

**CATEGORIES OF PROBLEMS AMONG INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN
A HIGHER LEARNING INSTITUTION IN MALAYSIA**

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**CATEGORIES OF PROBLEMS AMONG INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN
A HIGHER LEARNING INSTITUTION IN MALAYSIA**

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To my beloved family specially my mother and father

To my respected supervisor

To my friends

Thank you for all the support, sacrifices, encouragement and motivation

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ABSTRACT

This study intended to identify the most disturbing categories of problems, most disturbing items in categories and most disturbing items in categories of problems related to demographic specifications (gender and country of origin) among international students at Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) international campus. Totally 135 international students were selected using multiple sampling (stratified and systematic sampling). In order to answer the research questions of the study exploratory mixed method (questionnaire and interview) were used. Shafeq Problems Check List (SPCL) was utilized in quantitative approach and semi-structured interview was used in qualitative approach. The collected data was analyzed using Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS for Windows v. 15) and statistical techniques (frequency and percentage). Pareto's Principle was used to identify the most disturbing categories and items in each category of problems. This study was identified 232 items in 11 categories of problems among international students at UTM. The categories of problems comprised health, finance, social and recreational, social psychological relation, personal relationship, marriage, family, moral and religious, adapting to academic work, future career adapting and curriculum and teaching method. The results of the study showed that the most disturbing categories of problems among international students in UTM were Social and Recreational Problems by 19%, and Curriculum and Method of Teaching Problems by 12%. The most disturbing items in categories of problems were also discussed. Recommendations and limitations of the study were also discussed.

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini dijalankan untuk mengenal pasti kategori masalah, masalah yang paling kritikal diantara kategori masalah dan mengenalpasti masalah yang mempunyai hubungan dengan latar belakang yang memfokuskan kepada jantina dan asal responden kajian. Seramai 135 orang pelajar antarabangsa telah dipilih secara persampelan pelbagai (rawak berlapis dan rawak bersistematik). Kajian ini menggunakan kaedah soal selidik dan temubual bagi menjawab persoalan kajian. Instrumen kajian yang digunakan untuk mengukur kategori masalah ialah Shafeq Problem Check List (SPCL) untuk pendekatan kuantitatif. Manakala temubual digunakan untuk pendekatan kualitatif. Data yang diperolehi dianalisis secara deskriptif menggunakan Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS for Windows v. 15) dan teknik-teknik statistik seperti frekuensi dan peratusan digunakan. Pareto's Principle digunakan untuk mengenal pasti item yang paling mengganggu dari 11 kategori masalah. Hasil kajian ini mendapati 232 item dalam 11 kategori masalah dalam kalangan pelajar antarabangsa di UTM. Kategori masalah tersebut adalah masalah kesihatan, kewangan, kegiatan sosial dan rekreasi, hubungan sosial psikologi, masalah peribadi, perkahwinan, keluarga, moral dan agama, persekitaran akademik, kerjaya dan cara pembelajaran. Dapatan kajian ini mendapati bahawa masalah yang paling mengganggu responden adalah kegiatan sosial dan rekreasi 19%, dan masalah kurikulum dalam cara pembelajaran 12%. Selain itu, masalah yang kritikal dalam kategori, implikasi dan cadangan untuk kajian seterusnya juga diperbincangkan.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

| | | |
|------|---|--|
| UTM | - | Universiti Teknologi Malaysia |
| KL | - | Kuala Lumpur |
| SPCL | - | Shafeq Problem Check List (2008) |
| ISC | - | International Student Center |
| PKK | - | Pusat Kanseling dan Kerjaya (UTM counseling center) |

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Recent developments in Malaysia induce the whole country structure to focus on becoming a knowledge-based economy. In other word, Education in Malaysia is one of the growing industries. Malaysia seeks to achieve the goal of becoming a developed nation by the year 2020 and thus, it needs to create a better educated and highly skilled population. It offers a variety of higher educational programs as well as professional and specialized specialty courses that are competitively priced and have excellent quality (Hassan, 2006).

