Increasing destination loyalty of international students towards Malaysian higher educational institutions

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
	Educational tourism has gained popularity worldwide due to the emergence of the knowledge economy that has increased the global demand for tertiary education. Therefore, the trend has inspired this study to examine the factors affecting international students' destination loyalty to revisit and recommend Malaysian higher educational institutions as their educational tourism attractions. In this study, 200 international students who were currently studying in Malaysian higher educational institutions were recruited through purposive sampling technique. The statistical package for the social sciences (SPSS) and SmartPLS were performed for data collection analysis. The findings demonstrated that the service quality, destination image, and cost of the study were positively correlated with the students' satisfaction wherein students' satisfaction contributed positively and significantly to the destination loyalty of international students in recommending and revisiting Malaysia for educational tourism. This study provided all the higher educational institutions and authorities in Malaysia with a better understanding of international students' expectations and perceptions towards studying in Malaysia. Subsequently, the relevant stakeholders could implement effective strategies to improve and assist the Malaysian government in accomplishing the aspiration of becoming one of the most excellent international education hubs in the world.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, tourism is one of the best performing industries across the globe as it is the crucial element for economic growth and employment generation in various nations. In 2019, United Nation World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) acknowledged the tourism sector as one of the most profit-making industries in the world had generated total revenue of USD 1.7 trillion in exports and the number of tourist arrivals hit the 1.4 billion mark in 2018 [1]. Evidently, a similar effect could be witnessed where the total number of tourists travelling to Malaysia was 25.8 million and had directly contributed RM 84 billion to the country's gross domestic product (GDP) in 2018 [2]. In Malaysia, the tourism industry can be categorised into cultural heritage tourism, agro-tourism, medical tourism, and educational tourism.

The significant transformations noticed in tourism and education industries has resulted in a new segment, namely, educational tourism derived from the combination of both with each of its quintessence. In recent years, many Southeast Asian countries have started to recognize that educational tourism is not only

just a simple amalgamation but also plays an important role in the economy, owing to the advent of the knowledge economy that has markedly enhanced the demand for higher education globally [3]. On the one hand, educational tourism is perceived to have a significant influence on the decision-making process amongst the industry players from the social and economic points of view. On the other hand, countries that are capable of creating a sustainable environment for educational tourism that comprises different international learning programmes will be more outstanding [4].

Educational tourism has been gaining traction for decades that could be witnessed from its current global demand which is estimated to reach seven million students [5]. Nevertheless, the number of international students enrolling in Malaysia has been declining in recent years [6]. Although a report disclosed that the Malaysian government aimed to hit the target of 200,000 international students in 2020, the Ministry of Higher Education highlighted that the number of foreign students enrolled in Malaysia has dropped by 20% from 2017 to 2019 [7], [8]. Nonetheless, the slower pace of growth in the number of Malaysian international students hinders the efforts of the Malaysian government to successfully achieve the target [9].

One of the main reasons for Malaysia to undergo the aforementioned decline is the low satisfaction and loyalty amongst international students compared to other countries [10]. Dissatisfaction occurs when the performances of the higher educational institutions and learning experiences do not meet the expectations of the foreign students [11]. Therefore, these students would unlikely revisit and recommend Malaysia to others as one of the educational tourism destinations [6], [11]. Additionally, the low satisfaction and loyalty amongst the international students became the obstacles for Malaysia in becoming a global education hub as the students might prefer other Southeast Asian countries such as Singapore and Thailand [5].

