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Psycho-educational Support Groups and International University Student Adjustment in Malaysia: A Qualitative Inquiry

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ABSTRACT

This study was a qualitative research about improving 16 international students' adjustment at University Kebangsaan Malaysia after 5 weekly psycho-educational support group sessions. Data was collected through focus group interview, journal reflection and observation. Interviews video-taped and transcribed and all data managed by Nvivo8. Results indicated most important adjustment problems among international students included poor English language, communication with local society as well as other society, hot and humid weather in Malaysia, spicy food, new academic environment and financial issues. International students showed better adjustment after finishing 5 session psycho-educational support group. Factors that contributed them to better adjustment were sharing experience with others, feeling similarity, improving English ability during sessions. Results of current research helped international students department to improve their program for international students.

Key words: International students, adjustment, psycho-educational support group

INTRODUCTION

Across the world, increasing numbers of university students are choosing to pursue their education outside of their country of origin (Altbach *et al.*, 2009). Prior research has demonstrated that international students face unique challenges in adjusting to their new environments (Mori, 2000) which is also reported in current studies (Gebhard, 2012). In fact, education in abroad involves adjustment to new academic and social environment (Sovic, 2009; Sherry *et al.*, 2010; Cheung *et al.*, 2010; Kuo, 2011). The demand of these new environments can create stressors that may put academic performance at risk (Gebhard, 2010; Kuo, 2011), strain interpersonal relationship (Tochkov *et al.*, 2010; De Araujo, 2011), health problems, feeling isolated, homesickness (Sherry *et al.*, 2010; Myers-Walls *et al.*, 2011) and undermine self-esteem (Poyrazli and Grahame, 2007; Sumer *et al.*, 2008).

Such demands are often more complex for the international students, who have to adapt to a new culture, language, academic and social environment (Dyson and Renk, 2006). This study investigates about international students' adjustment in Malaysia which has currently become a destination for foreign students to pursue their post-secondary education than ever before (MOHE., 2010). Although, prior research has begun to identify the concerns and needs of these international students in Malaysia, further study is needed to understand these students' personal

experiences, particularly as supportive interventions are employed to ease their transition into the Malaysian academic and social community. The current qualitative study gives voice to the individual student's academic, social and emotional adjustment to studying experiences.

The population of university students studying outside of their home county has grown over the last several decades (Altbach *et al.*, 2009) due to globalization and internationalization (Zolfaghari *et al.*, 2009). According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in their 2009 World Conference on Higher Education report, more than 2.5 million students were studying outside their home country of origin. This appears to be true across diverse countries and regions of the world including Turkey (Kagnici, 2012), South Africa (Mudhovozi, 2011), Malaysia (Mahmud *et al.*, 2010) and the United States (Lidy and Kahn, 2006; IIE., 2010). Some estimate that the global population of international students will be more than double to 7 million by 2020 (Altbach *et al.*, 2009).

As more students study outside of their home county, several researchers have called for increased attention directed toward understanding and addressing their unique needs (Arthur, 2004; Andrade, 2006; Poyrazli and Grahame, 2007; Alavi and Mansor, 2011; Gebhard, 2012; Lee, 2013). Research has found that when moving to a new environment, many international students faced a series of difficulties related to different foods, strange living circumstances, language barriers and an unfamiliar education system (Andrade, 2006; Shatkin, 2008; Bektas, 2008; Carroll and Ryan, 2010; Cheung *et al.*, 2010). During the process, many international students also experienced psychological problems, including stress, depression, homesickness and loneliness (Sovic, 2009; Sherry *et al.*, 2010; De Araujo, 2011; Myers-Walls *et al.*, 2011) all of which in return influenced their academic adaptation (Kuo, 2011; Gebhard, 2012).

