Predictors of Resilience among Iranian Graduate Students in University Putra Malaysia

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Abstract

This study has two main objectives, first to investigate the relationship between dimensions of social support, optimism, self-efficacy and dimensions of psychological well-being and level of resilience among Iranian graduate students in University Putra Malaysia and second, to investigate the extent to which dimensions of social support, optimism, self-efficacy and dimensions of psychological well-being significantly predict the level of resilience among Iranian graduate students in University Putra Malaysia. This research is a descriptive correlational study. The 251 of Iranian graduate students of university Putra Malaysia participated in this research. Simple random sampling was employed to collect data. According to the findings, there are positive relationships between optimism, three dimensions of social support (support from family, significant others and friends), self-efficacy, and four dimensions of psychological well-being (personal growth, purpose in life, positive relation with others and autonomy) and resilience. Also, the result of stepwise regression analysis revealed that self-efficacy, personal growth, optimism, and purpose in life are significant predictors of resilience. This study provides useful implication for the involved parties, such as Ministry of Education Malaysia, educators, counsellors, psychologist, and researchers to improve students' resilience.

Keywords: Optimism, Social Support, Self-Efficacy, Psychological Well-Being, Resilience, Graduate Students

Introduction

University Putra Malaysia has been attracting students from countries around the world. A study conducted by Talebloo and Baki (2013) among Iran, Yemen and Saudi students of University Putra Malaysia, revealed that the target students were exposed to a variety of challenges during their studies. The challenges included lack of sufficient facilities (accommodation, transportation, food and campus restaurants), social environment (cultural difficulty, English difficulties and communication problems), academic problems (academic system, teaching methodology and faculty supervisor, lack of time, and unclear feedback),

and international service programme (lack of entertaining activities and the visa application process). Moreover, the Iranian Students' Association in UPM (ISAM) has reported that Iranian students encounter many problems and challenges in UPM. The main concerns of the students stem from financial issues, communication problems and academic difficulties (ISAM, 2015).

McLachlan and Justice (2009) discovered that most of the international students experience problems in host countries such as differences in culture and social environment. Yan and Berliner (2009) indicated that common problems faced by foreign students included academic stress and language differences, which hindered interaction between these students and the faculty members and others in a host country. International students tend to experience greater anxiety, tension, and psychological distress due to challenges they face in a new environment (Bayram & Bilgel, 2008). As a result, the effects of these challenges increase psychological and physiological problems such as stress, anxiety, tension, depression, loneliness, homesickness, low self-esteem, sleep disturbances, gastrointestinal among international students (Hojat & Herman, 1985; Takeuchi et al., 2007). Obviously, students need to be aware of what can help them to reduce the negative effects of migration on their mental health and what actions to take for better adjustment. The key concept for Iranian students to deal with all pressure is resilience trait. Resilience is a personality trait that controls the harmful impacts of stressors and increases adaptability (Pidgeon, Rowe, Stapleton, Magyar, & Lo, 2014). Prior literature by Bonanno (2004), Dawson and Pooley (2013), Rutter (2006), Snyder, Lopez, Shorey, Rand, and Feldman (2003), Soenens et al. (2007), Tugade & Fredrickson (2007), and Urquhart and Pooley (2007) have discovered that optimism, social support, self-efficacy and psychological wellbeing are predominant elements impacting the level of resilience.

