



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

***DESTINATION SELECTION PROCESS AMONG INTERNATIONAL HIGHER
EDUCATION STUDENTS IN MALAYSIA***

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By

BELLO YEKINNI OJO

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies,Universiti Putra Malaysia, in
Fulfilment of the Requirement for Doctor of Philosophy**

September, 2015

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the almighty God who made it possible for me to attain this height of academic excellence! To you alone be all the glory!



Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in Fulfilment
of the requirement for award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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September, 2015

Chairman : Raja Nerina Raja Yusof, PhD
Faculty : Economics and Management

International student migration is now a multi-billion dollar business to many countries, and the global economy. Globally, over 4.1 million students seek for university education outside their home countries in 2010, and created market worth RM1, 120-1,400 billion. Various countries are taking advantage of mobility of international students to brand a tourism typology known as edu-tourism. Thus, taking advantage of this industry to boost their foreign exchange earnings. Malaysia is having her fair share for exporting university education. This form of edu-tourism product contributed RM27 billion or four percent to the Malaysia's Gross National Income in 2009. The government of Malaysia plan to earn RM60 billion per year from edu-tourism from the year 2020, thus, creating additional jobs of about 536,000. This highlight the attractiveness and importance of international students as a potential target group to fulfilling the national goal. Explanation on why international students decide to come to Malaysia to pursue higher education, including, factors that influence this touristic travel decision informed this study.

A modified synthesis model was adapted and used to develop the contemporary edu-tourism destination choice model (CEDCM). The CEDCM model was used to explain edu-tourist's decision making process, and to seek various dimensions that determine edu-tourists decision at each stage of the choice process. The research sampled 1000 postgraduate and undergraduate international students who enrolled in 13 Malaysia's public and private universities using a survey questionnaire.

The research reveals that edu-tourist's socio-cultural factor, quest for career development, and economic factor of home country are the key intrinsic and extrinsic push factors that determines their decision to study abroad. The socio-cultural and economic factor of Malaysia attracted them to Malaysia, while they choose Malaysia's university due to its institutional characteristics, and internationalisation attributes. The study further shows socio-cultural factor of edu-tourists as the most influencer of decision to study abroad. Socio-cultural factor of Malaysia mostly influenced their choice of Malaysia, while institutional characteristics mostly informed their choice of university. The three hypotheses in

the study are significant, hence supported, while the mediation test shows a partial mediation.

This study provides significant implications for the government of Malaysia, the ministry of tourism, and higher education, including, the managers of Malaysia's education institutions to implement its useful findings in order to leap-frog the Malaysia's tourism sector. This include continuous tourism research effort aimed at identifying intrinsic / motives of the edu-tourists to study abroad, aside their major learning motive. Government of Malaysia, and the tourism operators should make the most of the attractive socio-economic image of Malaysia for effective positioning strategy of Malaysia in the global tourism market. Design effective tourism destination marketing strategy for the country using the socio-economic platform of the country to attracting more tourists, and as well, international students. Maximise the institutional image, and internalisation reputation of Malaysia's universities as essential tourism assets for the country to develop its tourism industry. The ministry of tourism Malaysia in collaboration with the ministry of higher education should explore a new thrust of culture-base or adventure type of tourism to attract this specific niche market of education oriented travellers. Environment and atmosphere at the Malaysia's tourism destinations visited by students should encourage social interaction. Specific effort should be undertaken in other to promote interaction between university students and hosts, particularly in destinations, and context where tourists-host interaction was lower among other recommendations.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk Ijazah Doktor Falsafah

DESTINASI PEMILIHAN PROSES DI KALANGAN PELAJAR ANTARABANGSA PENDIDIKAN TINGGI DI MALAYSIA

Oleh

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Penghijrahan pelajar antarabangsa kini merupakan perniagaan bernilai berbilion dolar ke banyak negara, dan ekonomi global. Di seluruh dunia, lebih daripada 4.1 juta pelajar mendapatkan pendidikan universiti di luar negara asal mereka pada tahun 2010 dan ini mewujudkan pasaran bernilai RM1,120-1,400 bilion. Pelbagai negara mengambil kesempatan daripada mobiliti pelajar antarabangsa untuk menjenamakan tipologi pelancongan yang dikenali sebagai edu-pelancongan, dengan itu, mengambil kesempatan daripada industri ini untuk meningkatkan pendapatan tukaran asing. Malaysia mempunyai bahagian yang adil dalam pengeksportan pendidikan universiti. Produk edu-pelancongan menyumbang RM27 bilion atau empat peratus kepada Pendapatan Negara Kasar Malaysia pada 2009. Kerajaan Malaysia merancang untuk mendapatkan RM60 bilion setiap tahun dari edu-pelancongan dari tahun 2020, dengan itu, mewujudkan kira-kira 536,000 peluang pekerjaan tambahan. Ini menyerlahkan daya tarikan dan kepentingan pelajar antarabangsa sebagai kumpulan sasaran yang berpotensi untuk memenuhi matlamat negara. Penjelasan mengenai mengapa pelajar antarabangsa membuat keputusan untuk datang ke Malaysia untuk melanjutkan pelajaran ke peringkat yang lebih tinggi, termasuk faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhi keputusan perjalanan pelancongan ini, adalah dimaklumkan kajian ini.

Model sintesis diubahsuai telah disesuaikan dan digunakan untuk membangunkan model pilihan destinasi edu-pelancongan kontemporari (CEDCM). Model CEDCM telah digunakan untuk menjelaskan proses membuat keputusan edu-pelancongan, dan untuk mendapatkan pelbagai dimensi yang menentukan keputusan edu-pelancong di setiap peringkat proses pilihan. Kajian sampel ke atas 1000 pelajar antarabangsa pascasiswazah dan ijazah pertama yang mendaftar di 13 universiti awam dan swasta Malaysia telah dijalankan menggunakan soal selidik kajian. Kajian ini mendedahkan bahawa faktor sosio-budaya, usaha untuk pembangunan kerjaya, dan faktor ekonomi negara edu-pelancong adalah faktor dorongan intrinsik dan ekstrinsik utama yang menentukan keputusan mereka untuk belajar di luar negara. Faktor sosio-budaya dan ekonomi Malaysia telah menarik mereka ke

Malaysia, manakala mereka memilih universiti Malaysia kerana ciri-ciri institusi, dan sifat-sifat pengantarabangsaan. Kajian ini juga menunjukkan faktor sosio-budaya edu-pelancong sebagai pengaruh sebahagian besar keputusan untuk belajar di luar negara. Faktor sosio-budaya Malaysia banyak mempengaruhi pilihan mereka terhadap atas Malaysia, manakala ciri-ciri institusi kebanyakannya mempengaruhi pilihan mereka terhadap universiti. Tiga hipotesis dalam kajian ini menunjukkan keputusan yang signifikan, oleh itu disokong, manakala ujian pengantaraan menunjukkan pengantaraan separa.

