Unfolding the Moving-in Experiences of International Students at a Malaysian Private Tertiary Institution

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Abstract: This paper focuses on the experience of international undergraduate students as they move into a university environment. Utilising a phenomenological approach with Schlossberg's Theory of Transition as the framework, data was collected through semi-structured interviews with 19 undergraduate students, all enrolled in one private university. The study found that their moving-in experiences were influenced by their aspirations, feelings and expectations. Conflicting emotions accompanied their departure from their home country: sorrow and anxiety versus excitement for their new life. Aided by a relatively smooth immigration process, the students moved on to experience memorable moments where friendships were formed and exploration of the surrounding areas was acculturated. Challenges faced include those of physical nature (weather and food), academic, and perhaps the most serious of which, psychosocial: in the form of homesickness and feeling of foreignness.

Keywords: challenges of international students, coping with transition, international students, international student experience, moving-in experience

1. Introduction

The presence of international students on campus is coveted by tertiary institutions across the world. As part of the greater internationalisation of higher education efforts, student mobility is often seen as "the 'face' of internationalisation" (Knight, 2012, p. 21). The rationales for internationalisation, including the recruitment of international students, cover a range of economic, political, social, cultural and academic reasons (de Wit, 2002; Knight, 1999; Knight & de Wit, 1995, 1997). International students add value to the institution, not just in terms of tangible economic benefits but also in terms of a diversified academic and social experience that benefits all stakeholders involved including the local students and the surrounding community, the academic staff and the institution itself.

Since the turn of the millennium, there has been "a strong interest in Malaysia to make the export of education products and services a major part of our foreign policy" (Azman & Abd. Aziz, 2006, p. 5). This interest was manifested in several ways, including the intensification of efforts by the Malaysian government in attracting international students to enrol in its higher education

institutions. Sirat (2008) opined that the increase of enrolment of international students started in 1996 and highlighted Malaysia's target to have 100,000 students by 2010. The latest target, as recorded in the Malaysian Education Blueprint (Higher Education) 2015-2025, is 250,000 students by 2025. (Ministry of Education, 2015).

Based on the UNESCO Institute of Statistics, the number of international students worldwide increased from 4.06 million in 2012 to 6.06 million in 2019. Data from the Ministry of Higher Education puts the number of international students enrolled in Malaysia to be 136,497 in 2019, out of which 93,569 were enrolled in tertiary institutions with 34,556 in public universities and 59,013 in private institutions (Kementerian Pengajian Tinggi, 2020). This is a big drop in number compared to that of 2017 with more than 170,000 enrolled, out of which 136,293 were full-time students at tertiary institutions (Kementerian Pendidikan Tinggi, 2018).

This drop, even before the COVID-19 pandemic hit the globe, is a matter of concern. With the advent of the pandemic, several measures were introduced by the Malaysian Government including restricting the entry of international students into the country which has made an even bigger impact on the higher education industry, especially private institutions of higher learning (Sharma, 2021). As Malaysia heads towards an endemic stage where international borders are expected to open, it is important to replan, reboot and renew the efforts in attracting international students to enrol into its tertiary institutions.

In order to attract new students, all stakeholders should be aware of the quality of, not just the academic programmes, but also the quality of the lived experience that previous students had undergone as they moved into, through and out of the university environment. It is through such studies that more impactful strategies can be devised to attract them to our shores, facilitate a successful academic journey and hopefully, encourage them to progress to a programme of a higher level in Malaysia. In addition, these studies can help identify "adequate and appropriate academic and social support…to sustainably attract and maintain significant number of international students" (Richards & Abd Aziz, 2011, p. 15).

This research is part of a PhD study which explored the lived experience of international undergraduate students at one Malaysian private institution of higher learning and the meaning these students attached to the experience. This paper specifically covers the moving-in stage, which for many started when they were still in their home countries as they made plans to pursue tertiary studies up to their experience as they navigated through life as a new undergraduate student in their first semester.