In fact, one of the most discussed problems refers to academic adjustment. For example, Zhou *et al.* (2011) reported that international students often have difficulty in understanding professor's expectations and grading style. Brown and Holloway (2008), on the other hand, have categorized academic adjustment as problem such as difficulty in communicating with their professors and peers, in working as graduate assistants, in writing academic texts and in participating in class activities. According to Andrade (2006), "Academic adjustment problems for international students tend to focus on language issues". In fact, Andrade (2006) considered English language proficiency and culture as two most important factors which challenges to international student's adjustment. Andrade (2006) also believed that academic success is affected by English ability as well as academic skills and educational background.

Poyrazli and Kavanaugh (2006) study, on the other hand, showed that English proficiency significantly affected the level of student sojourners' academic adjustment. Huang (2006) spoke about international students problems in taking lecture notes while Kuo (2011) mentioned about international students' difficulty in comprehending professors, articulating their knowledge on essay exam and reading textbooks in a predicted time. Lee and Carrasquillo (2006) in their study showed that being uncomfortable with speaking in class, viewing professors as having absolute authority; having trouble expressing critical thoughts and having difficulty answering negative questions are some academic issues for international students. According to Gill (2007) and Wang and Shan (2007), international students struggle with academic adjustment which seems related mainly to two factors: Language deficiency and different education system. However, some researches points to international student's difficulty in giving oral presentations, asking the professor questions and interacting in seminar discussions (Han, 2007; Gebhard, 2010).

Carroll and Ryan (2010) advise that the first 6 months of any international study will be the hardest. Their language, writing and knowledge of the area will develop over time. They will be learning new language and discourses, concepts and methods of analysis and expression.

Researches show that social and cultural adjustment is stronger predictors of college attrition than academic adjustment for both domestic and international freshmen (Estrada *et al.*, 2005; Dimmock and Leong, 2010). In fact, may be adjusting to a new culture is the first problem that is typically faced by the international students (Barletta and Kobayashi, 2007). International students, as a matter of fact, have to deal with the new culture, language, values, norms and customs in the host country which may be very different from those in their own country (Ang and Liamputtong, 2007). Poyrazli and Grahame (2007) also demonstrated that international students encounter some host difficulties which may be related to facing strange environment such as acculturative stress and the related issues to social and psychological adjustment.

According to Duru and Poyrazli (2007), acculturative stress consists of mental and physical discomfort that ensues from experiencing a new culture. In other words, cross-cultural adaptation is a major issue of international student's lives. Perhaps the biggest concerns expressed by many international students were isolation and difficulty in fitting in the host culture (Edward and Ran, 2006; Wang and Shan, 2007). Johnson *et al.* (2008) investigation showed that changes in international graduate student's levels of social support upon entering graduate school prevented them from using it as a means to cope with stress. Similarly, Sumer *et al.* (2008) found in their study that social support had a significant contribution in predicting depression. Another social challenge for many international students is lack of familiarity with intricate social rules for interacting (Rose-Redwood, 2010; Zhou *et al.*, 2011).

According to Johnson and Sandhu (2007), the symptoms of acculturative stress are different but may include loneliness, sadness, fear, homesickness, cultural identity confusion and social withdrawal. On the other hand, by cultural distance, alienation may appear which in itself could lead to low level of confidence and disruptive behavior (Sulkowski and Deakin, 2009). Anyway, cultural shock is considered a normal fact in a foreign cultural environment, although the individual that experience it, doesn't respond to it or unable to overcome the problems that it bring to their life. On the other hand, the way students go through adjustment is different depends on each individual. Some international students may adapt quickly while others never fully adapt at all, others feel well adjusted and then regress back to feeling culture shock after having had a series of new problems (DeCapua and Wintergerst, 2004; Gebhard, 2010).

Many researches on international student's adjustment focus on students' psychological stress and challenges, including struggling in high level of anxiety, depression and other emotional problems (Constantine *et al.*, 2005; Alazzi and Chiodo, 2006; Dao *et al.*, 2007; Nilsson *et al.*, 2008). Psychological distress of the international students is influenced by a range of demographic and psychosocial demands (Furnham, 2004).

