

Perception of International Students on Multiculturalism in Malaysian Universities

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Abstract: The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of international students of the impact of multiculturalism at institutions of Malaysian higher education. Data were collected through employing questionnaires and focus-group interviews. The respondents in this study were all international students in twelve public Malaysian universities. The results of this study show that the institutions of higher education in Malaysia provide their students with good facilities for helping them to overcome study difficulties. Although the results indicate that the institutions of higher education in Malaysia provide good services and facilities for sport activities, health services and food services, results reveal that improvement of services provided at language and counselling centers should be given more attention by authorities. On the other hand, the results of this study show that services and facilities for housing and vegetarian food should be improved. Finally, the findings show that the institutions of higher education in Malaysia have gained good reputation due to (a) the presence of international students, (b) encouragement for academic research and (c) providing good opportunities for scholarships.

Keywords: Multiculturalism, Institutions, International students, Malaysia

Higher Education and Benefits of international students: Higher education is one of the most important parts of the increasing globalisation of the trade in goods and services. This is because it has been estimated that the number of international students seeking education in or from a foreign country will reach 3.1 million in 2025 (Blight, 1995). In the last few years, it has been noticed that there is an increasing interest in international higher education worldwide (Rauhvargers, 2006). As a result of this, it has been observed that there is an increase in the number of journals that focus on issues related to international higher education and studying abroad with a focus on Europe, North America, Australia, and recently in Asia. The presence of international students in institutions of higher education has valuable benefits for any host country. Studying abroad is also beneficial for international students themselves. Research has shown that study abroad experiences benefit students and society in several ways (e.g., Hoffa & Pearson, 1993; Ridley, 2004). Studying abroad helps to create global awareness, promote international security, enhance academic learning, develop leadership skills, and advance students' careers. Students doing their higher education abroad also experience personal growth and have the opportunity to learn different languages and learn about different cultures. According to Hoffa and Pearson (1993:22), the goal of studying abroad is to enable students get academic and cultural

benefits, and to help them “to be better prepared to face the challenges of the globalized future than students who do not have these experiences”. Institutions of higher education can greatly benefit from cultural diversity in many ways. First of all, worldwide recruitment of students provides a larger pool of applications. Thus, universities can attract and retain the best available human talent. Second, one of the goals of modern education is to prepare students for work in global environments (Hale, 2004). Having classmates from different countries provides an excellent opportunity to receive first-hand experience of work in multicultural settings. Furthermore, diversity of both experiences and backgrounds enables the generation to share and exchange more ideas and opinions; this, in turn, enriches in-class discussions and activities of group meetings. Finally, international students are one of the important sources of revenue (Andrade & Evans, 2009). Thus, the benefits of diversity for international groups are great and undisputable, but if not managed properly cultural differences can negatively affect different aspects of organization, institutions and particularly teamwork. Universities and colleges in Malaysia have been experiencing increasing internationalization of their student body. Most colleges and universities in Malaysia host international students from countries in Asian, African and Arab countries (Kaur & Sidhu, 2009). However, international students from the Middle East constitute a significant percentage of international students in Malaysia (Pandian, 2008). As a result of this fast flow of international students, there have been some positive procedures for transforming higher education in Malaysia toward internationalization. These procedures include ensuring more enrolment of international students in the coming years (Pandian).

In addition to the adjustment problems they face, international students in Malaysia face some difficulties and challenges in coping with the academic requirements (Pandian, 2008; Kaur & Sidhu, 2009). Among the difficulties international students face, there are different academic difficulties due to the English language and the different educational system, financial pressures, psychosocial stressors due to unfamiliarity with new academic context they move to. These academic problems are the result of inadequate study methods, language difficulties and prior limited background to the academic area (Lin & Yi, 1997; Mori, 2000).

