Community education as a lifelong learning to support sustainable tourism

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ABSTRACT

A community-based tourism (CBT) approach has become an integral part of rural and sustainable tourism development strategies. However, CBT has some constraints on being sustainable due to some internal weaknesses and external concerns, including poor marketing competencies. As a top-down government initiative, Malaysian CBT homestay is blessed with numerous assistance to ensure its survival which in the other hand, creates over-reliance toward other parties. This lack of marketing expertise challenges homestay sustainability. This study examines the importance of community education in marketing activities as a lifelong learning towards sustainable tourism in Malaysia. Qualitative case study is employed to gain an extensive and in-depth explanation on homestay's marketing implementation and its issues. A semi-structured interview was taken to nine homestay operators. This study employs a thematic data analysis to investigate the interview results. Research findings show that in majority, the community enjoys the comfort zone provided by government and travel agents, hence encourage the resistance for change. However, a few homestay demonstrates positive respond to involve lifelong learning through community education to support sustainable tourism. More importantly, partnership between various key stakeholders are the utmost important to ensure policy planning and to improve community education quality.

Keywords: community education, lifelong learning, sustainable tourism, homestay Malaysia

INTRODUCTION

Tourism industry in Malaysia has been vital to the country's development and progress (Karanasios & Burgess, 2008; Latiff et al., 2020; Shahbaz et al., 2018, 2020). Moreover, tourism is widely anticipated to contribute directly or indirectly to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals, with the help of other stakeholders (UNWTO, 2017). The agenda highlights the importance of sustainable tourism. UNWTO (2017) stresses the importance of a well-defined organisational framework, sufficient funding, and investments in technology, infrastructure, and human resources for a sustainable tourist industry.

Community-based tourism (CBT) is a means to realise sustainable tourism goals, which include encouraging local participation and fostering economic growth (Ellis & Sheridan, 2014). In addition, as CBT is typically located in rural regions (Boronyak et al., 2010), it is seen as pro-poor tourism. The community is expected to gain control of the CBT operation and reaps many of the benefits of it (Méndez-López et al., 2014; Simpson, 2008). As a result, CBT seeks to involve local communities in the management of CBT projects. By doing so, CBT will boost residents' standard of living by allowing community to earn supplemental income while also protecting the region's unique cultural and natural resources.

The 7th Malaysia Plan (from 1996 to 2000) included CBT as a new tourism offering for the country (Bhuiyan et al., 2013; Hummel, J., de Jong, H., Dhiradityakul, 2013). By promoting the inclusion of all ethnic groups in the tourism industry, it expects to preserve and reinforce the principle of balanced development, which was first put forth in 1991, as well as to foster the growth of rural communities and intercultural dialogue. Homestay is one of the most popular forms of CBT in rural tourism Malaysia (Boon, 2018), and it allows residents of rural areas to benefit economically by hosting visitors (Bhuiyan et al., 2013; Othman et al., 2013).

As a top-down government initiative, this rural community receives abundant assistance from the government including homestay legal-licensed, incentives, and marketing activities to promote homestay and to gain tourists' arrival. Furthermore, travel agencies also play role in bringing tourists into the homestay. Rather than collaboration and partnership among stakeholders, this situation creates homestay over dependency towards the government and travel agencies. Homestay found that it is extremely difficult to attract international tourists without connections to travel agencies (Dodds et al., 2018; Mtapuri & Giampiccoli, 2016). The scarceness of marketing expertise and human resources worsen homestay promotion strategies (Dodds et al., 2018). As a result, the shared benefits and their ability to be sustainable will be restricted.

As a matter of fact, to take collaborative action towards sustainability, a strong community is essential. UNEVOC UNESCO (2020) emphasises the key role of education to assist communities' benefit. Buhalis (2000) argues that education and training on strategic marketing in tourism destination can effectively determine the degree to which a destination will accomplish benefits. Community education pertains to lifelong learning, which places greater importance on the dissemination of particular skills or techniques in the community (Hoerniasih, 2019; Papageorgiou et al., 2020). Rural communities, in particular, will have a brighter future if they embrace community learning (Kilpatrick, 2000). The community members shape the community future. Moreover, the communities' capacities for learning, adapting, and changing can only be strengthened if policymakers really put the best available strategy, to constraint a silos mentality among community.