Demographic factors such as finances, accommodation, language and academic stress also affect the international students. Anyway, psychosocial issues of college students need a long time to cope by all students that are involved. Feeling disorientation and sometimes alienation, also can be overwhelming among international students (Sakurai *et al.*, 2010). On the other hand, recent studies point to homesickness as one of several acculturative stressors affecting individuals who experience cross-cultural adjustment (Wei *et al.*, 2007). International students according to Sawir *et al.* (2008), also face loneliness as a result of losing contact with their loved persons and

families who were left in their own country as well as social loneliness as a result of losing their network. Loneliness, on the other hand, can happen as a result of being in different culture which causes international students experience alienation in a new environment without any social support to rely on (Sawir *et al.*, 2008).

Depression is also considered as a big social phenomenon which tends to be a mental health problem as well as the global cause of disability. "Depression can affect people as many as possible such as students, female, male, adolescents" (Pilgrim and Rogers, 2011). Depression, on the other hand, is counted as the second leading cause of disability by Oluwafunmilola (2012). Depression is understood to be an internalization issue which leads to excessive sadness, loss of interest in activities, loneliness, language problem, cultural shock and this is common among international students. Vergara *et al.* (2010) found that international students had also experienced stress as a result of cultural shock and discriminations.

So, according to Arthur (2004), there is an ethical responsibility to provide program and services that support both their academic and personal success. Institutions have responsibilities for meeting the needs of international students through the following ways: (1) Providing international students with accurate information and ongoing support while residing in the host country in ways that considers their special status as international students, (2) Facilitating interactions and development of relationships between international and local students, as well as supporting relationship between the diverse nationalities of international students, (3) Supporting the development of relationships between international students and members of the local community and (4) Encouraging international students to have a voice in expressing their needs and in organizing as a group to form effective working relationships with campus personnel and representatives of the local community.

Five questions were used to guide the research inquiry and formed the basis for discussions in the weekly groups:

- What are your goals and expectations before coming to Malaysia?
- What are your thoughts and feelings about Malaysia after coming to the country (socially, emotionally and academically)?
- What challenges (social, emotional and academic) have you faced in studying and living in Malaysia?
- What are your thoughts and feelings (socially, emotionally and academically) after participating in the psycho-educational support sessions?
- How do the psycho-educational support sessions help with your adjustment to living and studying in Malaysia (socially, emotionally and academically)?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Participants for the current study were international students at the graduate level attending a large, state-sponsored university in Malaysia. International graduate students at this university are required to take language courses based on their prior skills and language needs. The participants were all enrolled in a 3 h, weekly English class. The instructor for the course granted the lead researcher 2 h of class time for 5 consecutive weeks for the project. On each of those five weeks, after 1 h of language instruction, the remaining 2 h of class time was dedicated to psycho-educational group support related to international student adjustment and transition.

All 16 students enrolled in the class participated in study, of which 11 were male and 5 were female. They came from Indonesia, Libya, Iraq, Palestine and Thailand. Nine students were studying in PhD. level while seven were studying in Master level. Their age was different from 20-50 years old. Each of the five sessions was video-recorded which then transcribed. Additionally, each of the student participants responded to the five guiding questions in a reflective journal. Students' journals were collected and constitute a second data point in the study. Transcripts and journals were reviewed and the text categorized using a phenomenological inquiry approach. Categories were reviewed and themes derived from the analysis so as to capture the shared experiences of participants.

Instruments of the study: This study uses focus group interview, journal reflection and researcher observation. An interview protocol is managed to obtain deeper express regarding the international adjustment issues during their studying and living in Malaysia. The second tool for this research is 5 weekly journal reflections that contain international students' answers to their adjustment problems as well as researcher observation during psycho-educational support group.

