

The Effect of Learner and Customer Identity on Academic Performance and Student-Lecturer Relationship

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Purpose of the study: This study attempts to determine the level of learner and customer identity among Malaysian students, their impact on academic performance (AP) and student-lecturer relationship (SLR) and the differences between students at public and private higher education institutions (HEIs). **Methodology:** This study adopted a quantitative approach. Data collected from a sample of 400 students was analysed using structural equation modelling (SEM) in AMOS software. **Main Findings:** The findings reveal a high level of learner identity (LI), but a low level of customer identity (CI). LI has a significant and positive effect on AP and SLR. CI only has a significant and negative effect on AP. All the relationships do not differ significantly across public and private HEIs. **Applications of this study:** The findings provide useful information and insights to the HEIs on how SAL and SAC identity among students could be exploited so as to enhance educational quality and increase student retention, particularly in Malaysian HEIs, to meet the challenges of IR4. **Novelty/Originality of this study:** The findings provide fresh insight into the roles of LI and CI in increasing student performance and engaging the student in a stronger SLR, particularly in HEIs. However, this study is still limited by several factors that require replication in future research.

Key words: *Learner identity, student-as-customer identity, academic performance, student-lecturer relationship, higher education institutions, structural equation modelling.*



Introduction

To achieve the aspirations outlined in the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015-2025 (Higher Education) or MEB (HE), all the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are striving hard to produce better quality students and lecturers (Higher Education Sector MOE, 2016). Due to the decrease in government funding, HEIs are pressured to operate under the forces of marketization (Bunce, Baird, & Jones, 2017; Guilbault, 2016, 2018). As the education service providers, HEIs can no longer wait for their customer but need to design and implement effective programs that will attract, win and retain their customers. Only then can the HEIs could sustain their existence and competitiveness. By adopting the marketization approach, the higher education landscape and views may change dramatically. Among the major changes would be the view of students. In particular, students are becoming more important than ever before as they are no longer viewed merely as the output or end product of the HEIs but rather, as the customer who demands the best service from the HEIs (Tomlinson, 2017).

Though student-as-customer (SAC) identity could benefit the HEIs as service quality is expected to continuously rise and improve (Bunce, et al., 2017), it has been argued, particularly by the academics in the field, that SAC could create more harm than good (Guilbault, 2016, 2018). Specifically, the issue is that SAC will only place the academic standard at risk due to a high possibility for lecturers to dumb down academic content and standards in order to be evaluated more favourably by students (Lesnik-Oberstein, 2015). Further, it is claimed that SAC may foster a culture where students tend to pursue a degree rather than the knowledge (Molesworth, Nixon, & Scullion, 2009), in which the teaching and learning process should only emphasize the elements of fun and enjoyment, while neglecting the need to learn and generate knowledge (Pathan, Mahesar, & Shah, 2017). Similarly, McCulloch (2009) emphasizes that SAC only diminishes the learning itself.

Further, by adopting the SAC, it has been argued that HEIs should rebrand their institution and programmes, expand their core values and present themselves as tangible service providers in accordance with industry demand (Gokcen, Hefferon, & Attree, 2012). That is, every HEI is required to offer programmes that only have clear employment prospects, provide the best facilities and infrastructures and much more, to ensure customer satisfaction (Lesnik-Oberstein, 2015). The increase in student expectation, potentially leads to tension in the student-lecturer relationship as lecturers would be burdened with heavy workload to meet and exceed students expectation, while those students who only care about good grades, could turn into passive learners (Bunce, et al., 2017). The autonomy and authority of the lecturers towards learning might lessen, however managerial control could increase (McCulloch, 2009). If such tension persists, it seems likely that the government's efforts will fail, particularly the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) aim to achieve the first and second shifts (Malaysia Education



Blueprint 2015-2025 (Higher Education)): produce balanced graduates and improve the quality and diversity of academic talent (Ministry of Higher Education, 2016).

Hence, it is important that a new study is carried out as to provide a clear insight on the issue and how such tensions can be addressed and consequently open up a new landscape for the Malaysian education sectors to be able to meet the challenges of the Industrial Revolution 4.0 (IR4). Until recently, greater attention has been paid to empirically address the issues on SAC. However, most of the studies have focussed on identifying the areas in HEIs where SAC should be emphasized (Koris, Örtenblad, Kerem, & Ojala, 2015). There remains paucity of empirical research on the extent to which students have embraced the SAC identity or the differential effect of the identity embraced by the students (i.e. learner vs customer identity) on their performance (Bunce, et al., 2017) and even the student-lecturer relationship.

The pursuit to become the Asian education hub requires superiority of the HEIs. Accordingly, both the public and private HEIs are creating and experiencing stiff competition in an attempt to generate marketable and quality graduates and consequently become the best education providers. Given the distinction between public and private HEIs is significant, it is clearly important to address such differences so as to provide valuable insights on student identity issues and determine how to produce quality graduates. Hence, this study attempts to determine the level of learner and customer identity among Malaysian students at HEIs, the impact of both learner and customer identity on student academic performance as well as the student-lecturer relationship and the differential effects between public and private HEIs.

Literature Review

The concept of identity is heavily rooted in social psychology (Curtis, Anderson & Pierrakos, 2017). Vignoles et al. (2006) defined identity as a person's subjective concept of oneself. Generally, identity is accepted as 'an internalized set of role expectations' (Simon, 2004) that it is both shaped by earlier understandings of experiences and influences how the individual responds to future situations. The identity of a student emerges through a developmental journey: firstly as a 'new' student, then by moving into and through new spaces of learning and sharing knowledge, critiquing and reflecting on new and unfamiliar ideas (Daniels & Brooker, 2014). Whatever identity is being formed, the flexibility is best achieved through exposure to a range of experiences, including that of being a university student. Hence, students need to learn how they relate to themselves, as students, as well as how they interact with and are perceived by, their peers, mentors, tutors and lecturers (Daniels & Brooker, 2014).

Previous research has promoted the significance of customer orientation for the long-term survival of the companies (Kotler et al., 2017). In the specific case of higher education (HE),

there is no exception. In particular, Guilbault (2016) points out that HEIs should include customer orientation in their strategic planning as to tackle the underlying challenges, including a growing competition among HEIs, the reduction in funding and increased expenses in acquiring and retaining students. In fact, in the MBE (HE), students are valued as an important indicator in transforming higher education (Higher Education Sector MOE, 2016). However, the notion that students are customers is not easily accepted by the education community, mainly the academics. There have been continuing debates on the student-as-customer (SAC) approach but only recently has empirical evidence to support the opponents and proponents views have been provided (Bunce, et al., 2017; D. B. Saunders, 2014).

