



INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS PERCEPTION ON DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT AT AN ACADEMIC DEPARTMENT: A CASE OF THE DEPARTMENT OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND CONTINUING EDUCATION, UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

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ABSTRACT

Malaysia got its independence in 1957, and its system of governance is Federal Constitutional Monarchy. It has a total landmass of 329,847 square kilometers. It is a country with three major ethnic groups, the Malays which are the majority, and then you have the Chinese and lastly, the Indians. However, there are other minority ethnics, and the official first language of the country is Bahasa Melayu, with the second official language been English language. It is home to many religions like Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, and Hindu. Despite been a multi-ethnic nation, Malaysia is a very peaceful country, and welcome to nationals of various countries, who come to Malaysia for higher education. Diversity in this study includes the following issues: Language, ethnic, cultural background, and national identity.

Malaysia has over the years intensified efforts for recruitment into its higher education program across various countries in different continents. Such recruitments cuts across various African countries, Central Asian countries, and also some other Island nations. There is also the “internationalization policy”, which has placed Malaysia above majority of the countries in Asia, in terms of “higher education”. In Universiti Putra Malaysia for example, there is a very large community of “international students” cutting across various continents. There are African students from Nigeria, Ghana, Gambia, Cameroon, Sudan, Kenya, and Somalia etc. In Asia, there are students from China, Bangladesh, Cambodia, and India. Etc. In terms of higher education, Malaysia is now the hub for most developing countries around the world.

The study concerns itself with the management of diversity in the academic department, between the various international students and the local indigenous students. The findings reflected that diversity exists in the academic department and there is the need for the management of the existing diversity in the academic department into a patronizing component. The findings reflected that there is the need for the promotion and proper management of diversity among the various diverse ethnics in the Department of Professional Development and Continuing Education, Universiti Putra Malaysia, and therefore a policy that would promote the cultures of the various ethnics in the academic department, that would at the end support a more culturally balanced academic environment of learning.

Keywords: Diversity Management; International Students; Perception; Academic Department; Malaysia.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

This paper provides a study on the perception of international students on diversity management in an academic department. Globalization in the twenty-first is of great importance to be effective in more than one organization or in one country. The interesting question may be what the word effectiveness brings to leadership. Effectiveness in various organizations probably means cutting costs and reducing time.

Diversity has many meanings. In Malaysia it means a combination of many ethnic groups and both genders. It also includes different religions and cultures, different levels of physical and mental ability, different talents, different sexual orientations, different lifestyles and family norms, different languages, and so on. Some of these differences are visible (such as a person's gender or the colour of his or her skin); some you cannot observe directly (such as beliefs or background). In this paper the word “diversity,” refers to the differences, and simply recognizing that it exist.

Harnessing the huge range of talents, outlooks, cultures, and background which exist in every academic institution is not just a political or human rights goal, it also makes real sense for the academic institution. It takes effort and commitment especially by the staff who manage its day to day affairs, and the governing body, which decides on school policy. But the reward for the school and everyone in it are so great that it is worth the effort. A school that accepts diversity and recognizes the contributions of all the people in it staff, learners is healthier and more productive than an academic institution that does not (Goduka, 1999).

Understanding and recognizing diversity enables the academic institution to make use of the different views and contributions that each of its members brings to school. The academic department can then provide a richer learning environment. Understanding and recognizing diversity can also make sure that the academic institution management team, learners, educators work more closely with each other to achieve the goals and objectives that the school has set for itself. Schools which treat diversity of their people as a strength, are also able to adapt better to the changes taking place in the rest of society (Goduka, 1999).

Malaysia as an evolving global economy is gradually taking the world by storm in terms of higher education among the global comity of nations. Most developing nations are gradually recognizing Malaysia as the hub of higher education, not just in Asia only, but globally. In 1995 alone, 20% of Malaysian students studied abroad. In response to the costs of sending students abroad, the Malaysian government developed a strategy to improve its Higher Education sector,

transforming it into regional and international hub for international students from various nations of the world. While restructuring its educational policies in the 1990s, the Malaysian government realized it would not be able to provide higher education to a significant proportion of its population through its own public institutions. In 1995, the Malaysian government was faced with a situation where 20% of Malaysian students studied abroad. This cost the country an estimated \$800 million USD, nearly 12% of Malaysia's current account deficit. Malaysia became one of the top countries sending its own students to study abroad. Faced with such a predicament the Malaysian government embarked on a program to turn Malaysia into a fully developed knowledge based economy. To that end, the Malaysian government sought to partner with foreign higher educational institutions to offer more educational opportunities for Malaysians on their own soil. The ultimate aim was to make Malaysia a regional hub of higher education in south-east Asia, and also on the international scene. These new policies were soon translated into regulatory frameworks to provide quality education in the private sector coupled with support from international institutions of higher education. The Malaysian government realized this would ease the pressure on currency outflow but to put such a policy into effect was by no means an easy task.

