



Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development

**INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' SATISFACTION WITH
UNIVERSITY MALAYSIA SARAWAK**

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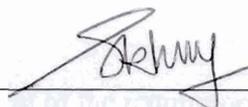
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This project is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for a
Bachelor of Science with Honours
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Statement of Originality

The work described in this Final Year Project, entitled
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ABSTRACT

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' SATISFACTION WITH UNIVERSITY MALAYSIA SARAWAK

Sia Ging Na

This study aimed to identify the factors that influence international students' level of satisfaction with UNIMAS. By using a cross-sectional survey research design, the required data of this study was collected from a total of 40 international students enrolled in the master and doctoral program in UNIMAS through the distribution of a questionnaire. The questionnaire for this study consisted of three sections, namely, section A, section B and Section C. Section A related to the demographic characteristics of the respondents. Section B related to the international students' satisfaction with UNIMAS. Section C related to factors influence international students' level of satisfaction with UNIMAS including academic experience, campus environment experience and interpersonal relationships experience. The results of the independent t-tests obtained in this study indicated that demographic characteristics of international students such as gender and faculty did not significantly impacted on the international students' level of satisfaction with UNIMAS. Likewise, the findings of one-way ANOVAs revealed that age factor was not considered as an important determinant towards international students' satisfaction with UNIMAS. However, country of origin and English ability among international students were found to effect on their satisfaction level with UNIMAS. The results of Pearson Moment Correlations showed that there were no statistically significant relationships between international students' level of satisfaction with UNIMAS and their academic experience, campus environment experience and interpersonal relationships experience. It is essential for UNIMAS to continuous improve the facilities and services provided in order to enhance international students' level of satisfaction towards UNIMAS.

ABSTRAK

KEPUASAN PELAJAR ANTARABANGSA TERHADAP UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA SARAWAK

Sia Ging Na

Kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengenal pasti faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhi tahap kepuasan pelajar antarabangsa terhadap UNIMAS. Dengan menggunakan rekabentuk kajian kerataan rentas, data yang diperlukan dalam kajian ini dikumpul daripada 40 pelajar antarabangsa yang berdaftar dalam program sarjana dan kedoktoran di UNIMAS menggunakan borang soal selidik. Borang kaji selidik bagi kajian ini terdiri daripada tiga bahagian, iaitu bahagian A, bahagian B and bahagian C. Bahagian A berkaitan dengan ciri-ciri demografi responden. Bahagian B pula berkaitan dengan kepuasan pelajar antarabangsa terhadap UNIMAS. Bahagian C menyelidiki faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhi tahap kepuasan pelajar antarabangsa terhadap UNIMAS merangkumi pengalaman akademik, pengalaman kampus persekitaran dan pengalaman hubungan interpersonal. Keputusan analisis ujian-t tidak bersandar menunjukkan bahawa ciri-ciri demografi pelajar antarabangsa seperti jantina dan fakulti tidak menunjukkan mempengaruhi tahap kepuasan pelajar antarabangsa terhadap UNIMAS. Keputusan analisis ANOVA satu-hala menunjukkan faktor usia tidak mempengaruhi kepuasan pelajar antarabangsa terhadap UNIMAS. Namun, negara asal dan kefasihan dalam Bahasa Inggeris di kalangan pelajar antarabangsa merupakan faktor-faktor yang boleh mempengaruhi tahap kepuasan mereka terhadap UNIMAS. Keputusan analisis Korelasi Monen Pearson tidak menunjukkan hubungan statistik yang ketara antara tahap kepuasan mahasiswa antarabangsa terhadap UNIMAS dengan pengalaman akademik, pengalaman kampus persekitaran dan pengalaman hubungan interpersonal. Ini adalah penting bagi UNIMAS untuk meningkatkan kemudahan dan perkhidmatan secara berterusan bagi meningkatkan tahap kepuasan mahasiswa antarabangsa terhadap UNIMAS.

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Research Framework of the Study

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

This study attempted to investigate the factors influencing international students' satisfaction with University Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS). This chapter provides the background of the study, problem statement, research objectives, research questions, research hypotheses, research framework, significance of the study, limitations of the study, and conceptual and operational definitions of the terms used in this study.

