Culture Shock for Arab Postgraduate Students at the National University of Malaysia (UKM): "A Case Study"

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Abstract: **This study concentrates on examining the challenges of international students, particularly for postgraduate's students. This study aims to contribute to our understanding of what comprises adjustment, using the experience of a group of international postgraduate students to describe and define the initial stage of the stopover.**

The limited narrative and clarity on what adjustment means, as the structure was highlighted and measured in different ways and from different perspectives and different models. When international students attend universities with a different culture than their own, they have to deal with new educational and social organizations behaviors and expectations, and adjustment challenges which they are common to students in general.

This study uses a qualitative method. All participants were Muslim, one participant has a family member with him in Malaysia, and other participants were not, two of the participant were married and had children, other participants were single. The findings of this study shown that there's a different level for Arab postgraduate student in adjustment with Malaysia culture; it also depends on the region of participating in the Arab world. All of the participantsagree that both culturesare very similar with few differences. This study suggested that the future studies my further study the international students in general rather than the Arabs.

Keywords: **Arab, Culture, Postgraduate, Shock, Students, The National University of Malaysia (UKM), University.**

I. INTRODUCTION

This study focuses and explains the challenges of the international students, particularly for Arab students. Every year many Arab leave their homes and families and come to Malaysia for studying purposes, a rapidlygrowing number of Arab postgraduate students came to Malaysian universities in the last few years.

The Interested in studying in Malaysia for Arab postgraduate student come from many reasons, but the most important reason that Malaysia is an Islamic state. The notable increasing growth of Arab and other nationalities of Middle East students in Malaysia started a few years after the event of "9/11" in 2001(Al-Zubaidi & Rechards, 2010). Living in a foreign country where Islam is a minority religion and culture is categorically different entails a lot of adjustments (Abunab, Dator, Salvador, & Lacanaria, 2017).

The Most of the international students originated from Southeast Asia, Middle Eastern countries, Middle Asia, and African countries, and a minimal number from Europe(Mahmud, Amat, Rahman, & Ishak, 2010).

The Culture shock is a global phenomenon, it may take a short time or a long time to develop, and it affects students and people living far from their home countries. The Culture shock is not in that basically being unfamiliar with new social habits, traditions, and norms or experiencing a new language, foods, and weather, it tends to impact students and people even after they've become familiar with and comfortable in new cultures or the new environment.

Culture shock normally classified for three different phases: honeymoon, negotiations, adjustment, and acceptance. While students experience these four phases differently and the influence of each phase varies widely from another:

Honeymoon Phase.

The students in this phase will accept the differences between the new culture and the original culture from a positive romantic perspective, enjoy exploring the new types of food, indulge in the new life of style, and accept the personal habits of his new society fully. This phase, as in the usual honeymoon, ends in a matter of weeks or a few months.

The Frustration and compromise Phase:

It explains the of dissimilarities between the old and new cultures in a clear and thoughtful way, reducing of the degree of enthusiasm and enjoyment of the new culture, a feeling of frustration, anxiety, and perhaps even anger is generated, as a result of being exposed to different experiences. This feeling often results from language barriers and other reasons. At times, the Arab student becomes isolated in this stage and thinking deeply.

The Arabs it a little bit easy to skip the language barriers, when international students are involved, especially for postgraduate programs, English and Arabic are used, depending on the nature and needs of their studies(Mahmud et al., 2010). On top of that there are similar words between Arabic language vocabulary words and the Bahasa Melayu words due to the Bahasa Melayu adopted a few words that originated in Arabic language. These vocabulary similarities somehow ease the difficulties for the Arab students to communicate with the local Malay people. Although, that was not enough for the Arab students, to overcome the issues of the culture shock in Malaysia.

Adjustment phase:

It often began after six or twelve months; students become more familiar with the general aspects of the new culture, able to deal with it properly from the new cultural perspective, integrate and engage better. A few factors are found to help International students better adjust. These include familiarity and similarity of culture, language ability, and efficient services at the institution(Mahmud et al., 2010).

