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POSITIVE IMPACT OF SELF-ASSESSMENT FIRST YEAR EXPERIENCE ON ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT AMONG INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

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Abstract:

The academic aspect plays a vital role as a 'transformative' element in bringing change into the life of each individual. One of the main goals of students continuing their studies abroad is to obtain a high-quality education. The first-year experience is considered an important phase involving self-assimilation, emotional change, cultural shock and social values that can influence the academic achievement of international students. The discussion of this paper elucidates the factors that contribute to the more meaningful first-year experience differences by comparing the process of self-assimilation and academic achievement of international students. In-depth interviews with 40 international students from four Malaysian public universities were conducted using a qualitative method approach that used objective sampling techniques. The findings lead to a self-reflection on the nature of international students, which is expressed through a narrative outpouring of emotions that describe the excitement, desire, and hope. The elements of transformation and self-assimilation of students in this study are interconnected with (i) the reputation of Malaysian public universities as a prestigious educational destination, (ii) the quality of a more comprehensive and 'versatile' higher education system, (iii) the flexibility and dynamics of the academic programs offered, and (iv) contemporary and 'market driven' academic programs. The empirical data from this study is hoped to be useful information for the university's human resource management, which relies heavily on international student enrolment. This effort is in line with Malaysia's National Strategic Plan for Higher

Education or PSPTN, which was created to transform the country into a global hub of higher education excellence.

Keywords:

Self-Assimilation, Academic Achievement, First Year Experience, International Students

Introduction

The Malaysian Higher Education landscape has shifted dramatically as a result of the Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia's (MOE) proactive efforts to meet the demands of globalization on access to higher education in the country (Ahmad and Buchanan, 2017). As a result, KPTM's fifth goal is based on the country's international higher education policy, which aims to attract 10 per cent of the country's higher education student population through international enrolment at the diploma, degree, and postgraduate levels (MOHE, 2021). The mission is in line with KPTM's five main thrusts, which are to create higher education planning strategically and systematically, empower national higher management, increase capacity, involvement, and access in various fields of higher learning, purify the quality of national higher education to international standards, and meet policy aspirations and goals internationalization of higher education (MOHE, 2021). Finally, the National Strategic Plan for Higher Education (PSPTN), which was formulated in 2007 to transform higher education, has taken on the task of establishing Malaysia as a global hub of excellence in higher education (Othman, Mokhtar, and Esa, 2022a).

The plan's strategic core is efforts to strengthen the country's international higher education policy (MOHE, 2018). The education sector will be designated as one of the National Key Economic Areas (NKEAs) in the Economic Transformation Program as a result of this strategy (Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, 2018). This is in line with efforts to continue the second core of the National Mission, which is to improve the country's knowledge and innovation capabilities to cultivate first-class minds. This connectivity is hoped to assist the country in meeting its goals of (i) increasing international student enrolment, (ii) increase the number of comprehensive and relevant programs available to international students, and (iii) rebrand Malaysian public and private universities to meet a target of 250,00 international students by 2025 (MOHE, 2021). The increase in annual international student enrolment at Malaysian public universities is shown in Table 1. The increase reflects the Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia's initiative in launching various efforts to realize the Malaysian higher education system's internationalization policy. Malaysia's main goal is to establish itself as a hub of higher education for Southeast Asia by 2025.

Table 1: Annual Enrolment of International Students in The Public University in Malaysia (2007-2019)

Year	Total International Students in the Public University in Malaysia
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>(From 2007-2019)

Table 1 from the Ministry of Higher Education shows that the number of international students enrolled in Malaysian public universities has increased since 2007, bringing the total number of international students to 14,324 people. Since then, the number of international students enrolled in Malaysian public universities has increased year after year. In 2013, 28,830 students were enrolled, which was the highest number ever. Although there was a slight decrease in 2014, bringing the total number of students enrolled in 27,042, the upward trend continued. International student enrolment reached 32,404 people in the year 2019, which was another encouraging figure (MOE, 2019). The rise in the number suggests that Malaysia's higher education system is on the right track, indicating that the government's efforts to raise the country's higher education institutions to international standards are yielding results.

Literature Reviews

The university is strategically planning various preparations to increase the enrolment of these groups in light of Malaysia's status as one of the top higher learning destinations for international students. Associated with the image and prestige of the university, the quality of education and diversity of program offerings, internal security issues and national political stability, affordable tuition fees, especially for private, multi-ethnic and cultural wealth of local communities are among the factors that catalyse the arrival of international students to a country (Othman, Awang and Mohd Suki, 2019a; Othman, Jupiter and Mohd Suki, 2019b).

