

Establishment of Institutional Policies to Support the Internationalization Process: The Case of Malaysian Research Universities

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Abstract

International student mobility is not a recent phenomenon as students have been studying in other countries since 600BC. This paper focuses on institutional policies that are in place in the Malaysian higher learning institutions to support academic success of international students. Astin's theory (1984, 1993, 1999) is adopted to link the idea of institutional policies and international student's academic success. In practical terms, Malaysian research universities are chosen due to their elite status to illustrate the institutional policies that are embedded in these universities.

Keywords: Internationalisation, higher education, institutional policy, research university, Malaysia

1. Introduction

Since the 1990s, the term internationalisation has commonly been used in higher education systems around the world (Enders, 2004; Parsons, 2008). One of the leading commentators Knight (2008) argues that internationalisation is a process which involves international activities such as “academic mobility for students and teachers, international linkages, partnerships and projects, new international academic programmes and research initiatives” (p. 22). The definition of internationalisation is commonly related to international actions or initiative such as “multicultural education, international education, international programmes and study abroad” (Tan, 2005, p. 2). This definition supports the Bologna Process as in Europe, the Bologna Declaration (1999) encouraged mobility of students, academicians and administrative staff across borders, thus transforming Europe's society into knowledge based society (Bilecen, 2009). This declaration has crucial impacts on higher education system in Europe (Bilecen, 2009) as well as other developed and developing countries due to the globalisation factor.

In Malaysia, internationalisation of higher education is acknowledged and promoted through the National Higher Education Strategic Plan (Ministry of Higher Education, 2007). The plan clearly outlines internationalisation goals, such as the enrolment of international students in Malaysian higher learning institutions as being “targeted at an average of 10 per cent of the overall student enrolment” (Ministry of Higher Education, 2007, p. 116). Further, Malaysia was also aiming to attract 100,000 international students by the year 2010 (Marimuthu, 2008; Sato, 2005). As a result, the enrollment of international students has been envisioned to enable “Malaysia to become a hub for excellence in international higher education” (Tham & Kam, 2008, p. 353) by the year 2020 (Ministry of Higher Education, 2007).

In this paper, the institutional policies that are prevalent in the Malaysian research universities are examined in terms of supporting the transition of international students to Malaysia and encouraging their academic success. In doing so, the process by which institutional policies are established in the research universities to accommodate the academic and non-academic needs of international students in Malaysia are clarified. The research universities are chosen because of the elite status that the universities earned through an independent audit team. In Malaysia, the standards and criteria were benchmarked against global standards (Komoo, Azman, & Aziz, 2008) of other elite universities around the world. The Malaysian research universities have been established to develop human capital or highly trained knowledge workers to support the knowledge economy (Ho-Abdullah & Yahaya, 2007; Kaur, Sirat, & Azman, 2008; Ministry of Higher Education, 2007;

Porter & Vidovich, 2000; Sato, 2005; Welch, 2002). In addition, the establishment of research universities in Malaysia coincided with the second strategic thrust of the Ninth Malaysian Plan 2006 -2010 that is “to raise the capacity for knowledge and innovation and nurture ‘first class’ mentality among Malaysian” (Ho-Abdullah & Yahaya, 2007, p. 2). However, according to the *Establishing Research University: A Concept Paper in Malaysia* (Ministry of Education, 2004), the objective of research universities are not only to produce knowledge workers but also to “generate intellectual capital, new knowledge and innovative technology” (p. 4). As a result, in 2006, four of Malaysia’s oldest and state-controlled universities were chosen to receive the recognition as research universities.

The four research universities are Universiti Malaya (UM), Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) and Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) (Ho-Abdullah & Yahaya, 2007); later in 2010, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) was chosen as a fifth research university (Malaysia, 2010). Although research universities represent only a small proportion of higher education, other “institutions often look to them as models so their influence is greater than their numbers would suggest” (Mohrman, Ma, & Baker, 2008, p. 5). This paper discusses on Astin’s theory (1984, 1993, 1999) which outlines institutional policies as they relate to the academic success of international students in terms of internationalisation strategies of leading Malaysian research universities. In practical terms, institutional policies that address the academic and non-academic support services in Malaysian research universities are explored insofar as they support the needs of international students and their academic successes.