In addition, there is a dearth of studies investigating the factors that affect international students' satisfaction and loyalty towards educational tourism destinations, especially in the Malaysian context. This is in contrast to the majority of the relevant past studies that study the local students instead of their foreign counterparts [12]–[14]. Hence, this study aims to determine the factors influencing the satisfaction levels of international students and also how it affects their destination loyalty towards Malaysian higher educational institutions. The findings of this study would provide a better comprehension of the international students' rationales in making their destination choices together with their satisfaction and loyalty to Malaysia for their further studies in the future. Moreover, it would provide insightful implications to the Malaysian government, Ministry of Tourism, Malaysian higher educational institutions, and tour operators to accomplish their targets with effective strategies.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

Over the years, educational tourism has been scrutinized by scholars and researchers and its definitions vary from time to time. In recent years, educational tourism was summarized with the provided definition as a form of tourism activity in which people travelled to a destination for educational pursuits [15] and the improvements of academic standards [16]. In essence, educational tourism is fundamentally motivated by the aim of obtaining an education. Meanwhile, certain academicians rejected this definition as they perceived the deed of seeking education could either be the ultimate or proximal goal of educational tourism. As such, the definition of educational tourism to date encompasses any travel-related activities wherein people journey to specific places for knowledge and skill attainment within those unique environments and educational pursuits can either be the primary or secondary purpose of their travel [17]. With the increased popularity of education tourism, it is of crucial importance for further exploration of the factors attracting international students to Malaysia.

2.1. Destination loyalty

Loyalty is defined as the outcome of consumers' satisfaction which leads to customer engagement including repeat purchase and patronization [18]. From the perspectives of tourism, destination loyalty is the engagement of tourists with their travel destinations wherein they form favorable attitudes to a particular tourism attraction, and they are likely to perform positive tourist behaviors such as revisiting, recommending, and positive word-of-mouth (WOM) [19]. The positive destination loyalty resulted in a higher revisiting rate of international students to their educational destinations for re-enrolment and further studies such as postgraduate or doctorate programs [20]. Besides, positive destination loyalty amongst the foreign students could also lead to higher levels of positive WOM as they were more likely to introduce and recommend their favorite destinations to others [6]. Hence, destination loyalty in the context of educational tourism refers to the tendency of international students to revisit and recommend their educational attractions to others such as friends, families, and relatives [21], [22].

2.2. Service quality

Service quality is defined as the ability of services to satisfy the needs and expectations of consumers [23]. Furthermore, service quality is benchmarked by the level of capacity to fulfil the quality standards that have been determined by the consumers, and better service quality will engender a higher level of customer satisfaction. For educational tourism, the quality of service is also one of the essential attributes in sustaining the satisfaction of international students [24], [25]. As illustrated by previous studies, students' perception of service quality mainly derived from personal evaluations of the available services such as learning environment, teaching quality, and the facilities provided by the tertiary educational institutions including the libraries, classrooms, and student hostels [26]. Support from classmates, teachers and families, self-efficacy, music, living environments, personal and teacher-student relationship have also been identified to be playing vital roles in contributing to the quality of school life [27].

Service quality was also discovered to be an essential factor in significantly influencing international students' satisfaction in the past studies and the degree of satisfaction was dependent on how they perceived the quality of services in their higher educational institutions such as academic services, campus facilities, and staff services [28]–[30]. In educational tourism, international students would be able to have a higher level of satisfaction towards their higher educational institutions when universities delivered a higher level of service quality to them [31]. In addition, well-functioning and comprehensive facilities of the universities and colleges in Malaysia also play an important role in improving students' satisfaction [32]. Evidently, the international students' satisfaction level was influenced by their experiences of consuming the available services [33]. Therefore, it can be deduced that there exists a positive relationship between service quality and international students' satisfaction in which better service quality will produce higher levels of satisfaction. Based on the previous findings, a hypothesis is formulated as: Service quality significantly and positively influences international students' satisfaction (H1).