Kajian ini memberi implikasi yang besar bagi kerajaan Malaysia, Kementerian Pelancongan, dan pendidikan tinggi, termasuk, pengurus institusi pendidikan Malaysia untuk melaksanakan penemuan kegunaannya untuk meningkatkan pertumbuhan sektor pelancongan Malaysia. Ini termasuk usaha penyelidikan pelancongan berterusan bertujuan untuk mengenal pasti intrinsik / motif edu-pelancong untuk belajar di luar negara, selain motif pembelajaran utama mereka. Pengendali Kerajaan Malaysia, dan pelancongan perlu menggunakan imej sosio-ekonomi yang menarik di Malaysia dengan sebaik mungkin untuk memposisikan kedudukan strategik Malaysia dengan efektif dalam pasaran pelancongan global. Mereka bentuk strategi pemasaran destinasi pelancongan berkesan untuk negara ini dengan menggunakan platform sosio-ekonomi negara ini untuk menarik lebih ramai pelancong, dan juga, pelajar antarabangsa. Memaksimumkan imej institusi, dan reputasi pengantarabangsaan universiti Malaysia sebagai aset pelancongan adalah penting bagi negara untuk membangunkan industri pelancongan. Kementerian Pelancongan Malaysia dengan kerjasama kementerian pengajian tinggi perlu meneroka teras baharu berasaskan-budaya atau jenis pelancongan pengembaraan untuk menarik perhatian pasaran khusus pelancong yang berorientasikan pendidikan ini. Alam sekitar dan suasana di destinasi pelancongan di Malaysia yang dikunjungi oleh pelajar perlu menggalakkan interaksi sosial. Antara cadangan lain adalah usaha tertentu perlu dilaksanakan untuk menggalakkan interaksi antara pelajar universiti dan tuan rumah, terutamanya di destinasi, dan konteks di mana interaksi pelancong dan tuan rumah adalah lebih rendah.

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This thesis was submitted to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as fulfilment of the requirement for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT	i
ABSTRACT	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
APPROVAL	vi
DECLARATION	viii
LIST OF TABLES	xiv
LIST OF FIGURES	xvi
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	xvii
 CHAPTER	
 1 INTRODUCTION	 1
1.1 Background of the Study	1
1.2 Focal Point of the Study	3
1.3 Statement of the Problem	5
1.4 Objectives of the Study	7
1.5 Relevance of the Study	7
1.5.1 Practical Relevance	7
1.5.2 Theoretical Relevance	8
1.6 Scope of the Study	9
1.7 Structure of the Thesis	10
1.7.1 Chapter 1: Introduction	10
1.7.2 Chapter 2: Literature Review	10
1.7.3 Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework and Hypotheses Development	10
1.7.4 Chapter 4: Research Methodology	11
1.7.5 Chapter 5: Data Analysis and Findings	11
1.7.6 Chapter 6: Discussion on Findings, Implications, and Conclusion	11
1.7.7 Summary of the Chapter	11
 2 LITERATURE REVIEW	 12
2.1 Meaning and Concept of Tourism	12
2.2 Elements of Tourism	13
2.3 Economic Importance of Tourism	14
2.3.1 Employment Generation	14
2.3.2 Revenue Generation and Enhanced Standard of Living	14
2.3.3 Tourism and the Balance of Payments	15
2.4 Types of Tourism	15
2.5 Tourism Development in Malaysia	16
2.6 Definitions of Edu-tourism	18
2.6.1 Economic Approach to Definition of Edu-tourism	18
2.6.2 Technical Approach to Definition of Edu-tourism	19
2.6.3 Etymology Approach to Definition of Edu-tourism	22
2.7 Global Patterns and Trends in Edu-tourist Industry	23
2.8 Internationalisation, Globalisation and Edu-tourist Industry	25
2.9 Defining the Concept of Emerging Economy: Edu-tourism Development Perspectives	26
2.10 Malaysia as an Emerging Economy (EE): Edu-tourism Development Perspective	27

2.11	Facet of Malaysian Edu-tourism Industry	28
2.11.1	The Development of Public Edu-tourist Institutions in Malaysia	29
2.11.2	The Development of Private Higher Edu-tourist Institutions in Malaysia	31
2.12	National Strategic Policies and Instruments for Edu-tourist Industry in Malaysia	33
2.12.1	National Strategic Policy for Edu-tourist Industry in Malaysia	33
2.12.2	National Policy Instruments for Edu-tourist Industry in Malaysia	34
2.13	Chapter Summary	35
3	THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE, CONCEPTUAL ORIENTATION AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT	36
3.1	Theoretical Perspective: Edu-tourist Destination Selection Process	36
3.1.1	Theory of Human Capital	36
3.1.2	Theory of Consumer Behaviour	37
3.1.3	The College Choice Theory	38
3.1.4	The Push – Pull Theory	39
3.2	Conceptual Orientation: Edu-tourist Mobility and Destination Selection Process	40
3.2.1	Stages in Edu-tourist Destination Selection Process	41
3.2.2	Dimensions of Edu-tourist Destination Selection Process: The Traditional Mobility Perspective	42
3.2.3	Dimensions of Edu-tourist Destination Selection Process: The Contemporary Mobility Perspective	47
3.3	The Literature Gaps	48
3.4	The Theoretical Framework	50
3.5	Developing the Contemporary Edu-tourist Destination Choice Framework	50
3.5.1	Decision to Study Abroad	51
3.5.2	The Choice of the Host Country	52
3.5.3	The Choice of a University	53
3.6	Hypotheses Development	54
3.6.1	Relationship between Decision to Study Abroad and Choice of a Country	54
3.6.2	Relationship between Choice of a Host Country (Malaysia) and Choice of a University	55
3.6.3	Relationship between Decision to Study Abroad and Choice of a University	56
3.6.4	Mediating Effect of Choice of a Country on the Relationship between Decision to Study Abroad and Choice of a University	57
3.7	Chapter Summary	57
4	RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	58
4.1	The Paradigmatic Worldview	58
4.2	The Research Design	58
4.3	The Population of the Study	59
4.4	The Sample Size	62
4.5	Sampling Procedure	63
4.6	Instrument for Data Collection	

