Assessment of Diversity Through Student Isolation: Qualitative Investigation of Academic, Social, and Emotional Isolation

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ABSTRACT

As higher education institutions grow as a commodity with diversified groups of local and international students, it is imperative for students, educators and policy makers to identify and address concerns that might arise from such amalgamation of cultures and experiences. In light of this interest, this article shares qualitative findings on how experiences of student isolation can cause deleterious effects on students’ university learning experiences. In-depth interviews were conducted with a total of five Malaysian and International students to discuss their student isolation experiences and how it engaged them in the overall university learning experience. The findings disclosed key factors that can potentially cause student isolation in aspects of academic, social and emotional development, and these key factors were critically examined to identify mitigation measures. Findings from this study addressed clear evidence to how student isolation can negatively affect one’s university learning experience, especially among international students who are not used to diverse education process, curriculum and expectations. UCSI University anchors great depth of interest in engaging students on holistic and successful university learning experience to ensure holistic development of graduates.

KEYWORDS

Academic, Diversity, Emotional Interviews, Language Barriers, Qualitative, Social, Student Isolation, University Learning Experience

INTRODUCTION

UCSI University has been a melting pot for students and educators since its establishment in 1986 with a diversified group of more than 10,000 students from 80 different countries worldwide are here today to pursue their dreams in one of Malaysia’s top leading private universities. Academic staffs in UCSI University share the same background as their students where a diversified cultural background of the staff added more valuable industrial and teaching experiences to immerse students into real-life situations and to conduct classes effectively and efficiently. Foreign partnerships between foreign institutions and UCSI University are also a highlight in its academic field that allow students to further their studies in world renowned education providers, such as University of Melbourne and RMIT University in Australia.

As a Praxis University, UCSI University has long been known for its strongly developed university-industry engagement where more than 2,500 corporations worldwide are industrial partners of its
Diverse Academic Learning Experience

UCSI University’s academic experiences include group assignments, class participation, extracurricular activities and library information searching which students are required to complete and equip as basic requirements for graduation. Group assignments require students to work as a group of three to any numbers of students as instructed by the lecturer and produce works that show team work and equal contribution from each member, which pose a higher need of communication skills as well as time management to students involved. Class participation allows students to raise their questions to lecturers and to demonstrate their understandings of the subject matter by responding to the instructor’s question or request. Engagement between students and lecturers bridge the gap of assumptions made by both parties to achieve better efficiency in the learning process. Extracurricular activities have gained attention in the academic field in recent years as educators realized the importance for students to learn beyond the classroom where skills and knowledge not printed on books are accessible in real-time events, such as sports clubs and facilitation programme. Lastly, library information searching allows students to access resources via printed books in the library or e-books on UCSI University’s Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC). Information searching requires students to be aware of key words of book or journal titles and to be able to skim through resources to select useful materials for their needs.

Diverse Social Learning Experience

Social experiences in UCSI University students’ lives may range from casual greetings to formal meetings or discussions between peers for different purposes. Socializing is an important aspect for them because networking opens up doors to potential connections and ultimately widens one’s perspectives in notions that are not readily available in his or her own social circle. Network building in universities is comparably tougher than in primary or secondary level due to the fact that university students meet their peers less often than primary or secondary students as a result of lesser subjects and classes. Strong in-campus network provides students a gateway to develop their soft skills as well as to seek help from people who are able to assist from their network.

Diverse Emotional Learning Experience

Emotional experiences are the most complex and yet important aspect for educators to look into for they come from humans and may need certain accumulation of time or events to come to specific points in life where emotions overpower rationale. UCSI University houses international students from 80 different countries as well as local students from different states and a multicultural environment
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