Malaysia is extremely conducive to study (Oxford, 2010; SEGI, 2010). The increasing number of students who attend universities in Malaysia and professional programs can show the importance of education in this country. Mohamed Khaled Nordin, Minister of Higher Education says *“our universities task is to ensure that they are able to produce the best graduates who not only meet the needs of industry but also of the nation. We are in a global world and Malaysia wants to be a global player. We need to share knowledge and need collaboration worldwide. So, our role is to produce the type of graduate that can fit into all these things”* (Oxford, 2010). Currently Malaysian institutions of higher education are attracting international students from various countries. There are more than 90,000 international students currently studying in the institutions of higher learning in Malaysia (Abdullah, 2009; Yusliza, 2010; Yusliza & Chelliah, 2010). Based on Immigration Department records, the highest number of international students related to Indonesia (14,359), China (11,628), Nigeria (6,765) and Iran (6,514) (Yusliza & Chelliah, 2010). These international students have been deployed in various Universities in Malaysia such as Universiti Malaya (UM), Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM), Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) and Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM).

Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) is one of the competitive universities that can show the growing of education in Malaysia. It is located in Johor Bahru, which is the second largest public university after University Putra Malaysia (UPM) and its other campus is located in Kuala Lumpur, capital city of Malaysia. There are more than 15,000 full-time undergraduate students at UTM and more than 6,000 enrolled on distance learning programs as part-time students. In addition, there are about 8,000 postgraduate students in various fields of specialization who are from different parts of the world (InkMalaysia, 2010; UTM, 2011).

The world is kept on changing and nothing is permanent (Chandra, 2010). The life is full of changes and transformation (Chandra, 2010; Gisbon, 2011). Therefore, change is the entity of life and this is obvious that people face challenges during every stage of their life (Chandra, 2010). These changes can be well known when entering higher level of education especially when the individuals seek knowledge in a place other than their homelands. This transition creates complex challenges as students involve to their new academic and social environments. The period of studying in university is a transition from parental dependent life to a free and independent. Students which their behaviors due to their believe system that was under the influence of family living style and relation with parents, may alter with the host country's characteristics such as changing in food, and facilities (Sovic, 2009). Furthermore, international students come from various countries with different languages, climate and culture backgrounds (G. Lin & Yi, 1997; Mahmud, Amat, Rahman, & Ishak, 2010). Changes in students' new life make them confront various problems that may never be seen while staying with their family in their motherlands. Therefore, if their problems be handled in a right and sensible way, the students come to maturity.

International students in UTM just like other international students who study in countries other than their own face different problems. Although, UTM provides modern equipments, technologies and facilities, these factors cannot solve all the international students' problems. Thus, one of UTM main roles is to know the problems among students to facilitate adjustment and educational progress. Consequently, the major purpose of this research is to identify most disturbing categories of problems and most disturbing items in categories and also to identify most disturbing items in terms of demographic specifications (gender and country of origin) among international students in UTM that gives increasing number of admissions to the students from different nations each year.

1.2 Background of the Study

Malaysia has about 600 higher education institutions – include community colleges to public universities, with so many higher education institutions, which offer different programs and embed so many local and international students (Insider, 2008). Therefore, it is important to pay attention to students' population, especially international students who come to continue their education in Malaysian universities which enroll more and more of them every year.

The reasons why international students pursue their studies overseas are well known. They include the chance to learn new ways of thinking and behaving, explore a different culture, improve their cross-cultural knowledge and skills and also make new friends (Andrade, 2006; Sovic, 2009). International students develop new outlooks and increase their confidence and self-esteem, as a result of their new independent life experiences in different culture (Sherry, Thomas, & Chui, 2010). International students play an important role in improving the rank of university in the world. Most of the high ranked universities around the world have a considerable fraction of students from other countries. It makes possible the communication between students, makes them energetic, improves understanding and experience sharing among students from different cultures with different ethnic backgrounds (Lebcir, Wells, & Bond, 2008).

