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EDU-TOURISM DESTINATION SELECTION PROCESS IN AN EMERGING ECONOMY

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ABSTRACT

International Edu-tourists seeking university education outside of their countries of origin was 4.1 million in 2010 and the figure is forecasted to hit 7.2 million by the year 2020, thus creating a market value worth US$342billion. Exporting university education services contributed US$6.6billion to Malaysia's Gross National Income (GNI) in 2009. Malaysia plans to earn US$14.67 billion yearly from 2020, including, creating 536,000 jobs. This highlights the importance of international Edu-tourists for Malaysian Edu-tourism industry promotion. Explaining the stages international Edu-tourists go through to select Malaysia as their preferred Edu-tourism destination, including validating factors that contribute to this tourist travel decision form the basis of this study. The study is based on the push-pull theory and 500 international Edu-tourists in 13 Malaysian universities were sampled. Results of confirmatory factor analysis revealed that Edu-tourists' socio-cultural factors, the quest for career development, and economy status of their country of origin all contributed to Edu-tourists' decision to study abroad. The socio-cultural and economic factors of Malaysia attract Edu-tourists to Malaysia, while the institutional and internationalisation attributes of Malaysian universities encourage them to choose these universities. It is suggested that tourism operators in Malaysia make the most of the attractive socio-economic environment in Malaysia for the effective positioning strategy of Malaysia in the global Edu-tourism market. Edu-tourism destination marketing strategies should be designed for Malaysia, using her socio-economic attributes. The reputation of Malaysian universities as essential Edu-tourism assets should be promoted to develop the Malaysian tourism industry. Tourism destinations in Malaysia should encourage social interaction between Edu-tourists and host destinations.

Contribution/Originality: This study contributes to tourism literature by branding university education as tourism product. It validates factors that influence the choice behaviour of international Edu-tourists in selecting Edu-tourism destinations in emerging economies. The present study helps to increase the explanatory power of the push-pull theory in explaining contemporary Edu-tourist mobility trends.

1. INTRODUCTION

Edu-tourism is a brand 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 (Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002; Becker and Kolster, 2012; Bello, 2015). It can also be described as an activity undertaken by tourist(s) for whom education and learning is the core of the trip (Ritchie *et al.*, 2003). Generally, Edu-tourism activities include participation in conferences (Oppermann, 1996; Leipe *et al.*, 2000; Dwyer, 2002), adult study tours

(Kalinowski and Weiler, 1992; Wood, 2001), international, and or domestic university studies (Michael *et al*., 2004; Shi *et al*., 2010; Corigliano, 2011) and secondary school students' travel, and exchange programmes (Smith and Jenner, 1997). The information above reveals that tourism development based on the need to explore educational resources that translate into education and learning experience give rise to edu-tourism. However, the present study focuses on edu-tourism with the aim of exploring international university education, the reason being that this form of edu-tourism (i.e. edu-tourism that aims to explore international university education) 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, of high value and offers long-term economic benefits (Shanka *et al*., 2006). Cross-border university education, a product of the edu-tourism industry, is now a multi-billion dollar business to many countries (Cheung *et al*., 2011) and to the global economy in general.

Globally, the number of edu-tourists seeking university education services outside their countries of origin was 4.1 million in 2010 and the figure is forecasted to hit 7.2 million by the year 2020, thus creating a market value worth US$342billion (Bohm *et al*., 2012). In 2013, it was estimated that the expenditure of international edu-tourists seeking university education services supported 313,000 jobs and contributed US$19.25 billion to the economy of the United States (NAFSA, 2013) as against US$16.79 billion in 2012 (ICEF Monitor, 2012a). The Canadian government reported that international edu-tourists' expenditure on university education services contributed more than US$6.033 billion to the Canadian economy in 2010 as against US$4.52 billion in 2008 (ICEF Monitor, 2012b). It also supported about 86,570 jobs and generated US$343.13 million as tax revenue for the Canadian government in 2010 (ICEF Monitor, 2012b). In addition, the economic contributions of international edu-tourists attracted by university education in Australia grew slightly from US$3.30 billion in 2007 to US$10.95 billion in 2011. Furthermore, export of edu-tourism services in the United Kingdom was valued at US$8.70 billion in 2012 of which approximately US$7.51billion was associated with the expenditure of international edu-tourists who sought university education services (ICEF Monitor, 2012a). In 2012, the government of New Zealand earned about US$1.23billion from international edu-tourists seeking university education (ICEF Monitor, 2013) as against US$367.98million in 2008. The study on the economic impact of edu-tourism by info – metrics estimated that the edu-tourism industry supported approximately 32,000 jobs in New Zealand in 2012 (ICEF Monitor, 2013). Malaysia has her fair share from exporting university education services (Bashir, 2007). This specialised form of edu-tourism product contributed approximately US$6.6billion or four percent of Malaysia's Gross National Income (GNI) in 2009 (Borneo Post, 2011 cited in Bello *et al*. (2015). The government of Malaysia has forecasted an earnings of about US$14.67 billion per year from this segment of edu-tourists in the year 2020 (Rehda Institute, 2014 cited in Bello *et al*. (2014), consequently creating an additional 536,000 jobs approximately, with the majority of them in the professional and technical fields.