1.1 Background of the Study

An international student is “one who undertakes all or part of his/her higher education experience in a country other than the home country” (Project Atlas, 2004, cited in Kishun, n.d., p. 1). According to Otsu (2008), international students referred to foreign students from different countries around the world, studying abroad to further their studies for degrees, such as bachelor’s degree, master’s degree and doctoral degree. While studying abroad, majority of the international students were financially supported by the government while others were self-funded or supported by their family (Otsu, 2008). Some of them were offered scholarship by universities or company. They were given opportunities to learn new languages as well as to adapt a new culture and lifestyle (Otsu, 2008). International students also need to adapt themselves to a new environment in order to equip themselves to face the challenges and obstacles ahead of them (Otsu, 2008).

According to Morshidi Sirat (2008), “the flow of international students in Malaysia has increased steadily since 1996, when various higher education reforms were introduced to facilitate the entry of the international students in higher education institutions” (p. 79). Based on the National Higher Education Action Plan, 2007-2010, Malaysia’s target was to meet 100,000 international students at institutions of higher learning (Morshidi Sirat, 2008). Morshidi Sirat (2008) further stated that the government had intervened by broadening the capacity and quality of Malaysian higher education and organized many seminars and exhibitions annually in order to attract and retain more international students to pursue their studies.

This study was conducted at University Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS), Kuching, which is one of the public universities in Malaysia. UNIMAS was officially incorporated on 24th December 1992. There were eight faculties in UNIMAS. Currently, UNIMAS have student exchange agreement or understanding with 29 universities in 13 different countries (International Affairs Division, 2010). These

countries were Australia, Cambodia, Canada, China, Denmark, France, India, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Thailand, USA, and United Kingdom (International Affairs Division, 2010).

According to the Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education (2009), the statistics indicated that there was an increasing trend in the number of international students studying in UNIMAS from year 2008 to year 2009. In year 2008, there were only 35 international students studying in UNIMAS. However, in year 2009, the number of international students had increased to 48 students. Since the number of international students in UNIMAS was increasing, there was a need to study the factors that influence international students' degree of satisfaction with UNIMAS.

Student satisfaction is defined as “the student’s perceived value of his or her educational experiences at an educational institution” (Astin, 1993, cited in Bolliger & Wasilik, 2009, p. 104). In today’s competitive academic environment, international students’ satisfaction is a priority for the university. Kara, DeShields, and Kaynak (2005) stated that universities focused on fulfilling students’ changing demands and expectations in order to maintain their high level of satisfaction with the universities. Butt and Rehman (2010) stated that universities provided quality education and positive environment for their students to enhance their satisfaction and retention. Based on students’ viewpoint, better learning opportunities were provided by good quality education for students to increase their academic performance (Aldridge & Rowley, 1998). Aldridge and Rowley (1998) suggested that students’ success or failure of learning was highly influenced by their level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Thus, students’ satisfaction was strongly connected to their retention and loyalty with the university (Helgesen & Nasset, 2007).

A study done by Abadi (2000) on international students’ satisfaction towards Oklahoma State University reported that majority of international students were satisfied with their academic experience at their university. Several researchers had

stated that students' satisfaction was associated with their academic success and retention as well as their academic performance (Helgesen & Nettet, 2007). One of the most important variables in measuring students' satisfaction with their academic experience was academic performance in terms of cumulative GPA or expected semester GPA (Aitken, 1982). International students' English language ability and their study skills might also affect their academic performance (Stoynoff, 1997).

Irungu (2010) described the campus environment as all the conditions and influences including physical and social factors that affected the development of all the individuals who stayed in it. The social conditions were indicated by the interactions between individuals while the physical conditions included the facilities, size, and location of the campus (Irungu, 2010). Students' perceptions toward campus environment were important since it would directly contribute to the efforts they put forth which might influence their satisfaction (Kuh & Hu, 2001). One of the examples of campus environment was campus living environment such as students' accommodation (Normazalila Binti Abu Bakar & Nor Mazlina Binti Abu Bakart, 2008). A research conducted by Roslina Binti Abdullah (2009) on students' satisfaction towards the services provided by University Utara Malaysia (UUM) indicated that majority of the students were satisfied with the facilities provided by the university, including campus accommodation. Bekurs (2007) found that campus accommodation had a positive influence on international students' satisfaction towards their university. Good accommodation facilities and services assisted students to attain intellectual competence as well as to gain their living experience (Roslina Binti Abdullah, 2009).