Malaysian homestay operator is characterised by older generation who are already retired or work for their own land in the rural areas. Minghetti & Buhalis (2010) learn that the Malaysian homestay community experiences a digital divide. The "digital divide" is the disparity between people, households, businesses, and geographic regions at various socioeconomic levels in terms of both their access to ICTs and their use of the internet for a variety of purposes (OECD, 2021). Moreover, the out-migration of local youths creates a big generation gap of tourism workforce in the community. This situation made the education for community become more challenging. Community education is an essential component of lifelong learning and is essential for increasing awareness, developing partnerships, and influencing action in order to engage people in the process of working towards sustainability and economic growth (Tilbury & Wortman, 2008). Community education programmes are, for the most part, constrained by the local context and driven by the community's knowledge and understanding. These programmes offer the chance to increase awareness, promote participation, foster leadership, and encourage democratic decision-making as part of an ongoing process of lifelong learning. Indeed, lifelong learning greatly improves self-reliant, resilience, and sustainable community (Papageorgiou et al., 2020).

This study will investigate the urgency of community education in marketing activities as a lifelong learning towards sustainable tourism in Malaysia. As one of superior tourism initiatives in Malaysia, homestay gains its importance to support sustainable development in the rural regions. Nevertheless, its limited marketing capability and human capital investment depreciate community contribution to achieve economic benefit and feasibility in the future. The top-down CBT projects initiated by the government, such as homestay in Malaysia, have failed to understand the potential market segments and the distribution channels, as well as tourism promotion strategy (Hamzah & Khalifah, 2009). While the digital divide exists in the community, the resistance to learn marketing design for homestay promotion occurs. In fact, education promotes community empowerment and sustainability. Therefore, an investigation on the

community lifelong learning education is required to enhance its forthcoming tourism sustainability and economic growth.

METHOD

This study takes a qualitative method to solving the stated research objective. The first steps of qualitative research are the formulation of working hypotheses and the application of theoretical frameworks to guide the investigation of research topics with individual or collective significance for broader social or human concerns. According to Creswell (2013), the purpose of qualitative research is to gain a nuanced and comprehensive understanding of a topic of interest. This information can be gathered through in-depth interviews with actual people, conducted at their homes or places of employment. The goal is to ensure that participants feel heard and respected, and to lessen the power dynamic between researchers and study participants (Creswell, 2013).

This study applies descriptive single case study qualitative research approach to take closer consideration on the homestay CBT operators in Johor, Malaysia. A descriptive single case study is chosen as a research design to describe some contemporary phenomenon and to gain an extensive and in-depth explanation (Yin, 2018), which focuses on an issue or a concern, then choose one particular restricted case in the real life circumstances, characteristics, behaviours, and patterns (Yin, 2018).

Purposeful sampling is a methodology employed in this study. This means that the researcher selects research participants and settings based on their potential to shed light on the study's key phenomenon and research challenge. This study intentionally selected seven homestays that have demonstrated exceptional achievements and already possess a presence on social media. Additionally, two homestays with limited activity on social media were chosen. These homestays are selected according to the recommendation of MOTAC Johor. Therefore, as many as nine homestay operators are included in the data collection trough a semi-structured interview. There are nine interviewees, representing each homestay, involved in this study. The age is varied from 40 to 70 years old, as shown in table 1 below. As the interview is aimed to investigate social media marketing implementation in the homestay, the respondents are those who are familiar with the homestay promotion activities.

Table 1. Respondents' profile

Code	Name of homestay	Interviewee position	Age
R1	Homestay 1	Chairman	60
R2	Homestay 2	Secretary	56
R3	Homestay 3	Chairman	70
R4	Homestay 4	Promotion manager	38
R5	Homestay 5	Chairman assistant	62
R6	Homestay 6	Chairman	65
R7	Homestay 7	Chairman assistant	68
R8	Homestay 8	Chairman	62
R9	Homestay 9	Chairman	65

The interview is structured by adopting technology-organization-environment (TOE) model. TOE is firstly proposed by Tornatzky et al. (1990) to construct the process of technology adoption and implementation. Based on prior literatures that utilise TOE model in tourism and hospitality field of study, the instrument of this research employs the following indicators as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Instrument indicators