4.7	Reliability and Validity of the Instrument	64
4.7.1	Reliability of the Instrument	64
4.7.2	Validity of the Instrument	65
4.8	Data Analysis and Procedure	65
4.9	Operationalisation of Variables	67
4.9.1	Operationalisation of Observed Variables and Items for Edu-tourist's Predisposition / Decision to Study Abroad	67
4.9.2	Operationalisation of Observed Variables and Items for Choice of a Country	68
4.9.3	Operationalisation of Observed Variables and Items for Choice of a University	69
4.10	Ethical Issues	70
4.11	Chapter Summary	70
5	DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS	72
5.1	Data Screening / Multivariate Assumption Analysis	72
5.1.1	Missing Data	72
5.1.2	Test of Normality Assumption	73
5.1.3	Influential Outliers	73
5.1.4	Multicollinearity	74
5.2	Questionnaires Distribution and Respondents' Demographic Profile	75
5.2.1	Questionnaires Distribution Information	75
5.2.2	Respondents' Demographic Profile	75
5.3	Dimensions of Edu-tourist Destination Selection Process among International Edu-tourists in Malaysia	80
5.4	Reliability of Measures of Edu-tourists' Destination Selection Process	81
5.4.1	Reliability of Measures of Decision to Study Abroad among International Edu-tourists in Malaysia	81
5.4.2	Reliability of Measure of Choice of a Host Country (Malaysia) among International Edu-tourists in Malaysia	83
5.4.3	Reliability of Measures of Choice of a University among International Edu-tourists in Malaysia	85
5.5	Factor Analysis of Dimensions of Edu-tourist Destination Selection Process among International Edu-tourists in Malaysia	86
5.5.1	Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) Technique	87
5.5.2	Confirmatory Factor Analysis	107
5.6	Determinants of International Edu-tourist's Behaviour at each Stage of the Choice Process	113
5.6.1	Determinants of Decision to Study Abroad among International Edu-tourists from Emerging Economies in Malaysia	114
5.6.2	Determinants of Choice of Country (Malaysia) among International Edu-tourists from Emerging Economies in Malaysia	114
5.6.3	Determinants of Choice of University among International Edu-tourists from Emerging Economies in Malaysia	114
5.7	Structural Regression Model: Edu-tourist Destination Selection Process among International Edu-tourists in Malaysia	114
5.8	Mediating Analysis of Choice of Country on the Relationship between Decision to Study Abroad and Choice of a University	117

6	SUMMARY, DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS, IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS	122
6.1	Summary of the Study	122
6.2	Limitations in Chen's Framework	123
6.3	The Proposed CEDCM Framework	124
6.4	Discussions	125
6.4.1	Unidimensionality / Plausible Dimensions of Edu-tourist Destination Selection Process	125
6.4.2	Extent of Influence of each Determinants on Edu-tourist Behavior at each Stage of the Destination Choice Process	128
6.4.3	Interrelationships among Variables that Explains the Contemporary Edu-tourist Destination Selection Process	130
6.4.4	Mediating Effect of Choice of Country on the Relationship between Decision to Study Abroad and Choice of a University	132
6.5	Implications of the Findings	133
6.5.1	Theoretical Implications	133
6.5.2	Methodological Implications	135
6.5.3	Practical / Policy Implications	135
6.6	Limitations of the Study	137
6.7	Suggestions for Further Studies	138
6.8	Conclusions	138
	REFERENCES	141
	APPENDICES	170
	BIODATA OF STUDENT	214
	LIST OF PUBLICATIONS	215

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
2.1 International Tourist Arrival and GDP in Malaysia (2007-2013)	17
2.2 Economic Approach to Definition of Edu-tourism	19
2.3 Technical Definitions of Edu-Tourism	20
2.4 Mobility Pattern of the Malaysian Edu-tourists to Major Destinations in Advanced Countries	29
2.5 The List of Public Edu-tourist Institutions Universities in Malaysia and Year of Establishment	30
2.6 The Top 7 Malaysian Public Edu-tourist Institutions with High Enrolment of International Edu-tourists	31
2.7 The Top 7 Malaysian Private Edu-tourist Institutions with High Enrolment of International Edu-tourists	32
2.8 Categories / Ownership of Some Private Edu-tourist Institutions in Malaysia	33
4.1 Enrolment of International Edu-tourists from Selected Countries in Africa, Asia and the Middle East in Malaysian Universities	60
4.2 Gross National Income (GNI) Per Capita in Billion Dollar of Selected Countries in Emerging Countries	60
4.3 The List of Selected Malaysian Public and Private Universities with High Enrolment of International Edu-tourist	61
4.4 The Top 7 Malaysian Public Universities with High Enrolment of International	61
4.5 The Top 7 Malaysia Private Universities with High Enrolment of the International Edu-tourists	62
4.6 Reliability Test of Individual Constructs	65
4.7 Showing the Summary of Objectives / Hypotheses and Method of Analysis	66
4.8 Operationalisation of Observed Variables for Edu-tourist's Predisposition / Decision to Study Abroad	68
4.9 Operationalisation of Observed Variables for Choice of a Host Country	69
4.10 Operationalisation of Observed Variables for Choice of the Host University	70
5.1 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents	77
5.2 Reliability of Dimensions and Items of Decision to Study among International Edu-tourist in Malaysia	82
5.3 Reliability of Dimensions and Items of Choice of a Country among International Edu-tourist in Malaysia	84
5.4 Reliability of Dimensions and Items of Choice of a University among International Edu-tourist in Malaysia	85
5.5 Inter Items Correlations of Concern Scales of Decision to Study Abroad among International Edu-Tourists in Malaysia	89
5.6 Overall Item's Measure of Sample Adequacy of Decision to Study Abroad among International Edu-Tourists in Malaysia	90
5.7 Measures of Edu-tourist's Decision to Study Abroad among	92

