SELF-ESTEEM, SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING AND SOCIAL ANXIETY AMONGST INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS OF SULTAN IDRIS EDUCATION UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

International students are generally susceptible to experience anxiety in their social interaction due to differences in the way of life in the foreign culture of the host country. International students who have social anxiety problems may tend to avoid social interactions, feeling uncomfortable in the new social environment, and this could have an untoward impact on them academically. Some findings have shown that self-esteem are related to well-being and low level of anxiety. However, some other studies did not support this view. Hence, the aim of this study was to further clarify the relationship between self-esteem and subjective well-being on social anxiety among International students of Sultan Idris Education University (UPSI) and to examine the level of social anxiety that is prevalent among them. There were 117 international students aged from 20-31 years old who participated. Research design was based on a quantitative approach using Pearson correlation and multiple regressions analysis. The instruments used were the Self-Esteem Inventory Short Form (SEI-SF), Subjective Well-Being scale – consisted of the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) and the Scale of Positive and Negative Experience (SPANE), and the Social Interactions Anxiety Scale (SIAS). The present study found a significant relationship and contribution from self-esteem and subjective well-being to social anxiety. There were negative correlations between them. However, self-esteem and subjective well-being jointly made the larger contribution to social anxiety. In addition, a descriptive analysis showed that the participants of this study reported an average level of social anxiety. Thus, this study provides information about social anxiety problems among international students; it explains the contribution of self-esteem and subjective well-being as predictors of social anxiety among international students.

Keywords: Self-Esteem, Subjective Well-Being, Social Anxiety, International Students

HARGA DIRI, KESEJAHTERAAN SUBJEKTIF, DAN KEBIMBANGAN SOSIAL ANTARA PELAJAR ANTARBANGSA DI UNIVERSITI PENDIDIKAN SULTAN IDRIS

ABSTRAK

Pelajar-pelajar antarabangsa biasanya mempunyai kecenderungan untuk mengalami kebimbangan di dalam interaksi sosial disebabkan oleh latar belakang hidup yang berbeza di negara asing. Pelajar-pelajar ini berkemungkinan mempunyai kecenderungan untuk mengelak interaksi sosial, berasa kurang selesa di dalam persekitaraan sosial yang baru dan ini boleh memberi kesan kepada perkembangan akademik mereka. Sesetengah kajian membuktikan bahawa terdapat perkaitan antara harga diri dengan kesejahteraan subjektif dan tahap kebimbangan yang rendah. Walaubagaimanapun, terdapat juga kajian yang tidak menyokong pendapat ini. Oleh itu, Kajian ini bertujuan untuk menjelaskan secara lanjut perkaitan di antara harga diri dan kesejahteraan subjektif dengan kebimbangan sosial di kalangan pelajar antarabangsa Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris serta mengkaji tahap kebimbangan sosial yang lazim di kalangan mereka. Kajian ini merangkumi 117 pelajar antarabangsa, berumur dari 20-31 tahun. Kajian ini direka berasaskan pendekatan kuantitatif korelasi Pearson dan pelbagai analisis terurus. Instrumen-instumen yang telah digunakan dalam kajian ini adalah Self-Esteem Inventory Short Form (SEI-SF), Subjective Well-Being scale – yang terdiri daripada Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) dan Scale of Positive and Negative Experience (SPANE), dan Social Interactions Anxiety Scale (SIAS). Kajian ini menunjukkan perkaitan signifikan serta kesan harga diri dan kesejahteraan secara subjektif terhadap kebimbangan sosial. Turut dibuktikan adalah terdapatnya pertalian korelasi negative di antara penemuan yang telah disebut. Walau bagaimanapun, harga diri dan kesejahteraan secara subjektif, merupakan penyumbang yang lebih besar kepada kebimbangan sosial. Tambahan daripada itu, analisis deskriptif juga menunjukkan bahawa pelajar-pelajar yang menyertai kajian ini mempunyai tahap kebimbangan sosial yang sekata. Oleh itu, kajian ini telah memberi informasi bahawa kebimbangan sosial merupakan masalah di kalangan pelajar-pelajar antarabangsa dan memberi penjelasan mengenai sumbangan harga diri dan kesejahteraan secara subjektif dalam meramal kebimbangan sosial di kalangan pelajar-pelajar antarabangsa.

