupiter, 2018b). The teaching quality of the diverse quality lecturers has also impacted positively on the students' quality learning. The suitable co-curricular design has also become the stimulant for international students to feel the fun as they go through international students' experience. The positive experiences positively influence their sustainability and satisfaction, and it will eventually affect their academic performance (Rajab, Abd Rahman & Shaari, 2011; Jupiter *et al.*, 2017).

The findings also illustrate that the international students' adaptation of their self-sufficiency and sustainability in their academic performance is also linked to their happiness in making friends with the local students. Their friendship improves their social networks within the campus community (Gresham, 2013; Arkoudis & Baik, 2014; Alghamdi & Otte, 2016; Othman *et al.*, 2018a; Van Mol, 2019; Li *et al.*, 2020). Respondent 27 has praised the attitude of the local friends, which come from different races and religions, and the public, who has become the best example of a plural society of a country that values unity. The people's friendly and approachable attitudes make international students feel welcome, which has helped them go through the self-sufficiency adaptation process more comfortable in a short time. When the international students do not feel alienated, they have reached the comfort zone, focusing on their study that has become the primary goal when they continue their study's overseas. The following response explains in detail about this positive experience.

Respondent 21 said,

*"When I first came here, I can still remember until today, the people's positive attitude in accepting us, the foreign students, really helps. It is undeniable that the high fees we paid are the source of the university's income. However, it is the university's reputation that satisfies us. The feedback we get from our seniors is encouraging that my decision to study here is valid. The friends' and lecturers' and the locals' openness and cooperation have made the adaption process fast. That is why I have much time to focus on my study."*

Nevertheless, some respondents do not think the university's good reputation play a positive role in the sustainability of their academic performance (Sawir, 2014; Tran & Vu, 2016; O'Malley, 2017; Li & Zizzi, 2018). Based on this perspective, it can be said that most of the respondents focus more on the balance function of their first-year self-sufficiency adaptation overseas as the central aspect of their sustainability in achieving satisfactory academic performance. The following response illustrates this focus.

Respondent 35 said,

*"I believe that the combination of the university's good reputation, accreditation and experiences in managing international students while they are in Malaysia contribute to the sustainability of our academic performance. There may be international students who are unknown yet get positive experiences and have excellent academic results. It is a good thing if international students manage to get all the elements such as a university with a good reputation and positive experience in the overseas' adaptation process. I believe that self-esteem and effort contribute to excellent academic achievement."*

However, some international students disagree that the university's reputation positively impacts the students' self-sufficiency adaptation. According to these students, the experiences they get in the host country refer mostly to the students' existing readiness to be outside the

comfort zone and get support from the university. The findings support the study conducted by Kouba, (2020) and Ross, Ta & Oliaro, (2020) which has found that the university's reputation is a significant factor influencing international students' decision to study abroad.

### **Competitiveness and Added-Value Marketability of the Programs Offered by the Malaysian Public Universities**

Studying in a university does not guarantee a job opportunity after graduation. Therefore, for the international students coming from all over the world, the diverse study programs offered by the Malaysian public universities become the best opportunity for them to enrol in the programs they like, as well as to earn a degree with more secure career prospect (Noel, Levitz & Saluri, 2012; Nilsson & Ripmeester, 2016; Hamad & Suzanne, 2016; Othman *et al.*, 2018a; Candela, 2019). The various programs offered by the Malaysia public universities are in line with the various types of universities' status, such as the comprehensive universities, research universities and technical universities (MOE, 2021b). The history of the Malaysian public universities' establishment from the beginning of independence until today has depicted the development of courses that are comprehensive and meet the current job market (Awang, Ramli & Ibrahim, 2012; Othman *et al.*, 2019a, 2019b).

Table 5 shows 26 respondents who have mutually stated that the diverse study programs, which are competitive in the structure and contents, are among the factors influencing the students' decision to choose a study field of their interest (Liew, 2012; Jupiter *et al.*, 2018; Candela, 2019; Shavelson *et al.*, 2019). The diversity of the programs offered has positively affected the students' self-sufficiency adaptation process and academic performance.