	International Edu-tourists in Malaysia	
5.8	Inter Items Correlations of Concern Scales of Choice of Country among International Edu-Tourists in Malaysia	95
5.9	Overall Item's Sample Adequacy Requirement of Choice of Country among International Edu-Tourists in Malaysia	96
5.10	Measure of Edu-tourist's Choice of a Host Country among International Edu- tourists in Malaysia	97
5.11	Inter Items Correlations of Concern Scales of Choice of a University among International Edu-Tourists in Malaysia	102
5.12	Overall Item's Measure of Sample Adequacy of Choice Abroad among International Edu-Tourists in Malaysia	103
5.13	Dimensions of Choice of a University in Malaysia among International Edu-tourists	104
5.14	Model Fit Indices and Corresponding Threshold Values	108
5.15	Validity and Reliability of Contemporary Edu-tourist Destination Choice Model	113
5.16	Hypotheses on the Relationship between the Stages of Edu-tourist Destination Selection Process among International Edu-tourists in Malaysia	115
5.17	Estimate of the Hypothesized Model	116
5.18	Mediating Test via Comparison of the Direct and Mediation Model	117
5.19	Rule of Thumb for Mediating Test via Comparison of the Direct and Mediation Model	117
5.20	Estimate of Direct Effect of Decision to Study Abroad on Choice of a University	119
5.21	Estimate of Mediation Model of Edu-tourist Destination Choice Process	120

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1.1 Enrolment Trends of International Edu-tourists from the Malaysian Top Six Sourced Countries.	5
2.1 Showing the Elements of Tourism.	14
3.1 The Push and Pull Factors Influencing the Choice of the United State as a Study Destination.	43
3.2 The Push-Pull Model for International Edu-tourist's Selection of an Edu-tourist Destination.	44
3.3 Chen Synthesis Framework.	46
3.4 Replication of Chen Synthesis Model.	50
3.5 The Proposed Contemporary Edu-tourist Destination Selection Model.	54
5.1 Showing Result of Multivariate Outliers Using D2 /df Measure.	74
5.2 Initial Standardised Measurement Model of the Contemporary Edu-tourist Destination Choice Process.	109
5.3 Final Standardised Measurement Model of the Contemporary Edu-tourist Destination Choice Process.	111
5.4 Final Unstandardised Measurement Model of the Contemporary Edu-tourist Destination Choice Process.	112
5.5 Structural Regression Model of the Contemporary Edu-tourist Destination Selection Process.	115
5.6 Effect of Decision to Study Abroad on Choice of University Using Direct Model.	119
5.7 Effect of Decision to Study Abroad on Choice of University Using Mediation Model.	120

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AMOS	Analysis of Moment Structure
ASV	Average Shared Variance
CEDCM	Contemporary Edu-tourist Destination Choice Model
CFA	Confirmatory Factor Analysis
CV	Convergent Validity
DEs	Developed Economies
DFID	Department for Information / International Development
EFA	Exploratory Factor Analysis
EEs	Emerging Economies
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GNI	Gross National Income
IMF	International Monetary Fund
KLEC	Kuala Lumpur Education City
MOEM	Ministry of Education Malaysia
MOHEM	Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia
MSV	Minimum Shared Variance
NHESP	National Higher Education Strategic Plan
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation / Development
SEM	Structural Equation Modelling
UNWTO	United Nation World Tourism Organisation
VDR	Visa with Reference
WEF	World Economic Forum

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides a general overview of the background of the present study, hence, described the concept of tourism and its relationship to edu-tourism and edu-tourism destination. The focal point of the study within the domain of edu-tourism is identified and justified. The statement of the problem, objectives, and relevance of the study are presented in this chapter. Also discussed in this chapter is the scope of the study, including, the structure of the thesis.

1.1 Background of the Study

Tourism is the temporary movement of people to destination(s) outside their original places of residence (Wall and Mathieson, 2006). Every tourist are primarily motivated to embark on a non-remunerative trip when there is a perceived attraction (Okoli, 2001). The primary motivators for tourism are further explained as reason(s) tourist(s) embark on a non-remunerative trip and these include education, sport, religion, to explore culture, and the environment among others (Wahab and Cooper, 2001). Tourism typologies was developed by experts in the field of tourism based on the motive of the trip (Okoli, 2001; Cohen, 1979; Smith, 1977). Therefore, the primary motivators or objective(s) that attracted tourist(s) to embark on a trip determine the type of tourism.

Edu-tourism is one of the types of tourism primarily motivated by the quest for education and learning (Ritchie et al., 2003). It refers to a form of tourism in which participants travel to a location outside their original place of domicile with the primary purpose of exploring education resources that translate to learning experience (Jiménez and Luis, 1986; Cohen, 1974). Information above revealed that education resources are domicile at the destination otherwise known as edu-tourism destination. Edu-tourism destination explains the geographical location which hosts education resources that attracts international students / edu-tourists (Becker and Kolster, 2012) and in particular those features that contributed to the attraction. The attraction in this case may be regarded as the anticipations by the international students / edu-tourists of some qualitative characteristics which are lacking in their generating region that they wish to experience personally (McMahon, 1992; Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002; Soutar and Turner, 2002). This may include, academic conference (Dwyer, 2002; Leipeet al., 2000; Oppermann, 1996), adult study tours / lifelong learning (Wood, 2001; Kalinowski and Weiler, 1992), international higher education (Corigliano, 2011; Shi et al 2010; Armstrong et al 2004), secondary school student's travel, and exchange programs (Smith and Jenner, 1997).

The pertinent question to be answered at this juncture is what is edu-tourist, and does international students in Malaysia fits into being addressed as such? The technical

definition of edu-tourism as suggested in Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2008), Lew and McKerracher (2004), Bodger (1998), and United Nation World Tourism Organisation (UNTWO) (1968) gave an insight to those characteristics exhibited by international students that portrays them as tourists / edu-tourists as follows.