Developing meaningful interpersonal relationships with others had a significant effect on international students' satisfaction (Irungu, 2010). This helped the international students to work with others cooperatively and effectively in accomplishing a given task. Apart from interpersonal relationships with others, communication abilities would also have significant impacts on international students' academic achievement

(Halawah, 2006). Researchers had found that students' satisfaction with their university was influenced by students' interactions with faculty and peers (Eimers & Pike, 1997). Students' interactions with faculty influenced their satisfaction with university as well as positively affected their intellectual and personal growth and academic experiences (Lamport, 1993). Administrative personnel and faculty members were encouraged to facilitate student-faculty interaction (Halawah, 2006).

Thus, understanding international students' satisfaction was essential because students' satisfaction was directly associated with their performance and productivity as well as their loyalty and retention with the university (Bolliger & Wasilik, 2009). The main purpose of this study was to identify the factors that influence international students' satisfaction level with UNIMAS. These factors included academic experience, campus environment experience and interpersonal relationships experience.

1.2 Problem Statement

According to Wan, Chapman and Biggs (1992), international students always had high level of stress with their academic experiences as they realized that their academic demands were heavy. In addition, instructor-student interaction was often fast-paced and their academic and social support mechanisms were not readily available to them compared to their local classmates (Wan et al., 1992). These academic problems, including language difficulties, lack of understanding in new educational system, and difficulty with academic tasks such as writing assignments, would influence their academic experiences. In this regard, academic experience was related to the satisfaction of the international students.

Campus environment experience was another factor that might influence the satisfaction of the international students. With better campus environment, the level of satisfaction of the international students was reported to be higher. Grebennikov

and Skaines's (2007) study indicated that overseas students at the University of Western Sydney (UWS) were significantly less satisfied with course outcomes, provision of various facilities and resources, and services provided. The findings of their study indicated that access to sport facilities and public transport were not viewed as satisfactory by the international students. Furthermore, provision of shops and news agencies, sport and fitness facilities, and sport activities and programs failed to satisfy the international students. However, there were relatively few empirical studies conducted to examine the campus environment. Hence, there was a need to conduct more studies on students' satisfaction based on campus environment.

Cotten and Wilson's (2006) study revealed that international students had limited social interactions with faculty members outside the classroom, and they also did not realize the importance of interactions with faculty members. There were limited frequent and quality student-faculty interactions (Cotten & Wilson, 2006). Students who tended to experience more difficulties in interpersonal relationships with other students would affect their ability to make friends and build close relationships with other students (Arslan, Hamarta, Ure, & Ozyesil, 2010). In fact, Zhao, Kuh, and Carini (2005) reported that relatively little was known about the extent to which international students were satisfied with their educational experience, peer and student-faculty interactions, and participate actively in various meaningful educational activities.

Demographic factors, which referred to the background of international students such as gender, age, country of origin, English ability, and faculty, were not central to many researches carried out on international students' satisfaction. Selected demographic factors investigated in this study included age, gender, country of origin, English ability, and faculty. According to Trice (2004), the difficulties with English language ability might cause international students to have a number of negative outcomes, such as facing difficulties in their academic experiences and social interactions with other people (Nicholson, 2001). However, Azleen Ilias,

Hishamuddin Fitri Abu Hasan, Rahida Abd Rahman and Mohd Rushdan bin Yaso'a's (2008) study had indicated that some selected demographic factors, including age and gender, did not play important role in measuring the level of student satisfaction. Therefore, more studies were needed on how demographic factors affected students' satisfaction in order to have a more accurate picture of the effects of these variables.

In general, a search of the "Perpun Portal" and "Malaysian Theses Online" website check showed that there was a lack of research in areas of international students' satisfaction because international students were relatively new phenomena in Malaysian tertiary institutions. Therefore, this study intended to identify whether there were differences in international students' level of satisfaction with UNIMAS based on selected demographic factors, including age, gender, age, country of origin, English ability, and faculty. The present study also aimed to determine the relationships between international students' level of satisfaction with UNIMAS and their academic experiences, campus environment experiences and interpersonal relationships experiences.

1.3 Research Objectives

The main objective of this study was to identify the factors influencing international students' satisfaction with University Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS). The specific objectives of this study were to:

1. Determine the international students' level of satisfaction with UNIMAS,
2. Identify differences in international students' level of satisfaction with UNIMAS based on gender,
3. Identify differences in international students' level of satisfaction with UNIMAS based on age,
4. Identify differences in international students' level of satisfaction with UNIMAS based on country of origin,

5. Identify differences in international students' level of satisfaction with UNIMAS based on English ability,
6. Identify differences in international students' level of satisfaction with UNIMAS based on faculty,
7. Determine the relationships between international students' level of satisfaction with UNIMAS and their academic experience,
8. Determine the relationships between international students' level of satisfaction with UNIMAS and their campus environment experience, and
9. Determine the relationships between international students' level of satisfaction with UNIMAS and their interpersonal relationships experience.

