

A Study on Academic Performance of International Students

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Abstract As the number of international students studying in both public and private universities in Malaysia increases, there is an increase in the diversity of students' learning styles which may affect their academic achievement. International students may have cultural shock due to cultural differences in both academic and social aspects. Some international students may experience academic difficulties, despite the fact that they have been successful academically in their home countries due to the different teaching and learning environment as compared to their home countries. The aims of this study are (1) to examine the academic performance of international students, (2) to compare the academic performance of international students and Malaysian students (overall as well as by gender) in the selected degree programmes and (3) to explore the experience of international students. Cumulative grade point average (CGPA) is used to measure academic performance of international students and Malaysian students studying in degree programmes in Law and Civil Engineering offered in the university. Questionnaire is used to explore the students' learning experiences. There are differences in the academic performance of Malaysian students and international students. Malaysian students outperform international students, while female students (both Malaysian and international) perform better than or as good as their counterparts in the programmes under study. International students have positive attitude toward interaction with other students, lecturers and faculty, and they are happy with their choice of education. The findings from this study can be used to improve the academic performance of international students in the university.

Keywords Academic performance • International student • Cumulative grade point average

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1 Introduction

As the number of international students studying in both public and private universities in Malaysia increases, there is an increase in the diversity of students' learning styles which may affect their academic achievement.

International students may have cultural shock due to cultural differences in both academic and social aspects. Some international students may experience academic difficulties, despite the fact that they have been successful academically in their home countries due to the different teaching and learning environment as compared to their home countries.

Chong and Mokhtar (2013) investigated learning experience from international students at two private institutions in Malaysia. They concluded that language is only one of the challenges faced by international students who came from the countries where English is not their medium of instruction. The international students found it difficult to adjust their learning in English.

Li et al. (2010) examined the effects of various academic and cultural related factors on academic performance of international students (Chinese and non-Chinese cultural groups) in the School of Management at the University of Surrey. They reported that the perceived significance of learning success to family, proficiency in English and social communication with compatriots was the most significant predictor of academic performance of all international students in their study.

Lovell (2003) studied the academic performance of international students enrolled in the Bachelor of Engineering (electrical) programme at the University of Queensland, Australia. He concluded that the international students perform as well as, if not better than, domestic students using the mean cumulative grade point average.

Olsen (2008) explored the comparative academic performance of international and Australian students in a group of 8 (Go8) universities: the Australian National University, Monash University, the University of Adelaide, the University of Melbourne, the University of New South Wales, the University of Queensland, the University of Sydney and the University of Western Australia. He concluded that international students on campus in Australia did as well as Australian students and did better than international students offshore in terms of student progress rate.

He and Banham (2009) and Nasir (2012) measured academic performance of students in terms of cumulative grade point average (CGPA), while Olsen et al. (2006) used student progress rate (SPR) as a key performance indicator in the Australian university system.

The aims of this study are (1) to examine the academic performance of international students, (2) to compare the academic performance of international students and Malaysian students (overall as well as by gender) in the selected degree programmes and (3) to explore the experience of international students.

2 Methodology

This study consists of three parts: involvement of international students, comparison of academic performance of international and Malaysian students and learning experiences of international students. This study focuses on the students enrolled in Bachelor of Civil Engineering and UK Degree Transfer in Law programmes offered in authors' university for January 2014 session.

Cumulative grade point average (CGPA) is used to measure academic performance of international students and Malaysian students. Means CGPA are calculated for the analysis by study year and by gender. Questionnaire as an instrument is used to explore the students' learning experiences. It includes their backgrounds (demographic information, precollege experiences) and the experiences during their study in the university (interaction with students, lecturers and faculty). It consists of 16 questions and takes about 10–15 min to complete.

3 Results

3.1 Involvement of International Students

The involvement of international students in Civil Engineering and Law programmes offered in the university is about 40 % and 19 %, respectively, in January 2014 session. International students came from 24 countries: Bahrain, Bangladesh, Brunei, China, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Fiji, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kenya, Lebanon, Maldives, Mauritius, Nigeria, Pakistan, Singapore, Sudan, Syria, Tanzania, Uganda, Yemen and Zimbabwe. The distribution of international students by the most contributing country for both programmes is shown in Fig. 1.

It is observed from Fig. 1 that the highest number of international students studying in both programmes came from Mauritius followed by Indonesia.

