INTERNATIONALIZATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION: A LITERATURE REVIEW ON COMPETENCY APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

This paper is a literature review on the internationalization of higher education focusing on staff competency in managing international students. This writing uncovered some empirical studies by researchers in a Malaysian context on the issue, challenges and expectation from both international students and university academics and administrators. International students faced great challenges in adjusting their life in Malaysia, these include different teaching and learning style, culture, language, loneliness and social distancing among others. On the other hand, the university academics and administrators similarly faced unfamiliar international students' characteristics and needs. Thus, universities need to review and look into the competency required to manage this group of students more effectively. This paper ends with recommendations by scholars to mitigate these gaps and challenges for universities.

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Keywords: Internationalization, Higher education, Competency approach, Teaching international students, Managing international students, Human resource.

1. INTRODUCTION

There is a large pool of literatures on internationalization of higher education (HE) with various focuses and themes. It ranges from the concept of internationalization (De Wit, 2002), internationalization management which include strategies, models and approaches (Davies, 1992; Knight and De Wit, 1995; Rudzki, 1998; Parsons, 2001; Zha, 2003; Ayoubi and Massoud, 2007); case studies on the implication of internationalization by different stakeholders in the higher education institutions (HEIs) (Al-Youssef, 2009), research in internationalization (Huisman, 2007), change management in internationalization (Der Wende *et al.*, 1999) and mode of internationalization (Mazzarol *et al.*, 2003). However, there is only a small number of research conducted in Malaysian context on internationalization of higher education (Tham and Kam, 2008).

There are studies (Akiba, 2008; Norhisham, 2008; Tham and Kam, 2008; Santhi, 2010; Sarjit *et al.*, 2010) which covered motivation, the extend of internationalization of HEI in Malaysia, institutional strategies, quality, issues, challenges and performance of internationalization of HE, trend and development of private higher education institutions (PrHEIs), teaching and learning and transnational programs in Malaysia.

Even though there are studies (Akiba, 2008; Banumathy and Vikneswaran, 2008; Nur Sofurah, 2011; Slethaug and Manjula, 2012; Abdul Rahman, 2013) that shed light on the dimension of international students' learning experience, staff teaching experience and administrators working experience. However, study focusing on staff competency for internationalization is extremely limited. The role of human resource, focusing on staff competency in managing international students is almost non-existence.

Based on the review of literatures on international students, this paper aims to provide insight and recommendation in managing international students from the perspective of human resource, focusing on staff competency.

2. INTERNATIONALIZATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Internationalization is a complex phenomenon in the field of higher education. Its complexity emerged due to the vast concept and evolution of its meanings, approaches, elements and its strategies. One of the greatest challenges of internationalization is the diversity of its related terms. Till to date, there is no single agreed definition on internationalization of higher education (Teichler, 2003; Elkin *et al.*, 2005). In 1993, The Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC) concluded that "there is no simple, unique of all encompassing definition of internationalization of the university" (De Wit, 2002).

Common used terms are international education, international studies, internationalism, transnational education and globalization of higher education. Each term has a different accent and reflects a different approach.

The terms are very much differs and evolve due to the different waves of internationalization. Factors influencing this may be time, the country or region, the changing environment and the different phases of development in higher education globally.

Some definitions emphasized on internationalization activities for example academic mobility, study abroad, students exchange and international cooperation (De Wit, 2002) which is influenced by the activity approach of internationalization or the term used as international education. But others advocated that is it not merely international activity but a process of internalizing internationalization in higher education institution (Rudzki, 1998). Others are curriculum-focused terms which include studies in education, multicultural education, intercultural education, cross-cultural education, international studies, language studies and global studies (De Wit, 2002).

Knight has given a comprehensive and in-depth definition of internationalization which can be applied by any institution of any country. Her definition extends beyond the curriculum to the whole university. She defined it as "the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education" (Knight,

2008a). Her comprehensive and yet general meaning is used and referred commonly by researchers in internationalization of higher education.

Other scholars (De Wit, 2002) have given a general definition, coined as internationalism; to describe the generic international character of universities as being part of the life-world of the university.