2.2. Destination image

Brand image can be elucidated as a set of beliefs developed in consumers' mind in terms of the brand identities and characteristics through the experiences of the brand's physical and non-physical attributes, both directly and indirectly [34]. When inspecting from the aspect of tourism, a destination image can be different from a product image due to their respective features [35]. For example, a specific destination contains distinctive economic, social, cultural, and political characteristics which cannot be found similarly in another product [36], [37]. A destination image was the perception of tourists towards a particular location shaped by its unique characteristics and attributes [38]. Whereas, some researchers [39], [40] defined destination image as an overall representation of ideas, opinions, and impressions of tourists towards a travel attraction. In addition, the image of a destination can be established by existing attributes including price levels, hospitality, food, hygiene, receptiveness, nightlife, personal safety, atmosphere, political stability, customs, cultural backgrounds, festivals, architecture, history, climate, reputation, and safety [41]. Nonetheless, destination image could be subjective to the personal interpretation of every tourist and there is no universal consensus as different travelers might have different notions even to the same destination [42]. As such, destination image can be considered as the general impression of individuals towards a specific destination [43]. Based on the discussions, a hypothesis is postulated as: Destination image significantly and positively influences international students' satisfaction (H2).

2.3. Study costs

One of the most identified factors amongst students in choosing a destination for their education is affordability. The cost factor has been appraised by much research literature and pinpointed as a key influence of students' satisfaction towards an educational institution [44], [45]. From the economic point of view, the cost is described as an exchange made in obtaining an item or service of similar value [46], [47]. In this study, the costs of education are defined as the number of financial resources expended by the students in receiving their intended education [48]. Simultaneously, some academicians opined that the study costs should also include non-monetary expenditures apart from their monetary equivalents. For instance, monetary costs are associated with direct spending including tuition fees and living expenses, while non-monetary costs refer to the indirect trade-offs such as going for a part-time job instead of studying [45], [49]. Although the educational costs could be categorized into the monetary and non-monetary aspects, academicians had propounded that monetary costs of study should be prioritized when determining the factors in affecting students' decision-making process compared to the non-monetary expenses [50].

In addition, study costs consist of two major elements, namely tuition fees and living costs while other relevant spendings such as travel costs, transportation costs and non-monetary expenditures play a relatively less essential role amongst the components of the cost factor [51]. A study found that lower costs of study could lead to a higher satisfaction level amongst the international university students as the major concerns for students in tertiary education were tuition fees and living expenses [52]. If tuition fees or costs

of living were too expensive, their overall satisfaction levels might plummet when they perceived their educational pursuits were overpriced and exceeded the values of the ensuing returns from received education [53]. However, some studies manifested contrary findings in which it was discovered that the costs of study including tuition fees and living costs would not have a significant effect on international students' satisfaction. This was because they emphasized the services and benefits received from the universities or colleges and they apprehended that the costs were to increase annually owing to inflation [54]. Thus, it is crucial to investigate the effect of study costs on students' satisfaction, especially on international students. The following hypothesis is proposed as: Costs of study significantly and positively influences international students' satisfaction (H3).

2.4. Students' satisfaction

Satisfaction is a state of feeling in an individual who has experienced an outcome that can fulfil his or her expectations. Nevertheless, if the outcome fails to meet the anticipations, it will result in dissatisfaction [55]. Additionally, satisfaction can be defined as a form of pleasure obtained after the fulfilment of one's needs or desires [56]. In terms of education, students can be considered as the consumers who engage themselves in the educational services offered by their educational institutions [57] and their satisfaction is regarded as a short-term attitude resulting from personal evaluations of their educational experiences [58], [59]. Factors such as the quality of university facilities and degree programs would significantly influence students' satisfaction levels [60] and might shape their behavioral intentions accordingly. Past research had indicated that the satisfaction of international students would directly influence their destination loyalty and future intentions to revisit their educational destinations [61]–[63], and a higher satisfaction level would increase WOM intention in recommending families or friends to enroll their satisfactory universities or colleges [64]. Aside from that, some studies' findings also demonstrated that students' satisfaction could positively influence revisit intention wherein it was revealed that the satisfaction of international students was the key driver for re-enrolment in their further academic pursuits [63]. When perusing the aforementioned variables in the Malaysian context, it was also found that highly satisfied students who participated in their international exchange programs were more likely to revisit Malaysia for further studies in the future [62]. Consequently, when students are satisfied with overall education services, destination loyalty can be firmly established in which they are more inclined to revisit and recommend the educational destinations that provided high satisfaction to them. Therefore, the hypothesis is proposed as: Students' satisfaction significantly and positively affects destination loyalty of international students to revisit and recommend their educational institutions for educational tourism (H4).