Despite the significant contribution of the resilience among international students and its important role to cope with difficulties in a host country, little investigation has been undertaken to examine resilience and its related factors among international students in Malaysia. Several studies have been conducted separately on the relationship between optimism, social support, self-efficacy, psychological well-being and resilience in Malaysia (Abdullah, 2008; Azlina & Jamaluddin, 2010; Dzulkifli & Yasin, 2009; Faleel, Tam, Lee, Har, & Foo, 2012; Holzmann, 2013; Lee, 2011; Mahyuddin et al., 2006; Naeemi, Tamam, Hassan, & Bolong, 2014; Nikmat, Mohamad, Omar, & Razali, 2010; Tam & Lim, 2009; Yusoff, 2012; Yusoff & Chelliah, 2010). There are also some models of resiliency, however none of these models combine all these factors in a single study. Kumpfer's (1999) model of resiliency also very general in nature. Besides, this model mostly deals with western countries, so it is not known how best this model is supported by data in Asian countries. As suggested in previous studies, there is a need to study the concept of resilience in a greater depth and its probable related factors in order to gain a better understanding of these relationships (Leary & DeRosier, 2012; Pidgeon et al., 2014; Sagone & De Caroli, 2013, 2014; Souri & Hasanirad, 2011). Therefore, the gaps this research addresses are related to the lack of quantitative description of the factors linked to resilience, above all optimism, dimensions of social support, self-efficacy, and dimensions of psychological well-being in Malaysia. This study investigate the relationship between dimensions of social support, optimism, self-efficacy and dimensions of psychological well-being and level of resilience among Iranian graduate students in University Putra Malaysia. Additionally, this study aims to investigate the extent to which dimensions of

social support, optimism, self-efficacy and dimensions of psychological well-being significantly predict the level of resilience among Iranian graduate students in University Putra Malaysia. Student's lack of knowledge about resilience and its related factors could be one of the main reasons to the difficulties they encounter. The fact that both university and the students struggle to overcome these important issues, there is an absolute need for a study of resilience, social support, optimism, self-efficacy and psychological well-being among Iranian graduate students.

Review of Literature

Concept of Resilience

Connor (1992) defined resilience as "the capacity to absorb high levels of change while displaying minimal dysfunctional behavior" (p.6). Bryant (1995) defined resilience as "the successful outcome of a process which is invoked by change" (p.6). Resilience is broadly defined as the ability of individuals exposed to an undesirable event to stay healthy and to deal flexibly with the difficulties of life (Bonanno, 2004). Resilience suggests the capacity to efficiently adapt to and adjust to difficulty. It is usually seen in the way an individual has survives significant emotional situations and yet remains positive (Tugade & Fredrickson, 2007). According to Zautra, Hall, and Murray (2010) resilience is the capacity to adjust effectively to troublesome and threatening circumstances. These authors also indicate the importance of individual attributes which assume a notable part in deciding how fruitful a person will be in adjusting to unfavorable conditions. Block and Kremen (1996) believe that the resilient individual is usually one who has an optimistic outlook, is active, ready for new experiences and is emotionally positive. Bonanno (2004) has observed that the quality of resilience usually emerges in emotional situations such as when there is a break in love related stress after experiencing a traumatic event, which is not uncommon and does not necessarily produce a pathological situation but can be a sign of a healthily adjusted individual. Lately, resilience has been applied to conceptualize related studies in the area of educational administration. Geocaris (2004) used the theory of resiliency for her study of essentials of thriving under tough conditions. In addition, Isaacs (2003) utilized the theory of resiliency to define the association among the resilience dimensions of high school principals toward reinforcement the principals' leadership capabilities. Goldstein (2003) investigated the perceptions of school principals related to their resiliency and efficacy.

Resilience and Optimism

Several studies have been conducted regarding the association between resilience and optimism. Also the majority of studies strongly support the belief that optimism is a characteristic that contributes to resilience (Warner, Peterson, & Treadon, 1997). Tusaie, Puskar, and Sereika (2007) investigated psychosocial resilience in adolescents and discovered the very strong influence of trait optimism on psychosocial resilience, while social support from family members is another important factor. Moreover, optimism and resilience seem to go hand in hand each other in times of facing adversity and there is an interactive relationship between these two variables. Resilience leads to optimism and optimism leads to resilience (Bonanno, 2004; Tusaie-Mumford, 2001). Yu and Zhang (2007) mentioned that optimism is a reflection of an individual's positive attitude towards adversity and the authors thus considered optimism as an important aspect of resilience. The control of positive emotions has also been associated with resilience, so people can mitigate negative emotional experiences and enhance positive thoughts and actions (Fredrickson, 2001; Tugade &

Fredrickson, 2007). As stated by Conchas & Clark (2002) and Tusaie et al. (2007), optimism as an internal factor consistently emerges in resilience research and has been seen to determine whether an individual adapts to difficult situations successfully or unsuccessfully. A survey of urban minorities showed that optimism characterized resilience among selected high school students attending introductory programmes for a career academy (Conchas & Clark, 2002).

