Internationalisation as Mutual Adjustment in the Learning and Teaching Experiences of International Students and Academic Staff: A case study in a Malaysian Technical University Setting

by

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List of Abbreviations

3P	Presage, Process and Product model
ABC	Affective, Behavioural and Cognitive
CGPA	Cumulative Grade Point Average
EAL	English as an Additional Language
GCE 'A' Level	General Certificate of Education Advanced Level
GPA	Grade Point Average
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
MoHE	Ministry of Higher Education
MTU	Malaysian Technical University
MTUN	Malaysian Technical University Network
MUET	Malaysian University English Test
RM	Malaysian Ringgit
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States
US$	United States Dollar
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

Abstract

Research on the academic and social adjustment experiences of international students who travel to other countries to undertake formal studies in higher education has predominantly been carried out in Western countries such as the United Kingdom, United States, Australia and New Zealand. However, phenomena associated with international students in non-traditional but emerging education markets are still relatively under-researched. This doctoral research project responds to this gap in the literature by investigating a developing and unexamined aspect of internationalisation in Malaysian higher education. It investigates internationalisation at the level of learning and teaching activities through the conceptual lens of *mutual adjustment*—a theory that portrays the dynamism of relationships and outcomes in internationalised education settings.

Mutual adjustment in this study was researched through the learning experiences of international students from the Middle East and Africa, as well as the pedagogical experiences of Malaysian academic staff at the Malaysian Technical University (MTU, a pseudonym)—a technical higher education institution that is one of the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) providers in Malaysia. MTU has been the main Malaysian TVET higher education provider to actively become involved in internationalisation activities; it has been recruiting international students since 2004. Jin's (1992) theory underlying the Cultural Synergy model and Biggs's (1996) Presage, Process and Product (3P) model were used to underpin the theoretical framework for mutual adjustment devised for this study. This framework posits that adjustment is a dynamic two-way process between international students and academic staff.

A qualitative case study methodology was adopted for this study. Focus groups and in-depth interviews were conducted with 11 international students and nine academic staff participants across three different engineering programs. Thematic analysis of the data revealed a complex and interrelated set of issues affecting the process of mutual adjustment; these issues affected international students, academic staff, local students and the institution more widely. While international students' experiences at MTU reflected many issues that have been identified in previous research on students studying overseas, the nature and characteristics of the learning and teaching environment at MTU also resulted in some novel findings—for example, the effect of English as the language of instruction on international students, academic staff and local students, who all speak English as an Additional Language (EAL). The emphasis on applied learning, which is

characterised by a ‘hands-on’ approach, affected international students in specific ways, especially those who had no previous experience in laboratory work. In addition, the practices of Islam, which were informally embedded in the educative process, significantly affected the experiences of both international students and academic staff, who all shared the same religion.

While the ‘ideal’ situation of mutual adjustment conjures up images of reciprocity, connectedness, complementarity, cooperation, partnership and positive changes for all parties involved in internationalised education settings, this research highlights a process that is far more chaotic, contested and less predictable in a setting where the institution itself is still in a relatively early stage of internationalisation. The research findings revealed that the process and outcomes of mutual adjustment in this case study were fragmented and contradictory, and they were more often characterised by high degrees of tension between international students and academic staff. This research makes a valuable contribution to the conceptualisation of internationalisation in higher education and the related body of knowledge at the level of human interactions in the classroom. It is also the first investigation to focus on the adjustment of international students in the Malaysian TVET setting and how their presence has affected and influenced the teaching practices of academic staff. As such, it has implications for institutions in Malaysia that are interested in learning more about the internationalisation of higher education.

1 Introduction

This study is situated in the field of the internationalisation of higher education. Although widely investigated in Western countries, this field has been relatively under-researched in the Malaysian higher education setting. This study aims to investigate the nature of *mutual adjustment* in the learning and teaching experiences of international students and academic staff at the Malaysian Technical University (MTU, a pseudonym), which is one of the Malaysian Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) providers operating in the higher education sector.

The concept of mutual adjustment refers to the dynamism and relationships between international students and academic staff as they interact with each other in the learning and teaching processes. It determines not only how each party is affected by the presence of the other, but also how mutual adjustment is manifested in the daily lives of students and staff. MTU offers a rich opportunity to study international students' experiences at a time when the numbers of international students are growing and academic staff are working in a learning and teaching environment with this changing student demographic. This study explores two complementary phenomena: (1) international students' experiences in adjusting to their academic environment at MTU, and (2) academic staff responses to having international students in their classrooms in terms of any pedagogical adjustments that are made to facilitate international students' learning.

The purpose of this chapter is to orientate the reader to the context of the investigation. It commences by providing a background to the study. Following this, the key research questions that guide the investigation are made explicit. Next, an outline of the study's design and methods are provided, followed by a discussion of the significance of the study. The final section of the chapter presents the structure of the thesis and provides brief outlines of each chapter.

1.1 Background to the Study

Research on the academic and social adjustment experiences of international students in higher education institutions has been undertaken over the past 50 years (e.g. Bochner, Hutnik & Furnham 1985; Chataway & Berry 1989; Lysgaard 1955; Major 2005; Pitts 2009; Ramsay, Barker & Jones 1999; Tran 2011). In the field of the internationalisation of higher education, the studies have generally taken place in Western countries such as the United Kingdom (UK) (e.g. Peelo & Luxon 2007; Trahar & Hyland 2011; Zhou & Todman 2009), the United States of America (US) (e.g. Cemalcilar & Falbo 2008; Seo & Koro-Ljungberg 2005; Volet & Ang 2012), Australia (e.g. Kudo & Simkin 2003; Sawir et al. 2008; Tran 2011) and New Zealand (e.g. Campbell & Li 2008; Hsien-Chuan Hsu et al. 2009; Zhiheng & Brunton 2007). Phenomena associated with international students in non-traditional but emerging education markets have been relatively under-researched, including the Malaysian TVET setting which has seen a rapid growth of international students. In 2010, there were 24,212 international students enrolled in all 20 Malaysian public higher education institutions—approximately half of whom were from countries in the Middle East and Africa (Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia (MoHE) 2010). This number has been increasing by 16.9 per cent per year, and the aim is to have 200,000 international students in Malaysian higher education institutions by 2020 (Sirat 2010b). In the case of Malaysian public higher education in the TVET sector, the number of international students in all four technical higher education institutions increased from five in 2004 to 1,194 by the end of 2012, with two-thirds of the students from countries in the Middle East and Africa. Therefore, researching the experiences of this growing population is an important undertaking not only to understand the students' points of view, but also to ascertain how academic staff and institutions are responding to having more international students in Malaysian higher education classrooms.