Multiculturalism: People in the world are from different cultures and ethnicities. Higher education institutions, the workplace and other social settings are rich of multicultural diversities. The concept of multiculturalism is widely used in scholarship and has acquired a multiplicity and divergence of meanings through the years. It is a term which has been used in many ways to refer to a scale of ideologies and practices which are related to observations of and answers to social diversity. Moreover, the concept of multiculturalism has been prevalent in social and political discourse since the 1970s and 80s, and its definition and impact still have yet to be accurately determined (Race, 2011). It can be understood and instituted in numerous ways and within multiple contexts in public policy. Multiculturalism originally has been described as a concept which, in its original intent, implied the intellectual, social, and cultural acceptance of diverse people who share

common geography and culture. Multiculturalism implies a study of all cultures as separate entities to allow students to see the world through a lens other than those of their native culture. Multiculturalism was originally instituted as a response to racial, social, and cultural inequalities. Moreover, multiculturalism encompasses issues such as gender and socioeconomic status, versus the international perspective of varying cultures across the globe (Bruch et al., 2004; Lee & Janda, 2006). As multicultural advocates, Chesler and Zuniga (1991) view multiculturalism as an important construct as it relates to the classroom experience of students, as well as their experience(s) as members of the greater society. Although there have been some recent devastating critiques of multiculturalism, it remains a philosophically sound concept and is in fact the approach to cultural difference that holds out most hope for the future.

Related Studies: Studies on multiculturalism in higher education have focused on different issues. The impact of diversity has been assessed both qualitatively and quantitatively. Most research findings indicate that diversity has a positive impact on both majority and minority students (Appel et al., 1996). Astin (1993) focuses on an important issue: how students are affected by campus policies and practices. Astin collected data from 217 four-year colleges and universities and found that emphasizing diversity and multiculturalism is associated to beneficial effects on students' cognitive and affective development. Furthermore, Astin asserts that there are positive effects of emphasizing diversity and multiculturalism in campuses of higher education. Educational gains for all students in a higher education institution can be achieved when the university campus makes a significant commitment to diversity. Further, student participation in diversity initiatives contributes to measurable changes in openness to difference, increased commitment to social justice, as well as to cognitive development and academic success (Appel et al., 1996). Using what he calls the input-environment-outcome (I-E-O) model as a conceptual framework for studying college student development, Astin (1993) has spent his career assessing how various environmental experiences during college contribute to student growth/change. In this model, inputs refer to the characteristics of the student at the time of initial entry to the institution; environment refers to the various programs, policies, faculty, peers, and educational experience to which the student is exposed; and outcomes refers to the student's characteristics after exposure to the environment.

Whitt, et al. (2001) studied the influences of (a) students pre-enrolment characteristics of students, (b) organizational and environmental characteristics of the institution attended, (c) students' academic experiences, and (d) students' non-academic experiences on openness to diversity. They found that the variables that have great influence on openness to diversity are (a) precollege openness to diversity and challenge, (b) sex (i.e., being female), (c) age (i.e., being an older student), (d) perceptions of a non-discriminatory racial environment at the institution, (e) participation in a racial or cultural awareness workshop in any year of the study, (f) diverse student acquaintances, and (g) conversations with other students in which different ways of thinking

