

Quality of Life Attributes and Life Satisfaction among Homestay Operators in Malaysia

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Abstract: Poor communities are still high among societies in Malaysia, especially those in rural areas due to the failure of development strategies. Tourism has been used as a tool to improve the economy and well-being of local communities and the optimal quality of life among communities is what most government wish to achieve. Homestay program has been introduced to local and rural communities to get involved in tourism and monitored closely by Ministry of Tourism Malaysia. The objective of the study is to determine quality of life attributes that influence the perceived life satisfaction of homestay operators in Malaysia. A questionnaire administered through survey was used to collect data from a total of 356 homestay operators throughout Malaysia using multistage cluster sampling method. The result of the research shows that quality of life attributes moderately influenced the homestay operators' life satisfaction. Governments are urged to approach the subjective assessment of quality of life such as life satisfaction indicator in determining the wellbeing of the people.

Key words: Community based tourism, homestay program, quality of life, life satisfaction, Malaysia

INTRODUCTION

The well-being of the community is very much emphasized by the Malaysian government with various efforts to improve the quality of life of its citizens to achieve developed nation status by 2020, especially in rural communities in order not to be marginalized from the mainstream of development (NAEC, 2010). To carry out the strategy of development plans and economic policies that can help increase the income of Malaysians as a whole, the government has targeted various programs as stated in the Tenth Malaysia Plan 2011-2015.

Among them, the government has targeted to improve the living standards of the lowest 40% of households in Malaysia by improving the quality of life of rural households and urban households by increasing their participation in economic activities. The government will also focus on the engine of economic growth and focus on one of the sectors that are considered important and has been given thoughtful attention by the government, i.e., the tourism industry. This is because the tourism industry is seen to contribute to the generation of foreign exchange, income jobs and stimulate economic growth in Malaysia (Bhuiyan *et al.*, 2013). Tourism has also been used as a tool to improve the well-being of local communities and

optimal well-being of the community is a key requirement to develop a more comprehensive tourism (Kayat, 2011). Community-based tourism are commonly initiated in rural communities in an effort to raise additional revenue to their household. This is due to geographical factors and the surrounding countryside that is relatively isolated from the mainstream of development which eventually led to the limited economic resources.

Community-based tourism approach has been highly recommended and become a popular choice such as homestay is said to be a catalyst that can help improve the economic and social benefits of the community in the rural areas by offering tourism and ancillary services such as accommodation, the sale of handicrafts, creation of restaurants and food outlets and offer tourist services (Ndivo and Cantoni, 2016; Liu, 2006; Ying and Zhou, 2007).

Research problem: Underprivileged communities are still high among societies in Malaysia, especially those in rural areas due to the failure of development strategies and less effective community development programs (Mohammad, 2003). Therefore, the development of a sustainable community requires the active involvement of local communities to carry out development programs that can improve their life satisfaction (Ploch, 1976). Life

satisfaction of the communities involved in tourism is vital to ensure the continued efforts and support in the success of the tourism products on offer (Woo *et al.*, 2015). However, in the context of community-based rural tourism in Malaysia there is still a gap in the issue of life satisfaction among those involved in community-based tourism and also the issue of whether tourism can contribute to life satisfaction of the communities involved in the tourism industry.

Although the tourism industry in the form of homestay accommodation sector in Malaysia was started unofficially since 1970's and has been given priority by the government since the 1990's, there are still issues that overwhelmed the homestay program operators to improve the standard of living in terms of their satisfaction towards achieving a better life. There are still homestays that are unable to attract visitors to stay in their villages. The establishment of homestay was initiated with good intentions to help poor rural communities in order to increase additional sources of income through tourism activities.

The main issue of this study is that not all communities involved in the homestay program receive lucrative income as noted in the newspapers. This has resulted in their quality of life also has not improved even though they been long involved in the homestay program. Thus, it also affects their life satisfaction. For example, based on a study in terms of the quality of life of people who were involved in the homestay program did not indicate any significant changes such as the number of household income was less encouraging. This is because theoretically the increase in income from tourists should be able to improve the quality of life of the community (Andereck and Jurowski, 2006). In fact, income which is directly earned by homestay operators throughout the homestay program was very low. The homestay operators considered income earned through this program was merely a consolation, instead of helping them to increase their income expectations.