SAC identity is the identity or ideology held by students that they are the customer of the educational services (Bunce, et al., 2017; Guilbault, 2018). In the context of consumer identity, students believe education is a product that they purchase which entails that they deserve to demand maximum education quality for the minimum effort of learning (Koris, et al., 2015; Maxwell-Stuart & Huisman, 2018). To ensure the worth of their tuition fees, they would also demand the faculty satisfy their, in some cases, unreasonable and unjustifiable requests (Molesworth, et al., 2009; Nixon, Scullion, & Hearn, 2018). Also, they do not value the learning or the learning experience and attend class, not for knowledge purposes, but hoping to be entertained (Jabbar, Analoui, Kong, & Mirza, 2017; Nixon, et al., 2018; Tomlinson, 2017). In addition, students with SAC identity are more likely to engage in a surface learning approach than a deep learning approach (Everaert, Opdecam, & Maussen, 2017).

To date, much research has investigated the role of SAC, but most of the studies tend to be conceptual rather than empirical (Guilbault, 2016, 2018; Pathan, et al., 2017). Specifically, most of the studies tend to provide arguments about whether the SAC view should be approved or refuted. Limited studies have provided empirical evidence on the extent to which students have embraced the SAC identity (Gokcen, et al., 2012; Tomlinson, 2017) or the issues pertaining to the emerging context where students feel they should be treated as customers (Koris, et al., 2015). Too little research has provided empirical evidence of the impact of SAC identity, one of the exceptions would be Saunders (2014) who investigated the profile of students that adopted the SAC identity. Only recently, Bunce, et al. (2017) and Watjatrakul (2014) examined the effect of customer identity on academic performance and revealed that customer identity among students has a significant negative effect on academic performance. Everaert, et al. (2017) also demonstrate that students who adopt a surface approach experience a negative impact on academic performance. To investigate whether SAC identity only undermines student academic performance, the following research hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Customer identity has a negative impact on student academic performance.

According to the prior perception, students should develop a learner identity. That is an identity that constitutes a broad set of attitude and behaviour associated with intellectual engagement and a deep approach to learning (Biggs, Kember, & Leung, 2001; Bunce, et al., 2017; Everaert, et al., 2017). By embracing the student-as-learner (SAL) identity, students are more likely to show study attitudes including attending class regularly, reading the related materials, making an effort to study, spending a lot of time studying and enjoying learning and being at the university to learn (Bunce, et al., 2017).

According to Picton, Kahu, and Nelson (2018), successful grades depend on individual factors including learner identity. The extant studies that investigate the effect of SAL on academic performance show the significant effect of SAL identity on student academic performance (Biggs, et al., 2001; Bunce, et al., 2017; Everaert, et al., 2017; Hasnor, Ahmad, & Nordin, 2013; Herrmann, Bager-Elsborg, & McCune, 2017). In particular, the positive effect of SAL on academic performance has been revealed. That is, stronger SAL identity leads to higher academic performance. Hence, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Learner identity has a positive impact on student academic performance.

Survival of the HEIs is greatly affected by the level of the student-lecturer relationship (SLR) (Zainol, Yahaya, & Osman, 2018; Zainol, Yahaya, Osman, & Mohamed, 2017). That is, the stronger the relationship, the higher the possibility to engage students which improves learning and reduces attrition (Hasan & Masri, 2015; Sadiq Sohail, Rajadurai, & Azlin Abdul Rahman, 2003). SLR refers to the relationship formed between students and their lecturer through learning interactions and activities (Farr-Wharton, Charles, Keast, Woolcott, & Chamberlain, 2018), and strong SLR denotes that the interactions have generally been positive, supportive and reciprocal.

Little research has delved into determining the impact of learner and customer identity on the student-lecturer relationship. Most of the previous studies posed that SAC identity only weakens the relationship between students and lecturers (Bunce, et al., 2017; Guilbault, 2018), due to the lack of effort in learning among students and the reduction in the autonomy and authority of the academics (McCulloch, 2009). It is of note that students with SAC identity tend to seek a business-like relationship with lecturers, where students tend to expect best service from lecturers which can consequently create tension among lecturers. Moreover, SAC could also lead to undue distance between students and education process and undermine the relationship in the education process including student-lecturer relationship (McMillan & Cheney, 1996). SAC pressures the academic staff toward gimmickry and excessive simplicity to satisfy student expectations (McMillan & Cheney, 1996). Thus, it could be perceived that

SAC identity could possibly weaken the student-lecturer relationship in HEIs and thus the following hypothesis is proposed.

H3: Customer identity has a negative impact on the student-lecturer relationship.

As for the impact of learner identity on SLR, it has been highlighted that learner identity could significantly lead to a positive learning culture (Huda et al., 2017). In particular, learner identity could create a more positive and healthy relationship between student and lecturer (Chepchieng, Mbugua, & Kariuki, 2006; Kurt, 2018). Further, has also been shown that student satisfaction and investment towards learning could affect the student-lecturer relationship in a positive way (Hasan & Masri, 2015; Hill, Lomas, & MacGregor, 2003; Sadiq Sohail, et al., 2003). Hence, it could be perceived that SAL identity could strengthen the student-lecturer relationship in HEIs and in this context the following hypothesis is proposed.

H4: Learner identity has a positive impact on the student-lecturer relationship.

The distinction between public and private education has continued to become an intense topic of interest. Previous studies have shown public and public education differ significantly with respect to institutional performance, academic quality and even in a social environment (Somers et al., 2006). In particular, it was highlighted that public education institutions are more likely to win in terms of affordability however private education institutions have superior advantages in offering higher standard courses, creating social contexts and motivating their students and staff to achieve higher standards (Achinewhu-Nworgu, 2017; Luo, Stiffler, & Will, 2017). SLR is stated as better perceived among students in private universities than in public universities (Luo, et al., 2017). Given the significant difference in the perception of students at public and private HEIs, it could be expected that there are differences in the effect of SAC and SAL identities on both academic performance and student-lecturer relationship. Accordingly, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H5: The effect of customer identity on student academic performance differs significantly between public and private HEIs.