The *Berita Harian* (2020) report examines the statement on the rising number of international students enrolling in Malaysian public universities, as well as the implications of such mobility, which has a significant impact on the country's economic growth. The average annual expenditure of an international student in Malaysia is estimated to be more than RM46,000, generating a total national income of around RM7.2 billion (Bernama, 2019). Malaysia's prestigious higher education system in the Southeast Asian region demonstrates that the country is willing to put in the effort necessary to create high-quality education that can compete internationally (*Berita RTM*, 2016). For the past decade, Malaysian public universities have taken a proactive approach to ensure that international students have the opportunity to have a meaningful first-year experience, thus having positive implications for their academic achievement. Two forms of approach are highlighted through literature highlights, the first is to present a synthesis of the literature of relevant scholars 'contributions in the study of international students' self-assimilation and academic achievement, as shown in Table 2. While the second approach is more focused on discussions involving empirical data, supported by a selection of interview narratives with international students.

Two forms of approach are highlighted through literature highlights, the first, presenting the synthesis of literature as a result of relevant scholarly contributions in the study of self-assimilation of international students and academic achievement, as projected in Table 2. While the second approach is more focused on discussions involving empirical data. with a narrative selection of interviews with international students.

Table 2: Positive Impact of First-Year Self-Assimilation on Academic Achievement Among International Students

Researcher	Findings
Rajab, Abd Rahman and Shaari, 2011; Othman, Jupiter, Abdul Hamid, Yusoff and Awang, 2018a	The credibility, experience, and expertise of academics, teaching and learning standards, curriculum system design to meet current needs, and a conducive learning environment are all factors that influence student choice.
Othman, Awang and Mohd Suki, 2019a; Othman, Jupiter and Mohd Suki, 2019b	International students are classified as individual diaspora across national borders and have a variety of definitions.
Chen, (2017)	Rejection factors that are not related to the country of origin, as well as justifications for various individual selections.
Yusoff, Othman, Razak, and Mohd Suki, 2016; Jupiter, Othman, Mohd Suki, Yusoff, Awang and Razak, 2017; Chen, Li and Hagedorn, 2019; Song, 2019	The tendency of students to choose their study destination is related to the medium of instruction used in higher education. In study programs involving international students, English is considered essential.
Newsome and Cooper, 2016; Othman, Awang and Mohd Suki, 2019a	International students' first-year experience is defined as a series of events that encompass the emotional upheaval of starting a new life. They are prone to emotional fragility as a result of the stress caused by cross-cultural shocks and large social comparison gaps, which have an impact on academic achievement.
Gabel, Dolen and Cerdin 2013; Yusoff, Othman, Mohd Shah, Esa, Abang Muis, Marinsah and Ramlie, 2021a	The university's international student recruitment strategy includes cultural diversity, which helps to shape the university's image as an international institution.
Othman, Yusoff, Lukin, Ationg, Abang Muis and Mohd Shah, 2020	Academics play a pivotal role in bringing about positive change in student's lives.

Othman, Mohd Shah, Yusoff, Mohd Suki, Awang and Jupiter, 2017	For international students, the university requires them to take local language courses as a requirement.
Hamad and Suzanne, 2016; Smith, 2020	The purpose of studying abroad is to obtain a high-quality higher education and to make a difference in the world. Self-assimilation is the process of adjusting one's academic system to a new environment.
Han, Gebbie and Appelbum, 2015; Jupiter, Othman, Mohd Suki, Yusoff and Awang, 2018; Sittisom, 2020	Contemporary academic programs that are relevant to job marketability are among the factors that draw international students to a higher education system.
Harvey, 2012	The directory of expertise refers to the areas of expertise and experience of notable lecturers in the selection of international standard study destinations.
Othman, Awang, Hamid, Yusoff and Jupiter, 2018c	The excitement of new experiences, the desire to travel to interesting places, and the opportunity to benefit from the overseas education system all contribute to an increase in international student enrolment.
Othman, Mohd Shah, Yusoff, Mohd Suki, Awang and Jupiter, 2017	Research into prestigious educational systems and top-notch academic programs. The expertise and interest of the lecturers in the course have a significant impact on the quality of teaching and learning.
Othman, Awang and Mohd Suki, 2019a; Othman, Jupiter and Mohd Suki, 2019b	Self-assimilation can be accelerated with a meaningful first-year experience. Student satisfaction is influenced by the university administration's academic quality and efficiency, the campus community's cheerfulness, and the diversity of international students. The first year of study abroad is a crucial transition period that can predict the student's adjustment period.
Gilakjani, 2015; Kim, 2015	Students' confidence in continuing their studies abroad is influenced by their ability to communicate effectively.
Gilakjani, 2015; Kim, 2015; Trujillo, Mohammed and Saleh, 2020; Jupiter, Othman, Yusoff and Muda, 2021)	International students have poor English proficiency in terms of comprehension, listening, and verbal mastery. Not good at communicating in terms of pronunciation intonation, conversational style and lack of confidence.