The policy of internationalization in higher education in Malaysia has evolved due to necessity in keeping with the demands of changing market economies. To transform from a production based economy to a knowledge based economy requires a highly skilled and knowledgeable workforce. Increase in foreign student's enrollment in Malaysia has made the country one of the strongest emerging contenders in the international market of foreign students. However, the Malaysian government is also concerned about the vocational focus of private education which may not prepare graduates with appropriate moral and ethical values needed for a multicultural and multiethnic Malaysia.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

This study seeks to understand managing diversity in an academic department, from the perceptions of international students. Through a qualitative interpretive analysis of data gotten from the respondents, this study presents an in-depth understanding of the experiences of international students studying in an academic department in Universiti Putra Malaysia.

In spite of the generally positive publicity given to organization diversity initiatives, there are some indications that diversity also creates problems for organizations (Miller & Rowney, 1999). The culturally diverse personnel have different backgrounds and experiences and therefore they hold very different perspectives and assumptions.

Diversity in an academic department enriches the educational experience of all involved. Diversity in this aspect has to do with the experiences, beliefs, and perspectives, and the lessons which can be taught and learnt in a richly diverse intellectual and social environment. Diversity in an academic department promotes personal growth, and also a healthy society. Diversity encourages critical thinking among students; and it helps students learn to communicate effectively with people of varied backgrounds in an academic department. Diversity in an academic department strengthens communities and the workplace. Education within a diverse setting prepares students to become good citizens in an increasingly complex, pluralistic society; as it fosters mutual respect and teamwork; and it helps build communities whose members are judged by the quality of their character and their contributions.

Perception can also be emphasized. The internal process by which an individual acquires, selects, evaluates, and organizes stimuli from the external environment. People behave as they do because of the ways in which they perceive the world, and behaviours are learned as part of their cultural experience (Peterson et al., 2007, p. 179).

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The study attempts to examine the total approach on managing diversity in the academic department by the international student's community. Even though this study will be limited and focused to the international students especially, this research may also serve as motivation for similar studies at other levels and in other areas of social contact and interaction.

In addition, we believe that the people included in the study, for instance, the interviewee's must be in some way reflect upon the subject of diversity.

There are many theorists and researchers that have studied diversity in organizations. However, the effectiveness in managing that diversity aspect has not yet been investigated to a large extent and therefore this study contributes to the body of knowledge.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

In pointing out limitations of the study, this paper did not include the local indigenous students during the process of interviewing. The interview sessions was only streamlined to the international students. Also, the researcher did not mention or state if those interviewed were either Africans or Non Africans.

In addition, the paper is talking about differences without making a judgment about whether the differences are good or bad, but simply recognize that it exists, and they should be managed effectively, for a greater and much more productive academic department.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. What inspired the international students to come to Universiti Putra Malaysia for their Post Graduate Program.
2. How the international students Experience Diversity in the Academic Department.
3. How prepared are the International Students to Manage Diversity, among the various diverse International Students.
4. How the international students are able to cope and manage in a diverse host environment.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Diversity has been defined in many of ways. Hayles (1996) for instance defines diversity as "all the ways in which we differ". He goes further to add that the diversity concept is not limited to what people traditionally think of race, gender, and disabilities.

According to Thomas (1996) diversity has an evolutionary nature, and it has far reaching impact on individuals and corporations.

A broad definition of diversity goes beyond protected class differences, because all individuals bring their differences, including a variety of group identity characteristics, to the workplace (Johnson, 1995).

Managing Diversity

Managing diversity means changing the existing culture; that is the standard operating procedures. It requires data, experimentation, and the discovery of the procedures that work best for each group. It is more complex than conventional management but can result in more effective (Triandis, Kurowski, & Gelfand, 1994). Thomas (1992) explains that managing diversity means to empower or enable employees. Managing diversity prescribes approaches that are philosophically broad enough to encompass all dimensions of diversity. Henderson (1995) relates managing diversity to the accomplishment of the organization's goals. For him managing diversity also emphasizes managerial skills and policies needed to optimize and emphasize every employee's contribution to organizational goals.