and understanding. Many international students experience difficulties on arrival in a foreign country, and there are several studies on the difficulties faced by international students. Some of these difficulties are language-related problems they encounter in their academic studies (Zhang & Mi, 2010). Other difficulties include culture shock, homesickness, lack of study skills and language proficiency, and so on (e.g., Marr, 2005). Zhang and Mi (2010) focuses on language problems of 40 Chinese students in 8 Australian universities and on the differences between linguistically demanding and less demanding courses in terms of students' language difficulties. They found that the respondents who spent more than two years at these universities reported less language problems. They found also that students in linguistically demanding courses tended to have a lot of difficulties as opposed to half of those in linguistically less demanding courses. Although there are some other studies that focus on difficulties of international students, studies on the roles of institutions in assisting students to overcome these difficulties are still inadequate. Facilities at the institutions of higher education include organizing activities for fostering friendships, sport facilities, housing facilities, food provided at the campuses, and health services. Sport facilities provided to both local and international students can create opportunities for international students to adapt to social behaviours of an entirely new culture (Lee, 2005). Moreover, food shock is another inevitable factor that plays a role in international students' adjustment (Brown, 2009). Housing and health services also have their roles in facilitating international students to adjust themselves to the cultural diversity in host countries. International students face multi-faceted challenges which can include academic, social, cultural, or personal adjustment. Subsequently, international students undergo immense stress that could lead to health problems (Cheng, 2004). Research studies and books have been published on the benefits of studying abroad and on the benefits of having international students. For example, Barron (2006) points out that benefits of studying abroad include academic interest, improving learning skills, and getting wider knowledge. However, studies on how international students perceive the benefits of their presence in institutions of higher education are still very few. For example, Trice (2003) focuses on the benefits of international students from the perspectives of faculty members. Thus, recognition of the importance of both multiculturalism and other factors playing roles in students' adjustment has resulted in changes in the curriculum and in student support services in higher education. However, there is a need for more research studies focusing on student support services in educational settings focusing on issues of race and ethnicity (Appel et al., 1996). Furthermore, studies on international students' views on the impact of multiculturalism in institutions of higher education are inadequately addressed. Studies on the impact of multiculturalism examined only issues related to multiculturalism and diversity in schools. Focusing on school support for multiculturalism on academic achievement among 280 Asian American and Hispanic youth, Chang and Le (2010) revealed that there was a significant positive relation between perceived multiculturalism and ethno-cultural empathy only for Asian American students. They also found that ethno-cultural

empathy was predictive of academic achievement for Hispanics only. Chang and Le recommended that fostering a school climate supportive of multiculturalism can have a crucial role in improving empathy toward ethnic out-groups; promoting compassion and tolerance for diverse ethnic groups may achieve better academic outcomes among Hispanic youth.

In a longitudinal study to determine which input or college environmental characteristics may contribute to students' overall satisfaction with their college experience, Villalpando (2002) employed Input-Environment-Outcome (I-E-O) methodological framework for assessing student change. Villalpando pointed out that the most relevant findings of the impact of a diversity emphasis on college satisfaction were the measures of how students are affected by an institution and faculty that promote multiculturalism and diversity, and by their involvement in "diversity" activities. Although the number of international students in institutions of higher education in Malaysia is in an increase, there have been very few studies examining issues related to the presence of international students in Malaysia. Moreover, none of these studies have focused on issues related to students' perceptions of the impact of multiculturalism. An exception to these studies is Pandian (2008), a study that examined the effect of increasing diversity and multicultural awareness on the growth and development of graduate students. The participants in Pandian (2008) were Middle Eastern students in University Sains Malaysia (USM). He found that despite the desire of international students to establish greater contacts with local students and seek positive social, psychological and academic benefits, the interaction between international and local students is low among them and local students. The very few studies on international students in Malaysian institutions of higher education examined their academic experiences and adjustment problems. These studies include Kaur and Sidhu (2009), Yusoff and Chelliah (2010), Mahmud, Rahman and Ishak (2011). Focusing on academic problems of both international and local students, Kaur and Sidhu (2009) indicate that graduate students face problems related to (a) pressures of undertaking and coping with the requirements of postgraduate work, (b) adjustment to a new academic culture, (c) language difficulties. Yusoff and Chelliah (2010) found that the factors that affect international students' psychological and socio-cultural adjustment problems are English language proficiency, social support, and some personality variables. After examining 385 international students' adjustment in three universities in Malaysia, Mahmud et al. (2011) revealed that international students' adjustment problems can be categorized under three major factors: academic, emotional and social.