Research procedure: The research is started after permission from lecturer of English class. The study is conducted through 5 weekly sessions and data is gain from focus group interview as well as filling the journal reflection in each session. In the group there are 16 international students from Indonesia, Iraq, Libya, Palestine and Thailand consist of 5 female and 11 male. Interview data is video-taped, transcribed and managed by NVIVO8.

RESULTS

Information from participants in both the transcribed group sessions and the journal entries were very similar. The only major differences noted between the two sources of data were that the journal entries often contained greater detail and depth and contained greater personal revelations. It may be that participants felt more comfortable revealing their concerns and feelings in the relative privacy of a journal, rather than in the group sessions. This parallels findings by Mattila *et al.* (2010) that international students were reluctant to share their most difficult experiences in the presence of a teacher or supervisor.

In the current study, the difference between the group and journal data appeared to be more one of detail, than of actual content or tone. Perhaps the time-pressure of spoken dialogue in English led to shorter responses, while with time to reflect and write in the journals, more details were shared. It appears that participants' perceptions of their lives in Malaysia varied as a function of their home culture. As would be expected, the students seemed to compare their experiences in Malaysia with their experiences in their country of origin. Individuals from countries with similar culture experienced less difficulty in adjusting and expressed greater satisfaction with their time in Malaysia. One student from Indonesia, which shares many similarities to Malaysian culture, reflected on his experiences in Malaysia and simply stated "Not much different". In cases where differences existed, the perception of life in Malaysia depended on the valence of the difference.

For instance, some individuals noted difficulty adjusting to the weather in Malaysia because it felt too hot for them, compared to their home country. But another individual wrote of difficulty adapting to the weather because "Malaysia is cooler and the wind was blowing harder". Although with the current participants this culture-related explanation for differences in experiences fit, it may have been just due to individual differences. For example for a student from Indonesia,

Malaysia is not very Islamic country which he expected: "I thought that Malaysia is an Islamic country, but I really disappointed when I see specially Chinese that wear like short skirt". While a student from Thailand found Malaysia very Islamic: "Malaysia is very Islamic, also program on TV and Radio is very Islamic, but in Thailand we don't have control on TV. programs". Additionally, several participants came from countries where personal freedom and safety are compromised by war, threat of violence and political unrest. These participants' perspectives about adjustment to living in Malaysia appeared to be influenced largely by their appreciation for the safety and expanded freedom they experience in Malaysia. Other cultural differences may have paled in comparison to the enhanced safety and freedom they experienced and hence they may not have been quite as aware of, or mentioned other cultural differences (either positively or negatively).

One Palestinian student shared "When I out from my house, you know in Palestine we have occupation so when we go we can't go from place to place, from city to city without checking board. You must have every time your ID, if not, they arrest you, punishing you. But here nobody ask for your ID, so easy life. You don't feel stress or nervous. You don't feel bad or afraid, so here is safe". Themes and findings from each of the five guiding question will be discussed below. Where helpful, we have chosen to use a few direct quotes from the participants to illustrate the themes that emerged from the analysis. Despite the fact that most of the student-participants were not yet fully proficient in their English skills, we have chosen to quote them directly so that their individual voices, captured in the moment, are expressed.

Goals and expectations before coming to Malaysia (Answer to RQ1): Participants mostly mentioned that the main goal of coming to Malaysia has been getting opportunity of studying in an international university. No matter they are in Master or PhD. level, they wish finish their studying as soon as possible. A student from Iraq: "I came to Malaysia to get my PhD. and I need to finish my study as soon as possible". A student from Indonesia: "My goals for enhance my English language like study Master and PhD". Their second goal of studying here has been improving English language and even for one who study Islamic studies, also learning Arabic language was a motivator to coming Malaysia. Knowing about new culture and new community has been another interest of participant. A student from Iraq: "I wanted to know about different culture and international people". Some participants, expectation before coming to Malaysia has been very different from their experience after coming to this country.