“Edu- tourism is defined as the movement of person(s) away from his / her original place of residence with the purpose of learning among other reasons, and whose period of stay at the destination is not less than 24 hours, not permanent in nature, and unconnected to earning purpose”.

Though the technical definition of edu-tourism as stated above has been the standard globally, but, not all countries applied it (Wall, and Mathieson, 2006). In view of this, what is the technical definition of edu-tourist in Malaysia, and does international students in Malaysia fit into being addressed as tourists / edu-tourists?

Viewing the above definition in the context of Malaysia, the immigration and visa policy of Malaysia defined the duration of stay of international students in Malaysia as a minimum of one year, subject to renewal up to a maximum of five years (Malaysia Immigration Regulation Act, 1963). According to the source, international students are allowed to stay in Malaysia for at least a year, subsequent upon which their pass are renewed up to a maximum of five years, hence, confirming them as tourists and not residents. This argument is in line with the suggestion in Huang (2008), that, international students are regarded as tourists, since, they are people in transition who have come to accomplish an educational goals before returning home, therefore fulfilling the dynamic component of tourism activity.

However, it is pertinent to state that international students are not permitted by the Malaysian immigration regulation Act 1966 to work or engage in any professional practice that can earn them a living in Malaysia (Borneo Trade, 2014, Malaysia Immigration Regulation Act, 1963). This also confirms them as net consumers of economic resources within Malaysia (McGowan and Potter, 2008). However, in case of students that enjoys research grants in their various host universities, OECD (2012), and Wall, and Mathieson (2006) opined that the expenditure of international students on various items at the destination are expected to exceed any incidental remuneration gained for them to be addressed as tourists. This implies that any incidental income made by international students in Malaysia are not expected to sustain their livelihood, hence, they are expected to depend on income from their origin countries for sustaining their stay. Another important distinguished feature of international students in Malaysia that qualifies them as tourists is that, their activity represents a discretionary use of time, and monetary resources (Jay and Eyes, 1993), hence, a touristic element.

Considering other experiences of international students at the destination, including, different tourists experiences theorised in tourism literature, international students in Malaysia could be addressed as tourists / edu-tourists (Huang, 2008). According to sociological theory developed by Cohen (1974), the term tourists were analysed in relation to the tourism industry, the destination, and familiarity / stranger hood continuum. Based on this theory, four types of tourists were identified: organised

mass tourists; individual mass tourists; explorer; and drifter (Cohen, 1974). Cohen argued that international students exhibit the features of explorer since they are seen making their own travel arrangement, make effort to sample local foods, language, and culture while still requesting certain level of comfort. Though international students could apply for admission, and visa independently. However, the advent of travel agency has encouraged the usage of travel agents for all activities involved in getting international students to their desired study destination. In view of this Cohen argued that international students could be classified as organised mass tourists.

In a related study of typologies of tourist experience, Cohen identified five categories of tourists' experience – recreational, diversional, experiential, experimental and existential (Huang, 2008). However, international students are seen spending time in distinctly non-tourist settings such as private homes embedded in the language and culture of the hosts (Cohen, 1979). Thus, aligning their pursuits within educational goals of a linguistic, cultural, and personal nature, they share some of the features of experimental tourists. They could also be classified as existential tourists since they find comfort in another culture with their physical and psychological base still firmly in their home culture (Huang, 2008). Based on Urry's metaphor of the "tourist gaze" gazes organise the encounters of visitors with the "other", thus, adding some sense of competence, pleasure and structure to the experiences (Urry, 1990). The gaze denotes an array of pleasurable qualities to be generated within particular times and space. In line with Urry's different gazes, international students in Malaysia are more or less an anthropological gaze, since they are found in large numbers, learning foreign languages, and encountering foreign cultures (Crawshaw and Urry, 1997; Urry, 1990), hence, a major component of tourist consumption (McGowan and Potter, 2008).

The whole international students' experience such as tasting, hearing, seeing, smelling, and touching among others at the destination perfectly matches the "tourism as an embodied practice" (Hall and Weiler, 1992). In view of this education-tourism practices in Malaysia did not only allow international students to master expert knowledge or learnt knowledge but, also enable them to gain lay knowledge (OECD, 2012) thus, qualify them as 'special interest' or 'niche' tourists (Hall and Weiler, 1992; Kalinowski and Weiler, 1992).

The conclusion based on the information above suggests that international students in Malaysia exhibit characteristics of tourists, hence, assumed as education-tourists, aside that their major motive of the trip is learning and education. Therefore, the term international student, and education-tourist are used interchangeably in this study.

1.2 Focal Point of the Study

The present study focused on education-tourists attracted by *International Higher Education* (i.e. University study). The reason being that, this form of education-tourism (i.e. Education-tourism with motive to explore university education resources) product is gradually becoming an attractive export commodity or activity due to its economic contributions to the host countries (Anthony et al 2004). International university

study is significant in terms of size and export earnings, it is knowledge intensive, high value added, and offer long-term economic benefits (Shank et al 2005). Cross-border university education, a product of edu-tourism industry is now a multi-billion dollar business to many countries (Cheung et al 2011) and the global economy in general. Globally, the number of students seeking university education services outside their countries of origin are put above 4.1 million in 2010 and the figure is forecasted to hit 7.2 million by the nearly year 2020, thus creating a market worth RM1,120-1,400 billion (Bohm et al., 2012).

In 2013, it was estimated that the expenditure of international students that seeks university education services supported 313,000 jobs and contributed RM78.75 billion to the economy of the United States (NAFSA, 2013) as against RM69.42 billion in 2012 (ICEF Monitor, 2012a). The Canadian government reported that international students' expenditure on university education services contributed more than RM24.68 billion to the Canadians' economy in 2010 as against RM18.48 billion in 2008 (ICEF Monitor, 2012b). It was also estimated that international students supported about 86,570 jobs and generated RM1403.63 million as tax revenue for the Canadian government in 2010 (ICEF Monitor, 2012b). In addition, the economic contribution of international students being attracted by university education to Australia grew slightly from RM13.5 billion in 2007 to RM44.80 billion in 2011 (Deloitte Access Economics, 2012).¹

Furthermore, export of edu-tourism services in the United Kingdom are valued at RM35.56 billion in 2012 of which approximately RM30.71 billion is associated with expenditure of international students / edu-tourists that consumed university education services (ICEF Monitor, 2012a). In 2012, the government of New Zealand earned about RM5.043 billion from international edu-tourists that seeks university education (ICEF Monitor, 2013), as against RM1505.34 million in 2008 (ICEF Monitor, 2013). The study on the economic impact of edu-tourism by the info – metrics, estimated that edu-tourist industry supports approximately 32,000 jobs in New Zealand in 2012 (ICEF Monitor, 2013).

