DESTINATION SELECTION PROCESS AMONG INTERNATIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENTS IN MALAYSIA

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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By

BELLO YEKINNI OJO

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 edutourists 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.
DESTINASI PEMILIHAN PROSES DI KALANGAN PELAJAR ANTARABANGSA PENDIDIKAN TINGGI DI MALAYSIA

Oleh

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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.

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I certify that a Thesis Examination Committee has met on 7 September 2015 to conduct the final examination of Bello Yekinni Ojo on his thesis entitled "Destination Selection Process among International Higher Education Students in Malaysia" in accordance with the Universities and University Colleges Act 1971 and the Constitution of the Universiti Putra Malaysia [P.U.(A) 106] 15 March 1998. The Committee recommends that the student be awarded the Doctor of Philosophy.

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<tr>
<td>IMF</td>
<td>International Monetary Fund</td>
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<tr>
<td>KLEC</td>
<td>Kuala Lumpur Education City</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>MOEM</td>
<td>Ministry of Education Malaysia</td>
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<td>MOHEM</td>
<td>Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia</td>
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<tr>
<td>MSV</td>
<td>Minimum Shared Variance</td>
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<tr>
<td>NHESP</td>
<td>National Higher Education Strategic Plan</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organisation for Economic Cooperation / Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>SEM</td>
<td>Structural Equation Modelling</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNWTO</td>
<td>United Nation World Tourism Organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>VDR</td>
<td>Visa with Reference</td>
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<td>WEF</td>
<td>World Economic Forum</td>
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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 (Dwyre, 2002; Leipe et 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 characterises 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 exhibits 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 desire 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 setting 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, culture, 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 edu-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 exhibits characteristics of tourists, hence, assumed as edu-tourists, aside that their major motive of the trip is learning and education. Therefore, the term international student, and edu-tourist are used interchangeably in this study.

1.2 Focal Point of the Study

The present study focused on edu-tourists attracted by International Higher Education (i.e. University study). The reason being that, this form of edu-tourism (i.e. Edu-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).  

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)


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 in 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 aim 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 determines 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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