

## INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' WITH SCHOLARSHIPS' ACADEMIC EXPERIENCES AT LINTON UNIVERSITY COLLEGE, MALAYSIA

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### **Abstract**

The rate at which most organizations and institutions of higher learning offered scholarship education to attract international students is becoming competitive among citizens of the developed and developing nations who seek to have international education experience for better career opportunities and development. The paper reports on the study conducted among a group of international students in Negeri Sembilan State, Malaysia. The objective of the study is to explore general academic experience of international students with scholarship. In-depth interviews were conducted among Petroleum Technology Development Fund (PTDF) scholarship students at Linton University College. The results revealed that majority of the participants are generally satisfied and are able to cope with the classroom teaching, host community, renewal of students' visa pass, academic adjustment and knowledge gained at Linton University College, Malaysia. Initiatives to improve international student academic experience studying abroad are recommended.

**Keywords:** International Students, Academic Experience, Malaysia

### **Introduction**

Challenges that emanates from globalization remain as one of the key factors why most government agencies and organizations offer scholarships to their citizens both at the local and international level. (Adekalu, Oludeyi, Genty & Wolo, 2013). Buttressing on this position, Skinner and Shenoy (2003) supported this claim with certain factors that lead students to seek for international education experience; these are categorized as push and pull factors. To these scholars, the push factor refers to those factors that contribute to students' decisions to seek higher education in countries other than their home countries which include poor educational systems, social discrimination, limited entry-level job opportunities, and a variety of political and economic factors. While on the other hand, the pull factor refers to incentives that attract international students toward certain host countries and can include scholarship availability, quality of the education system, political ties, cultural and linguistic similarities, and the hope that holding an international education credential will help for better lucrative opportunities careers.

The effort of Malaysia government under the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) to attract 200,000 international students by year 2020 will be a dream of reality when the existing international students have academic testimonies to share with the international communities in terms of the teaching and learning experience gained. On this vein, Chong & Amlı (2013) reported that, ranking of universities in term of quality of education, availabilities of technology, infrastructures development and rate of international students seeking for higher education experience among others are some of the key factors while Malaysia today, strive to have more international students in both private and public universities. Hence, international institutions/organizations partnership and cooperation have become a major national trend in most countries higher education sector (Bartram, 2007; Komives, & Woodard, et al., 2003).

International students, and their dependents, have proven to be an important constituency in higher education, with aim of bringing substantial revenues to host institutions and contributing significantly to their host countries' intellectual and cultural capital (Lee, 2007). In this regards, Komives (2003) further advised that, student affairs practitioners should increase their awareness and knowledge of international collaboration as part of their efforts to stay proactive in this ever changing and complex world of student academic experience.

Thus, this study was conducted to answer the research questions: First, to what extent do students with scholarship adjust to cope with classroom teaching, host community, renewal of students' visa pass during their stay in Malaysia? Second, to what extent does the whole academic experience gained by students has positive and negative impact on students' academic and non-academic development?

Although, there are substantial empirical studies that have been done in other countries with regards to international students and most of the research focused on a particular aspect of international students such as advising relationships or mental health issues (Aida Hafitah & Maimunah; 2007, Anh, 2010). Though, limited amount has only been done in Malaysia context in term of the experience of international students. Thus, the result of this study is important in order to add to the body of knowledge in academic industries. In addition, it is worthy to note that, this study only reflect the experiences of the international students with scholarships under the sponsorship of Petroleum Technology Development Fund (PTDF) at Linton University College Malaysia.

### **Literature Review**

There are substantial literatures on international students depending on the area and background of the researchers. Some literatures identified some problems encounter by international students which includes, loneliness, lack of support, few meaningful relationships with host nationals, culture shock, unfamiliar modes of teaching and learning, a changing sense of identity, unrealistic family and self-expectations, financial problems, crises at home, adverse experience in the host country, isolation, and alienation (Deakins, 2009; Hanassab, 2006; Klomegah, 2006; Leask, 2009; McClure, 2007; Mitchell et al., 2007; Neri & Ville, 2007; Rosenthal et al., 2008).

