INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS’ LEARNING EXPERIENCES
AT PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN MALAYSIA
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ABSTRACT
Malaysia under the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) aims to attract 200,000 international students by year 2020 (MoHE, 2007). Having more international students in the campus is excellent yet at the same time creates additional responsibilities and expectation onto the institutions. The university may have a system but it cannot be applied the same with both local and international students. As international students come to foreign country, they will experience foreignness. This is due to cultural difference both in academic and social aspect (Banumathy & Vikneswaran : 2008). They may experience different teaching and learning style as compared to their home country. Language seems to be the major problems that they faced in their learning (Banumathy & Vikneswaran, 2008; Akiba, 2008). This is particularly true when English Language is their second or foreign language. Existing research also found that there is a gap in expectation from these students on the academicians. Students expect greater level of interaction and involvement in research from academic staff and the lack for engagement by the academic staff with students. This paper aims to provide the learning experience from international students at two private institutions in Malaysia. Data will be gathered through a semi-structured interview with selective international students pursuing their degree at two private HEIs in Malaysia. It is hope that this paper may provide useful insight for universities and lecturers in managing international student learning at their institutions.

Keywords: International student learning experience, Internationalization, Private higher education

Introduction
Ranking and survival of universities have put much pressure on both public and private universities in Malaysia to attract international students in the recent decade. There is tremendous growth in the number of international students studying in the public and private higher education institutions (HEIs) in Malaysia. It is recorded that 18,242 international students in 2001 (Badaruddin, 2010) and in ten years, it has grown to 86,919 international students, with about 16% growth per annum. Malaysia targets to attract 200,000 international students by year 2020 (MoHE, 2011). In the latest statistic published by Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE, 2011), the highest number of international students came from Iran with 9,880 students, followed by Indonesia with
8,569 students and 7,394 from China. This is translated to 14%, 12% and 10% respectively.

Due to the set up of public higher education institution (PuHEI) for public good, policy is in placed to protect local needs and demand, hence PuHEIs are allow to offer only 5% international UG students placement. As these universities seek to be more research-focused, their target will be international postgraduate (PG) students which is supported by the policy to encourage international PG students. These efforts will help the PuHEI to improve university ranking through increase generation of research output and number of international students. Meanwhile, as the private higher education institution (PrHEI) set up are more commercially driven, hence these institutions target for undergraduate (UG) international students, because there is more demand for UG programmes. PrHEI are motivated to attract international students as it is the main source of income for the corporations through tuition fees. Based on the trend, about 70% of international students enrolled at PriHEIs. With that, the PrHEIs will therefore house approximately 105,000 international students or 70 percent of 150,000 by 2015. Table 1 shows the enrolment of international students at PuHEI and PrHEI for a period of 9 years. It shows drastic increment of enrolment dominantly at PriHEIs.

Graph 1 : Data of international student enrolment at Public and Private HEIs between 2002-2010.

Source :
As the number of international student increases, there is a need to understand their needs and expectation from this group of students. Due to the different culture and system of education of these diverse students, it may pose challenges for both the students and academicians in learning and teaching. Hence, it would be interesting to explore the current status of their learning experience from this group of students.

Objective

This paper aims to explore the learning experience from international students at two private institutions in Malaysia. It is hope that this paper may provide useful insight for universities and lecturers in managing international student learning at their institutions. The discussion of this paper will only focus on academic aspect; these include language, teaching instruction, curriculum, engagement with lecturers and other students, assessments, attendance and examination.

Literature Review

The following paragraphs will discuss the issues, challenges and expectation from international students and academic staff based on some empirical studies by other researchers.