For example some expected that Malaysia should be a Muslim country with a very Islamic environment, while after that, they found here multi-religion and multi-cultural with respectful atmosphere for all religion and culture and people can wear as they wish freely. A student from Libya: "My expectation was that the people are Muslim, but when I came to Malaysia I found many Chinese, Indian with other religion". Some students never knew that they encounter to such a kind and soft people here, anyway after they come to Malaysia they found Malaysian people very kind and smiling.

For one of student from Indonesia coming here has been stressful due to some challenges between Indonesia and Malaysia, but anyway he found here safe: "First I decided come to Malaysia I thought that maybe I face to problem, because Indonesian and Malaysian have some issues, but my friend recommend me it is nice and safe and when I came here until now I didn't have any problem". Participants liked green and beautiful nature in Malaysia as well as facilities provided in university. A student from Indonesia: "The facilities at university are excellent". There was

different view regarding how Islamic is Malaysia, participants from Indonesia and Arab countries believed that Malaysia is not such Islamic country, while a student from Thailand knew Malaysia a very Islamic country with control on TV programs that she couldn't find in her country.

As a whole, getting higher education and finishing it as soon as possible as well as learning English was the most important goals of coming to Malaysia.

Thoughts and feelings about Malaysia after arrival (Answer to RQ2): Most student participants expressed a mix of both positive and negative perceptions after arrival in Malaysia. Students noted a number of challenges they were facing in making the transition, but were careful to note the positive things they were experiencing as well. A student from Indonesia: "I certainly felt longing to family, friends and my hometown food, but it is also provide a high motivation to accomplish the task with the best". One student articulated the ambivalent mix of positive and negative thoughts and feelings when he said: "Ya, I feel happy here but something makes me not happy".

Another from Palestine: "I feel very sad to leave my family, my home, my relative and my friends, but in same time, my emotions and feeling is very good because I want to follow up and continue my study and I feel so happy for my study in Malaysia". Socially, only a few students mentioned positive experiences. One of the students mentioned being surprised and impressed at how "soft" (kind) the Malaysian people were, while another stated "Social and cultural situation are the best for me in Malaysia in that the most people like to study and to speak with foreign students". In reflecting on her positive perception, she noted how she had no problems in the social dimension because: "Social and cultural in Malaysia same with my country".

In contrast to the few positive thoughts and feelings reported, there were many expressions of social challenge and difficulty. Homesickness was directly reported by several and implied by a number of others: "I feel I am alone, even I have got a lot of friends, because I miss my family so much, also may be because of the events that happened in my country". While missing family and friends was a common theme related to social adjustment difficulty, one student reported: "My emotion for being away from my country is just doing fine because my family is here. Only sometimes miss my relative in my country". Lack or presence of family seemed to play a large role in social adjustment, positive or negative. In addition, a few students reported being ignored by others because they were foreign.

One student said: "For example, I sit beside an Iranian and I ask 'where are you from? Where is your faculty? (college department) but they don't want speak with a person from another community". Another stated: "Not all are polite, like here because people are different". Students reported that language difficulties played a key role in their ability to adapt socially to their life in Malaysia. One reported: "Sometimes when I go to the doctor I can't say what I feel and she can't understand my problem, because my English is not good". Another wrote: "The best thing, many cultures live with each other (Malaysian, Chinese, Indians, Arabs), without problem, the difficult thing is that I can't make communication with the others because the language". As was frequently expressed by the group, across social, emotional and academic domains, this student was pleased about the opportunities to be an international student, while simultaneously frustrated by the challenges that this presented. As far as positive social, emotional and academic thoughts and feelings, participants expressed liking the weather, the people and the food.

Several appreciated the enhanced freedom and safety they found in Malaysia and a number were very pleased with the educational facilities and opportunities at their university. One of the

most common challenges mentioned was difficulty with the language. Participants noted struggling to communicate with other students and people on the street. Challenges that were commonly expressed included difficulties communicating with others, struggles to adapt to the weather and the food and disappointment with some aspects of the culture.