The problem essentially is that the target of the of the Malaysian government to attract a minimum of 100,000, 150,000 and 200,000 international edu-tourists in the years 2010, 2015 and 2020 respectively (Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, 2008) has not been met. Recent reports on the enrolment statistics of international edu-tourists in Malaysia shows a decrease in the enrolment rate of international edu-tourists, especially from the major edu-tourist source countries (Bello, 2015). The knowledge of the stages international edu-tourists go through in selecting an edu-tourism destination is important, including the corresponding determinants of edu-tourist behaviour in each stage of the choice process (Becker and Kolster, 2012). It is therefore pertinent to state that a number of studies have explained the stages (process) international edu-tourists from emerging countries go through in selecting edu-tourist destinations in advanced economies (i.e. The West) (Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002; Vossensteyn, 2005; Chen, 2007; Fowler, 2009; Hagel and Shaw, 2010; Becker and Kolster, 2012). However, there are no reports or studies that examine the stages international edu-tourists from emerging economies go through in selecting edu-tourism destinations in Malaysia (Siti *et al*., 2010). In addition, studies conducted to explore the

determinants of international edu-tourist choice behaviour at each stage of the destination choice process in the Malaysian context are limited. In view of this, the present study aims to examine the stages in edu-tourism destination choice process among international edu-tourists in the context of Malaysia, including, determinants of edu-tourist choice behaviour in each stage of the choice process. The outcome of the present study will enable authorities in charge of the Malaysian edu-tourist industry to know the dimensions that determine edu-tourist behaviour at each stage of the destination choice process. Furthermore, it will enable the management of the Malaysian edu-tourist industry to know the extent to 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. Besides, the study also attempts to bridge the gap between limited studies on the edu-tourism destination choice process that characterises Malaysian tourism literature.

2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1. Theoretical Perspective: Push-Pull Theory

The Push-Pull theory was developed by the E. G. Ravenstein, a Fellow of the Royal Geographic Society in the mid-eighteenth century (Ravenstein, 1855). Ravenstein used the push-pull theory to explain migration patterns of people both within and between nations, and hence, proposed the law of migration (Ravenstein, 1876). The theory holds that travellers embark on a trip because they are pushed by their internal forces (intrinsic factors) and the external forces (extrinsic factors) of their origin country (Ravenstein, 1889). The theory also holds that travellers are pulled to migrate to a particular destination as a result of the attractiveness of the destination as perceived by them (Ravenstein, 1889). Numerous empirical studies have applied the push-pull theory in tourism motivation (Lee and Tan, 1984; Baloglu and Uysal, 1996; Bashar and Ahmad, 2010; Foo *et al*., 2010; Jacqueline, 2010; Jason *et al*., 2011). The theory in the context of tourism holds that tourists are motivated to travel outside their original place of abode, because, they are pushed by their internal forces (intrinsic factors) and the external forces (extrinsic factors) of their origin country (Lee and Tan, 1984; Baloglu and Uysal, 1996) thus indicating that push factors are personal to tourists' orientation and country of origin. The theory also explains the pull side of tourist migration, and holds that tourists are pulled to migrate to a particular tourist destination as a result of the tourist's perception and expectations of such as novelty, benefit expectations and other tourist images of the destination (Lee and Tan, 1984; Baloglu and Uysal, 1996).

The push-pull theory has been applied to explaining decision making processes of international edu-tourists in selecting edu-tourism destinations (Altbach *et al*., 1985; Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002; Chen, 2007, Foo *et al*., 2010). In this case, the theory holds that international edu-tourists are motivated to study abroad because they are pushed by their internal (intrinsic) forces and the external (extrinsic) forces of their origin country (Foo *et al*., 2010). Having decided to study abroad, they are also pulled to choose an edu-tourism destination country, and choose a university at the destination (Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002; Chen, 2007). The decisions of international edu-tourists to choose a country and a university of study are determined by dimensions such as attractiveness of the country and the university as perceived by them (Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002; Chen, 2007).

As applied in the current study, edu-tourism destination selection process in Malaysia is viewed as comprising three distinct stages, which include: (1) decision of international edu-tourists to choose to study abroad rather than study locally (2) the choice of Malaysia as the host country, and (3) the choice of a university in Malaysia. In view of the applicability of the push-pull theory to the present study, the researchers adopted these three variables as the stages international edu-tourists go through to explore edu-tourism services in Malaysia.