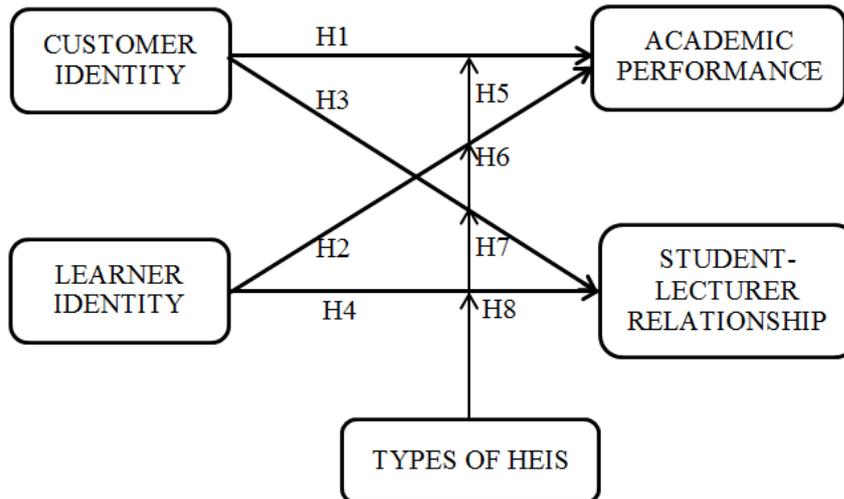
H6: The effect of learner identity on student academic performance differs significantly between public and private HEIs.

H7: The effect of customer identity on the student-lecturer relationship differs significantly between public and private HEIs.

H8: The effect of learner identity on the student-lecturer relationship differs significantly between public and private HEIs.

The overall framework proposed for this research is displayed in Fig 1 below.

Fig 1. Proposed Research Framework



Methodology

This research adopted a quantitative approach. The research was conducted in selected public and private HEIs in West Malaysia. Considering the quantitative and qualitative factors, 400 was determined as the adequate sample size for this research. Given that this study attempts to compare the students' perception at public and private HEIs, the number was allocated equally. To ensure a valid and reliable evaluation from the students, this research only considered students who were at least in their second semester (MacKenzie & Podsakoff, 2012; Morais, Dorsch, & Backman, 2004) of course study. To minimize biases, the sample was selected by employing probability sampling methods (Trochim, 2006), particularly cluster sampling. This research used a self-administered questionnaire as an instrument to gather data. To measure customer identity (CI) and learner identity (LI), 35 items were adapted from Bunce, et al. (2017). The measurement for the student-lecturer relationship (SLR) was adapted from the 16-items scale by Sornsri and Bing (2017). To determine the academic performance, a single item was used i.e. CGPA. The items adapted are listed in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Initial Measurement Items for Each Construct and Sources

No.	Items
Student as Customer Identity – Adapted from Bunce, et al. (2017)	
1.	The main purpose of my university education is to maximise my ability to earn money.
2.	I only want to learn in courses that will help me in my future career.
3.	I think of myself primarily as a paying customer of the university.
4.	If I cannot earn a lot of money after I graduate, I will have wasted my time at university.
5.	As long as I complete all of my assignments, I deserve a good grade.
6.	My lecturers increase my final mark grade if my mark is closer to the next grade boundary.
7.	I regularly think about the cost of my degree.
8.	If I could get a well-paying job without going to university, I would no longer interest in studying for a degree.
9.	It is solely the lecturer's responsibility to educate me at the university.
10.	What I learn in my course is not useful for my future.
11.	Since I have paid to attend university, the university owes me a degree.
12.	If I cannot get a good job after I graduate, I deserve to get some of my tuition fees refunded.
13.	I think of my university degree as a product I am purchasing.
14.	I deserve to graduate with a degree because I am paying for it.
15.	The cost of my degree is frequently on my mind.
Learner Identity – Adapted from Bunce, et al. (2017)	

No.	Items
1.	I feel most satisfied when I work hard to learn something.
2.	I prepare for class.
3.	I think of myself as being at the university to learn.
4.	I do my very best to pass all the assessments.
5.	I would choose to study even if I did not achieve a degree from it.
6.	I am at university to expand my knowledge.
7.	When I'm working on a new topic, I try to see in my own mind how all the ideas fit together.
8.	I take part in class discussions.
9.	I read relevant sources to learn more about my subject at university.
10.	I want to expand my intellectual ability.
11.	I am at university to learn new things.
12.	I take notes during class.
13.	Lecturers treat students as if they are at university primarily to learn.
14.	I make good use of my study time.
15.	I want to learn as much as possible while at university.
16.	I enjoy studying.
17.	I always try my best in assessments.
18.	I attend every class on my timetable.
19.	I discuss my subject with my lecturer.
20.	I enjoy learning at university.
Student-Lecturer Relationship – Adapted from Sornsri and Bing (2017)	
1.	The lecturers are trustworthy.
2.	The lecturers understood my needs.
3.	The lecturers are easily approachable.
4.	Their teaching style matches my preference.
5.	The lecturers are able to clarify my doubts.
6.	I am grateful to the lecturers.
7.	I feel thankful to the lecturers.
8.	I appreciate studying with the lecturers.
9.	I respect the lecturers.
10.	I am impressed by the lecturers.
11.	I need to maintain a relationship with the lecturers.
12.	The lecturers are important to my future study.
13.	I need to rely on lecturers.
14.	No one can replace the lecturers.
15.	There are no better lecturers for me to choose from.
16.	The lecturers are important to me.

Prior to commencing the actual data collection, two pilot tests were conducted involving two groups of people, i.e. two experts and 100 potential respondents (Darusalam & Hussin, 2016; Malhotra, 2009; Shukla, 2008). The pilot test aimed to ensure the content validity of the

measurement items (Ibrahim, Arip, & Bistamam, 2015), improve the questionnaire by identifying the time taken by the respondent to complete the questionnaire, examine the appropriateness of the questionnaire, determine the problems encountered while respondents answered questions (Maldaon & Hazzi, 2015; Malhotra, 2009; M. Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009; Yin, 2014) and determine the validity and reliability of the scale (Darusalam & Hussin, 2016; Pa, 2014; M. Saunders, et al., 2009). To test the construct validity and instrument reliability, the Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and Cronbach's Alpha were performed, respectively.