2. Internationalisation strategies: International students in Malaysia

In this paper, international students are defined as “students who have chosen to travel to Malaysia for tertiary education and have not attended secondary or preparatory education in Malaysia” (Devi & Nair, 2008, p. 180). International students are attracted from all over the world to pursue their higher education in Malaysia and their numbers are increasing dramatically each year (Devi & Nair, 2008). The international student population in Malaysia has grown substantially in recent years, from 30,397 students in 2002 to 47,849 students in 2007 (Wan, Kaur, & Jantan, 2008). In 2009, there were about 22,456 international students enrolled in public higher learning institutions and about 58,294 studying at private higher learning institutions, for a total of 80,750 international students from 167 countries around the world (Ministry of Higher Education, 2010). The majority of these international students are from Iran (10,932 students), Indonesia (9,812 students), China (9,177 students), Nigeria (5,969 students) and Yemen (4,931 students) (Ministry of Higher Education, 2010). Most of the international students are enrolled in programs that are related to technical fields, accounting, information and communications technologies (ICTs) or business (Ministry of Higher Education, 2007).

Based on the preceding statistics, international students come to Malaysia from countries such as those in Southeast Asia, which include Indonesia and China. These students are attracted to Malaysia because of similarities between the Malay and Chinese languages and a shared Malay and Chinese socio-cultural value system (Sirat, 2008a; Sugimura, 2009). Similarly, many Middle Eastern students report to prefer Malaysia because they seek “safer and more affordable options closer to home” (Sirat, 2008b, p. 88). In general, international students choose Malaysia as their tertiary education destination because of the low cost of living and the use of English as the language of instruction for science and technology courses (Safahieh & Singh, 2006). There are several benefits and advantages a host country, in this case Malaysia, can observe by attracting international students.

First, international students contribute significantly to the economy of Malaysia and to institutions of higher learning (Steele, 2008) because of the foreign currency they bring into the country (Sugimura, 2009). In 2007, for example, Malaysia generated about RM 1.5 billion in revenue (Kaur et al., 2008) by attracting international students to the country. In addition, the extensive internationalisation policy practiced by research universities has led to increased tuition revenues, which enable the universities to finance costly infrastructure that sustains the high caliber of their research facilities (Marginson, 2006).

Second, besides the economic benefits they bring, international students are a notable source of cultural enrichment because of their diverse backgrounds and cultures; thus, domestic students are rewarded with a broadened learning experience (Townsend & Huay, 2008; Trice, 2003). This is echoed by Devi and Nair (2008), who wrote that international students “promote greater intercultural mix and understanding” (p. 180) as well as add to a greater variety to student life. These cultural exchanges increase the Malaysian student’s global awareness of other cultures and societies (Kaur, 2006; Steele, 2008; Thakur & Hourigan, 2007) and “prepare all students for the real world of work where they will interact with people from different cultures” (Kaur, 2006, p. 17).

Third, the host country can benefit from global talent (Steele, 2008) by encouraging international students to stay after graduation to fill labor shortages in certain critical areas such as science and technology (Gribble, 2008; Steele, 2008). For instance, Malaysia is currently benefiting from the skills of international students who have chosen to remain in Malaysia to enhance their careers by training with local industries and gaining local work experience (Ministry of Higher Education, 2007). These students are allowed to work 20 hours per week during semesters, and the Malaysian government is working out a plan to help international students find employment in the country when they complete their studies (Ministry of Higher Education, 2007).

Malaysian institutions of higher learning are aware of the financial, cultural and intellectual benefits that international students contribute to the institutions as well as to the host country; therefore, these institutions are increasing their efforts to attract international students (Verbik & Lasanowski, 2007). However, internationalisation of higher education in Malaysia is “seen as a means for improving and empowering higher education in the country so that these institutions can become comparable to the best in the world” (Tham & Kam, 2008, p. 353) by attracting international students. On the other hand, international enrollment serves “as a critical marker of a higher education institution’s prestige” (Lee, 2010, p. 66). The theory, adopted here to link institutional policies and elements of academic success, is discussed further in the following section.