Malaysia had her fair share from exporting university education services (Bashir, 2007). This specialised form of edu-tourist product contributed approximately RM27 billion or four percent to the Malaysia's Gross National Income (GNI) in 2009 (Borneo Post, 2011). The government of Malaysia forecasted to earn about RM60 billion per year from this segment of edu-tourists from the year 2020 (Rehda Institute, 2014). The projection is based on an average earning of RM30, 000 per international edu-tourists annually, consequently, creating additional jobs of about 536,000 with majority of them in the professional and technical fields (Musa, 2010). The above information shows that edu-tourist industry has attained the status of international business; hence, many countries and more so Malaysia are consciously improving her infrastructure, and capacity to actively participate in exporting the product (Jason et al 2011; Foo et al 2010). Therefore, attempt to succeed in attracting more international edu-tourists to Malaysia will depend on the ability of stakeholders and policy makers in the Malaysian edu-tourist industry to understand

¹ Note: The actual monetary value of the cited RM, including the prevailing exchange rate of concern countries is depicted in Appendix 16.

the edu-tourism destination choice behaviour among international students at each stage of the destination choice process (Jacqueline, 2010; Siti et al 2010). This is the focus of the present study.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

The government of emerging countries are characterised by setting up recruitment plans to attract more international edu-tourists (Douglas and Edelstein, 2009). This is not an exemption with the government of Malaysia as it target to attract a minimum of 100,000, 150,000 and 200,000 international edu-tourist by the year 2010, 2015 and 2020 respectively (Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia (MOHEM), 2008). However, available data on the enrolments of international edu-tourists in Malaysia shows that the government of Malaysia manage to attract about 86,000 international edu-tourists in 2010 (MOHEM, 2011a). This enrolment status of Malaysia shows a deviation from the target of recruiting a minimum of 100,000 international edu-tourists by the year 2010. Recent report on the enrolment statistics of international edu-tourists in Malaysia shows a decrease in the enrolment growth rate of international edu-tourists, especially from the major edu-tourist source countries as presented in Figure 1.1. This shows a negative trend for the Malaysian edu-tourism industry, therefore, immediate attention of the government of Malaysia and other edu-tourism stakeholders are required to sustain edu-tourism business in Malaysia.

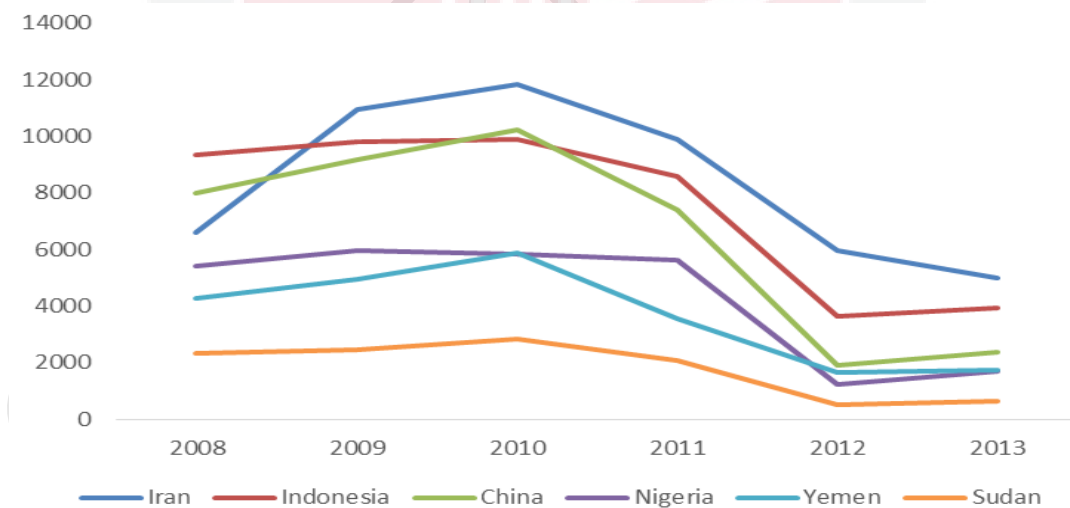


Figure 1.1 Enrolment Trends of International Edu-tourists from the Malaysian Top 6 Sourced Countries.

Source: Ministry of Education Malaysia (2014).

Furthermore, global edu-tourism system had been characterised by high edu-tourists mobility from emerging countries to the west, especially the English speaking countries such as the United States, United Kingdom and Australia (Verbik and Lasanowski, 2007), thus, portraying a traditional edu-tourist mobility trends. Traditional edu-tourist mobility trends explains the choice behaviour of international

edu-tourists from emerging economies in favour of edu-tourism destinations in the developed economy (Chen, 2007; Altbach, 2004). However, this trend is now changing as many emerging countries and Malaysia in particular now play host to international edu-tourists from other emerging countries (Becker and Kolster, 2012), thus a contemporary edu-tourist mobility trends. It was reported that about 86, 000 international edu-tourists enrolled in Malaysia's universities in 2010 (MOHEM, 2011). Majority of whom are from other emerging countries such as Iran, Indonesia, China, Nigeria, Yemen, and Sudan among others (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2014). The mobility of international edu-tourists from emerging economies to other emerging economies is a new trends in international edu-tourist migration especially in Malaysia (Roberts et al 2010).

