

Language Barrier, Academic Stress and Cultural Differences Towards International Students' Satisfaction

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Abstract

International students pursuing higher education encounter a slew of obstacles, including linguistic stumbling blocks, academic stress, and cultural barriers. The fundamental goal of the research is to investigate the link between these difficulties, specifically, language hurdles, academic stress, and cultural differences and their influence on student happiness. The research intends to give significant insights into the complex dynamics that impact the overall happiness of international students in the educational landscape by diving into these linked elements. Furthermore, this research utilizes quantitative approaches by means of survey distribution to the participants. Respondents for this study are international students to whom the questionnaires are distributed. In accordance with the sample size formula furnished by Krejcie & Morgan, a suitable number of 285 participants is considered for incorporation into this research endeavor. The research, which combines descriptive and correlational methods, finds a strong connection between several variables and the level of satisfaction felt by students. Researchers need to know more about the challenges that international students encounter, and this study helps fill that gap. Finding ways to make students satisfied is the driving force behind this research.

1. Introduction

The number of students opting to study in a foreign country has skyrocketed in the last several decades. This has prompted colleges all around the globe to employ a variety of strategies to entice overseas students. This includes institutions in the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, the United States, and even certain nations in Asia and the Middle East (Deuchar, 2022, Kearney & Lincoln, 2017; Wen & Hu, 2019 & Deuchar, 2022).

Educational institutions are witnessing an increasing number of international students enrolling, underscoring the significance of offering education with a global perspective. In an effort to promote cultural diversity, Malaysia actively promotes internationalization, which has resulted in the country being ranked eleventh worldwide for foreign students by UNESCO. However, international students may find it challenging to adapt to other aspects of Malaysian life, including as the language, cuisine, weather, money, healthcare, and housing, according to studies.

Furthermore, immigrants have extra difficulties as a result of linguistic and financial constraints (Mahmud *et al.*, 2010, Tseng & Newton, 2002; Lin & Yi, 1997 & Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007). This study aims to investigate how academic, cultural, and linguistic aspects affect the educational experiences of international students at Malaysian institutions. It focuses on Malaysia because of its unique educational system and cultural variety. Its goal is to shed light on the difficulties these youngsters confront from different angles so that we may better comprehend them.

1.1 Problem Statement

This study seeks to fulfill the urgent requirement of constructing a comprehensive model of student satisfaction by thoroughly examining the various factors that impact this crucial part of the academic journey. The emphasis on student well-being by educational institutions stems from its positive impact on academic performance and the competitive edge it offers. Positive student outcomes, such as favourable word-of-mouth communication, high student retention rates, and strong student loyalty, play a crucial role in assessing the overall performance of an institution. In order to succeed in the international education sector, marketing academics like Kotler and Fox (2002) emphasize the importance of creating and delivering more student value. The importance of comprehending and giving priority to student well-being becomes evident when considering the challenges posed by cultural diversity, varied learning styles, and the growing expectations of students in an ever-expanding range of study environments and educational opportunities. Universities want to acquire profound understanding of the intricate dynamics of global education through this study, especially in relation to the growing emphasis on student well-being.

Student discontentment is a widespread concern that significantly contributes to the yearly decrease in enrollment. It is primarily caused by obstacles including academic pressure, communication barriers, and cultural differences. The participants in this research encounter difficulties pertaining to the management of health issues and the navigation of peer relationships. The variety of personal adjustment issues that international students face is highlighted in the research of Thomas and Svarney (1989) and Althen (1989). These issues include withdrawal, alienation, anxiety, melancholy, helplessness, resentment toward the host country, and loneliness. These substantial obstacles discourage prospective students from applying to institutions of higher education. The objective of this study is to examine particular elements that contribute to discontentment, including academic pressure, language barriers, and cultural disparities. By doing so, it will provide a unique insight into the fundamental factors that are influencing the decrease in student enrollment. Establishing an atmosphere that effectively engages and retains a greater number of contented students becomes a feasible objective upon identification and resolution of these obstacles (Zhai, 2002).

1.2 Research Question

- 1) What is the relationship between language barriers and student satisfaction among international students in UTHM?
- 2) What is the relationship between academic stress and student satisfaction among international students in UTHM?
- 3) What is the relationship between cultural differences and student satisfaction among international students in UTHM?

1.3 Research Objective

- 1) To identify the relationship between language barriers and student satisfaction among international student in UTHM.
- 2) To identify the relationship between academic stress and student satisfaction among international student in UTHM.
- 3) To identify the relationship between cultural differences and student satisfaction among international students in UTHM.