3. Astin’s theory of institutional policies and academic success

Astin’s (1984, 1993, 1999) Input-Environment-Output/Outcome (I-E-O) model is adopted as the guiding theory in this paper to unfold the relationships between input, environment and output or outcome elements. According to Astin (1993), input is defined as characteristics of the student at the time of initial entry to the institution. The characteristics of input can include academic self concept, family background, marital status, age, gender, race, parental education, housing, social experiences, achievement expectancies, and past experiences. Environment “refers to the various programs, policies, faculty, peers and educational experiences to which the student is exposed” (Astin, 1993, p. 7). Outcome denotes the student’s characteristics, knowledge, skills, critical thinking, attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviors after exposure to the environment and the student’s level of academic success (Astin, 1993, 1999). Astin’s I-E-O model is adopted because this model focuses on the institutional environment which comprises of academic and non-academic support services that are provided by the higher learning institutions.

Astin states that student success in academia is closely related to students’ involvement with their friends, administrators, faculty members and institutional programs that are provided for them (Astin, 1999). This concept is also echoed by Kuh (2003), who conceptualised student engagement theory as “the time and energy students devote to educationally sound activities inside and outside of the classroom and the policies and practices that institutions use to induce students to take part in these activities” (p. 25). Conversely, if student engagement is to be effective, “institutions must also do their part; making sure that there are policies and practices that support student engagement; and that there are opportunities available for students to engage in” (Irungu, 2010, p. 38). Many studies have emphasised either input or outcome but have rarely focused on the environmental factor (Bitzer & Bruin, 2004). However, Astin’s approach emphasises the importance of the institutional environment for the student’s academic success. Astin’s theory posits that academic achievement is related to various academic and non-academic support services that are provided in institutions of higher learning. Therefore, this paper focuses on the element of the environment as emphasised in this theory.

4. Institutional policies in the campus environment

Studying in a foreign country can be an exciting and challenging experience; however, many different and unpredictable problems can arise when international students arrive in a host country (Mehdizadeh & Scott, 2005). International students often repeatedly encounter academic, social and personal problems (Joo, 2002). For example, international students in Malaysia face challenges in terms of the English language (Kaur, 2006; Lee, 2010). They also experience cultural differences as they get used to new values, norms, holidays, food and customs (Kaur, 2006; Lee, 2010). The educational system presents a different academic culture in which there are variations in expectations of class participation, the evaluation process (Kaur, 2006; Lee, 2010) attitudes toward plagiarism, financial difficulties and standards of accommodation. Further, international students can experience anxiety, stress, homesickness and loneliness, along with less social support because their friends and family are far away and visiting is more difficult and infrequent for them than for domestic students (Andrade, 2006; Mu, 2007; Sawir, Marginson, Deumert, Nyland, & Ramia, 2008; Zhai, 2004). Therefore, implementation by institutions of higher learning of policies in terms of support services to accommodate international students’ needs is crucial to facilitate their learning experiences. Tinto (2005) stressed that institutional commitment is very important in the provision of excellent support services for students to achieve academic success. Institutional commitment is defined by Tinto (2005) as “the willingness to invest the resources and provide the incentives and rewards needed to enhance student success” (p. 90).

It is interesting to note that most of institutions of higher learning have established services to support international students in their studies (Andrade, 2006). There are two kinds of policies, including academic and non-academic support services and facilities that are established in institutions of higher learning to accommodate the needs of international students. Support services are defined as “academic and non-academic assistance provided by educational institutions to help students adapt themselves to their school environment and achieve their academic goals successfully” (Joo, 2002, p. 9). Therefore, in this paper, academic support services include Academic Writing Centers, English language services and library services. For the most part, the non-academic support services relate to financial needs and student accommodations.