2.5. Research framework

Figure 1 delineates the research framework. It describes the linkages between the service quality, destination image, and cost of study, students' satisfaction and destination loyalty. A total of four hypotheses were developed in the study. Service quality, destination image and costs of study have impacts on students' satisfaction. In addition, students' satisfaction is positively related to destination loyalty.
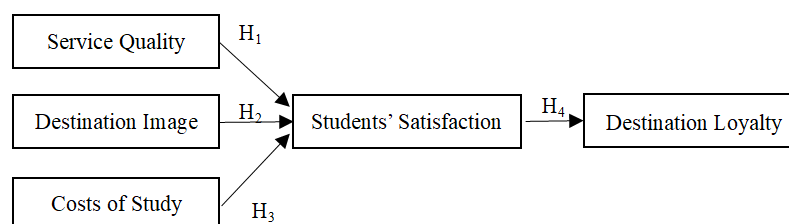

Figure 1. Research framework

3. RESEARCH METHOD
3.1. Population and sampling

Population refers to a set of people or objects with common and specific characteristics [65]. From research perspectives, the target population is defined as the population of interest that is related to the studies of the researchers [66]. Thus, the target population of this study is the international students who study in Malaysian higher educational institutions. This study employed G*Power software to determine the sample size and the minimum required sample size was 129. However, researchers in the past research [67] suggested that a sample size of 200 was considered an acceptable amount when conducting research.

Therefore, the sample size of this study is 200. In addition, this study adopted the non-probability sampling methodology which was the purposive sampling technique because the focus of this study was international students who enrolled in Malaysian higher educational institutions for educational purposes.

3.2. Research instrument and measures

Data can be collected both qualitatively and quantitatively. Qualitative data is unstructured and non-numerical information including ideas, opinions, and suggestions that can be collected from observations and interviews, whereas quantitative data gathered via questionnaires and polls is countable and measurable with the applications of numbers and formulas to convert this numerical data into meaningful information for researchers [68]. In this study, the quantitative approach was adopted and the questionnaire instrument was employed to collect the primary data from the respondents online in the format of Google Forms. The questionnaire consists of two sections: Section A and Section B. In Section A, there are ten questions regarding the demographic profiles of respondents such as the age, gender, countries of origin, and the Malaysian higher educational institutions they enroll in. Section B consists of 25 questions wherein the first 15 questions are related to the respondents' opinions on the possible factors in affecting the satisfaction and loyalty of international students, namely the service quality, destination image, and costs of study while the remaining 10 questions are asking on their satisfaction and loyalty towards Malaysian higher educational institutions.

The four measurement items of destination loyalty were adapted from previous study [69]. This measure aims to investigate the levels of loyalty amongst international students to recommend their universities to friends and relatives, their tendency of positive WOM, and decisions to choose the same universities in the future. In addition, the five items measuring students' satisfaction and the antecedences for students' satisfaction including the service quality (eight items), destination image (five items), and costs of study (three items) were also adapted and adopted from several studies [62], [69], [70].

The 5-point Likert Scale was enacted in Section B of the questionnaire ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree), 2 (Disagree), 3 (Neutral), 4 (Agree), and finally to 5 (Strongly Agree). After the stage of data collection, the data were screened, processed and analyzed by using the statistical package for the social sciences (SPSS) and SmartPLS software. The SmartPLS software was employed as the proposed research framework of this study includes several constructs to model the relationships.

3.3. Data collection procedure

In this study, the research questionnaires were distributed online and also manually as physical copies. The online questionnaire was developed and formulated before converted into the format of Google Forms and distributed to the international students studying in Malaysian higher educational institutions. On the other hand, paper-and-pencil self-administered questionnaires were only distributed to the foreign students from Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM). The entire process of data collection for this study took approximately two months which commenced from September until the end of October, 2020. The collected data were analyzed by performing normality test, descriptive analysis, reliability test, validity test, and structural equation modelling.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
4.1. Profile of respondents

After analyzing the 200 responses, the demographic profile demonstrated that the majority of the international students were male (56%) with 44% as female. More than one-third of them aged between 21 to 25 years old (37%). Around two-fifths of the respondents came from Indonesia (21.5%) and China (17%), opted for public university (74.5%), enrolled in undergraduate programs (58.5%) as full-time (96.5%), and was self-financed (55.5%).