In the related literature, much of the discussion has focused on academic and social challenges that international students have encountered during their transition to Western institutions (e.g. Bartram 2008; Cameron & Meade 2003; Ramsay, Barker & Jones 1999; Sobre-Denton & Hart 2008; Wang, Y-W 2007; Williams 2008; Yakunina et al. 2012; Zhiheng & Brunton 2007). Debate has also centred on the methods of support that lecturers and institutions should provide to assist the transition of international students (e.g. Bartram 2008; Cameron & Meade 2003; Carroll 2005; Dao, Lee & Chang 2007; Peelo & Luxon 2007; Sanderson 2006; Skinner 2010; Yeh & Inose 2003). Also evident in

the literature is a growing consensus that adjustment challenges and support not only apply to international students, but also to academic staff (e.g. McLaughlin 2004; Sanderson 2006; Tran 2008, 2011; Zhou & Todman 2008). As such, it is suggested that adjustment should be promoted as being mutual or reciprocal, with efforts to adjust being required from both international students and academic staff in order to encourage productive and sustainable learning and teaching environments (Davis 2009; Tran 2008, 2011; Zhou & Todman 2008).

However, much of the existing research has failed to provide sufficient information on how international students adjust in non-Western institutions and particularly in TVET institutions. It offers limited information on how international students adjust in a new academic environment in a non-Western developing country such as Malaysia, which is relatively new to receiving international students. The literature also does not take into consideration the role of TVET institutions in Malaysia, which act as the main provider of technical and vocational training, or the adjustment that international students make when learning in this environment. Researching adjustment in the TVET sector is particularly important because TVET curriculum has a very strong focus on technical skills or competencies attached to specific job roles (Alias & Hassan 2013). TVET is not just confined to an emphasis on applied learning, but also about the development of employability skills and the ability to manage oneself in a workplace which has specific cultural dimensions. As such, TVET is not just about students having to adjust in the applied learning context but more importantly, students must be able to understand how the job role is undertaken in the country where these students will generally be involved in industrial training in local workplaces (Mohd Zain 2008). In addition, although the theoretical perspectives of adjustment are currently being viewed as mutual, there is little discussion in the literature on the notion of mutual adjustment as a characteristic of the practice and, indeed, the dynamism of internationalisation in higher education. The literature tends to investigate the experiences of either students or staff, and rarely the relationship between them. This represents a significant gap in the knowledge required for a detailed understanding of the effects and outcomes of the transition experienced by international students.

1.2 Research Questions

To achieve the stated aims, this study is guided by the following four key questions:

(1) What are the learning-related experiences of the international students as they make the transition from their previous academic environment to the MTU learning and teaching environment?
(2) What are the teaching-related experiences of the academic staff who have international students in their classes who are transitioning to the MTU learning and teaching environment?
(3) How can mutual adjustment between international students and academic staff be conceptualised in the MTU learning and teaching environment?
(4) What implications do the research findings have for both theory and practice in terms of assisting international students and academic staff to make their respective transitions in the internationalising of the MTU learning and teaching environment?

1.3 Research Design and Methods

The research questions outlined in this study address the complex social reality that connects the experiences of international students and the responses of academic staff in order to address the phenomenon of mutual adjustment. Based on these intentions, an interpretive qualitative case study methodology was chosen for this study. The key philosophical assumption of this research is that students and staff construct a social reality through their interactions with the world (Kvale 2009; Merriam 1998). The goal of this research is to portray an in-depth description of these experiences by gathering rich, 'descriptive', 'particularistic' and 'heuristic' characteristics of the phenomenon in question (Merriam 2009, pp. 43–44) using focus groups and in-depth interviews to analyse and interpret the phenomenon as a 'case' (Stake 1995, p. 3) or 'bounded system' (Merriam 1998, p. 65, 2009, p. 41). The research design adopted the Z-path design (Maxwell 2005) which emphasised five components of simultaneous reflexive processes (goal of study, theoretical framework, research questions, research context and processes and ethical concerns). Methods used in this study were focus groups and in-depth interviews conducted with 11 international students and nine academic staff in the MTU.

1.4 Significance of the Thesis

This study is significant in at least four ways. First, this research decentralises the mainly Western focus of the literature on the internationalisation of higher education by

investigating the internationalisation process in the non-Western, Malaysian TVET setting, which has previously received limited research attention (Mohd Zain 2008; Rajuddin 2000; Saat 2007; Safahieh & Singh 2006; Mohd Yusof & Sidin 2008). This is also aligned with the importance of monitoring the progress and development of internationalisation initiatives in an institution (Knight 2001). Since the internationalisation of higher education has expanded into developing countries such as South-East Asian nations, including Malaysia, this study contributes knowledge on the progress of the internationalisation of higher education in non-Western countries. Malaysian higher education is relatively new to the education of international students. Thus, research has not yet focused on this area, but rather has concentrated more on the development of educational policies, plans and marketing strategies (Saat 2007; Sirat 2009, 2010a; Sirat, Ahmad & Koo 2011). However, because the number of international students is rapidly growing (and will continue to grow), research is warranted to examine how international students adjust to learning in the Malaysian universities, and how academic staff accommodate these students and respond to this change. This is important because the literature on students studying in other countries (especially countries in the West) indicated that when an educational environment has significant changes (i.e. when an institution has students in different cultures), it impacts both students and academic staff. Therefore, it is important to be able to understand these changes and understand what is going on, and this is what motivated this particular doctorate study. Second, this study is timely for the Malaysian context because it examines the issue of the internationalisation of Malaysian higher education at a time when the Malaysian government is aiming to increase international student numbers in Malaysian higher education institutions. In addition, the Malaysian government is planning to recruit international students as part of its policy when upgrading TVET post-secondary institutions to universities (Davis 2009; Idris 2009; Md Yunos et al. 2005a; Mohd Taha 2010; Safahieh & Singh 2006; Utusan Malaysia Online 2009). Third, the findings of this study will inform both policy and practice in the internationalisation of higher education—specifically in Malaysia—as the goals of the Malaysian government and the country's higher education institutions are realised over the next decade. Fourth, it also has the potential to add more broadly to the corpus of knowledge in the field of the internationalisation of higher education.