5. Academic support services

Institutions of higher learning have developed help mechanisms in terms of institutional policies in terms of support services to accommodate and help international students to adjust in a new learning environment (Steele, 2008) as well as “to facilitate their cross-culture adaptation” (Zhang, 2009, p. 9). It is interesting to note that most of the higher learning institutions have establish support services to support students with their studies (Andrade, 2006). However, currently, higher learning institutions are strengthening their support services to accommodate domestic as well as international students who pay hefty tuition fees for the privilege of studying in a respectable foreign higher learning institution (Li, Baker, & Marshall, 2002). It is ethical and important for the institutions, especially faculty members and university administrators, to acknowledge and be accountable for students’ needs in meeting their everyday challenges in the educational environment (Abubakar, Shanka & Muukac, 2010; Lacina, 2002; Madgett & Bélanger, 2008). According to Prebble, Hargreaves, Leach, Naidoo, Suddaby and Zepoke (2004), the provision of academic and non-academic support services and facilities ensures students’ outcome in terms of academic success.

Therefore, universities in Malaysia especially the research universities have invested a tremendous amount of effort into enhancing the well-being of international students by setting up specialised academic and non-academic support services to offer practical assistance to these students to facilitate their learning experience. The following section of this paper focuses on academic support services that are provided by the Malaysian research universities, including English language services, academic writing services and library services to support international students.

5.1. English language services

English-language skills are identified as one of the major factors involved in achieving academic success among international students (Steele, 2008). Achieving English-language proficiency has been rated as one of the most common difficulties because international students come from non-native English-speaking countries (Fitzgerald, 1998; Steele, 2008; Zhai, 2004). Mostafa (2006) suggested that “studying in a language other than the learner’s mother tongue is one of the main difficulties facing international students which may negatively affect their performance” (p. 40). A study by Irungu (2010) found that the most common problems faced by international students occur when they need to communicate in English in both academic and social settings, whether written or oral. Further, “the difficulties with the English language are due to various reasons: differences in accent, pronunciation, slang, and use of special English words” (Irungu, 2010, p. 21). Furthermore, mistakes in wording, vocabulary and grammar impede students in articulating their ideas in English (Brown, 2008; Kim, 2007).

Generally, in Malaysia, international students are enrolled in programmes offered by institutions of higher learning if they have satisfactorily fulfilled the English language requirement based on a proficiency test, usually the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) (Harvey & Stewart, 1991; Sandhu, 1994) or the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) (Woodrow, 2006). The rationale is to ensure that international students benefit in terms of understanding lectures, taking notes, reading texts and writing papers (Harvey & Stewart, 1991). Further, institutions of higher learning have taken some initiatives to support international students in terms of offering credited English-language courses as part of their postgraduate programs (Abel, 2002; Andrade, 2006; Kim, 2007; Peelo & Luxon, 2007). English Language Centers were also set up for international students to improve their English-language proficiency (Joo, 2002). According to Irungu (2010), international students with good language skills “have less difficulty in the adjustment process and exhibit better reading and writing skills, and more engagement with classmates and faculty” (p. 21). In short, according to Steele (2008), academic success is promoted with improved English language skills.

For instance, one of the Malaysian research universities which include Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) established a one-stop Postgraduate Academic Support Services Centre (PASS) through the Institute of Postgraduate Studies (IPS) to provide English support to postgraduate students (Institute of Postgraduate Studies, n.d.).

The PASS center is set up to help students with English-language difficulties by offering proofreading and editing services for their dissertation work (Institute of Postgraduate Studies, n.d.) in terms of grammar, punctuation and spelling (Institute of Postgraduate Studies, 2009a). The ultimate aim is to help postgraduate students develop research, academic and generic skills and increase their publication in refereed journals and presentations at local and overseas conferences (Institute of Postgraduate Studies, n.d.). Further, the Faculty of Languages and Linguistics at Universiti Malaya also offers compulsory English-language courses for international students at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels (Faculty of Languages and Linguistics, 2010). An English placement test for international postgraduate students is offered by the University of Malaya Centre for Continuing Education (UMCCed) if international students have not achieve the minimum requirement of IELTS Band 6 or a TOEFL score of 550 (Institute of Graduate Studies, 2010a). Based on the results of the placement test, and to further enhance their English language proficiency and writing skills, students are placed in modules: Module 1 is Intensive Proficiency and Writing Skills, Module 2 is Academic Language Skills and Module 3 is Academic Writing (Institute of Graduate Studies, 2010b). Bahasa Melayu (the Malay language) is the national language of Malaysia and, therefore, in addition to English-language proficiency, international students are required to enroll in and pass courses in the Bahasa Melayu language during their course of study in Malaysian universities (Safahieh & Singh, 2006).