Another general definition given by (Wande, 1997), "any systematic, sustained efforts aimed at making higher education responsive to the requirements and challenges related to the globalization of societies, economy and labour markets". These two general definitions do not provide specific elements or approaches of scope or parameter of internationalization for institution to work on.

Definition by (Elkin *et al.*, 2003) is more student-driven, suggesting that internationalisation should "aim to create values, beliefs and intellectual insights in which both domestic and international students and faculty participates and benefit equally.

They should develop global perspectives, international and cultural and ethical sensitivity along with useful knowledge, skills and attitudes for the globalised market place".

3. INTERNATIONALIZATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN MALAYSIA

This paper focuses on one dimension of the internationalization of higher education, which is international student. Flow of international students will continue to increase and grow worldwide in the foreseeable future (Woodfield, 2010). This dimension of internationalization will continue to be placed as important by HEIs.

Malaysia aspires to be an international education hub and in achieving this, the Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) has put in place internationalization of higher education as one of the strategic trusts as stipulated in Malaysia National Strategic Plan of Higher Education (PSPTN) Phase 1 (2007-2010) (Ministry of Higher Education Undated, 2007).

The objective of this strategic trust is to build world recognition, marketable graduates, attract international students and generates innovation through research and development (Ministry of Higher Education Undated, 2007). This strategic trust will eventually help to build the brand and reputation of Malaysia as international education provider.

Subsequently in PSPTN Phase 2 (2011-2015) (Ministry of Higher Education Undated, 2007), MoHE had introduced 23 Critical Agenda Project (CAP) in its effort to transform higher education in Malaysia. Among the 23 CAPs, internationalization has been identified as one of the CAP. One of the objectives of CAP-Internationalization is to realize Malaysia as the higher education hub in the ASEAN region and globally through increasing the number of international students. In both phases of PSPTN, it can be observed that the ministry had consistently placed the importance of international students, apart from international academic staff and collaborations.

With that, MoHE has set the target to attract 150,000 international students by year 2015 and 200,000 by 2020, with average consistent growth of 13.5 percent annually (Ministry of Higher Education Undated, 2007).

There is tremendous growth in the number of international students studying in the public and private HEIs in Malaysia. It is recorded that 18,242 international students in 2001, and in less than ten years, it has grown to 86,919 international students, with about 16 percent growth per annum (Malaysia Higher Education Statistics, 2011).

About 70 percent of international students enrolled at PriHEIs. With that, the PrHEIs will therefore house approximately 142,500 international students or 95 percent of 150,000 by 2015. Figure 1 shows the enrollment of international students at public higher education institution (PuHEI) and PrHEI for a period of nine years (MoHE' website). It shows drastic increment of enrolment dominantly at PriHEIs.