Kata Kunci: Harga Diri, Kesejahteraan Subjektif, Kebimbangan Sosial, Pelajar-Pelajar Antarabangsa

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

df	Degree of freedom
DV	Dependent Variable
IV	Independent Variable
KMO	Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin
KS	Kolmogorov-Smirnov
M	Mean
MSA	Measure of Sampling Adequacy
N	Population size
n	Sample size
p	Probability
SD	Standard deviation
SEISF	Self-Esteem Inventory (Adult Version) Sort Form
SIAS	Social Interaction Anxiety Scale
Sig.	Significant
SPANE	Scale of Positive and Negative Experience
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Science
SWB	Subjective Well-Being
SWLS	Satisfaction with Life Scale

LIST OF SYMBOLS

%	Percentage
<	Less than
>	More than
≤	Equal less than
F	F distribution, Fisher's F ration
r	Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient
α	Cronbach's index of internal consistency
μ	Mean
σ	Standard deviation
β	Population values of regression coefficients
R^2	Multiple correlation squared

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This study aims to investigate the relationship between self-esteem, subjective well-being and social anxiety among international university students of Sultan Idris Education University. In exploring a possible relationship among variables, this study elaborates the relationship amongst self-esteem, subjective well-being and social anxiety of international students. This chapter explores the background of the study, statement of problem, research questions, purpose of the study, research objective, significance of study, operational definitions, and limitation of study.

1.1 Background of the Study

International standards of high quality education are closely monitored by the Malaysian Education Ministries through their quality control authorities and appropriate legislation. Monitoring includes life in a multicultural society, a geographically safe environment, affordable living expenses, and an excellent transportation system, all becoming keys for Malaysia to promote their higher education to international students (MoHe, 2012). A growing number of universities in Malaysia are competing to accommodate international students. The number of international students who enroll in Malaysian higher education institutions has been increasing since 1996 (MoHe, 2007), putting forth a variety of higher education reforms, which were introduced to facilitate the entry of international students itself.

The exact number of this increase has been shown since 2003-2007, which reported a 17,531 international student increase during that interval who came from more than 175 countries. Further, the report by Department of Immigration (MoHe, 2009) has shown 70,259 total international students who have enrolled in either Private Higher Education Institutions or Public Higher Education Institutions in 2009. The top five countries of enrolling students were from China (10,355), followed by Indonesia (10,020), Iran (6,245), Nigeria (6,054), and Bangladesh (3,586). The latest statistics showed that there are more than 90,000 international students currently studying in the several institutions of higher education in Malaysia (Yusoff and Chelliah, 2010). The

latest number of international students has shown by academic database of Multimedia University (MMU) which has 3000 total population of international students in 2013 (MMU Portal, 2013). The current population of *University Kebangsaan Malaysia* (UKM) reported 3,347 are foreign students from 35 different countries enrolled for graduates and postgraduates programs (ISSD, 2011). Furthermore, there have been 7,530 International students of graduates and postgraduates who have successfully completed their studies at the IIUM since 1987, and the 28th Convocation 2012 of International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) reported that 815 International students have graduated (28th IIUM Convocation Ceremony, 2012). In this study, the researcher concentrated on Sultan Idris Education University as one of the larger public sector education universities in Malaysia, which has developing international standards for education levels. The population of international students who enrolled at Sultan Idris Education University based on academic database 2012/2013 was 155 including exchange program students. This population comprised 89 students from degree program, including exchange students, 51 students from master program, and 15 students from PhD program.

As more students choose to study abroad (Wang, 2009), the requirement to understand and concentrate on their psychological and social interaction anxiety while in a foreign country, becomes increasingly important. International university students have a great deal to feel anxiety in foreign country environment. The problems, such as cultural shocks, identity crisis, having new roommates and relationship problem, add seriously to the feeling of anxiety. Adjustment process to a new educational and social environment

can be stressful (Sumer, Poyrazli and Grahame, 2008). During this period, international university students could experience isolation, loneliness and feel social anxiety. Social anxiety is a condition that arises in social setting as an outcome of interpersonal relationships (Sübaşi, 2007). Anxiety in this study is a general feeling of discomfort, public speaking anxiety and shyness during social interaction (Hidayat, Singgih & Indiati, 1996). Brown (2008) has established many international students suffer anxiety due to the stress of communicating, feeling shame and inferiority, including even those who are able to speak English well. Vitasari, Wahab, Othman and Awang (2010) have shown that most of university students used to feel discomfort and anxious when doing class presentation because of social anxiety.