1.5 Structure of the Thesis

After this introductory chapter, the next two chapters set out the theoretical issues and contexts that inform the direction of the research. Chapter 2 examines the concept of internationalisation as it applies to higher education, international students and the concept of mutual adjustment. Chapter 3 focuses on the internationalisation of higher education in Malaysia and TVET in order to provide a better understanding of the particular and unique characteristics of the context in which this research takes place.

Chapter 4 presents the methodology and methods adopted in this study. It outlines the research design and data collection methods used to conduct this study. Chapters 5 and 6 outline the research findings. Chapter 5 explores the adjustments made by international students throughout their learning experiences at MTU. Chapter 6 presents the pedagogical and related experiences of academic staff in terms of issues surrounding the presence of international students at MTU and their transition to the MTU learning and teaching environment.

Chapter 7 analyses and synthesises the research findings. It conceptualises mutual adjustment at MTU by integrating the experiences of both international students and academic staff, and examining these experiences in light of the internationalisation context of MTU and previous studies on mutual adjustment and related theories. Finally, Chapter 8 presents the conclusions and implications that can be drawn from the research.

2 Internationalisation of Higher Education and Mutual Adjustment

Research on the adjustment of international students is situated in the broader field of the internationalisation of higher education. The amount of potentially relevant literature in this field is extensive. However, this study focuses on the current state of mutual adjustment at the MTU. Thus, this chapter explores the relevant literature on the adjustment of international students and the growing theoretical perspectives on the concept of mutual adjustment.

The chapter has three main sections. First, it examines the internationalisation of higher education, which sets the context for exploring mutual adjustment. The second section outlines information on international students in higher education institutions. This discussion leads to a consideration of related theories and studies on adjustment. The focus is discussions of their adjustments when learning in a foreign country, as well as the gaps in the literature, which this study aims to fill. Next, the third section presents theories related to mutual adjustment. This section establishes the theoretical framework for this study, which is based on Jin's (1992) perspective of the Cultural Synergy theory and Biggs's (1996) Presage, Process and Product (3P) model. This chapter concludes with the theoretical framework that guides the conduct of this study.

2.1 Internationalisation of Higher Education

2.1.1 Historical overview of the internationalisation of higher education

The internationalisation of higher education has been researched since medieval times, when education was realised as important for preparing young people to cope better in an increasingly interdependent world (Hayden & Thompson 1995; Knight & de Wit 1995).The historical development of the internationalisation of higher education was dominated by the West and can be divided into three phases: prior to the Eighteenth

century, between the Eighteenth century and World War II, and post-World War II to the present. Before the Eighteenth century, the internationalisation of higher education had its roots in European countries, with elite students and scholars travelling to obtain academic knowledge and other cultural experiences (Knight & de Wit 1995). The use of Latin as a common language and the similarities between different higher education systems in Europe enabled students to travel to institutions around the region (De Ridder-Symoens cited in Knight & de Wit 1995). Between the Eighteenth century and World War II, three important elements characterised the internationalisation of higher education. The first element was the export of higher education systems from countries such as England, Spain, Portugal, France and Holland to their colonies in, for example, Asia, Africa and the Caribbean. The second element was the activity of research and publications between scholars from the US and various countries in Europe. The third element was the mobility of students and scholars—usually from less industrialised countries to more industrialised countries such as the US and the UK (Knight & de Wit 1995).

After World War II, the internationalisation of higher education expanded through political, economic, social and academic means, which were controlled by the more powerful nations that emerged after the war, such as the US and the (then) Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) (Kerr 1994; Knight & de Wit 1995). In the 1960s, the decolonisation of many countries, the expansion of higher education institutions and the role of universities as the agent of human capital development started to progress and change the internationalisation of higher education through the mobility of students—especially from developing countries to more developed countries (Knight & de Wit 1995). During this period, the US and the USSR believed they could expand their political and economic powers through relationships with colonised and less developed countries. These collaborations were normally oneway. For instance, student mobility moved from countries in Asia, Latin America and Africa to the US, the USSR and, following that, to Europe, Canada and Australia. Financial aid was also moving one way, where funds were provided by the US, the USSR and European countries to support academic programs in less developed countries (de Wit 2002; Knight & de Wit 1995).

In the period from the early 1980s until the present, higher education grew in significance in the West and in Asian countries for a combination of political, financial, academic and socio-cultural reasons (de Wit 2002). The rise of non-Western countries such as Japan has seen them emerge as providers that have a significant influence on international education

(Sirat 2008). This situation has in turn shifted the internationalisation process towards more of a two-way collaboration through international exchange and cooperation between Western countries and countries in the Asian region (de Wit 2002; Knight & de Wit 1995). Higher education institutions are expected to make efforts to increase international cooperation by increasing the transfer of knowledge between societies, thereby advancing communication opportunities and supporting labour mobility (Knight 2004). These efforts have been developed and established through collaborations between academic institutions in different countries, establishing branch campuses in different countries, and developing policies and practices relating to the recruitment of international students (Altbach 2002; de Wit 2002; Knight & de Wit 1995; Mazzarol, Soutar & Michael 2003).

2.1.2 Definitions and concepts around the internationalisation of higher education

The definition of the internationalisation of higher education has been controversial, as it has been used in a variety of ways in different countries. The definition depends on what best suits the purpose of each country (de Wit 2002). However, the definition is commonly linked with a process of change from the development of institutional activities—such as institutional policies, programs and strategies that suit the purpose of the national agenda—to the inclusion of international dimensions in those activities (Altbach 2002; Saat 2007; Söderqvist 2002). For instance, Arum and Van de Water (1992) proposed that internationalisation for US higher education refers to 'the multiple activities, programs and services that fall within international studies, international educational exchange and technical cooperation' (p. 202). Knight (1997), with an emphasis on the notion that internationalisation is a process, defined the internationalisation of higher education in Canada as 'the process of integrating an international/intercultural dimension into teaching, research and service functions of the institution' (p. 29). While Arum and Van de Water (1992) and Knight (1997) focused on the inclusion of the international/intercultural dimensions, Söderqvist (2002) extended those dimensions with the view that in Finland, the focus of internationalisation involves an education change process and a holistic view of management at the institutional level. Söderqvist (2002) defined the internationalisation of higher education as:

> a change process from a national higher education institution to an international higher education institution leading to the inclusion of an international dimension in all aspects of its holistic management in order to enhance the quality of teaching and learning and to achieve the desired competencies (p. 29).