In this context, scholarship could be refer to as an award of financial aid given to student to further their education at the local and international level while the beneficiary that is privilege to be award scholarship based on selected criteria that reflect the values and purposes of the award can be referred to as scholarship student. Hence, studying abroad may give a different lifestyle and set of experience for most international students and it is on this note that, this study becomes imperative. The student academic experience can be defined as knowledge gained through experience obtained in an academic environment. In this regards, most students entering a tertiary environment for the first time undergo a period of transition; this experience is heightened for international students (Guilfoyle, 2004; Burns, 1991).

However, Pires, et al. (2006) link the themes of social support and cultural identity in their research, that ethnic communities in a host culture play a valuable role in aiding the transition experience. Bandura (2007) further supported that, student success is more likely to take place when students believe that their individual effort matters, that is, when they believe they can exert significant influence or control over their academic and personal success. Meanwhile, student success is more probable when students find meaning or purpose in their college academic experience, that is, when students perceive relevant connections between what they are learning in college and their current life or future goals. Though, factor like lack of personal goals for the college experience may stand irrelevance in term of the teaching method and curriculum (Noel, 1985; Levitz & Noel, 1989).

Also, past research shows that, student involvement outside the classroom is potent predictor of student retention. For example, students who communicate effective with the academic and non-staff of the college may more be likely to persist to college experience suitable and memorable (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005). Most time, due to cultural difference both in academic and social aspect some international students may experience being alien (Banumathy & Vikneswaran, 2008; Hooley & Horspool, 2006). This may make students to have proper orientations at the beginning of their studies in other to cope with life experience to become successful when engaging in rethinking of what they are learning compared with their previous experience.

### **Research Methodology and Participants Location**

In this study, data were gathered involving face-to-face in-depth interview with a total 6 participants through semi-structure interview among undergraduate Petroleum Technology Development Fund (PTDF) scholarships International students at Linton University College. The number of participants was determined until the study reached its saturation points. The participants age range between 19 to 30 years. The interviews were facilitated through the use of voice recorder and writing materials and the data were further categorised and analysis until a set

themes is derived. The study interviews were taken in participants' campus hostels at Linton University College, Mantin, Negeri Sembilan State, Malaysia. Below is the profile of the participants;

#### Profile of Participants

Informants	Gender	Course of Study	Duration of Stay
Bashir	Male	Software Engineering	1 year and 7 months
Ngonabo	Female	Business Information Systems	1 year and 5 months
Jephter	Male	Civil Engineering	1 year and 7 months
Aisha	Female	Software Engineering	1 year and 7 months
Lucky	Male	Software Engineering	1 year and 7 months
Moses	Male	Mechanical Engineering	1 year and 10 months

### Results and Discussions

#### 1. Classroom Teaching

##### Question One. *How do you cope with the Classroom Teaching at LUC?*

##### 1. Bashir

"The classroom teaching here at LUC particular in Malaysia is good, nice and comfortable for every student because, the classrooms are well equipped with teaching facilities; there are chairs and projector in all classes.... The numbers of students in each class are not that much that will affect the teaching of the students.... Also the lecturers are qualified and they teach very well to their students".

##### 2. Ngonabo

"The classroom teaching is good but it depend on the kind of lecturer, because here at LUC we have access to interact with our lecturers like they are our friends on like other countries where lecturers are seen as "God"... when students ask question the lecturers gives relevant answers

##### 3. Jephter

"The method of teaching here at LUC is encouraging... the lecturers have been giving helping hands to me and not only me but to other students in the class & sometime the lecturer organised additional extra classes to enhance our knowledge in the area we have difficulties".

##### 4. Aisha

"The classroom teaching is quite good and motivating... I do feel inspire to develop my career in academics. I have access to technology & other instructional materials in my college this as help me a lot to improve my learning ability".

##### 5. Lucky

"With the facilities provided the classroom teaching are in order... Some of the lecturers were unable to explain some certain things that are experimental issues whereas they focus on the theoretical part which are some of the laps in my experience over here at LUC.... But the classroom teaching generally is worthy to be embrace which is good in learning something worldwide".