Having more international students in the campus is excellent yet at the same time creates additional responsibilities and expectation onto the institutions. The university may have a system but it cannot be applied the same with both local and international students (Hooley & Horspool, 2006). As international students come to foreign country, they will experience being alien. This is due to cultural difference both in academic and social aspect (Banumathy & Vikneswaran, 2008; Hooley & Horspool, 2006). They may experience different teaching and learning style as compared to their home country. Language seems to be the major problems that they faced in their learning (Banumathy & Vikneswaran, 2008; Akiba, 2008; MoHE, 2012). This is particularly true when English Language is their second or foreign language. The report by MoHE (2012) found that there is a gap in expectation from these students on the academicians. Students expect greater level of interaction and involvement in research from academic staff and more engagement and psychological support (MoHE, 2012) by the academic staff.

Empirical research conducted by Shekarchizadeh, Amran and Huam (2011), on the perceived service quality of top five Malaysian Public HEIs on 522 postgraduate international students measuring service quality in five domains; professionalism, reliability, hospitality, tangibles and commitment. Negative perceptions on their experienced in the universities in all domains were found from this research.
A study on international student experience conducted by Slethaug & Manjula (2012) at a mid-sized Malaysian tertiary institution on 78 international students from 17 countries with majority from Middle East and Africa. Findings show that students were frustrated with the administrative process such as admission, subject registration and subject add-drop during their first semester of study. However, the frustration was less pertinent during their second semester when they were more familiar to the system. Students did wish that administrative staff could help more in their first semester as to ease their administrative process and settled down in foreign soil. They have expectation from Malaysian lecturers, they expect a more personable, friendly, connected, caring and fair instructors.

Akida (2008) in her research highlighted that some international students felt that the competency of English language by some lecturers may not up to the expectation. Correspondingly to the research conducted by Slethaug & Manjula (2012) where international student expect lecturers to have high level of English speaking, writing and pace. They wish that lecturer to speak not too fast or too slow with global English accent.

Another empirical study conducted by Nur Sofurah (2011) on international student learning experience at one of the Malaysian technical and vocational education university. The study reveals that lecturers encounter difficulty in teaching international students. This includes international students having difficulty in the application of lesson as they discovered that most of this students adopt learning style of their home country where memorizing was key to their learning. This learning technique may no longer applicable for higher education. It can be understood that they are memorizing for the fact that they have difficulty understanding English. With that, lecturers feel that it is indeed cause difficulty in delivering their lessons and to ensure that they do understand and able to apply lessons learned. In terms of project assignment, more attention was required as lecturers need to provide close guidance to the students. They also seem to disengage from other local students and this may due to the lack of communication skills.

Abdul Rahman Embong (2013) examined the perceived challenges face by lecturers, administrators and both international and local students at public and private institutions through interviews and focus group. His findings is also consistent with other empirical studies conducted by other researchers on the view or challenges faced by academicians, among the highest concern is the lacking in the proficiency of English of the international students which will definitely impede or slow down their learning and eventually lacking behind for other students. An interesting finding from this study is the issues of quality students. In the chase of getting the international enrolment numbers, universities may bend or make-way which eventually may impact on the overall quality of the university. While for administrators, they perceived that the greatest challenge facing them is the ability to attract the targeted number of international students to their institutions, insufficient facilities to accommodate to the needs of international students, problems with visa requirement, drop-out and
compliance to all rules and regulation while they are here in Malaysia without committing crimes or other social offence. The sentiment of incompetent staff in terms of limited experience or trained staff in managing the international students has also been a challenge for the administrators. International students on the other hand, feel that some lecturers are not well-prepared and have communication problems. Adding to that, they have undergone social stress due to the disengagement from the locals.

Hooley & Horspool (2006) have conducted an empirical study on student and staff perception on non-native speakers at one of the British university. Questionnaires and interviewed were conducted on both academic and support staff and international students. The findings are consistent with findings from Nur Sofurah where teaching staff faced the same challenge in their teaching experience. Amongst the challenges were perceived cultural gap, low participation in class, poor learning, poor understanding of academic convention for example plagiarism, linguistic difficulty and other personal problems making the teaching experience very time consuming. This is because they require more time in guiding them as compared to native students. It was interesting to note that most of the discipline problem related to plagiarism involved international students. Problem with English was highlighted as a problem faced with lecturers teaching international students where English is not their first language. Lecturers found that international students are very reserve to share the problems that they faced. Students on the other hand find that language was their most difficult obstacle in acclimatizing themselves into the campus. Students did voice that they should be given more support from the university.