5.2. Academic writing services

Academic writing is fundamental to the academic success of international students in higher education (Arkoudis & Tran, 2007). According to Arkoudis and Tran (2007), the challenges faced by international students in academic writing are “far beyond the level of study skills and linguistic forms in writing” (p. 158). A study by Angelova and Riazantseva (1999) illustrates that international students have different styles of writing because they are from different educational backgrounds and have different values; they also sometimes lack critical skills and the ability to think independently (Arkoudis & Tran, 2007; Li et al., 2002). These students need support in adapting to new academic environment requirements. Therefore, institutions of higher learning must assist international students by providing academic writing guidelines and services based on Malaysian educational requirements. Tran’s (2008) study revealed that the university’s support services includes institutional practice in academic writing to help international students with their writing skills.

For example, Universiti Sains Malaysia, through the Institute of Postgraduate Studies, offers in-house activities and training workshops including several workshops on academic and scientific writing skills, research methodology, dissertation writing, grant writing, academic publication and how to write a good research proposal (Institute of Postgraduate Studies, 2008 & 2009a). These services are coordinated under the newly established Personal and Professional Development (PPD) unit (Institute of Postgraduate Studies, 2009a). This unit is responsible for planning, offering and managing courses that would have a significant impact on a postgraduate student’s creative, analytical and ethical skills (Institute of Postgraduate Studies, 2009a). In addition, Universiti Putra Malaysia offers a series of learning support programs that include academic writing, publication, proposal writing, effective presentation and English editorial services for thesis writing to those students who need assistance in English (School of Graduate Studies, 2010a).

5.3. Library services

The effective use of library services and resources is a critical factor for achieving academic success for all students, including international students and specifically graduate students (Harmon & Wales, 1999). However, according to Jackson (2005), incoming international students might face problems in using library services in the universities due to “heightened levels of library anxiety, compounded by their newness to the university and the country” (p. 198). International students from diverse educational backgrounds and systems are accustomed to the different library services offered in the institutions in their home country, and they also have degrees of access to information that vary from those offered in the host university libraries (Harmon & Wales, 1999; Jackson, 2005; Mu, 2007).

International students have indicated that it is difficult for them to access library services such as online databases and catalogs for books, journals and other reading materials, print indexes, and the library classification system. Compared to domestic students, they have trouble locating information for their research and knowing how to cite information (Mu, 2007). Jackson’s (2005) study suggests that international students have problems because “services such as interlibrary loan, librarian reference-by-appointment and live online reference are new concepts, whereas services and concepts such as the reference desk and open stacks are understood” (p. 203) by students as the services that are similar to those at their home country libraries. Mu (2007) echoes that most students from Asia are not “fully aware of the readily available professional assistance on information-related issues and view the library as a place to study and librarians as bookkeepers rather than information providers” (p. 3).

However, due to their sometimes limited proficiency in English, both librarians and international students can encounter verbal and non-verbal communication barriers (Jackson, 2005; Shaffer, Vardaman & Miller, 2010), especially during library orientation, in terms on how to use the various library services. Therefore, it is important for institutions of higher learning to establish library services that will help international students overcome their insufficient library skills and achieve academic success. Thus, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Universiti Malaya, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia and Universiti Putra Malaysia have extensive library services extended to all students, not only international students. These services include information skills sessions and workshops for postgraduate students that focus on locating and selecting information resources through online databases as well as proper citing of sources. Such library orientations are offered at the beginning of each semester for all newly enrolled students to specifically brief them on the services provided by the library, the rules and regulations of the library, and include a guided library tour (Library National University of Malaysia, 2005; University of Malaya Library, 2006; UPM Library, 2010; Universiti Sains Malaysia Libraries; 2008).