Based on the feedback from the experts, several items were restructured to more precisely convey meaning. Table 2 below shows that responses from a convenience sample of 100 students were successfully collected. About 65 per cent of them are female, while the majority are Malay (82%) and Muslim (86%), studying at the public HEIs (72%) and pursuing a bachelor degree (83%). Most of the respondents are in the age range of 18 to 22 years old (51%), taking Social Sciences, Business and Laws program (50%), in the third year (37%) and with CGPA of 3.5 and above (62%). Details of the respondents' profile are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Respondents Profile

		Frequency	Per cent
Gender	Male	35	35.0
	Female	65	65.0
Ethnic	Malay	82	82.0
	Chinese	5	5.0
	Indian	6	6.0
	Others	7	7.0
Age	18-22	51	51.0
	23-27	40	40.0
	28-32	6	6.0
	33-37	3	3.0
Religion	Islam	86	86.0
	Buddha	4	4.0
	Hindu	4	4.0
	Christian	6	6.0
Types of HEIs	Public HEIs	72	72.0
	Private HEIs	28	28.0
Program	Diploma	10	10.0
	Bachelor degree	83	83.0

		Frequency	Per cent
	Master degree	2	2.0
	PhD	5	5.0
Field	Education	32	32.0
	Arts & Humanities	7	7.0
	Social Sciences, Business & Laws	50	50.0
	Science, Mathematics & Computer	11	11.0
Year	First year	15	15.0
	Second year	30	30.0
	Third year	37	37.0
	Fourth year	18	18.0
CGPA	2.0 - 2.5	2	2.0
	2.5 - 3.0	6	6.0
	3.0 - 3.5	30	30.0
	3.5 - 4.0	62	62.0
	TOTAL	100	100.0

To test construct validity, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was performed on CI, LI and SLR simultaneously. Prior to performing exploratory factor analysis (EFA), preliminary assumption testing for normality and outliers were conducted. In particular, the skewness and kurtosis values are all within the range of ± 2 (Garson, 2012b), and the standard z-scores for every item are in the range of ± 4 , indicating that all items are reasonably normally distributed and no outliers in the data, respectively. As there is no significant violation found, the data is suitable for EFA.

The results (Table 3 below) show that the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) value of 0.943 exceeded the recommended value of 0.6, with significant Bartlett's Test of Sphericity, suggesting the appropriateness of the data to proceed with factor analysis (Coakes & Steed, 2003; Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010; Huck, 2012; Pallant, 2007; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). A three-factor solution with a total variance explained of 47.51 per cent is produced. No items with low loading or significant cross-loading are found (Bhattacharjee, 2012; Hair, et al., 2010; Pallant, 2007). Thus, the factor solution is acceptable. Specifically, Factor 1 confirms the items to measure CI, which made up of 15 items; Factor 2 proves the items for LI, which consisted of 16 items and Factor 3 reveals 16 items to measure SLR. The Cronbach's alpha value for all constructs is all above 0.7, indicating the acceptable internal consistency of the scales (Hair, et

al., 2010). Therefore, it is supported that all the items are a reliable measurement of their respective constructs.

Table 3: Exploratory Factor Analysis and Reliability Results

Constructs	EFA Results		Cronbach's α
	Items	Factor loadings	
Customer Identity (CI)	b1	0.523	0.855
	b2	0.518	
	b3	0.601	
	b4	0.693	
	b5	0.594	
	b6	0.508	
	b7	0.514	
	b8	0.508	
	b9	0.530	
	b10	0.524	
	b11	0.617	
	b12	0.723	
	b13	0.702	
	b14	0.730	
	b15	0.674	
Learner Identity (LI)	b16	0.694	0.947
	b17	0.729	
	b18	0.797	
	b19	0.743	
	b20	0.533	
	b21	0.749	
	b22	0.723	
	b23	0.724	
	b24	0.624	
	b25	0.793	
	b26	0.817	
	b27	0.569	
	b28	0.553	
	b29	0.602	
	b30	0.731	
	b31	0.685	

	b32	0.713	
	b33	0.501	
	b34	0.558	
	b35	0.645	
Student-lecturer Relationship (SLR)	c1	0.698	0.951
	c2	0.724	
	c3	0.690	
	c4	0.679	
	c5	0.642	
	c6	0.658	
	c7	0.626	
	c8	0.664	
	c9	0.497	
	c10	0.644	
	c11	0.629	
	c12	0.702	
	c13	0.665	
	c14	0.754	
	c15	0.711	
	c16	0.743	
Note: Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) value = 0.943; Bartlett's Test of Sphericity=0.0; Cumulative % of variance=51.465			

Once the questionnaire items have been finalized, the actual data collection was conducted involving a sample of 400 students. To ensure the ethical research conduct, this research adopted several measures including voluntary participation, anonymity and confidentiality (Bhattacharjee, 2012; M. Saunders, et al., 2009; Sekaran & Bougie, 2009). Data was analysed using descriptive analysis and structural equation modelling (SEM). In particular, the descriptive analysis involved frequency, mean, standard deviation and percentage measures in summarizing the respondent's profile and determining the level of CI, LI and SLR. SEM was conducted in three stages, i.e. preliminary analysis, validating measurement model and testing the hypothesized relationships.

The preliminary analysis involved the screening for missing values and assumptions, which include normality, outliers and multicollinearity. The normality assumption was checked using the skewness and kurtosis values as well as Mardia's coefficient of multivariate kurtosis (Garson, 2012a). Outliers were examined using standardized z scores and Mahalanobis distance values (Coakes & Steed, 2003; Kline, 2011; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). The

multicollinearity problem was checked by inspecting the inter-construct correlations and factor loadings. Validation of the measurement model involved examining the goodness-of-fit indices, construct reliability and validity. Once the satisfactory fit was achieved, validity and reliability assessment were pursued. Once the reliability and validity were achieved, the hypothesis testing was performed involving determining the GOF for the structural model and testing the hypothesized relationship.

Findings

Profile of Respondents

Questionnaires were distributed to 400 respondents, and from these, 200 respondents were selected from each of public and private HEIs. All 400 responses were successfully collected. However, 55 responses were excluded due to them having either more than 10 per cent of unanswered items or similar answers for all questions (Hair, et al., 2010). Hence, only 345 valid responses were used for further analysis, representing a response rate of 86.25 per cent.

Table 4 below shows that majority of the respondents are female (74.5%), Malay (67.2%), in the age range of 18 to 23 years old (80.6) and Muslim (69.3%). Most of the respondents are studying at the Public Higher Education Institutions (57.4%). With respect to their studies, the greater part of the respondents is taking bachelor degree (80%), Social Sciences, Business & Laws (55.1%), in their second year (39.4%) and with CGPA of 3.5 and above (44.9%).