Academic, social and emotional challenges faced (Answer to RQ3): In aspect of academic, participants had problem again with deficiency in English language. One of the students said:" I can't express my opinion and my thoughts to other, so misunderstanding is occurred". Having different academic system also made a little problem as a student from Iraq said: "At the first time it was difficult for me because everything was new here but after several times I adjusted with new academic system here". Social expression of participants showed they had some adjustment problem with making communication with others mostly due to poor English and sometimes because other communication doesn't let to others to communicate with them, as he says: "The separation of communication prevent me from communicate with others". Also they had problem about food, transportation and getting visa as well as rude people in immigration office was a big problem for all students.

Other common issue was the unfamiliar accent of Malaysian people, for example international students couldn't recognize if Chinese people are speaking English or Chinese, because their English accent was so strange. Emotionally participants had different feeling about adjusting to weather, they were not adapted with hot and humid weather in Malaysia while they liked this weather and beautiful nature. Unpredictable rain in Malaysia was common adjustment problem among the participants. A student from Indonesia said: "I have problem with the weather here because I don't know today is rainy or sunny".

Thoughts and feelings after support session participation (Answer to RQ4): International students reported benefit from support sessions. Commonly they were satisfied from speaking English and getting more confident through the sessions: "I can find 3 point, first it give us opportunity to speak and then the second is that how to know each other and the different cultures, maybe the third one for me is about sharing the idea, by discussion we can share our idea". The journal reflections had more detail but similar to sessions. International students benefited from improving English, sharing experience, improving self confidence, getting motivation, feeling relax, becoming friendly, improving academic writing, feel valued and making friends: "I feel more confidence, because I was given the opportunity to introduce ourselves in English and are required to hear and remember the information from that, so what I say is important for others, it makes us feel valued in the group". One student said: "I feel stronger and proud to be my friends who also feel the same feeling and motivate each other and support each other". Other student: "This session makes me feel relax". A student's view: "Actually by these sessions we can know the problems of other members and maybe would be a good experience for us". The other said: "I am very pleased with these sessions as more of a cross-cultural vision for the growth of mutual understanding and mutual respect. I felt increasingly familiar as a family".

For a student: "Sharing culture can help us become friendly with other people by sharing knowledge and also contribute in many conversations among us. By the same time I will get new friends". Anyway, for two students sessions had no benefit: "No, this session can't be overcome". Other student said: "Not too different, but overall these sessions make us try to speak English".

Support sessions and adjustment (Answer to RQ5): At the sessions, international students were courage to express their experience in English, so this encouragement could lead them to improving their English: "In this class I can speak English very much and in the class I have confident to speak English". For some students knowing about other culture was helpful: "I'm very happy because I must know my friends from many cultures and from many country, then I know how is culture from this country, because in this discuss we have subject, before that I didn't know how is the culture of other countries, this make me improve and increase my knowledge about other countries and the differences with my country". Knowing about other culture was a helpful factor to deal with their problem: "Thank you for this group because this session help me to solve some problem such as speaking English and understand others and discussion helped me to learn more about other culture and about other problems and how to solve the problems in Malaysia".

Reading and speaking English in the sessions helped international students to improve their English language: "Talking to each other and discussing participate in the class and frequent reading will help me to improve my information and skills". Sharing experience benefited international students: "When I share my emotions with other members, I feel relax because each one has emotions different from me and give me a lot of notes and advise". Or: "At the end of these sessions I can clearly identify my weakness and my strength, especially in communication skill and level of self-confident in giving and sharing ideas with others. These sessions help me a lot and guide me to achieve my ambition and goal". With being in same position: "When I know about others I feel that I am not lonely, they also have the same feeling. Benefit by knowing about other culture: "I am very pleased with these sessions as more of a cross-cultural vision for the growth of mutual understanding and mutual respect. I felt increasingly familiar as a family". Learning trough getting information: "I am going to do to improve my academic adjustment.