1.4 Scope of study

This quantitative research examines language, cultural, and academic challenges experienced by international students at UTHM. Large-scale surveys using standardized instruments collect and analyze quantitative data to show the prevalence and severity of these issues. The study uses statistical methods to find patterns and relationships, improving generalizability outside the sample. This method is essential for forecasting trends, exploring causal links, and providing the foundation for evidence-based interventions and policy recommendations to solve UTHM's global student population's challenges (Shi *et al.*, 2023 & Yumeng, 2023).

This quantitative study examines the numerous relationships that cause academic, language, and cultural difficulties for overseas students. The quantitative analysis of 1033 foreign UTHM students used a carefully selected sample size of 285 students. This project aims to offer empirical information to inform support network growth, build a more inclusive and supportive academic environment for foreign students, and guide particular activities (Wachyunni *et al.*, 2023 and Dinamika Ilmu, 2023).

1.5 Significance of study

This study examines the factors that influence foreign students' decision to pursue higher education abroad. The findings of this study have significant implications for academic communities and institutions. The findings of this study can serve as a foundation for developing recruiting efforts, programs, and support services that are tailored to the diverse needs and preferences of this global population. By gaining a thorough understanding of these elements, educational institutions may enhance their capacity to effectively cater to international students (Janik *et al.*, 2023 & Zsuzsanna *et al.*, 2023).

Furthermore, the findings of this study have the potential to challenge and improve upon existing frameworks and assumptions that are associated with global education. The results of this study might possibly motivate a rethink of current frameworks, which would provide a more complete knowledge of the variables that effect the decision-making process of foreign students (Yunxin *et al.*, 2023). In addition to providing a scholarly contribution, the findings of this research could also make a contribution to the field of research. From a broader perspective, the results of this research may provide valuable insights to policymakers who are interested in fostering international student mobility and cross-cultural understanding on a global scale. The findings of the research may contribute to the accomplishment of these overarching objectives by providing direction for the development of more effective programs. These programs will go beyond the limits of certain academic environments in order to address difficulties that are prevalent in a variety of geographical locations.

This research has the potential to become an invaluable resource for academics in the future who are interested in gaining a better grasp of the difficulties involved in decision-making among overseas students. The purpose of the ongoing research is to improve our understanding of the shifting needs and preferences of international students. This has the potential to stimulate interventions and advancements in intercultural education, thereby establishing a solid foundation for further investigation in the field of international education (Janik *et al.*, 2023 & Zsuzsanna *et al.*, 2023).

2. Literature Review

2.1 Student Satisfaction

Student satisfaction is a dynamic indicator that displays the results and consequences of an educational system, hence increasing student loyalty (Weerasinghe *et al.*, 2017 & Zeithaml, 1988). Elliot and Shin stress the importance of individual assessments of learning experiences and outcomes on student satisfaction, emphasizing its role as a dependent variable in this study. A main area of study is the subtle interplay of language barriers, academic stress, and cultural differences, which includes intellectual, social, and institutional factors (Weerasinghe, Lalitha, & Fernando, 2017).

Student satisfaction is a key indicator of both academic achievement and the quality of the educational experience as a whole, according to the study's authors. Highlighting the challenges posed by language barriers, academic pressure, and cultural differences, it shows that student satisfaction is directly related to expectation fulfilment (Saif, 2014). Concerns about Malaysia's capacity to meet the rising demand for higher education on a global and domestic scale persist despite the country's efforts to revamp and enhance its educational system (Sohail & Saeed, 2021 & Sohail & Saeed, 2003). The potential and challenges that higher education institutions face on a global scale are brought to light by this.

A variety of socioeconomic and environmental factors impact international students' country and academic institution selection (Arambewela & Hall, 2009, Veloutsou *et al.*, 2005; Arambewela, 2003; Smith *et al.*, 2002). The research emphasizes the need of understanding and managing these complex dynamics, which involve individual factors, academic curriculum, tuition, amenities, educational excellence, and cultural features. Despite being essential to worldwide expansion, international branch schools face selective enrollment, curriculum duplication, and building and service limits.

Exorbitant tuition and poor facilities and services at international branch schools make student happiness a major issue. This study raises questions about Malaysian students' foreign branch campus education. Quantifying student happiness helps understand the effects of cultural differences, academic pressure, and language limitations (Welsh & Onishi, 2018 & Syed, 2014).

2.2 Dimensions of Student Satisfaction

Student happiness is complicated and affected by many things. Walker-Marshall and Hudson (1999) stress the importance of GPA for academic success and satisfaction. Marzo-Navarro *et al.* (2005) and Appleton-Knapp & Krentler (2006) divide these components into personal (age, gender, and job position) and institutional (training quality, feedback urgency) categories.