Table 4: Respondents' Profile

		Frequency	Per cent
Gender	Male	88	25.5
	Female	257	74.5
Ethnic	Malay	232	67.2
	Chinese	82	23.8
	Indian	8	2.3
	Others	23	6.7
Age (M=22.26, SD=2.83)	18-23	278	80.6
	24-29	51	14.8
	30-35	15	4.3
	36-41	1	0.3
Religion	Islam	239	69.3
	Buddha	74	21.4
	Hindu	6	1.7
	Christian	25	7.2
	Other	1	0.3

		Frequency	Per cent
Type of HEI	Public HEIs	198	57.4
	Private HEIs	147	42.6
Level of Studies	Diploma	52	15.1
	Bachelor degree	276	80.0
	Master degree	11	3.2
	PhD	6	1.7
Field of Studies	Education	83	24.1
	Arts & Humanities	30	8.7
	Social Sciences, Business & Laws	190	55.1
	Science, Mathematics & Computer	35	10.1
	Others	7	2.0

		Frequency	Per cent
Year of Studies	First year	71	20.6
	Second year	136	39.4
	Third year	89	25.8
	Fourth year	48	13.9
	Others	1	.3
CGPA (M=3.30, SD=0.47)	1.5 - 2.0	8	2.3
	2.0 - 2.5	22	6.4
	2.5 - 3.0	44	12.8
	3.0 - 3.5	116	33.6
	3.5 - 4.0	155	44.9
Total		345	100.0

Preliminary Analysis

The screening of the data reveals no missing values for all items and therefore, the data were used for further analysis (Hair, et al., 2010; Kline, 2011). Next, three important SEM assumptions were checked, namely normality, outliers and multicollinearity. The normality assumption was assessed using the skewness and kurtosis values (univariate normality) and Mardia's coefficient. An inspection of the skewness and kurtosis values (Table 5 below) reveals five items (i.e. b26, b32, c7, c8 and c9) with values of skewness and kurtosis beyond the range of ± 2 (Garson, 2015). Hence, those items were deleted.

Table 5: Assessment of Normality

Var	skew	kurtosis	Var	skew	kurtosis	Var	skew	kurtosis
c16	-0.83	0.58	b33	-1.15	0.95	b15	-0.48	-0.53
c15	-0.38	-0.21	b32	-1.21	2.03	b14	-0.17	-1.10
c14	-0.40	-0.09	b31	-1.01	0.87	b13	0.34	-0.98
c13	-0.34	-0.40	b30	-0.78	-0.15	b12	0.57	-0.55
c12	-1.12	1.33	b29	-0.39	-0.19	b11	0.32	-0.86
c11	-1.10	0.90	b28	-0.47	-0.01	b10	1.16	0.67
c10	-1.21	1.24	b27	-0.91	0.14	b9	-0.78	0.09
c9	-1.45	2.18	b26	-1.30	2.10	b8	0.22	-1.17
c8	-1.37	2.08	b25	-0.93	0.55	b7	-0.60	-0.30
c7	-1.47	2.51	b24	-0.56	-0.05	b6	-0.29	-0.37
c6	-1.14	1.62	b23	-0.70	0.32	b5	-0.71	-0.08
c5	-0.74	0.71	b22	-0.47	-0.65	b4	0.04	-1.29
c4	-0.73	0.65	b21	-1.05	0.20	b3	-0.19	-0.78
c3	-0.53	-0.10	b20	-0.66	-0.20	b2	-0.52	-0.64
c2	-0.43	-0.10	b19	-0.88	-0.17	b1	-0.48	-0.36
c1	-0.99	0.70	b18	-1.03	1.23	Multivariate		578.74
b35	-1.10	1.08	b17	-0.66	-0.01			
b34	-0.42	-0.24	b16	-1.31	1.63			

Further, the Mardia's coefficient of multivariate kurtosis is too large as compared to the acceptable value (Garson, 2015), implying a severe multivariate nonnormality distribution. Provided that extreme nonnormality can produce an unreliable result, true outliers were examined through standardized z scores and Mahalanobis distance values. Examination of the standardized z scores shows no values that fall outside the acceptable range of ± 4 , indicating that no observations can be considered as extreme cases or outliers. Next, using a $p1 < 0.005$ criteria for Mahalanobis distance, 33 extreme cases (Coakes & Steed, 2003; Kline, 2011; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007) were removed from the sample (Hair, et al., 2010).

As advised by Gao, Mokhtarian & Johnston (2008), it is important to reduce extreme nonnormality while maintaining the representativeness of the population. After removal of true outliers, the Mardia's coefficient of multivariate kurtosis drops by 49.06 per cent. In this context, deletion of 33 cases only contributes 9.57 per cent of data loss and the remaining data is still sufficient to ensure generalizability. Accordingly, the deletion of the true outliers has lowered the multivariate nonnormality and still representative of the population (Gao, et al., 2008). Further, the correlations among constructs and factor loadings are all below 0.95. Therefore, the multicollinearity problem does not appear to influence the results (Garson, 2015;

Hair, et al., 2010). As no significant violation is found, the measurement model is ready for validation.

Validation of the Measurement Model

The results of the confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) (Table 6 below) show a significant chi-square (χ^2) value of 2855.81 (df=986, $p < \alpha$) and the normed χ^2 value within the range of 1 to 5. However, the comparative fit index (CFI) value of 0.783 falls below the acceptable threshold and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) values above the acceptable threshold. Hence, based on the selected indices, the measurement model does not adequately fit the data. Therefore, model modification is necessary to improve the goodness-of-fit. To improve the model fit, factor loadings were examined on any values that below 0.5, the residual covariance matrix for values exceed ± 4 and modification indices for the highest values. As a result, 24 items were deleted.

Table 6: Goodness-of-fit (GOF) Indices for Measurement Model

GOF statistics	χ^2 (df, p)	χ^2/df	CFI	RMSEA
Measurement model	2855.81 (986, 0.000)	2.896	0.783	0.078
Modified measurement model	481.86 (206, 0.000)	2.339	0.921	0.066
Acceptable value*	Significant at $\alpha = 0.05$	1-5	> 0.9	< 0.08

Next, the reliability and validity of the constructs were examined (Table 7 below). The results show the construct reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE) exceed the threshold of 0.6 and factor loadings higher than 0.5 or ideally 0.7 (Hair, et al., 2010), but the AVE for CI falls below 0.5 (Hair, et al., 2010). Provided that the CR is higher than 0.6, the AVE above 0.4 can be accepted (Fornell & Larcker, 1981) Hence, the reliability and convergent validity are evidenced. Further, to indicate the discriminant validity, the inter-construct correlations (IC) were examined. Given that, all the ICs are below 0.85, the items have more in common with their respective construct than other constructs (Kline, 2011). Therefore, discriminant validity is supported.

