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**Toward a Better Adjustment of International Students in
Thailand: A Case Study at Prince of Songkla University,
Hat Yai Campus****Yejin Kim, Wanchai Dhammasaccakarn, Sirinan Srion**
Prince of Songkla University, Thailand**Isara Tongsamsi**
Songkhla Rajabhat University, Thailand**Abstract**

This research investigated the levels of adjustments of international student and demographic factor, such as gender, group of nationalities, and age, differing in adjustment and tried to understand their satisfaction and hardship experienced in their adjustment. It focused three dimensions of adjustment: academic, social and personal-emotional adjustment. The research was performed at Prince of Songkla University, Hat Yai Campus, Thailand as a case study. Mixed method was adopted. 153 participants and 13 key informants responded to the research. It was found that academic adjustment had the highest score among three dimensions, and also found that differences were showed in two dimensions: age and group of nationalities in personal-emotional adjustment and group of nationalities in academic adjustment. Three themes were identified to understand their satisfaction and hardship for enhancing a better adjustment: Successful Academic Achievement, Languages Barriers, and Consideration for the Marginal.

Keywords: *adjustment, Thailand, hardship, SACQ, satisfaction*

INTRODUCTION

There has been a rapid growth in the number of international students across the world. According to ICEF (2017), the number of international students has been on the increase from 1990 to 2010. Putting in estimate, nearly five million higher education students left their own countries to study in other countries (ICEF, 2017).

In Thailand, as one of ASEAN members, according to the data from the annual survey by The Office of Higher Education Commission, 16,999 international students enrolled at 107 higher educational institutes in Thailand in 2012 (OHEC, 2015).

Since Prince of Songkla University (PSU) joined as a member of AUN (ASEAN University Network) in 2012, the numbers of international students who enrolled at PSU increased rapidly from 11 in 2013, to 160 in 2017 (Graduate Office, 2017). In the first semester of 2017, 243 international graduate students from more than 25 countries registered to study at PSU, Hat Yai Campus, which is one of five campuses.

International students, undoubtedly, encounter problems or difficulties after their arrival in host countries (Mustaffa & Ilias, 2013). Homesickness, prejudice and discrimination, language proficiency, culture shock, fear and financial challenges are predicted as the sources of acculturative and academic stress (Akhtar, 2012). Academic system, accommodation, food, religious environment, and social norms and values might trigger difficulties for international students in new and foreign countries (Zapf, 1991; Mustaffa & Ilias, 2013; Rujipak and Limprasert, 2016). Although it is very natural that students meet difficulties and even national students have more stress than international students in some parts (Akhtar, 2012), the necessity to understand international students' problems and difficulties for adjustment cannot be ignored.

Considering the unique environment of international students, it is anticipated that their problems or difficulties might be rooted in three categories: different academic environment, cross-cultural circumstance, and personal-emotional challenges (Berry, 1997). Rujiprak (2016) stressed that many difficulties such as academic and social difficulties could have negative effects on psychological well-being by citing Poyralzi and Lopez's study (2007) and Townsend and Poh's (2008).

In addition, international students in Thailand mainly meet a bilingual circumstance. The main academic language is English and the social language is Thai; which is in the 4th category of difficult language rankings (FSIL, 2018). Thus, international students in Thailand will have to overcome more complicated situation while studying.

It is very necessary to support or empower international students to overcome their own difficulties. The progress made in overcoming these challenges is known as 'adjustment' (Rajab, Wahab, Shaari, Pannatik & Nor, 2014). Mustaffa and Ilias (2013) stressed the importance of understanding the process of adjustment of international students.

Unfortunately, the study on the adjustment of international students in Thailand is at the beginning stage, as little research have been conducted (Jareonsubphayanont, 2014; Rujipak, 2016; Rujipak & Limprasert, 2016). Additionally, the purposes of the past studies in Thailand were based on identifying factors affecting adjustment or examining the relationships between demographic factors or personal resources and cross-cultural adjustment or stress or well-being. Hardly, it is found research on understanding of the adjustment based on insight gleaned from qualitative interview of international students in Thailand.

RESEARCH PURPOSE

This research was designed to examine the levels of international students' adjustment and to comprehend their opinions and experiences for enhancing a better adjustment in the future. It is anticipated that their satisfaction and difficulties may be signs or catalysts to guide a better adjustment of international students and stakeholders in Thailand.

The research was conducted at Prince of Songkla University (PSU), Hat Yai Campus, Thailand. As a case study, the participants were limited to graduate students.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

In order to contribute to the existing literature on understanding the adjustment of international students in Thailand, the research had two objectives: (a) To examine adjustment levels of international students following demographic factors in three dimensions (academic adjustment, social adjustment, and personal-emotional adjustment): gender, age, and group of nationalities and (b) To understand satisfaction and hardship that international students experience in adjusting at Prince of Songkla University, Hat Yai Campus, Thailand.