It is clear that international students may face challenges because they come from different countries with different culture, climate, food and languages backgrounds (G. Lin & Yi, 1997; Mahmud, et al., 2010). Therefore, neglecting the problems among international students causes so many consequences. Travelling and living abroad implies discovering new horizons where old and new blend going, avoiding perils, unearthing customs through secretive language, exploring one's resources, pioneering new methods and strategies to negotiate the unexpected, trying out potential identities, and all the time learning (Gill, 2007). Related researches

make clear the background of problems among international students. Students face different problems such as health problems, family problems, emotional problems, academic problems and so on. These problems due to the situation and believe system which shape their attitudes are different (G. Lin & Yi, 1997; Mahmud, et al., 2010). Problems faced by international students are mostly cultural, social, academic, financial and emotional or personal problems which make their adjustment difficult (Hus, 2003; Russell, Thomson, & Rosenthal, 2008; Sovic, 2009). Lack of proficiency in English language among international students can result in communication problems (Lebcir, et al., 2008; Lui, 2009; Sandhu, 1994; Yeh & Inose, 2002). Also, lack of social support can result psychological and homesickness or social isolation (Andrade, 2006; Lui, 2009; Sandhu, 1994; Yusliza & Chelliah, 2010). Based on Sandhu (1994), students may face problems which can be classified in two categories: Intrapersonal factor and Interpersonal factor. As a result of the problems related to these factors students may feel sense of loss, sense of inferiority, sense of uncertainty about future, communication problem, cultural shock, and loss of social support. Based on Sherry, et al., (2010), not paying attention to the needs and adjustments of the international students cause students to feel unfulfilled, disappointed, and even exploited. Further, the satisfaction level in students' life will decrease and cause to psychological symptoms such as feelings of inferiority, confusion, home sickness, loneliness, anxiety anger, isolation, lost of identities, insomnia, low motivation, not being able to focus and lacking in self confidence (Mahmud, et al., 2010).

By identifying the different problems among international students, the area of problems among international students in UTM can be known in order to help the students and the university to consider the problems. Being aware of the problems on one hand, improves the situation for international students in UTM, and on the other hand, improves the performance and the ranking of UTM among other universities.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Based on the stated evidence and background, international students are facing different problems during their studying period. International students in UTM are not different from other international students and they may face different problems.

Understanding international student problems has global implications for intercultural education (Andrade, 2006) and also these problems cause different complications in students life. Previous studies considered problems among international students but did not cover all of the problems scientifically. Besides, there are not any conducted studies with this target in KL campus of UTM. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to identify the most disturbing categories of problems and items in categories and also most disturbing items in categories of problems in terms of demographic specifications (gender and country of origin) among international students in UTM. Hence, in this research, Shafeq Problem Check List (SPCL) was utilized as the basic quantitative research method for the first time to identify the problems among international students of UTM, and in order to gain a closer insight and covering all the problems, interviews conducted as qualitative research method. Also, in order to identify most disturbing categories of problems and items among international students in UTM, Pareto Principle was used for the first time.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of this research were as follows:

- 1.4.1 To identify the most disturbing categories of problems among international postgraduate students in UTM international campus.
- 1.4.2 To identify the most disturbing items in categories of problems among international postgraduate students in UTM international campus.
- 1.4.3 To identify the most disturbing items in categories of problems among international postgraduate students in terms of demographic specifications (gender and country of origin) in UTM international campus.

1.5 Research Questions

This research attempted to answer the following questions:

- 1.5.1 What are the most disturbing categories of problems among international postgraduate students in UTM international campus?

- 1.5.2 What are the most disturbing items in categories of problems among international postgraduate students in UTM international campus?

- 1.5.3 What are the most disturbing items in categories of problems among international postgraduate students in terms of demographic specifications (gender and country of origin) in UTM international campus?

1.6 Significance of the Study

This study with making use of the power of exploratory mixed method research attempted to identify the different problems that the international students in UTM encounter during their studies. The considered problems were in the field of health, financial, recreational, psychological social relation, emotional, marriage and sexual, family, moral and religious, academic work, future career and curriculum problems explicitly and clearly. The finding of this research would be beneficial for:

1.6.1 University

The results of current research have the potential to open a new outlook on the issues of international students for the International Student Center (ISC). Being aware of the problems which the nonlocal students may encounter can be lead to better handling and resolving the difficulties. ISC may be more able to manage ethnographic university by providing quality in campus services based on students' needs and requirements such as better services in counseling clinic or students health center.

Moreover, the School of Postgraduate Studies (SPS) can provide more competent and satisfactory official services after being informed about the international students' problems and difficulties.

In addition, the findings of this research can be useful for the university administration to alleviate the problems faced by students and by designing suitable programs or activities within possible limits based on students' needs to facilitate their educational progress.