In a sample of 300 Iranian students of Dezful city, the result of regression analysis illustrated that optimism is a predictor of resilience (Nasiir, 2010). Similarly, the findings of a study among 150 Iranian students of Imam Khomeini University found a significant and positive relationship between optimism and resilience (Tankamani & Haghighat, 2014). In the same way, in a study among Iranian married students of Kerman University Elham Ghadami (2015) revealed a positive direct relationship between resilience and optimism. In addition, Brissette, Scheier, and Carver (2002) expressed that optimism and perceived social support independently and significantly predict resilience. The results of a study of 95 first year university students indicated that students with higher levels of optimism and social support experienced higher levels of resilience (Dawson & Pooley, 2013). In their study, the authors showed that optimism and perceived social support appear to be beneficial in coping with university transition and positive adaptation to adversity as well as being associated both directly and indirectly with resilience.

Resilience and Social Support

Weidong et al. (2012) using the survey method, revealed that resilience has a positive correlation with social support and two coping styles such as seeking help and solving problems. Social support has also been seen to be a significant resilience factor among students in middle school. In a sample of 95 university students in Australia using regression analysis, Dawson and Pooley (2013) indicated that perceived social support significantly predicted resilience. Similarly, Sara (2011) discovered a positive relationship between social support and resilience among 1233 Iranian students of Ilam University. Hosseini (2009) revealed a significant relationship between social support and resilience among Iranian students. Moreover, the result of multivariate regression analysis showed support from family members and a significant person were two significant predictors of resilience. In the same way a positive relationship between social support (support from family and friends) and resilience was found among 329 Iranian students of Kermanshah University (Ghasemi & Ariapooran, 2011). In a sample of Mexican American students, Gonzalez and Padilla (1997) revealed that a sense of belonging and academic support in college promoted resilience. Phinney and Haas (2003) reported on 30 ethnic minority college freshmen, most of whom were the first to attend college in their families. Students with more sense of self-efficacy and a greater social support had a greater ability to deal with stressors. Social support is positively associated with social and college connection, school adjustment, self-esteem, self-reliance and academic achievement (Arambewela & Hall, 2009; Bernardon, Babb, Hakim-Larson, & Gragg, 2011; Weber, Puskar, & Ren, 2010). As suggested by the literature, having social support effect on the level of resilience.

Resilience and Self-efficacy

In order to understand the relationship between self-efficacy and resilience, several studies have been undertaken among students. For example, the result of a study among African-American students in Washington, DC revealed resilience to be significantly and positively

correlated with self-efficacy and achievement (Speight, 2009). Similarly, in a sample of 141 university students by using the regression model Keye and Pidgeon (2013) discovered that academic self-efficacy and mindfulness were significant predictors of resilience. The result asserts that academic self-efficacy and mindfulness have a positive effect on resilience. Pertaining to this topic, in a study by Hosseinchari and Ghasem (2012), the 402 (212 girls and 190 boys) Iranian students in Karaj city were selected by the cluster sampling method. The findings derived from regression analysis illustrated that intrinsic-extrinsic motivation can predict psychological resilience as mediated by self-efficacy and stress appraisal. In a similar manner, a study of 220 undergraduate students of Southeastern University in the United States revealed a relationship between negative life changes and resilience and self-efficacy played a mediating role (Cody, 2013). In the sample of 117 college students of the Southeastern University, Hudson (2007) mentioned that self-efficacy and parental involvement were two important predictors of the academic performance and resilience of the college students. Conversely, Garza, Bain, and Kupczynski (2014) explored the relationship between resiliency, self-efficacy, and persistence of college seniors in higher education. The result did not find any significant relationship between resiliency, self-efficacy and persistence.

