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HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION ROLES IN DEVELOPING ENTREPRENEURIAL SKILLS AMONG BOAT OPERATORS IN COASTAL AREA

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Abstract:

Sebuyau is a coastal fishing village located about 100km away from the main city of Kuching, Sarawak. Local communities depend on fishing activities, agriculture, small businesses, and cottage industry products as their economic resources. Sebuyau can be highlighted as one of the potential tourist attractions in Samarahan District through boat rentals to tourists for fishing and river cruise activities. Boat rental for fishing and river cruise activities is a community-based tourism (CBT) product that provides opportunities for boat operators or fishermen to engage in social entrepreneurship by using their existing boats. It is an approach to diversifying their sources of income with a lower impact on natural resources. However, to ensure a sustainable transformation, the local community needs to be given exposure, knowledge, and guidance to shift the activities of ordinary fishermen or individual boat owners to boat operators who are able to generate income from boat rental activities. Therefore, higher education institutions need to take proactive roles

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to assist local communities in ensuring this transformation is achievable. This article discusses the role of the higher education institution in developing entrepreneurial skills among boat operators in Sebuyau. In addition, this article also discusses the achievements of the local communities who have successfully managed their boat rental activities as a result of an approach involving the roles of higher education institutions.

Keywords:

Higher Education Institution Roles, Community-Based Tourism, Entrepreneurship, Boat Operator, Coastal Area

Introduction

Community-based tourism (CBT) is an approach that involves working with local communities to develop tourism products and services based on their cultural, natural, and historical assets. This ensures that the benefits of tourism are shared among all members of the community, promoting sustainable development and empowerment. Entrepreneurship is important in the context of CBT as it involves developing and managing tourism-related businesses that are owned and operated by local residents. This promotes self-reliance and unique tourism experiences that can attract visitors. Aji (2020) emphasizes the significance of developing tourism at the community level in Indonesia to ensure local communities benefit from the income generated by the industry.

Boat rental and fishing activities are important components of community-based tourism (CBT) that can contribute to sustainable economic development and cultural preservation in local communities. Kayat & Zainuddin (2016) conducted a study on the success of a community-based tourism initiative in rural Malaysia, which included boat rental and fishing activities, and found that it provided economic benefits to the local community while preserving their cultural heritage. By providing visitors with opportunities to engage in traditional fishing practices and experience the natural beauty of the area, boat rental and fishing activities can create economic opportunities for community members while also promoting environmental conservation and cultural heritage.

In many coastal communities, boat rental and fishing activities have been integrated into CBT initiatives as a way to diversify the local economy and generate income for community members. Esteves & Lopes (2017) explored the potential of fishing tourism as a development strategy for small coastal communities in Portugal. They highlighted the benefits of fishing tourism for diversifying the local economy, generating income for community members, and promoting environmental and cultural sustainability. Sebuyau, a fishing village located on the coastal area in Samarahan Division, Sarawak, has the potential to become a popular tourist attraction for fishing and boat cruising activities due to its strategic location. According to Ahmad et al. (2014), Sebuyau's local products and industry should be developed further for tourism because they have the potential for long-term community development. As the village is home to numerous privately-owned small and large fishing boats, these resources can be utilized to offer boat rental services to visitors, thus diversifying the sources of income for the fishermen. In addition, fishing and boat cruising activities can be packaged creatively to attract tourists.

Although some fishermen in Sebuyau have already started offering boat rental services to visitors for a fee, the implementation of CBT has not been properly executed. However, this activity has contributed to the development of entrepreneurial values within the community. To manage CBT in the area effectively, higher education institutions should assist the community in developing a systematic approach. Universities have a critical role to play in promoting and supporting community-based tourism initiatives. Font et al., (2005) highlights the importance of building social capital in these initiatives and the potential for universities to act as facilitators and intermediaries between communities, businesses, and government agencies. By providing knowledge transfer through training, universities can help to develop the entrepreneurial skills and knowledge necessary to create successful community-based tourism ventures. Additionally, universities can work closely with local communities to identify their unique assets and develop strategies for promoting and marketing community-based tourism products and services.

In this article, we will explore the roles that universities can play in developing entrepreneurial skills among communities through community-based tourism focusing on boat rental and fishing activities in Sebuyau. We will discuss the impacts that these efforts have had on promoting sustainable development and empowering local communities.