It is interesting to compare between the Malaysian case to the case from United Kingdom. We can conclude that regardless of which host countries, students leaving home to study in a foreign country, do face the challenge in academic and social adjustment. In the same way the academic and support staff of the universities hosting the international student also faced the comparable challenges with the Malaysian case.

Methodology

Data were gathered through a semi-structured interview with randomly selected international students pursuing their degree at two private HEIs in Malaysia. A total of 21 students were interviewed from 10 countries ranging from Nigeria (6), Yemen (3), Iran (3), Botswana (2), Jordan (2) and each from Bhutan, China, Iraq, Arab Saudi and Mauritania. Out of these 21 students, 15 are male students and 6 are female students. More than half (57%) of these informants are in their final year of study and majority (71%) are pursuing engineering and IT programmes, while the rest are enrolled in social science and business studies.

Findings & Discussion
Language

Both the private universities under study use English as the medium of instruction. As expected, international students who came from countries where English language is the medium of instructions do not face any problem in their learning and adjustment to study in Malaysia. These include students from Nigeria, Botswana and Bhutan. While countries where English is not their medium of instruction find it difficult to adjust their learning in English. This is consistent with findings by Banumathy & Vikneswaran, 2008; Akiba, 2008; MoHE, 2012, Abdul Rahman Embong, 2013; Hooley & Horspool, 2006, Nur Sofurah, 2011). These are students from Yemen, Iran, Saudi Arabia, China, Jordan, Mauritania and Iraq. According to these informants, students typically translate English word to their first language. As such, it took up more time in their learning. Two informants from Iran, stated that they have to spend at least three times more effort to read and understand the content in English as compared to Persian language. The challenge to learning in English is more immense with high content base subject as compared to calculation subjects. These students took at least two to three semesters to slowly adjusting their learning in English. Hence, the first two semesters are the most difficult and critical for these international students in adjusting themselves to learn in English. This discovery supports the research findings of Banumathy & Vikneswaran (2008) where international students faced great challenge and a critical stage during their first year in Malaysia. However, informant from Yemen mentioned that the Intensive English Program (IEP) was very effective in equipping them to study in English.

Even though most private universities deliver their teaching in English, however informants raised their concern that some lecturers do use Bahasa Melayu while teaching. Quoted by one informant from Nigeria, saying it is rampant where sometimes up to 30% of the time where local lecturers use Bahasa Melayu in delivering the lessons. Some lecturers speak English with Malay accent also impose a difficulty in their learning. Other time, local lecturers were unable to express well in English. These students feel that some local lecturers have English proficiency problems in their teaching or instruction. This has further strengthened the findings of other researchers (Akida, 2008; Slethaug & Manjula, 2012; Abdul Rahman Embong, 2013) of incompetent lecturers in delivery lessons in English. There were tendency of local lecturers to answer in Bahasa Melayu when local students asked questions in Bahasa Melayu. From the findings and discussion above, we can observe that language has certainly impeded their speed in learning. This could be due to English proficiency problem of the international students as well as local lecturers.

Teaching Instruction
As most Malaysian classrooms are now equipped with multimedia with the hope that it will improve teaching and learning. However, not many of these international students came from such background in learning. According to informants from Yemen, Iraq, Iran, Botswana and Nigeria, their learning was still white board and marker instead of multimedia. One informant from Nigeria explained that he prefers teaching instruction in Malaysia as he has textbooks to read as compared to his home country where he was learning without textbook. In terms of class ratio between teacher and student, informant from Botswana and Bhutan informed that their home country has smaller ratio with ratios of 1:35/40. However, informants from China, Nigeria and Yemen conveyed that they have ratio of 1:100 and can be up to 1:300. This may due to very few universities as compared to student enrolment in the country. While in Iran a mixture of scenarios are seen between public and private providers. Very similar to Malaysia where the public universities housed more population of students as compared to private institutions. Hence the ratio is higher for the public institutions as compared to the private.

