



The Perceived Role of Leadership and Community Support in the Performance of Community-based Rural Homestay Programme in Malaysia

Kalsom Kayat^{1*}, Nur Farrah Ain Zainuddin², Razamin Ramli³, Maznah Mat Kasim⁴

¹Universiti Utara Malaysia, Kedah, Malaysia, ²Universiti Utara Malaysia, Kedah, Malaysia, ³Universiti Utara Malaysia, Kedah, Malaysia, ⁴Universiti Utara Malaysia, Kedah, Malaysia. *Email: kals932@uum.edu.my

ABSTRACT

In Malaysia, community-based rural homestay (CBRH) is promoted as a tourism product and expected to perform as a means to develop rural communities through their engagement in small tourism businesses. Both financial and non-financial supports have been provided to the homestay operators by different government agencies to enable them to serve visitors and eventually to sustain their performance. This paper presents a descriptive study on CBRH operators' perceptions toward two variables that may influence CBRH's performance. Specifically, it explores the influential roles that can be played by leadership and community support which have been mentioned by the literature as probable influencer to the performance of a CBT similar to the CBRH programme. The results show that homestay operators perceived leadership as a more predominant factor than community support in ensuring the performance of their homestay.

Keywords: Leadership, Community Support, Community-based Rural Homestay Programme

JEL Classifications: O2, Q3, R1

1. INTRODUCTION

The Ministry of Tourism and Culture began to promote the community-based rural homestay (CBRH) programme in 1995. The CBRH programme is essentially a community-based tourism (CBT) product that offers refreshing rural environment and local community lifestyle experience to the visitors. Besides offering visitors with an alternative tourism experience, this program is also intended to generate tourism income to rural population through their participation as operators of homestays within their dwellings as well as through their participation in other activities included in the packages offered to their guests (Mapjabil et al., 2015). Thus, CBRH programmes are said to benefit the communities collectively and/or individually (Novelli and Gebhart, 2007; Simpson, 2007; Goodwin and Santilli, 2009). Simultaneously, CBRH, at least in theory, is capable to preserve the local culture and conserves the nature (Nair and Hamzah, 2015). Several authors regard CBRH programme as an economic booster, as it provides significant contribution to the development of local communities

especially in rural (Mapjabil et al., 2015; Ramli et al., 2015). Income opportunity and development are the main benefit from CBRH that motivate community members to participate in the programme (Abdul Razzaq, Hadi, and Mustafa, 2011).

In the 9th Malaysia Plan, a sum of RM40 million was allocated by the ministry to upgrade the infrastructure and facilities of the homes in the homestay programme (Ramli et al., 2015). In addition, series of training were provided to the homestay operators prior to receiving their certificate as homestay operators in the programme. The success of this programme is reflected by its ability to generate income to the community continuously, as well as its ability to operate independently from stipulations and control of any aid agencies or government bodies (Mizal et al., 2014). However, regardless of many success stories about the homestay programme in earlier studies, there are still homestay operators who disengaged from the programme as they fail to sustain (Pusiran and Xiao, 2013). Two variables have been mentioned in the literature to have a probable influence on the performance of

CBRH. This paper discusses these variables as well as present a study undertaken to explore the perception of the operators on the variables namely leadership and community support in regards to the homestay performance.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Studies on Community-based Tourism Initiatives' Performance

The various challenges faced by community-based tourism initiatives across the globe have been documented (Hamzah and Mohamad, 2012). The challenges which include limitation in financial and organizational resources have definite effects on the computable and qualitative performance of the homestay programme. Previous studies on CBT have mostly focus on the success of the homestay programme without exploring in depth the reason for the success. Understanding determinants to the homestay's performance will help in strategizing the programme as an effective tool to generate income and create employment opportunities to the communities through tourism.

Hu et al. (2012) evaluated the performance of homestay programme in Taiwan using analytic network process (ANP) (Hu et al., 2012). The homestay programmes in Taiwan are similar to the homestay programme in Malaysia as they also practice the community-based principle. The researchers gathered the weights of the factors involved to acquire the performance guided by fuzzy theory. Their findings showed both homestay operators and visitors weighed four criteria that are important for the homestay programme in Taiwan to excel. These variables are physical attraction of accommodation, service quality, operation, and homestay management.