Figure-1. International student enrollment at Public and Private HEIs between 2001-2010.
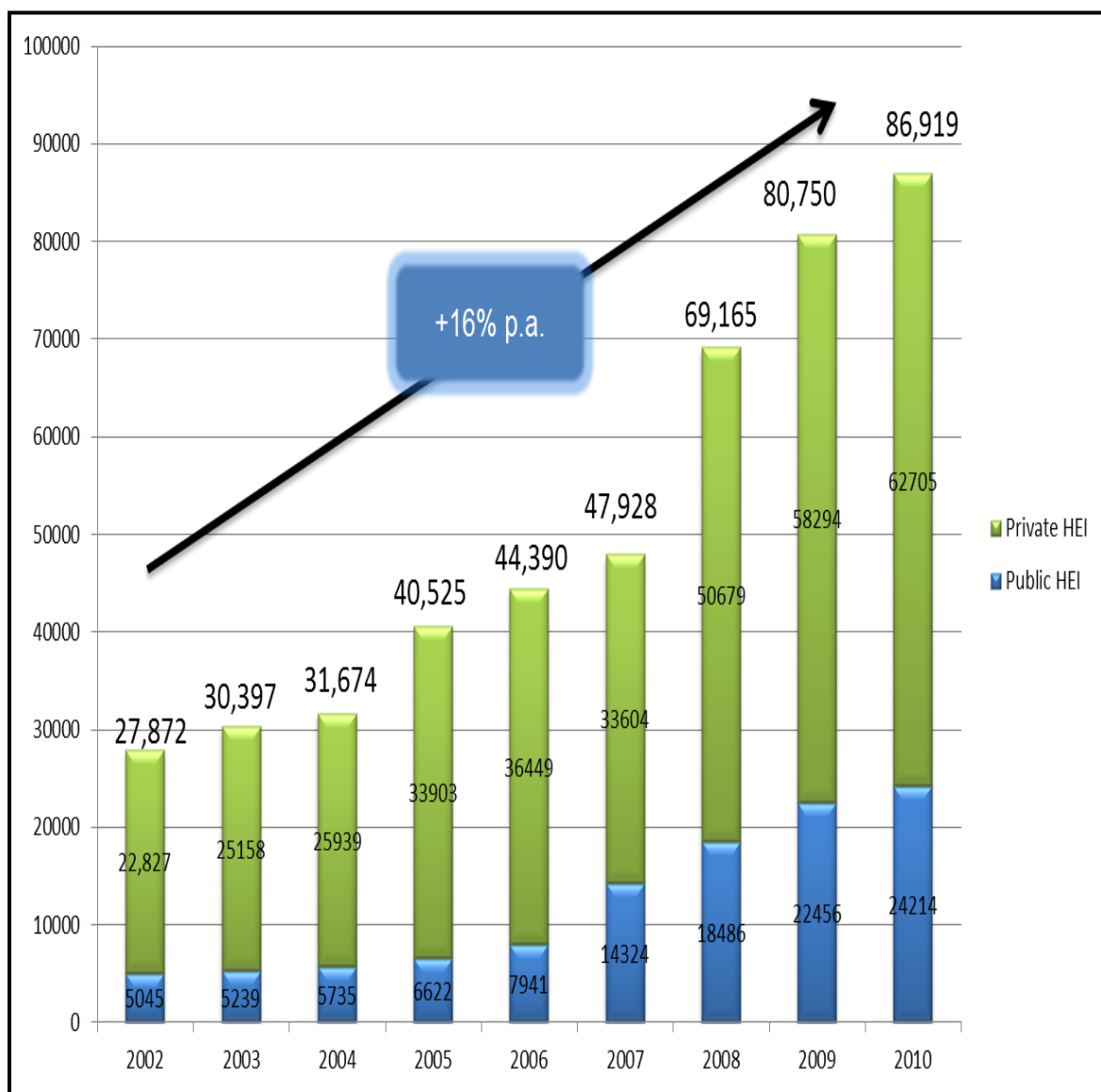
Apart from academic rationale for internationalization of HE, economic factor has placed an influential rationale for Malaysia. In the year 2010, income generated from international students is RM2.6 billion (Malaysia Higher Education Statistics, 2011). It was recorded that the PriHEIs in Malaysia has contributed RM1.3 billion annually to the gross domestic product (Ministry of Higher Education Undated, 2007).

This number is only achievable with the influx of international students registering at PriHEIs in Malaysia. This great impact in terms of economic contribution has made this dimension the priority in the internationalization of HE by Malaysian government. Hence, great emphasis has been placed on international students by MoHE. This is evidenced through policy and framework being planned and developed, for example, the formulation of Internationalization Policy (Malaysia Higher Education Statistics, 2011) and the Operational Framework for International Students Management (Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, 2012).

This dimension of internationalization was found important for both PuHEI and PriHEI, as both types of HEI are actively involved in, even though with different motivations. For these reasons, these institutions will target to attract different levels of students. Due to the set up of PuHEI, for public good, thus policy is in place to protect local needs and demand.

Hence, PuHEIs are allowed to offer only 5 percent of international undergraduate (UG) students' placement. As these universities seek to be more research-focused, their target will be international postgraduate (PG) students which is supported by the policy to encourage international PG students. These efforts will help the PuHEI to improve university ranking through increase generation of research output and number of international students.

Meanwhile, as the PrHEI set up are more commercially driven, hence these institutions target for UG international students, because there is more demand for UG programmes. PrHEI are motivated to attract international students as it is the main source of income for the corporations through tuition fees.