Wheeler (1995) refers to the management of diversity as the planning and implementation of organizational systems and practices in such a way that people are managed to maximize the potential advantages of diversity. A further goal of the management of diversity is to optimize the ability of employees to contribute to organizational objectives, regardless of their diverse groups.

Gauvain (1995) points out that managing diversity is not simply a matter of auditing employees' linguistic and cultural skills and using them in a mechanistic way. Rather, the authors say, the literature indicates that it involves a major change in the way that organizations manage themselves and do business. At the very least, they require a reappraisal of the role of minority groups in the workforce and productive market, and a willingness to transform organizational culture accordingly.

International Students Experience in Studying Abroad

The approach to student learning in this study places the study within the parameters of Astin's (1985) involvement theory. Involvement theory affirms that "students learn by becoming involved" (Astin, 1985, p. 133). Astin asserts that students' involvement in an educational endeavor is about the "physical and psychological energy" devoted to the experience (Astin, 1985, p. 134). In this sense, involvement theory is about behaviors rather than mental states. Astin states that involvement implies a behavioral component. This is not to deny that motivation is an important aspect of involvement. It is not so much what the individual thinks or feels but what he or she does that defines and identifies involvement." (Astin, 1985, p. 135).

This study is focused on the international students and on their perspectives, not on an evaluation of the content or educational objectives of their studying abroad programs. In involvement theory, what students learn has less to do with the specific structure of a program or the "resources or techniques typically utilized by educators" and more to do with "what the student does" (Astin, 1985, p. 142). In this sense, the theory allows room for what the students bring to bear on their learning and on their experience. The theory allows for consideration of both the prior characteristics of students and for their perspectives.

Although involvement theory is not centered in consideration or measurement of the resources or techniques utilized in an educational endeavor, it can foster an understanding of how different aspects of a program or an activity can impact student learning. Astin suggests two "key educational postulates" of the theory (Astin, 1985, p. 136).

Communicating Respect for Others

One of the basic principles of effective multicultural leadership is to signal respect for the unique characteristics of another's culture. Small gestures can communicate respect, such as greeting persons in their native language, taking time to chat and learn more about individuals, and keeping their culture and personal view points and values in mind as you work together. Doing this effectively requires learning about diverse sub-groups and building skills in relating to them.

Attracting and Retaining the Best People

Attracting and retaining the best people in the organization, you must meet their potential needs, like showing respect for them as individuals, and use similar multicultural skills in working with them.

Improving the Quality of Management

Diversity can prod managers to learn fresh approaches to business problems, to see issues from a new perspective, and to add new contacts to their business networks. Exposure to colleagues from diverse backgrounds can help managers develop openness (Koopman, 1991). Also, much of what an organization learns in trying out a special training programme for diversity purposes may later be broadly applied to all employees.

Problems of Managing Diversity in Education

Tierney (1993) identifies the following problems when introducing and strengthening the process of managing diversity in education:

1. The concept of diversity is often restricted to ethnicity ignoring the reality of multiple identities (gender, age, social status, etc.). This leads to emphasizing tendencies of segregation.
2. As far as ethnicity is concerned, managing diversity is predominantly limited to the promotion of the minority rights and does not involve society as a whole.
3. The balance between unity and diversity is not given enough attention.
4. Concepts of diversity management often lack adaptation to the realities of the region.

Multicultural Education

Multicultural education is a process of comprehensive school reform and basic education for all learners. It challenges and rejects racism and other forms of discrimination in schools and society and accepts and affirms the pluralism (ethnic, racial, linguistic, religious, economic, and gender, among others) that students, their communities and teachers reflect. Multicultural education permeates the school's 'curriculum' and instructional strategies, as well as the interaction among teachers, learners, and families, and the very way that schools conceptualize the nature of teaching and learning. Because it uses critical pedagogy as its underlying philosophy and focuses on knowledge, reflection, and action as the basis for social change, multicultural education promotes democratic principles of social justice (Nieto, 2000). Multicultural education is a process; it is ongoing and dynamic. No one ever stops becoming a multicultural person, and knowledge is never complete. This means that there is no established canon that is cast in concrete. Also multicultural education is a human process because it involves primarily relationships among people.

METHODOLOGY

The basic interpretive approach in qualitative research allows for a great deal of flexibility in how the subject is approached and ultimately in how the data are collected and interpreted. A fundamental aspect of the basic interpretive approach is in allowing room for the data to lead the researcher or for the data to speak for itself. In this kind of approach the researcher is often drawn in directions that are unanticipated prior to the start of research. It seemed particularly appropriate to incorporate a great deal of flexibility in the planning stages of research since "qualitative research is emergent rather than tightly prefigured" (Creswell, 2003, p. 181).