Acceptance Phase:

This study realizes the ethical standards and the nature of social interactions of a new culture, adopting new standards according to the acceptable attitude or the behavior in the new Malay community. The International students divided into three categories in terms of culture shock: Rejecter, adaptor, cosmopolitan.

(Research Problem):

All Arab postgraduate students face culture shock in Malaysia, the influence of culture shock may extend to their academic performance and the degree of culture adjustment, that causes harmful feeling toward deciding whether continuing study or come back to their home country.

Research Gap

Moving into a new environment was considered one of the most stressful events in a person's life, as a certain degree of culture shock is inevitable in most visitors. The culture shock was referred to as anxiety resulting from the loss of familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse and their replacement with other strange indications (Hall, 1959). However, Limited narrative and clarity on what adjustment means, as the structure was highlighted and measured in different ways and from different perspectives and different models (Ward & Kennedy, 1999). When international students attend universities with a different culture than their own, they have to deal with new educational and social organizations, behaviors and expectations, and adjustment challenges which they are common to students in general.

Nevertheless, this challenge was clear when the new arrivals are unaware of the conflict in advance and even difficult when they are unaware and mistakenly imagines that the new culture works like their home country.

In this sense, the quality of the psychological, sociocultural and educational experiences of this group of people is important. Many kinds of literature have been concerned with students' adaptation problems worldwide, but few studies of which we are aware of concentrate in the adjustment and adaptation faced by the postgraduate Arab student in Malaysia.

This study aims to contribute to our understanding of what comprises adjustment, using the experience of a group of international postgraduate students to describe and define the initial stage of the stopover. It is important that there is a clear understanding of the issues facing this particular group.

Research Questions:

1. What is the difference between studying in Malaysia and another country in term of a culture shock for Arab postgraduate students at the National University of Malaysia (UKM)?

2. How Arab postgraduate students at the National University of Malaysia (UKM) dealing with culture shock in Malaysia?

3. How may culture shock influence academic performance for Arab postgraduate students at the National University of Malaysia (UKM)?

Research Objectives:

1. To explore the culture shock main aspects for Arab postgraduate students at the National University of Malaysia (UKM) – Malaysia.

2. To identify the obstacles of adopting a new culture for Arab postgraduate students at the National University of Malaysia (UKM).

3. To analyse the relationship between culture shock and academic performance for Arab postgraduate students at the National University of Malaysia (UKM).

Purpose

This paper aims to explore the influencing of Arab postgraduate students at the National University of Malaysia (UKM) by culture shock in Malaysia and the influence of their academic performance.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Arab postgraduate student's worldwide

Most of the Arab students studying abroad normally shocked by new culture especially if it's the first experience of travelling. Worldwide, where some people who have Islamophobia especially from Arab, (Moufakkir, 2013) confirm media reports about the negative perceptions that the Dutch have about the Moroccan community in the Netherlands. These findings affected Arab postgraduate students when they decided to study abroad, and select countries have the same religion as Malaysia.

In another study, all of the participants agreed that they had experienced culture shock from day one and even up to present. Middle Eastern's culture completely differs from the Filipino's way of life in so many aspects (Abunab et al., 2017). This study confirms the lived experience of the Arab-Muslim students also implies that the Arab-Muslim students, no matter where they are, still suffer the stigma of being an Arab and a Muslim that has been plaguing them since ages.

A study conducted about a Cross-Cultural Comparison of Organizational Culture: Evidence from Universities in the Arab world and Japan, (Dedoussis, 2004) founded No clear-cut picture emerges regarding the impact that similarities in Arab and Japanese cultures have upon surface manifestations of organizational culture in the four universities.

In USA, a study to determine factors associated with a positive adjustment to studying in the U.S and identify the satisfaction of Arab Fulbright students with their study in the U.S (Al-Hattami & Al-Ahdal, 2014) results 58% of the

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student-respondents were satisfied in the matter of their personal experience; 55% respondents were generally in their overall social life.