2. Review of Literature

This study used the Theory of Transition developed by Nancy Schlossberg as the framework. Transition is often understood to be temporary adjustment periods, a filler between two points of time. However, Schlossberg's theory emphasised that "a transition is a process that extends over time" (Patton et al., 2016, p. 47). It is a movement of the self from a state of awareness of the transition itself, to a phase of continuous evaluations and adjustments to a point that the transition has been embedded into one's self. This movement occurs in the stages or phases of moving in, moving through and moving out (Anderson et al., 2012).

During the moving in phase, the individual is familiarising himself with new roles, relationships, routines and assumptions brought forth by the change in circumstance. The moving through phase is a period of continual adjustment. The moving out stage is precipitated by an ending where the person has to prepare to disengage from the functions that she or he has played previously (Anderson et al., 2012; Goodman et al., 2006).

Schlossberg categorised the factors affecting the transition experience as the 4 S System consisting of situation, self, support and strategies. Elements of the situation factors include trigger, timing, control, role changes, concurrent stress and perception of cause (Anderson et al., 2012; Evans et al., 2010; Patton et al., 2016). Self consists of socioeconomic status and psychological factors, the latter of which include ego development, outlook, sense of commitment, value system, spiritual identity and resilience (Anderson et al., 2012; Goodman et al., 2006). Support, according to

Schlossberg, could be provided by long-term partners, family, friends and organisations while strategies are found in methods such as modifying the situation, controlling the meaning and management of stress (Anderson et al., 2012; Goodman et al., 2006).

For international students, the moving-in stage begins in their home country with the process of choosing the destination and institution for their studies. McMahon (1992) termed factors that influence the choice as pull factors which included the profile of the host country (reputation, climate, geographical proximity, cultural and social ties, safety and security) and the attractions that the host country offers (travel, lifestyle and entertainment) (González et al., 2011; Jamaludin et al., 2018; Lesjak et al., 2015; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). The cost, including tuition fees and living expenses, as well as visa or immigration-related processes are also contributory factors (Eder et al., 2010; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). Students also take into consideration future employment opportunities, the reputation of the institution and recommendations from family and friends in the selection process (Kim et al., 2018; Ramli, 2019).

The support provided by institutions to ease the moving-in stage is important in helping students navigate their new lives. Pre-arrival and post-arrival support in the form of assigning current students to help new international students were recommended by Le (2018) and Singh (2021). The connection established by such efforts would help develop a sense of belonging as well as alleviate psychosomatic feelings such as homesickness, depression and loneliness upon arrival. In addition, Garza (2015) and Jeon-Huh (2015) advocated for a formal anticipatory orientation which would provide them with a better understanding of the academic and living systems and help them manage their expectations in terms of campus life.

The orientation programme is also often offered by institutions to facilitate their adjustment. Students found such programmes to be useful, providing information on academic systems, norms and functions of the university as well as non-academic matters including accommodation, transport and finance (Cowley & Hyams-Ssekasi, 2018). In addition, such sessions had their psychosocial benefits in the welcoming warmth often displayed by those involved in conducting the sessions as well as improving the sense of belonging and integration of the new students (Acar Güvendir, 2016, 2018).

Talebloo and Baki (2013) categorised challenges faced by international students as facility-related (transportation, food and library), social environment (culture, communication and English language), academic (systems, lecturers/supervisors and methodology) and recreational activities. Cowley and Hyams-Ssekasi (2018) had broader categories: academic and non-academic issues. The academic challenges were mostly language-related while non-academic issues included mental health (homesickness and isolation) and finance.