The research method used to carry out this study is focused on semi-structured interview of international students, where there is the interaction between the researcher and the participants on the research topic pertaining to the interview questions. It involves an organized discussion with a selection of individuals, who were interviewed to gain information about their opinions and experiences of a topic. This method is particularly suited for a researcher interested in obtaining several perspectives about the same topic (Morgan, 1998; Gibbs, 1997).

Interviews

Upon saturation point of information, four international students interviewed were all from the Department of Professional Development and Continuing Education. Among the four international (post-graduate) students interviewed, were three Master's Degree students, and a PhD student.

Bio-Data of Respondents

Names	Level of study	Age	Gender	Marital Status
Anthony	Master's Program	30	Male	Single
Kizito	Master's Program	29	Male	Single
Stella	Master's Program	32	Female	Married
Mahmud	PhD Program	42	Male	Married

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This part of the paper will focus on findings and discussion. Data collected through interviews are analyzed, and interpreted in this part. The purpose is to determine how diversity is experienced and managed by the various international students and their perceptions. Interviews were conducted with four international students in the academic department.

Research Objective One

What inspired the international students to come to Universiti Putra Malaysia for their Post Graduate Program. Interviewing the respondents, as regards to what inspired them to come to Universiti Putra Malaysia for their postgraduate study, the four respondents bared their minds. Below are the exact quotes from the four respondents.

According to Anthony: "Several factors were responsible for his coming to Universiti Putra Malaysia. One of such main factor is the presence of highly learned academicians in the field of Human Resource Development. Also Universiti Putra Malaysia been the bedrock and a foundation, compared to some other universities in East Asia. There are also good and efficient professors in Universiti Putra Malaysia in the HRD profession". Anthony further stated that, the HRD profession/field in UPM is highly rated and respected, within Asia and in the global academic community. Also, Anthony stated the issue of UPM been a well-equipped academic institution which is globally recognized and well respected, and with globally recognized professors motivated him to come to UPM to study for his Master's program.

According to Kizito: "The cost of education in UPM is cheaper than those of other countries. The course of study, which is HRD, is more visible and efficient here in UPM. The image of the country Malaysia is very much positive outside of Malaysia, i.e. in Nigeria, when the issue of higher education is mentioned. Also, been a culturally diverse environment, a peaceful nation, and having a stable economy". Kizito further stated the same opinion. That the HRD field in UPM is highly rated and respected, within Asia and in the global academic community.

According to Stella: “My main aim of coming to UPM is the fact that I consider UPM as a globally recognized research institution. An international academic institution that is always been referred to in the educational system. The field of HRD in UPM is very practical and globally recognized as well. Also taking the issue of referencing as a major factor after graduation. An issue of been proud of my alma-mater. Easy verification of old and past students, and having to study in a school with a different background and fresh experiences”. Stella further mentioned that, the HRD field in UPM is highly rated and respected, within Asia and in the global academic community. Stella went further to mention that, UPM is an academic institution that is highly rated in the international community, and that was what motivated her in coming to UPM to study for her postgraduate studies.

According to Mahmud: “My motivation for coming to UPM to study was that it’s a research university and coupled with the fact that it is globally recognized among research academic institutions. The HRD practice which happens to be my course of study is highly respected in UPM among majority of countries in Asia. Also it is a technologically based academic institution. The exposures of the teaching staffs (professors) are also a motivation. UPM is a basically a research academic institution that is well respected in the international community”. Mahmud clearly mentioned that, the HRD profession/field in UPM is highly rated and respected, within Asia and in the global academic community. Mahmud also went further to say that, UPM been a well-equipped, recognized academic institution within Asia and in the international community. The status and exposures of the professors in the HRD field. All these motivated him to coming to UPM to study for his postgraduate studies.

Research Objective Two

How the international students Experience Diversity in the Academic Department.

Interviewing the respondents, as regards to how they experience diversity in the academic department, the four respondents bared their minds. Below are the exact quotes from the four respondents.

According to Anthony: “It’s my ability to managing differences, leaving and managing the differences at the same time. UPM is a replica of an international institution, so diversity must exist in such an academic environment. Different ethnics like the Malays, Indians, Chinese, Iranians and Africans. So there is the readiness in my ability to manage the existing differences also in issues like food, the society, and weather, as very much different from my home society”. Anthony further mentioned that he is very much aware that diversity exists in the academic department. He went further to say that UPM been a globally recognized academic institution, so therefore diversity must exist in such an academic environment.