It was interesting to find that different country have different time of the day to conduct lectures. Malaysia generally has flexi-time table between the office hours from 8:00 in the morning till around 6:00 evening. Evening or night classes may also be conducted if part-time lecturers are engaged or catering to the need of working adults or post graduate students. Country like Bhutan has a fixed time of lecture during the day from 9am to 5pm. According to the informant, classes after 5pm are prohibited. Meanwhile, in Mauritania that follows the French system has a fixed time table between 9.30am to 2pm, which is similar to their school system. The earliest lecture in Yemen is at 10am. While Saudi Arabia, has different schedules for male and female students. According to a female informant, for the male they will start lectures from 8am till 6pm while the female students will have class between 8am to 3pm.

**Curriculum**

One Computer Science student from Iran and a final year Mechanical Engineering student from Botswana student expressed that their learning has been more on theory instead of practical hands-on. One final year Civil Engineering student from Iran who had taken 127 credits from his home country stated that the civil engineering programme at this institution in Malaysia has higher standard as compared to his home country. He further gave a comparison of the final year project in his home country are equivalent to one assignment of a course in Malaysia. A Jordan Civil Engineering student feels that more technical elective should be offered to better equip them with more specialized courses in civil engineering. A final year Mechanical Engineering student from Mauritania feels that the standard of the programme he enrolled in is good because 80% of the courses are equivalent to other reputable universities like Oxford or Harvard University. Most informants feel that the program that they had enrolled in Malaysia had met their expectation and it is better than their home country. Female students are not allowed to enrol in engineering program in Saudi Arabia, according to a female electrical engineering student from Saudi Arabia. She is glad that she is able to enrol in such programme in an Islamic country in Malaysia.

**Engagement with Lecturers**
Students have the most contact with lecturers. Thus the relationship between students and lecturers are immensely crucial in their learning experience. However due to different system and culture it was observed that some of these students may not see this engagement as important. For example informants from Nigeria and Botswana mentioned that students hardly see their lecturers after lecture or tutorial. This could be due to the big ratio between lecturer and students. However in other countries like Malaysia and China, lecturers encourage students to meet them.

Overall, almost all informants feel that lecturers in Malaysia are generally helpful, approachable, friendly, and relatively humble. A final year civil engineering student from Iran who graduated her first degree in Architecture in a university in Iran experienced that local lecturers are very motivating. This has helped her to motive her learning and subsequently continue to improve her results tremendously from grade D to grade A. Another female informant from Nigeria finds that lecturers at his/her institution are very helpful where he was given the opportunity to have continuous feedback for his assignment, where he can submit draft of his work and re-do whenever necessary before the final submission of assignment. These feedbacks from informants seem to contradict with findings from Slethaug & Manjula (2012), where students expect local lecturers to be more personal, friendly, connected and caring. A female Botswana student said it is easy to for her to meet her lecturers because lecturers are in their office most of the time as compared to her home country. This may be because not all lecturers in her home country have a room to themselves. This sentiment is the same as mentioned by one female informant from Iran. One male Iranian feedback that he was surprised when lecturers are providing students with their email address and mobile phone number to students to contact them. He added that this will never happened in his country, most lecturers will be very formal with students and he felt that there is a gap between lecturers and students. This same feeling applied to one informant from Yemen, particularly lecturers who are highly qualified, for example with PhD and professorship. A female Saudi student mentioned that, due to the system and culture in their country, she never have the opportunity to see her male lecturer face-to-face. Hence, there is no engagement between female students with male lecturers. A final year Computer Science Iranian student observed that local lecturers with international qualification or exposure are more open and able to understand and can better relate to international students. This opinion concur with a research by Cushner & Mahon (2002), teachers with international experience are more inter-culturally sensitive and empathetic to international students.