Moreover, a wide range of additional facilities are also offered by the libraries, including computers, discussion rooms, reading areas, carrels, audio-visual rooms, photocopying machines, prayer rooms, lockers, and access to Wi-Fi internet connections. More typical circulation services such as loan, renewal, reservation and membership are also offered by the libraries of Universiti Sains Malaysia, Universiti Malaya, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia and Universiti Putra Malaysia to accommodate students (Library National University of Malaysia, 2005; University of Malaya Library, 2006; UPM Library, 2010; Universiti Sains Malaysia Libraries; 2008).

6. Non-academic support services

6.1 Financial services

Another major stressor for international students is financial difficulties (Joo, 2002; Steele, 2008) due to increased tuition fees and living expenses. Much like other students, international students generally sustain themselves on scholarships and on parental and family support (Campbell & Li, 2008; Khawaja & Dempsey, 2008). It is important for international students to have adequate finances to cover necessities such as food and shelter (Khawaja & Dempsey, 2008) for themselves as well as for families who accompany them to study in a foreign country. However, research by Mehdizadeh and Scott (2005) found that international students and their spouses have difficulty finding jobs to help them sustain a healthy financial status. That study also found that spouses who had full- or part-time jobs in their own country were often unable to work in their area of expertise (Mehdizadeh & Scott, 2005) in Malaysia.

Hence, institutions of higher learning provide some financial assistance to international students by providing scholarships and grants (Grayson, 2007). However, it is not possible to provide funds to every international student that is in need of financial aid (Grayson, 2007) because funds are limited. For example, the Malaysian government has approved about 15 Malaysian International Scholarships to outstanding international students to pursue higher education in Malaysia (Ministry of Higher Education, 2007). The Ministry of Higher Education of Malaysia took an initiative to expand the number of scholarships to 100 outstanding international students from around the world, including some from developed countries (Ministry of Higher Education, 2007). Apart from the scholarships offered by the Ministry of Higher Education, Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation (MOSTI) awards two fellowships, *Pasca Siswazah* scholarship and National Science Fellowship, which both include tuition fees, examination fees and monthly allowances (Institute of Postgraduate Studies, 2008). Another solution to the financial difficulties faced by international students is to create temporary employment. For example, in Malaysia, international students are allowed to work up to 20 hours a week during the semester to support themselves (Ministry of Higher Education, 2007).

Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) has taken several financial support initiatives, including scholarships, fellowships, graduate teaching assistance and grant schemes to help international students, and especially postgraduate students, with their tuition fees and living costs throughout their studies (Institute of Postgraduate Studies, 2008). The financial support initiatives include the Vice-Chancellor's Award (Institute of Postgraduate Studies, 2008) given to exceptional PhD students at USM (Institute of Postgraduate Studies, 2009a). This award offers an allowance of RM 3,000 per month, with tuition and examination fees waived and research grants to the top postgraduate students across all disciplines (Institute of Postgraduate Studies, 2008). Further, the USM Fellowship Scheme is offered to outstanding local and international postgraduate students, specifically those in research, who have achieved academic excellence. The holders of the fellowship will receive monthly allowances ranging from RM 1,500 to RM 2,500, with tuition and examination fees covered by the university (Institute of Postgraduate Studies, 2008).

Furthermore, to develop postgraduate teaching skills, the Graduate (Teaching) Assistant Scheme is offered to deserving postgraduate students with monthly allowances of RM 900 for master's students and RM 1,100 for PhD students (Institute of Postgraduate Studies, 2008). A similar scheme, called the Graduate Research Assistantship Scheme (GRAS), is also extended by the University of Malaya as a form of financial assistance to international students (Institute of Graduate Studies, 2010b). Universiti Putra Malaysia also offers limited financial assistance to academically excellent international students on a competitive basis (School of Graduate Studies, 2010b). The financial assistance includes the Special Graduate Research Allowance Scheme (S-GRA), which offers allowances of RM 1500 to RM 1700 to postgraduate international students who assist in research work as instructed by the supervisor, and the Graduate Research Assistant Scholarship (GRA), with allowances worth RM 1125 to RM 1500 monthly and waivers of tuition fees (School of Graduate Studies, 2010a). The GRA recipients are expected to assist in teaching/tutoring/supervising final-year undergraduate students (School of Graduate Studies, 2010a).