The Study: The purpose of this study was to examine international students' perceptions of the impact of multiculturalism on the institutions of higher education. Our present study is one of the series of our studies on issues related to multiculturalism in institutions of higher education in Malaysia. We hope that the findings of our present study will provide some insights on how to enhance the continuing efforts and encourage additional efforts to promote diversity and multiculturalism in the academic programmes in Malaysian universities. Based on the

discussion above, the research questions of this study are:

1. How do international students perceive the role of the Malaysian institutions of higher education in helping students overcome their academic difficulties?
2. How do international students perceive the facilities provided at the Malaysian institutions of higher education?
3. What are the effects of the presence of international students in Malaysian institutions of higher education?

Results obtained through this study can be beneficial for curriculum improvement in higher education. When an institution adopts policies and practices designed to foster multicultural perspectives in the curriculum and improve racial representation, it makes these differences parts of the curricular learning process and public discourse on the campus.

Samples- Institutional Samples: The institutional sample in this study included 12 universities located in most of Malaysian states. The universities Malaysian universities: Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), (Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), University Malaya (UM), Univeristi Teknologi Malaysia (UTM), Univeristi Technnologi Mara (UiTM), Univeristi Malaysia Pahang (UMP), Universiti Malaysia Perlis (UniMAP), Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS), Universiti Malaysia Terengganu (UMT), Universiti Malasiay Sarawak (UNIMAS) and Univeristi Utara Malaysia (UUM). **Students Samples:** The individuals in the sample were international students at the twelve universities. They were selected randomly from all international students in the 12 Malaysian universities. For the focus-group interviews, purposeful sampling was employed in which international students were selected from some Malaysian public universities based on specific purposes associated with answering the research study's questions.

Stages of Data Collection: Due to the nature of the mixed research design of this study, data were collected in two phases: quantitative and qualitative. While quantitative data were collected through questionnaires, qualitative data were collected through focus-group interviews. The survey instrument, which was created, validated and administered in the twelve Malaysian universities, was designed to obtain information from the respondents on some issues related to their perception of impact of multiculturalism on institutions of higher education. The survey items were organized into two sections. While the first section of the questionnaire was meant to obtain information related to the respondents' demographic data, the second section focused on students' perceptions of the impact of multiculturalism on Malaysian institutions of higher education. The demographic items that were included in the first part were related to (a) gender (male, female); (b) age, (c) current level of study, (d) mode of study (master, doctoral, postgraduate diploma), (e) current year of study, and (g) nationality. The second section that included 14 items focused on issues related to the impact of multiculturalism on institutions of higher education. The items in the second section of the questionnaire required the respondents to provide their responses to 14 items pertaining to three

	University	Participants
1.	USM	4
2.	USM	4
3.	UPM	4
4.	UPM	6
5.	UPM	3
6.	UMP	7
7.	UUM	3
8.	UNIMAS	6
9.	UniMAP	4

Table 1: Universities Selected for Focus-group Interviews

were of Likert-type response scale: 1 was defined as “strongly disagree”, 2 indicated “disagree”, 3 signified “unsure”, 4 represented “agree”, and 5 indicated “strongly agree”. The second phase of data collection included focus-group interviews which were conducted with international students from six universities. Focus-group interviews serve as the primary means of collecting qualitative data; in focus groups qualitative data is collected through interaction between the participants and the researcher (Morgan, 1997). As provided in Table 1, there were nine focus-group interviews in which the number of the participants in each group differed ranging from 3 to 7 participants. The focus groups were facilitated by professional trained facilitators and digitally recorded with the permission of all participants.

Results and Discussion: Quantitative data collected from questionnaires were analyzed using SPSS (version 16). Descriptive statistics then was conducted to summarize the results obtained through questionnaires. Data collected from focus-group interviews were transcribed and analyzed using content analysis.

