

UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA

**LEARNING OUTCOMES OF IRANIAN
STUDENTS AS EDUCATIONAL
TOURIST IN MALAYSIAN
UNIVERSITIES**

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Thesis submitted in fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Faculty of Business Management

February 2016

ABSTRACT

Today, international students are recognized as a rather unique category of tourists. The perceptions of this group are shaped based on whole life experiences in the host country. In response, this thesis develops a model to evaluate the learning outcomes of Iranian students who study in Malaysian universities from the educational tourist perspective. This model extends the effect of service quality, image, price, and student perception on learning outcomes of Iranian students. Learning outcomes is a product of the university that is as an indicator of institutional quality and effectiveness. In addition, this model examines the influence of these constructs on learning outcomes by mediating effect of satisfaction. The methodology of study is based on mixed method research. The researcher used embedding dataset in the mixed method in order to support the proposed theoretical model. In the qualitative part, a semi-structured in-depth interview with Iranian students was conducted in order to gain a deeper understanding of the perception of those respondents towards Malaysian universities and Malaysia as a destination study. In this regard, the constant comparative method was used for data analysis as it allowed the researchers to identify foundation categories by focusing on three different types of coding (open, axial, and selective). In the quantitative part, a survey, by using self-administered questionnaires has been adopted to collect data for the constructs proposed in the theoretical model from Iranian students who are in the last year of their studies, graduated, or have graduated from Malaysia and starting with another degree. Structural equation modeling is also used to validate the model. The results of the study indicate that satisfaction is a complete mediation variable between image and learning outcomes. The results also reveal that satisfaction is a partial mediation variable between price and learning outcomes. Finally, the model failed to support the relationships between service quality, student perception and the learning outcomes of Iranian students, as well as by mediating effect of satisfaction. These results have extensive practical implications for the education and tourism organizations. Managers of universities must pay attention to reliable, responsive, and empathetic services which are indeed related to improved service quality perceptions. A commitment to excellence in the delivery of services causes student satisfaction as international students have different forms of motivation for studying abroad. Lastly, a favorable image can boost a university attraction through increased student satisfaction. Likewise, high international image and prestige of a destination is an attraction to international students as it is expected that image and prestige would open up better career opportunities for them. Finally, this thesis reveals the perceptions of Iranian international students towards Malaysian universities and Malaysia as a destination study.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Firstly, I wish to thank God for giving me the opportunity to embark on my PhD and for completing this long and challenging journey successfully. My gratitude and thanks go to my supervisor Dr. Nor Hashima Hashim. Thank you for the support, patience and ideas in assisting me with this project. I also would like to express my gratitude to Assoc. Prof. Dr. Anizah Binti Zainuddin, Prof. Dr. Faridah Haji Hassan, Dr. Sariwati Bt Mohd Shariff, Dr. Herwina Binti Rosnan, Prof. Dr. Rosmimah, and Prof. Dr. Rosidah Musa for providing the knowledge and assistance.

Finally, and most importantly, I would like to thank my husband Mahdi. His support, encouragement, quiet patience and unwavering love were undeniably the bedrock upon which the past six years of my life have been built. His tolerance of my occasional vulgar moods is a testament in itself of her unyielding devotion and love. I thank my parents, Mohammad and Zahra, and my brother Morteza for their faith in me and allowing me to be as ambitious as I wanted. It was under their watchful eye that I gained so much drive and an ability to tackle challenges head on. Also, I thank Mahdi's parents, Valliolah and Ghodsi. They, like Mahdi and I, are a couple who endured and provided me with unending encouragement and support.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 PREAMBLE

This chapter presents the structure and content of the thesis. It is divided into nine sections. The chapter begins with the background of the study. The problem statement is consequently developed, followed by the research questions and research objectives. The scope and significance of the study are then presented, and the chapter ends with organization of the thesis.

1.2 BACKGROUND OF STUDY

Today, international students are recognized as a rather unique category of tourists (Huang, 2008). This type of tourist who travels to a country different from their own to pursue their tertiary study is characterized as educational tourist because of the collection of both educational and tourist experiences (Huang, 2008). For instance, besides the educational experiences, promoting personal career, cross-cultural skills, and global mindedness are significant outcomes of tourist experiences (Kwai, 2009). In recent decades, changes in the tourism and education industries have been accelerated (Lam et al., 2011). In particular, the convergence of the tourism and education industries has provided mobility and opened up new horizons for international students in the last two decades. This situation arouses students to travel abroad in order to develop their personal abilities and obtain a wide variety of skills (Kwai, 2009).

Higher education as a commodity market is expected to become one of the world's largest industries (Tarry, 2011). By 2025, the global demand for international higher education is predicted to 7.2 million with a compound growth rate of 5.8 percent (Hyam, 2003). In this regard, the fast growth export of international education