According to Kizito: “Diversity exists in the academic department. Diversity the academic department is reflected in the “internalization features” of UPM, which goes down to the academic department. UPM is an international institution, so one must always expect the diversity in the academic department. “Internalization features” in this aspect means the ability of the academic department to embrace nationals from different countries into their academic department. The greater the number of nationals of different ethnics, the higher the diversity”. Kizito in his brief stated that, he was very much aware that diversity exists in the academic department, and also that, UPM been an academic institution that is globally recognized, so therefore, diversity must in existence in such a globally recognized academic institution.

According to Stella: “I experience diversity, as UPM is an international academic institution. I mix-up with different ethnics and also learning important issues from them. Focusing on exploring the differences to been a better human. Another example is the class lecture group debates and discussions, and working together as a team. These are all major experiences in my experiencing of diversity”. Stella in her words during the course of the interview, mentioned that, she is very much aware that diversity exist in the academic department, and also that since UPM is well recognized globally, there was no way diversity could be of no existence in such an academic environment.

According to Mahmud: “It’s very much good. International students having to mix-up with local students and everyone, both the local and international students getting to learn the various cultures of the other. It is a very interesting experience to behold”. Mahmud mentioned that he is very much aware that diversity exists in the academic department. Multicultural education is a process of comprehensive school reform of discrimination in schools and society, and also accepts and affirms the pluralism (ethnic, linguistic, religious, economic, and gender, among others) that students, their communities and teachers reflect. Multicultural education infuses into the school’s curriculum and instructional strategies, as well as the interaction among teachers, learners, and families, and the very way that schools conceptualize the nature of teaching and learning. Because it uses critical pedagogy as its underlying philosophy and focuses on knowledge, reflection, and action as the basis for social change. Multicultural education promotes democratic principles of social justice (Nieto, 2003).

If we learn how to find greater unity and harmony in our diverseness, we can bring this knowledge to the arena of global culture, where as an academic institution we can apply it in meeting global challenges and creating global harmony and abundance for the world economy (Goduka, 1999).

Research Objective Three

How prepared are the International Students to Manage Diversity, among the various diverse International Students.

Interviewing the respondents, as regards to how they were able to manage diversity among other International Students, they all bared their minds at various times. Below are the exact quotes from the four respondents. The interview question was: "How you have been able to manage diversity among other international students?"

According to Anthony: It is all about admitting to oneself that I am an international student in an international academic environment and with various diverse ethnics as students. Different students from different ethnic backgrounds with different thinking, different faith, different culture, different food, and different way of life and as well the social interaction as an aspect on its own. Having to develop internal motivation to be able to cope and manage within a diverse

academic environment. In most cases, the strategy I apply in terms of feeding and interaction are: relating to students of all ethnic groups, developing friendships, and using it as a technique to know more of their likes, dislikes, and it gives me the ability to manage diversity effectively well. Also getting to know the various diverse students religiously, e.g., the Muslims, the Christians, the Buddhists, the Hindus and the free thinkers, etc. and trying everything humanly possible not to say or mention what he or she may dislike hearing. Also getting to know them culturally as well. Relating very friendly with them is actually a major technique to knowing them better. Asking questions of their likes and dislikes. The various different schools of thoughts, knowing them and acting upon them, in other not to offend any of them. Anthony further stated that he was able to manage diversity among other international students by being very friendly and respectful to all students (international and local students respectively) in the academic department. Also by coming to terms that he is in an internationally recognized institution, so the issue of diversity must exist, since different ethnics exist in the academic department.

According to Kizito: It is very much simple, by not seeing my own culture and beliefs as the best. Not been ethnocentric. Kizito stated that, he was able to manage diversity among other international students by also being respectful to all.

According to Stella: She was able to manage the diverseness very much well. Not much challenging, because I was actually expecting the diversity, due to the status of UPM as a globally recognized and accepted research academic institution. Stella stated that, she was able to manage diversity among other international students, because she was ready for the tasks ahead.

According to Mahmud: I have been able to manage and cope successfully. Making friends across various ethnic groups. Discussing about the various religions, cultures and as well politics. Discussing cultural issues to know their likes and dislikes and therefore using it as a strategy to know how to interact with them constructively. I also try to discuss societal issues across continents with the international students. Mahmud mentioned that he applied the technique of respecting their cultural views, through constant communicating in the ability to knowing their likes and dislikes.