In terms of academic mentoring is one of many important roles that a lecturer assumed. However many students do not see the important and relevant in meeting their academic advisor. Informants from Mauritania, Botswana and Yemen have never met their academic advisor. On the other hand, an Iranian student recognized the important of seeing the academic advisor and hence has met his advisor regularly. While
informant from Nigeria informed that there is no one-to-one academic advisor in his country, they only have a counsellor for the entire learning institution.

**Engagement with other students**

Interesting findings were gathered in term of the engagements of international students with local students as the informants have shared both positive and negative aspects of their experiences while studying in Malaysia. In Malaysia, the students are allowed to choose their own group members, and lecturers in Malaysia do not force the students to have a mixture of local and international students in group work. As such, the students tend to stick only with their own people or with those whom they are familiar with. From their observations, the informants noted that local students prefer to work within themselves. An Iraqi informant pointed out that most of the Malaysian students have their own groups. Thus, most of the time, the international students are left to form a group that consists of international students only. It is informed that many of the international students were isolated during their early years of studying here. This finding concurred with research conducted by Banumathy & Vikneswaran (2010) on first year experience of international students. “During the first and second year of the study, none of the Malaysians come to get to know me, expressed by a Computer Science, final year Iranian student. They stressed that most of the local students are not willing to share ideas and they like to cling with their own local friends. A sad remark received was when one of the informants feels that the local students are purposely avoiding the international students.

However, some international students prefer to work with non-Malaysians, as informants from Nigeria highlighted that the work culture here is different, thus they are having some difficulties working together with the local students. An informant from Yemen informed that most of the time he works with people from Gulf and neighbouring countries to avoid language and cultural differences. On top of facing problems in adapting to a different culture, language is proved to be one of the main problems faced by the international students. “Language is a barrier,” said a Saudi informant. Nevertheless, they still would like to involve with local students although it is a bit harder because of different language and culture. “Most of them speak Malay. They tried to speak English but after a while, they will speak Malay again,” said a Nigerian informant. Thus, most of the informants declared that they prefer to work with other international students because there is no language barrier between them. This discovery also supports the study of Abdul Rahman Embong (2013) and Nur Sofurah (2011) where international students disengage with local students.

However, not all of the informants have negative experiences working with local students. “Local students are friendly and good,” said a Jordan informant. A Nigerian informant mentioned that he is very happy working with his Malaysian friends. “I relate very much with Malaysians,” he said. Other informant commented that he had good experiences working together with the local Indians and Chinese. One of the informants suggested that the international students have to be more proactive if they want to
work with local students. “If international students are doing their jobs, the local students will trust and help them,” said a final year civil engineer student from Iran. “Local Chinese are doing things on time,” he added. A student from Botswana professed that he prefers to mix around because she can work well with students from different countries including Malaysians. Surprisingly, one informant stated that she prefers not to work with students from own home country because those students tend to take advantage of her. “Local students are more helpful,” she said. According to an Iraqi informant, local Indians are more flexible and easier to join in. It is interesting when an Iranian student admitted that she feels it is easier to work with local students after having bad experiences working with international students. “The international students like to do a copy and paste work,” she said.

Assessments

Most of the informants agreed that there are many different types of assessments being implemented by the universities in their home countries such as assignments, quizzes and examinations. They also agreed that the types of assessments that being practised in their current host universities in Malaysia are the same with the assessments implemented by the private universities back home. Based on an Iranian student interviewed, the universities in Iran emphasis only on examinations. This could add more stress among the Iranian students here as they have to juggle with individual and group assignments, quizzes and also presentations in Malaysia. In contrast, according to one informant from Yemen, less assignments are given to first semester students as the focus are more on quizzes and examinations. However, lots of assignments are given in Bhutan because they have very few quizzes and examinations. Different types of assessments implemented by universities in different countries could contribute to their difficulties in adapting to local education system. Some lecturers are being nice and helpful enough by providing final examination tips during lectures or tutorial classes. This effort really means a lot to most of the local and international students. Nigerians appreciate the tips given by the local lecturers prior to the examinations as it is never being practised by the lecturers in their country.