Resilience and Dimensions of Psychological Well-being

Regarding the relationship between resilience and psychological well-being, a few studies have been undertaken among Iranian students. In a study by Maddah (2014) of 322 native and non-native students of Zanjan University the results indicated resiliency and spiritual experience can predict psychological well-being. It was also revealed that resiliency described 23% of the variance of psychological well-being in native students and spiritual experiences explained 10.8% of the variance in the students' psychological-well-being. Moreover, Bigdeli, Najafy, and Rostami (2013) in a study to investigate the relationship between attachment styles, emotional regulation and resilience with the psychological well-being of 200 medical students in Semnan University, found positive relationship between attachment styles, resilience and psychological well-being. In this regards, other studies discovered a relationship between resilience and psychological well-being among students (Bahadorinezhad Khosroshahi, 2014; Khademi, Ghasemian, & Hassanzadeh, 2014).

Also, Zombory (2014) examined the relationship between psychological flexibility, resilience, and personal growth. The findings of the study discovered that psychological flexibility and resilience were positively related to growth orientation. Moreover, Nygren et al. (2005) found a significant relationship between resilience and purpose in life. Similarly, Saklofske (2013) revealed that purpose in life is the significant predictors of resilience. Also, in a sample of 635 Iranian university students Katebi (2015) revealed significant relationship between self-acceptance and resilience. Hurd (2004) Believed that people who have high level of self-acceptance and family support are more resilient to face with grief. In a sample of 379 Iranian high school students, Kaydkhorde, Moltafet, and Chinaveh (2014) on the other hand found that autonomy have significant and positive relationship with resilience while Bernard (2013) believed that three dimensions of psychological well-being (environmental mastery, self-acceptance and positive relation with others) are significant indicators of resilience.

Conceptual Framework of the Study
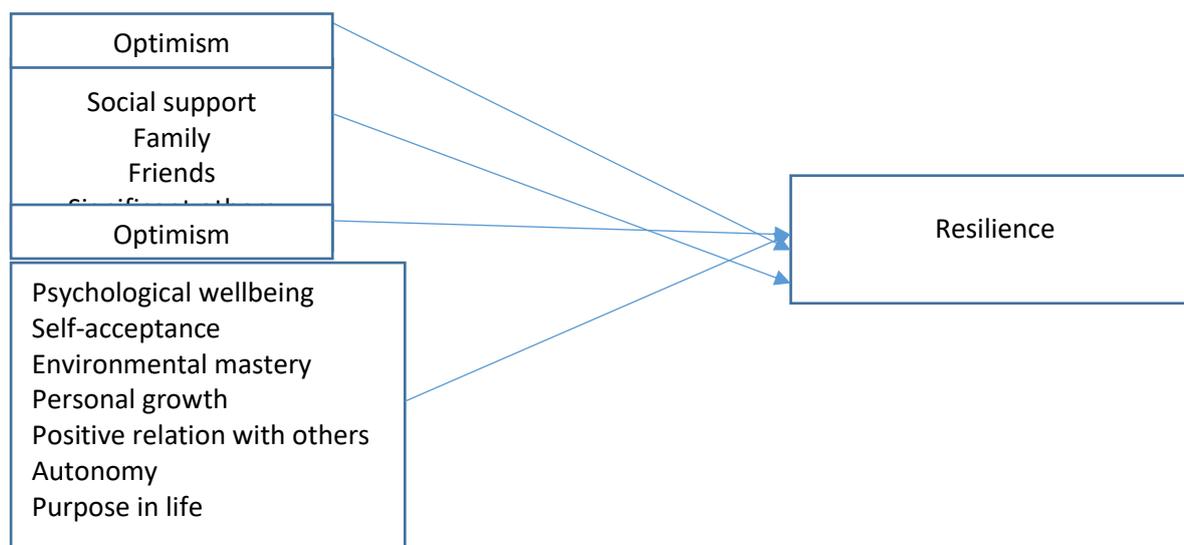
Methodology
Research Design