In view of the fact that mobility of international edu-tourists from emerging economies to Malaysia who is also an emerging economy is a new trends in Malaysia's edu-tourism industry, studies that examine the dimensionality of edu-tourists behaviour at each stage of the destination choice process in Malaysia context are required (Becker and Kolster, 2012; Jason et al 2011). Marianne (2014) and Backer and Kolster (2012) reported that dimensionality or underlying structure are measures of choice behaviour of international edu-tourists from the emerging economies at each stage of the destination choice process. In the context of Malaysia, this had not been holistic (Jason et al 2011; Foo et al 2010; Jacqueline, 2010; Siti et al 2010). This is because previous studies conducted in this respect in the context of Malaysia largely focused on the measures of choice of university (Jason et al 2011; Foo et al 2010; Jacqueline, 2010; Siti et al 2010). Thus, shows one sided approach to measures of edu-tourism destination choice studies in Malaysia. Besides, studies on dimensionality of choice of a university in Malaysia among international edu-tourists from emerging economies are characterised by adoption of small population and sample size (Jason et al 2011; Foo et al 2010, and Jacqueline, 2010). Hence, evidences obtained from these studies are not enough to generalise the Malaysia's' situation in the context of dimensionality of choice of a university among international edu-tourists from emerging economies (Jacqueline, 2010; Siti et al., 2010). In view of this, there is a need to explore plausible measures capable of explaining the choice behaviour of international edu-tourists in Malaysia at each stage of the destination choice process.

Furthermore, various studies in the domain of edu-tourist migration had identified determinants of choice behaviour of international edu-tourists from emerging economies at each stage of the destination choice process in the context of advanced countries according to their degree of influence (Chen, 2007; Anthony et al., 2004; Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002; Mc Mahon, 1992; Agarwal and Winkler, 1985). However, limited study had been conducted to identify determinants of the choice behaviour of international edu-tourists from emerging economies, including, their extent of influence on edu-tourist choice behaviour at each stage of the destination choice process in the context of Malaysia (Backer and Kolster, 2012; Siti et al, 2010). This has resulted in the dominance of dimensions that defines the traditional edu-tourist mobility trends in the body of literature (Robert et al 2010; Bodycott, 2009; Cant, 2009; Chen, 2007). In view of the limited study in respect of degree of influence of determinants of choice behaviour of edu-tourists from emerging

economies at each stage of the choice processes in the context of Malaysia, the present study filled this gap.

Despite that Malaysia is now in the league of emerging edu-tourism destination, few studies have been conducted on destination selection process among international higher education students in Malaysia (Jason et al 2011; Jacqueline, 2010; Mohd Taib Hj et al 2009). Destination selection process in this case implies the stages international edu-tourists go through to selecting an edu-tourism destination (Becker and Kolster, 2012). A number of studies had explained the stages (process) international edu-tourists from emerging countries go through to selecting edu-tourist destination in advance economies (the west) (Marianne, 2014; Becker and Kolster, 2012; Hagel and Shaw, 2010; Fowler, 2009; Chen, 2007; Vossensteyn, 2005; Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002). However, studies that examine the stages international edu-tourist from emerging economies go through to selecting a destination in the context of Malaysia had not been reported (Siti et al 2010). In view of this, the present study aims to examine the stages in destination choice process among international edu-tourists from emerging economies in the context of Malaysia, including, the causal relationship between the stages.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

The general objective of the present study is to examine destination selection process among international higher education students as edu-tourists in Malaysia.

Specific objectives include:

1. To explore dimensionality of edu-tourists' destination selection process among international edu-tourists from emerging economies.
2. To assess determinants of international edu-tourist's behaviour at each stage of edu-tourists' destination choice process.
3. To determine the causal relationship between the stages in edu-tourists' destination choice process.
4. To examine the mediating effect of choice of a country on the relationship between decision to study abroad and choice of a university.

1.5 Relevance of the Study

The outcome of the present study is expected to contribute both practically and theoretically to the body of knowledge, as the following explanation.

1.5.1 Practical Relevance

Practically, the outcome of the present study is expected to be useful to the following target populations:

Strategic Decision Makers in Malaysian Edu-tourist Industry: The outcome of the present study will enable authorities in charge of Malaysian edu-tourist industry to know dimensions that determine edu-tourist's behaviour at each stage of the

destination choice process. Furthermore, it will enable the management of Malaysian edu-tourist industry know the extent at which they understand and translate these dimensions into reality in terms of edu-tourist service delivery. Moreover, the study will educate policy makers in Malaysian edu-tourist institutions on how to improve and sustain international edu-tourist inflow.

Government of Malaysia: The outcome of the present study will enable the government of Malaysia to identify indices of quality of Malaysia that attract international edu-tourists thereby, suggesting to the government the need to sustain and improve on these indices for sustainable edu-tourist industry. Moreover, the study also brings to the limelight, the expectations of international edu-tourists to the government of Malaysia. Hence, this will assist the government to plan and formulate feasible and viable policies towards the delivery of memorable edu-tourist experience among international edu-tourists while in Malaysia.

Edu-tourist Recruitment Practitioners, and Parents and Guidance around the World: The outcome of the present research will enable edu-tourist recruitment practitioners in Malaysia and other emerging edu-tourist destinations to understand dimensions that determine the behaviour of international edu-tourists from the emerging economies. This will assist them to formulate appropriate marketing strategies and business plans towards attracting more international edu-tourists, hence, sustaining their businesses. Furthermore, information contained in this study will enable parents and guidance around the world to have a better understanding of features of the Malaysian edu-tourist industry. This will enable them to offer necessary advice to their wards.

Tourism Industry Generally: The outcome of this study will contribute generally to the Malaysian tourist industry, hence, will enable the hotel and restaurant operations in Malaysia to understand the source countries of the edu-tourists, thus, their culture and food needs. This will help the hospitality business operators in Malaysia to adopt flexibility in their menu planning to meet the food needs of these edu-tourists, including their accommodation demands while also enhancing the possibility for more profit making. Travel agencies and tour operators in Malaysia will find the outcome of this study useful as it will enable them to understand the travel needs of the edu-tourists, enable them to formulate appropriate marketing strategies and business plans towards targeting the edu-tourists, hence, sustaining their businesses. The activities of the Malaysia tour guards will also be enhanced since, tour guard services to the edu-tourist during mid semesters and a holiday to places of tourist interest in Malaysia cannot be ruled-out.