4. COMPETENCY

Individual competences usually represent the cornerstone of a firm's intellectual capital and a key determinant of organization performance and competitive factor (Camuffo and Comacchio, 2005). Author like (Boyatzis, 1982) define competence as an "individual trait and behavior which is associated with effective performance".

Competency was originally used in education industry, which describes teacher trainee behaviors (Bakunda, 2003). Though there is no universal agreement on the term of competence (Bakunda, 2003; Delamare-Le and Winterton, 2005) however literature provides a few views on competence. The first focuses on individual's abilities or attributes in the job situation or task. In other words, it refers to the underlying ability of a person to deliver the jobs.

Competencies are characteristics that are related to effective and/or superior performance in a job (Boyatzis, 1982; Bakunda, 2003). Another view of competence referred to the behavior of an individual displayed while performing a job while on a job (Bakunda, 2003). The third view of competency reveals the ability to match performance standards in a work setting. As (Hager *et al.*,

1994) put it as the specification of knowledge and skill and the application of that knowledge and skill to the standard of performance required.

To conclude the different views on competency, it can be grouped as KSA, refers to Knowledge, Skills and Attitudes (Delamare-Le and Winterton, 2005). KSA has been commonly adopted by human resource practitioners during the development of job analysis so that person who holds the job is able to perform the job adequately.

KSA is also being used to determine the kind of training needed for the job (Gomez-Mejia *et al.*, 2012). This suggests that competency can be learned through training and development (Czinkota *et al.*, 2005; Delamare-Le and Winterton, 2005). Besides KSA, other researchers also include behaviours, work habits, abilities and personal characteristic that formed a broader aspect of competency (Delamare-Le and Winterton, 2005).

5. IMPORTANCE OF HUMAN RESOURCE IN INTERNATIONALIZATION OF HE

Institution is made up of people. Hence the success of an institution does depend on its people in the organization, the people refers to staff or the employee. In whatever mission, goals or initiative embarked by the institution will ultimately involved competent staff to implement and achieve the institution's goal. Numerous literatures (Welch and Luostarinen, 1999; Scullion and Starkey, 2000; Radulovich, 2008; Alemu, 2011; Gomez-Mejia *et al.*, 2012) have verified that HR has contributed to the success of firms' internationalization. Similarly, the role of HR is vital to the success of internationalization of HE (Santhi, 2010). Likewise, for HEI to internationalize its institution will therefore requires competent staff, both administrative and teaching staff in achieving its internationalization strategy and plan. Internationalization of HE has emerged to be a key or critical agenda for universities and this subsequently has changed the organization of the university. Departments or Centers and new positions and portfolio were created to cater for internationalization efforts (Taylor, 2010).

We witnessed top management of university who has a portfolio for internationalization, for example DVC, Deputy Rector, Director for Internationalization (Taylor, 2010) who is responsible for the internationalization efforts of the university; this includes the strategy and implementation in achieving its internationalization targets. Santhi (2010) has conducted research suggested ten success factors for internationalization of HE. These include institutional policy and structure, governmental policy, leadership and governance, administrative support, financial support, knowledge, human resource and recognition, technology integration, internationalization ethos and innovativeness. Findings from her research suggested that faculty members will be the drivers for internationalization activities and subsequently determine the effectiveness of an institution's internationalization effort.

There is no doubt that faculty members play a pertinent role in the internationalization of institution (Dewey and Duff, 2009), other staff within the institution should be given equivalent emphasis as they play equally important role in the internationalization of HEI. This is because there are many dimensions in the internationalization of HE (De Wit, 2002; Elkin *et al.*, 2005; Knight, 2008b; Taylor, 2010). Among the dimensions that are favorably adopted by countries and

institutions include international students and staff, research collaboration, students and staff exchange and cross-border programmes. With these varieties of dimensions, hence lead to different groups of staff in the universities be it academic staff, researchers, students, administrators, decision and policy makers will be directly and indirectly involved in the activities of internationalization. As a result, it is believed that all actors from top management, academician to administrative staff should work in synergy in the quest of internationalization of its institution (Taylor, 2010).