Besides orientation, other support programmes are often offered by institutions. Sakurai et al. (2010) highlighted a multicultural intervention programme of an Australian university and the impact it had on the social ties of international students. The programme was proven to be successful in widening the social network of those involved. Some institutions offer programmes as part of the curriculum as in the case of an American university with a one-credit course that exposed students to the elements of academic and social living on campus (Yan & Sendall, 2016)

At times, even with various support programmes made available, social integration is still difficult to achieve. Zhou and Zhang (2014) explored the social integration experiences (or lack thereof) of first-year international students in a Canadian university. The majority relied on their fellow countrymen for help, with limited interaction with other local students, and even their lecturers. Lee and Bailey (2020) highlighted the lack of interest, exacerbated by communication barriers, on the part of local South Korean students in interacting with international students.

As many scholars found, identity is a major factor in the moving-in experience. In an ethnographic study of identity dis-orientation and re-orientation of international students from China at a Mid-Western American university, Zhang (2015) found that the move from being part of the majority to becoming a minority led to mental confusion. As they were adjusting to their new role as a minority, many of them reported experiences with discrimination which contributed to a re-adjustment and re-orientation of their identity. In addition to overt discriminatory practices, the subjects of Onyenekwu's (2015) study reported encounters of micro-aggression that led to the quest for an identity re-definition.

As quite a substantial percentage of international students are usually not native speakers of the language of communication, Humphreys et al. (2012) studied the impact of one semester's worth of undergraduate studies on the English language proficiency of international students enrolled in an Australian university. Using the results of the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) tests administered at the beginning and end of the semester, the study recorded marginal improvements in the scores. Delving into communication strategies, Tan et al. (2012) studied international students in a Malaysian public university enrolled in an English language proficiency course as they did not initially meet the language entry requirements. In analysing the data from oral group discussions, the researchers found that the top four strategies used by these students were code-switching, literal translation, topic avoidance and message abandonment.

3. Methodology

The methodology of a study is driven by the objectives of the research. Since this paper is part of a larger PhD study that aimed to explore the entirety of the lived experience of international undergraduate students and the meaning they attached to the experience, the qualitative approach was deemed the most appropriate. As posited by Creswell (2014), a qualitative inquiry is exploratory in nature and often used to study "the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (p. 4). Focussing on the perception of the students or the meaning that these experiences had for them, the researcher had to "make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. 43). As such, out of all the qualitative methods, phenomenology was chosen as the most appropriate.

Moustakas (1994) referred to Hegel in his description of phenomenology as "knowledge as it appears to consciousness, the science of describing what one perceives, senses, and knows in one's immediate awareness and experience" (p. 26). A researcher who uses the phenomenological approach must therefore be focused on the experience as it is lived, perceived, interpreted and understood by the subjects of the study.

In phenomenology, the interview is the main tool to gather data as it is the best conduit in presenting the consciousness of the participant to the researcher. In his book, *Phenomenological Research Methods,* Moustakas (1994) featured only one data-gathering tool, which is the interview. Van Manen, a noted specialist in phenomenology, expressed his preference for the interview over the alternative of writing, highlighting that participants "will talk with much more ease and eloquence and with much less reserve than they write their thoughts on paper" (van Manen et al., 2016, p. 64). It is through the interview that a researcher is able "to understand the world from the subjects' point of view, to unfold the meaning of peoples' experiences" (Kvale, 2007, p. 1).

In gathering data for this study, the semi-structured interview format was utilised. The Theory of Transition was heavily relied on in drafting the questions, in particular the elements of approaching the transition and the actual moving-in experience.

The interviews were recorded and self-transcribed by the researcher using Audacity, a free and open-source digital audio editor and Google Docs Voice Typing function. The transcripts served as the primary data and were coded using NVivo to facilitate the work. Clusters, themes and codes were determined by the researcher based on the thematic analysis approach, moving "from the narrow units of analysis (e.g., significant statements), and on to broader units (e.g., meaning units), and on to detailed descriptions" (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The data analysis process included several rounds of combing through the transcripts of each participant to identify "aspects of meaningfulness" (van Manen et al., 2016, p. 5). Figure 1 presents a sample of the coding work using NVivo as a facilitating platform.