The challenge to managing diversity in an academic department as a topic symbolizes the key to our power in creating the world we want and so desires, at every levels of existence. It symbolizes the new world, and the challenges we need to make in other to meet its challenges and arise to its opportunities. This can clearly well be connected to the response gotten from the respondents in the related themes. Diverse groups with the skills and support systems to integrate effectively are likely to be considerably more effectively than non-diverse or homogenous groups involved in the same activities (Moore, 1999).

“Diversity plays its most important role in the work stage where the group uses its diversity to collect new perspectives and ideas, in other to create alternative problem definitions and solutions. Diverse groups are able to better see situations, interpret their perceptions, and create alternatives in more ways than homogenous groups are in the work stage (Adler, 1991)”.

“Valuing diversity involves seeing a diverse workforce as an asset that offers valuable opportunities for innovation, networking, marketing savvy and similar benefits. This approach primarily involves a shift in beliefs and attitudes away from “we are all alike (or should be)” to “we are each unique and that is the source of our greatness”. The valuing of diversity approach focuses primarily on educating people through experiential and informational seminars to make appropriate attitude shifts. It emerged in the 1980’s and it is still a part of managing diversity (Hoecklin, 1995)”.

Research Objective Four

How the international students are able to cope and manage in a diverse host environment.

Interviewing the respondents, as regards to how they have been able to cope in a widely diverse host environment, they all bared their minds at various times. Below are the exact quotes from the four respondents. The interview question was: “How you have been able to cope in a widely diverse host environment?”

According to Anthony: “It’s not been really easy, and I have been faced with much challenges of managing local diversity. However, the question I continue to ask myself is; who do I satisfy? It is nice to listen and relate to students of all ethnic affiliation. Sometimes, I also pay them visits as well. Respecting the diversity of the host environment. Going to the various restaurants of the Malays, Chinese and Indians, and even that of the Iranians too. Been neutral by respecting all ethnics. Relating to the various ethnics as one, and seeing them all as one. Respecting their diverse laws, life styles, respecting their various religious affiliations also. Aside the fact that I was taught the local indigenous language (Bahasa Melayu) at my first semester, there was also the extra effort to having to learn and study it privately. It helped a lot in my communications with the locals. However, it’s not been really easy doing this for the past fourteen months”. Anthony further stated that he has been able to cope in a widely diverse host environment because he employed the technique of not been ethnocentric to any of the ethnics, but by simply been friendly to all ethnics (the Malays, the Chinese, and the Indians). Respecting their various religions, and cultural heritage.

According to Kizito: “Seeing them all as one, and not looking at them from the ethnic angle, though they are of various ethnic backgrounds. This has really assisted in my ability to cope successfully”. Kizito stated that, he was able to cope by not been ethnocentric.

According to Stella: “I am coping very well, by not been ethnocentric, and by appreciating the diverseness of the environment, it was much easier to cope. In this context, it’s easy culturally, religiously, and socially, due to the fact that I am also coming from a very diverse environment in my home country Nigeria”. Stella further stated that, she was able to cope by not been ethnocentric, and having to appreciate the diverseness of the environment, been the fact that she was also coming from a diverse environment (home country).

According to Mahmud: “I cope personally with the little resources at my disposal. Having to make use of my finance wisely. Also having to learn the local Malaysian language (Bahasa Melayu) which makes for easy communication. Making friends from among the Malays, Chinese and Indians, and as well sharing views about the social

aspect of our various cultures". Mahmud also stated that his ability to learn the local language (Bahasa Melayu) assisted in communicating easily with the local indigenes, and also making friends across all ethnics. Cultural diversity, at the simplest level, reflects the characteristics that may make one culturally different individual from another. Cultural differences involve patterns of life styles, values, beliefs, ideas, and practices. Cultural diversity includes the differences in ethnicity, national origin or identity, language and religion (Blank & Slipp, 1994).

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussions, the study managed to fulfill its research objectives, and the following are the related themes. The international students are:

1. Aware of the concept of managing diversity but are not committed enough to promoting diversity at the academic department.
2. However, the students do not experience or encounter any problems in terms of studying and learning in their various classrooms.
3. Sometimes, there is a communication problem between the international students and the local indigenous students.
4. Managing diversity has a great deal to do with encouraging a culture of tolerance and respect. When we respect one another, we can learn from one another.
5. Managing diversity needs the university management leadership to be able to distinguish how important is diversity in an academic environment. It requires a consultative and participatory approach to leadership, and it requires courage and wisdom.

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