Lewis, 2016; James-McEacher and Yun, 2017	International student mobility is defined as individuals' decision to leave their home country's educational system and study in a foreign country for some time.
Liew, 2012; Dora, Ibrahim, Ramachandran, Kasim and Saad, 2014; Othman, Awang and Mohd Suki, 2019a; Othman, Jupiter and Mohd Suki, 2019b	The selection of Malaysia as a study destination of interest is associated with international recognition of the study program to meet the employment industry and the needs of employers.
Liew, 2012; Yan, 2017	International students are socially marginalized because the lecture method does not use the English medium.
McInnis, James and Hartley, 2012; Pawar, Dasgupta and Vispute, 2019; Othman, Esa, Ationg, Ibrahim, Lukin and Abdul Hamid, 2021b	The university's marketing strategy is to use digital infrastructure facilities to provide complete and up-to-date information on the benefits of foreign universities.
Trujillo, Mohammed and Saleh, 2020	External factors such as knowledge of the host country's history, parental support, close friends, agent recommendations, university reputation, cost-effective tuition, a comprehensive and conducive learning system, strategic geographical location, infrastructure facilities, and social screening are examples of attraction factors.
Pawar, Dasgupta and Vispute, 2019	The push factor is defined as an internal factor in the student's home country that influences their decision to study abroad. These include programs offered by foreign universities that are of higher quality than those offered in the country of origin, difficulties in obtaining a place to study at a university in the country of origin, a desire to travel and learn about other cultures, the variety of study programs available abroad, and the excitement of gaining experience in other countries.
Nilsson and Ripmester, 2016	The importance of study programs and syllabi relevant to career prospects.
Noel, Levitz and Saluri, 2012; Jupiter, Othman, Mohd Suki, Yusoff, Awang and Razak, 2017	The significance of relevant study programs and syllabi for future career prospects. The preference of international students for programs with up-to-date, practical, comprehensive, and 'market-driven learning curricula.
Singh, Jack and Schapper, 2014; Othman, Esa,	Course management, academic staff directory, library facilities, residential colleges, health facilities, and international affairs office services are all linked to student satisfaction.

Ationg, Ibrahim, Lukin and Abdul Hamid, 2021b	
Yan, (2017)	The forgetfulness of some lecturers is less concerned with English proficiency causing dropouts in lectures.
Zhang and Mi, 2014; Falcone, 2017; Jupiter, Othman, Mohd Suki, Yusoff, Awang and Razak, 2017; Suh, Flores & Wang, 2019; Yusoff, Othman, Jupiter and Mokhtar, 2021b	The lack of English proficiency causes difficulties in the learning process and puts pressure on international students' academic performance.

Referring to Table 2, the authors conducted a literature review with a discussion of the findings of the study on the first-year experience of self-assimilation of international students in Malaysian public universities and their implications on their academic achievement.

Research Methodology

This study chose a qualitative research approach to investigate the positive impact of the international student community self-assimilation with the continuity of first-year experience abroad. University I, University II, University III, and University IV are named numerically as justifications for the selection of four public universities that use the pseudonym method approach. The categorization is based on the public university's status, the university's historical background, the number of annual international student enrolments, and the proactive internationalization policies implemented by the respective universities. The identity of international students who volunteer to be research participants is also protected by maintaining confidentiality.

Selection of a case study is a study design aimed at intensively identifying the background of something that occurs based on the environmental interaction of a social unit, whether it involves individuals, groups, institutions or communities (Simons, 2009; Thomas, 2011). A total of 40 international students were successfully interviewed using a set of semi-structured questions. The interview question protocol was designed, implemented and tested in a pilot study at a public university that was not included in the list of four IPTs (Seidman, 2006).

The use of semi-structured interview methods has proven effective for researchers because researchers have the freedom to interview in more depth without being fully tied to the interview questions (Creswell, 2013; Flick, 2014). This leads to a deeper exploration of the answers to the questions answered by the respondents. From the results of the interviews, the data recorded through the audio recording tape is transferred in the form of text by transcribing the recording and then analysed through the coding process to obtain the main themes (Creswell, 2013; Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2016; Babbie, 2017).