Table 7: Evaluation of the Measurement Model

Construct (<i>factor loading</i>)	Inter-construct correlation			CR	AVE
	CI	LI	SLR		
CI (0.574, 0.562, 0.596, 0.707, 0.752, 0.728)	1.000			0.819	0.433
LI (0.718, 0.752, 0.77, 0.773, 0.648, 0.696, 0.784, 0.542)	0.067	1.000		0.892	0.511
SLR (0.804, 0.845, 0.784, 0.786, 0.828, 0.734, 0.509, 0.727)	0.732	-0.007	1.000	0.914	0.576
Note: CI- Student-as-Customer Identity, LI- Learner Identity, SLR- Student-Lecturer Relationship					

By achieving the model fit and demonstrating acceptable construct reliability and validity, the model is appropriate to test the proposed hypotheses. Fig 2 below displays the acceptable measurement model.

Descriptive Analysis

The results in Table 8 below show that the level of student-as-customer identity (CI) is low level, whereas the level of learner identity (LI) is high. Hence, the results indicate that on average students tend to think of themselves as a learner and are less likely to view themselves as customers. In a comparison between the public and private HEIs students, CI is more likely to be observed among students at private HEIs, while LI is greater among students at public HEIs. Based on the independent samples t-test results, it can be seen that the difference in LI is significant between types of HEI, but not CI. Accordingly, it could be affirmed that students at public HEIs are more likely to consider themselves as a learner compared to their counterpart at private HEIs.

Hypotheses Testing

Direct Effect

Based on the results displayed in Table 9 below, the goodness-of-fit indices for the structural model of direct relationships are all within the accepted thresholds. Hence, the overall model fit is adequate to test the proposed hypotheses.

Fig 2: Modified Measurement Model

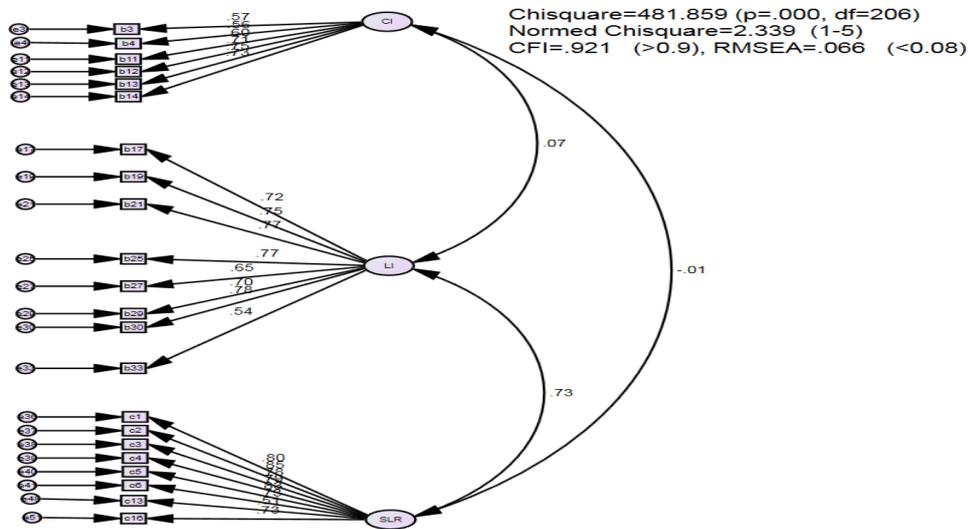


Table 8: The Mean Comparison of the Constructs

	Overall (n=312)		Public HEIs (n=182)		Private HEIs (n=130)		F	Results
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. Deviation		
LI	5.91	0.81	6.05	0.71	5.71	0.90	7.12 (p=0.000)	High
CI	2.52	0.88	2.51	0.88	2.54	0.89	0.04 (p=0.794)	Low

Note:
7-point scaled used: 1-3 low level, 3-5 moderate level, 5-7 high level

Table 9: Goodness-of-fit (GOF) Indices for Structural Model

GOF statistics	χ^2 (df, p)	χ^2/df	CFI	RMSEA
Structural model	514.65 (226, 0.000)	2.277	0.919	0.064
Acceptable value*	Significant at $\alpha = 0.05$	1-5	> 0.9	< 0.08

Next, the results of the hypothesis testing are depicted in Table 10 and Fig 3 below. The R^2 for the first equation, the result indicates that 10.4 per cent of the total variance in academic performance (AP) is explained by the CI and LI. Based on the standardized and unstandardized estimates, both CI ($\beta = -0.188, p < 0.05$) and LI ($\beta = 0.275, p < 0.001$) turn out to be the significant predictor of AP. As predicted, CI has a negative effect on AP, while LI has a positive effect on AP. Accordingly, the greater the students view themselves as the customer of the education

services, their academic performance is more likely impaired. However, the academic performance is more likely to heighten when the students hold the learner identity. Thus, H1, as well as H2, are supported.

As for the second equation, the R^2 is 0.54, indicating that CI and LI explain 54 per cent of the variance in the SLR. The estimates further reveal that the CI-SLR relationship is negative but not significant ($\beta=-0.057$, $p>0.05$). Hence, CI does not affect SLR. That is, CI does not account in the development of the relationship between student and lecturer. Conversely, LI has a significant and positive effect on SLR ($\beta=0.736$, $p<0.001$). Thus, LI contributes significantly to the development of SLR. In particular, the stronger the student believes themselves as a learner, the stronger the bond developed with their lecturer. Accordingly, H4 is supported, but not H3.