2.2. Predictors of Edu-Tourism Destination Selection Process

According to the push-pull theory, stage one in edu-tourism destination choice process is tagged "predisposition stage / decision to study internationally rather than study locally" (Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002; Chen, 2007). Decisions made by international edu-tourists at this stage are determined by both the intrinsic (Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002) and, extrinsic push dimensions (Becker and Kolster, 2012). Previous studies have revealed *edu-tourist characteristics* (McMahon, 1992; Chen, 2007; Hung, 2008) *academic learning* (Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002; Rees, 2002; Hung, 2008; Joseph, 2011; Becker and Kolster, 2012) and *career development* (Chen, 2007; Hung, 2008; Alex, 2010) as intrinsic dimensions of an edu-tourist's decision to study abroad. In addition, extrinsic dimensions of an edu-tourist's decision to study abroad include; s*ocial/cultural factors* (Carlson *et al*., 1990; Van Hoof and Verbeeten, 2005; Hung, 2008) e*conomic factors of home country* (Agarwal and Winkler, 1985; McMahon, 1992) and e*ducation / academic systems of home country* (Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002; Kapur and McHale, 2005; Hung, 2008).

Furthermore, the push-pull theory explains that once an international edu-tourist has decided to study abroad, the next decision is the search and selection of a preferred host country (Jason *et al*., 2011). Previous studies have reported dimensions that determine selection of a host country. These include, *economy of the host country* (McMahon, 1992; Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002; Chen, 2007) *the host country edu-tourism image* (Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002; Chen, 2007; Wilkins and Huisman, 2011) and *the socio-cultural factors of the host country* (Cateora and Graham, 1999; Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002; De Mooij, 2004 ; Chen, 2007; Wilkins *et al*., 2011). Besides those, an overwhelming number of research in the domain of edu-tourism destination choice process examined dimensions of edu-tourists' choice of a university in stage three of the choice process. Evidences from these studies show *institutional characteristics* (Harari, 1992; Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002; Cohen, 2003; Keling, 2006; Chen, 2007; Bin Yusof *et al*., 2008; Lee, 2008; Ismail, 2009), c*ost / fees (i.e. Financial Factor* (Agarwal and Winkler, 1985; Webb, 1993; Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002), *internationalisation of the university* (Deem and Brehony, 2005; Ayoubi and Massoud, 2007; McGowan and Potter, 2008; Wende, 2009) and *peer group / relation* (Mazzarol *et al*., 1997; Licata and Maxham, 1998; Baharun, 2006; Chen, 2007) are plausible dimensions of choice of a university.

Due to the dynamic nature of an edu-tourist's behaviour and variations in the levels of development of edu-tourism resources of countries, it was reported that predictors of edu-tourism destination choice process vary from country to country (Becker and Kolster, 2012). In view of this, it is important to assess dimensions that determine international edu-tourists' behaviour in each stage of edu-tourism destination choice process in the Malaysian context.

3. METHODOLOGY

A quantitative research design was used in this study. The researchers used a structured questionnaire to measure the process international edu-tourists go through in selecting edu-tourism destinations in Malaysia. The enrolment statistics of international edu-tourists, both undergraduates and postgraduates, from each of the following six selected countries: Republic of China, Indonesia, Iran, Nigeria, Sudan, and Yemen, in 13 Malaysian public and private universities were obtained to determine the population of this study; 16, 205 international edu-tourists were thus confirmed. International edu-tourists from these six countries were used in this study because they consistently top the list of countries that generate international edu-tourists to the following 13 Malaysian public and or private universities as presented in Table 1.

Table-1. The List of Selected Malaysian Public and Private Universities with High Enrolment of International Edu-tourists.

Public	Private
Universiti Malaya	Limkokwing University of Technology
Universiti Sains Malaysia	Multimedia University
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia	Linton University
Universiti Putra Malaysia	Taylor's University
International Islamic Universiti Malaysia	Asia Pacific University
Universiti Teknologi Malaysia	INTI International University
Universiti Utara Malaysia	-

Source: Researcher Computation (2015).

To determine the exact sample size for the present study, the suggestion in MacCallum *et al.* (1999) that a sample size of 500 or more observations is adequate for factor analysis, was adopted. To determine sample size of each of the 13 selected universities vis-a-vis the undergraduate and postgraduate international edu-tourists from the six selected countries, the present study conceded to the method of proportional allocation suggested in Kothari (1990). The proportion of international edu-tourists from each of the 6 selected countries (i.e. Pi....6) to be drawn from the sample size (n) of 500 edu-tourists was determined hence; Pi....6, / N. The sample size of each of the six selected countries (i.e. pi.....6) was determined by multiplying the sample size (n) for this study, put at 500, with the enrolment proportion of international edu-tourists for each of the 6 countries hence; Pi....6,/ n. The process was repeated in the 13 universities to determine the sample size for international edu-tourists per country, per university and level of programme. Since it is practically impossible to access the nominal register of international edu-tourists from the six selected countries in each of the targeted institutions, the researchers opted for non-probability sampling with convenience sampling technique. In view of this, the researchers personally visited each of the 13 targeted universities in Malaysia and, thus, administered the structured questionnaires to every international edu-tourist from the six targeted countries until the sample size for international edu-tourist per country, per university and level of programme was met.