Table 3 shows the demographic profile of the participants in this study, which includes three main variables: gender, age, and marital status (single or married). A total of 40 people took part in this study, with 28 of them being men (70.0 per cent). The remaining 12 people are all

women, accounting for 30.0 per cent of the total. The majority of the participants are between the ages of 20 and 21, with a total of 16 participants out of 40.0 per cent of the total. Following that, the participants aged 22 to 23 years recorded a total of 10 participants, resulting in a 25.0 per cent percentage. The participants aged 19 to 20 years old accounted for a total of eight participants, or 20% of the total. 6 participants in the study are 17 to 18 years old, which is 15.0 per cent. The single status of 36 participants made up the majority of the participants, accounting for 90% of the total number of participants. Referring to the balance, those with the status of married, or 4 participants of the study, account for as much as 10%. All of the participants are first year undergraduate students enrolled full-time at one of four Malaysian public universities. Referring to the balance, those with the status of married, or 4 participants of the study, account for as much as 10%. All of the participants are full-time first-year undergraduate students at one of Malaysia's four public universities. In terms of the balance, those who are married, or 4 of the participants, account for as much as 10%. All of the participants are undergraduate students enrolled full-time at one of four Malaysian public universities.

Table 3: Participants Demographic Profile

Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<i>Gender</i>		
Men	28	70.0
Women	12	30.0
<i>Age (Years)</i>		
17-18		
19-20	6	15.0
21-22	8	20.0
23	16	40.0
	10	25.0
<i>Status</i>		
Single	36	90.0
Married	4	10.0

Research Findings Discussion

Five sub-themes emerged from the discussion on the impact of self-assimilation of the first-year experience on academic achievement among international students, namely (i) Malaysian public university education system as a prestigious educational destination, (ii) The quality of Malaysian public university education services is more comprehensive and "versatile," and (iii) Flexibility as a prestigious educational destination, (iv) Development of courses and offerings of contemporary and 'market driven' study programs as well as, (v) Value-added benefits of the use of English as a medium of learning and teaching in Malaysian public universities.

Malaysian Public University Education System as A Prestigious Study Destination

Based on feedback on self-assimilation and academic achievement, 19 out of 40 international students specifically mentioned the benefits and drawbacks of the Malaysian public university education system. Reflections on the self-assimilation process during the first year of experience are said to be more prone to positive responses that focus on the benefits of Malaysia's public university education system.

Table 4: Self-Assimilation of the First-Year Experience of International Students Based on the Public Education System of Malaysian Public University as a Prestigious Study Destination

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

According to statements made by International Students 13 and International Students 21, the first year of university experience has been satisfactory. The semester system is used to organize classroom learning and teaching methods, and the study program offerings are easy to comprehend (Noel, Levitz and Saluri, 2012; Nilsson and Ripmester, 2016; Jupiter *et al.*, 2017; 2018).

This is supported by the understanding of International Students 13 and 21 who have successfully changed negative perceptions of the shortcomings and weaknesses of studying abroad due to the difficult assimilation process by linking learning experiences at Malaysian public universities. Students 13 and 21 agree that the Malaysian public university learning and teaching system achieves a balance of theoretical and practical knowledge, as well as the interconnectedness with students' personal development.

International students 21 add to the explanation by describing how they communicate in English all of the time on campus and outside of lecture time. The following statement demonstrates the severity of the situation:

“One thing I can say about studying here is that I am proud to be a student at one of the prestigious universities with a good image in Southeast Asia. I have a sister and brother who study at several universities abroad. I always visit them. In comparison, I found that Malaysian public universities have the complete infrastructure and beautiful campuses. So is the credibility of the university in offering a comprehensive program. I was informed that graduates who graduated from this university also got a job upon graduation. Therefore, I hope I can study well here and get excellent results for a good future.” (International Student 13)

“The main criteria that I put when deciding to choose Malaysian HEIs as a destination for further study is due to the English language used as a medium of teaching and learning. I feel comfortable when I find that the number of international students enrolled in public universities in this country is also in large numbers. This indicates that foreign students are concentrating on coming to Malaysia due to the reputation of the university here. I have done a little research in relation to academic staff who have a number of lecturers taken from abroad. All of that builds my confidence to come study here. I am confident that studying at a university that has a conducive environment and a good teaching staff is the catalyst for me to study hard.” (International Student 21)

Meaningful experience while in the first year of study can shape the development and determinants of student academic achievement (Othman, Rahim and Abu Bakar, 2022b; Othman, Awang and Mohd Suki, 2019a; Othman, Jupiter and Mohd Suki, 2019b). In addition, Pawar, Dasgupta and Vispute, (2019) investigate three key aspects of international student mobility: (i) the geographical location of study destinations, (ii) the accreditation of study programs, and (iii) the university's credibility, reputation, and image. Before making a final decision, international students refine the set of criteria. International students 13 believe that the elements of teaching quality, relevant curriculum design, and a directory of experienced and experienced lecturers can justify a student's choice (Singh, Jack and Schapper, 2014; Jupiter et al., 2018; Smith, 2020).