LITERATURE REVIEW

International students contribute to academic and ethno-cultural diversity in host countries (Khan, Hamdan, Ahmad & Mustaffa, 2015; Baklashova & Kazakov, 2016; Alemu & Cordier, 2017). Providing international academic atmosphere is helpful to national students to experience various perspectives and approaches of study (Rujiprak, 2016). On the other hand, studying abroad as higher education students gives great benefits (Mesidor & Sly, 2016; Alshafi & Shin, 2017; Rujiprak, 2016). However, it is anticipated that studying in cross-cultural environments makes students experience difficulties and needs to adjust in new circumstances (Mesidor & Sly, 2016).

In addition, international students have to accept the sudden and spontaneous changes of their social status to marginal people, on arriving to the host countries. As the meaning of marginal people is 'a usually smaller group within a larger society' (Nugent, 2013), international students could encounter many difficulties caused by disharmony between previous experiences, knowledge or social skills and new environments (Thurber & Walton, 2012). They need to adjust in the new environment to achieve their own goals (Church, 1982; Mesidor & Sly, 2016).

On the other hand, the stakeholders need to provide functional conditions for their easy-and-smooth adjustment. It is strongly believed that the mutual interaction causes a better adjustment of international students in host countries (Rajab, Wahab, Shaari, Pantatik & Nor, 2014).

Academic Adjustment

First of all, international students should understand the new and different academic system in host countries (Pare & Tsay, 2013). It is inevitable that new and different curriculums, academic periods, administrative systems, teaching styles, instructors, classmates, facilities and regulations make international students confused directly or indirectly at least.

Language is one of the most significant and fundamental issues out of all the problems (Huang & Chang, 2011; Eze & Inegbedion, 2015; Alshafi & Shin, 2017). Additionally, Wang and Hannes (2014) found that international students from Asian in Belgium faced the difficulties in understanding professional English terms. It is inevitable that non-English-native students face hardship to produce academic achievement in English. Lack of confidence in the language is linked to the frustrations of many international students (Alshafi & Shin, 2017). Wang and Hannes (2014) also found that Asian international students in Belgium had four main challenges in Academic Adjustment; academic activities, academic resources, language, and time management.

Social Adjustment

On their arrival, it might be true that international students experience cultural problems or difficulties, although the levels are different. Even if the challenges have not reached the level of 'culture shock' (Oberg, 1960), it is undeniable that international students should adjust socially in host countries while studying. According to Alshafi and Shin (2017)'s research, international students face more difficulties in social adjustment than academic adjustment.

In social adjustment dimension, the significant and direct relationship between language proficiency and the reduction of sociocultural problems was stressed by Akhtar (2012). Intercultural skills' effectiveness including non-verbal communication was studied by Hashim, Baker, Mamat and Razali (2016) in multicultural society; and, it was suggested that providing intercultural trainings or education can decrease the negative effects in host country.

Personal-Emotional Adjustment

Thureber and Walton (2012) stated that homesickness is nearly a universal experience to those who left their home. It was the top most reported source of acculturative stress in Akhtar (2012)'s study in Germany. Additionally, Alsahafi and Shin (2017) stressed the other personal-emotional difficulty, loneliness, after studying Saudi Arabia students in Australia. Rujipak and Limprasert (2016) found the relationship between personal-emotion and adjustment; according to their study in Thailand, adjusting to new academic and social environment caused stress and affected psychological well-being.

When international students arrive in host countries, they need to adjust psychologically and physically to the new environment. Stress on cross-culture and academic achievement might affect their personal and emotional dimension, and disturb their smooth adjustment in different educational environments. Anxiety, depression and loneliness caused by homesickness influence individuals (Thurber & Walton, 2012). In addition, the sudden changes to minority or marginal people in host countries trigger their psychological and physical problems due to the unfair treatments, and discrimination etc.

RESEARCH METHOD

The research was based on the sequential mixed method design; qualitative methods were conducted to explain the quantitative results (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). The Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ) was adopted as a main tool for obtaining the quantitative data. The Cronbach alpha of the Full Scale of SACQ is .92 to .95 (Baker & Siryk, 1999). The Cronbach alpha score of the measurement in this research is .94. The each score of Cronbach alpha scores in three dimensions is .87, .82, and .85: respectively, academic adjustment, social adjustment, and in personal-emotional adjustment.