4.2. Normality test

The ranges of skewness and kurtosis values were between -2 to +2 and were considered a normally distributed data set [71]. The findings showed that the skewness and kurtosis values for all the variables were within the acceptable range. The skewness values ranged from -0.52 to -0.05 whereas kurtosis values ranged from -0.13 to 0.76. Hence, the data set in this study could be considered to be normally distributed.

4.3. Assessment of measurement model (outer)

The measurement model was evaluated with three main criteria: consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. The value of composite reliability for each construct should be above 0.70 to ensure the measures' internal consistency [72]. As shown in Table 1, the results indicated that the composite reliability of all variables ranged between 0.79 and 0.89. Besides, the convergent validity of the

constructs was assessed from the values of outer loadings and average variance extracted (AVE). The outer loadings of each item should be above 0.70 while the AVE should be higher than 0.50. Although some outer loading values were lower than 0.70, they could still be considered acceptable as their values of AVE were larger than 0.50 [72]. Therefore, convergent validity was established for all the variables in this study.

In terms of the assessment of discriminant validity by utilizing Fornell and Larcker criterion [73] and cross-loading respectively, the AVE of each construct should be larger than their highest values of squared correlation with other constructs. Table 2 shows the values of each construct were: costs of study (CS)–0.75, destination image (DI)–0.71, destination loyalty (DL)–0.71, service quality (SQ)–0.71, and students' satisfaction (SS)–0.72. Besides, the values of each item's cross-loadings on its construct were required to be larger than that of the cross-loadings on other constructs. Table 3 demonstrates that the values of each item's cross-loadings were the highest on its construct compared to that of the values of other constructs in the same rows and columns. Thus, this showed that the discriminant validity was established as the findings fulfilled the requirements of the discriminant validity.

Table 1. Convergent validity assessment

Construct	Item	Outer loading	Composite reliability	Average variance extracted	Convergent validity
Service quality (SQ)	SQ1	0.712	0.890	0.502	Yes
	SQ2	0.684			
	SQ3	0.697			
	SQ4	0.727			
	SQ5	0.702			
	SQ6	0.728			
	SQ7	0.710			
	SQ8	0.708			
Destination image (DI)	DI1	0.708	0.835	0.503	Yes
	DI2	0.689			
	DI3	0.754			
	DI4	0.697			
	DI5	0.695			
Costs of study (CS)	CS1	0.710	0.793	0.561	Yes
	CS2	0.814			
	CS3	0.719			
Students' satisfaction (SS)	SS1	0.758	0.841	0.514	Yes
	SS2	0.716			
	SS3	0.717			
	SS4	0.723			
	SS5	0.668			
Destination loyalty (DL)	DL1	0.710	0.800	0.501	Yes
	DL2	0.734			
	DL3	0.706			
	DL4	0.680			

Table 2. Assessment of discriminant validity

Construct	CS	DI	DL	SQ	SS
CS	0.749				
DI	0.668	0.709			
DL	0.571	0.636	0.708		
SQ	0.677	0.690	0.585	0.709	
SS	0.601	0.643	0.595	0.594	0.717

4.4. Assessment of structural model (inner)

The structural model was assessed via the values of variance inflation factor (VIF) and R^2. Construct VIF was adequate if the value of each construct was below five. Researchers in their previous studies [74] determined that the acceptable range of R^2 values was between 0.75 (substantial), 0.50 (moderate), and 0.25 (weak). The result manifested that the R^2 values were between 0.34 and 0.48. Therefore, the R^2 value of this study was accepted.