The benefits of pursuing studies abroad were also mentioned by some participants. Such advantages can build social networks through new relationships with the campus community and the local community (Gresham, 2013; Lee and Ciftci, 2014; Alghamdi and Otte, 2016; Othman et al., 2018a). The optimistic nature of International Students 5 concerning a plural society that is open, approachable has given space for international students to establish friendships. The expansion of such social networks has a high impact on new students catalysing the process of accommodation to a foreign environment (Gresham, 2013; Lewis, 2016; Lee, 2017). The following dialogue excerpts are related to the above-mentioned context of social network expansion:

"From the first day I was here I was exposed to the open acceptance from all levels whether university management, local students and the local community. I think that (good experience) contributes to the rapid assimilation process. I was placed in a residential college where my roommate was a local student. He helped me a lot in getting used to the new environment. I often follow my roommate to study at the university library. Indirectly my social network is expanding by making friends with other local students. When you have friends from different backgrounds, the experience gives you a lot of advantages, especially from the context of effective learning."
(International Student 5)

However, a small number of students continue to have difficulties with the self-assimilation process (Sawir, 2014; Thomas and Sumathi, 2016; O'Malley, 2017; Li and Zizzi, 2018; Tran, 2020). One of the self-assimilation dilemmas is the inability to master English as a universal language while simultaneously attempting to learn Bahasa Malaysia, the country's official language (Kuo, 2011; Zhang and Mi, 2014; Gilakjani, 2015; Martirosyan, Hwang and Wanjohi, 2015; Jupiter et al., 2021; Yusoff et al., 2021b).

According to International Student 40, the situation becomes more difficult when professors do not use complete English in lectures with international students. Because it involves international students, the scenario is a major concern that must be addressed. The following excerpts from interviews demonstrate the anxiety that students face when confronted with language problems:

"I have made a report several times to the faculty management, but until now no action has been taken. The issue relating to the lecturers who taught in Malay. I understand that when international students enrol in a particular course then the lecturer must teach using English. I am not sure why the lecturer ignored the instruction to teach in

English completely. We were always puzzled and had to seek assistance from local students. Unfortunately, not all of the students want to collaborate. I have also had instances where local students refused to include me in group projects. This makes me feel frustrated. Negative acceptance, I believe, disturbs my emotions to some extent, affects my learning performance, and, as a result, has a negative impact on my exam results. I sincerely hope that this issue can be resolved so that I can attend lectures with ease and confidence.” (International Student 40)

The scenario above depicts what happens when Bahasa Malaysia is used as a medium of communication in learning and teaching methods (Teaching and Learning), which leads to a variety of misunderstandings. When the situation has an impact on the performance and academic achievement of international students, it is considered a critical issue.

The public is aware that issues related to poor English proficiency among local students are also associated with an uncondusive learning environment. This occurs when the lack of fluency of international students to communicate fluently and coupled with the lack of local students to communicate in English has put language issues increasingly critical (Zhang and Mi, 2014; O'Malley, 2017; Jupiter et al., 2021; Yusoff et al., 2021b; Othman, Ahmad and Esa, 2022c).

The Quality of Educational Services in Malaysian Public Universities as Comprehensive and Versatile

As shown in Table 5, 27 of the 40 international students in this study agree that the differences between the Malaysian education system and the country of origin justify the choice of study destinations. Three aspects are highlighted: (i) academic quality, (ii) instructional medium, and (iii) the higher education system.

Table 5: Self-Assimilation of the First-Year Experience of International Students Based on the Quality of Educational Services in Malaysian Public Universities More Comprehensive and Versatile

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

A comparison of the study systems of the host country and the country of origin is made from the beginning of the process of exploring the study destination through the responses presented by International Students 6 and International Students 15. The duration of the study, type of academic program, and evaluation of examination courses are among the details completed by students.

“The education system in this country provides many options that are more comprehensive compared to my home country. Many of my friends who are already

studying here got jobs as soon as they returned home. I think the programs offered are relevant to the current job market. The marketability of graduates from this university is also evidenced by statistics from alumni of university graduates which I think is very encouraging. I find many of the courses offered here are not available at other universities. For example, the program of study that I follow is Aeronautical Engineering (Professional Aviation) which is more 'market oriented' and has a high demand from the aviation industry." (International Student 6)

"All I know is that the Malaysian public university system has three categories, namely research universities, comprehensive universities and focused universities. Since I am interested in becoming a professional engineer in military engineering then I chose the focused university in the country as a destination to further my study. I feel that the specialization of public universities in Malaysia gives an advantage to international students to choose the program of study that is closest to their interests and ambitions." (International Students 15)

The views expressed by International Students 6 and International Students 15, have similarities with Jupiter et al., (2018) study in which educational services are assessed in terms of teaching and learning methods, course evaluation, examination standards and academic staff directory. These elements are comparisons studied on the education system of a country. The demands in line with the era of globalization demand the higher education sector to improve the quality of educational services offered (Ahmad and Buchanan, 2017; Othman et al., 2017; Ross, Ta and Oliaro, 2020).