It consists of 67 items with a 9-point scale to assess the levels of adjustment: 'applied very closely to me' to 'does not apply to me at all'. While 34 items were negatively keyed, 33 items were positively keyed. Its subscales were divided into four: academic adjustment (24 items), social adjustment (20 items), personal-emotional adjustment (15 items) and attachment (7 items). Therefore, the ranges of raw scores in each of dimensions are different: (a) Academic Adjustment, 24-216; (b) Social Adjustment, 20-180; (c) Personal-Emotional Adjustment, 15-135 (Baker & Siryk, 1999). As the research focused on three dimensions, the last subscale was tested, but not presented.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted as the qualitative tool for understanding satisfaction and hardship of international students' adjustment in three dimensions. Each of interviews lasted from 30 minutes to one and a half hours. All the interviews were scripted for thematic analysis. The questionnaire of the interviews consisted of three parts: satisfaction and hardship in general, satisfaction and hardship in the three dimensions, and suggestions.

The research ethics was approved by the Centre for Social and Behavioural Sciences Institutional Review Board, Prince of Songkla University.

Sampling and Participants

The research was performed at Prince of Songkla University (PSU), Hat Yai Campus, in Thailand, and the participants were limited to the graduate students, who had enrolled the first academic semester in 2017. While the participants were 158; 44 participants by online and 114 by paper-based questionnaires, the effective sample size was 153. 43 by online due to one uncompleted response and 110 by paper-based

questionnaire as 3 questionnaires were not returned out of 114 distributed. A purposive sampling was used for achieving the research objectives.

The demographic factors analysis of participants is presented in Table 1. The 153 respondents were consisted of 90 males (58.8%) and 63 females (41.2%). In Age factor, the 21-25 years old group was the majority in the population as 67 (43.8%), followed by 45 (29.4%) in the range of 26-35 years old. The two groups contributed 73.2 % of the total sample population. Interestingly, the population of over 40 years old was relatively higher as 11 (7.2%) than past studies (Mustaffa & Iliars, 2013; Rujiprak, 2016; Rujiprak & Limprasert, 2016).

The groups of nationalities were divided into three groups based on the cultural distance from the host country: ASEAN group, Asia (none ASEAN) namely Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Korea, Nepal, Pakistan, Taiwan, Yemen, and Others such as UK, USA, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Sudan, Zimbabwe. 106 (69.3%) students from ASEAN participated in the research, followed by 33 (21.6%) and 14 (9.2%) Asia (none ASEAN countries) and Others respectively.

Table 1: Description of the participants' demographic factors (n=153)

Demographic factors		Frequency	Percent (%)	Cumulative Percent(%)
Gender	Male	90	58.8	58.8
	Female	63	41.2	100
Age	21-25 years	67	43.8	43.8
	26-30 years	45	29.4	73.2
	31-35	21	13.7	86.9
	35-40	9	5.9	92.8
	Over 40	11	7.2	100.0
Group of Nationalities	ASEAN	106	69.3	69.3
	Asia.	33	21.6	90.8
	Others	14	9.2	100.0

Note. Asia. = Asia(none ASEAN).

Lastly, 13 key informants participated in the semi-structured interviews after signing their own signatures on the Human Information Consent forms prepared by the researcher. All interviews were conducted by following the prepared questionnaire after obtaining interviewees' permission to record interviews and explaining the brief orientation on this research. All interviews were transcript.

9 Male and 4 female international students were chosen as key informants for the semi-structured interviews. Twenties and thirties were 6 people respectively among 13 key informants, and the rest was over 40 years old. The interviewees from ASEAN countries were 7, Asian students not from ASEAN 4, and students in Others group 2 among 13.

Collecting the Quantitative Data

The quantitative data was collected by online and paper-based questionnaires. Graduate Office sent two mails with the invitation letter for the research to international students, and face-to-face data collection was conducted purposively by the researcher and two data collecting helpers who had been instructed on the research, ethics and the guidelines of data collecting.

Collecting the Qualitative Data

Based on the results of analyzing the quantitative data, the participants were divided into three groups: the high scored group, the middle scored group, and the low scored group in the full scale of SACQ. An invitation letter for 5-6 representatives in each of the three groups was sent by email. Then, those who responded instantaneously were chosen as interviewees for the study.

The data collection was performed for 8 weeks from 30th of October in 2017 to 23rd of December with three phases. Collecting the quantitative data was for three weeks from start data to 18th of November. Analyzing the quantitative data and preparing the qualitative data collecting were done for 3 weeks until on 9th of December. Conducting semi-structured interviews was for 2 weeks until on 23rd of December in 2017.

Data Analysis

First of all, to fulfill the first research objective, Comparing means, t-test and one-way ANOVA test were conducted: t-test for Gender and one-way ANOVA for the two other demographic factors, Age and Group of Nationalities. The Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS) for Macbook Version 25 was utilized for the quantitative data analysis. The qualitative data analysis for the first research objective was conducted to examine the levels of adjustment and to determine which demographic factors differ in academic, social, and personal-emotional adjustment among international students sequentially. An alpha level of .05 was used for the statistical analyses.