Different types of assessments allow the students to strategize their academic performances. It is common for the lecturers in Malaysia to display the coursework marks or carry marks prior to the final examination so that students will know their current performance. Seeking additional marks is never a practice in Bhutan because the education system implements centralized marking for the examinations. Informants from Jordan and Iraq mentioned that they do not seek extra marks from the lecturers but informants from Botswana, Saudi, Jordan, Mauritania and Iran admit that it is their culture to negotiate the marks with lecturers by requesting additional assignments. Students in Yemen do not seek extra marks from senior and local lecturers but they will try to negotiate with foreign lecturers back in their home country. One informant from Nigeria disclosed that students do not seek for extra marks from lecturers but occasionally they bribe the lecturers up to RM15,000. This negative culture should not
be practised here in Malaysia as it will definitely tarnish the credibility of the education system.

Another important aspect of assessment is plagiarism. Each university in Malaysia has its own rules and regulations on plagiarism. This study would like to understand how plagiarism is treated in other countries and how the international students are coping with this problem in Malaysia. It is not allowed to plagiarize in Nigeria but many students do although they are aware that their marks will be deducted. Similar with Malaysia, the education system in Iran, Bhutan, Saudi, Iraq and Iran consider plagiarism as a serious offense. One informant from Mauritania told that if one student is found guilty of plagiarized, the student will be suspended from university and his or her pictures will be displayed all over the campus area. According to a student from Botswana it is difficult to plagiarize in his country. In contrast, the informants from Yemen and Nigeria admitted that the plagiarism rules in Malaysia are stricter than what is being practised in their home countries.

One of the common assessments in Malaysia is group work assignments. Group work assignments require the students to share ideas while improving their communication skills with other group members. It is a challenging task as they have to learn on how to systematically plan, compromise and work together despite of their differences. Unfortunately, no or less group work is being practised in other countries such as Nigeria and Jordan. An informant from Jordan mentioned that individual work is more popular than group work in Jordan. Furthermore, the informants from Nigeria told that they only have individual assignments in their countries. This explains why many of the international students might be facing some problems in adapting with the local education system that requires them to work in groups because they are not used to this type of assessment in their home countries.

**Attendance**

Education systems in many countries emphasize on the lecture or class attendance among students in country like Nigeria, Bhutan, Yemen, Iran, China, Jordan and Iraq. However, attendance is not compulsory in Botswana and Saudi. According to a Nigerian informant, marks will be deducted if students were found absent from lectures. Education system in Bhutan requires the students to attend a minimum of 85% lectures. Yemen has implemented the swipe card technology to systematically monitor the students’ attendance. “Attendance is compulsory and students cannot sit for final examination if they were absent from classes,” said one informant from Yemen. Lecturers in Iran and Mauritania will call out the students’ names in class as attendance is considered very important. In contrast, attendance is not taken in Botswana as it is not compulsory to attend lectures. An attention-grabbing statement about being late was given by an informant from Saudi. “Being late to class is a culture,” she said. These findings are very important for the lecturers in Malaysia to understand that not all universities from different countries regard attendance as compulsory. As such, it is crucially important for the university to brief the international students about this rule during the orientation week and lecturers to keep on reminding them in classes as they may take longer time to adapt to it.
Punctuality between the local and international students is another aspect that this study would like to analyse. Most of the informants agree that generally the lecturers in Malaysia are punctual but not the students. From the findings, it showed that some countries emphasize on punctuality to class but some are not. An informant from Botswana highlighted that lecturers are punctual in his home country but the students just do their own business. In Nigeria, students are not punctual to class which explains why the students are having punctuality problems in Malaysia. “There are too many students in the class, so the classroom is smelly. That is the reason why many students refuse to go to class,” said one of the Nigerian informants. An informant mentioned that in Saudi, the senior lecturers are not punctual whereas the junior lecturers are punctual. Teachers and students are punctual in Iraq and the students will sit in class throughout the lecture because the lecturers are very strict. However, based on the informants’ observation, sometimes the students in Malaysia tend to leave the class earlier. Punctuality is very crucial in Bhutan, as such, if a student comes five minutes late to class, he or she will have to attend a detention class as a penalty. Lecturers are also punctual in Mauritania but most students are not punctual because they are part time students. “In Malaysia, students from Mauritania are having punctuality problems to go to early morning classes because students have lots of activities at night. Thus, they do not get enough sleep,” said the Mauritania informant. On the other hand, the informants from Jordan and Iran enlightened that late comers are not allowed to enter the class in his country. According to the Jordan informant also, most Arab students are not punctual to morning classes in Malaysia because they usually sleep late. A direct remark given by one of the informants is the international students tend to sign the attendance on behalf of their friends but the Malaysian students are more honest. One statement provided by an Iranian informant is that the culture of coming late to class among the international students has started here in Malaysia and not in their home country.