Empowerment of English as the official medium of instruction is also an attraction for international students in the selection of study destinations. Feedback from some participants such as International Students 33 confirmed the tendency to study abroad is referring to the gap in the use of English that is not implemented in the higher education system of the country of origin. The students feel that the use of their mother tongue as a medium of learning to obtain a degree does not promise the same advantages as English when graduating and looking for more secure job opportunities in the future (Martirosyan, Hwang and Wanjohi, 2015; Yusoff et al., 2021b).

"Actually, the study program that I follow here is also offered in my country of origin. What differentiates is that the courses offered are more "advanced" where the content of the syllabus is more concerned with the needs of the current market. The language medium used in the learning and teaching methods here is entirely in English. These factors give me an advantage because I can learn knowledge in the universal language. It is also hoped that this will help me get a job from an international employer. The experience during my studies here was very positive. I think a good experience has also contributed to the achievement of good performance in exams. Undoubtedly some lecturers are still using English as the language of instruction at the college perform." (International Student 33)

Taking a view on the tendency of International Students 33 on the issue of English as the official medium of instruction should be taken into consideration by the university management. The results of this study are in line with the study of Othman, Mohd Shah, Abdul Hamid and Yusoff (2018c), where the empowerment of the English medium in teaching and

learning is seen to accelerate the internationalization process in a university and promise to increase the enrolment of international students to come further studies in Malaysia.

As a result, lecturers, particularly those who teach international students, are advised to adhere to the responsibility of giving lectures in English as stipulated in university rules. Not only is a lecturer's strong commitment to acquiescence seen as beneficial, but it also helps international students understand what they are learning. The method is also thought to be capable of assisting local students in improving their English skills. Effective delivery methods by teaching staff, according to Rakhshandehroo and Ivanova (2020) and Li, Xie, Ai and Li (2020) contribute to better understanding among university students and can encourage proactive participation in the lecture room. It has a more positive impact on international students who have always felt marginalized.

However, the majority of the participants still stated that the education system in Malaysia is much better than their country of origin. International 22 student expressed their sincere views by appreciating Malaysia's public universities for successfully maintaining a conducive environment for learning. These elements are the catalyst for the arrival of more international students here. Apart from the reputation of Malaysian public universities which are said to be in the league equivalent to international universities, the university's ongoing initiatives to ensure the well-being and welfare of international students are also praised. The following statement demonstrates the student's understanding:

“The issue of unqualified academic staff is not relevant to be associated with lecturers at Malaysian public universities. I find the majority of the lecturers here have a background of graduating from abroad. Most lecturers have very extensive experience in their respective fields of expertise. This has huge implications for the quality of knowledge imparted to students. There are also several international staff appointed as ex-pat academic academics at this university. The diversity of educators and students from various backgrounds and countries has contributed to the prestige brought by a university. I think that is one of the advantages I learned here”. (International Student 22)

The validity of the systematic and effective education system as a yardstick to the due consideration of international students when deciding to choose the destination of the country of study is demonstrated by the statement issued by International Student 22. Infrastructure system facilities in the context of the physical and psychosocial environment become two main elements that are emphasized not only by students but also to gain family consensus (Chelliah, Khan, Krishnan, Kamarulzaman and Goh, 2019; Othman et al., 2021).

Flexibility and Dynamics of the Public University in Malaysia Study Program

According to the findings of a study by Othman, Jupiter and Mohd Suki, (2019b) the presence of a diverse range of academic programs at a university is critical in attracting more international students. In this context, current international students await the dynamics and relevance of syllabus content, as well as the projected flexibility of academic programs, before making a final decision on which foreign universities to attend.