Thematic Analysis was conducted to achieve the second objective. Alhojailan (2012) noted two significant purposes of adopting it for qualitative data analysis, such as classifications and creating themes. The research followed the Braun and Clarke's framework (2006) which has six clear steps and used Descriptive Coding. As seen in its referring title, Topic Coding, it is a useful technique to create importance topics based on qualitative data (Saldana, 2012).

This study, also, focused on finding the major topics of satisfaction and hardship of international students while studying at PSU in academic, social, and personal-emotional adjustment rather than scrutinizing the nuances. In addition, Descriptive Coding was chosen due to the potential misunderstanding associated with interpreting interviews. Their body language providing better communication might have different interpretations, as each of them has different cultural background.

Lastly, two trained research helpers made the transcripts of all the interviews, one of researchers examined the accuracy between the transcription and audio. All the data was initially congregated and placed in five pools; general adjustment, academic adjustment, social adjustment, personal-emotional adjustment and suggestions.

Topics or codes were allocated to the statements while reading the transcripts. Then the topics were located into multiple categories created, and a definition to each code and category was assigned by one of researchers. All the procedure were guided by the other researchers and all the results were reported to other researchers. The final results were made after discussing among the researchers until reaching concurrence.

FINDINDINGS

Examining Adjustment Levels

Table 2 displays the results of means of the questionnaire, Student Adaptation to the College Questionnaire (SACQ). The mean score of the participants was at 405.05 in full scale, and the score converted into a percentile score indicated at 34 % (Baker & Siry, 1999). Similar results were found in Alshafi and Shin's study in Australia (2017).

Looking at the three dimensions; Academic Adjustment had highest percentile score, at 54 %. Social adjustment and Personal-Emotional Adjustment were lower than Academic Adjustment, and at 34 % and 31 % respectively (see the Table 2). It might be interpreted that international students at PSU relatively adjust better academically than socially or personal-emotionally (Baker & Siryk, 1999).

A study on international undergraduates' adjustment in Malaysia found that the overall mean in Social Adjustment had the highest score (Rajab, Wahab, Shaari, Panatik, & Nor, 2014).

Table 2: The results of means of international students' adjustment

	Adjustment (Full Scale)	Academic Adjustment	Social Adjustment	Personal- Emotional Adjustment
Mean	405.05	105.12	117.40	85.66
%	34	54	34	31
N	153	153	153	153
SD	59.191	23.100	19.113	18.494
SEM	4.785	1.868	1.545	1.495
Range	334	117	104	97
Kurtosis	.106	-.224	-.079	-.259
Skewness	-0.71	.025	-.024	1.110

Note. SD = Standard Deviation; SEM = Std. Error of Mean.

Table 3 shows the results of the independent samples T-test in gender on three dimensions: academic, social, and personal-emotional adjustment. The results indicated that there was no significant difference in the levels of academic adjustment for male ($M = 152.13$, $SD = 22.0$) and female ($M = 147.24$, $SD = 24.4$), $t(151) = 1.293$, $p = .198$. No significant differences were also found in social and personal-emotional adjustment: respectively, male ($M = 117.87$, $SD = 18.2$) and female ($M = 116.73$, $SD = 20.4$), $t(151) = 0.361$, $p = .719$, and male ($M = 85.63$, $SD = 18.6$) and female ($M = 85.79$, $SD = 18.5$), $t(151) = -.021$, $p = .983$. The results suggested that gender does not differ in the three dimensions of adjustment.

Table 3: The results of t-test on gender

Variable		N	Mean	SD	t	df	Sig.
Academic Adjustment	Male	90	152.13	22.0	1.293	151	.198
	Female	63	147.24	24.4			
Social Adjustment	Male	90	117.87	18.2	.361	151	.719
	Female	63	116.73	20.4			
PE Adjustment	Male	90	85.63	18.6	-.021	151	.983
	Female	63	85.79	18,5			

Note. Sig. = Sig. 2-tailed; SD = Standard Deviation; PE = Personal-Emotional.

The results of the one-way ANOVA test are presented in Table 4. While the one demographic factor, group of nationalities ($F(2, 150) = 5.794$, $p = .004$), statistically made significant difference in academic adjustment, age ($F(4, 148) = 0.529$, $p = .714$) did not at $p < .05$ level.

On the other hand, the results indicated that statistically significant differences were found in personal-emotional adjustment at $p < .05$ level. Age ($F(4, 148) = 2.437$, $p = .050$) and group of nationalities ($F(2, 150) = 7.165$, $p = .001$) differed in the dimension.