Fig.1 Sample of Coding Using NVivo

A total of 19 participants were selected based upon criterion sampling: they must be enrolled in an undergraduate programme at the selected private university. All participants were assured of strict confidentiality and signed a consent form to be part of the study. Table 1 presents specific details through the use of pseudonyms.

Table 1 Details of Participants of the Study (by Pseudonym)

Pseudonym	Country	Gender	Age	Field
Adam	Somalia	Male	21	Engineering
Ali	Indonesia	Male	17	Engineering
Amir	Bangladesh	Male	24	Business
Azad	Pakistan	Male	24	Engineering
Buddhi	Sri Lanka	Female	23	Biotechnology
Chelsea	Zambia	Female	26	Business
Daniel	Uganda	Male	22	Biotechnology
Derek	Uganda	Male	26	Nursing
Elaine	Nigeria	Female	27	Nursing
Fu	China	Male	24	Engineering
Gayesha	Sri Lanka	Female	22	Biotechnology
Harun	Maldives	Male	22	Biotechnology
Mansur	Syria	Male	21	Engineering
Nadira	Thailand	Female	22	Nursing
Noshi	Bangladesh	Female	21	Computing
Thomas	Kenya	Male	19	Engineering
Yasmine	Indonesia	Female	18	Nursing
Yong	China	Male	41	Nursing
Yusuf	Tanzania	Male	22	Business

4. Findings

In analysing the data, several themes were uncovered. The moving-in experience of the participants was heavily influenced by their approach towards the transition including their aspirations, the choice of country and field of study, their initial feelings and expectations, and their family. The narratives of the actual moving-in stage were centred on themes surrounding preparations made, the departure and arrival experience, the memorable moments and the challenges faced.

4.1 Aspirations

Aspiration was the seed of the whole experience. This aspiration might have been initially influenced by family or society but ultimately, it had been embedded in their psyche as an ambition, a pursuit necessary to become, as Adam (Somalia) stated, an "important person in the world".

The desire to study overseas as opposed to at a local university was driven by the perception of quality and prestige which was expressed succinctly by Elaine (Nigeria), "There's something different getting a degree overseas and getting from a local school". An overseas degree was perceived to provide a wider platform of opportunities in terms of knowledge as well as cultural exposure, as stated by Derek (Uganda), "Yeah, overseas gives you an opportunity to see different cultures, different things, different people, and better education as well yeah."

Their aspiration was the trigger of the transition experience that the subjects were undergoing. Since the transition was caused by their own aspiration, it had a positive impact on the experience.

4.2 Choice of Country and Field of Study

Control over the choice of country also affected the transition experience. Those who actually had Malaysia as their first choice did not face any emotional hurdles, unlike the majority who initially wanted to go to another country. For some, their socio-economic status did not allow them to pursue their studies at the destination of choice as revealed by Amir (Bangladesh), "for financial reasons, I chose Malaysia". Another common cause involved academic or visa requirements which could not be fulfilled due to their situation as per the case of Azad (Pakistan), "At that time, I was waiting for my visa (to Australia) but I couldn't get it". Though disheartened, the students were at a stage of ego development in which they were able to bear with the disappointment and accept the alternative available to them, which was Malaysia.

The students had more flexibility in terms of choice of field of studies. Although some initially wanted to pursue other areas, ultimately it was a decision they made out of their own free will to accept the offer for a different programme, an example of which came from Elaine (Nigeria), "I wanted to go for medicine. That was my first choice, then nursing my second choice. I would say that I'm still in my preferred field of study."

4.3 Initial Feelings and Expectations

The start of the transition for all the students was filled with conflicting emotions. The fear and anxiety expressed by Yasmine (Indonesia), "But also nervous at the same time because I was thinking what will my life will be (sic)?" was echoed by the other subjects. These feelings were balanced with excitement at the thought of a new beginning, as Mansur (Syria) stated, "Yeah, I was counting the days, every day counting the days. I just want, because it was my first time, it was my first time to go discover a place." Their sense of self, reflected in the anxiety, led them to brace themselves for possible difficulties during the transition experience. At the same time, the sense of adventure gave them a positive outlook towards the transition.