Despite their references to specific countries, these definitions all concentrate on the institutional level and thus have limitations for countries that are attempting to view the internationalisation of higher education from a broader perspective. Taking this limitation into account, de Wit (2002) pointed out that a more comprehensive definition with clear parameters was necessary in order to provide a focus among researchers and to enable discussion of the term with a clear conceptual basis in mind. Responding to this suggestion, Knight (2004) expanded the definition of the internationalisation of higher education and described it as:

> the process of integrating international, intercultural, or global dimensions—the sense of relationships between nations, culture and countries as well as relating the diversity of cultures that exist within the institution, into a purpose, function or delivery of post-secondary education (p. 11).

To date, this definition has been widely accepted as the working definition used to understand the internationalisation of higher education. It offers 'breadth and depth' into the practices of internationalisation at the organisational level (Sanderson 2008, p. 278). The depth is reflected by the stratification of the internationalisation process, which involves a level greater than the institutional—in this case including national and sector levels. The breadth of internationalisation is demonstrated through the inclusion of intercultural, international and global flows, which reflects that internationalisation involves the process of building relationships between and among different countries and diverse cultures (Knight 2004; Sanderson 2008).

Despite the wide acceptance of this definition, Knight's (2004) overall concept of internationalisation has limitations. Sanderson (2008) argued that Knight's conceptualisation does not really attend to the learning and teaching environment, and that it is limited in terms of its ability to guide internationalisation initiatives at the individual level. According to Sanderson (2008), students and staff are the driving forces that give effect to, and are affected by, internationalisation processes; hence, they should be included in the understanding of the process of internationalisation (p. 279). He further suggested that in order to understand the true extent of the processes and effects of internationalisation, it is essential to investigate the purposes, practices and experiences of key stakeholders at all levels. Accordingly, Sanderson (2008) extended Knight's (2004) stratification of national, sector and institutional levels by adding two levels to reflect the depth of internationalisation dimensions: supranational and within-institutional. These extended levels are reflected in Sanderson's (2008) diagram, as presented in Figure 2.1.

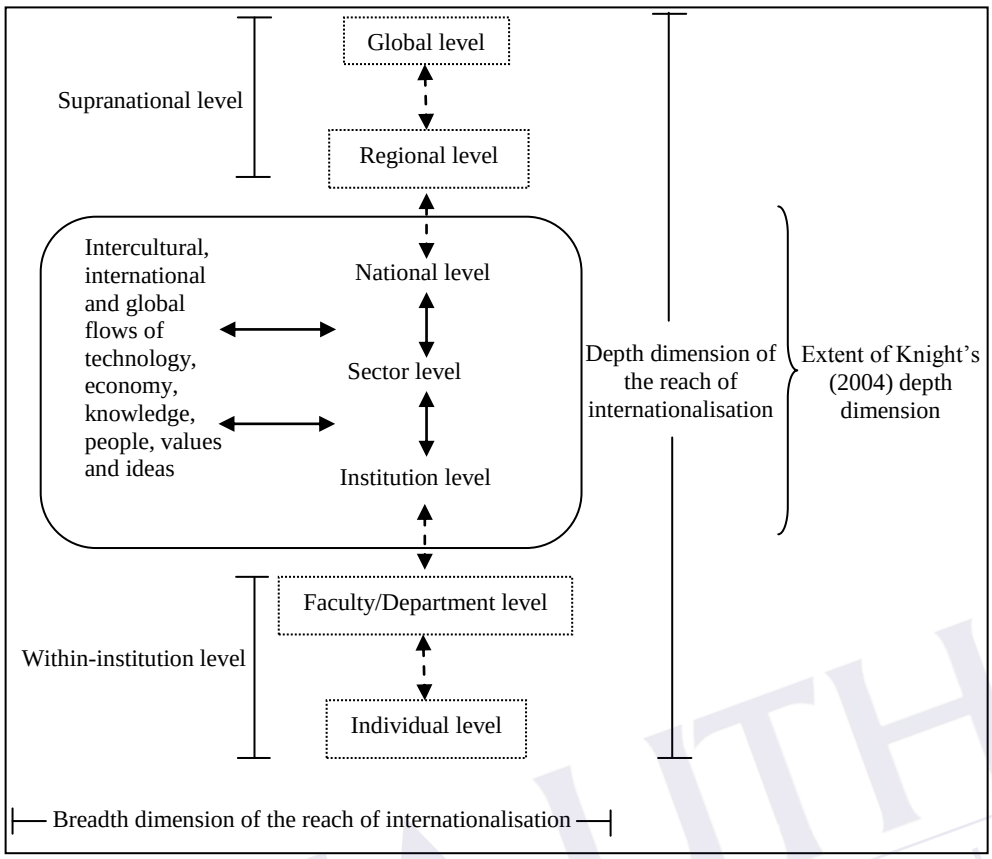

Figure 2.1: Sanderson's extended internationalisation dimensional framework (Sanderson 2008)

Sanderson's (2008) additional levels address the global and regional levels within the supranational level and, more importantly for the purposes of this study, the faculty/department and individual levels at the within-institutional level. The argument presented by Sanderson (2008) and his extended framework legitimised the idea of other researchers investigating the management of the internationalisation process at all levels—especially the within-institutional level (e.g. Andrade 2010; Durkin 2008; Yan & Berliner 2011).

Another limitation identified around the concept of internationalisation portrayed by Knight (2004) is that internationalisation is very conceptual and idealistic in nature—it portrays respect between different cultures and about people in different cultures working the best they can to respect other cultures (Sanderson, 2010). However, the literature illustrated that there are challenges around the practice of internationalisation—especially in classrooms (between international students and staff)—and this shows that internationalisation is not as direct as Knight's (2004) portrayal.

2.1.3 Institutional engagement with internationalisation

Sanderson's (2008) extended framework and Knight's (2004) concept of the internationalisation of higher education portrayed the process of internationalisation as consisting of three significant levels: national, sector and institutional. The national level is engaged with internationalisation through four rationales: social/cultural, political, economic and academic (Knight 2004). How internationalisation policy and plans are developed depends on the rationales that motivate the nation, and the implementation of the plans varies between countries (de Wit 2002; Knight 2004). The sector level is a country's universities where the internationalisation engagements are commonly influenced by the nation's internationalisation agendas, and therefore the sector level complements activities at the national level (Knight 2004). An example of activity that signifies the sector level is a government's offer for scholarships for international students as a support and encouragement for developing nations which may also have a political agenda at the national level. At the institutional level, internationalisation engagement is motivated by five rationales: the aim for international recognition, staff and students' development, income generation, strategic alliances, and research and knowledge production. In turn, these should coincide with the four rationales at the national level (Knight 2004, pp. 25–28). Institutions are engaged by implementing internationalisation activities; hence, as Knight (2004) argued, this is where the 'real process' of internationalisation activities is taking place (p. 6). Examples of institutional activities in internationalisation include collaboration in research with foreign universities, academic exchange programs between institutions, development of branch campuses and recruitment of international students (Altbach 2002; Gacel-Ãlvila 2005; Söderqvist 2002).