However, in social adjustment, the two demographic factors, age ($F(4, 148) = 0.655$, $p = .624$) in five conditions and group of nationalities ($F(2, 150) = 0.582$, $p = .560$) in three conditions, did not differ statistically and significantly at $p < .05$ level.

Table 4: The results of one-way ANOVA test on age and group of nationalities in three dimensions

	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Academic Adjustment					
<i>Age</i>					
Between Groups	1144.228	4	286.057	.529	.714
Within Groups	79965.655	148	540.308		
<i>Group of Nationalities</i>					
Between Groups	5816.344	2	2908.172	5.794	.004*
Within Groups	75293.538	150	501.957		
Social Adjustment					
<i>Age</i>					
Between Groups	966.037	4	241.509	.655	.624
Within Groups	54462.643	148	368.667		
<i>Group of Nationalities</i>					
Between Groups	427.846	2	213.923	.582	.560
Within Groups	55100.834	150	367.339		
Personal-Emotional Adjustment					
<i>Age</i>					
Between Groups	3212.999	4	803.100	2.437	.050
Within Groups	48775.928	148	329.567		
<i>Group of Nationalities</i>					
Between Groups	4533.692	2	2266.846	7.165	.001*
Within Groups	47454.327	150	316.364		

Note. * $p < .05$; SS = Sum of Squares.

Table 5 shows the results of the Post Hoc Tukey Honestly Significant Difference test (Tukey HSD) on the two demographic factors creating significant differences in the two dimensions in this research. The results in social adjustment are not displayed, as no differences were found.

Table 5: The results of the Post Hoc Tukey HSD test on age and group of nationalities differing in academic and personal-emotional adjustment

		MD	SE	Sig	95% CIM	
					LB	UB
Group of Nationalities in Academic Adjustment						
ASEAN	Asia.	-3.8	4.466	0.672	-14.37	6.77
	Others	-21.608*	6.371	0.003	-36.69	-6.53
Asia.	ASEAN	3.8	4.466	0.672	-6.77	14.37
	Others	-17.807*	7.146	0.037	-34.72	-0.89
Others	ASEAN	21.608*	6.371	0.003	6.53	36.69
	Asia.	17.807*	7.146	0.037	0.89	34.72
Group of Nationalities in Personal-Emotional Adjustment						
ASEAN	Asia	.750	3.546	.976	-7.64	9.14
	Others	-18.673*	5.058	.001	-30.65	-6.70
Aisa.	ASEAN	-.750	3.546	.976	-9.14	7.64
	Others	-19.422*	5.673	.002	-32.85	-5.99
Others	ASEAN	18.673*	5.058	.001	6.70	30.65
	Asia.	19.422*	5.673	.002	5.99	32.85
Age in Personal-Emotional Adjustment						

		MD	SE	Sig	95% CIM	
					LB	UB
21-25 years	26-30	-3.963	3.499	0.789	-13.63	5.7
	31-35	-6.795	4.54	0.566	-19.33	5.74
	36-40	-4.985	6.445	0.938	-22.78	12.81
	Over 40	-17.440*	5.906	0.03	-33.75	-1.13
26-30 years	21-25	3.963	3.499	0.789	-5.7	13.63
	31-35	-2.832	4.798	0.976	-16.08	10.42
	36-40	-1.022	6.629	1	-19.33	17.28
	Over 40	-13.477	6.106	0.183	-30.34	3.39
31-35 years	21-25	6.795	4.54	0.566	-5.74	19.33
	26-30	2.832	4.798	0.976	-10.42	16.08
	36-40	1.81	7.233	0.999	-18.17	21.78
	Over 40	-10.645	6.757	0.515	-29.31	8.02
36-40 years	21-25	4.985	6.445	0.938	-12.81	22.78
	26-30	1.022	6.629	1	-17.28	19.33
	31-35	-1.81	7.233	0.999	-21.78	18.17
	Over 40	-12.455	8.16	0.547	-34.99	10.08
Over 40 years	21-25	17.440*	5.906	0.03	1.13	33.75
	26-30	13.477	6.106	0.183	-3.39	30.34
	31-35	10.645	6.757	0.515	-8.02	29.31
	36-40	12.455	8.16	0.547	-10.08	34.99

Note. MD = Mean Difference; SE = Std. Error; CIM = Confidence Interval for Mean; LB = Lower Bound; UP = Upper bound.

Firstly, the Turkey HSD test showed that the means of between ASEAN and Others differed honestly and significantly at $p < 0.05$ at level in academic adjustment. Looking at the personal-emotional adjustment, there were honest and significant differences in between ASEAN and Others, and between Asia (none ASEAN) and Others at $p < 0.05$ level.