Literature Review

The literature review section focuses on five topics based on prior research and findings: higher education institutions, community-based tourism, entrepreneurship, boat operators, and coastal areas.

Higher Education Institution (HEI)

Higher education plays a crucial role in any nation, acting as a catalyst for the development of a peaceful, productive community and strong economic growth. Through its ability to produce a highly skilled workforce, higher education significantly aids in nation building (Zakariya, 2014). According to Suyanto et al. (2019), in Malaysia HEI plays an important role in developing, helping and empowering the community through the implementation of community service programs. The community and any related parties, such as universities and local governments, are all responsible for developing a tourism village through related organizations. Through extensive communication, HEI plays a crucial part in opening the community's insights and expertise in maintaining tourist villages. Open dialogue is crucial for communication since it aids in understanding community communication and forging stronger ties. (Lafever, 2011).

Community Based Tourism (CBT)

The development of the tourism sector should take place at the community level to make sure that the money flow is reaching local communities. There are many diverse methods to tourism, such as community-based tourism, which implements various concepts based on unique qualities of the local community. A concept of community-based tourism called tourism social entrepreneurship able to promote sustainable community growth (Aji, 2020). In addition, entrepreneurship is able to improve society by making people and organizations responsible and accountable for their respective fields (Kim, 1996). In fact, Wang et al. (2019) emphasized that carrying out tourism entrepreneurship is a motivation to transform the local communities' way of life into a business way of life.

Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship plays a crucial role in changing the supply of leisure and recreational opportunities (Chang, 2011). Due to its ability to foster innovation and change while also driving growth, entrepreneurship is regarded as a key factor in economic development. To local, regional, and national economies, particularly through its development, entrepreneurship offers a number of benefits (Kavya, 2021). To add, entrepreneurs are strongly linked to the generation of economic wealth, both for themselves and for society (Johannisson & Senneseth, 1993) thus highlighting the significance of entrepreneurship to the overall economy (Haugh & Pardy, 1999)

Boat Operator

The local community's involvement and engagement in the tourism industry is essential, especially for creating employment possibilities for locals. It is believed that their involvement as a boat operator will raise living conditions and help to lessen poverty in the community (Sharif & Lonik, 2013). Apart from that, Kamarudin et al. (2014) stated that boat operators' participation as Malay entrepreneurs is crucial in the endeavour to encourage the community to get involved and further develop the tourism sector. Based on experience and a series of training and courses offered by the government, now boat operators have been able to manage their business effectively.

Coastal Area

The tropics' coastal zones are among the most dynamic environments on earth. The majority of Malaysia's population lives along the coast. More than 80% of Sarawak's population lives along the 800 km coastline (Integrated Coastal Zone Management, 2023). According to Neumann et al. (2015) peoples have always been interested in the coastal zone because of its rich resources, especially the supply of subsistence resources; for logistical reasons, being an access point to trade and marine transport; as a place for recreational or cultural activities; or simply because of their special sense of place between the earth and the sea. One of the coastal fishing villages in Sarawak is Sebuyau, located 70 km from Kuching, Sarawak's capital city. The residents' economic dependency is primarily on fishing, farming, small businesses, and cottage industries.

Higher Education Institution Roles

Higher education institution developed entrepreneurial skills among boat operators in Sebuyau through community-based tourism (CBT) was implemented based on the following roles shown in Figure 1:

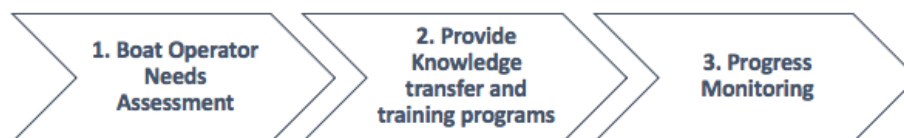


Figure 1: HEI Roles to Develop Entrepreneurial Skills Among Boat Operators in Sebuyau

Involvement of a higher education institution in a CBT project with boat operators in Sebuyau lasted for 6 months. The project's execution involved several stages, beginning with assessing

the boat operators' needs, followed by providing knowledge transfer and training programs. Finally, the HEI monitored the progress of the project.

Boat Operator Needs Assessment

Before initiating this project, it is crucial to conduct a thorough needs assessment and engage with the community to ensure that their needs and priorities are understood and addressed. Mohd Noor et al. (2017) mentioned that engaging with the community is crucial for addressing their needs and priorities and ensuring the success of the tourism initiatives. In this project, the process include visiting and discussing the project's potential benefits and challenges with boat operators in Sebuyau and other relevant parties. By involving the community in this way, we can ensure that the project is grounded in their needs and that the boat operators are willing and able to participate in it. Additionally, this approach can foster trust and collaboration between higher education institution and the community, which can enhance the project's overall impact and sustainability.