The subjects also expected a certain amount of role changes that the transition would bring them. They had to make extensive adjustments to their lifestyle, foremost among which was the need to manage the wide-ranging aspects of daily living including sustenance, health, budget and safety, as they no longer had their parents to depend on. Gayesha (Sri Lanka) expressed it simply as, "But once

I come here….I have to do the other day-to-day tasks as well." This move towards independence, though burdensome to a certain extent, was also relished as it meant freedom to take control of major aspects of their life. However, they realised that freedom came with responsibility, as Derek (Uganda) said, "And then, autonomy, the ability to make decisions knowing that they're going to impact your life and no one will be there to save you." This intrapsychic behaviour in controlling the meaning of the transition was a reflection of their newfound maturity in their journey towards adulthood.

4.4 Role of Family

Family played a big role in the subjects' approach towards the transition, instrumental among which was the financial support provided by their parents. With this support, the expectations were for the subjects to perform well in their academics, as expressed by Derek (Uganda), "When it comes to school, I know my parents want me to do well because….they really spent a lot of money just for me to be here." Although they felt the pressure of such expectations, the subjects naturally converted it to become a source of motivation for them to push forward during the transition. This strategy of controlling the meaning to reduce the stress of the transition was applied by all the students and best reflected by Thomas (Kenya), "I don't want to fail because all the effort they've put in me it shouldn't go in vain."

4.5 Preparations for the Move

When they were still in their home country, it became imperative that they gathered as much information as possible on Malaysia so that they could better prepare themselves physically, mentally and spiritually. Yusuf (Tanzania) stated, "So, I did plenty of research on Malaysia before coming here. So, the culture of people and the international, foreigners' life in Malaysia". This preparation helped them manage their stress as the information gathered gave them some reassurance and a sense of control over the forthcoming transition experience.

Digital platforms provided immense organisational support for the subjects to gather information on the host country. The platforms used included search engines, video sharing sites and social media, which gave them a view of the future life that they hoped to undergo as an undergraduate student.

In addition to the gathering of facts, students also included the application process as part of their moving-in recollections. Mansur (Syria) laid out his preparations as, "…I had to take my certificate, school certificate, college certificate. And then medical stuff. And then NOCs [No Objection Certificates] from courts, from police, from other areas." This early administrative experience made quite an impact on their memories of the transition experience.

Other than information gathering, the majority did not make any other major preparations. Though some forayed into academic preparations, these were not significant. This demonstrated their outlook, especially in terms of their confidence in their academic ability to adjust as expressed by Elaine (Nigeria), "No more preparation, when I go there, I just either, I need to adapt my time or study or something. There was no more, no special preparations about going to Malaysia."

4.6 Departure and Arrival

One of the strongest recollections for the students was the departure from their home country, especially the parting from their loved ones. It was at this stage that the students realised that the bond with their family would be affected by the physical distance. Many witnessed the tears of their parents and other family members while some unabashedly shared that they too cried as related by Harun (Maldives), "Actually my mum cried and that's when my mum cries, I will cry." In expressing their grief either outwardly by tears or through other forms of intrapsychic behaviour, the subjects were able to manage their stress. Even though their family was sad that they were leaving, there was an understanding that this parting was temporary and was made for a better future for all of them as

was made clear to Azad (Pakistan) by his father, "No, Azad, don't feel sad. You are going for something good." This sentiment became a source of motivation for the subjects, a method of controlling the meaning of the transition.

The Kuala Lumpur International Airport was the port of entry mandated by the government. Due to the huge size of the airport with its multiple terminals and gates, the feeling of disorientation and confusion, especially for those who had never travelled internationally, was immense. This was reflected by Amir's statement, "I was confused like super duper confused. Because the moment I dropped off, I don't know, maybe I was stressed."