As seen in Table 6, it can be stated that international students in Others group ($M = 168.93$, $SD = 19.93$) relatively adjusted better than students from ASEAN countries ($M = 147.32$, $SD = 22.51$). In addition, international student of Others group ($M = 102.79$, $SD = 16.12$) showed a better adjustment than the two groups in personal-emotional adjustment: ASEAN ($M = 84.11$, $SD = 18.39$) and Asia (none ASEAN) ($M = 38.36$, $SD = 16.35$).

Looking at Age in personal-emotional adjustment, over 40 years old international students had the higher score ($M = 99.45$, $SD = 10.19$) than 21- 25 years old students ($M = 82.01$, $SD = 18.70$).

Table 6: The Results of means of age and group of nationalities differing in academic and personal-emotional adjustment

	N	Mean	SD	Std. Error	95% CIM			
					LB	UP	Min	Max
<i>Academic Adjustment</i>								
ASEAN	106	147.32	22.51	2.19	142.99	151.66	92	208
Asia	33	151.12	23.05	4.01	142.95	159.29	91	196
Others	14	168.93	19.82	5.30	157.48	180.37	140	206
Total	153	150.12	23.10	23.10	146.42	153.81	71	208
<i>Personal-Emotional Adjustment</i>								

	N	Mean	SD	Std. Error	95% CIM		Min	Max
					LB	UP		
ASEAN	106	84.11	18.39	1.79	80.57	87.66	32	129
Asia	33	83.36	16.35	2.85	77.57	89.16	51	111
Others	14	102.79	16.12	4.39	93.48	112.09	76	127
Total	153	85.66	18.49	1.50	82.71	88.61	32	129
21-25	67	82.01	18.70	2.29	77.46	86.57	32	129
26-30	45	85.98	18.76	2.28	80.34	91.61	51	127
31-35	21	88.81	14.76	3.22	82.09	95.53	67	124
36-40	9	87.00	24.60	8.20	68.09	105.91	48	115
Over 40	11	99.45	10.19	3.07	92.61	106.30	84	117
Total	153	85.66	18.49	1.50	82.61	88.61	32	129

Note. CIM = Confidence Interval for Mean; LB = Lower Bound; UP = Upper bound; Min = Minimum; Max = Maximum.

Satisfaction and Hardship

The research attempted to emerge themes for comprehending the satisfaction and hardship of international students' adjustment collectively rather than to elaborate in each of the three dimensions: academic, social, personal-emotional adjustment.

Three themes were overarching identified from the data analysis to understand their adjustment: successful academic achievement, language barriers, and consideration for the marginal.

■ Successful Academic Achievement

Most of key informants, generally, expressed their high satisfaction while studying at Prince of Songkla University. Most of them gave a score from 6 to 9 on a scale 1 to 10 of asking their satisfaction on adjustment at PSU in the semi-structured interviews. Two of key informants strongly expressed their satisfaction: "It is not perfect, but I am okay with it (studying at PSU). On a scale of 1-10, I will give it 9 or 8" and "I think I going to go with 8 (out of 10)".

Most of them, also, showed their satisfaction on the academic environment or the quality of education of PSU. One key informant indicated the relevance of the materials and curriculum:

Interviewee 4: "On academic life, I would say that each course, that we have been taking so far in this semester, (is) consisted of so many important materials...The three courses that I've been taking are closely related to the thing(s) that we have been expecting."

The satisfaction with the professors at PSU was highlighted by most of key informants. One key informant expressed the satisfaction by saying:

Interviewee 7: "Academic (adjustment) is ok. (it is) seen at high knowledge. I am feeling that the quality of the advising in academic standard at PSU is quit high."

In addition, most of key informants were highly motivated to achieve their goals as international students. One of key informants expressed it clearly:

Interviewee 2: "Well, even though I have some obstacles in the process of adjusting (at PSU). At the end of the day. I am still able to manage it. Because I'm trying to get back to 'why am I here?'. And I'm trying to redefine my goals again."

Interestingly, financial stress was not referred by any key informant while interviewing them. Its reason might be explained by the statement:

Interviewee 10: “I have no problem. Thai (people) are very kind. And I have no finance problem while I am studying, as I have been granted the scholarship from PSU.”

Based on the data from Graduate school of PSU, 90 international students, among those who newly enrolled in the first semester of Master program or Ph.D. program at Hat Yai campus of PSU in 2017, were granted THE-AC scholarship (Thailand Educational Hub-ASEAN countries) which pays their full tuition for two or three years and monthly allowance (Graduate Office, 2017).