Wilkins and Balakrishnan (2013) identified lecturer competency, physical amenities, and technology use as major contributors. Further study addresses instructional materials, educational resources, peer interactions, and feedback mechanisms, which all affect student happiness. Teaching competency, a flexible curriculum, a strong reputation, instructor autonomy, student-centered policies, and campus climate are key factors in an institution's

quality. Student satisfaction is expected to be affected by UTHM's unique characteristics. Due to the complex relationship between UTHM's attributes and student satisfaction, an in-depth study is needed to understand student contentment.

2.3 Language barrier

International students face significant linguistic barriers that affect their academic and social lives. Lund University in Sweden and Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia's rigorous language requirements show the challenges non-native English speakers confront when studying abroad. The need for full English language aid, including writing, understanding lectures, learning vocabulary, and speed, is stressed by McCormick (2014) and Ramburuth (2001).

This study divides language concerns into speaking, listening, reading, and writing. It acknowledges international students' various obstacles and offers solutions. Academic English challenges like identifying viewpoints and using proper methods affect student satisfaction. Communication issues hinder academic communication, making notetaking, discussions, and coursework review difficult.

Education *et al.* (2022), Andrade (2006), Chen *et al.* (2019), Juan and Zainol-Abidin (2013), and Singh (2019) have shown that several factors affect communicative language learning for international EFL students. Individual differences, past learning experiences, and cultural differences exacerbate educational challenges (Brown, 2005). Libyan students studying abroad, particularly in Malaysia, are understudied. Despite the Libyan Ministry of Education's encouragement to enroll in top overseas schools, Abduljalil (2018) and Said & Yassin (2014) note pupils' unpreparedness for the English-medium curriculum. Research and intervention are needed to close this gap, with a focus on meeting Libyan students' unique needs to improve their academic experiences and satisfaction.

2.4 Academic stress

Academic stress is common among international students. According to Rienties *et al.* (2012), academic pressure negatively affects social adaptability and academic accomplishment. According to Lowinger *et al.* (2014), Chinese students in the US experience stress differently by gender. Kuo (2011) noted that linguistic difficulties for understanding and expressing concepts complicated stress causes.

This research aims to understand international students' academic stress at UTHM. By revealing the institution's support mechanisms, the goal is to improve these students' academic experience. Adapting to new evaluation methods, financial issues, and academic guidance are the primary sources of stress (Mesidor & Sly, 2016).

Academic stress from exams and evaluations causes student anxiety. Academic stress increases blood pressure and pulse rates, according to Gopal *et al.* (2011). The study emphasized the intricate relationship between stress and physiological health markers, focused on stress's influence on immune response regulation and health risks.

2.5 Cultural Differences

Jibreel (2015) highlights the challenges international students face in the US. Students must modify their culture and be persistent as they adjust to a new lifestyle. The literature review examines difficult issues, focusing on cultural adaption in Malaysia.

International students' reactions to their host country and culture differ. Perceived discrimination, communication skills, cultural affinities, extraversion, and desire to connect affect these feelings, according to Ying (2002). Traditional cultures like Asian ones may struggle to transition into American society, causing a sense of alienation (Poyrazli *et al.*, 2004). Cultural differences strongly impact how much foreign students identify with fellow international students or host nations. Schmitt, Spears and Branscombe (2003) note that cultural differences affect reported prejudice. Creating inclusive environments that identify and bridge cultural differences improves students' education satisfaction and makes it more supportive and pleasant.

2.6 Hypothesis Development

The satisfaction and well-being of international students have become crucial elements of academic institutions' success as globalization promotes greater mobility in education (Qilong,2023). International students face many challenges, but this study focuses on how language barriers, academic pressure, and cultural differences affect happiness. The research demonstrates that language barriers, which limit communication and language skills, and academic strain from coursework, exams, and adapting to new educational systems adversely impact international students' satisfaction (Dinamika Ilmu,2023).Furthermore, research proposes that cultural variations, including differences in customs, traditions, and societal norms between the home and host countries, have a significant impact on shaping the satisfaction of international students (Michał et al , 2022).

Applying an integrated questionnaire and quantitative analysis, this study aims to investigate the complex relationships between these variables and the fulfilment of international students. The study aims to illuminate the complex dynamics involved and offer practical insights and recommendations for educational institutions to effectively support diverse needs and improve the satisfaction of their international student population. Therefore, considering these findings, the following hypothesis for this study is proposed as:

H_1 = There is relationship between language barriers and Student satisfaction.

H_2 = There is relationship between Academic stress and student satisfaction.

H_3 = There is relationship between Cultural differences and student satisfaction.

2.7 Research conceptual framework.

By adapted from the previous study of (Nguyen & Nagase, 2019), the research framework for this study is shown as in Figure 1.