The objective of this study is to identify factors derived from quality of life attributes that affect the life satisfaction level among homestay program operators that require attention and emphasis by the government and the communities themselves. The management of community-based tourism should be given due attention so that sustainable tourism can be maintained and can generate additional income as desired (Kim *et al.*, 2013). This include an emphasis on the aspects of community life satisfaction who were struggling to promote the homestay program. This matter must be addressed to ensure that each homestay program in each villages eventually succeed in order to achieve the objectives of the development of their homestay.

Quality of life attributes and life satisfaction: The concept of community life satisfaction is not easy to measure since it involves a complex relationship between the physical, psychological and environmental needs and particular life domains (Kim *et al.*, 2013). It is fair to be refined because not only it is important in the context of community development but also it is a tourism asset that could be used for community capacity to grow again if managed well (Woo *et al.*, 2015; Beeton, 2006). Communities who are satisfied with what they are doing will create a positive atmosphere and environment and this can be felt by the travelers who receive their services. Travelers who are satisfied with the services provided by the homestay operators will always remember the great times and will tell others about the advantages of visiting the homestay.

Through previous studies it can be concluded that life satisfaction is a subject under quality of life and become one of the indicators of subjective well-being, which also include the positive and negative effects (Christoph and Noll, 2003; Diener and Suh, 1997; Veenhoven, 2007; Voicu and Pop, 2011). Life satisfaction has been defined as an assessment of the quality of life of an individual based on the criteria set by themselves (Shin and Johnson, 1978). This notion is further supported the fundamental basis of life satisfaction which focused on self-assessment of a person, rather than on the basis of criteria set by the other party (Diener *et al.*, 1985). Many studies conducted in identifying variables or determinants of life satisfaction. It includes a variety of perspectives, country and culture. In several studies there are various domains of life that have an impact on human such as marriage, leisure, health, neighborhood, transportation and wealth (Rode and Near, 2005; Andrews and Withey, 1976; Headey *et al.*, 1991; Rice *et al.*, 1979, 1980).

This study has selected quality of life attributes that theoretically will influence the perceived life satisfaction of homestay operators in Malaysia based on recommendations by previous studies such as the quality of life, attitude, community role and the role of government (Muda *et al.*, 2006). Quality of life is one of the factors that play a role in influencing life satisfaction. Among the studies that use quality of life attributes as determinants is a study which examines the well-being of the 102 fishermen who were taken at random using unstructured sampling in various fishing villages around the coast of Kuala Terengganu, Terengganu, Malaysia (Muda *et al.*, 2006). The results of their study showed that there was a positive relationship between the quality of life for the well-being of the fishermen. The result demonstrated that an increase in income, expenses, savings, education, home ownership, land and vehicles of

the fishermen will also improve the well-being of their lives. Therefore, they pointed out that quality of life is a decisive factor for the well-being of fishermen being surveyed.

Another study of the satisfaction of farmers who operate homestays in a farm (farm-stay) in Matsuura, Japan also noted that the quality of life of the operators has determined their life satisfaction and help to boost the potential use of natural resources more effectively (Ohe *et al.*, 2009). The findings of their study established the most important theory, i.e., in order to improve the potential of local resources, it is applicable when entrepreneurs or operators are happy and love their work as farm-stay operators. This is often dealt by homestay operators in a village but seldom supported by research and empirical evidence.

In another study which examines the level of satisfaction of farmers, breeders and fishermen involving 652 samples were collected in a stratified sampling method in six districts in Terengganu namely Kuala Terengganu, Marang, Dungun, Kemaman, Setiu and Besut. The study showed that factors in the quality of life attributes such as income, expenses, savings, housing, equipment, health, safety and education were significantly related to the satisfaction of the farmers and breeders. But, residential land has no relationship with their life satisfaction. The study also indicated that the quality of life of farmers, breeders and fishermen in Terengganu especially in terms of revenue contributed 15% to the satisfaction of the farmers, breeders and fishermen, while saving contributing 8.8 percent to the satisfaction of the fishermen in Terengganu.