For women, (Lefdahl-Davis & Perrone-McGovern, 2015) explore adjustment experiences of Saudi women students in the United States through Grounded Theory approach. The majority of Saudi women international students who were interviewed or surveyed did not experience "culture shock" or acculturative stress when they came to the United States, the most common explanations included the following: They had travelled before, they grew up in a way similar to U.S. Americans, or they already knew about the culture in the United States through other sources, such as family and friends, the media, or Internet.

In Canada, (Mostafa, 2006) explores the experiences of Arab Muslim graduate students in the University of Alberta (U of A) regarding cultural differences and adjustment, language difficulties, supervision, differences of study system, and funding. Reveal that although students experience some difficulties adjusting to Canadian society, the adjustment is made easier through their interaction with local Muslim communities and organizations such as mosques. Also, respondents indicate the multicultural nature of Canadian society is an asset that helps them in and out the campus.

Arab postgraduate student in Malaysia

In a study conducted undertaken into the perceptions and experiences of Arab postgraduate students at five Malaysian Universities: UM, UTM, UKM UPM, and IIUM, (Al-Zubaidi & Rechards, 2010) founded The main obstacles faced by Arab students in Malaysia is language barriers, academic challenge, and cultural barriers.

 In another study (Mahmud et al., 2010) to discusses the challenges experienced by International students in Malaysia, they founded Challenges Faced by International Students in Malaysia is culture, climate, and care.

This study examined the kindness strategies found in Arab postgraduate students' e-mails to their supervisors during their period of study at Malaysian universities, and interactions with intercultural experiences of Arab students in Malaysia, (Najeeb, Maros, & Nor, 2012) founded one of the most interesting findings is a new strategy used by the Arabs, which the researcher called 'over politeness strategy'. This strategy is due to the influence of Arabic expressions norms originated from the Arab culture. It is a strategy that has been in the Arabic language and culture. But, it does not work well for Malaysian culture.

As a result of culture shock and the resultant inability to adequately cope, Arab students are often considered to be lacking in autonomy and resourcefulness and unwilling to be accountable for their action (Meleis, 1982).

In terms of reverse culture shock, a study to assess the relationships between reverse culture shock and personal problems/concerns experienced at college, willingness to see a counselor with regard to the expressed concerns, and types of services used by overseas-experienced college students, (Gaw, 2000)   founded factor analysis produced a four-factor solution for the personal problems subscale. The factors were: personal adjustment, intimacy concerns, college adjustment, and shyness concerns.

III. METHODOLOGY

The case study was used to explore the Culture Shock for Arab Postgraduate Student at the National University of Malaysia (UKM) – Malaysia. Most of the participantsmeet the criteria of research founded in Bahasa Melayu classes that international students have to register during his first semester. This study asks our colleagues in the class to participate, which facilitate understanding of their response and reactions in preparing this study.

Participants

The exact number of Arab postgraduate students at the National University of Malaysia (UKM) is undefined. The students become from all Arab countries, which mean selecting nine participants based on the region students to come from as follows.

Participants are studying at the National University of Malaysia (UKM) in Malaysia for postgraduate level; they have been in Malaysia since one to sixteen month. All participants were Muslim, one participant has a family member with him in Malaysia, and other participants were not, two of the participant were married and had children, other participants were

single. The all of the interview participants, are planning to return to their countries after the completion of their studies. Male participants agree to record Audio during interviews whereas the female participants disagree.

Procedures

This study was conducted using a Qualitative interviews approach. The researchers are PhD students at The National University of Malaysia (UKM). The participants of this study have been in Malaysia for three months. The author's conducted with the participant's interviews during the current first semester (2018/2019) to answer the following questions:

1. What are the main cultural differences between Malaysia and your home country?

2. What are the main obstacles you face in Malaysian culture?

3. Do culture changes influence your academic performance?

4. What means to you being a student National University of Malaysia?

5. How can Arab postgraduate students at the National University of Malaysia (UKM) become more Malaysian cultural adjustment?