Chen's (2007) synthesis instrument was adopted and modified based on previous studies in the domain of edu-tourism destination choice process as operationalized in Tables 2-4. The instrument was originally used to examine dimensions of destination choice process among international edu-tourists from East-Asian countries in respect to the Canadian graduate schools. The modified questionnaire contained four parts, with part one focused on measures of decision to study abroad, and part 2 addressing dimensions of choice of host country (i.e. Malaysia). Part three of the questionnaire posits dimensions of choice of a university in Malaysia. Part one, two, and three of the questionnaire adopted a 5-point Likert scale answer of: 1 for strongly not agreed to 5 strongly agreed. Part four of the questionnaire focused on the demographic information of the respondents.

Table-2. Operationalisation of Observed Variables for Edu-tourist's Predisposition / Decision to Study Abroad.

Latent Variable	Observed Variables	Number of Items	Description	Source
Predisposition / Decision to Study Abroad	EDUCH	5	Edu-tourist characteristics	(McMahon, 1992; Chen, 2007; Hung, 2008).
	ACDLN	5	Academic learning motives	(Rees, 2002; Hung, 2008; Joseph, 2011; Becker and Kolster, 2012; Zhang and Chen, 2012).
	CARDV	5	Career development	(Hung, 2008; Alex, 2010; Becker and Kolster, 2012).
	SOICF	5	Social / cultural Interaction	(Carlson *et al.*, 1990; Van Hoof and Verbeeten, 2005; Hung, 2008).
	ECOFA	5	Economic factors of home country	(Agarwal and Winkler, 1985; McMahon, 1992).
	EDUAS	5	Education and academic system in home country	(Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002; Kapur and McHale, 2005; Zhang and Chen, 2012).

Source: Researchers Computation (2015).

Table-3. Operationalisation of Observed Variables for Choice of a Host Country.

Latent Variable	Observed Variables	Number of Items	Description	Source
Choice of the Host Country	SIGOH	5	Edu-tourist's personal ties to host country	(Chen, 2007; Joseph, 2011; Zhang and Chen, 2012).
	ECNFT	5	Economic factors of host country	(McMahon, 1992; Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002; Chen, 2007).
	HCEDU	5	Host country edu-tourism image	(Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002; Chen, 2007; Wilkins and Huisman, 2011).
	HCSCF	5	Socio-cultural relationship between the host and home Country	(Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002; De Mooij, 2004 ; Chen, 2007; Wilkins *et al.*, 2011).
	ENVGF	5	Environmental factors and geographical link between the edu-tourist's hosts and home country.	(Rees, 2002; Alvord *et al.*, 2008; Kleckley, 2008).

Source: Researchers Computation (2015).

Table-4. Operationalisation of Observed Variables for Choice of the Host University.

Latent Variable	Observed Variables	Number of Items	Description	Source
Choice of Host University	INSCH	5	Institutional Characteristics	(Rees, 2002; Wilkins *et al.*, 2011; Zhang and Chen, 2012).
	COTFS	5	Cost factors	(Agarwal and Winkler, 1985; Webb, 1993; Rees, 2002; Joseph, 2011).
	INTUN	5	Degree of Internationalisation of the host university	(McGowan and Potter, 2008; Wilkins *et al.*, 2011).
	PEGRT	5	Influence of peer group / relation	(Rees, 2002; Chen, 2007; Joseph, 2011; Zhang and Chen, 2012).

Source: Researchers Computation (2015).

Confirmatory Factor Analysis CFA was employed in the present study to test the fitness of the model. The purpose of CFA is to examine the convergent and discriminant validity of a model (Hair *et al.*, 2010). This implies that, to examine determinants of international edu-tourist behaviour at each stage of the choice process, the

percentage of the value of coefficient of determination (R^2) that measures the variability of each dimension on its corresponding construct in the second order measurement model is assessed. However, prior to the conduct of factor analysis, psychometric reliability of measures to determine the extent to which each underlying variable obtained from responses to questionnaires is free from random measurement errors was conducted (Chatfield and Collins, 1992; Kline, 2005; Pallant, 2010).

4. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

The reliability of measures of each construct of edu-tourism destination selection process in respect to international edu-tourists in Malaysia was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. The composite reliability of each of the six aggregate dimensions of decision to study abroad among international edu-tourists in Malaysia ranges between 0.75 to 0.871 except for "Edu-tourist characteristics" and "Academic learning" with composite scores of .439 and .511 respectively. This suggests that the two dimensions are not reliable and are thus dropped from the scale. However, the composite reliability scores of the remaining four dimensions: - Career development (α=0.775), Social cultural factor (α=0.871), Economic factor of the origin country (α=0.859), and education / academic system of the host country (α= 0.704) show that they are all statistically reliable. This implies that items for the remaining four measures of decision to study abroad among international edu-tourists in Malaysia are internally consistent (Barrett, 2007). In addition, the composite reliability score for each of the five aggregate dimensions of edu-tourist's choice of a host country among international edu-tourists in Malaysia ranges from 0.747 and 0.809 with Significant Other, (α=0.747), Economic factor of the host country, (α=0.809), Edu-tourist image of the host country, (α=0.806), Social cultural factor of the host country, (α= 0.806), and Environmental factor of the host country, (α=0.769). This justifies that all the items for the five measures of choice of country among international edu-tourists in Malaysia are internally consistent. Furthermore, the composite scores for each of the four aggregate dimensions of choice of a university among international edu-tourists in Malaysia range from 0.753 and 0.839. The composite reliability value of Institutional characteristics, (α=0.836), Cost / Fees, (α=0.839), Internationalisation of the university, (α=0.812), and Peer group / Relations, (α= 0.753) show that they are all statistically reliable. This implies that items for the four latent subscales of choice of a university among international edu-tourists in Malaysia are internally consistent. The results of the initial model specification did not fit well with the data, as the normed chi-square (CMIN/DF) = 3.36; comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.796; goodness of fit index (GFI) = 0.751; root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.058; and incremental Fit Index (IFI) = 0.797. This indicates the need for further modification of the model. To improve the initial model specification, items with factor loading < 0.6 were deleted from the model, one item at a time starting from the lowest loading. Following this procedure, two items which include EDAS5 and EDAS4 were deleted from the Education and Academic System in the home country (EDUAS) variable. Hair *et al.* (2010) suggested that every latent variable should have a minimum of three items to justify its retention in the model. In view of this, only two items which could not justify the retention of EDUAS variable in the model were deleted. Three items SIGOH2, SIGOH5, and SIGOH1 were deleted in the Significant Others. The variable could not be retained with only two items; hence, it was deleted from the model. Only one item could not justify the retention of the Environmental factor variable as three items which include EVNGF1, EVNGF2, and EVNGF3 were deleted due to low factor loadings. Items HCEDU4 and HCEDU1 were deleted from the EDU_Image variable, while item EVNGF2 and HCSCF2 were deleted from the Socio-cultural variable. Four items, PEGR1, PEGR3, PEGR2, and PEGR5 and two items, COTFS5, and COTFS4 were deleted from the Peer and Cost dimensions respectively; the researchers therefore did not retain both variables in the model.

Items that share relative numbers of large standardized residual covariance with other items were deleted as indicators for possible misspecification. This was confirmed via modification indices (M.I) which show the extent to which overall mode X^2 is reduced by constraining respective paths (Hair *et al.*, 2010). Following this guide,

HCEDU3 was deleted in EDU_Image variable, making us lose the variable due to limited items to justify its retention in the model. An examination of the results of the third attempt yielded better results but the model still did not fit despite the adoption of stringent cut-off factor loadings of < 0.6-0.7. In this case, more specification improvement was warranted.