6. ISSUES, CHALLENGES AND EXPECTATIONS

It is pertinent that HEIs provide special care and attention to international student learning experience while they are in their campus. Building good relationship with international students will bring great importance to the institution. Besides improving retention rate (Banumathy and Vikneswaran, 2008; Arambewela, 2010; Shekarchizadeh *et al.*, 2011), it helps in the marketing of the university.

Their experience in the campus will lead to word-of-mouth marketing (Akiba, 2008; Arambewela, 2010; Slethaug and Manjula, 2012; Abdul Rahman, 2013) as termed by Taylor (2010) as customer–experience marketing. Universities recognize that one of their best marketing tools is a positive recommendation from happy students (Arambewela, 2010). Some international alumni are actively involved in further recruitment upon returning to their home countries (Taylor, 2010).

The more tangible benefit of internationalization at HE is the income generation for the institution. Major contributor to this income comes from the tuition fees of international students (Taylor, 2010). This is particularly important for the private providers. Besides contributing to the economic benefits from international students, HEI also reaps greater social and cultural benefits by creating diversity in the campus (Hooley and Horspool, 2006; Arambewela, 2010).

This provides greater exposures and improves learning experience through interaction between local staff and students with international students (Hooley and Horspool, 2006; Knight, 2008b; Abdul Rahman, 2013). Hence also serve the effort of the university in preparing its students for global workforce.

The following paragraphs will discuss the issues, challenges and expectation from international students, academic staff and administrative staff based on some empirical studies by other researchers.

Having more international students in the campus is excellent yet at the same time creates additional responsibilities and expectations onto the institutions. The university may have a system but it cannot be applied together with both local and international students (Hooley and Horspool, 2006). As international students come to foreign country, they will experience being alien. This is due to cultural difference both in academic and social aspect (Hooley and Horspool, 2006; Banumathy and Vikneswaran, 2008).

They may experience different teaching and learning style as compared to their home country. Language seems to be the major problems that they faced in their learning (Akiba, 2008; Banumathy and Vikneswaran, 2008; Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, 2012). This is particularly true when English Language is their second or foreign language. The report by

Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia (2012) found that there is a gap in expectation from these students on the academicians. Students expect greater level of interaction and involvement in research from academic staff and more engagement and psychological support (Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, 2012) by the academic staff.

As for social aspect, these students may undergo psychological adjustment like homesick, loneliness, anxiety and communication problems (Hooley and Horspool, 2006; Akiba, 2008; Banumathy and Vikneswaran, 2008; Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, 2012). International students were found having difficulty mixing with local students and they seem to disengage from their other local peers (Akiba, 2008; Slethaug and Manjula, 2012).

Another difficulty that international students faced is the financial problem (Banumathy and Vikneswaran, 2008) which may lead to poor academic performance and other social issues. Even before leaving their home country, students had experienced some forms of difficulties; this includes problems related to immigration and country admission that could affect their entry procedure to the country (Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, 2012). This may lead to delay in commencing their first semester of study.

The provider of services on the other hand, similarly faced unfamiliar international students' characteristics and needs. This has imposed challenges on academicians (Banumathy and Vikneswaran, 2008) and administrator at HEIs. As Nur Sofurah (2011) coined it as two-way effort in addressing the learning by the international students and the teaching by academic staff. To the academicians, though majority do see the benefits of having international students in the campus (Abdul Rahman, 2013), both economic and social benefits. To some established public universities, it will be for brand building and ranking purposes.

For whatever reasons or rationales, in the eyes of lecturers, having the presence of diverse groups of students in the same classroom may pose to certain extend challenges to their pedagogy practice. To some, it requires additional effort to teach international students (Taylor, 2010). Stereotyping international students by academician may impose greater gaps between students and teachers (Arambewela, 2010).

Empirical research conducted by Shekarchizadeh *et al.* (2011) on the perceived service quality of top five Malaysian Public HEIs on 522 postgraduate international students measuring service quality in five domains; professionalism, reliability, hospitality, tangibles and commitment. Negative perceptions on their experienced in the universities in all domains were found from this research.