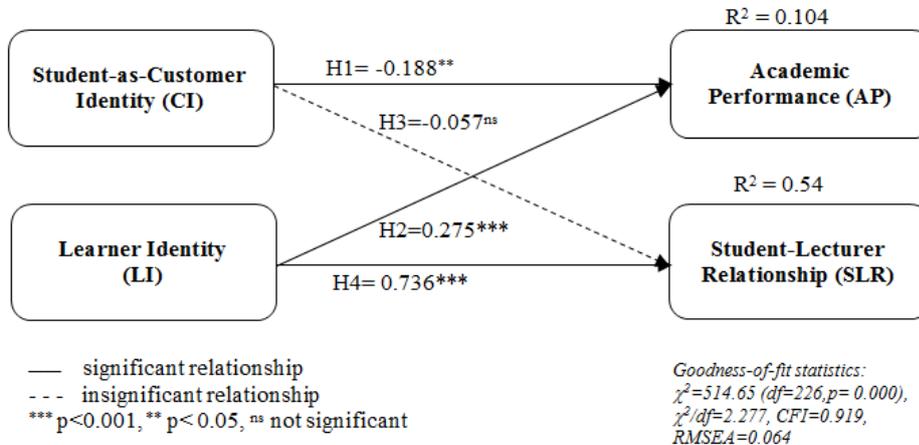
Table 10: Summary of the Hypotheses Testing Results

Hypothesized path	Expected direction	Standardized estimate	p-value	t-value	Result
$R^2 (AP) = 0.104$					
H1: CI \rightarrow AP	negative	-0.188**	0.002	-3.042	Supported
H2: LI \rightarrow AP	positive	0.275***	0.000	4.666	Supported
$R^2 (SLR) = 0.54$					
H3: CI \rightarrow SLR	negative	-0.057 ^{ns}	0.239	-1.178	Not supported
H4: LI \rightarrow SLR	positive	0.736***	0.000	10.745	Supported
<i>Goodness-of-fit statistics: $\chi^2=514.65$ ($df=226, p=0.000$), $\chi^2/df=2.277$, $CFI=0.919$, $RMSEA=0.064$</i>					

Note: AP – Academic Performance, CI – Student-as-customer identity, SLR – Student-Institution Relationship

*** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.05$, ^{ns} not significant

Fig 3: Test Results of the Proposed Structural Model



Moderating Effect

To test the moderating effect of HEIs types in the proposed model, the multi-group structural equation modelling (MSEM) was performed. In particular, the adequacy of model fit and invariance test were performed on both measurement and structural model. The invariance test is used to compare between constraint and unconstraint models in order to identify the best fitting model. The measurement invariance test results in Table 11 below show the insignificant chi-square difference value of 28.572 ($p>0.05$) (Ho, 2006), with the CFI and RMSEA values difference less than 0.01 and 0.015, respectively (Kline, 2011). Hence, the results indicate that the two models do not differ significantly in their goodness-of-fit, indicating that the constraint model is better fitting than the constraint model. Accordingly, to proceed with the structural multi-group analysis, the constraint model is appropriate to be used. Further, observation on the unstandardized and standardized regression weights for both public and private groups reveals two items, i.e. b33 and c13, with values below 0.5. Hence, the items were removed.

Table 11: Goodness-of-fit (GOF) Indices for Measurement Invariance Test

GOF statistics	χ^2 (df, p)	χ^2/df	CFI	RMSEA
Constraint model	766.313 (431, 0.000)	1.778	0.904	0.050
Unconstraint model	737.741 (412, 0.000)	1.791	0.907	0.051
Difference	28.572 ($p=0.073$)		0.003	0.001

Note: GOF threshold: χ^2 significant at $\alpha = 0.05$, χ^2/df within 1to5, $CFI > 0.9$ and $RMSEA < 0.08$

As shown in Table 12 below, the structural model achieves a good fit to the data. Further, the results of the structural test show the chi-square difference and z score values for all paths are not significant ($p > 0.05$, within ± 1.96) across public and private HEIs. Hence, the hypothesized structural relationships operated similarly for students in both public and private HEIs. Accordingly, all the proposed hypotheses on the moderating effect (H5 to H8) are not supported.

Specifically, the results depicted in Table 12 and Fig 4 below reveal that CI and LI are able to explain SLR ($R^2_{\text{public}} = 0.538$, $R^2_{\text{private}} = 0.519$) better than AP ($R^2_{\text{public}} = 0.05$, $R^2_{\text{private}} = 0.107$). Both CI ($\beta_{\text{public}} = -0.174$, $\beta_{\text{private}} = -0.208$; $p < 0.05$) and LI ($\beta_{\text{public}} = 0.165$, $\beta_{\text{private}} = 0.254$; $p < 0.05$) turn out to be the significant predictor of AP. While the effect of LI on AP is positive, the effect of CI on AP is negative. Thus, learner identity embraced by students is more likely to improve academic performance, but customer identity may impair the performance. As for predictor of SLR, the effect of LI is significant ($\beta_{\text{public}} = 0.74$, $\beta_{\text{private}} = 0.72$; $p < 0.05$), but not CI ($\beta_{\text{public}} = -0.104$, $\beta_{\text{private}} = -0.038$; $p > 0.05$). Since the effect of LI on SLR is positive, LI embraced by students is more likely to create a stronger bond between student and lecturer.

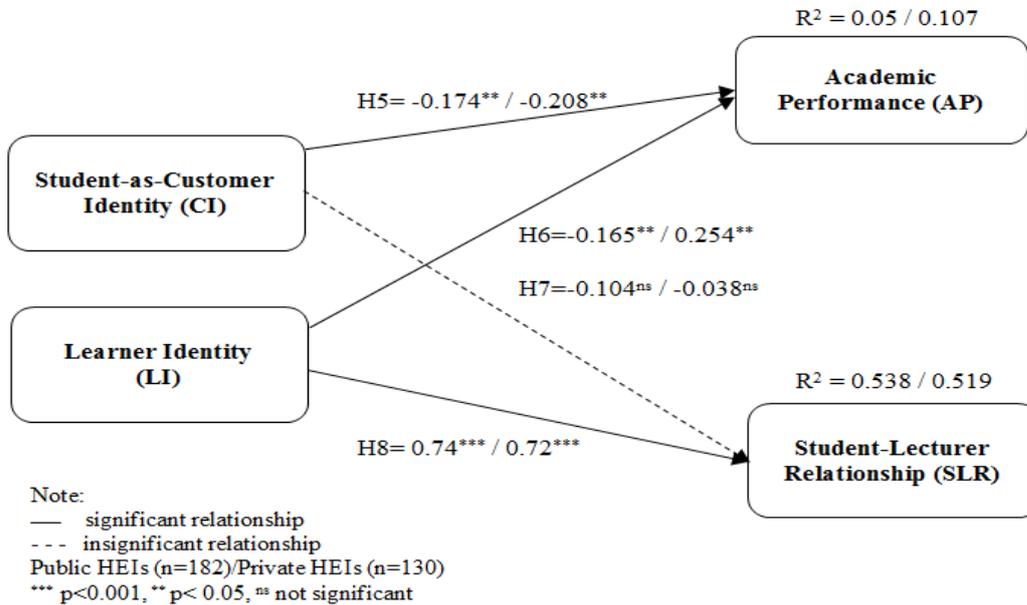
Table 12: Structural Invariance Test Results