1.4 Research Questions

Based on the research objectives stated in section 1.3, this study aimed to explore the questions as follows:

1. What was the international students' level of satisfaction with UNIMAS?
2. Were there differences in international students' level of satisfaction with UNIMAS based on gender?
3. Were there differences in international students' level of satisfaction with UNIMAS based on age?
4. Were there differences in international students' level of satisfaction with UNIMAS based on country of origin?
5. Were there differences in international students' level of satisfaction with UNIMAS based on English ability?
6. Were there differences in international students' level of satisfaction with UNIMAS based on faculty?
7. Was there a relationship between international students' level of satisfaction with UNIMAS and their academic experience?

8. Was there a relationship between international students' level of satisfaction with UNIMAS and their campus environment experience? and
9. Was there a relationship between international students' level of satisfaction with UNIMAS and their interpersonal relationships experience?

1.5 Research Hypotheses

Based on the research questions, the research hypotheses were written as null hypotheses in this study. The null hypotheses to be investigated in this study were stated as follows:

- H₀1: There were no differences in international students' level of satisfaction with UNIMAS based on gender,
- H₀2: There were no differences in international students' level of satisfaction with UNIMAS based on age,
- H₀3: There were no differences in international students' level of satisfaction with UNIMAS based on country of origin,
- H₀4: There were no differences in international students' level of satisfaction with UNIMAS based on English ability,
- H₀5: There were no differences in international students' level of satisfaction with UNIMAS based on faculty,
- H₀6: There was no relationship between international students' level of satisfaction with UNIMAS and their academic experience,
- H₀7: There was no relationship between international students' level of satisfaction with UNIMAS and their campus environment experience, and

H₀8: There was no relationship between international students' level of satisfaction with UNIMAS and their interpersonal relationships experience.

1.6 Research Framework

The research framework of the study was formed to illustrate the factors that were hypothesized to influence the international students' level of satisfaction with University Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS) as shown in Figure 1.1. The dependent variable of this study was the international students' satisfaction with University Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS) while the independent variables of this study were the academic experiences, campus environment experiences, interpersonal relationships experiences, and demographic variables of the respondents, such as gender, age, country of origin, English ability, and faculty.

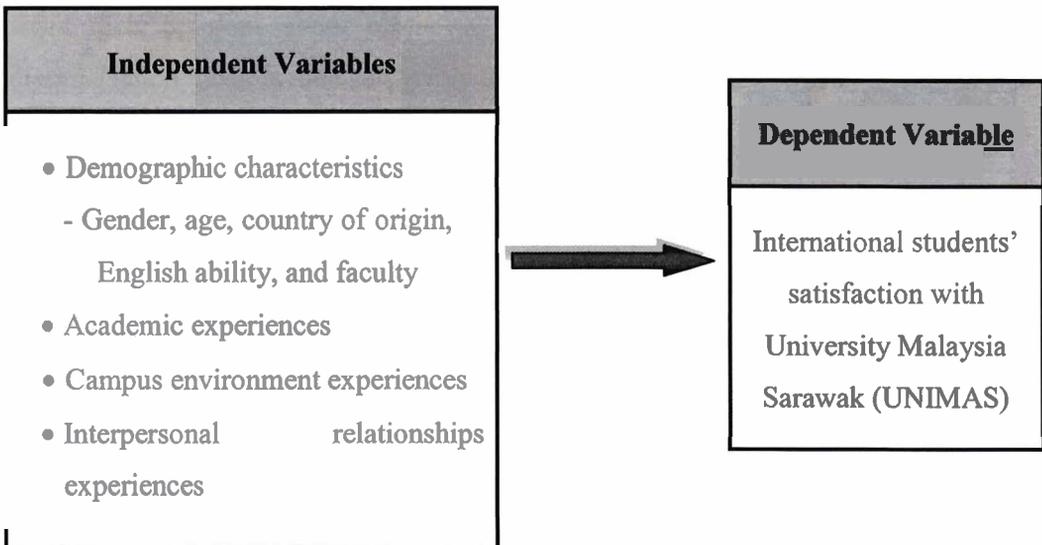


Figure 1.1: Research Framework of the Study