Table 6: Self-Assimilation of the First-Year Experience of International Students Based on the Flexibility and Dynamics of the Malaysian Public University Program

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

Meanwhile, as shown in Table 6, 24 out of 40 international students agreed that the Malaysian public university courses' syllabus is dynamic and comparable to that of international universities. The opinions of International Students 7, 20, and 29 are evidence of this:

"Among the things we browse on the internet while still in the process of deciding the destination of study is the syllabus of courses offered. What we can conclude is that this university has a syllabus that is not only detailed but relevant and coincides with the wishes of employers. I have a career week program organized by Student Affairs. Upon listening to a briefing from industry representatives, it was found that the specifications desired by the employer are very close to what is contained in the syllabus of courses offered. I feel very excited and feel this is the right choice I made by deciding to study here." (International Students 7)

"As we know, the first day of the lecture is the day when the lecturer is required to explain about the course syllabus that we follow throughout the semester. In my opinion that is a very good practice because students will be guided from the beginning of the lecture. I find that most of the syllabus formed will focus on learning outcomes that are related to job prospects. That's the part I've been waiting for the most. This is because I like to relate the lessons, I receive to future career prospects. The syllabus is very important for us, to be a tentative learning every week. Students like me are very concerned about the guidance of the learning system so that they can get good results in exams." (International Students 20)

"The evaluation component for the courses we take has a mixed approach. But basically, course assessment is divided into individual assignments, group assignments, intermediate and final exams, tests and quizzes. At first, I was a bit 'overwhelm' because each assessment requires a different way. However, the help of the lecturer who handled the course helped me a lot to understand the course evaluation system. Having experienced sitting for exams and doing assignments last semester, I think this system is more beneficial to students. The flexible nature of the course helps students get better results." (International Students 29)

Other international students agree that the course syllabus should be further simplified with a comprehensive explanation by guided lecturers and tentative teaching of each course. More importantly, the comprehensive content of the syllabus has a positive impact on the students'

understanding of the courses taught (Han, Gebbie and Appelbaum, 2015; Nilsson and Ripmester, 2016; Jupiter *et al.*, 2018).

Course Development and Offering of Contemporary and Market-Driven Programs

Malaysia's public university reputation is divided into three categories: comprehensive status, research, and focus (MOE, 2021). This reflects the university's ongoing efforts to develop more comprehensive courses of study that always meet the current job market (Awang, Ramli and Ibrahim, 2012; Boado, Hu and Soysal, 2017).

Table 7: Self-Assimilation of First-Year International Students' Experience Based on Course Development and Offering of Contemporary and Program Driven Study Programs

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

Table 7 shows that 22 of the 40 international students who took part in this study agreed that Malaysia's public university study program diversity is among the best in Southeast Asia. This is due to the benefits of categorizing the university system based on specialization and direction of the university's establishment. In that regard, international students who wish to study in the country are given the best opportunity, as they can enrol in any study program that suits their interests and have better job prospects (Nilsson and Ripmeester, 2016; Hamad and Suzanne, 2016; Othman *et al.*, 2018b).

According to the perspectives and understanding of international students, 7, 12, and 31 refer to the following Malaysian public university career prospects programs:

“Before coming here, I was more excited to know the program I got compared to the university that offered me a place to study. Personally, I think the study program is more vital because that is where our career begins. If you get an offer but on a program that students do not want, it will cause various problems. You certainly do not want to be tied down or stuck with a profession that you are not interested in. I am grateful when I can learn the things I am interested and my place of study is a university that has an image in producing marketable graduates.” (International Student 7)

The statement implies that a large number of programs offered by Malaysian public universities have their unique niche and are regarded as such by the international community. Aside from being competitive, the study program's structural and content aspects also meet the needs of the labour market. This is supported by the findings of a study by Othman *et al.*, (2018a), which identified reputation, image, and diversity of study programs as the primary factors influencing foreign university selection.

"I chose to study in this country because I found that the development of university study programs is always renewed. Every year there must be any university that offers study programs that fit the current market. I think when a university is constantly updating their program of study, it shows their sensitivity to be in the competitive league of international universities." (International Student 12)

International Student Explanations 7 and 12 support the findings of Othman et al., (2017), where universities should offer academic programs aimed at graduate marketability prospects.

Value Added Benefits of Using English as the Medium for Teaching and Learning in Malaysian Public Universities

To gain recognition as a relevant, competitively prestigious higher education system and international standard, the majority of universities around the world empower English as the universal language for teaching and learning (Othman et al., 2017; Song, 2019; Rakhshandehroo and Ivanova, 2020; Yusoff et al., 2021a). As shown in Table 8, a total of 36 out of 40 international students in this study unanimously point to English proficiency as an urgent need for more excellent and secure career prospects:

Table 8: Self-Assimilation of First-Year Experiences of International Students Based on the Value-Added Benefits of the Use the of English as a Medium of Teaching and Learning in Malaysian Public Universities

University 1	University II	University III	University IV
Student 1	Student 11	Student 18	Student 26
Student 2	Students 12	Student 20	Student 27
Student 3	Student 13	Student 21	Student 28
Student 4	Students 14	Student 22	Students 29
Student 5	Students 15	Students 23	Student 30
Student 7	Student 17	Student 24	Student 31
Student 8		Students 25	Student 32
Student 10			Student 33
			Students 34
			Students 35
			Student 36
			Students 37
			Student 38
			Students 39
			Students 40