Provide Knowledge Transfer and Training Programs

Once the community in Sebuyau agreed and ready to participate in this project, the higher education institution need to provide knowledge transfer and deliver the training through a combination of seminar sessions and practical exercises. Partnerships between communities and higher education institutions are an essential component of research and practise. These collaborative relationships should ideally comprise a mutually beneficial exchange in which community agency partners share knowledge about vulnerable populations, their most pressing needs, and the best ways to satisfy those needs (Minkler, 2005). The programs can include courses on entrepreneurship, marketing, customer service, financial management, and sustainable tourism practices. The training should be designed to be interactive, participatory, and adapted to the learning styles and needs of the boat operators. The activities that had been carried out with Sebuyau community are as follow:

Upgrading Existing Fishing Boats

Upgrading existing fishing boats for boat rental activities involves modifying the boats to make them suitable and safe for renting out to customers for recreational purposes. This include making changes to the boat's design, equipment, and amenities, such as adding seats or benches, and providing safety equipment such as life jackets and first aid kits. Figure 2 shows the picture of boat before and after upgrading.



Figure 2: Fishing Boat Before and After Upgrading

Boat License Application

The boat license application process involves applying for and obtaining a legal license to operate a boat or watercraft. To obtain a boat license, it is advisable to consult with the local boating authority or licensing agency to understand the specific requirements. In this project, boat operators in Sebuyau were educate on how to apply for a boat license with Lembaga Sungai-sungai Sarawak (LSS). After the license application is approved by LSS, the boat will display the license number, as illustrated in Figure 3.



Figure 3: Fishing Boat After Applying Boat License

Purchasing Boat Insurance

Renting out a boat for recreational purposes can be a great way to earn some extra income, but it also comes with its own set of risks and liabilities. That's where boat rental insurance comes in. As an article by Allstate (n.d) explains, this type of insurance can protect boat owners from financial losses and liability claims that may arise from renting out their boats. To purchase boat rental insurance, the HEI assists the boat operators in Sebuyau to contact an insurance company that specializes in marine insurance. They can provide information about the different types of coverage that are available and assist to select a policy that meets the needs and budget.

Boat Permit Application

A boat permit is a document issued by the relevant government agency or organization that allows an individual or organization to legally operate a boat for rental purposes. An article by the National Marine Manufacturers Association (n.d) explains that "if you are operating a boat rental business, it is critical to ensure you have the proper licenses and permits to operate legally." The purpose of the permit is to ensure that the boat is in compliance with all applicable laws and regulations, and that it is safe for use by renters.

To apply for a boat permit for rental purposes, HEI guide the boat operators to follow the application process established by the relevant agency or organization in your area. This typically involves completing an application form, providing proof of ownership or a rental agreement for the boat, and paying any applicable fees. Once the application has been processed and approved, a boat permit will be issued that will allow the boat operators to legally rent their boat to customers.

Marketing Strategy

The potential marketing strategies for a boat rental and fishing activity business that has been applied in Sebuyau is using Social Media. Social media platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, and YouTube has been utilized. For instance, YouTube can help businesses reach potential customers. Smith et al., (2022), found that social media has been instrumental in raising brand awareness, increasing customer engagement, and generating leads for the company. In addition, the marketing messages need to be kept consistent across all platforms, and always provide excellent customer service to ensure that customers have a positive experience and are likely to recommend the business to others.

Package/Product Development

Boat operators in Sebuyau underwent training on creating tourism packages or products that offer boat rentals and fishing activities, which can be a highly effective approach to drawing in fresh clientele and increasing profits for their enterprise. Figure 4, shows the boat rental activities package offered by the boat operator.