1.5.2 Theoretical Relevance

The present study contributes theoretically to the body of knowledge in several ways. The study established an underlying structure of edu-tourist destination choice process in Malaysia. This was achieved by exploring and validating dimensions that determine the behaviour of international edu-tourists from emerging economies in Malaysia (Combs et al., 2009; Chatterjee and Hambrick, 2007). Furthermore, in

view of the fact that the present study is anchored on the push pull theory, the study contributed in large measure towards extending the applicability of the push pull theory to edu-tourism studies in Malaysia. Besides that, the study also bridges the gap of limited studies on edu-tourist destination choice process that characterised the Malaysian tourism literature.

Previous studies in the domain of edu-tourism in Malaysia failed to examine the causal relationship of the stages international edu-tourists from emerging economies go through to selecting Malaysia as a preferred edu-tourist destination (Jason et al., 2011; Foo et al., 2010; Jacqueline, 2010; Siti et al., 2010), this study largely bridged this gap. Furthermore, considering the one sided approach to the study of international edu-tourism in Malaysia, focusing only on dimensions that determine the choice of university among international edu-tourists from emerging economies (Jason et al., 2011; Foo et al., 2010; Jacqueline, 2010; Siti et al., 2010). This has therefore, neglected the consideration of dimensions that determine edu-tourist's behaviour in other stages in edu-tourist destination choice process. This gap is addressed in the present study, thus, enriching the scope of edu-tourism studies in Malaysia (Combs et al., 2009).

Accordingly, previous studies on dimensions of university choice among international edu-tourists in Malaysia are characterised with adoption of small population / sample size, and in most cases not empirical in nature (Jason et al., 2011; Foo et al., 2010, and Jacqueline, 2010). The adoption of larger population and sample size in the present study coupled with the usage of factor analysis, and structural equation modelling, including, examining the mediating effects of choice of a country on the relationship between the decision to study abroad and choice of a university have improved the research methodology deficits of edu-tourism studies in Malaysia (Baum and Wally, 2003; Miller and Shamsie, 1996).

1.6 Scope of the Study

The scope of the present study focused on Malaysia because of its emergence as an edu-tourist destination of choice among international edu-tourists from emerging economies. Report had it that international edu-tourists from over 168 countries comes to study in Malaysia (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013). Beside the above, Malaysian edu-tourism literature is limited by not reporting the underlying structure of edu-tourist destination choice process in the context of international edu-tourists from emerging economies. Therefore, the scope of the present study include exploring and validating dimensions of the contemporary edu-tourist destination choice process in the context of Malaysia. The present study also focused on university based edu-tourism. This is because, this form of edu-tourism is gradually becoming an attractive economic activity to many countries, especially, the emerging countries. This is due to its economic and social contributions. It is pertinent to state that the present study did not aimed at examining those touristic features or elements such as transportation, and hospitality that contributed to the main edu-tourism attraction that edu-tourists also explore in Malaysia. However, the main interest of the present study is the process

international edu-tourists go through, including, determinants of their choice behaviour at each state of the choice process.

Furthermore, the research focused on international edu-tourists from Africa (Nigeria and Sudan), Asia (Indonesia and China), and the Middle East (Iran and Yemen) who enrolled in Malaysian universities. The choice of these six countries is because they had consistently top the list of countries that generate international edu-tourists to Malaysian universities, including, aside that they are all emerging countries as shown in chapter four of this thesis. In addition, the scope of the study also extends to examining the causal relationship between the stages in edu-tourist destination choice process, and also, the mediating effect of the choice of a country (Malaysia) on the relationship between decision to study abroad and choice of a university.

1.7 Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is structured into six chapters as follow:

1.7.1 Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter one represents the introduction, and begins with the summary of what to expect in the chapter. The chapter also discussed the background of the study, the focal point of the study, and the statement of the problem. Other compositions of the chapter one include; research objectives, relevance of the study, scope of the study, the structure of the thesis, and summary of the chapter.

1.7.2 Chapter 2: Literature Review

Chapter two reviewed previous literatures as it relate to the meaning and concept of tourism, elements of tourism, economic contributions and types of tourism. The chapter also reviewed the development of tourism in Malaysia, including the adoption of edu-tourism to diversify the Malaysian tourism industry. Globalisation and internationalisation approaches to edu-tourist industry, and the facet of Malaysian edu-tourist industry formed part of the chapter two. The concept of emerging economy as it relates to edu-tourism in Malaysia is also explained. Finally, literature on national strategic policy and instruments for edu-tourist industry in Malaysia were also discussed.

1.7.3 Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework and Hypotheses Development

The chapter three of this thesis reviewed relevant theories and models, including, discussing their applicability to the present study. The chapter justified adoption of push-pull theory over other theories that have been applied in edu-tourism studies.

The chapter also justified adaption of Chen synthesis model as a theoretical framework over other frameworks. Furthermore, the chapter discussed how Chen's synthesis model was modified based on the literature, and the emergence of contemporary edu-tourist destination choice model (CEDCM) used as the framework in the present study. Various hypotheses are proposed for the present study to enable the researcher to validate the proposed model.

1.7.4 Chapter 4: Research Methodology

The chapter four explains the methodology that was adopted in the present study and the paradigmatic worldview that explains the paradigm on which the present study is rooted. The research design, population of the study, and method of sample size determination were also discussed. The instrument used for data collection, method of data analysis and ethical issues were extensively discussed.

1.7.5 Chapter 5: Data Analysis and Findings

Chapter five focused on data analysis and findings. Data that were obtained were analysed and results were discussed, including, results of the data screening in terms of the missing data, influential outliers, normality, and multicollinearity. Descriptive analysis of demographic characteristics of participants used for the study was discussed. Results of the factor analysis, and the structural equation modelling (SEM) were also presented in this chapter.

1.7.6 Chapter 6: Discussion on Findings, Implications, and Conclusion

This chapter reported estimated results that addressed research objectives, including, interpretations of findings. In addition, implications of findings were discussed in the context of theory, methodology, and practice. Limitations of the study are highlighted, including, suggestions for future research. Lastly, the chapter summarises the findings in a concise conclusion.

1.7.7 Summary of the Chapter

The chapter one of the present study presented the background of the study, the focal point of the study, and the statement of the problem. Other compositions of the chapter one are the objectives of the study, relevance of the study, the scope of the study, the structure of the thesis, and the chapter summary.

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