International Student Agreements 4, 15 and 25 are seen when they agree that English proficiency is a form of communication that can not only be learned theoretically but should be done with exposure to activities such as debate, 'public speaking', 'mooting', 'mock court' and group assignment presentation. In that context, the experience of using English as the language medium for the effective learning process can give the self-confidence to communicate in public. When international students agree that English proficiency is a form of communication that can be learned not only theoretically but also through exposure to activities such as debate, "public speaking," "mooting," "mock court," and group assignment presentation, they sign International Student Agreements 4, 15, and 25. In that context, the

experience of using English as a language medium for effective learning can provide self-confidence in public communication. This can be seen in the following statement:

"Indeed, at first I felt a little awkward because I had to speak English almost all the time. When I was placed in a dormitory with local students then I had to communicate in English. This is because no one here knows my mother tongue. Although my vocabulary is very limited and not as good as any daily exposure has made me proficient in speaking English and this is an advantage of studying abroad compared to at home. I am confident that when I graduate here, I will have a good level of English proficiency." (International Students 4)

"Universities here require every international student to take English classes. We sit for screening exams to place students at certain levels. I think the system is quite interesting because good proficiency students will be with peers who are proficient in their language proficiency. For weak students then English teachers will focus more on them." (International Student 15)

"Yes, it is undeniable that my active participation in debate activities and 'mooting' greatly increased my confidence in speaking English. Initially, I was exposed to finding reading materials to discuss. Then I was given the opportunity to practice debating in English with the guidance of teachers. That is a very valuable opportunity for me and over time I feel more confident in my skills." (International Student 25)

International Students 40's approach, on the other hand, has given them an advantage. The students' proactive initiatives include constantly improving their English proficiency by seeking assistance from more fluent friends, cultivating the habit of reading English books, and surfing the internet, such as YouTube, if they are having difficulty communicating. This is supported by a statement from 40 international students who linked his initiative to join the English Language Association as a means of improving English proficiency:

"The English Association I joined from the beginning of the year is a very effective platform in helping me master English faster. Many activities are carried out every week that can improve language skills. For example, we are told to read a book and make comments about the book. At the next meeting, we were asked to share what we read and understand. Indirectly I am excited and responsible to finish reading the book every week. I also build confidence when commenting on my reading in front of other friends." (International Student 40).

The findings revealed that English language skills, both in terms of speech and writing, are essential for studying abroad (Jupiter et al., 2021; Yusoff et al., 2021b). The participants of this study agree that having English recognized as a universal language implemented, used, and mastered is a major factor in influencing students' decision to study abroad.

Discourse Formulation and Recommendation

This study focuses on the process of international students' self-assimilation of their first-year experience. Academic achievement is the basis of the positive consequences of international students' self-adaptation while studying in the host country in this context.

The majority of international students who took part in this study gave positive feedback on the country's public university system, which is said to be efficient and well-organized. Students appreciate the approach of the teaching and learning system of Malaysian public universities, which emphasizes the appropriateness of the theoretical and practical balance, and this feels different from the education system in their home country, according to the new findings of this study. The findings of this study demonstrate the importance of a balance of theory and practice in positively shaping international students' academic development. The continuity will inevitably impact more secure career prospects as international students achieve better academic performance.

The study also highlights high-quality teaching, appropriate and contemporary curriculum design, and a directory of competent academics with expertise and vast experience, all of which are said to improve international students' satisfaction. Only a few international students have expressed dissatisfaction with the commitment of lecturers who refuse to comply in fully implementing English-language teaching and learning, particularly in courses attended by international students.

The findings also support the importance of adjusting teaching and learning to a universal language medium by implying that the university is responsible for empowering English to realize the country's higher education internationalization policy. The study's contribution also shows that English proficiency has an impact on first-year international students' self-assimilation. The ability to communicate in English is regarded as a necessary component of academic success. The emphasis on the choice of destination country by the majority of international students indicates that the empowerment of English as an intermediary medium is intertwined with the increasing enrolment of international students into Malaysian public universities.

This research demonstrates international students' multi-dimensional perspectives on the dynamics of the course syllabus as a benefit in aiding their comprehension. When lecturers are friendly and active in assisting international students in their learning process, the first year of study abroad does not dampen their enthusiasm. Student satisfaction is increased by the credibility of academics with extensive experience, good teaching and learning quality, and a relevant syllabus curriculum. A meaningful first-year experience projected a positive impact on academic achievement and is complemented by the independence that international students are proud of throughout their stay in the country.

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