This study employed descriptive correlational design to investigate whether the related variables are correlated with each other (Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, & Sorensen, 2010). In this research, the independent variables are optimism, three dimensions of social support, self-efficacy and six dimensions of psychological well-being. The dependent variable in this study is resilience.

Population and Sampling

The population of this study is 841 Iranian graduate students of UPM. The software of GPower 3.1 was employed to calculate appropriate sample size. Then again, for every single distinctive test included in this specific examination, a significance level of 0.05, power of 0.80 and a medium effect size (r= 0.30), were used. Even though the result of calculating the sample size is not the same for the different tests, a maximum sample size is required for the collection of the research data. Based on the power analysis (Cohen, 1977) conducted, the sample size calculated for t-test was 114, for Pearson correlation sample size required was 84, followed by 123 for multiple regression analysis. However, the study included a greater number of subjects to ensure the reliability of the study to counter the possibility of the nonresponse error (Slavin, 1992). For data collection procedures like survey and other voluntary participation methods, the response rates are typically less than 100%. Therefore, over sampling is suggested by increasing the sample size for uncooperative subjects (Salkind & Rainwater, 2003). Additionally, Krejcie and Morgan (1970) emphatically suggested that, in order to be more confident with the selected sample, acquire a bigger sample than the numbers indicated in their table of g sample size. Therefore, via a simple random sampling technique, a total of 400 subjects were selected as sample of this study.

Instrumentation

Instruments were used to assess the variables of the study. The instruments were Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale 25 (CD-RISC-25), Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS), Life Orientation Test-Revised (LOT_R), General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSE) and

Ryff Psychological Well-Being Scales (PWBS). All responses in the instrument were rated on a 5 point Likert scale (1- strongly disagree, 2- disagree, 3- neither agree nor disagree, 4- agree, 5- strongly agree). The MSPSS, LOT-R, GSE and PWBS Scales were collected from Public Domain website that is open for general access. The details in the instruments will be discussed in the following section.

A panel of experts in psychology and English language were asked to validate the research questionnaires. The panel reviewed the questionnaires to ensure the content and face validity of all the instruments. A pilot study was conducted to determine the reliability of the instruments used in this research. Participants in the pilot study consisted of a sample of 30 Iranian graduate students of UPM who were not included in the actual research. The resulted Cronbach Alpha value was 0.880 for the CD-RISC scale (resilience), 0.751 for the LOT-R scale (optimism), 0.906 for the MSPSS scale (social support), 0.892 for the GSE scale (self-efficacy) and 0.725 for the RPWS scale (Psychological Well-Being) respectively.

Data Collection
An online questionnaire was created and distributed via email to the respondents. The data collection started in April 2015 and its process took approximately two months. A number of 265 questionnaires were returned out of which 251 questionnaires were filled appropriately to be used for analysis in this study.

Data Analysis
To carry out all the statistical procedures, the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS version 20 designed for Windows) program was employed. The descriptive statistics in this study includes the frequencies, mean and standard deviation for dependent variables. In order to conduct inferential analysis, a series of analyses were employed such as independent t-test, Pearson correlation and multiple regression analyses.

Results
Demographic
According to the results, 134 males (53.4%) and 117 females (46.6%) participated in this study. Also, more than half of the respondents, 61.4% (N=154) were single and 38.6% (N=97) were married.

Level of Resilience
It is found that only 3 students (1.2%) from the total sample of study are categorized into the group of low resilience. Around 92 students (36.7%) are having a medium level of resilience. A majority of 156 respondents (62.2%) fall into the category of high resilience level. Overall, it could be determined from the findings that Iranian students were more probable to experience high level of resilience.