From a macro perspective, one study stated that wealth is one of the determining factors that give satisfaction to the people living in western countries (Diener *et al.*, 1995). A relationship between a country's wealth towards its people's life satisfaction is obvious because rich countries are able to provide a better life such as health, nutrition, housing and safety. But, no doubt the rich and developed countries do not guarantee the satisfaction of their people as the studies done in Japan and France which shows the level of satisfaction of people's living was low (Cummins, 1998). Most life domains that affect life satisfaction are an attributes which is owned by an individual. This includes property, housing, security, financial, family and so forth. In fact, according to them, the quality of life attributes often affect an individual's consideration in determining the level of well-being or life satisfaction.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The population for this study is the homestay operators registered with the Ministry of Tourism Malaysia under the Homestay Program Malaysia. The focus of the sampling frame for this survey is all homestay operators throughout Malaysia which still actively registered with the Ministry of Tourism Malaysia in year 2011 consisting a total of 3,211 operators. This study, used multi-stage cluster sampling as a mean of collecting data from the target population of the study throughout the whole Malaysia. Respondents were divided into six zones, namely the Northern Zone, West Coast, East Coast Zone, Southern Zone, Sarawak Zone and Sabah Zone. Northern Zone is represented by the states of Perlis, Kedah, Penang and Perak; West Coast Zone represented by the state of Selangor, Melaka and Negeri Sembilan; East Coast Zone represented by the states of Pahang, Terengganu and Kelantan; Southern Zone represented by the state of Johor while the Sarawak Zone and Sabah Zone was represented by state of Sarawak and Sabah, respectively.

The next procedure was to select 3 homestays in each states based on second stage of multi-stage cluster sampling because Perlis has only 3 homestays in the state. Therefore, to ensure the selection of the homestay program in each states was fair, the researchers decided to select 3 homestays in every states across Malaysia. A total of 356 respondents were identified as a sample and a questionnaire was distributed through survey and conducted throughout Malaysia utilizing either interviewer-completion or respondent-completion method. However, only 337 data can be used for the purposes of this study.

Items in the questionnaire were constructed from several questionnaires that have been developed in previous studies (Diener *et al.*, 1985). The original questionnaire for the quality of life attributes was adapted from two main researches. Questionnaire by the first study containing 10 constructs which include income, expenses, saving, home, land, vehicle, equipment, health, safety and education that consists of 40 items. This study adopted nine out of 10 constructs by omitting the equipment because the equipment does not relevant to homestay. The study reported the validity and reliability of its quality of life attributes questionnaire with reliability test value of Cronbach alpha was 0.80 (Muda *et al.*, 2006).

While the second study for quality of life attributes consist of nine constructs such as income, expenses, saving, home, land, vehicle, boat and fishing equipment, health and education, which contains 36 items in total. This study, adopted eight out of nine constructs by not taking boat and fishing equipment. Their questionnaire

have high reliability Cronbach alpha value of 0.88. This indicated that both questionnaires on the quality of life attributes are good and can be adopted. The validity and reliability values are high and measurement can be accepted as a good tool. Both quality of life questionnaires use a five-point Likert scale with the lowest level of 1 for 'strongly disagree', 2 for 'disagree', 3 for 'neutral', 4 for 'agree' and the highest number of 5 for 'strongly agree'.

For life satisfaction questionnaire, Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS) is referred and it has five items (Diener *et al.*, 1985). The mean score for the SWLS is 23.5 with standard deviation is 6.43. All five items in SWLS has an index of high reliability in which the value of Cronbach's alpha was 0.87. SWLS has been factored and the results of the factor analysis is only one factor that appear and give 66% variation.