Knight (2004) and de Wit (2002) argued that if an institution engages with internationalisation by highlighting only these activities, it is applying the 'activity approach' (Knight 2004, p. 20) and is likely to treat any international activities as separate from other aspects of the institutional core business. Rather, these activities should integrate international dimensions into the activities of teaching and learning, and service functions at the within-institution level, hence implementing the 'process approach' (Knight 2004, p. 20), which, according to de Wit (2002), is the comprehensive approach to remain responsive to the demands of internationalisation. This process approach involves comprehensive internationalisation strategies that look into factors, barriers, guiding principles and monitoring that influence any internationalisation activities under

development (Knight 1997). This process also requires commitment from all levels in the institution and involves an ongoing process that, as argued by Saat (2007), requires several stages of strategic planning, sufficient financial support and individual commitments from institutional faculty members including leaders, administrative and individual staff, and students (p. 3).

At the institutional level, a number of researchers have argued that the commitment from institutional leaders in administrative and faculty/department is needed to ensure that the internationalisation activities are progressing as planned (Hall 2004; Hamrick 1999). This, according to Bartell (2003, pp. 46-67) can be achieved in several ways. Firstly, the leaders should be able to stay focused on their internationalisation goals and plans, and share them by effectively communicating with other members in the institution. This then encourages the institutional staff and students to understand the related aims and cooperate with any international activities implemented in the institution. Secondly, the leaders should be able to develop the necessary organisational structure and infrastructure to accommodate any activities that are planned for internationalisation. Third, institutional leaders must be proactive in continually evaluating the institutional curricula and student entry requirements. Faculties should be encouraged to review the curricula in their respective programs to ensure that they meet the standard that the institution requires. The institution should also continuously revise the entry requirements for students, especially in terms of English language proficiency and the level of basic knowledge required for the various disciplines in which they offer programs.

These institutional engagement approaches are unique in every institution depending on the different circumstances that relate to the institutional culture, priorities, history and resources (Knight 2004). However, institutional leaders who manage to successfully support their organisation could encourage a strong organisational culture where internationalisation occurs in the manner described by Bartell (2003):

> synergistic, transformative process, involving the curriculum and research programs that influences the role and activities of all stakeholders including faculty, students, administrators, and the community at large (pp. 51–52).

2.2 International Students in Higher Education and Adjustment

International students move to another country in the hope of receiving a better education that will give them more opportunities in their future professional lives (Altbach 2004). In

2004, two million students were studying overseas; since then, approximately three million students have travelled to study overseas every year—predominantly moving from Asian countries to study in developed English-speaking countries such as the US, the UK, Australia and New Zealand (Altbach 2004; Sawir et al. 2012). It is expected that there will be approximately eight million students studying overseas by 2025 (Altbach 2004).

The majority of international students are located in higher education institutions; hence, research on international students has been largely confined to their experiences in higher education. Most of the research on international students has concentrated on their ability to successfully adjust, or fit in, to the new academic and social contexts (e.g. Fritz, Chin & De Marinis 2008; Wang 2009; Misra, Crist & Burant 2003; Ramsay, Barker & Jones 1999, 2007; Wang, C-CD & Mallinckrodt 2006; Yakunina et al. 2012; Zhang & Goodson 2011a). Adjustment has been emphasised because international students encounter specific experiences in new academic environments. These include challenges commonly related to language proficiency, learning skills and personal identity (Fritz, Chin & De Marinis 2008; Sawir et al. 2012; Yusoff 2011; Zhiheng & Brunton 2007).

In the literature, the process of *adjustment* is used interchangeably with that of *adaptation*, with researchers often not providing a clear definition or distinction between the two terms (e.g. Andrade 2006; Chirkov et al. 2007; Wang 2009). The adjustment outcome can be positive or negative depending on how an individual adapts. Positive adjustments include having successful relationships, effective interactions, high awareness, self-confidence and stress reduction. Negative outcomes include emotional distress, dysfunctional communication, difficulties in relationships and depression. Researchers have suggested that when the experiences of international students in a different culture are accompanied by positive adjustments, students are left with positive learning experiences and have significant potential to become 'a different, but better individual' (Matsumoto, Le Roux & Yoo 2005, p. 17).

In the literature, discussion on the processes needed for international students to successfully adjust suggests that it is neither a simple nor a direct process; rather, it depends on students' capabilities to reflect critically and learn from their 'intercultural experiences' (i.e. international students' interactions with diverse cultures, such as hosts and other international students) and from staff in an 'international classroom' (i.e. specific learning and teaching activities in classrooms that consist of students with diverse

cultures and backgrounds) (Gu, Schweisfurth & Day 2010, p. 10; Teekens 2000, p. 9, 2003, p. 110). The conditions of international classrooms are often different from the norms in the international students' previous academic environments; thus, how they respond to the new experience will determine the outcome of their adjustment. To adjust successfully, international students should be able to reflect on their personal experiences and upbringing while appreciating and being able to negotiate the new experience (Matsumoto, Hirayama & Le Roux 2006, p. 2). If international students can adjust positively to intercultural experiences in the international classroom, it will positively affect their learning (Volet & Ang 2012). Conversely, if they have a negative adjustment process, they usually experience psychological distress and depression, which contributes to negative learning experiences (Zhang & Goodson 2011a).

2.2.1 Theories of adjustment

Theories on adjustment have been evident in multidisciplinary research areas such as psychology and intercultural relations since the 1950s (e.g. Lysgaard 1955; Oberg 1960). This early research highlighted the effects on travellers such as immigrants, refugees and international students when exposed to another culture. It was claimed that these travellers encountered *culture shock*, which describes commonly negative aspects of the adjustment process, such as the overwhelming, confusing and disorientating situation caused by a series of contacts with unfamiliar settings (Furnham & Bochner 1986, p. 48). This understanding of culture shock supported the development of the U-curve model of adjustment by Lysgaard (1955, p. 50), which was emphasised by him and Oberg (1960, p. 177). This model highlighted four phases in the migration of travellers: (1) honeymoon stage of enthusiasm and fascination, (2) optimism and motivation—travellers first arrived in the new country with confidence to lead a better life; (3) frustration, depression and confusion—travellers were affected by anxiety and shocked by precipitate changes and losing familiar signs and symbols that had oriented their lives; and (4) gradual improvement for better adjustment—as travellers started to adjustor fit in with the new culture and environment. The adjustment could include circumstances where an individual started to accept and possibly enjoy local food, drink, habits and customs, and to establish social networks.