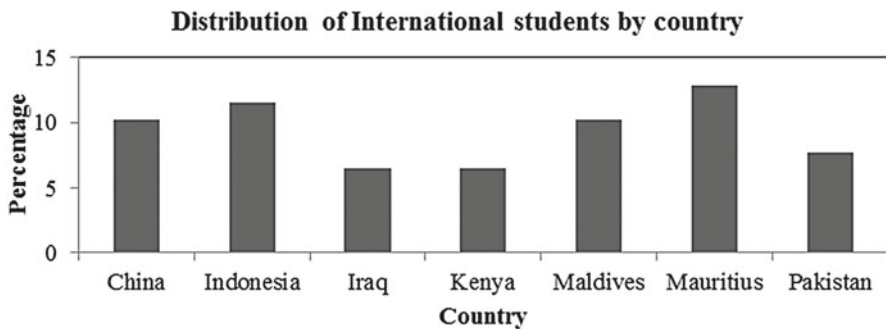


Fig. 1 Distribution of International students by country

3.2 Academic Performance of International Students

Mean CGPA of international students and Malaysian students studying in Civil Engineering and Law programmes in January 2014 session is calculated to measure their academic performance and shown in Table 1. It can be seen from Table 1 that Malaysian students outperform international students in both programmes. This is consistent with the finding in Canada obtained by He and Banham (2009) since their study shows that domestic students' academic performance is generally better than international students' performance.

Mean CGPA of students by study year and all students is calculated for Civil Engineering and Law programmes and shown in Figs. 2 and 3, respectively. It is

Table 1 Comparison of mean CGPA of students

	Civil engineering	Law
International students	2.60	2.18
Malaysian students	2.87	2.72

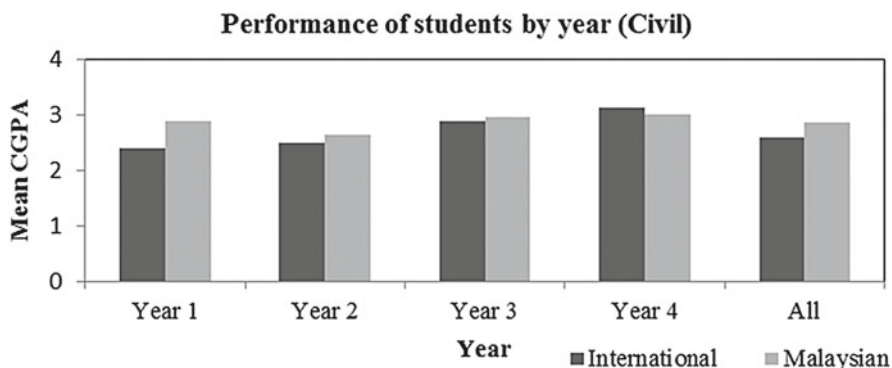


Fig. 2 Academic performance of international and Malaysian students by year (Civil)

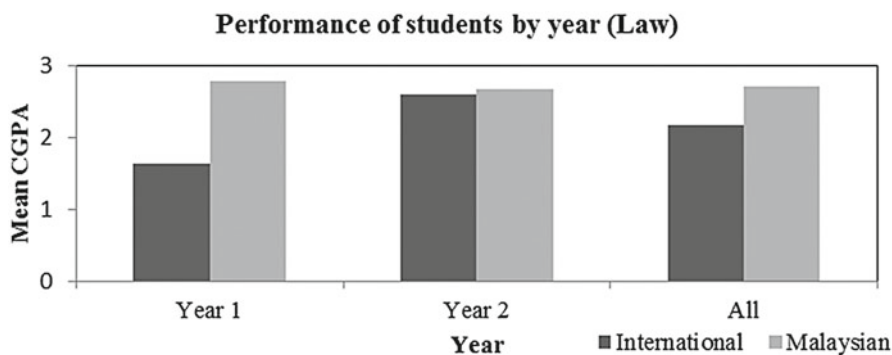


Fig. 3 Academic performance of international and Malaysian students by year (Law)

noted that the duration of Bachelor of Civil Engineering is 4 years, and UK Degree Transfer in Law programme in the university is 2 years. Students studying in Law programme progress their study in UK universities to complete their Bachelor of Law degree.

It is observed from Fig. 2 that the academic performance of Malaysian students in Civil Engineering is better than international students in year 1. However, the performance of international students improves in years 2 and 3, and they are as good as Malaysian students. International students perform slightly better than Malaysian students in year 4.

The same trend for Law programme is observed in Fig. 3. International students may experience academic difficulties in year 1 due to the different learning and teaching environment in Malaysia. Mean CGPA of international students and Malaysian students by gender for both programmes is given in Table 2 and shown in Fig. 4. The involvement of female students is about 14 % of total students in Civil Engineering and is about 58 % of Law students.

It can be seen from Table 2 that international female students outperform international male students in Law, and Malaysian female students outperform Malaysian male students in both programmes. In overall, female students perform better than or as good as their male counterparts in both programmes under study.

It can be seen in Fig. 4 that Malaysian students (both gender) outperform international students in both programmes.