##### 6. Moses

"I like sitting at the front doing lectures... the lecturers do encourage us to listening first before writing... As for me the classroom is very good... I like to listen to the lecturers when teaching & try to understand before writing...".

Majority of the participant reported that, the classroom teaching at LUC is very good and encouraging. All the participants said, the lecturers at LUC have been teaching very well with instructional material and the experience their lecturers have in academic industries as served to help them to comprehend well in the class.

## 2. Renewal of Student Visa Pass

**Question Two: *What are your experiences in renewing your student visa doing your study?***

### 1. Bashir

“I can say is 50-50... student visa pass processing here in Malaysia is in two way.... some students get there visa pass renew without time delay while other students like myself, there are always a long time delay in getting my student visa pass renewed... I can't say either is the problem from the LUC or Malaysia Immigration Department, but with the new process now am hearing from my college the process is been simplified than before”

### 2. Ngonabo

“I have never experience any difficulty as regards to my student visa pass renewal... as a scholarship student; I try to fulfil the requirement of Malaysia Immigration Policy by having 80% attendance with the CGPA of 2.00 and above... So is quite easy for me”

### 3. Jephther

“I think the Malaysia Government need to make some measure in this area of renewal of student visa pass... Here at LUC the management are trying in making sure the student visa pass are renew within the period of 1 to 2 months.

### 4. Aisha

“The process is very rigorous .... As scholarship student I should fine my visa renew easily... Though, Malaysia Immigration Department are trying their best, if there are any doubt about my studentship they can refer to LUC or PTDF”

### 5. Lucky

“I think this an issue that keep reoccurring over and over again is a dynamic one... at LUC before to renew student visa pass is quite easy but now everything have become cumbersome with the Malaysia Immigration Policy...some are ask to conduct medical text before they could renew their visa pass & the process is a time consuming”

### 6. Moses

“Am always quite lucky... ever since I have been submitting my passport to renew my student visa pass I have been receiving my passport back with visa in less than 1 month.... As for me, I have not really experience any difficulty in renewal my student visa pass.

Findings show that, some participants fine it very easy in renewing their students' visa and some do have certain difficulties which serve as a challenge for them to renew their student visa pass at LUC due to new Malaysia Immigration Policy.

## 3. Adjustment

**Question Three: *How do you adjust to the academic life in LUC?***

### 1. Bashir

“The academic life here at LUC is much easier while in some areas is very stressful... Is quite easy for to adjust to the academic setting in such a way that, the system provides more practical than theoretical aspect... as software engineering student, I find it very easy to understand my courses because the practical aspect am been exposed too”

**2. Ngonabo**

“At LUC is very easy to adjust to the academic life, the lecturers are friendly and nice... I like a self-leaning approached and with support of internet I research & make findings which as fine interest & has BIS student, I don't always feel comfortable if I don't work with my laptop everyday”

**3. Jephter**

“I think the academic life at LUC is quite encouraging & good if am to say the truth.... am able to cope & adjust to the academic system with the use of technology am exposed to now I can network globally”

**4. Aisha**

“Am able to adjust to the academic life here at LUC very easy because the method of teaching here at LUC is English Language & the environment is conducive for learning”

**5. Lucky**

“The ability of a man to adjust to any environment is one of his attribute... as for me is favourable one, the time zone varies, time to sleep and time to go for lectures... I have been able to adjust quickly at LUC because I have to make my academic plans”

**6. Moses**

“When I first came to Malaysia here at LUC to study Mechanical Engineering it was challenging for me... when am given the first assignment to do I feel not comfortable...I work closely with my Lecturers and the senior students in term of my difficulties and they tried to advised and put on the right path & today and always grateful to God”

The finding show that, majority of the participants adjust easily to the environment and academic life at LUC which they all find very nice and interesting.