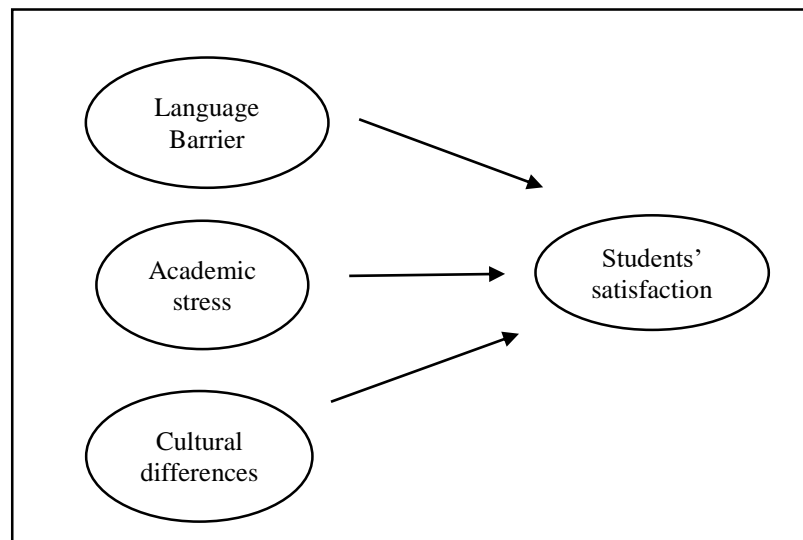


Fig. 1 Research Framework

3. Methodology

Research methodology is a methodical strategy used to explore a certain subject. This course includes in-depth examination of several aspects of research techniques. These include research design, study participant selection, research tools, data gathering procedures, and data processing techniques used to examine the collected data.

3.1 Research Design

To achieve its objectives, this study will utilize quantitative research methodologies, including the distribution of questionnaires to collect quantitative data.

3.2 Population and Sampling

The target population is the units of nature that a researcher intends to study. The study targeted 285 respondents drawn from the international students in UTHM. The sample size based on Krejcie and Morgan table. Sampling strategies provide a variety of approaches for reducing the quantity of data required for research by focusing on data from a subset of the population rather than all available components (Saunders *et al.*, 2009). The research instrument will be distributed to the intended respondents using a simple random sampling technique.

3.3 Research Instruments

The questionnaire will undergo a rigorous curation and validation procedure to verify that it aligns with the specific requirements of the present study and the underlying research concept. A questionnaire survey will be conducted to assess the model and hypothesis being investigated. The Likert 5-point scale will be used in all questionnaires. A score of one signifies a significant disagreement, whereas a score of three signifies a moderate stance, and a score of five signifies a strong consensus.

3.4 Questionnaire Variables

The questionnaire has been divided into five major sections. The first section consists of demographic and personal information about the individuals. The second section consists of five questions regarding dependent variable student satisfaction. Third section consists of five questions regarding the first independent variable of the student is language barrier. The fourth section also has five questions regarding second independent variable is academic stress. The last section and the fifth section is cultural differences.

All the items in sections second, third, fourth and fifth for this study will be measured using a Likert scale of measurement with a scale ranging from one to five. The items studied for measuring each component were modified and based from previous study. For using of Likert scale, a score of 1 indicates strongly disagree, score 3 indicate for moderation and score 5 indicate strongly agree. This study is consider using 5-point Likert scale because it is simple to understand for survey and respondents alike. Respondents may convey both the direction and the intensity of their opinion regarding a topic by using the midpoint on a Likert-scale (Chyung *et al.*, 2017).

3.5 Data Collection

The key data that will be utilized to fulfil the study will be acquired using primary data where the data will be collected by distribution questionnaire. This study collects data via electronic mail and the direct approach survey technique, both of which are regularly used in previous studies (Anil & Satish, 2019).

3.6 Statistical Analysis

The research employed descriptive and correlational analyses to examine the impact of various factors, including academic stress, language barriers, and cultural differences on the level of student satisfaction at UTHM University. The data, which were entered and analyzed using SPSS (version 25.0), provided significant findings regarding the interrelationships between these variables. The study utilized correlation analysis to examine the associations among cultural differences, academic stress, language barriers, and student satisfaction. The objective of this exhaustive investigation was to uncover the intricate mechanisms that influence the general well-being of students enrolled at UTHM University.

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Conflict of Interest

Authors declare that there is no conflict of interests regarding the publication of the paper.

Author Contribution

The authors confirm contribution to the paper as follows: **study conception and design:** Talish Alam, Mohd Asmadi Mohd Angsor; **data collection:** Talish Alam; **analysis and interpretation of results:** Talish Alam; **draft manuscript preparation:** Talish Alam. All authors reviewed the results and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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