1.6.2 Students

This research can provide valuable information for students who are studying in UTM to devise solutions to overcome the problems.

The results of this study are also informatively valuable for students who are planning to continue their studies in UTM as well as whom planning to study oversea to gain insight about the international students' problems and get ready to accept the new conditions.

1.6.3 Body of Knowledge

In view of the fact that there is not enough literature about the categories of problems faced by international students, this research provides additional literature in this research area.

1.7 Scope of the Study

In order to identify the different problems faced by the students who study in oversea universities, this research focused on international students in Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) international campus. It should be mentioned that postgraduate level was only taken into account.

The data from this scope was obtained by utilizing a mixed method research methodology (SPCL and interview). Therefore, the reliability and validity of the results largely depended on the honesty and trusty of the respondents.

1.8 Conceptual Framework of the Study

Figure 1.1 clearly illustrates the purpose which going to identify problems faced by international students in UTM.

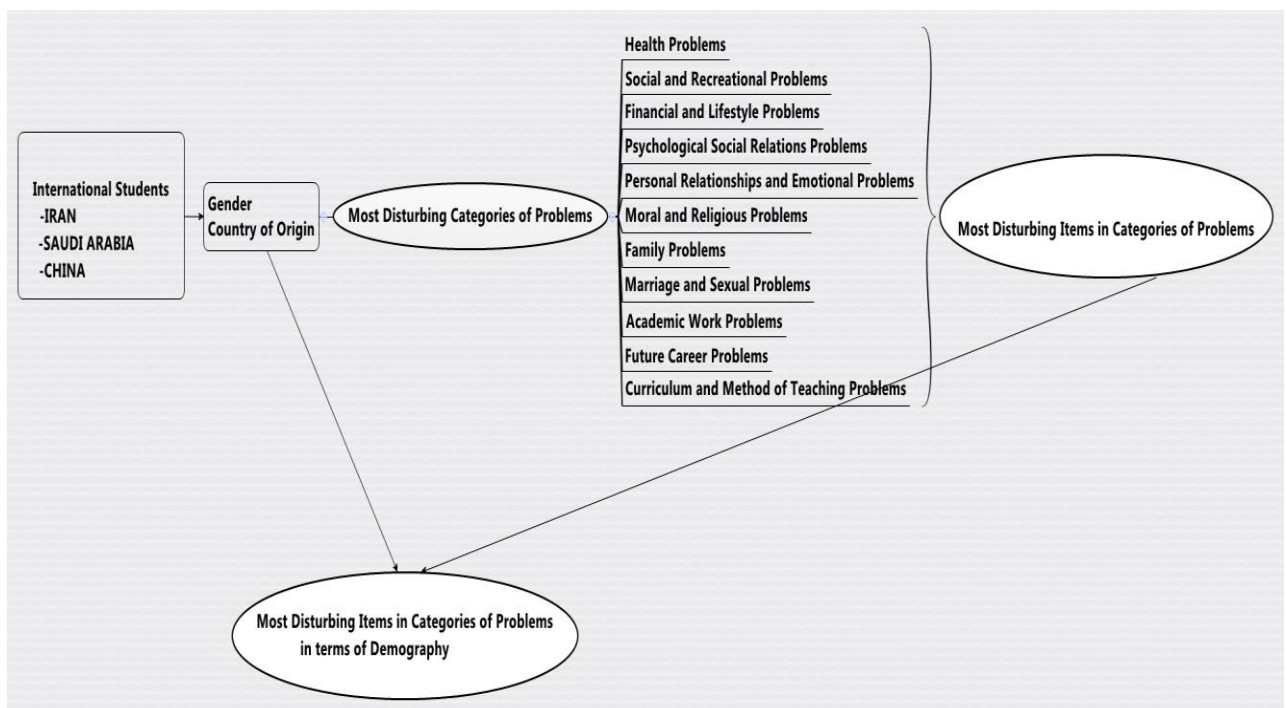


Figure 1.1: Conceptual Framework of the Study

In this research the sample was selected from postgraduate international students (master level) from countries with the highest population in UTM. These countries were: Iran, Saudi Arabia, and China. Demographic specifications (independents variables) in this research were gender (male and female) and country of origin (Iran, Saudi Arabia and China). Based on SPCL, the problems are divided in to 11 categories (dependents variables) as bellow:

1. Health Related Problems
2. Financial, Lifestyle and Career Related Problems
3. Social and Recreational Problems
4. Psychological Social Relations Problems
5. Personal Relationships and Emotional Problems
6. Marriage and Sexual Problems
7. Family Problems
8. Morals and Religious Problems
9. Adapting to Academic Work Problems
10. Future Career Adapting Problems
11. Curriculum and Method of Teaching Problems

There were 11 categories in the questionnaire. Each category had different number of items that the participants had to choose either “Yes” if applicable or “No” if does not applicable, for each. The first category was “Health Related Problems” with sixteen items. The Second category involved 22 items regarding “Financial, Lifestyle and Career Problem”. The third category was “Social and Recreational Problems” with 40 subcategories. The fourth one was “Psychological Social Relations problems” that involved 24 items in this regard. The fifth category was “Personal Relationships and Emotional Problems” with 23 items. The next category investigated “Marriage and Sexual Problems with 23 items. The seventh category tried to seek the problems related to “Family”. In “Family Problem” category there were 14 items. The eighth category was “Moral and Religious Problems” which seeks understanding of this area with 15 subcategories. The ninth category of concern was “Adapting to Academic Work Problems”. This category made use of 26 items to gain insight of this issue. Next category was “Future Career Adapting Problems” with 18 items of investigation. And the last category was “Curriculum and Methods of Teaching Problems” with 24 subcategories.

The findings of this research were obtained from exploratory mixed method (SPCL and interview) to identify the most disturbing categories of problems, to discern the most disturbing items among international postgraduate students in UTM and also to gain a clear understanding of differences between problems of investigated categories based on demographic specifications (gender and country of origin).

The findings can be useful for both students and university to become conscious of the existent problems. Due to the fact that UTM strives to enrich the students' educational experience and struggle to be one of the competitive universities in Malaysia by giving admission to increasing day-by-day international students, the results of this study may help its administration to tackle the problems. The ultimate outcome of this research may lead to better decision making in planning, managing and sustaining the issues related to international students.

1.9 Conceptual and Operational Definitions

There are several terms which were used in this study that need to be explained. These terms are: problem, international students, UTM, international campus.

1.9.1 Conceptual Definitions

Conceptual definitions refer to the elements of the research process, in which a specific concept is defined as a measurable occurrence.

1.9.1.1 Problem: In this research, problems refer to the factors that faced by international students (Health Problems, Financial and Lifestyle Problems, Social and Recreational Problems, Psychological Social Relations Problems, Personal Relationships and Emotional Problems, Marriage and Sexual Problems, Family Problems, Morals and Religious Problems, Academic Work Problems, Future Career Problems, Curriculum and Method of Teaching Problems (Shafeq, 2008)).

1.9.1.2 International Students: In this study international students refer to students who study in UTM and come from overseas countries, how has the most 3 biggest populations such as Iran, Saudi Arabia, and China.

1.9.1.3 UTM: In this research, UTM refers to Universiti Teknologi Malaysia as a public university in Malaysia.

1.9.1.4 International campus: In this study, international campus refers to UTM campus which is located in Kuala Lumpur.

1.9.2 Operational Definitions

It is important to gain a contextual understanding of operational definitions of terms that formed the foundation for this research. Thus, this section provides the definitions of widely used concepts in this study.

1.9.2.1 Problem: Problem is an obstacle, impediment, difficulty or challenge which needs attention (Longman, 2009).

1.9.2.2 International Students: According to Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) International students are those who travel to a country different from their own for the purpose of tertiary study (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_student).

1.9.2.3 UTM: UTM is the acronym of Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, the oldest public international technology university in Malaysia.

1.9.2.4 International campus: A university which gives admission to students from different nations.

1.10 Conclusion

This chapter presented a brief explanation of the research. As international students from a large group in UTM which can affect the university progress, the objectives of this research are to identify most disturbing categories of problems, most disturbing items in categories and also most disturbing items in terms of demographic specifications (gender and country of origin) faced by international students in UTM international campus based on SPCL and interview. The sample was selected from postgraduate international students who come from different countries. The significant of this research is for university administration, student and body of knowledge to raise their awareness about international students' problems and to proceed with upgrading the qualification of the university.

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