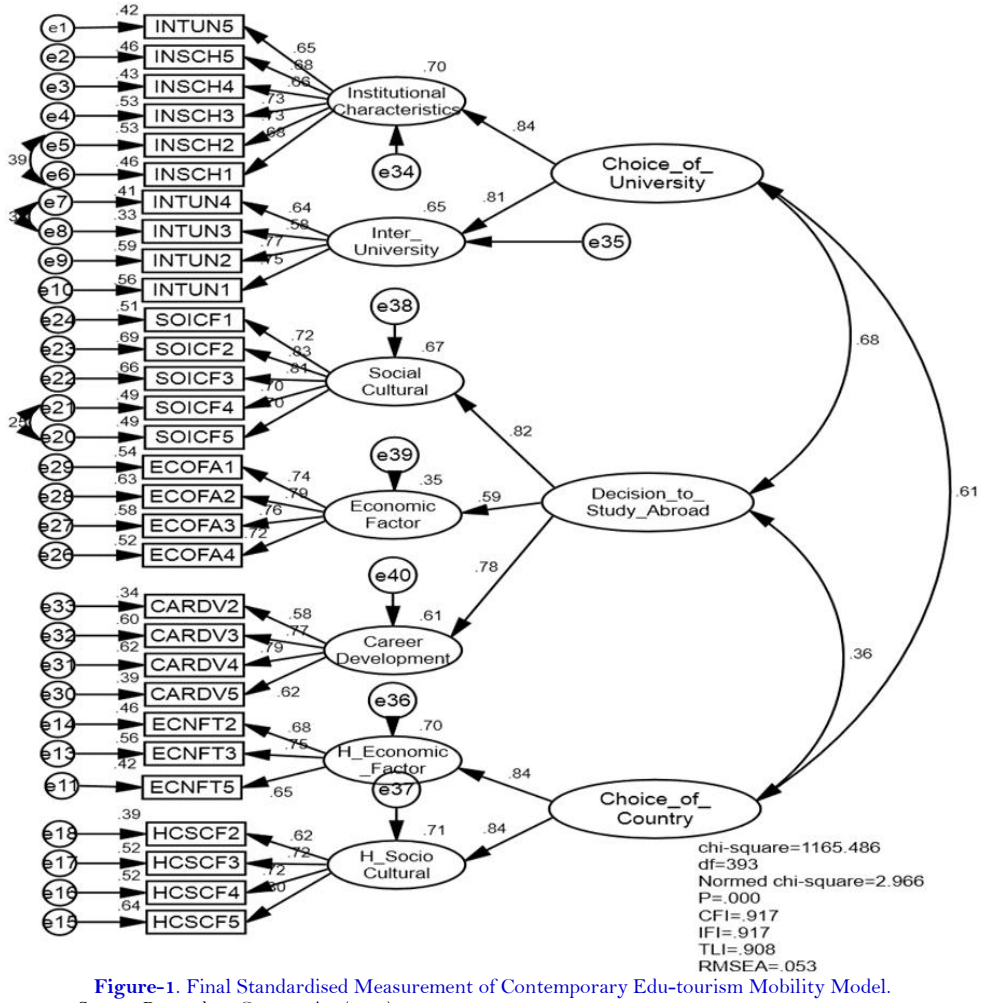

Figure-1. Final Standardised Measurement of Contemporary Edu-tourism Mobility Model.
Source: Researchers Computation (2015).

Following suggestions in Hooper *et al.* (2008) two errors of the same dimensions with high M.I value are said to be redundant, thus, one such item should be deleted or better still, both items should be co-varied. In view of this, items 5, 6, 7, 8, 20 and 21 were correlated. This significantly improves the model as shown in Figure 1. Thus it is revealed that the value of Chi-square (x^2) = 1165.486; Comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.917; Goodness of fit index (IFI) = 0.917; TLI = 0.908; Root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.053; Normed Chi-square = 2.966, and df = 393. This implies that the model fits well with the data.

In addition, all factor loadings (coefficients) of items of each dimension in each stage of edu-tourism destination choice process in the context of international edu-tourists in Malaysia substantially meet the ideal threshold value of > 0.2 (Joreskoh and Sorbom, 2001; Hoe, 2008) as shown in Figure 2.