A study on international student experience conducted by Slethaug and Manjula (2012) at a mid-sized Malaysian tertiary institution on 78 international students from 17 countries with majority from Middle East and Africa. Findings show that students were frustrated with the administrative process such as admission, subject registration and subject add-drop during their first semester of study.

However, the frustration was less pertinent during their second semester when they were more familiar to the system. Students did wish that administrative staff could help more in their first semester as to ease their administrative process and settled down in foreign soil. They have

expectation from Malaysian lecturers, they expect a more personable, friendly, connected, caring and fair instructors.

Akiba (2008) in her research highlighted that some international students felt that the competency of English language by some lecturers may not up to the expectation. Correspondingly to the research conducted by Slethaug and Manjula (2012) where international student expect lecturers to have high level of English speaking, writing and pace. They wish that lecturer to speak not too fast or too slow with global English accent.

Another empirical study conducted by Nur Sofurah (2011) on international student learning experience at one of the Malaysian technical and vocational education university. The study reveals that lecturers encounter difficulty in teaching international students. This includes international students having difficulty in the application of lesson as they discovered that most of this students adopt learning style of their home country where memorizing was key to their learning. This learning technique may no longer applicable for higher education. It can be understood that they are memorizing for the fact that they have difficulty understanding English. With that, lecturers feel that it is indeed causing difficulty in delivering their lessons and to ensure that they do understand and able to apply lessons learned. In terms of project assignment, more attention was required as lecturers need to provide close guidance to the students. They also seem to disengage from other local students; this may due to the lack of communication skills.

Abdul Rahman (2013) examined the perceived challenges face by lecturers, administrators and both international and local students at public and private institutions through interviews and focus group. His findings is also consistent with other empirical studies conducted by other researchers on the view or challenges faced by academicians, among the highest concern is the lacking in the proficiency of English of the international students which will definitely impede or slow down their learning and eventually lacking behind of other students. An interesting finding from this study is the issues of quality students. In the chase of getting the international enrolment numbers, universities may bend or make-way which eventually may impact on the overall quality of the university.

While for administrators, they perceived that the greatest challenge facing them is the ability to attract the targeted number of international students to their institutions, insufficient facilities to accommodate to the needs of international students, problems with visa requirement, drop-out and compliance to all rules and regulation while they are here in Malaysia without committing crimes or other social offence.

The sentiment of incompetent staff in terms of limited experience or trained staff in managing the international students has also been a challenge for the administrators. International students on the other hand, feel that some lecturers are not well-prepared and have communication problems. Adding to that, they have undergone social distancing due to the disengagement from the locals.

Hooley and Horspool (2006) have conducted an empirical study on student and staff perception on non-native speakers at one of the British university. Questionnaires and interviews were conducted on both academic and support staff and international students.

The findings are consistent with findings from Nur Sofurah (2011) where teaching staff faced the same challenge in their teaching experience. Amongst the challenges were perceived cultural

gap, low participation in class, poor learning, poor understanding of academic convention for example plagiarism, linguistic difficulty and other personal problems making the teaching experience very time consuming. This is because they require more time in guiding them as compared to native students.

It was interesting to note that most of the discipline problem related to plagiarism involved international students. Problem with English was highlighted as a problem faced with lecturers teaching international students where English is not their first language. Lecturers found that international students are very reserve to share the problems that they faced. Students on the other hand find that language was their most difficult obstacle in acclimatizing themselves into the campus. Students did voice that they should be given more support from the university.

7. RECOMMENDATION

It is interesting to compare between the Malaysian case to the case from United Kingdom. We can conclude that regardless of which host countries, students leaving home to study in a foreign country, do face the challenge in academic and social adjustment. In the same way the academic and support staff of the universities hosting the international students also faced the comparable challenges with the Malaysian case.

Every stakeholder in HE would agree that providing good experience for the international students is imperative (Arambewela, 2010). There are vast spectrums in managing international students.

Starting with pre-admission prior entering to host country, receiving, orientation upon arrival of students, accommodation, registration of courses, payment of fees, attending and following lessons, student support services and personal matters will need to be managed well.