The U-curve model was then extended to the W-curve model by Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963), who incorporated a re-entry perspective (re-adjustment after returning home). In the 1980s, scholars argued that, unlike refugees and immigrants, international students

have to additionally adjust to academic requirements, which commonly differ from their previous experiences. The differences could include academic language, learning skills and social skills, which increase the challenges for international students seeking to successfully adjust (Ryan & Hellmundt 2003; Ward, Bochner & Furnham 2001; Williams 2008). The failure of international students to adjust to this new academic environment negatively affected their educational experiences, including their social situations and psychological wellbeing. Subsequently, research on adjustment started to change its direction from highlighting the adjustment process and its negative aspects to viewing adjustment as a dynamic experience (Bochner, Hutnik & Furnham 1985; Furnham & Bochner 1986). This perspective viewed international students as seeking knowledge in a particular institution; thus, it involved active interactions with the new academic environment (McFalls & Cobb-Roberts 2001; Ward, Bochner & Furnham 2001). The interactions with individuals in the new (or host) social and educational environments required an adjustment process because they were different to what most international students had previously experienced. However, researchers have argued that international students' experiences in international classrooms could be managed through the development of appropriate adjustment skills (Furnham & Bochner 1986; Matsumoto, Hirayama & Le Roux 2006; Ramsay, Barker & Jones 1999; Ward, Bochner & Furnham 2001). These include learning about and appreciating the new social and academic culture, and increased participation and interactions with hosts. This supposition became the foundation for theories that emphasised adjustment skills, including culture learning (e.g. Furnham & Bochner 1986), stress and coping (e.g. Folkman 2001), social identity (Phinney 1990) and the theory of three skill sets, which is the affective, behavioural and cognitive (ABC) theory (Ward, Bochner & Furnham 2001).

The growing emphasis on adjustment as a learning process that is a dynamic experience has influenced recent views that successful adjustment is a reciprocal effort (Andrade 2006; Ramsay, Barker & Jones 2007; Ward, Bochner & Furnham 2001). It is argued that adjustment does not only involve international students, but also offers the opportunity for intercultural experiences for the hosts, including the local institution's staff and students (Altbach 2004; Biggs & Tang 2011; Davis 2009; Otten 2003; Safahieh & Singh 2006; Tran 2008, 2011; Zhou & Todman 2008). Thus, while international students have to successfully adjust to the new academic environment, the local institution's staff and

students also have an opportunity to reciprocally learn and adjust (Biggs & Tang 2011; Kingston & Forland 2008; Tran 2008; Zhou & Todman 2008).

With regard to the local institution's staff and students, research has concentrated on academic staff because they directly communicate with international students in learning and teaching activities (e.g. Biggs & Tang 2011; Kingston & Forland 2008; Tran 2008, 2011). It is argued that academic staff are required to assist with the adjustment of international students in the learning and teaching process (Biggs & Tang 2011; Jang 2009; Teekens 2003; Tran 2008; Zhou & Todman 2008). Most of the suggestions for academics have focused on them adjusting their pedagogy to suit the learning needs of international students. Such adjustments to pedagogy include assistance in terms of making students understand the format of learning and assessment, speed of language delivery in lectures, use of unfamiliar concepts and expressions, and the effects of cultural traditions on group work participation (Ryan 2013; Ryan & Hellmundt 2003). Ideally, academic staff can assist international students to better adjust to the learning and teaching processes and, in doing so, promote a harmonious academic environment that is conducive to success.

2.2.2 Studies on adjustment

Despite the increasing theoretical perspectives on adjustment as a dynamic experience with the host institution, a review of the literature has shown that research on adjustment has predominantly focused on international students; fewer studies have included the perspectives of academic staff. Most of the research has argued that international students encounter challenges when learning in a foreign university and thus need to adjust to these challenges in order to have positive learning experiences. Studies have also suggested a range of supports that are important to assist international students' adjustment efforts. For the purpose of providing a background to the study presented in this thesis, the next section of this review provides a meta-analysis of studies since the year 2000 that have focused on the adjustment of international students and/or academic staff. Although adjustment experiences cannot be isolated only to academic aspects of students' international experiences, most of the significant issues of adjustment did occur within the academic environment (Zhou & Todman 2009). Thus, this meta-analysis has focused on the adjustment of international students in relation to their learning processes and of academic staff in relation to their teaching processes. Table 2.1 presents a summary of challenges encountered by students.

Challenges encountered by international students

Studies on the challenges related to the adjustments that international students need to make to their new academic environment can be grouped into three themes: linguistic proficiency, socio-cultural exclusion and learning issues (see Table 2.1). Among these challenges, researchers have argued that linguistic proficiency is the biggest obstacle hindering positive adjustment efforts (e.g. Cadman 2000; Sawir et al. 2012; Yang, Noels & Saumure 2006; Yeh & Inose 2003; Zhang & Mi 2010; Zhiheng & Brunton 2007). They have also argued that linguistic issues have, to some extent, prevented international students from being motivated to communicate with local students (and vice versa) and thus have precipitated other challenges—namely, socio-cultural exclusion and learning difficulties.

Table 2.1: Challenges encountered by international students

Challenges	Description	Examples of references
Linguistic proficiency	• Difficulties learning in English language • Hardship in academic reading and writing • Communication difficulties, such as adjusting to English accents, terms, idioms and jargon • Inability to follow lecturers' speech rate in teaching • Lack of communication with lecturers/local students • Miscommunication and misunderstanding	Seo &Koro-Ljungberg (2005); Andrade (2006); Dao, Lee & Chang (2007); Richardson & Hurworth (2007); Fritz, Chin & DeMarinis (2008); De Foote (2010); Zhang & Mi (2010); Nieto & Booth (2010); Bolton & Kuteeva (2012); Sawir et al. (2012)
Socio-cultural exclusion	• Separation from the host academic and institutional culture • Fragmented student–student and student–lecturer relationships • Some degree of perceived unawareness and perceived discrimination • Overwhelming institutional bureaucratic requirements, e.g. accommodation, rules • Limited social, emotional and practical support from mentors/lecturers, peers and institutions	Thorstensson (2001); Andrade (2006); Arkoudis (2006); Hanassab (2006); Poyrazli & Grahame (2007); Wadsworth, Hecht & Jung (2008); Chang (2010); Nieto & Booth (2010); Guo & Chase (2011); Williams & Johnson (2011); Trahar & Hyland (2011)
Learning issues	• Difficulties following disciplinary requirements, teaching methods and styles • Overwhelmed by the intensity of knowledge they are required to learn • Differences in educational traditions, e.g. collectivism *v.* individualism	Robertson et al. (2000); Hanassab & Tidwell (2002); Zhou & Todman (2008); Kingston & Forland (2008); Tran (2008); Akazaki (2010)