Part	Variables	Indicators	Source of measurement
TOE model	Technology context	Relative advantage (benefit) Complexity (familiarity) Infrastructure Youths	(Ali Abbasi et al., 2022; AlSharji et al., 2018; Nguyen et al., 2022))
	Organisational context	Top management support Staff capability Organisation structure	(Ali Abbasi et al., 2022; AlSharji et al., 2018; Zhu et al., 2003)
	Environment context	Competition Government policy Customer demand Outside assistance	(Ali Abbasi et al., 2022; AlSharji et al., 2018)

Construct validity is used in this research to identify the appropriate operational measures for the concepts that are being investigated

A thematic analysis is used to analyse the data. According to Braun & Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is a technique for evaluating qualitative data that entails searching for, identifying, and reporting recurrent themes across an entire dataset. The results of the analysis are reported using this manner. The processes of selecting codes and constructing themes in this method require interpretation in addition to describing the facts.

The thematic analysis used in this study involves 6 steps that are required to be carefully taken and may need repetitive process (Creswell, 2013).
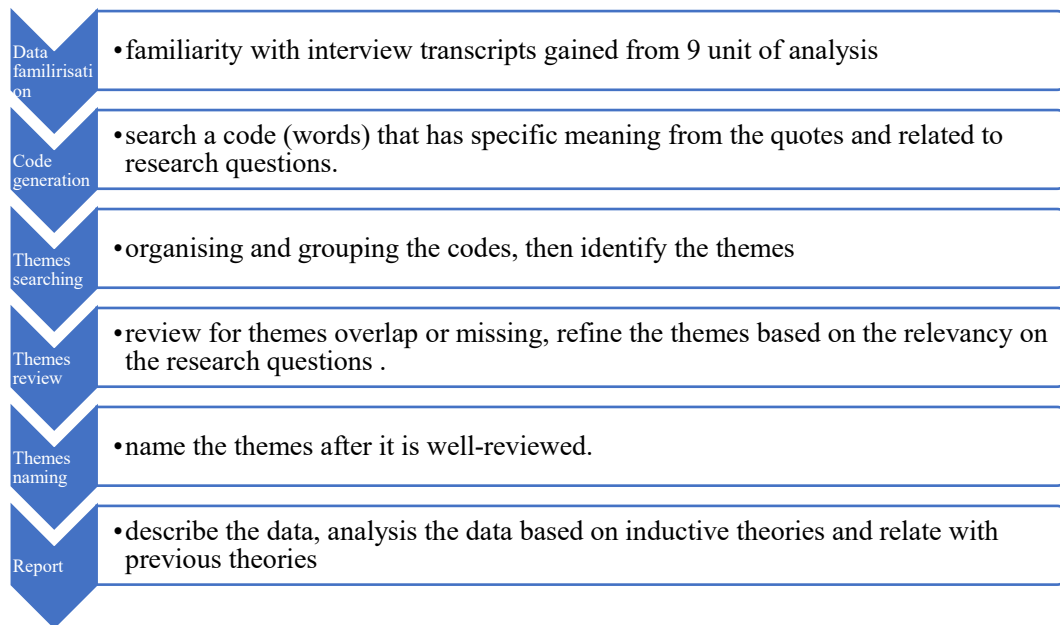

Data familirisation
- familiarity with interview transcripts gained from 9 unit of analysis

Code generation
- search a code (words) that has specific meaning from the quotes and related to research questions.

Themes searching
- organising and grouping the codes, then identify the themes

Themes review
- review for themes overlap or missing, refine the themes based on the relevancy on the research questions .

Themes naming
- name the themes after it is well-reviewed.

Report
- describe the data, analysis the data based on inductive theories and relate with previous theories

Figure 1. Thematic analysis process (own data processing)

The data is analysed using the computer-assisted programme Atlas.ti. This software enables researchers to consolidate all of their data (including text, pictures, audio, and video) as well as their codes, notes, and results into a unified and coherent project. Researchers have the ability to assign labels, annotations, and assessments to specific portions of the data. The app offers a minimalistic interface for effortlessly moving and placing code snippets. Therefore, a researcher can efficiently search, retrieve, and analyse relevant data segments and notes related to an idea. Importantly, they can create unique visual networks by connecting visually selected lines, memos, and codes in a concept map (Creswell, 2013).