Table 2 Mean CGPA of students by gender

	Civil engineering		Law	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
International	2.40	2.64	2.25	1.88
Malaysian	3.16	2.83	2.75	2.69
All	2.80	2.76	2.62	2.62

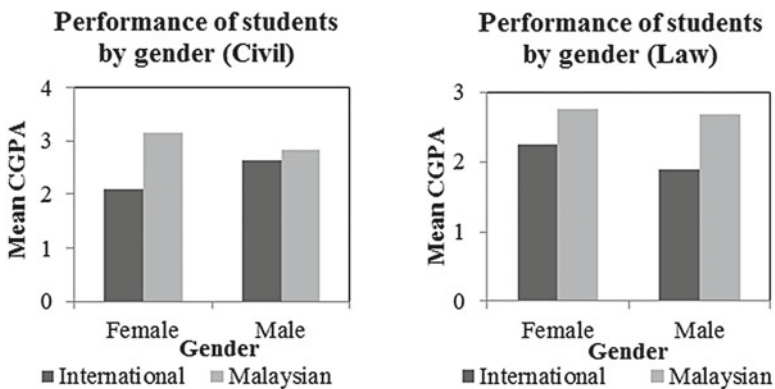


Fig. 4 Academic performance of international and Malaysian students by gender

3.3 Experience of International Students

Questionnaire is given to international students for their experience in the university. The analysis is focused on two programmes together as a whole since only 40 % of international students from Civil Engineering and 44 % from Law responded the questionnaire. Among the respondents, 17 % in Civil Engineering and 86 % in Law are female students. Respondents are from China, Equatorial Guinea, Fiji, Indonesia, Iraq, Kenya, Maldives, Mauritius, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Tanzania. About 60 % of the respondents were between the ages of 21 and 23, with which 20 % were older and 20 % were younger. Respondents received Matriculation British 'A' level (52 %), 'O' level (10 %), High School certificate (26 %) and others (12 %).

The majority of respondents (70 %) reported that English is used as medium of teaching in their home country, while Arabic, French, Indonesian, Mandarin and Spanish are used as medium of teaching for the remaining students. About 90 % of respondents do not have any difficulties with English in the university. However, students from China reported that they have difficulties with English since Mandarin is used as medium of teaching in their high school. This is consistent with the finding by Chong and Mokhtar (2013). Thirty five percent of respondents received academic award given by the university at least once since they have enrolled in the programme. About one-third of respondents have been elected as a class representative for the specific subject. Majority of them have participated in the activities (89 %), 70 % have joined Society Club and 50 % participated in sports organised by the faculty or university.

Students are asked to reflect their experiences during their study in the university whether they have advantage or disadvantage in the areas such as interaction with faculty and lecturers compared to Malaysian students (see Fig. 5). Although 7-point scales are used to measure the perception of students in the questionnaire, the analysis of the responses is carried out by taking percentage for advantage (combining

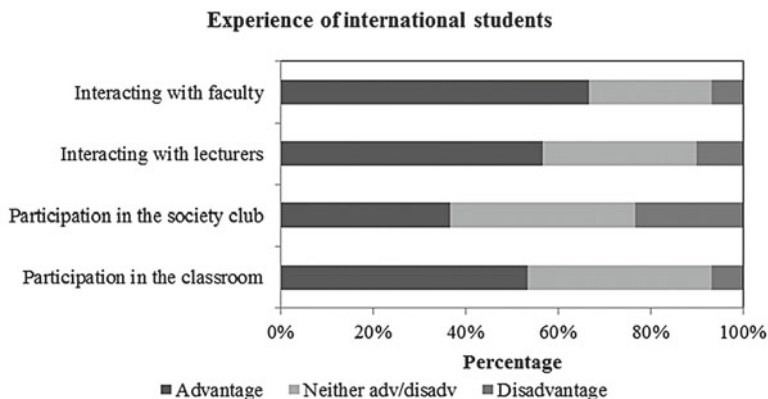


Fig. 5 Experience of international students

great advantage, moderate advantage and slight advantage), neither advantage nor disadvantage and disadvantage (combining great disadvantage, moderate disadvantage and slight disadvantage) to analyse for their experience.

It is observed from Fig. 5 that more than half of the respondents felt that they have advantage in interacting with lecturers and faculty and participating in the classroom compared to Malaysian students. About one-third is neutral in all areas. The majority of the respondents are happy with the interaction with other students, and they have opportunity to learn other's culture. They reported that Malaysian students are friendly since it is easy to make friends with them.

Overall, almost all students are confident that they have made the right major, and they are happy with their choice of their education.

4 Conclusion

This study has attempted to analyse the academic performance of international students in Civil Engineering Degree and UK Degree Transfer in Law programmes and their experience during their study in the university. The conclusions are as follows:

1. Malaysian students outperform international students, while female students (both Malaysian and international) perform better than or as good as their counterparts in the programmes under study.
2. The majority of international students do not have any difficulties with English as medium of teaching in the university.
3. International students have positive attitude toward interaction with other students, lecturers and faculty.
4. Overall, almost all students are happy with their choice of their education.

The findings from this study can be used to improve the academic performance of international students in the university.

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