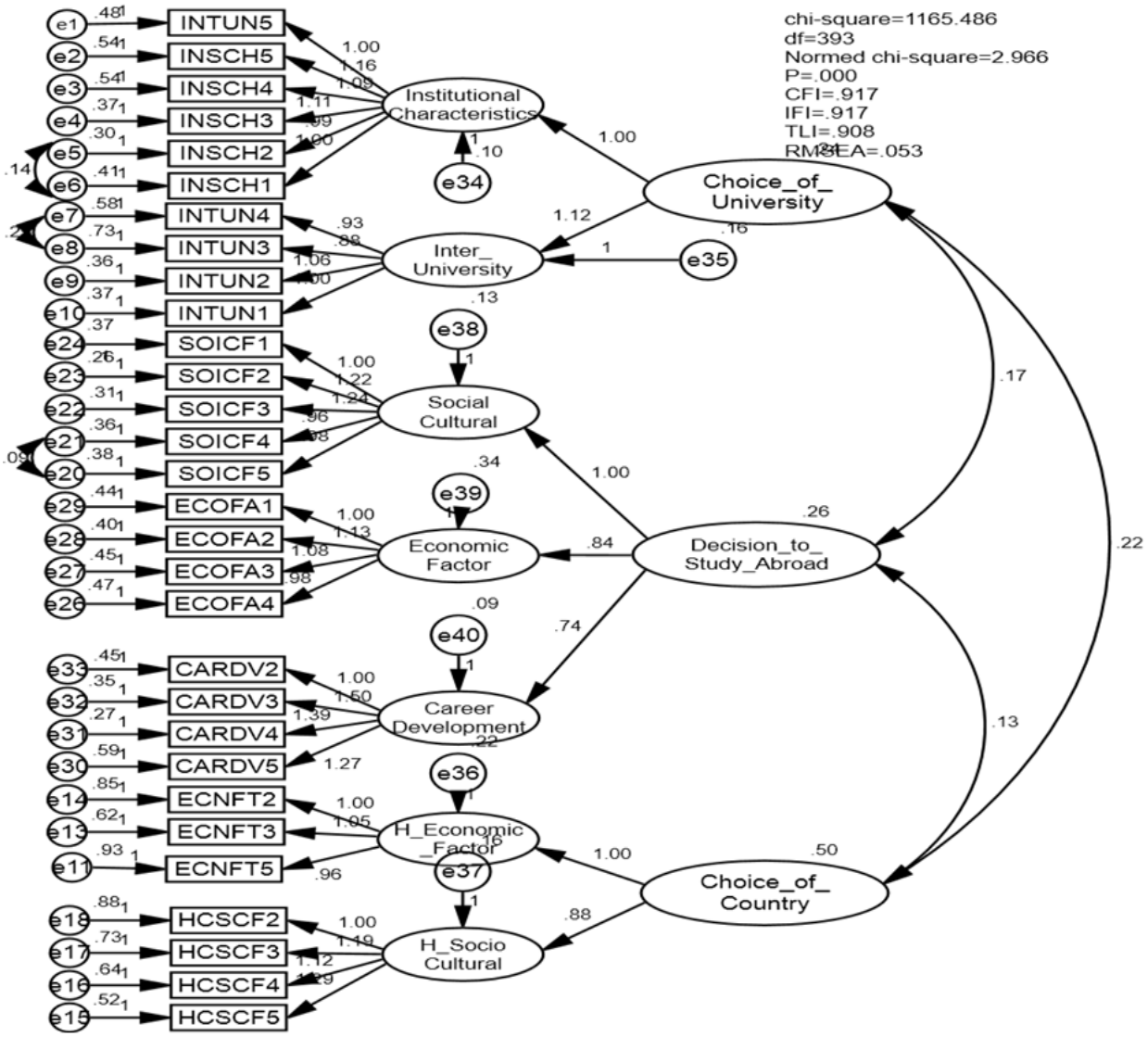

Figure-2. Final Unstandardised Measurement of Contemporary Edu-tourism Mobility Model in Malaysia.
Source: Researchers Computation (2015).

The results of the construct and discriminant validity of the final measurement of the contemporary edu-tourism mobility model shows that both CR and AVE computed for the model meet the cut-off minimum values of 0.7 and 0.5, respectively. The results of composite reliability show that the value of CR is greater than 0.7. This shows the fulfillment of composite reliability as shown in Table 5. Convergent validity is achieved when all the CR values' corresponding to different constructs exceed their respective AVE values. This evidences the fulfillment of this rule as shown in Table 5.

Table-5. Validity and Reliability of Edu-tourist Destination Choice Model in Malaysia.

Edu-tourism Destination Choice Process	CR	AVE	MSV	ASV	Choice of Country	Choice of University	Decision to Study Abroad
Choice of Country	.821	.698	.377	.252	**.836**		
Choice of University	.808	.678	.468	.422	.614	**.823**	
Decision to Study Abroad	.775	.540	.468	.298	.357	.684	**.735**

Source: Researchers Computation (2015).

The discriminant validity was assessed by examining both minimum shared variance (MSV) and average shared variance (ASV). The rule of thumb for achieving discriminant validity is if the values of both MSV and ASV

are less than their corresponding AVE values for each of the constructs. The evidence of this rule is met as shown in Table 5. The result of coefficient of determination (R2) that validates determinants of international edu-tourists' behaviour at each stage of the choice process shows that social cultural factors of international edu-tourists accounted for about 0.67 (67%) of the total variance, followed by quest for career development which accounted for 0.61 (61%) of the total variance, and lastly, economic factor of edu-tourist's home countries accounted for 0.35 (35%) of the total variance. In terms of determinants of choice of country (Malaysia) among international edu-tourists, the results of the percentage of the value of R^2 shows that social cultural factors of Malaysia accounted for about 0.71 (71%) of the total variance, followed by economic factors of Malaysia which accounted for 0.70 (70%) of the total variance. In addition, the results of determinants of choice of Malaysian universities among international edu-tourists show that institutional characteristics of Malaysian universities accounted for 0.70 (70%) of the total variance, while internationalisation of Malaysian universities accounted for 0.65 (65%) of the total variance.

5. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The current study sought to establish determinants of international edu-tourist's choice behaviour at each stage of edu-tourism destination choice process in Malaysia. The major findings of the study are as follows;

i. Regarding the determinants of international edu-tourist's decision to study abroad, rather than their country of origin, the study found that the social cultural factor of edu-tourists has the biggest influence on edu-tourists' decisions to study abroad. This is followed by the quest for career development, and lastly, the economic factor of edu-tourist's home countries. This finding is not in conformity with previous literature on determinants of decision to study abroad. McMahon (1992) examined determinants of international edu-tourists from emerging economies to study abroad in respect to the USA in the 70s. The outcome of the study revealed economic factors of the edu-tourist's home country as the strongest determinant, followed by the academic factor of international edu-tourist's home country. Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) based their study of determinants of international edu-tourists from four Asian countries - China, India, Indonesia, and Taiwan who studied at Australia. Their study revealed that the social-cultural factor is the strongest determinant, followed by academic learning, and lastly the perceived quality of the overseas education. Chen's (2007) results on determinants of decision of East Asian edu-tourists who choose to study at Canadian graduate schools revealed socio- economic status of the edu-tourists as the biggest determinant, followed by edu-tourist's personal characteristics, and lastly, the academic ability of edu-tourists.

ii. In respect to determinants of international edu-tourist's choice of host country (i.e. Malaysia), the findings show that social / cultural, and economic factors in Malaysia have almost the same degree of influence on international edu-tourist's choice of Malaysia. This finding is partially in conformity with previous literature in respect to determinants of choice of a host country. Agarwal and Winkler (1985) examined determinants of choice of USA among international edu-tourists from 15 developing countries in Africa, Asia, and Middle – East. The study revealed that the economic factor of the USA was the strongest determinant. McMahon (1992) studied the determinants of choice behaviour of international edu-tourists from emerging economies that chose the USA in the 70s. The study revealed the economy of the USA as the major determinant. Mazzarol and Soutar's (2002) study focused on determinants of choice of country (Australia) among international edu-tourists from the four Asian countries - China, India, Indonesia, and Taiwan who studied in Australia. The study revealed that the economy of Australia was the strongest determinant.

iii. On the determinants of choice of university among international edu-tourists in Malaysia, the study found that institutional characteristics of Malaysian universities are considered the biggest influence. This is followed by the internationalisation nature of Malaysian universities. This finding is in conformity with previous literature in respect of determinants of choice of a university. Lee (2008) examined the determinants of choice of a university in USA among international edu-tourists from East Asia. The study revealed that institutional characteristics are the biggest determinant. Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) conducted a study of determinants of choice of a university among

international edu-tourists from the 4 Asian countries - China, India, Indonesia, and Taiwan who studied in Australia. The study revealed that the choice of a university in Australia among international edu-tourists from Asian countries was mostly determined by institutional characteristics.

6. CONCLUSION AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

One of the conclusions that can be drawn from this study is that the socio-cultural factor is the biggest determinant of decision to study abroad among international edu-tourists in Malaysia. This is followed by quest for career development, and lastly, the economic factor of edu-tourist's home countries. In addition, the socio-cultural and economic factors prevalent in Malaysia have almost the same degree of influence in determining the choice of Malaysia as a preferred edu-tourism destination among international edu-tourists. Furthermore, international edu-tourists in Malaysia are motivated to choose Malaysian universities due to their institutional characteristics, and internationalization features. Based on these conclusions, it is pertinent to state that the knowledge of the motive of the edu-tourists to study abroad may be useful in segmenting tourism, and edu-tourism market in Malaysia, including, its usefulness to designing promotional programs, and decision making about edu-tourism destination development. Since the findings in this study disclose the socio-cultural factor of edu-tourists as having the biggest influence on edu-tourists' decisions to travel for higher education outside their countries, hence, to sustain the inflow of international edu-tourists to Malaysia, the ministry of tourism Malaysia in collaboration with the ministry of higher education can explore a new thrust of culture-base or adventure tourism to attract this specific niche market of education oriented travellers.

Also, tourists' travel behaviour can be driven by external factors; hence, the decisions on where tourists go are based on the attributes found at the destination. It is critical to identify the unique attributes that are perceived as important by the visitor to ensure the effective positioning strategy of a destination. In the context of the present study, the economic and socio-cultural factors of Malaysia are perceived as important in choosing Malaysia as a preferred edu-tourism destination among international edu-tourists. Hence, the government of Malaysia and tourism operators should make the most of the attractive country image of Malaysia in the context of its economic and socio-cultural factors as perceived by international edu-tourists to design marketing strategies for the country to attract more edu-tourists. Furthermore, the government of Malaysia and the private sector should aggressively promote condusive environments and atmosphere at the Malaysian tourism destinations visited by international edu-tourists to encourage social interaction especially where tourist-host interaction is low. The involvement of local residents in providing edu-tourism services (i.e. Tour guides, edu-tourist recruitment agents among others) could be appropriate strategies to achieving this goal.

Finally, the results of the present study have further identified the influence of institutional characteristics of Malaysian universities, including, its internalisation attribute as a contributing factor to attracting international edu-tourists. The ministry of tourism Malaysia can maximise the institutional image, and internalisation reputation of Malaysian universities as essential tourism assets for the country to develop her edu-tourism industry.

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