Demographic Data of the Respondents : Table 2 presents the demographic data of 794 international students who were the respondents to the items in the survey instrument. The male respondents were 559 students (70.4% of the total sample) and the female respondents were 235 respondents (29.6% of the total sample). The analysis of the item related to age revealed that 429 respondents (54% of the total sample) were between 20 and 29, 280 (35.5% of the total sample) identified to be between 30 to 39, and 85 (10.7% of the total sample) were 40 years old or above. While the respondents doing master were 480 (60.5% of the total sample), respondents who were doing doctorate programmes were 298 students (37.5%). Only 16 student respondents (2.0 %) were doing postgraduate diploma. With reference to the item on students' mode of research, 406 students (51.1 % of the total sample) belonged to research mode, 213 students belonged to coursework mode, and 175 students (22.0%) mixed mode. For the item that required the respondents to provide the current year of their study, it was found that 394 students (49.6% of the total sample) were in their first year, 275 students (34.6%) were in their second year, 103 students

dimensions. While the first dimension contained four items that were related to the roles of institutions in assisting international students in their study difficulties, the second item contained seven items focusing on facilities provided to students at the institution at higher education. The third dimension had three items which examined students' perceptions of the impact of their presence in institution of higher education. When responding to the survey items, respondents were instructed to choose one of the options from 1 to 5. These five options

	Demographic data	Category	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Gender	Male	559	70.4%
		Female	235	29.6%
2.	Age	20 - 29	429	54%
		30- 39	280	35.3%
		40 and above	85	10.7%
3.	Current level of study	Doctoral	298	37.5%
		Master	480	60.5%
		Post Grad.Diploma	16	2.0%
4.	Mode of study	Research	406	51.1%
		Mixed mode	175	22.0%
		Coursework	213	26.8%
5.	Current year of study	First Year	394	49.6%
		Second Year	275	34.6%
		Third Year	103	13.0%
		Fourth Year	13	1.6%
		Fifth Year to eighth	9	1.13%
6.	Nationality	Iranian	246	30.98%
		Iraqi	99	12.47%
		Indonesian	68	8.56%
		Chinese	46	5.79%
		Yemeni	45	5.67%
		Libyan	38	4.79%
		Others	252	31.74%

Table 2: Respondents' Demographic Data (N= 794)

(13%) were in their third year of study, 13 students (1.6%) in their fourth year of study, and only 9 students (1.13%) were between the fifth and the eighth years. Regarding the item related to the nationality of the students, the respondents were of a range of nationalities from different reigns including Asia, Africa, and Middle East countries. The top five nationalities of the respondents were Iranian, Iraqi, Indonesian, Chinese, and Yemeni. As shown in Table 1, 246 students (31% of the total sample) were Iranian, 99 students (12%) were Iraqi, 68 students (8.6%) were Indonesian, 46 students (5.8%) were Chinese, and 45 students (5.7%) were Yemeni. The main purpose of this study was to look closely at international students' perceptions of the impact of multiculturalism on the institutions of higher education in Malaysia. The quantitative results of the analysis of the 14 items included in the second section of the questionnaire are provided in Tables 3-5.

Study Difficulties and the Roles of Institutions : The first research question focused on the international students' perceptions of the roles of higher education institutions in assisting students to overcome study difficulties. Items related to this issue focused on students' views of their academic difficulties and their perceptions of the role of their institutions in helping them to overcome such difficulties. With reference to the roles of language centers to help international students overcome their academic difficulties, Table 3 shows that 283 respondents (35.6 %) gave neutral responses and 265 students agreed that language centers played important roles in helping them to overcome their language difficulties. Regarding roles of academic counseling centers in helping students to overcome their academic difficulties, 341 respondents (42.9%) showed

	Item	Scale N (%)					%	Mean	Std. Dev.
		SD	D	UN	A	SA			
1.	Language centers help students with language difficulties	74 (9.3)	124 (15.6)	283 (35.6)	265 (33.4)	48 (6.1)	100	3.11	1.046
2.	University academic counseling center helps students with study difficulties	68 (8.6)	116 (14.6)	341 (42.9)	223 (28.1)	46 (5.8)	100	3.08	0.998
3.	University authorities provide good counseling services	61 (7.7)	114 (14.4)	319 (40.2)	260 (32.7)	40 (5.0)	100	3.13	0.982
4.	University authorities provide good facilities for education purposes	43 (5.4)	92 (11.6)	228 (28.7)	333 (41.9)	98 (12.4)	100	3.44	1.025

Table 3: Study Difficulties of International Students (N=794)

that they were unsure about the help provided by academic counselling centres for international students. Although 319 respondents (40.2%) were unsure of the counselling services provided by the authorities at the universities, the majority of the respondents (41.9%) indicated that the university authorities provided good facilities for educational purposes (Items 3 and 4 in Table 3).