Earlier, a study by Maliao et al. (2009) found seven factors that are crucial for community-based tourism programme to achieve high performance; the factors are participation, influence, control, access, income, conflict management, and compliance on the performance of community-based coastal resource management (Maliao et al., 2009). However, the study found that the programmes are effective in engaging the local community in managing their local resources even when they are still in doubt regarding the capability of the programme to improve their living in the future.

Using an arithmetic average method to analyse the operators' evaluations on critical success factors of a homestay programme, Daud et al., (2015) found that a community's ability and capacity to run the programme has the highest average rating, followed by benefits to the community, conservation of community resource, leadership, and so on (Daud et al., 2015). They conclude that Capacity and ability to run the programme is important success criteria to the homestay.

In addition, they suggested that in order to improve the business performance of homestays in this country, homestay operators should focus on improving their ability and capacity and focus on enhancing their leadership skills (Ramli et al., 2015).

2.2. The Role of Leadership and Community Support in CBRH

The CBRH programme promoted by Ministry of Tourism Malaysia is essentially a community programme in which the main actors in its implementation are the residents themselves. Such group effort requires an affective and proactive leader to steer the group towards achieving its goals. Indeed, leadership has been discussed in the literature as an important element in a homestay programme in Malaysia (Pusiran and Xiao, 2013; Abdul Razzaq, Hadi, and Mustafa, 2011; Mizal et al., 2014; Hamzah and Mohamad, 2012; Kontogeorgopoulos et al., 2014; Che Ismail et al., 2014). According to Pusiran and Xiao (2013), the relationship between leadership and the unity of the community enhance the sense of ownership and pride among them, thus motivate them to work together toward the success of such programmes (Pusiran and Xiao, 2013). They added that a competent community leadership should be sustained as it has a close relation with the community empowerment. Mizal et al. also found that the community entrepreneurship excellence depends heavily on the local champion that lead CBT initiative (Mizal et al., 2014). As an example, dynamic leadership is one of the important elements found to have made Miso Walai Homestay to become a successful community-based ecotourism initiative (Hamzah and Mohamad, 2012).

A community needs a leader as they may not be ready for the intended changes or development. Thus, the leader or local champion for a successful CBT programme such as the CBRH must be able to fulfil multiple roles competently and must possess the skill to communicate about the communal benefits of the CBT, the plan to avoid possible disruptions to their relationships with external actors, as well as to lead resistance against the temptation to continue expanding the tourism beyond the community's carrying capacity (Kontogeorgopoulos et al., 2014).

For a community-based programme to produce intended benefits it does not only require effective leader, it must be trusted and supported by the community. Similarly, the CBRH programme must be supported by the community itself for it to thrive and sustain. Community support includes participation by the community in every stage of the programme as well as their commitment in making sure that the programme is implemented successfully. The support of the local population is essential for the development, successful operation, and sustainability of tourism initiative in their community (Jurowski et al., 1997). Thus, in addition to leadership, community support is another determinant factor for CBRH program success.

These have been indicated by several past studies which have shown that community involvement is very crucial in a homestay program (Pusiran and Xiao, 2013; Ibrahim and Abdul Razzaq, 2010). The community must be given the ability and capability to be involved in a community-based program. Increasing the capacity of the community in itself is benefit from such program as the community members will experience "development" as their ability and capability are enhanced (Hamzah and Mohamad, 2012). Community support will lead to interaction between hosts and guests; these interactions as well as experience from the interactions will in turn contribute

in strengthening the participating members of the community. Only when these take places will the benefits of the community based tourism development are materialized (Abdul Razzaq, Hadi and Mustafa, 2011).

The CBRH program is intended to be a winning tourism product offering to the tourists and a tool for the development of rural areas and its people. However, its implementation requires commitment and understanding among the communities especially if it is to survive without aids from agencies (Ghasemi and Hamzah, 2011). Active involvement and participation of residents in the tourism development process seem to be prerequisites for achieving the goal of sustainability and thereby improving the overall welfare in the community (Ertuna and Kirbas, 2012). In addition, community capacity building that focuses on increasing local participation, knowledge and skill of local community, as well as to instil leadership, strengthen community structure, establishing sense of community as well as external partnership are the critical success indicators for the homestay program development in Malaysia (Abdul Razzaq, Hadi, and Mustafa, 2011).