**Table 5: Number of Respondents of the Study and Their Codes According to University**

University A	University B	University C	University D
Respondent 3	Respondent 11	Respondent 21	Respondent 31
Respondent 4	Respondent 12	Respondent 23	Respondent 32
Respondent 5	Respondent 13	Respondent 25	Respondent 34
Respondent 7	Respondent 15	Respondent 27	Respondent 35
Respondent 8	Respondent 17	Respondent 28	Respondent 37
Respondent 12	Respondent 18	Respondent 30	Respondent 38
	Respondent 19		Respondent 40

The responses explaining the programs offered by the Malaysian public universities are more career-oriented are shown as follows:

Respondent 3 said,

*"I feel excited to study here because I'm confident that the university's credibility will secure me a job after my graduation because my program has a high value-added marketability."*

Respondent 18 stated,

*"In my opinion, the marketability of a degree does not only on the excellent academic achievement but also on the existing industrial partner relationship of the university that affects the job placement of the university's graduates in this challenging job market."*

Respondent 40 said,

*“When I chose this university, my goal is to get the chance to be in the circle of the industrial partner of this university, which may have the potential to become my employer when I graduate in the next two years.”*

The responses by respondents 3, 18 and 40 support the findings of some scholars like Alghamdi & Otte (2016), Candela (2019) and Shavelson *et al.* (2019) whose studies have shown that students' dependency on the contemporary and value-added marketability programs is among the issues discussed. The international students' active involvement relates to their high ability to go through the self-sufficiency adaption process successfully while studying in this country. Thus, achieving the best academic performance is no longer become the only goal for international students. They also need to have the skills to adapt in any given situations and to become a good leader in future have also become their targets.

### **The Policy to Establish the Use of English Language as the Medium of Instruction in the Malaysian Public Universities**

In this globalization era, proficiency in the English language is no longer regarded as one's added value, but also it is one of the key requirements for future employers (Nilsson & Ripmeester, 2016; Chelliah, Khan, Krishnan, Kamarulzaman & Goh, 2019). The relation between the language and economy is undeniably complicated. Nevertheless, English language skill is a requirement for international students because it is a universal language offered by the university that is compulsory for international students (Zhang & Mi, 2014; Suryandari, Jaafar & Hamzah, 2014; Falcone, 2017; Othman, 2021). Table 4 shows the number of respondents of the study and their codes according to university.

**Table 6: Number of Respondents of the Study and Their Codes According to University**

University A	University B	University C	University D
Respondent 1	Respondent 13	Respondent 21	Respondent 31
Respondent 2	Respondent 14	Respondent 22	Respondent 32
Respondent 3	Respondent 15	Respondent 24	Respondent 34
Respondent 7	Respondent 16	Respondent 25	Respondent 36
Respondent 9	Respondent 17	Respondent 27	Respondent 37
Respondent 11	Respondent 18	Respondent 28	Respondent 38
	Respondent 19		

About 24 international students stated that among the reasons for them to pursue their study overseas is to improve their English language proficiency. Most of the students agreed that globalization has made the language a universal language in the economy and international businesses. Responses from respondents 1, 16, 25 and 36 show the importance of English language skills and use in assisting them in adapting their self-sufficiency, particularly during their first-year study at the university. Among the issues mentioned by these respondents was the lack of confidence in communication and the lack of ability to write in English well. These disadvantages affected their confidence, mainly in doing the assignments. They also had problems to refer to a quality source of references that were mainly in English. The low proficiency in the English language among graduates has made it difficult for them to secure a job after graduation. Among the responses of these issues were as follows:



Respondent 1 said,

*“As an international student who is not proficient in English, I experience cultural shock due to the lack of confidence because not only I’m not able to communicate well in English, I also have a problem to write in English, which is critically important in writing up the assignments. My low proficiency in the English language has affected my academic performance as well as the adaptation of my self-sufficiency during my first-year study here, and this has negatively impacted my overall grades.”*