Results obtained from the analysis of quantitative data were triangulated with the results of the analysis of focus-group interviews. As reflected by most of the participants in the focus groups, they had to go to other language centers outside their chosen universities because some universities required IELTS certificates and the language centers did not provide a good quality of teaching. For example, one student participant commented: *Okay. I have a friend here, when he came he has to enter a language course, but it is not good. They lecturers are not teaching very well. They ask us to have IELTS or TOEFL for example. We have to go to other institute to learn.* For counseling centers and services, the international students in the focus groups indicated that the counseling services and centers were available but not enough or the services they provided were not enough. For facilities provided for educational purposes, the majority of the participants agreed that they were provided with good facilities for educational purposes. These facilities included internet services, databases services and libraries. In one of the focus-group interviews conducted in one of the selected universities, a participant declared: *I think about the facilities here is...okay, we can access the internet wherever we go and get a lot of information from internet. Library actually is okay, it is a good place for study but the lecturers, I don't think we gain a lot of information from them. All the study is based on ourselves. The programme here is okay, the education system here is good. Actually it helps us to broaden our vision.* Thus, it can be understood that international students agree that the Malaysian public universities offer good educational facilities. However, international students perceived that language and counselling services do not provide them with the services they wanted to have.

Facilities at the Institutions: The second research question focused on the respondents' perceptions of other facilities (such as sport, health and food) provided by the authorities at the universities. As provided in Table 4, 326 respondents (41.1%) of the respondents agreed that sport facilities are provided in a good manner for them by the authorities at the universities (Item 1 in Table 4). With reference to the role of housing

centers in helping international students with their housing difficulties, 235 respondents (29.6%) gave their agreement on this issue. On the other hand, 300 students (37.8%) of the respondents were unsure about the services provided by housing centers. With reference to health services provided by the universities, 340 respondents (42.8%) agreed that the universities in Malaysia offered reasonable and good health services (Item 3 in Table 4). Regarding activities for fostering friendships among both international and local students, 267 respondents (33.6%) agreed that their universities organized activities for fostering friendship among international and local students. However, 254 respondents (32.0%) were unsure about this issue. With reference to food services and cafeterias at the Malaysian universities, 365 respondents (46%) showed their agreement on the issue that authorities at the universities facilitated providing cafeterias with halal food. Moreover, 271 (34.1%) agreed that universities in Malaysian organized different activities in which the chances were given for multicultural food exhibitions (Item 5 in Table 4). Regarding the university authorities' roles in providing cafeterias with vegetarian food, the majority of the respondents (36.8%) were unsure about the provision of cafeterias with vegetarian food, and 270 (34.0%) gave their agreement on this issue (item 7 in Table 4). Data

	Item	Scale N (%)					% Mean		Std. Dev.
		SD	D	UN	A	SA			
1.	University authorities provide suitable sport facilities.	45 (5.7)	83 (10.3)	265 (33.4)	326 (41.1)	75 (9.5)	100	3.38	0.988
2.	University housing centers help students with housing difficulties	102 (12.8)	109 (13.7)	300 (37.8)	235 (29.6)	48 (6.1)	100	3.02	1.091
3.	University authorities provide good health services	54 (6.8)	97 (12.2)	217 (27.3)	340 (42.8)	86 (10.9)	100	3.39	1.052
4.	Organizing activities for fostering friendship among international and local students	73 (9.2)	144 (18.1)	254 (32.0)	267 (33.6)	56 (7.1)	100	3.11	1.075
5.	Organizing multicultural food exhibitions	77 (9.7)	125 (15.7)	264 (33.2)	271 (34.1)	57 (7.3)	100	3.13	1.076
6.	University authorities provide cafeterias with halal food	32 (4.0)	49 (6.2)	175 (22.0)	365 (46.0)	173 (21.8)	100	3.75	0.994
7.	University authorities provide cafeterias with vegetarian food	47 (5.9)	104 (13.1)	292 (36.8)	270 (34.0)	81 (10.2)	100	3.29	1.015