**4. Host Community**

**Question Four: *How do you cope with the host community?***

**1. Bashir**

“The weather here in Malaysia is adaptable for me... the cost of living is almost the same with my home country in term of the food I eat and the materials I use for my day to day activities... also the people in the host community are friendly and accommodating”

**2. Ngonabo**

“It's doesn't take me much time to cope and adjust to the host community because Malaysia weather looks like that of home country compare to some western countries... the kind of people I met when I came to Malaysia, the Malays, Chinese, Indians, Iranians they are very friendly and accommodating...this make it easy for me cope the environment and meeting so many Africans here at LUC I feel make me more comfortable”

**3. Jephter**

“The people here at LUC make the environment conducive for learning....so am able to cope and with response am hearing from my friends they also testify to it that the environment is friendly and I think that is okay”

**4. Aisha**

“The host community have been good, I have coping very well to the glory of almighty God... I adapt quickly with the weather condition and the people are meet here are very friendly and nice to accommodate me and I find it very interesting”

**5. Lucky**

“The environment is good and friendly I must recommend that... so I cope very fast because I prepare myself before coming to Malaysia for my studies and whenever I find myself to study in the world I will like to adapt and cope irrespective of the situation...the local and fellow international students are friendly... in one sentence the host community is good”

**6. Moses**

“When I first come to Malaysia I find it very difficult to cope seeing many Africans... But when I start going for lectures I meet with the Malays, Chinese, and Indians, Iranians, Pakistanis & other nationalities... I feel more comfortable... so the environment is usually okay and nice for academic purpose”

The results show that, majority participants were able to cope with the host community. It was further testified by the participants that the environment is conducive for learning and the people in the community are good and accommodating most especially the Malays, Chinese, India and other nationalities.

**5. Knowledge Gained**

**Question Fifth:** *What impacts do your experience as students make in your life positive, negative or both?*

**1. Bashir**

“I can say is both... I will like to start with the positive aspect, first, I had the experience to travelled abroad to study... second, I had the experience of adapting to new environment that is different from my home country... third, I had the experience to live with many people of different nationalities, cultures and norms here in Malaysia.... Forth, I had the experience of living away from my Family which made me to be more confident & independent... For the Negative aspect, my understanding of practical approach of learning here at LUC have diminished my orientation of understanding of theoretical courses”

**2. Ngonabo**

“My academic experience so far in Malaysia is positive I don't know of other students because here at LUC am expose to more of practical way of learning & the education system in Malaysia is very easy compare to some developing countries system of education....

**3. Jephter**

“I had positive experience because here I can do things on my own and I can work together with my fellow students as a group”

**4. Aisha**

“For me is both... the positive aspect is that, I'm happy to study software engineering and been a scholarship student I have never think of tuition fees and I'm living comfortable...the academic environment also at LUC is conducive for learning and with the usage of technology I'm expose to has really made positive impact in my life...while the only negative experience I had is living far from my family because I love been with my parents back in my home country”

**5. Lucky**

“The impact so far is positive... coming down to Malaysia to study has really reshaping my life positively...”

**6. Moses**

“Is positive...my life has change socially and academically and I always give thanks to God, my parents and PTDF because is always my dream to study abroad and now is no more a dream but a reality...”

The finding shows that, participant categories (2, 3, 5, & 6) have positive experience which has transformed their life positively and participants' categories (1& 4) said to have both positive and negative experience in the course of their study in Malaysia

### Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the finding from this study, it can be concluded that, international student with scholarships have more positive academic experience in living their home country to study abroad and the level at which they adjust to the academic life in Malaysia is encouraging taking into consideration the teaching methods, lecturers friendliness, manner at which the people in the host community accommodate and welcome international students. Hence, it is worthy to note that, this study has been designed and carried out with specific purpose of looking at international students' academic experience with focus to scholarship students at one university and this cannot be claimed to be in any way generalizable to other universities and students that are self-sponsored. Among the initiatives that the host university can consider are as follows:

1. Host institution should provide international students with informative welcoming package that explains about the academic and the non-academic matters so that students can prepare themselves sufficiently.
2. A supportive international office is very crucial as international students face many challenges that are sometimes generic and sometimes unique in nature. A 'one size fits all' procedure may help in routine procedure like passport renewal or other immigration matters. However, as for things which are more personal in nature, a more personal intervention from the officers really help in supporting the students
3. Host institution should enhance the international student ecosystem through activities that nurture diversity management in campus and encourage interfacing among both local and international students.

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