Furthermore, research of Schreier, Heinrichs, Alden, Rapee, Hofmann, Chen, and Gels (2010) has shown that there was influence of cultural factors on social anxiety felt by every individual, whether it be from collectivistic or individualistic culture. Variation of culture among international student's environment is more vulnerable to lead students experience social anxiety. According to cultural differences and misunderstandings of the new environment and having various experiences, it is possible that international university students will experience a feeling of estrangement, anxiety, and depression (Adler, 1975). Furukawa (1997) explained that people who exposed to foreign cultures might become depressed or anxious and show maladaptive behaviors because of this acculturative stress. Social fears are very much dependent on a particular culture (Hofmann, Asnaani, & Hinton, 2010). Social avoidance motivation is associated with

frequent experience of negative affect, which, in turn, leads to lower subjective well-being (Nikitin & Freund, 2010).

These studies have shown that social anxiety has been studied in many ways in psychological research as espousal variable. In this study, the researcher concerns to international students while they are doing social interaction in a foreign country, in daily life such as, class interaction, interpersonal interaction and public speaking. The literature survey demonstrates that studies conducted on social-evaluative anxiety, shyness, dating anxiety, communication apprehension, social phobia, and performance anxiety are clubbed under the title of social anxiety (Sübaşi, 2007). According to Collins (2009) social anxiety disorder was nearly as prevalent in the university student population as in the general population. Thus, it is important to know the level of social anxiety among international students of Sultan Idris Education University to prevent or minimize its vulnerability. Little is known about the factors that contribute to social anxiety during adulthood. Most of the researches have studied social anxiety in children and adolescents (Chrystan, 2005) and clinically termed as social anxiety disorder.

The students from various countries have specific self concept and beliefs. When they group together in the alien country, each individual may feel different levels of self-esteem compared to when they were in their own native country. Jaret and Reitzes (2009) have explored how different identities related to university students' sense of self-esteem and their academic performance. How young adults conceive themselves as university

students and the way they formulate their own racial-ethnic identities associated to their self-esteem and efficacy. Self-esteem refers to an individual's evaluation of the self and how positive or negative a person feels about him or herself (Wilson, 2010). Hence, the way individual think about him or her self determines how they perceive the social environment and its possible influence to social anxiety.

In one study, Wilson (2010) has found that in the context of daily life, low versus high self-esteem and low versus high social anxiety are more likely to moderate the influence of interpersonal experiences. Individuals with high self-esteem emerged to be more likely to seek out others in an effort to savor positive events, but socially anxious individuals appear less likely to pay attention to positive experiences. These findings suggested that self-esteem and social anxiety might influence how individuals respond to daily social interactions. The similar quotation in another study has reported people high in self-esteem claimed to be more likable and attractive, to have better relationships, and to make better impressions on others than people with low self-esteem, but objective measures disconfirm most of these beliefs (Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, and Vohs, 2003). In his finding, Baumeister et. al., concluded that effect of self-esteem does not clearly promise the benefit in individuals' performance, as sometime people with high self-esteem may also face problem in their behavior. Meegan and Kashima (2010) also explored the self-esteem in their study about well-being measurement and personal self-esteem, which showed that both of these variables show same pattern but they were non-

significant nonetheless, implying the possibility that the effects on self-esteem were spurious.

Subjective well-being often was defined in terms of frequent positive affect, infrequent negative affect, and high life satisfaction (e.g. Diener, Suh, Lucas, and Smith, 1999). Life satisfaction, pleasant affect, and unpleasant affect in part have been studied more frequently across culture (Diener, et. al., 1999). Furthermore, these subjective well-being components are major focal points that allow for a definite level of precision in measuring the fuzzier, folk concept of happiness. The cross-cultural study of subjective well-being is one indicator of the quality of life in a society (Diener, 2009). Diener and Diener (2009) have studied subjective well-being in 31 nations, and found that the correlates of well-being vary across societies. The degree to which self-esteem was correlated with life satisfaction varied dramatically across cultures and showed a much stronger association in individualistic societies. Predictor of subjective well-being varies substantially across cultures. Subjective well-being is different between individualistic and collectivistic society. Another research has reported a close relationship between subjective well-being and maintenance of physical and psychological health in life and degree of social interaction (Iwasa, Kawaai, Gondo, Inagaki and Suzuki, 2006).