In relation to linguistic proficiency, international students encounter difficulties in understanding the language and using English as expected by the institution (Akazaki 2010; Bolton & Kuteeva 2012; Dao, Lee & Chang 2007; De Foote 2010; Fritz, Chin &De

Marinis 2008; Sawir et al. 2012). These issues have arisen because international students are not familiar with the use of English, especially in communication. For example, Akazaki's (2010) findings on the experiences of 39 Japanese students at different universities in the UK demonstrated that they were unable to follow the speed of the speech among lecturers and local UK students. One reason for the difficulties faced by international students is that they tend to mentally translate English into their native language before being able to comprehend and respond (Sawir et al. 2012). These findings are supported by a study by Poyrazli and Grahame (2007), where 15 international students at a US university reported that they had difficulties following the lecturers' speech rates in English. The challenges were usually attributed to the distinct accents, idioms and jargon of lecturers and local students, as well as the use of English terms across disciplines. As a result, students were confused and experienced miscommunication. They often chose to segregate themselves and participate less in classroom discussions and group work assignments. These findings are similar to those of Zhou and Todman (2008), whose study involved 148 Chinese postgraduate students at two universities in the UK. The study showed that students—especially those who came in groups—tended to segregate themselves, partly because of their lack of confidence in communicating in English. In another study, Zhang and Mi (2010) interviewed 40 Chinese students at eight Australian universities and found that they encountered challenges in more linguistically demanding courses compared to less linguistically demanding courses. Similarly, Bolton and Kuteeva (2012) found that students from courses such as law and management perceived that the use of English was more widespread and intense because the nature of these courses required students to be more involved in discussions and arguments, as opposed to engineering courses, where the use of English was more practical and direct.

The issue of socio-cultural exclusion refers to international students feeling separated from the local or host institution's culture and community. This separation can be due to differences between the academic culture and international students' previous academic environments. Students are often overwhelmed with institutional requirements such as methods of registration, accommodation, rules and regulations (Chang 2010; Guo & Chase 2011; Williams & Johnson 2011). For example, a study by Guo and Chase (2011) found that 149 international students (49 per cent from China) at a Canadian university felt that they did not receive sufficient social, emotional and practical support from the

institution's lecturers and local students. These findings were supported by Hanassab and Tidwell (2002), who studied the experiences of 585 international students studying at a US university. Although the findings showed that psychological needs such as support from society were less important compared with academic needs, international students frequently felt discriminated against—especially those from Africa, Asia and South-East Asia. Students perceived that the institution's staff and students were racist to some extent and had stereotypical impressions of students from these regions. In contrast, a study by Nieto and Booth (2010) revealed that academic staff were more aware of the adjustment issues that international students encountered because they understood that students came from diverse cultures; thus, staff were more sensitive to cultural differences. In another study on international students by Poyrazli and Grahame (2010), participants revealed a different dimension when expressing views on social issues. International students with high levels of neuroticism experienced negative emotions and had fewer coping mechanisms to deal with cross-cultural stresses. These students encountered more serious negative emotions when experiencing a lack of institutional support (i.e. homesickness) compared to students with lower levels of neuroticism.

International students also encountered challenges related to learning when studying at foreign universities. Commonly cited issues include difficulties following disciplinary requirements, teaching methods and styles (e.g. Durkin 2008; Hanassab & Tidwell 2002). In Durkin's (2008) study, 42 East Asian international students (the majority from China) encountered learning challenges at UK universities and attributed their difficulties to the Western style of argumentation. For these students, the learning was rigorous, required strong critical thinking and involved aggressive debating, which they claimed to be different from the practices in their own countries. These international students also have reported feeling overloaded with information and overwhelmed by the intensity of knowledge they are required to access (Akazaki 2010; Hanassab & Tidwell 2002; Robertson et al. 2000). In Akazaki's (2010) study, which was conducted with 39 mature Japanese students (who had experience working in Japan), studying in the UK illustrated that the amount of knowledge these students were expected to acquire in the discipline—especially when learning in a foreign language (in this case, English)—was the most challenging issue. The findings resonate with those of Gang, Wei and Jing-Lin (2010), whose participants were mainly Chinese international students who also encountered challenges transferring ideas into English writing. Another issue in learning is different

educational traditions (collectivism *v*. individualism), as reported in Kingston and Forland's (2008) study on East Asian students (predominantly Chinese) in the UK educational setting. In their study, Chinese students who inherited the collectivist tradition revealed that they preferred an education setting where they did not have to speak (the collectivist tradition), as opposed to an open discussion setting (the individualist tradition). The issue of different educational traditions echoes research by Poyrazli, Rajat and Erdinc (2010), who revealed that students who brought more collectivist values (in this case, African students) encountered more psychological stress in Western settings, which are characterised by a more individualist culture.

Support to assist the adjustment of international students

In addition to exploring the challenges encountered by international students, a number of studies offer suggestions for ways in which students' adjustment could be supported. The types of support primarily suggested were institutional, academic staff/local students and individual support (summarised in Table 2.2). These supports were perceived as being particularly important in assisting international students to adjust to learning in their new academic environment.