For this study the quality of life attributes questionnaire consists of 40 items divided into nine main constructs of income, expenses, saving, home, land, vehicle, health, education and safety. Items focused on questions about satisfaction with the attributes they felt now, whether these attributes can be better than before and what is the expectations of respondents of those attributes in the future. All items in this study use a five-point Likert scale according to the level provided above.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To test for a linear relationship between two quantitative variables it is important to remember that Pearson's correlation only provides information about the direction and strength of the linear relationship between the two variables. The study proposed a hypothesis that there is a relationship between quality of life attributes and life satisfaction. From the Pearson correlation test in Table 1, the results showed a moderate but significant relationship between the quality of life attributes and life satisfaction. The study concluded that there is evidence about quality of life attributes is related to life satisfaction. In particular, it seems that the higher the quality of life attributes are, the greater the life satisfaction felt by homestay operators ($r = 0.45, p < 0.001$).

The findings are in line with the well-being study on coastal fishing communities on the East Coast of

Peninsular Malaysia that exhibits the quality of life attributes of fishermen have a positive relationship with the well-being of the fishermen themselves (Muda *et al.*, 2006). This is because most of the homestays run this program as a second job to supplement their existing income because majority of the homestay operators has had other jobs and more than half of them are housewives. Therefore, they are not expecting the income derived from their homestay as the main source. Additional income gained only considered as consolation only since the most important for them is the spirit of cooperation to undertake the homestay program. The determining factors such as income, expenses, saving, home, land, vehicle, health, education and safety play a major role in influencing life satisfaction homestay operators. Therefore, these factors should be taken into consideration by the government and community when planning and managing community-based tourism programs or projects.

The study, also confirmed that overall life satisfaction is the result of the satisfaction of the various domains in life. Among the domains that play a role in this study, is the quality of life attributes that had an influence over life satisfaction among homestay operators. The changes that occur in these domains will lead to changes in an individual's life satisfaction. This study confirmed that the quality of life of the homestay operators have a relationship and contribute to the satisfaction of their lives.

This study adds new knowledge in the field of tourism, particularly community-based tourism and quality of life by clarifying that tourism does affect the quality of life of the community in tourist destinations. Therefore, people who has greater well-being and enjoying better life will be more receptive and more open to appreciate the tourists who visit their place. This is affirmed with the study in Arizona, USA which shows that majority of the people in Arizona feel that tourism industry has improve the quality of their lives and they generally experiencing a positive atmospheres in their community (Andereck and Jurowski, 2006). This study, also in conjunction with similar study which concluded that tourism has bring major changes to the local community economy, environment and social status through employment, education, health and conservation initiatives (Hanafiah *et al.*, 2016).

CONCLUSION

Governments are urged to approach the subjective assessment of quality of life such as life satisfaction indicator in determining the wellbeing of the people. The

Table 1: The pearson correlation between quality of life attributes and life satisfaction

Tests	Quality of life attributes	Life satisfaction
Pearson correlation	1	0.448*
Sig. (2-tailed) N	337	337
Pearson correlation	0.448**	1
Sig. (2-tailed) N	337	337

government requires subjective indicators in planning their social policies for several reasons (Veenhoven, 2002) including: social policy not only involves purely materialistic, it also involves mentality. To evaluate the mentality of the subjective indicators is required to assess what the people feel and experience; progress in achieving material cannot always be measured objectively but rather requires subjective measurement in identifying many factors that can affect these goals; an objective indicator sometimes cannot tell the government about what is required by the community. The government needs to gain a better understanding of what goes on their minds and the government needs to identify what is required and what is necessary for the people.

Often what is needed by the people were expressed in the form of life satisfaction. The subjective evaluation is appropriate to know in order to identify what the people really want. Subjective measurements of this study that measures life satisfaction of homestay operators is essential to serve as a guide in planning various programs and activities appropriate to the rural communities. The appropriate quality of life attributes such as housing, income, health and education need to be taken seriously by government in order to achieve a better life for its citizens.

Well-being or quality of life measurement is useful for community organizers to provide an assessment of the welfare of the community from time to time and this allows the policy maker and planners to observe the development of the welfare of the community as a whole either growing or showing deterioration (Sirgy *et al.*, 2010). The community planners must identify the causes or determinants of well-being that give satisfaction to the community so that they can recommend programs and services that can improve community life satisfaction and reduce dissatisfaction. More research should be directed towards explaining the causes and implications of other aspects of quality of life that could affect the community life satisfaction in tourist destination.

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