Table 4: Facilities at the Institution (N=794)

from the focus-group interviews also focused on facilities provided to international students at institutions of higher education. For health services at the universities, the participants in the focus groups showed their satisfaction with what was provided by health centers at their universities. Regarding the help international students were offered for solving housing difficulties, international students coming without their families received noticeable support from housing centers. However, some students who brought their wives and children found some difficulties while trying to solve housing problems. When asked about housing facilities provided for international students, a participant pointed out: *I should mention some actually negative experiences in this regard.*

Because you know you apply for the houses family houses and I don't know for some reason they just let you down. It happened to me. I don't know what criteria they are following or what the reason was. I just couldn't get the house. With reference to the food provided by restaurants and cafeterias inside the campuses, most of the participants in the focus groups revealed that halal food was available with reasonable prices. However, participants from Arab countries admitted that they missed the real taste of the original Arab dishes. Some of them also pointed out that the food varieties inside campuses were not found. For example, one student participant said: *For the halal food, okay. But you know our Arabic culture is different from Malaysian culture. ... Arab people when they come to Malaysia, they are looking for sweet food. ... Most of them they prefer Indian food here. Because it is a little bit similar with Arab food.* Moreover, another participant affirmed: *Some of the food in Malaysia I like. But some international student don't like because culture different. I eat something until I come to. Then I eat other food difficult to accept very fast. But halal food and all is okay.* Another issue related to food was organizing multicultural food exhibitions. In the focus groups, participants admitted that the university organized different cultural food exhibition in which students from different cultures brought the dishes they made to the universities. For example, one participant in one of focus-group interviews explained happiness when the students participated in multicultural food exhibition: *We really happy on that two days for arranging and bring in our cultural foods.* Thus, responses of international students in the questionnaires and the focus-groups interviews reveal that the authorities at Malaysian public universities provide students with good sport and health services. In addition, the responses of the students indicated that cafeterias with halal food are available inside and outside campuses. However, the analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data shows that the authorities in Malaysian universities should give more attention to two issues: (1) organizing activities to foster friendship between international and local students and (2) helping international students to solve housing difficulties.

Presence of International Students and Institution: How international students perceived the impact of their presence on the institutions was the third research question of this study. The impact of the presence of international students was conceptualized in terms of the reputation of the universities, opportunities for academic scholarship and opportunities for research. Most of the respondents agreed that their presence as international students at the Malaysian universities had its

	Item	Scale N (%)					%	Mean	Std. Dev.
		SD	D	UN	A	SA			
1.	Presence of international students increases the institution's reputation	20 (2.5)	53 (6.7)	230 (29)	332 (41.8)	159 (20.0)	100	3.70	0.946
2.	Presence of international students give new opportunities for academic scholarship	33 (4.2)	69 (8.7)	259 (32.6)	305 (38.4)	128 (16.1)	100	3.54	0.998
3.	Presence of international students gives new opportunities for research	28 (3.5)	44 (5.5)	178 (22.4)	375 (47.2)	169 (21.4)	100	3.77	0.962

Table 5: Presence of International Students and Institution (N=794)

impact in all aspects. About 333 respondents (41.8%) agreed that their presence had its impact in increasing the reputation of their universities (Item 1 in Table 5). With reference to the impact of the presence of international students on giving new opportunities for academic scholarship, 305 respondents (38.4%) give their agreement on this matter. With reference to item 3 in Table 3 that focused on the respondents' presence of international students on giving new opportunities for research, 375 respondents (47.2%) agreed that their presence have its effect on creating new opportunities for research. In focus groups, students showed that the presence of international students in institution of higher education can increase the reputation of the universities, lead to some new opportunities for academic scholarship and give new opportunities for research.