3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

An exploratory study was undertaken to gain better understanding of the factors that influence the performance of the CBRH programme in three states in the northern regions of the Peninsular Malaysia. Based on the literature review discussed above a conceptual framework was established (Figure 1) to guide the study. The framework consists of two variables namely leadership and community support in the community-based homestay program performance. Leadership is one of the crucial criteria to build a strong and effective community that lead to the success of the program. In addition, the community itself plays the most important role in any community tourism initiative. The community participation and involvement in the homestay activities will determine the level of performance of homestay program. Thus, in order for the programme to achieve a better performance, a skilful local champion and active support from the community are essential.

4. METHODOLOGY

The study aims to define the level of acceptance of items perceived by the homestay operators as important for the performance of the CBRH programme in their community. The variables consisting of leadership and community support are tested. Quantitative method was applied in order to answer the research objective. This study was carried out in Perlis, Kedah, and Penang.

Questionnaires consisting of items to measure respondents' perceptions toward the importance of leadership and community support in the performance of the CBRH programme were distributed to all 599 CBRH homestay operators in three states in North Malaysia. The respondents were asked to answer the questions which were constructed to measure their perception. The questionnaire was structured using a 10-point Likert scale with 1 represents a response of "Strongly disagree" till 10 represents

"Strongly agree." The items for leadership and community support variables were self-constructed by the researchers based on the operational definitions (Table 1). Several stages were involved in establishing the items for the variables including a series of brainstorming session based on inputs received from in-depth interviews conducted among key stakeholders in CBRH. Next, a pilot test was carried out to confirm the goodness of measure of those items. In the final stage, the researchers concluded the final survey items after some corrections and improvements were made on the pilot test outcome.

5. RESULTS

This exploratory study uses descriptive analysis as to obtain the value of mean for each items in two variables tested

Figure 1: Community-based rural homestay performance conceptual framework

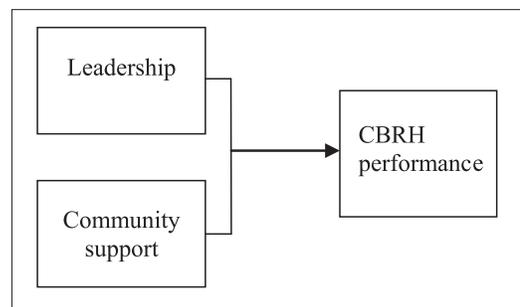


Table 1: Operationalization of key terms

| Variables | Definition |
|-------------------|---|
| Leadership | The skill possessed by the local champion and the community in steering the community towards achieving the objectives of the homestay programme |
| Community support | The degree of involvement of every operator in any activities organized by the homestay program as to ensure that the programme is long lasting over the time |

Table 2: Descriptive analysis for leadership items

| Code | Items | Mean (%) |
|------|--|--------------|
| KP1 | Each operator has a vision to ascertain the success of this programme | 8.85 (14.94) |
| KP2 | A homestay operator understands each other | 8.91 (15.05) |
| KP3 | There is fair distribution of homestay visitors to the operators | 8.73 (14.74) |
| KP4 | The participants will always try to solve problems that may arise together | 8.70 (14.69) |
| KP5 | The operators believe that ensuring the success of the programme is the responsibility of the committee members as well as the Ministry of Tourism | 6.17 (10.42) |
| KP6 | I believe that the homestay programme will receive good response from visitors | 8.70 (14.69) |
| KP7 | The leader of the committees plays a crucial role to ensure the success of the homestay programme | 9.16 (15.47) |
| | Total | 59.22 (100) |

Table 3: Descriptive analysis for community support items

| Code | Items | Mean (%) |
|-------|---|--------------|
| PK1 | There are some people in the community who do not support the homestay activities. | 6.24 (12.19) |
| PK2 | Only committee members are involved in the implementation of homestay activities | 5.17 (10.10) |
| PK3 | Only committee members are involved in planning of the programme activities. | 5.56 (10.86) |
| PK4 | Comments and suggestion from the community Members (residents) on the homestay activities are always welcomed | 8.22 (16.05) |
| PK5 | I always try to promote the development of the homestay programme | 8.79 (17.16) |
| PK6 | Local community participation is the key success of the homestay programme | 8.62 (16.83) |
| PK7 | The homestay programme will be not sustained if there is no participation from the local community | 8.61 (16.81) |
| Total | | 51.21 (100) |

(i.e., leadership and community support). Table 2 demonstrates the total items for the leadership criteria. The results indicate that the highest mean is derived from item KP7 (M = 9.16). The results indicate that the homestay operators believed the community leader play an important role to ensure the success of homestay programme. Meanwhile, the least important item perceived by the respondents is KP5 (M = 6.17) which consists of items to indicate the participants' perception that ensuring the success of the programme is the responsibility of the committee members as well as the Ministry of Tourism and not them. The bar chart in Figure 2 represents total items of leadership.