Table 2.2: Types of supports required to assist international students' adjustment

Source of support	Types of support	Examples of references
Institutional	• Establish orientation programs to enable international students to access and be informed about institutional requirements • Consider after-arrival intervention programs for academic and social life, e.g. security- and health-related programs • Be alert to international students' usual lifestyles, e.g. provide international food and beverages	Cameron & Meade (2003); Poyrazli & Grahame (2007); Cemalcilar & Falbo (2008); Zhou & Todman (2008)
Academic staff/local students	• Develop small or one-to-one tutorial groups • Restructure classroom to increase satisfaction with communication • Establish co-national and international friendship collegiality • Have good teaching practices, such as being explicit and showing concern for international students' academic issues • Develop better intercultural understanding among local students and academic staff	Cameron & Meade (2003); Kudo & Simkin (2003); Wang & Mallinckrodt (2006); Zhou & Todman (2008); Bartram (2008); Tran (2008); Williams (2008); Brown (2009); Arkoudis (2010); Nieto & Booth (2010); Yusoff (2011); Trahar & Hyland (2011); Williams & Johnson (2011); Arkoudis et al. (2013)
Individual	• Recommend systematic pre-departure preparation • Emphasise initiatives to mediate personally enacted gaps • Promote self-independence	Ramsay, Barker & Jones (2007); Forbes-Mewett & Nyland (2008); Wadsworth, Hecht & Jung (2008); Zhou & Todman (2008)

In relation to support from institutions, they are deemed responsible for providing a diverse range of programs for international students to assist their adjustment process, especially during the first six months of their study (Brown & Halloway 2008; Cameron & Meade 2003; Cemalcilar & Falbo 2008; Poyrazli & Grahame 2007; Ramsay, Barker & Jones 2007). During this period, international students experience high levels of anxiety and are also still strongly attached to their familiar networks. Hence, the physical separation from international students' usual relationships may discourage them from engaging in their new institutional environment, leading to negative adjustment outcomes (Wang & Mallinckrodt 2006). A key element is the provision of support programs for international students (Cameron & Meade 2003; Hamza 2010). Cemalcilar and Falbo's (2008) study of 94 international postgraduate students at a US university showed that they needed crucial institutional support to understand the academic and living environment in the first four months of their candidature. It was suggested that the institution should provide information on academic requirements—especially assessments—and on essential needs such as food, accommodation, health centres and transportation. Academic and administration staff should be well informed of the available support services and be knowledgeable about the appropriate personnel to contact in order for the particular concerns of international students to be addressed. This study supports Cameron and Meade's (2003) study on international students studying at a university in New Zealand. The study indicated that international students require thorough assistance—particularly in their first few months of study—in terms of information about available support services and the contact details of key personnel.

Studies also agree on the significant role that academic staff and local students play in supporting international students' adjustment, especially with regard to communication (Arkoudis et al. 2013; Pritchard & Skinner 2002; Safahieh & Singh 2006; Yusoff 2011). Effective communication between international students and staff/peers (specifically local students) supports the establishment of positive networks. With this support, international students feel a sense of belonging, which helps them to solve academic issues, and it provides a platform from which they can express any concerns (Brown 2009; Ramsay, Barker & Jones 2007; Yusoff 2011). In terms of support from academic staff, studies by Kingston and Forland (2008) and Bartram (2008) highlighted that international students need academic staff support for thorough guidance on assessments and assignments, with transparency on marking criteria. However, Arkoudis (2010), Arkoudis et al. (2013) and

Ryan (2013) suggested that academic staff could assist international students by being explicit in their teaching and expectations, as well as assisting peer interactions among diverse culture students. This would help to ensure that international students acknowledged and understood the academic system and were then able to adjust to the academic requirements. With respect to peer support, Yusoff's (2011) study of 185 international students at a Malaysian public university found that support from their families and friends (from home, other international students in the institution and local Malaysian peers) had a significant effect on their psychological adjustment. The participants often regarded their adjustment as being positive when they could closely connect to families and friends—especially local Malaysian friends. For these international students, having local friends helped them to have a 'sense of belonging' and thus reduced their homesickness (Yusoff 2011, p. 14). Brown (2009) supported this finding with a study of 150 postgraduate students (the majority from South-East Asia) at a UK university, which revealed that social support from local UK students was viewed as the best source of information about institutional cultural norms and therefore significantly contributed to positive adjustment experiences. However, these and other studies (e.g. Cameron & Meade 2003; Zhang &Goodson2011b) have also demonstrated that, despite the importance of receiving support from staff and students, international students often experience a lack of interaction with local students and academic staff. This leads to separation between international and local students and staff, and does not enhance successful adjustment.

In addition, research has suggested that international students can support themselves during pre-departure by learning how to be independent in a foreign country (e.g. Forbes-Mewett & Nyland 2008; Zhou & Todman 2009). In Forbes-Mewett and Nyland's (2008) study of 55 international students and staff at an Australian university, international students demonstrated their lack of knowledge on health and security procedures at the university. According to the staff, these issues can be managed if students conduct more research into how the university manages these aspects. Further, Wadsworth, Hecht and Jung (2008) and Wang and Mallinckrodt (2006) recommended that international students learn how to improve their communication skills, especially with local students. According to Brown (2009), Chang (2010) and Kudo and Simkin (2003), efforts could be made by initiating communication or seeking a common topic that could be shared with local students. The researchers suggested that if international students are independent

and improve their communication skills, they might encounter less stress in adjusting to the new academic environment.

2.2.3 Gaps in the literature

The meta-analysis of the literature presented in the previous section reveals some gaps in the literature that should be addressed. Firstly, studies on the adjustment of international students have largely focused on students moving from Asian countries (primarily South-East and North Asia) to study in Western English-speaking countries such as the UK (e.g. Peelo & Luxon 2007; Trahar 2011; Trahar & Hyland 2011; Zhou & Todman 2009), the US (e.g. Cemalcilar & Falbo 2008; Seo & Koro-Ljungberg 2005; Volet & Ang 2012), Australia (e.g. Kudo & Simkin 2003; Sawir et al. 2008; Tran 2011) and New Zealand (e.g. Campbell & Li 2008; Hsien-Chuan Hsu et al. 2009; Zhiheng & Brunton 2007). Phenomena associated with international students studying in non-traditional but emerging education markets such as Asia (e.g. China, Japan, Singapore and Malaysia) are under-researched. Therefore, the limited information on the adjustment of international students in non-Western countries points to a gap in the literature, particularly in relation to international students studying in Asian countries. Conducting this study in Malaysia offers an opportunity to add a much-needed perspective to the literature regarding the adjustment of international students.

Secondly, studies have focused on international students from a range of disciplines. However, there are limited studies on adjustment in TVET institutions. TVET institutions in Malaysia emphasise applied learning, and their curricula include both theory and application in all learning activities, which aim to assist students to develop the skills and knowledge needed for education, employment, training and involvement in the community (Md Yunos et al. 2005b; Mustapha & Abu Abdullah 2004). Programs offered in Malaysian TVET institutions at the higher education level include engineering, teacher training in technical and vocational education, information technology, technology management and hospitality. These academic programs prepare students for professional and managerial roles, such as engineers, TVET educators, information technology officers and surveyors, by emphasising applied learning (Leong 2009). The absence of studies on the adjustment of international students studying at TVET institutions requires research to examine how students adjust in these academic environments.

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