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Finding

Based on the data, thematic analysis was conducted by creating the code and final themes as the table 3 shown below.

Table 3. Thematic data analysis

Themes	Codes	Frequency	Code description
Technology	Infrastructure constraint	3 counts	technologies availability
	Lack of youths	16 counts	Limited young generation available
	Non-user friendly	9 counts	Difficulties in technology operation
	Relative advantage	14 counts	The technology benefit
Organization	Lack of expertise	25 counts	Incapability in handling the new technology
	No organization structure	3 counts	Unavailability of organization '
	Positive leader's perspective	8 counts	Top-level management's role in encouraging innovation
Environment	Competition	2 counts	Market situation over other homestay operators
	Government policy	3 counts	Government regulation for homestay operation
	Outside assistance	25 counts	Other parties' help to promote homestay

Technological factors are dominated by lack of youths even though social media benefit are founded by homestay operators. The homestay is experiencing lack of youths who are ready and willing to take part in homestay tourism.

We lack of young generation. They prefer move out to city and get a more promising job. Here, homestay cannot guarantee tourists arrival so the income is also cannot be predicted. (R3)

Not only the scarcity of eligible young individuals, the limited infrastructure also becomes the primary factors impeding the implementation.

Organization factors are mainly led by lack of expertise of operating social media marketing. Despite having homestay' social media accounts, it is important to learn that some homestay post the tourists activities through their personal social media account. A little event description that follows some uploaded photos on Facebook explains homestay limited promotion ability. Additionally, it is common to see empty response on the comment space provided below the posts.

What I can do just to upload photos. I am not capable to create selling words on that. I have no experience, I am old already, right. Maybe those who are young can do that. (R2)

However, homestay positive leaders' perspective achieve considerable counts in the findings. A leadership mindset that is positive helps to a good attitude towards social media marketing adoption. Yet, homestay also experience the lack of organisational structure that worsens the reluctance to embrace the technology.

From the environment perspective, homestay receives numerous outside assistance which causes resistancy to adopt the social media platform even though few homestay alert that competition is now become an emerging trend in promoting the business. Homestay prefers to

get assistance mainly from government then travel agents. The willingness to promote homestay directly to the market by having social media is rare. Based on the interview, most homestays are not capable to create a tourism product package and offer it to the market. Instead, they let travel agencies made for them including the itinerary and the pricing.

.... For the itinerary and pricing, we depend on travel agent requests. What do they ask for, we provide it (Respondent 1)

... the products offered to tourists are based our discussion with travel agent, but all is decided by them. So we just follow and receive the income from them (Respondent 4)

...the government created social media for us, but it is difficult for me to fill in and create the content (Respondent 9)

Actually, we want to upload the tourism package into the platform, but we cannot create our own product. How to create the product? (Respondent 2)

Indeed, the over reliance to outside parties such as government and travel agencies create a comfort zone for homestay while also challenge its sustainability in the future.

Discussion

Malaysian homestay tourism is aimed at reducing the income gap between urban and rural areas and improving rural community participation in the village. As a top-down tourism program, homestay tourism is targeted at senior citizens and villagers who stay in rural areas to manage and operate the business. Due to the massive influence of social media marketing technologies on tourism industry nowadays, homestay is questioned for its long term visibility. Based on the findings above, there are some issues and challenges need to be addressed.

Technological factors in social media marketing adoption

Since most homestay operators are senior citizen, age becomes one of crucial issues in adopting the technology. Social media marketing requires a technology savvy user to keep updated with the features. There are few homestays admitted the benefit of having social media marketing for the business promotion. Yet, due to unavailability of young generation in homestay operation, it limits the level of familiarity of using the technology. Malaysian homestay is majority operated by elder generation. It is rare to see middle-aged peers assist homestay management. This finding aligns with (Razzaq et al., 2011) who found that Malaysian homestay is experiencing low youth participation, lack of skilled young generation needed for homestay sustainability (Kunjuraman & Hussin, 2017); and limited young people support to develop homestay program (Samsudin, Maliki, Rahman, & Omar, 2021).