IV. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The data analysis was the beginning of the transcription of interviews, which was performed by researchers. Tow transcript was checked by the audio recording to ensure accuracy. The other interviews checked by a female participant who disagrees with recording audio to check accuracy. Researchers coded data.

The analysis of the participant's Interviews shows that there are different levels for Arab postgraduate student in adjustment with Malaysia culture; it also depends on the region of participating in the Arab world. All of the participantsagree that both culturesare very similar with few differences. One of the participants said:

"No more cultural differences Because All of us are Muslims, we have Islamic culture."

Climate

Many of the participant'sstudents said that the Malaysian climate affected them a lot. We found that the climate may affect them regarding a region of student they come from, for LEVANT region students agree that weather in Malaysia is very hot for them, but for Arab gulf participants and North Africa, they agree it's a little bit same.

One participant said:

Climate in Malaysia is hot, in my country in this season it's winter and very cold. I think no winter season in Malaysia. And also finding winter clothes are not available widely in Malaysia".

Language Barriers

Language Barriers was another theme of discussion and cause for feeling the effects of culture shock in the first and subsequent interviews. One of the participants said:

"It's possible to communicate with local people with the English language; a lot of people know English. And also I am happy to take Bahasa Melayu course this semester. I learned many Melayu words facilitate an understanding of the basic issue in my daily life in a different situation".

For instance, an international student who possess limited English speaking skills and who feel disconnected from their peers may experience heightened levels of interpersonal distress. Peer support can provide not only a sense of validation and inclusion for many international students but can also be a source of career-related information

Driving

Climate and language barriers are not the only dimensions of culture shock. The driving system found to be another difference during most of the interviews has been conducting. Most of the participants said they were shocked by driver seat on the right side, where it's in the left side in all participants' countries. One participant said:

In the first day for me in Malaysia, while I am crossing the road, I thought the cars would come from the left side. I scared when I saw the cars come from the right side…"Laughing".

Food

All of the participants agree that Malaysian food is different from their ones. One of the participants said:

It's very for me to eat from Malaysian food; it's very spicy and sweet.

Academic performance

No one of the participant's said that culture shock influences their academic performance. One participant said when we ask her about culture shock influence on her academic performance:

No, I feel here I have to depend on myself more to do my study.

Arab postgraduate student at National University in Malaysia of cultural adjustment

Cultural adjustment and the association of stress have long been considered significant issues affecting the experiences of international universities students who study abroad. Most of the Participants have argued that in addition to dealing with aspects associated with universities life such as financial burdens, academic pressures, and loneliness, they also deal with the challenges associated with adapting to the culture of the country. One of the interviewee sums up this theme:

"I think it's not easy to adopt Malaysia culture''.

Interpersonal relationship difficulties with Malaysian 'people often represent another factor that contributes to some international students' cultural adjustment. One participant described:

"If we can engage and communicate with them more and if they become more open to us and explain to us more about their culture we can be more aware of their culture and adapt with it "

V. CONCLUSION

Finally, the international postgraduate students in every country face a culture shock, which they must deal with to achieve successful completion of their studies and academic accreditation. The Most of the new Arab postgraduate students at National University of Malaysia, do not have a clear idea about culture shock, nevertheless the Arab students in Malaysia are exposed to views often different experiences from those in their home countries. Living in a different cultural context requires adaptation to the new cultural environment, to the learning of new languages, and also to different contexts of academic education.

This study identified the main differences between Arabs culture and Malaysian Culture through exploring culture shock for Arab postgraduate students at the National University of Malaysia (UKM), and the main obstacles and barriers in adopting Malaysian culture.

These Issues faced were ranked as follows: first, academic difficulties; second, languages difficulties; and third, cultural difficulties. The majority of the Arab students are Muslims similarly, as the Malaysian population. That may explain the lesser figure for cultural challenges. Despite, how many students did link cultural factors to their perception of academic challenges? This study suggested that the future studies my further study the international students in general rather than the Arabs.

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