Immigration is usually another source of stress for most travellers. After the difficulty in navigating the physical space of the airport, students had a relatively smooth immigration experience. Before their departure, they were informed that university personnel would be there to help them clear the immigration process and bring them to campus as per the experience of Nadira (Thailand), "I landed, they'll have one staff of International Office, waiting me in front of the immigration (sic)". This institutional support was instrumental in facilitating the arrival experience.

4.7 Memorable Moments

The first few weeks of the transition experience were approached with an adventurous spirit. There was a need to explore the surrounding areas and familiarise themselves with the facilities and amenities which were needed in their day-to-day living as shared by Fu (China), "For me, walked around the hangar then go to Tesco bought some, you know, everything". The exploration included visits to nearby shopping malls and recreational centres, mostly using public transport. Some even went to Kuala Lumpur and other parts of Malaysia. These trips gave them joy and helped ease the stress of being a new student in a foreign country as experienced by Ali (Indonesia), "We went to different places which made me less homesick because you know, as you have fun sometimes you just think, you just forget about all the negative things you know".

The explorations were made possible with the help of their friends, the majority of whom were from newly-formed relationships. These friends were instrumental in helping them acclimatise to daily life as an undergraduate of the institution. One of the platforms used by the subjects in forming relationships was the orientation programme. Those who joined found it fun and useful, as expressed by Harun (Maldives), "It was helpful actually orientation. I was actually in need of like getting to know people around the campus and how to get along around the campus."

4.8 Challenges Faced

The earliest challenge faced by the students was the weather. Although they had read about the tropical weather, the actuality of the heat and humidity shocked them. As Yong (China) mentioned, "I have some ideas about yeah hot. But I didn't expect oh so hot in twelve months because in China we have four seasons." Since they didn't expect such heat and humidity, those who chose non-airconditioned accommodation initially regretted it. Despite the unpleasant experience, all ultimately became acclimatised.

Food was also an issue as they were not familiar with the local food and had difficulty understanding the choices they were given. As Amir said, "So maybe I was ordering the in random. So, I got most of the sweet foods" Other elements of the local food that they were unhappy with included the smell, spiciness and oiliness. To counter this difficulty, the subjects became resourceful and took direct action by either cooking themselves or choosing inoffensive food like bread. Some also looked around for restaurants that served cuisine that they were familiar with. Given time, some managed to adapt to the local food offerings.

Another early challenge the subjects faced was related to communication. Those who were not confident in their English language skills struggled to get used to the academic as well as social environments. Yasmine (Indonesia), for instance, struggled with the lectures in English and initially translated her notes to understand them better. Yong (China) claimed that he could understand up to 90% of the content of his classes but found it challenging to write in English for his assignments.

Azad (Pakistan) and Fu (China) suffered from confidence issues and at first, avoided interacting socially with others except for those who understood their native languages. The strategies used by the subjects depended on the situation faced by them. At the point of the interviews, all of them had resolved the communication issues and managed to communicate well.

The feeling of foreignness was felt keenly by some subjects. With many students speaking languages other than English, they felt excluded, as voiced by Amir (Bangladesh), "It's comparatively hard to get along with the Chinese ethnic. Because I'll say the, they normally don't talk in English." The Africans, due to their physical appearance, stood out and reported that they were often stared at, as shared by Elaine (Nigeria), "The biggest challenges, I was, I've felt all of them, like going to place or shopping mall, someone looking at you. And I'll be like just that these people haven't seen foreigners." Rather than take direct action, those affected resorted to intrapsychic behaviour in just ignoring the perceived slights.

The subjects who had very close relationships with their families keenly felt the separation and suffered from homesickness. As young adults, the attachment they felt to their families and friends was still strong, as expressed by Gayesha (Sri Lanka), "I think the only negative experience was, Madam, I was a bit homesick. Because it's my, like, as I told you it's my first experience staying away from my family for this long." To help ease their pain, the subjects reached out to the persons whom they missed via video calls.