In addition, Table 3 depicts all items in the variable of community support. Statistical analysis on the data indicates that the item code for PK5 (M = 8.79) has the highest mean closely followed by PK6 (M = 8.62), PK7 (M = 8.61), PK4 (M = 8.22), PK1 (M = 8.24), PK3 (5.56) and PK2 (M = 5.17) respectively. The result illustrates that the community and homestay operators have a willingness to promote development in homestay programme. Next, the mean value for all items in the variable of community support is shown through the bar chart in Figure 3.

In summary, Figure 4 presents the comparison mean between leadership and community support which indicates that the homestay operators perceive leadership as a more important critical success factor in the homestay performance than community support.

6. CONCLUSION

This paper began with an explanation about the importance in understanding the determinants of CBRH programme's success to enable the relevant authority to monitor the effectiveness and sustainability of CBRH programme in rural community development. There are many factors that may influence the performance of the CBRH programme in Malaysia. This paper discusses two of the probable factors, namely leadership and community support. This exploratory study finds that the homestay

Figure 2: Mean distribution in percentages for the leadership items

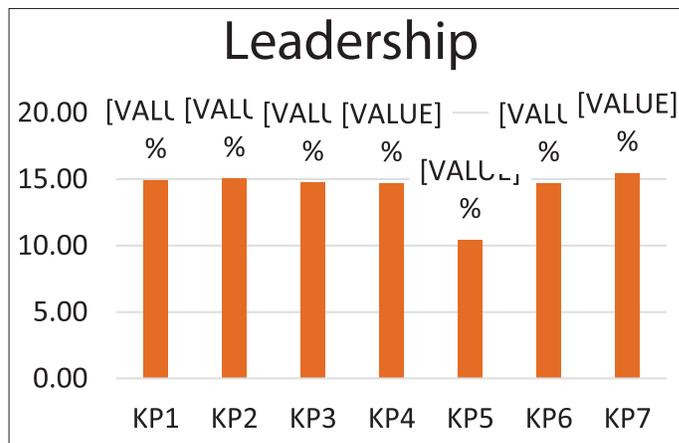


Figure 3: Mean distribution of community support items

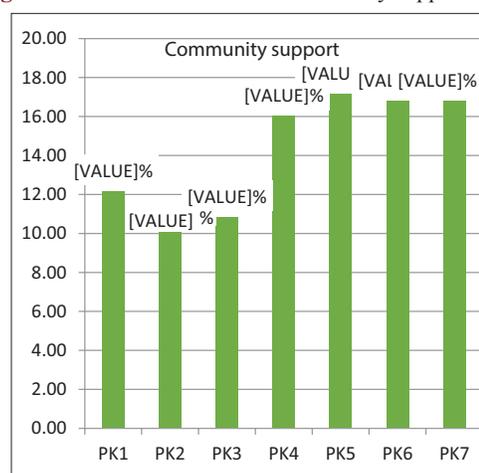
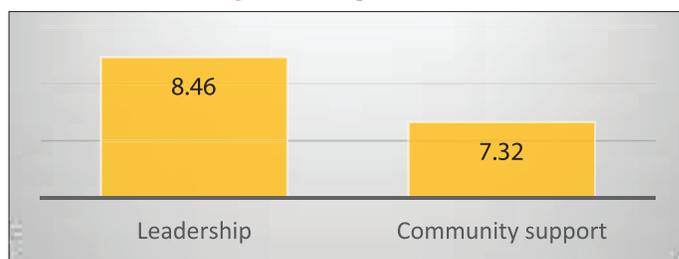


Figure 4: Comparison mean



operators perceive leadership as a more important critical success factor in the homestay performance than community support. Further studies are suggested to further examine this variable and their relationship with the performance of CBRH. In addition, more studies are recommended to be undertaken to explore other potentially important variables such as the entrepreneurial skill among the operators as well as linkages between the programme with other important tourism players and related agencies.

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