Respondent 16 said,

*“I feel that it is compulsory for a university student to be proficient in English to enable them to find reading materials and the latest source of references. The cyber-world has exposed us to online learning where most of the scientific achievements are through the internet. Without English, it’s difficult to adapt to the learning environment that is alien to us.”*

Respondent 25 said,

*“My low proficiency in English has never become an obstacle for me to get closer to my local friends and lecturers. They are my ‘training centre’ to polish my English language skills. Everybody knows that the medium of communication for international students is only English. It’s impossible for outsiders to learn my first language. Thus, I must move in line with the urgent needs of the globalization era. In whatever I do, I must think positive. At least, I can achieve my goal to be proficient in English when I’m put in this no-choice-condition.”*

Respondent 36 said,

*“One of the reasons why my family sent me to continue my study overseas is to improve my English language proficiency. My brother and sister had problems getting a job based on their qualification because of their poor English command, which made my parents determined to send me to study overseas. Although I had a problem to adapt at the beginning due to language skills, my English proficiency has helped me a lot in achieving good academic performance.”*

Among the responses obtained from the international students were the difficulty in following the lessons at the university because there were lecturers who still use the first language in class (Kuo, 2011; Zhang & Mi, 2014; Freeman & Li, 2019). The international students were told to be serious in mastering the local language as it benefits them. However, this has caused dissatisfaction among international students because, from their perspective, a world-level university's lecturers should be ready and trained to conduct classes in English. The Malay language status as the official language of Malaysia should not be used to deny the needs to use English as the medium of class instruction. It is illogical for a person to become proficient in the Malay language in one to three years. The following translated response shows this dissatisfaction:

Respondent 11 said,

*“It is unreasonable for lecturers to give lectures in Malay when they are fully aware that the international students are attending their classes. Moreover, the classes were offered to international students, although locals were registered for the classes. I feel offended when I am told to master the local language. It is unfair for us to be told to learn a new language apart from improving our English language proficiency when we are only in the country for less than three years. It is challenging for us to be in a foreign place and to go through the self-*

*adaptation. Therefore, I think the university management should ensure that the medium of instruction for the teaching and learning of a subject should be conducted in English because the subject is offered to international students."*

The incident faced by Respondent 11 is not new and needs to be addressed by the university management quickly. The lecturers' reluctance to use English in the subject offered to international students negatively affects the university's reputation. The university's internationalization policy, which has become one of the main objectives to attract more international students' admission, will face a difficulty when lecturers are not playing their role (Othman, Mohd Kamal, Yusoff, Norazah, Awang & Jupiter, 2017b). When two languages are used in lectures, international students will have problems understanding the lessons, which affects the sustainability of their academic performance (Kuo, 2011; Zhang & Mi, 2014; O'Malley, 2017). Academic staff should consider this non-compliance attitude to teaching in Malay for the courses offered to international students, simply because the number of local students registered for the course is greater than the number of international students, as unacceptable. If the lecturers are concerned about the local students' low proficiency in English, they should also concern about the international students' rights to get education by using English as the medium of instruction in their classes (Liew, 2012; Kim, 2015; James-MacEachern & Yun, 2017).

### **Clients' Satisfaction and Coordination of Continuous Quality Assurance of the Malaysian Public Universities**

One of the main agendas in implementing internationalization policy is the continuous service and commitment given to international students. In this study, quality service is regarded as the catalyst to the international students' self-sufficiency adaptation process related to their academic performance upon graduation (Othman *et al.*, 2017b; Ross, Ta & Oliaro, 2020; Othman, 2021). Students focus more on the issues relating to these two elements, namely (i) the operation's quality and the supporting staff's management's efficiency in taking care students' welfare, and (ii) the quality two-way communication between students and the university in improving students' satisfaction during their study years in the university (Falcone, 2017; Jupiter *et al.*, 2018; Ross, Ta & Oliaro, 2020). Table 7 shows the number of respondents for this element and their codes according to the university.