Nevertheless, some hardships were expressed by the key informants, while they were studying at PSU. The administrative issues were indicated in academic adjustment by some of the key informants. A sudden change of scholarship polices caused difficulties without considering international students’ opinion by granting little freedom of choice. Zapf (1991) noted also that it is inevitable for international students to face conflicts caused by the differences in rules between home and host countries:

Interviewee 13: “For me I have a special case. I got a scholarship from Thailand while I was still in my country and I agreed with the requirement of the scholarship. But when I got to PSU, I was given another scholarship contract to sign and the requirement of the new contract was more difficult for me. I did not have much choice; I either sign it or I go back to my country. This makes me unhappy.”

Additionally, fulfilling the requirements of scholarships may cause their stress or hardship, two statements of key informants were referred:

Interviewee 7: “We face the same problems. When we talked about this, we feel stressed. All of us (those who were granted scholarship) have to submit something new and a very good experiment.”

Interviewee 13: “Problem(s) are only the work and language. If we want to submit a paper to high-quality journal, all of us have to submit something new and (from) a very good experiment. And English also. Actually, I think that ISI (International Scientific Indexing) is too high for me.”

■ Language Barriers

The research found that English and Thai languages overarchingly acted as catalyst or anticatalyst (hindrance) while international students were adjusting academically and socially. Language was the major issue covering through academic and social adjustments like Mustaffa and Ilias’ study in Malaysia (2013). Likewise, Eze and Inedgbedion (2015) found that English language was the most significant factor for international students studying in the United Kingdom.

Several key informants indicated the communication issue with Thai administrative workers of faculties or campus facilities while adjusting at PSU:

Interviewee 1: “The members of staff in my faculty have difficulty in communicating in English. For instance, when there is important information like deadline on assignments, they have to write it down on paper because they cannot say it in English.”

Interviewee 6: “In area of communication, that is number one (difficulty), I (am) studying English program, so I communicate in English, but among staffs (it did not work well).”

Interviewee 2: “Members of staff cannot speak English. I had an experience one day. I went to book the badminton court for me and my friends. And because the staff in the office could not speak English, she wrote the things to do for me in Thai language on a paper. I could not communicate directly with them.”

Two statements of the key informant also indicated the difficulties of communicating with Thai students.

Interviewee 6: “Thai Ajarns (professors), they can speak in, really, good English. For the students, some of them can speak in English, although at a poor level. but most of them cannot speak in English at all.”

Interviewee 9: “Working in a lab, there are many Thai students. I have found that it is a big problem. Because, most of the subjects are in Thai language, few in English. And we need to speak in English, but most of the time we don’t understand each other.”

In addition, language barriers impact the adjustment not only in academic, but also in social adjustment (Huang & Yougsheng, 2011; Rajab, Rahman, Panatik & Mansor, 2014; Alshafi & Shin, 2017). Consequently, it was found that their poor communication experiences with administrative workers or Thai colleagues influenced their own personal-emotion. Two statements clearly expressed international students’ personal-emotions:

Interviewee 10: “They (Thai students) speak in Thai mostly. So sometimes it is annoying. They talk in Thai and (I feel) the talk about me in Thai behind me.”

Interviewee 2: “There are only 5 international students and 8 Thai students. When (we) gather, they start talking in Thai. I cannot mingle with them. it sometimes makes me annoyed because I can’t understand them. Ever if you (they) are not talking about me.”

Looking at the proficiency of Thai language of international students, all of key informants did not have any chance to study Thai language except several hour lessons during the preparation week provided by Graduation School and could not read in Thai language.

However, none of the key informants, interestingly, referred to hardship or difficult while communicating in English with the professors at PSU. Additionally, it was indicated that speaking in Indonesian or Malay language fostered the easy and smooth adjustment at PSU. One of the interviewees said, “When I buy some food, they (workers in a shop) can speak (Pattani) Malay, so it help(s) me a lot. I don’t feel like abroad. It helps me to adjust here”.

■ Consideration for the Marginal

Inevitably, international students at PSU confront difficulties in Thailand. Two of key informants expressed their feeling when facing difficulties in adjusting in the host country:

Interviewee 4: “The first week of our arrival here, the first week of our study, I found many difficulties adjusting with some cultures of Thai. Like it’s totally different, the things we didn’t have in (my own country), it was here.”

Interviewee 3: “Actually, at first, maybe, what is different is the weather, because it is really hot. And the language, we can’t even read. So it’s like (being) blind.”

Zapf (1991) noted that it is inevitable for international students to encounter ‘overwhelming confusion and frustration as a part of culture shock’ (p. 113). In some circumstances, international students are discouraged when information that is meant for both Thai and international students were relayed in Thai language only. This was exemplified by two experiences referred by two interviewees:

Interviewee 13: “In dorm, they always announce information in Thai. Sometimes we are sleeping and they have a Thai student to announce the information in Thai. We don’t understand.”

Interviewee 12: “There are new buildings at PSU now, but there is no sign in English. Names and Floors for Thai styles all the time as well. I have to askall the times where is a toilet, and where are the rooms (in the buildings)?”