Based on past researches, theoretically, some issues about self-esteem and subjective well-being have the similar definition as construct used in psychology, but operationally it is quite different. In other words, researcher could predict that subjective well-being consistently giving positive effect to any psychological problem, but self-

esteem benefit is still confusing and debatable. Indeed, the two primary measures of well-being, negative affect and personal self-esteem, do not always show converging results, with the latter showing more inconsistency. Thereby, this study will evaluate which one between self-esteem and subjective well-being have more influence on social anxiety among International students of Sultan Idris Education University.

1.2   Statement of Problem

International university students generally suffer from anxiety in their social interaction due to cultural diversity and the adjustment process to a new social life in a foreign country. Daily life activities in a new cultural environment leads individuals to feel homesick and avoid situations that are some quite different than their own country. University environment also contributes to social anxiety. Indulging in different interpersonal interactions, meeting new students from local and other countries, which may have very different characteristics and behaviors, are quite challenging. Social anxiety may increase problems in cognitive, affective and behavioral areas. This problem may force individuals to avoid social interactions, give rise to the feelings of discomfort in a new environment, and prevent them to perform well academically. Since, Sultan Idris Education University started developing International students' standards earlier this year, international students in this study are apart of a new population at the university. It is important for the university to know their psychosocial reports from the screenings.

Social anxiety is relating how the individuals thought about themselves and the environment. The evaluative part of self concept is called self-esteem. Some findings show that self-esteem is related to well-being and low levels of anxiety (Iwasa et. al., 2006; Nikitin and Freund, 2008; 2010; Wilson, 2010). However, some current studies do not support this view (Baumeister et al., 2003; Megan & Kashima, 2010). In other words, subjective well-being has been studied before and showed its connection to positively influence a human's personality, behavior and social life generally. However, these studies were not directly concerned with social anxiety. Hence, this study reveals the level of social anxiety which prevalent among international students at Sultan Idris Education University, analyzes which kind of relationship among the variables (self-esteem, subjective well-being, and social anxiety) exists among international university students. Further, it explores, which one has significant influence on social anxiety-self-esteem or subjective well-being?

1.3   Research Questions

The research questions in this study are as follows:

a. What is the level of social anxiety among international students of Sultan Idris Education University?

b. Is there any relationship between self-esteem and social anxiety among international students of Sultan Idris Education University?

c. Is there any relationship between subjective well-being and social anxiety among international students of Sultan Idris Education University?

d. Is there any contribution from self-esteem in the social anxiety among international students of Sultan Idris Education University?

e. Is there any contribution from subjective well-being (consists of life satisfaction and happiness) in the social anxiety among international students of Sultan Idris Education University?

f. Are there any joint contributions from the self-esteem and subjective well-being in the social anxiety among international students of Sultan Idris Education University?

1.4   Research Objectives

Based on the discussion earlier, a detailed explanation of self-esteem, subjective well-being and social anxiety is needed in order to understand why international students are vulnerable and face various social problems in foreign countries. Thus, the purpose of this study is to explore the relationship between self-esteem and subjective well-being and social anxiety among international students of Sultan Idris Education University. Higher level of self-esteem and subjective well-being are required to predict a lower level of social anxiety. In addition the results also describe the level of social anxiety that is prevalent among international students of Sultan Idris Education University.

The objectives of this study are to examine:

a. The relationship between self-esteem and social anxiety among international students of Sultan Idris Education University.

b. The relationship between subjective well-being and social anxiety among international students of Sultan Idris Education University.

c. The contributions of self-esteem to social anxiety among international students of Sultan Idris Education University.

d. The contributions of subjective well-being, consists of life satisfaction and happiness, to social anxiety among international students of Sultan Idris Education University.

e. The joint contribution of self-esteem and subjective well-being in the social anxiety among international students of Sultan Idris Education University.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study provides a general description about the levels of social anxiety among international students of Sultan Idris Education University. It may be used as a reference or as a screening for future intervention from self-esteem and subjective well-being perspectives. The result provides an explanation about how international students face problems in social life. This study extends the explanation about the influence of self-esteem and subjective well-being in the social anxiety, which is very rarely studied.