Conclusion: Teaching in a multicultural society is not an easy task. Diversity entails different styles of communications, world views, and means of interaction. Educators today should be aware of the educational challenges presented by the changing linguistic and ethnic composition of the population in higher education institutions. The experience and perspective of educators greatly influence their teaching styles and their behaviours in the classroom. The teacher is the one who can create a learning environment which provides equity and embraces the diversity of the world in which people live. The majority of the respondents showed that the Malaysian universities provide their students with good variety of facilities for educational purposes. The respondents also admitted that these facilities included internet, laboratory and library facilities. The respondents also declared that using the facilities help them in their academic achievements. However, the majority of the respondents declared that they were unsure about the facilities and services provided by the language and counseling centers. The responses of students in the questionnaires and focus group interviews indicated that sport facilities and health services and food services provided for students at the campuses of the Malaysian universities are good. Similar to Brown (2009), food emerged to be one of the effective factors in multicultural community. However, the respondents showed that housing facilities provided to international students need to be improved. Moreover, responses to the questionnaires indicated that cafeterias at the universities do not provided adequate vegetarian food. Regarding activities for fostering friendships between international students and local students, the responses showed that despite the encouragement of such activities, chances of friendships are still low. In the questionnaires and the focus groups, international students indicated that their presence in the Malaysian universities is an important factor for (a) increasing the reputation of the Malaysian universities, (b) giving new opportunities for academic scholarships and (c) giving opportunities for research.

Practical Recommendations: It is recommended that universities in Malaysia should establish a wide variety of programmes and new curricula to better educate all students for a diverse society and interconnected world. Some critics have challenged the usefulness of these programs. An increasingly comprehensive body of research is now emerging that documents the effects of diversity on student learning and

campus relations. It is recommended that the public universities in Malaysia should take into consideration the major academic difficulties faced by international students because success of providing students with services related to language difficulties and counselling services can be crucial roles in students' achievement. Socialization in institutions of higher education should involve a variety of practices aimed at orienting individuals to a culture. In academe, such practices are especially important as they can create a more diverse climate. As with the structural suggestions outlined, an institution that is concerned about multiculturalism will develop specific approaches from the moment someone is hired. On-going orientation and mentoring programmes are examples of the kind of activities that should occur at higher education institutions. Simultaneously, developing a systematic approach for individuals to understand people different from themselves is needed. Thus, institutions of higher education in Malaysia ought to have developed programmes for international students to understand the culture and history. Due to the importance of friendship between international students and local students, the authorities at the Malaysian universities should try to find some more activities that encourage international and local students to come together. With the increase of international students coming to Malaysian universities, the authorities in such universities have to find particular programmes for housing services, such as giving temporary accommodation for those new students. Moreover, services such as helping students to find reasonable and good apartments outside the universities can be developed. **Recommendations for Future Research:** Our present study reported in this paper focused on how international students perceive the impact of multiculturalism on the institutions of higher education in terms of (a) facilities provided to international students for overcoming academic difficulties, (b) facilities for non-academic services such as food, sport and health services and (c) impact of the presence of international students on the reputation of the institutions, academic research and scholarships. Future studies on multiculturalism in Malaysia can focus on the impact of multiculturalism on the communities outside campuses. These recommended studies can focus on international students' participation in activities held by communities outside the universities. Moreover, such studies can focus on communication problems with people outside universities such as those in the neighbourhood. **Acknowledgment:** We would like to acknowledge that this research was supported by a grant from Division of Research and Innovation, Universiti Sains Malaysia.

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