Another issue is the limited internet connection in the rural areas. The finding aligns with (Kunjuraman & Hussin, 2017), who studied CBT in Dagat Village in Sabah Malaysia, that proves poor basic facilities, especially network lines through electronic devices and the internet due to the village's remoteness, have made the community unable to implement its promotional strategy worldwide.

Organizational factors in social media marketing adoption

Based on the interview, most homestays are not capable to create a tourism product package and offer it to the market. Instead, they let travel agencies made for them including the itinerary and the pricing. It is worth to know that creating tourism product package is challenging for homestay. This implies that the basic marketing approach is not yet mastered by homestay. This finding is also confirmed by Balasingam & Bojei (2019), that a significant number of Malaysian homestays are unable to maintain their operations over the long term because their owners do not possess the requisite branding and marketing skills, relationships, or resources to attract guests. Affizzah et al. (2017) warn that the development of homestay products package in Malaysia could

be jeopardised by a lack of expertise in information and communications technology (ICT), marketing of sustainable tourism, and branding on the part of homestay operators. Lim & Lee (2020) also emphasise that a successful homestay branding requires community participation, political support.

This study found that Malaysian homestays face challenges in maintaining long-term sustainability due to the operators' limited branding and marketing skills, lack of established mutual partnership, and insufficient resources to effectively recruit guests. The development of homestay products in Malaysia is at risk due to a lack of branding skills among homestay operators, as well as a lack of competence in ICT and marketing of sustainable tourism (Affizzah, W, & R, 2017; Balasingam & Bojei, 2019). The success of homestay branding is contingent upon the active involvement of the community, the endorsement of local authorities, and proficiency in social media markting aimed at promoting sustainable tourism (Lim & Lee, 2020).

Environmental factors in social media marketing adoption

The over-reliance of registered homestay operators in Malaysia on other parties, including the government and travel agents, has made them resistant to market competition. Hence, sustainability in terms of the economic aspect is also questioned. Malaysian homestays gain numerous assistance and protection from government in the local and state levels. In addition to financial grant given to each homestay operator, Tourism Malaysia, Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture (MOTAC) Johor, and Tourism Johor also employ agencies to create digital platforms to help promote the homestay. Additionally, these government frequently conducted homestay visit in order to boost homestay visitors and revenue. Other variety of promotional programs are also initiated such as travel exhibition to help secure homestay sustainability.

Homestay that are difficult to utilise social media rely more on travel agent to get customers. The homestay's lack of proficiency and preparedness in embracing social media marketing as a promotional tool hinders their confidence in promoting their own products, leading them to entrust this responsibility to a travel agent. These businesses rely heavily on traditional agents like tour operators to market and sell their goods and services (Bastakis, Buhalis, & Butler, 2004; Buhalis, 2000). (Mtapuri et al., 2017) also argue that marketing the products of CBT are the major difficulties when struggle to market globally. Consequently, this dependence leads to a diminished level of community empowerment, which hinders the attainment of shared benefits and jeopardises their long-term viability.

Community education as a lifelong learning

Digital divide, the disparities especially in age and infrastructure occurred in Malaysian homestay is a fundamental challenge. Since the young and expert human resources in Malaysian homestay are scarce, a lifelong learning is one of ways to enhance the community sustainability. By having education, community will acquire skills and knowledge as vital vehicle for local tourism development. Transformative skills that focus cognitive flexibility, the necessity for trial and error, an openness to change, and support for lifelong learning should be emphasised in education and training for everyone (United Nations Environment Programme, 2015). The most effective way for education to promote sustainability is to inspire those in authoritative positions to actively seek knowledge, welcome innovation, and pinpoint problem areas (Wals & Benavot, 2017). Community programmes that educate the whole population can help people of all ages develop their potential (Tilbury & Wortman, 2008).. Communities should receive training on how to market themselves, how to integrate their promotional efforts, how to create effective target marketing campaigns, how to create pricing strategies that are appropriate for target markets, and how to create tourism packages (Stoep, 2000).