In short, it is important for international students to be financial viable to support themselves as well as their family in a foreign country. This feeling of security and stability (Mehdizadeh & Scott, 2005) does lead to their academic success. On the other hand, in order to facilitate research activities, cultivate a healthy research culture as well as to achieve academic success in international students research work, IPS Graduate Fund was established in Universiti Sains Malaysia to support postgraduate students to present their papers in local and international conferences, provide seed money for research as well as research attachments overseas (Institute of Postgraduate Studies, 2009a). Recently, beginning of 2009, USM-RU Postgraduate Research Grant Scheme (USM-RU-PGRS) is offered to full time research mode postgraduate students to undertake meritorious research activities with allocations of RM 10,000 for Masters and RM 20,000 for PhD students (Institute of Postgraduate Studies, 2009a).

6.2 Accommodation services

Provision of student housing or accommodations is considered a key area of support services offered to international students (Macintyre, 2003). Moreover, provision of suitable and affordable student housing has become an increasingly important factor to attract new international students (Macintyre, 2003). The rationale is that if international students are comfortable with their housing on campus, the chances of retaining the students at the university are higher and they are more successful academically compared to international students who are less comfortable with their housing (Astin, 1999; Macintyre, 2003).

However, international students often have problems finding proper housing for themselves, their spouses and their children (Joo, 2002). According to Joo (2002), even if housing is available, international students face several difficulties, including making a wise choice in selecting rooms, finding suitable roommates, understanding what the rental charges cover and coping with the rules and regulations of housing. The problem is greater for students arriving late to an institution that is experiencing shortages in housing for international students (Barakat, 1988). Hence, Khawaja and Dempsey (2008) discovered that the "majority of international students resided in rented accommodation" (p. 40) because of shortages on campus.

Universiti Malaya established its International House off-campus for undergraduate and postgraduate international students (International Student Centre, n.d.). The International House is located about 2 kilometers away from the University of Malaya main campus and strategically close to shopping areas, public transport and a university shuttle bus, a market, a mosque and a post office (International Student Centre, n.d.). The International House is fully furnished with 2 bedrooms and it has 24-hour security to ensure the safety of international students (International Student Centre, n.d.).

Other than rental accommodations that are not under the university's supervision, university accommodations located within the university boundaries or near the campus that are administered by the university or an affiliated organisation are also available for international students (Paltridge, Mayson & Schapper, 2010). Lau (2003) suggested that some universities have established multicultural dorms and international halls for international students to help them cope with socially diverse events such as parties, formal dinners and cultural exchanges (Paltridge et al., 2010). For instance, Universiti Sains Malaysia has built housing on campus for both male and female international students called the International House (Institute of Postgraduate Studies, 2009b). On the other hand, Universiti Putra Malaysia offers two types of on-campus accommodations to international students: International Transit House (ITH), which has 2-room 1-bath flats that are fully furnished, and Residential Colleges, which have shared double rooms with common facilities (International Centre, 2010). Paltridge et al. (2010) further found that international students living in campus housing are likely to establish new social networks with nationals of the host country. Similarly, Naylor (2009) also illustrated that students who reside in campus housing integrate better into the college community.

According to Astin (1999), students who live in campus housing are most likely to take part in all aspects of university life, especially in terms of interaction with faculty, because they have more time and opportunity. This not only has positive impact on the student retention rate in the university (Astin, 1999; Paltridge et al., 2010), but also results in a greater level of academic success (Macintyre, 2003). Interestingly, Universiti Putra Malaysia also acknowledges that finding the right kind of accommodation does affect the academic success of international students (International Centre, 2010).

7. Conclusion

The purpose of this paper is to explore the institutional policies that address academic and non-academic support services provided by the Malaysian research universities to support the needs of international students to enhance their academic success. Thus, this paper provided a review of current literature and policy documents on international students in Malaysia as well as the academic and non-academic support services that are provided in the research universities. Ultimately, the results noted here have suggested that by providing significant academic and non-academic support services Malaysian universities can support the needs of international students and thereby contribute to their academic success.

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