**Examination**

Next, this study would like to understand the differences and similarities of how examinations are being conducted in different countries. The findings are important in order to understand how the international students from different countries are adapting themselves while studying in Malaysia. Most of the informants agreed that it is very easy to cheat or copy during examinations in Malaysia because of the ways the examinations are being conducted here. On the other hand, many of them also agreed that it is impossible to cheat during examinations in their own countries. In Iran, there are more invigilators on duty such as 10 invigilators to one student. Cash incentives are also being given to invigilators if they manage to catch students cheating. If one student is being caught cheating in Iran, automatically the student will be getting zero mark for the examination. An informant from Bhutan highlighted that students are not even allowed to move their heads during examination in his country. According to an informant from Botswana, it is easier to copy during examination if it is held in classroom; on the other hand, it is more difficult to do so in the examination hall.”If you
are found cheating, you will be asked to leave the hall immediately,” he said. In contrast, an informant from Mauritania mentioned that the students can openly share their answers during examination in his home country because the invigilators are school teachers and not their lecturers.

**Implication and Recommendation**

This research has given important insight on international student learning experience. As more than half of these informants are in their final year, as such information given is immensely valuable. This is because they have had experienced three years of study in a private university in Malaysia. In other words, they had successfully understood and adapted into the Malaysian system.

Based on the data findings, it is recommended that during the first two semesters, universities could offer more calculation subjects than highly content-based subjects. This seems to be more applicable for technical, science or engineering programmes. With this, we hope that it can minimize the drastic change in learning in English. The Intensive English Program should continue to serve as an English language preparatory for their academic programme.

Private universities may design special programs for academics to further improve their command of English. In general, most academics are able to communicate in English, what this program should aim to achieve is to train lecturers to speak English without mother tongue accent; it could be Malay, Chinese or Indian accent. Universities should also encourage local students to speak in English so that international students may communicate and collaborate with them.

Lecturers should encourage a good mixture of local and international students in group work. Emphasizing the importance of working with diverse groups of students will benefit them as they prepare themselves to be a globally competent workforce. University administrators may need to brief the teaching and learning system and culture in Malaysia during the orientation to international students. This includes language, curriculum, attendance, assessment, and plagiarism. So that students will be more aware and equipped to the new system that they embark on. This will lead to better performance and adjustment to varsity life at the same time reduce frustration of teachers and students.

Institutions may offer courses like intercultural communication to both local and international students to understand and ease their adaptation to diverse cultures. Such programs may also be tailored to academic staff to improve their teaching skills among diverse groups of students. Cross-cultural understanding plays a pivotal role for both teachers and students.
Conclusion

This study has contributed immensely in understanding international student learning experience at two private higher education institutions in Malaysia. The finding from this research has provided insight to the root of common problems faced by international students. It has proven that language is only one of the challenges faced by these students and local lecturers. The main challenges lie in both students and universities. International students need to adjust their learning into Malaysian system and universities at the same time need to improve its competency to provide higher quality education.

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