The Relationship
As provided in Table 1, there was a large and significant relationship between optimism and resilience among the students ($r = 0.597$, $p < 0.01$). The statistical result illustrated a significant positive relationship between resilience and the dimensions of social supports. Namely, significant others ($r = 0.355$, $p < 0.01$), family support ($r = 0.311$, $p < 0.01$), and friend support ($r = 0.211$, $p < 0.01$). The relationship between family support and significant others was

significant and medium, while there was a small significant relationship between friends support and resilience. Also, the result clearly indicated a significant and large relationship between resilience and self-efficacy with ($r = 0.715$, $p < 0.01$). Based on the findings, there is a significant and large relationship between personal growth and resilience among Iranian students with ($r= 0.612$, $p < 0.01$). Also, there is a significant and medium relationship between purpose in life and resilience ($r= 0.494$, $p < 0.01$) and positive relation with others and resilience ($r = 0.377$, $p < 0.01$). Additionally, there is a significant and small relationship between autonomy and resilience among Iranian students ($r= 0.193$, $p < 0.05$). However, there is no significant relationship between self-acceptance ($r= 0.035$, $p > 0.576$), environmental mastery and resilience among Iranian students ($r= 0.086$, $p > 0.173$). Based on the results of the Pearson correlation, hypothesis H03 which stated that there are no significant relationships between three dimensions of social support, optimism, self-efficacy and six dimensions of psychological well-being (except self-acceptance and environmental mastery) and resilience among Iranian students is rejected.

Table 1:
Relationship between Variables Studied and Resilience

Variables	r	P
Optimism	.597	.000
Significant others	.355	.000
Family support	.311	.000
Friends support	.211	.001
Self-efficacy	.715	.000
Positive relations with others	.377	.000
Self-acceptance	.035	.576
Autonomy	.193	.002
Personal growth	.612	.000
Environmental mastery	.086	.173
Purpose in life	.494	.000

Discussion

Significant Relationship between Dimensions of Social Support and Resilience among Iranian Graduate Students

The findings of this study confirm that there is relationship between resilience and the dimensions of social support. This finding shows that the level of resilience among Iranian graduate students is affected by the support from their family, friends, relatives, as well as important people such as lecturers, supervisors, neighbours, or even their owners. Previous studies have shown similar results. According to Weidong et al. (2012) resilience was positively related with social support. Similarly, in a study of first year students in Australia, Dawson and Pooley (2013) indicated that resilience has a strong relationship with social support from family, friends and significant others.

Furthermore, Wilks and Spivey (2010) stated that social support have significant positive impacts on one another and on resilience. According to the result of the study the overall score of resiliency was high, representing that Iranian students have coped to challenges successfully through the stress posed by the living in Malaysia as international students. The

factors contributing to resiliency model suggested that having support from family, friends, community as protective factors can help to foster resilience (Kumpfer, 2002). This finding could motivate students to expand their social life by making new friends or by joining new communities to get in touch with more people and groups.

Optimism as Predictor of Resilience among Iranian Graduate Students
Based on the findings, optimism and resilience accompany each other in unpleasant situations. The result showed there is a significant relationship between optimism and resilience. Also, the finding obtained from the regression analysis identified optimism is a predictor of resilience. Based on previous literature, resilience and optimism have a relationship and an optimistic view contributes greatly to resilience. These findings are supported by previous studies by (Carver & Connor-Smith, 2010; Tusaie-Mumford, 2001; Yu & Zhang, 2007) which stated that optimism or one's positive attitude when facing an unfavorable situation is a significant predictor of resilience. Furthermore, based on Dawson and Pooley (2013) there is evidence of a strong relationship between optimism and resilience among students. According to the results of this study, students who have a positive outlook are more likely to be in control of their environment and have greater confidence in their ability to adapt to and overcome challenges. Obviously, having positive attitudes about life and future would increase the resilience or ability to cope with adversity and challenging situations.