Presumably, the two cases above showed that administration did not consider that minor or marginal group; international students, existed at PSU. Though welcoming atmosphere for international students at PSU were indicated by some key informants: “They (workers of graduate office) are trying to welcome us” and “I could see that most (of administrative workers) our department are helpful, they really want to help us, in a lot of ways”, more detail consideration for the international students should be operated by correcting the past mistakes.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Adjustment of international students is a complex, multi-faceted and dynamic process (Brown & Holloway, 2008; Mustafa & Ilias, 2013; Rajab, Rahman, Panatik & Mansor, 2014). This research focused on examining levels of adjustment in academic, social and personal-emotional dimension and on identifying themes for understanding satisfaction and hardship while international students study at PSU.

The research found that international students at PSU performed better in academic adjustment than in social or personal-emotional adjustment. One demographic factor, gender, did not make any difference in the three dimensions. No demographic factors among gender, age, and group of nationalities differed in social adjustment.

While age did differ in personal-emotional adjustment, group of nationalities created the differences in academic and personal-emotional adjustment. The post Hoc test and the results of comparing the means indicated that over 40 years old international students adjusted better than the 21-25 years old, this similar result was found in Rujipak and Limpraset's study (2016).

And others group adjusted academically easier than ASEAN, and the group also showed better adjustment in personal-emotion adjustment than the other two groups. Interestingly, Rujipak and Limpraset (2016) found similar results; Western students in Thailand showed better adjustment than international student from Asian countries in academic and physical and mental health adjustment.

Three themes emerged from the analysis of qualitative data explaining the satisfaction and hardship of international students while they adjust: successful academic achievement, language barriers, and consideration for the marginal. The three themes are complicatedly linked in the three dimensions (Rajab, Rahman, Panatik & Mansor, 2014).

Among the three themes, the theme, language barriers, may be regarded as the most important and practical factor to influence the adjustment of international students. Church (1982) stated that effective cross-cultural communications and understanding is a key to sojourners' adjustment by citing Brein and David's study (1971). Baklashova and Kazakov (2016) stressed that international students should adjust in different communication patterns in host countries.

This research also found that the lack of common language proficiency between international students and Thai administrative workers or students triggered difficulties or challenges or misunderstanding in academic and social adjustment, even in personal-emotional adjustment (Mustafa & Ilias, 2013).

Lastly, though international students are satisfied with studying at PSU and appreciated the welcoming atmosphere, the stakeholders should understand that international students are a minority and a stranger-group in the host country. Therefore, more delicate cares and administration should be shown to them while achieving their goals and adjusting in the new environment (Eze & Inegbedion, 2015).

SUGGESTIONS

According to the findings, a number of recommendations should be suggested for a better adjustment as 'multicultural student body (Simmala, 2008)' in the future. Pare and Tsay (2013)'s suggestions were divided into these dimensions: cultural and social integration, variety of food restaurants, Chinese classes, and Course content and methods. Rajiprak (2016) found the significance of social support from family, friend or significant people influences cross-cultural adjustment in Thailand. The practical suggestions of the current study are also divided into three parts namely; for international students, for administrative staff and students, and for other stakeholders.

For international students, academic English courses for academic achievement (Alsehafi & Shin, 2017) and Thai Language courses for daily life should be provided. Although those could be official or unofficial in

curriculum, regular based activities or courses are more effective for enhancing the levels of international students' adjustment. Baklashova and Kazakov (2016) urged universities in Russia to provide a Russian language program for international students too.

For administrative staffs and Thai students, it is highly expected that English course for basic communication and orientation on international environment will decrease misunderstanding with international students and superfluous feelings or experience.

Lastly, for other stakeholders, open channel or space, where international students express their difficulties and functional suggestions, will be helpful for a better adjustment. Although stakeholders at PSU hold one-week orientation for preparation, meetings with international students to obtain their opinions (e.g., a meeting with scholarship grantees), new projects such as a peer program: which had a positive result (Talbot & Geelhoed, 1998) could be considered for enhancing the adjustment of international students in Thailand.

LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As the current research was conducted at only one campus of one university, further research with wider scales should be performed for understanding adjustment of international students in Thailand and further research with different perspectives on adjustment of international students should be conducted (e.g., to understand the challenges of stakeholders with international students, evaluation of current activities, effectiveness of trainings for international students, staffs or Thai students.) Additionally, research on various factors affecting the adjustment of international students in Thailand should be conducted for providing adequate policies, activities, or projects. Lastly, it should be researched on the two contrast results with previous studies: (a) international students from longer cultural distances from Thailand performed better adjustments (Rujipak & Limprasert, 2016), and (b) the oldest group somehow showed a better adjustment than the youngsters.

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