The Ministry of Higher Education understands the sentiment of these international students and has therefore provided The Code of Practice as a systematic guideline for HEIs in managing international students.

The code has identified six major scopes in managing international students; (1) Information to international students, (2) Marketing and recruitment of international students, (3) Enrolment of international students, (4) Fees, (5) International student support services and (6) Grievances & appeals. The academic aspect has been embedded into the international student support services.

Having the Code of Practice and Guidelines is a good move where at the least, HEIs will be able to have a more structured and organized way in managing international students. However, the people that execute and follow the guidelines are immensely important.

There are indeed challenges in managing international students by different categories of staff at the university. The presence of literature has highlighted that there is an increasing recognition on the importance of necessary skills for effective internationalization within higher education and pressing need to train and equip staff both academicians and administrators to be competent in managing international students (Taylor, 2010). However, there is very limited research on staff competencies for internationalization of HE.

Based on the literatures, scholars and policy makers had given recommendations for academicians and administrators in order to mitigate theses challenges.

Academic

- To have good understanding of learning background, expectations and aspirations of all their students in order to implement successful strategies (Arambewela, 2010).

- To acquire skill on intercultural teaching and learning issues in meeting the needs of diversify international students (Slethaug and Manjula, 2012).

- To understand the different approaches to student learning and issues relating to language proficiency (Taylor, 2010)

- To know the expectation of higher level of competence in English language, hence to improve English proficiency (Tham and Kam, 2008; Taylor, 2010).

- To be prepared to put additional effort required to teach international students (Taylor, 2010).

- To be extra sensitive to create positive classroom atmosphere, friendliness and fairness (Slethaug and Manjula, 2012).

- To review pedagogic practices (Hooley and Horspool, 2006).

- To conduct a need analysis to discover how international student priorities can be met within the classroom and translated into staff-development programs (Slethaug and Manjula, 2012).

Administrator

- To understand the cultural and language difference in their involvement with international students (Arambewela, 2010; Taylor, 2010; Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, 2012).

- To understand the relevant Malaysian laws and regulations governing international education, such as immigration laws (Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, 2012).

- To understand their roles and responsibilities in managing international students (Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, 2012).

- To raise levels of customer care relating to international students (Arambewela, 2010; Taylor, 2010).

- To review all support practices at every level of the institutions (Hooley and Horspool, 2006).

- To know and understand international student recruitment, identify new markets, international recruitment fairs, international recruitment agent, special deals for sending countries with large group of students international marketing staff (Taylor, 2010).

- To have the right skills, competencies and the right attitude with international mindset in managing international students (Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, 2012; Abdul Rahman, 2013).

- To have experience and knowledge on international activities and issues (Santhi, 2010).

- To be competent in language skill is critical i.e. English Language (Tham and Kam, 2008).

The above recommendations comprises of knowledge, skills and attitude (KSA), which in the early discussion terms as competencies. It was proposed by MoHE that Malaysian HEIs should conduct staff development through specialized training programmes and cross cultural programmes appropriate to the level of involvement of staff with international students (Hooley and Horspool, 2006; Ministry of Higher Education Undated, 2007; Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, 2012).

What had been discussed has revealed the needs to provide necessary services for international students so that they will have a productive and memorable learning experience while in HEIs in Malaysia. We also observed the challenges and expectations from academic and support staff in making this happened. Hence, there is a need to look into the competencies of the academic and support staff in managing international students which is pertinent.

University should develop intercultural competence for lecturers to equip them to teach a plural or diversify students and learning to meet the needs of learner of different cultures. It is necessary that university staff are trained in cross-cultural awareness and understanding to operate successfully in this highly diverse and dynamic HE environment (Arambewela, 2010).

8. CONCLUSION

The literature review of this paper has provided much insight on empirical studies on the challenges faced by both university administrators and academician in managing and teaching international students. Managing these students will require additional set of knowledge, attitudes, skills, and understandings about the international/intercultural/global dimension of he (Knight, 2008a). Hence, institutions need to relook into the competency of staff so that they are better equipped in managing international students

9. ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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