5. Discussion

In terms of approach towards the transition, the clusters that were uncovered by the textural descriptions included the subjects' aspirations. All had the dream of going to university and many wanted to do this at a foreign institution. Similar to subjects of Kim et al.'s (2018) study who were influenced by future employment opportunities and global citizenry, the subjects of this study also had practical reasons, including cost and immigration policies, behind their choice. Most were contented with the field of studies in which they were enrolled, even those who initially preferred another country and/or field.

Their approach towards the transition was also affected by the feelings and expectations that they had before they began the transition. The fear, uncertainty and concerns were balanced by the excitement at the thought of a start to a new life. At the same time, they were also very much aware of the hopes and expectations that the family had for them. Though this was a source of pressure for them, it was not overwhelming since these expectations were aligned with their own aspirations. The subjects also found the changes in roles, routines and relationships that they had to go through to be quite jarring but their recollections also included a sense of satisfaction and pride in their success in managing their own lives as independent individuals.

In preparing for the move, the students made full use of online resources. They also included the administrative processes that they had to go through as part of their recollections, highlighting the importance of this experience. To facilitate their preparations, a pre-departure orientation, similar to those described by Garza (2015) and Jeon-Huh (2015), would be useful. Academic preparations were insignificant which shows their confidence in their ability to cope with their studies.

The actual departure from the home country was filled with conflicting emotions: excitement versus grief and apprehension. Upon landing, although navigating the airport was confusing for some, the support provided by the institution as well as the special immigration processes led to a relatively smooth experience for all. Even as early as the day of their arrival, the subjects realised the importance of reaching out and did so almost immediately. The importance of expanding their network has also been confirmed by other studies including that of Zhou and Zhang (2014). What took longer to resolve was the Malaysian weather which was a major shock to most of them.

The first weeks were full of memorable moments comprising a multitude of experiences including exploration of the surrounding areas and places of interest, day-to-day shopping and participation in the orientation programme. Just like the subjects of Acar Güvendir's (2016) study, the welcoming warmth of the orientation session gave students a positive start. They took the

opportunity to use this platform to widen their network of friends who served a very important function in helping them adjust to the new environment.

For some, the encounters with new people also included perceived discrimination, which was similar to the experiences of the subjects in Zhang's (2015) and Onyenekwu's (2015) studies. In addition, the adjustment they had to make to the new teaching and learning systems also brought some difficulties. Other challenges encountered include language issues for those who were not initially fluent in English. Many also experienced the sense of being an other and the sense of isolation intensifying their feeling of homesickness which was not helped by the scarcity of familiar-tasting food.

6. Conclusion

Throughout the world, the moving-in stage for international students usually consists of a myriad of experiences. For the participants of this study, their aspiration was the trigger for the experience which brought with it certain expectations. The anxiety and apprehension of life in unfamiliar surroundings were balanced by the feeling of excitement. Conflicting emotions as in the grief of parting from their family and friends versus the anticipation of a life of independence were concurrently present. The relatively smooth immigration process was a positive start, and they did not waste any time in making friends who helped them navigate their new surroundings. Though there were problems related to the weather and food, more problematic were the psychosocial challenges of homesickness and the feeling of foreignness. The findings of this and other such studies help highlight the lived experience of international students. This discovery could help policymakers and relevant personnel of tertiary institutions devise strategies that would facilitate the moving-in experience of international students.

7. Suggestions

This research is part of a PhD study which focussed on the experiences of international students enrolled at a private institution. For comparative purposes, it is suggested that a similar study be conducted for students enrolled at a public institution. As the participants of this research were enrolled in undergraduate programmes, it would be enlightening to conduct a similar study on postgraduate students.

8. Co-Author Contribution

The authors affirmed that there is no conflict of interest in this article. As this research is part of a PhD study, the corresponding author conducted the research in fulfilment of the requirements for the programme while Prof. Siow Heng Loke served as the supervisor.

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