Table 4 and Figure 2 show the bootstrapping results of the entire model and the assessment of path coefficients. The findings discovered that SS had the highest influence on DL as it achieved the highest t-value of 11.50. In this study, all the relationships were supported as the requirements of t-value >1.65 and p-value <0.05 had been fulfilled.

Table 3. Assessment of discriminant validity (cross-loading)

Item	CS	DI	DL	SQ	SS
CS1	0.710	0.443	0.416	0.497	0.381
CS2	0.814	0.572	0.460	0.501	0.542
CS3	0.719	0.472	0.406	0.538	0.403
DI1	0.487	0.708	0.469	0.470	0.465
DI2	0.514	0.689	0.466	0.404	0.451
DI3	0.526	0.754	0.466	0.520	0.487
DI4	0.454	0.697	0.462	0.558	0.385
DI5	0.385	0.695	0.397	0.503	0.477
DL1	0.429	0.405	0.710	0.423	0.407
DL2	0.388	0.478	0.734	0.422	0.469
DL3	0.374	0.438	0.706	0.398	0.413
DL4	0.431	0.481	0.680	0.415	0.389
SQ1	0.582	0.513	0.549	0.684	0.469
SQ2	0.460	0.502	0.449	0.684	0.469
SQ3	0.411	0.461	0.328	0.697	0.382
SQ4	0.512	0.491	0.389	0.727	0.418
SQ5	0.449	0.451	0.405	0.702	0.337
SQ6	0.454	0.511	0.420	0.728	0.428
SQ7	0.438	0.444	0.370	0.710	0.426
SQ8	0.511	0.524	0.376	0.708	0.400
SS1	0.436	0.486	0.427	0.394	0.758
SS2	0.410	0.499	0.388	0.519	0.716
SS3	0.399	0.403	0.400	0.390	0.717
SS4	0.395	0.432	0.449	0.419	0.723
SS5	0.502	0.474	0.460	0.402	00668

Table 4. Assessment of path coefficient

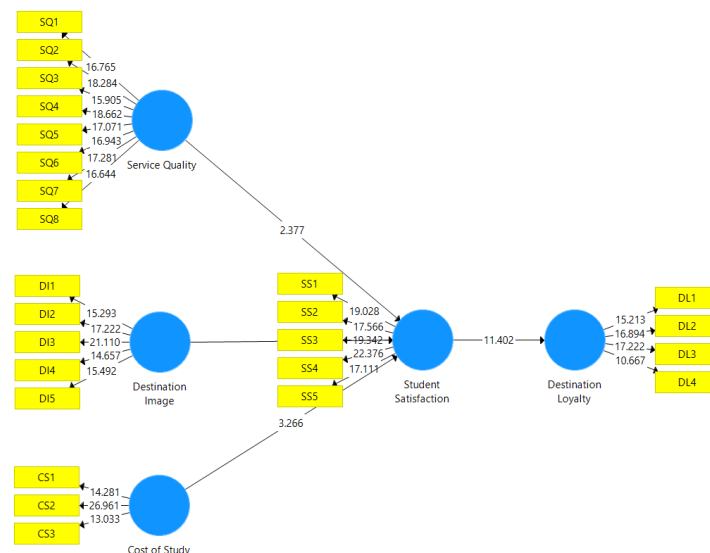| Relationship	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	p-values
CS -> SS	0.236	0.238	0.074	3.187	0.002
DI ->SS	0.354	0.354	0.082	4.302	0.000
SQ ->SS	0.190	0.196	0.079	2.402	0.017
SS -> DL	0.595	0.601	0.052	11.500	0.000

Figure 2. Bootstrapping result of the model

First and foremost, the findings indicated that SQ possessed a significant and positive influence on the satisfaction level amongst the international students (t-statistic=2.40; p-value=0.02) as the value of t-statistic was larger than 1.96 whereas the p-value was smaller than 0.05. This result was concurrent with that of the past research [28]–[30], [33] wherein the authors propounded that international students' satisfaction levels were contingent on their experiences of service consumption including academic services, university facilities, and staff services in Malaysian universities and colleges.