**Table 7: Number of Respondents of the Study and their Codes According to University**

University A	University B	University C	University D
Respondent 2	Respondent 14	Respondent 21	Respondent 32
Respondent 5	Respondent 18	Respondent 23	Respondent 34
Respondent 6	Respondent 19	Respondent 24	Respondent 36
Respondent 8	Respondent 20	Respondent 25	Respondent 38
Respondent 12		Respondent 26	Respondent 40
		Respondent 28	
		Respondent 30	

Table 7 illustrates 21 respondents' satisfaction as the client and the quality services offered by the Malaysian public universities. Respondents 5 and 20 stated that it is normal for the students, as the clients, they hope to receive the best service from the university to facilitate the self-sufficiency adaptation process smoothly primarily during their first-year study in the university (Othman *et al.*, 2019a; 2019b). Among the issues mentioned by these respondents during the

interview were related to performance, system, and the supporting staff's service structures. The responses are as follows:

Respondent 5 said,

*"I have high hopes about the supporting staff's services, especially when I have the dilemma to solve problems like the course registration, study fees, and library service. I always feel marginalized, and this negatively affects the assimilation process of my life here. In my opinion, the operation's quality, and the management's efficiency in managing the international students' welfare should be the main goal of the university's administration."*

Respondent 20 stated,

*"I believe that all problems can be solved if the university shows its commitment to provide us with the correct info, comforting us through their service and showing us the students-friendly service. I had a bad experience last time when the supporting staff was not responsive and emphatic towards my problems like the inconducive living environment and delayed student's visa management."*

Some respondents also commented that they put their trust in the university's efforts in assisting them during their self-sufficiency adaptation process in the earlier arrival at the university (Podymov *et al.*, 2019). Respondent 30 said that the initiative taken by the International Student Affairs office of the university in the aspects of taking care of international students' welfare is proven to be efficient. The following is the response:

Respondent 30 said,

*"I think the role of the International Student Affairs office of each university should be optimized so that the international students' self-adaptation process benefits their future academic achievement. I believe that each problem can be solved quickly if the International Student Affairs office handles it. When the problems are solved, the international students' trust towards the university will improve, which influences our focus on our achievement."*

The response indicates that humanitarian relations benefit the university's trust and credibility, and this trust will form a long-term eternity and respect. The office's efficiency in managing the students' conflicts will result in the students' satisfaction, and it will eventually form sustainability in their promising academic performance. Humanitarian factor positively affects the international students' well-being (Othman *et al.*, 2018a; 2018b).

On the contrary, respondent 34 felt that the effective two-way communication between the students and the university had leveraged the students' self-satisfaction throughout their stay in the university (Singh, Jack & Schapper, 2014; Shapiro, Farrelly & Thomas, 2014; Othman *et al.*, 2019b). The students' perception of the university's quality services results from the students' expectation of the outcome they received from the university's essential services. The following is the Respondent 39's response.

Respondent 34 said,

*"Two-way communication is essential, especially to the international students who constantly have problems to go through to the self-sufficiency adaptation process using two different languages. Some of us are not fluent in English, although the language is a universal medium. Thus, the university should be concern about our shortcomings. I feel very grateful*

*because there are language courses offered specially for international students with low English proficiency. The English language classes have not only boosted our confidence but also has helped us to get good results in examination.”*

The responses show that the international students stress more on their satisfaction as the clients concerned and responsive to elements like empathy, security, physical evidence, and the university's reliability in helping them go through the adaptation process. Their increasing satisfaction affects their academic performance positively. In conclusion, to increase the international students' satisfaction towards the university, the university must improve (i) the quality of its operation, and the supporting staff's efficiency in managing students' welfare, and (ii) the quality of the two-way communication between the students and the university.