Self-Efficacy as Predictor of Resilience among Iranian Graduate Students
According to the results, there is a significant relationship between self-efficacy and resiliency among Iranian graduate students. On supported of this finding, the result of study among African American students in Washington, DC revealed resilience was significantly and positively correlated with self-efficacy (Speight, 2009). Likewise, in a sample of 141 university students by using a regression model, Keye and Pidgeon (2013) discovered that academic self-efficacy and mindfulness were significant predictors of resilience. Also, the result of the study revealed that self-efficacy is a significant and strong predictor of resilience among Iranian students. Additionally, as reported by Sagone and Caroli (2013), and Schwarzer and Warner (2013), individuals with a high level of resilience perceived themselves to be more efficient. One way to understand this finding is by taking the concept of self-efficacy as an adaptive mechanism which refers to the belief of students in their capability to fulfil tasks to achieve their goals. Having self-efficacy powerfully affects a person's power to essentially cope with adversity and stressful conditions. Self-efficacy can be enhanced by using an educational programme which has a direct effect on the level of resilience of students.

Dimensions of Psychological Well-Being as Predictors of Resilience among Iranian Graduate Students
 The results showed that there are significant relationships between four dimensions of psychological well-being, namely personal growth, purpose in life, autonomy and relations with significant other and resilience among the Iranian graduate students of UPM. This result is in line with Keye and Pidgeon (2013) who found a significant and positive relationship between psychological well-being and resilience among Australian students. Similarly, Sagone and De Caroli (2014) revealed a significant positive relationship between dimensions of psychological wellbeing (self-acceptance, environmental mastery, and personal growth) and resilience. In addition, Findings of this study were consistent with the findings of Picardi et al.

(2012), who found that there is a positive correlation between dimensions of psychological well-being (except for the dimension of autonomy) and resilience. Also, result of the regression is supported by Zombory (2014), who found that the level of resilience is predicted by personal growth. According to the result, the dimensions of psychological well-being which includes purpose in life, personal growth, autonomy and positive relationships with others in terms of shaping the perspective of the students with regard to life issues and their capability to manage trouble and cope with challenges in their lifespan. Indeed, Iranian students seem to perceive themselves as self-satisfied, they find themselves able to pick connections suitable to individual needs and to see themselves as developing and extending. Also, students have purposes and goals in their lives, for example being creative and productive or attaining emotional integration in later life which has significant role on determining their tendency to deal with stressful situations.

Limitation and Future Studies
Even though the findings of this study contribute to related fields in resiliency, a few recommendations have yet to be provided for future research. In this study the findings are not generalizable to all international students in Malaysia. In fact, using a bigger sample size and including more nationalities in future studies could yield more representative active results. Hence, it is recommended to future researchers to include more universities and nationalities in their study. Moreover, it is suggested that future research employ qualitative approach to further investigate on resiliency; for instance, how instructional methods can be applied to foster resiliency, what are the potential solutions to increase resiliency of students, or what factors contribute to resiliency. The cross sectional method may not be the best approach as it is unable to recognize the cause-and-effect relationships among the variables. Future researchers are encouraged to employ longitudinal study to identify these relationships.

Conclusion
The current study aimed to investigate the relationship and the contribution of optimism, dimensions of social support, self-efficacy and dimensions of psychological well-being and resilience among Iranian graduate students at University Putra Malaysia. According to the findings of the study, there are significant relationships between dimensions of social support (family support, friends support and significant others), optimism, self-efficacy and four dimensions of psychological well-being (personal growth, purpose in life, autonomy and relations with significant other) with resilience. Moreover, the result of the study showed that self-efficacy, optimism and two dimensions of psychological well-being (personal growth and purpose in life) are predictors of resilience among Iranian graduate students. The findings revealed that Iranian students who had higher level of optimism, self-efficacy, purpose in life and personal growth experienced higher level of resiliency.

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