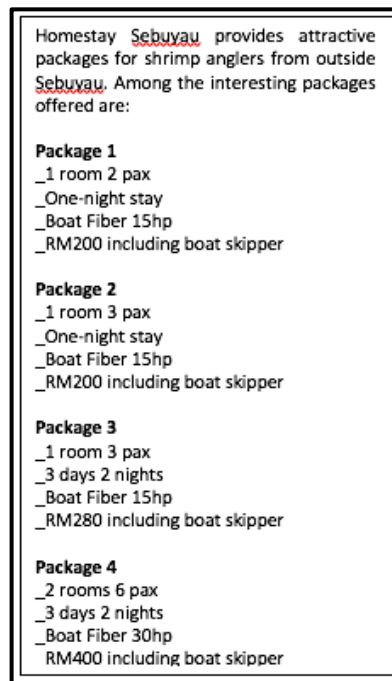


Figure 4: Sample of Boat Rental Activities Package Offered by The Boat Operators

Source: Facebook

Progress Monitoring

The higher education institution oversees the implementation of the training by monitoring the performance of the boat operators over a period of 5 months. Mentors are responsible for making routine visits to the sites and offering advice on business growth. This monitoring process encompasses various aspects, such as social media promotions for boat rentals, maintaining a logbook, and tracking the income generated through boat rental activities during the 6-month period.

Findings and Discussion

This section will address the impacts of the Higher Education Institution's (HEI) involvement in developing entrepreneurial skills among boat operators in Sebuyau through Community-Based Tourism (CBT). The discussion is focusing on the promotion, boat rental activities and income generation.

Promotion

The aim of this study was to assist boat operators in generating revenue by providing them with training on the effective use of diverse social media platforms for marketing and promotional purposes. According to the findings of the interview, Boat Operator 1 successfully applied the techniques advised by the higher education institution (HEI) to boost their boat rental income. This involved leveraging various social media channels, including YouTube, Facebook, and WhatsApp, to promote their boat activity packages. Additionally, Boat Operator 1 frequently updated and promoted their boat rental offerings. A screenshot from the YouTube channel created by Boat Operator 1 to showcase their activities is presented in Figure 5.



Figure 5: Boat Cruising as the Activities Offered in Sebuyau

Source: YouTube

Conversely, Boat Operator 2 only utilized WhatsApp to promote their boat activities and seldom publicized their boat rental packages.

Boat Rental Activities

Figure 6 displays the information regarding boat rental activities, which is meticulously documented in a logbook. Boat operators receive orders via phone calls and messages, which they then record manually in the logbook to maintain accurate and up-to-date records. All pertinent details regarding the tourists, such as their names, destination, booking dates, number of boats needed, number of guests, and duration of the boat rental, are meticulously recorded to ensure completeness of information.

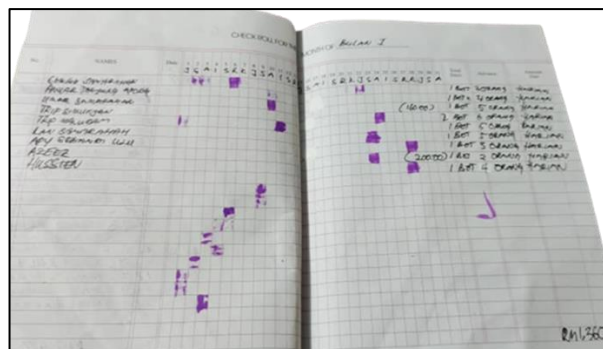


Figure 6: Logbook Sample to Record Boat Rental Activities

Income Generation

The earnings of the two boat operators from September to January are presented in Table 1, indicating a distinct difference in their total income from boat rental activities. Specifically, Boat Operator 1 earned RM9,480.00 while Boat Operator 2 earned RM2,540.00. The variation in their income could be attributed to the promotional approach employed and the regularity of promoting their services. An increase in the frequency of promoting their services on social media can result in a surge in sales, as users are more likely to engage with such accounts.

Table 1: Sample on Income Generation From Boat Rental Activities by Local Community

Months	Income Boat Operator 1 (RM)	Income Boat Operator 2 (RM)
Sept	2,040.00	280.00
Oct	1,720.00	480.00
Nov	1,880.00	800.00
Dis	2,480.00	320.00
Jan	1,360.00	660.00
TOTAL (RM)	9,480.00	2,540.00

Conclusions

Higher Education Institution (HEI) or universities have the potential to significantly enhance the entrepreneurial skills of boat operators in coastal regions and aid in promoting sustainable development through community-based tourism by implementing these steps. Nevertheless, there is room for additional involvement by higher education institutions in the pursuit of advancing the entrepreneurial capabilities of boat operators in coastal areas. The results demonstrate the significance of the efforts and roles played by higher education institutions in promoting sustainable development and empowering local communities to engage in boat rental activities.

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