	PublicHEI		PrivateHEI		z-score	$\Delta\chi^2$	p
	Std Estimate	P	Std Estimate	P			
H5: CI → AP	-0.174	0.035	-0.208	0.024	-0.906	0.813	0.367
H6: LI → AP	0.165	0.036	0.254	0.004	1.101	1.211	0.271
H7: CI → SLR	-0.104	0.129	-0.038	0.607	0.523	0.271	0.603
H8: LI → SLR	0.74	0.000	0.72	0.000	-0.513	0.26	0.61
$R^2 (AP)$	0.05		0.107				
$R^2 (SLR)$	0.538		0.519				

Note: CI-Customer Identity, LI-Learner Identity, AP-Academic Performance, SLR-Student-lecturer Relationship

Goodness-of-fit statistics: $c^2=667.807$ (df=387, $p=0.000$), $c^2/df=1.726$, CFI=0.914, RMSEA=0.048

Fig 4. Test Results of the Structural Model for Public and Private HEIs



Discussion

This study attempts to determine the level of learner and customer identity among Malaysian students at HEIs, the impact of learner and customer identity on student academic performance and student-lecturer relationship and whether the effect of customer and learner identities on student academic performance and student-lecturer relationship differ significantly between public and private HEIs. The results show that the level of student-as-customer identity (CI) is low, but for the level of learner identity (LI), it is high. Hence, students tend to think of themselves as a learner rather than as a customer. In comparison between the public and private HEIs students, CI is more likely to be observed among students at private HEIs, while LI is greater among students at public HEIs. However, the difference is only significant in LI, not CI. Accordingly, it is found that students at public HEIs are more likely to consider themselves a learner and have a stronger bond with their lecturers compared to their counterparts at private HEIs.

As predicted, both CI and LI are the significant predictor of AP. In particular, CI has a negative effect on AP, which supports Bunce, et al. (2017), Watjatrakul (2014) and Everaert, et al. (2017). Alternately, LI has a positive effect on AP. The results seem to concur with many of the previous studies (Biggs, et al., 2001; Bunce, et al., 2017; Everaert, et al., 2017; Hasnor, et al., 2013; Herrmann, et al., 2017; Picton, et al., 2018) and validate that stronger SAL identity leads to higher academic performance. It is concluded that the more the students view themselves as the customer of the education services, the more their academic performance is

likely to be impaired. In contrast, students' academic performance is more likely to heighten when they have a learner identity.

The CI-SLR relationship is not significant. Hence, CI does not count in the development of the relationship between student and lecturer. Therefore the findings seem to contradict with previous studies (Bunce, et al., 2017; Guilbault, 2018; McMillan & Cheney, 1996), which showed that SAC identity weakens the relationship between students and lecturers. Accordingly, the view that academics staff are pressured by the CI of the students appears to be irrelevant. Such findings may be due to the low level of SAC identity among students in HEI in Malaysia. Conversely, LI has a significant and positive effect on SLR. The findings seem to correspond with the previous findings which highlighted that learner identity could significantly lead to a positive learning culture (Huda, et al., 2017). The findings also comply with other studies that learner identity could create a more positive and healthy relationship between student and lecturer (Chepchieng, et al., 2006; Kurt, 2018). Thus, LI contributes significantly to the development of SLR. In particular, SAL identity could possibly strengthen the student-lecturer relationship in HEIs.

Although the previous studies showed a significant difference between public and private education with respect to institutional performance, academic quality and even social environment (Achinewhu-Nworgu, 2017; Luo, et al., 2017; Somers, et al., 2006), the findings of this study fail to find significant difference in the effect of CI and LI on academic performance and SLR. The findings are probably due to the narrow gap in CI and LI between students in public and private HEIs. Despite no significant difference, the findings reveal strong evidence on the positive effect of LI on SLR. Therefore, to create a stronger bond between student and lecturer, the learner identity of the student should be a focus. Although the effect is small, both CI and LI turn out to be the significant predictors of AP. Specifically, the effect of LI on AP is positive but the effect of CI on AP is negative. Thus, learner identity embraced by students is more likely to improve academic performance but customer identity may impair academic performance. To improve academic performance and build a strong student-lecturer relationship, students must have stronger learner identity and reduce customer identity.

Research Implications

The findings of this study add to the limited existing literature on the level SAC and SAL identity and the impact of SAC and SAL identity on academic performance as well as the student-lecturer relationship, particularly in the Malaysian context. Specifically, the findings reveal that the SAC identity is low but SAL identity is high. Hence, the academics, faculties and even HEIs should not feel threatened by the SAC trend as the findings indicate that the trend is still controllable. Therefore, more motivation and awareness programs are required to

promote the right students' attitudes and responsibilities and heighten the SAL identity while hindering the SAC trend from spreading.

The findings also highlight that the SAL is more likely to boost academic performance and student-lecturer relationship and that SAC is more likely to impair academic performance. Hence, SAL turns out to be the right identity that students should embrace to improve their academic performance and student-lecturer relationship and consequently achieve the Ministry's aspiration. Thus, academics and faculties should encourage students to attend class regularly, read the related materials, make an effort to study, spend a lot of time studying and enjoy learning and being at the university to learn (Bunce, et al., 2017) in order to enhance the SAL identity. Further, the findings provide useful information and insights for the HEIs about how SAL and SAC identity among students could be exploited to enhance educational quality and increase student retention, particularly in Malaysian HEIs to meet the challenges of IR4.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

Several limitations in this research should be noted. First, this study involves a majority of degree students who are Malay respondents and the sample size is not large enough for a solid and broad generalization. Therefore, the generalisation of the findings must be interpreted with the utmost caution. To increase the generalisation, replication of this research is suggested covering a wider area of research locations and a demographically diverse group of respondents. This study only examines the effect of customer and learner identities on academic performance and student-lecturer relationship and there are other variables that could become the antecedents or consequences of customer and learner identities such as consumer orientation (Bunce, et al., 2017) and self-efficacy (Herrmann, et al., 2017) which have not been taken into account. Hence, future research should include these variables to determine whether these additional variables could increase the explanatory power of the framework. Further, it would be interesting to determine the potential mediator and moderator in the relationship.

Acknowledgement

Funding support for this manuscript was provided by the Research Management Innovation Centre (RMIC), UPSI, under University Research Grant (URG) [Research code: 2018-0116-06-01]



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