### **Recognition of Continuous Accreditation of Malaysian Public Universities**

The accreditation recognition of a university is one of the international students' elements to consider in deciding which university to go to for their study (Othman, 2021). The teaching and learning methods, co-curriculum designs and delivery, students' evaluation on the course offered, students' selection, support system and the academic staff expertise's directory of a university are among the components for the university's continuous accreditation recognition. Studies have shown that students' decision on continuing their study to a specific university is often based on the university's continuous accreditation recognition, and this is because the probability for them to secure a job after graduating from a good university is high (Alghamdi & Otte, 2016; Nilsson & Ripmeester, 2016). Table 8 illustrates the number of respondents of the study and their codes according to university.

**Table 8: Number of Respondents of the Study and their Codes According to University**

University A	University B	University C	University D
Respondent 2	Respondent 14	Respondent 24	Respondent 33
Respondent 5	Respondent 17	Respondent 26	Respondent 35
Respondent 8	Respondent 20	Respondent 28	Respondent 40
		Respondent 29	

Most of the interviewed respondents agreed that the university's goal to maintain their accreditation status has contributed to factors like the offer of comprehensive and student-friendly courses that attract diverse students from overseas. Among the responses supporting this agreement are shown as follows:

Respondent 8 said,

*“As an international student, I feel excited to adapt to the new learning environment. Personally, it's fun to know that the courses I'm taking for this semester are contemporary and match the current job prospects. When I feel excited, the adaptation process happens fast because of excitement. I hope to obtain good results in examinations due to my passion.”*

Respondent 17 stated,

*“The first thing I did is to check the accreditation of this university before delving into aspects related to my study. I do this because I get a scholarship from my government. I don't want to return to my country without getting a job based on qualification.”*

Respondent 29 said,

*"I was advised by my family and experienced teachers to go to a university with quality teaching and learning method. So, the adaptation process will become easier and not stressful if it is difficult to understand the programs' contents. I also did some research on the university's academic staff expertise directory to ensure that the lecturers have a diverse educational background."*

Table 8 shows that 13 respondents have collectively agreed that a university that plans, executes and monitors the study program's implementation is a higher educational institution that commits to continuously improving its study programs. Responses given by respondents 8, 17 and 29 show positive feedback on the teaching and learning methods, co-curriculum design and delivery, students' evaluation on the course offered, students' selection, support system and the academic staff expertise's directory of a university, the factors influencing the students' adaptation of the self-sufficiency and sustainability in their academic performance (Harvey, 2012; Kam, 2014; Othman *et al.*, 2019a).

### Conclusion

In these era, academic aspects are the transformative elements bringing changes to everyone. The study has found that self-sufficiency adaptation affects the Malaysian public universities' international students' sustainability of their academic performance. From the international students' perspective, the primary goal for pursuing their study overseas is getting the best-planned educational procurement for getting the opportunity to become a quality graduate who has secured future.

The element of self-sufficiency adaptation in going through the new academic experiences becomes the main frustration for international students. It is natural for international students to face various problems, especially in assimilating the academic system's adjustment. The different educational system between the host country and the students' home country has affected their academic performance. The teaching and learning methods involving the handling of the course, the lecturers' quality, the infrastructure of the learning facilities like the library, hostels and health facility are the critical elements contributing to the international students' academic performance throughout their study years.

The responses illustrated in the discussion part of the study focus more on the international students' narrative view on the advantages and disadvantages of the Malaysian public universities' education system. The issues mentioned by the respondents have the potential to generate different implications to the students' self-sufficiency adaptation like the students' confidence on the university's reputation, their satisfaction on the university's customer-friendly practices, service quality assurance, continuous accreditation, provision of new programs that have market value-added, and the policy to use English as the medium of instruction of the university.

The international students' shared experiences have discovered new knowledge and filled in the gaps of international students' management studies in the context of the first-year adaptation process in the host country. Therefore, the study's findings contribute to the empirical data on international students' perception of the Malaysian university's services. In sum, the international students' goal in pursuing their study overseas is to gain new experience, get to know the local culture, and get the benefits of the education system that is different from



their home country. Thus, the self-adaptation process towards the new environment will become more positive with the support staff, academicians, and local students.

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