For example, I should follow the rules of the UKM study, always meet with supervisor". While for some students still is no benefit:" I can't answer, because I did not get the benefit". And: "My lifestyle adjustment is normal after this session, actually no more change".

DISCUSSION

This study found that ambivalence emotion towards different issues among international students, are very common. While they had amount of adjustment problem around some area, at the same time they enjoyed from studying and improving here. Finding from this study believed that although international students struggle with loneliness and homesickness as well as missing their country and their family, but having safety environment and friendly people along them, can encourage them to continue their studying with more motivation and feel happy and relax. This study showed that a big portion of communication problem referred to ability to speak English as well as difference in culture, however students from similar culture to Malaysia expressed less difficulty in making communication, so in this study students from Indonesia and Thailand showed less difficulty to make communication. The research showed that how some differences in adjustment refer to condition of international students' country.

For example, students from Iraq and Palestine with war at their country, found Malaysia a safe and peaceful country, while for students from Indonesia and Thailand safety didn't count as a privilege for choosing Malaysia. In their academic area, international students from Thailand and Indonesia were more relax to make communication with their supervisors, even Indonesian students could find Indonesian supervisor, but from other students making communication with the supervisor had a little difficulty due to difference from their country.

Research showed that although academic system in Malaysia is different from academic system in other country, but it can't be a serious problem for international student and they can adapt with it soon. The most problem in adjustment academic was that they had not a strong orientation to inform them from the academic system here and they had to ask from others, find and search to inform from academic system here. Similar to previous researches about international students adjustment in other country (Rai, 2002), international students face a number of broad challenges, including language and cultural barriers, social isolation and financial hardship.

According to Mahmud *et al.* (2010), international students in Malaysia face adjustment regarding local food, weather, financial arrangement, health care, accommodation, transportation and local language. Current study showed adjustment with local food and the weather as well as difficulty in making communication in English and local language, are still the most adjustment problem here. However, students from Indonesia and Thailand with a similar culture to Malaysia had less difficulty in adjustment.

According to Arthur (1997), there is an ethical responsibility to provide program and services that support both international students academic and personal success. Current research showed that international students benefit from taking part in support group, when they found that they are not alone in their difficulties. Sharing feeling and experience in such groups help international students to better adjust with their adjustment problems. Other way in coping with issues is that international students can gain useful and necessary information from other members in their group or even local members or lecturers that can give them guidance and consultant.

Poyrazli and Grahame (2007) believed that students should get some information concerning geographical aspects, educational system and cultural backgrounds of the country they intend to further their study. Universities must prepare to manage these students who are made up of groups of heterogeneous minorities from various races, ethnics, languages, religions and political backgrounds (Schmitt *et al.*, 2003). A survey done in Malaysia by Mahmud *et al.* (2010) said that the intentional visits by international students are very important in building social economic and political networking between Malaysia and other countries. Therefore, universities have the responsibility to ensure meaningful learning and life style for international students during their period of study. Also the international office should take measures to help improve international students' adjustment by organizing ongoing programs because the university that provides sufficient support services helps international students to better adjust (Sumer *et al.*, 2008).

As sufficiency in English language was an important factor to making better communication and better adjust, university should provide a program to enhance international student's proficiency in English language.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, certainly the university can't eliminate all adjustment struggle, students will always compare host to home and are likely to find some differences hard. Better to aim for facilitating the transition. Groups offer way for students facing similar challenges to share concerns, see how not alone in facing challenges, find tangible and emotional support and try to better adjust. In the other hand, being an international student for researcher may impact the analysis and interpretation of the research, at the same time the researcher has same feeling and experience like other international students.

So, more research suggests to be done both by local and international students in all universities in Malaysia. By recognizing the adjustment issues of international students, universities can provide better services to help international students cope with their adjustment problems.

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