Furthermore, the results showed that there was a significant and positive relationship between DI and SS of the foreign students (t-statistic=4.30, p-value<0.001). As the international students could also be regarded as educational tourists who visited a destination for educational purposes, the results of this study were also aligned with previous studies which focused on examining tourists' perspectives [75], [76]. This suggested that a desirable DI could improve international students' satisfaction. Besides, this findings were also consistent with a study [77] in which the foreign students had indicated that Malaysia was a safe country and the Malaysian culture was also popular amongst them.

Thirdly, the significant and positive relationship between CS and SS amongst the international students (t-statistic=3.19, p-value=0.002) was also discovered, and similarly, it was also consistent with the results of previous studies [52], [53]. It could be postulated that the higher expenses for tertiary education such as tuition fees, accommodation, and transportations might lead to increased dissatisfaction levels amongst the foreign students as they would perceive the education services to be low in 'value for money'. In addition, the economical consideration factors including costs of living and costs of education could influence students' satisfaction levels when studying abroad as they might have anticipated being provided with the programs and accommodation facilities at reasonable fees [6]. In this study, international students especially those coming from developing countries such as Indonesia, China, Pakistan, and Bangladesh were satisfied with their studying experiences since the CS was considered relatively inexpensive in comparison with other nations. CS was the most significant attribute in contributing to SS which could be observed from the academic programs of Malaysian tertiary educational institutions as the programs from foundation to doctorate were offered in high affordability.

Lastly, it was found that there was a significantly positive relationship between international students' satisfaction and their DL (t-statistic=11.50, p-value<0.001) as the value of t-statistic was higher than 1.96 whereas the p-value was smaller than 0.001. The relationship concurred with the previous findings [62], [63], as the results suggested that SS would positively influence the DI of international students to recommend and revisit their educational destinations [64]. Moreover, the findings also propounded that SS affected DI positively in terms of revisit intention that might encourage the international students to re-enroll in the same educational institutions for further studies in the future [63].

5. CONCLUSION

This study manifested that the service quality, destination image, and costs of the study had positive and significant impacts on international students' satisfaction while similarly, international students' satisfaction could also positively influence their destination loyalty to revisit and recommend Malaysia as the destination for educational tourism. These findings have discovered important theoretical implications as this study adds additional support to the existing relevant research literature. Hence, the study findings could be served a reference for future researchers in their further empirical investigations on the methods to increase satisfaction and destination loyalty amongst international students.

In terms of practical implications, this study's findings also offer insights of crucial importance for the development of educational tourism in Malaysia to the practitioners in the field such as universities, colleges, government authorities in Malaysia. By scrutinizing this study, they will receive a clearer delineation of the perceptions of international students studying in Malaysia before implementing effective strategies to attract more foreign students to visit Malaysia for educational purposes. As this study found that the service quality and costs of study played significant roles in boosting higher levels of international students' satisfaction which could lead to a higher tendency to recommend and revisit, Malaysian higher educational institutions are urged to enhance their services while maintaining its affordability to ensure high satisfaction levels amongst the foreign students. For instance, Malaysian higher educational institutions could focus more the efficacious implementations in delivering good quality services including a conducive learning environment, accessible and comprehensive facilities, and high lecturers' competencies while maintaining the costs such as tuition fees and hostel fees at a competitive level.

In short, this study offers a better understanding of the drivers on international students' satisfaction and destination loyalty to the government authorities such as the Ministry of Higher Education and Ministry of Tourism as well as tourism operators. While the findings address the importance of destination image in contributing to international students' satisfaction, it also provides government authorities with the ideas of formulating execution plans in constructing a good image before promoting Malaysia as an attractive and cultural attraction for education on the global stage. Meanwhile, further refinements are also imperative to ensure the continuous inflow of international students into Malaysia for educational tourism. This could be performed by the Malaysian government authorities to regularly assess the effectiveness of the policies in attracting international students including scholarships and education rebate programs.

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