Investing in people, the expanded role of education and learning that continues throughout one's life, as well as improving educational and employment policy are all important factors in determining an economy's potential for growth, development, and success in today's economy. Learning is a multifaceted process that is individualised for each person, takes place all the time and everywhere, and meets not only individual requirements in order to encourage the ongoing

development and improvement of the knowledge and skills necessary for employment and personal fulfilment but also community needs.

Lifelong learning compresses of four pillar as a tool to not only gain economic growth and employment but also social development and personal empowerment (Su, 2015) as figure 1 below. In regards to tourism marketing and promotion activities, learning to know means the capability to understand and to be aware of tourism marketing concept. Learning to do implies the learning to apply the knowledge and skills to run marketing and promotion activities. Learning to live together means to learn working collaboratively, to be sensitive and respect local culture in a concern of sustainability. Learning to be implies the learning to be open-minded, initiative, and confident within tourism stakeholders (Su, 2015).
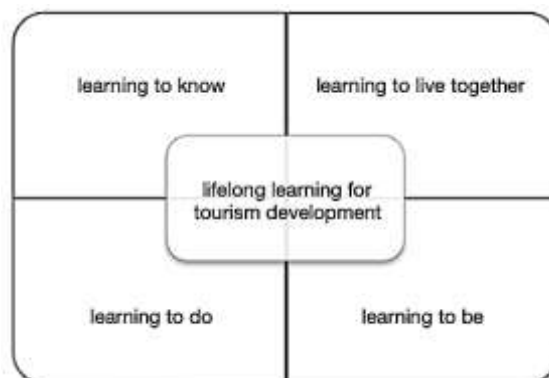

Figure 2. Lifelong learning pillars for tourism development

Ngah et al. (2022) reminds the need to educate and train the rural communities to assist Malaysian homestay mind set. It was found that some homestays tend to resistance to change in a better way to raise and preserve the homestay, as mentioned by the statement below.

....I don't need to create a package and promote the homestay since the visitors will be managed by travel agent (R7)

The Youtuber came here one day, he did some recordings and uploaded on YouTube. So, that is how customers know us. We don't need promotion (R8)

However, a few homestay operators are not willing to cooperate with travel agents. They are worried when the income generated from tourists are not fairly distributed. Yet, they do not capable offering the tourism product to customers.

I realise that working for travel agent is less-profitable. Actually I want to promote our own product directly to the market. But we lack of expertise to create that. (R3)

The importance of university students to play roles in assisting community-based tourism education is emerging (Lucia et al., 2021; Tomasi et al., 2020). As an example, a study of students' internship in Jamaica provides a number of learning outcomes including getting first-hand knowledge of the strategic development orientations of the destination, as well as their problems and triumphs, also the management and policy consequences of these; understanding the drivers for, as well as the problems associated with, the development of community-based tourism with a concern for sustainability principles can be compared and contrasted with the development of enclave tourism; having an understanding of the implications that various management and marketing methods can have on the destination, and analysing, from personal experience, the advantages and disadvantages that various kinds of CBT products.

Indeed, universities play a key role in educating the community to support their sustainability (Lucia et al., 2021). It is feasible to strengthen ties between the community and the

institution by providing students with opportunities to engage with the real world context (Tomasi et al., 2020). It is necessary for universities and other stakeholders in the tourism industry to provide tourism programmes and educational materials. Also, the government should be involved in the creation of tourism policies. Yanes et al. (2019) argue that policies and regulations concerning education will support local community to play a major role and gain benefit in the CBT. In the same vein, Nason & Nyakiba (2018) prove that education enables the community to achieve sustainability as they can play a greater role in tourism planning, coordination, and activities. By having education, community will acquire skills and knowledge as vital vehicle for local tourism development. Policies promoting continuous education throughout one's life are required since participation in such programmes ultimately results in the acquisition of marketable skills that confer a competitive edge (Terziev, 2019).

CONCLUSION

Malaysian homestay tourism is an answer for poverty alleviation, economic growth, social life, and environmental preservation in rural area. In response to the current trend of social media marketing in tourism, Malaysian homestay is challenged with the limited expertise, lack of youths, and over reliance to outside assistance including government and travel agents to promote the homestay. As a result, it creates low level of community empowerment and threats their sustainability. Community education plays crucial role to bridge this digital divide. As part of lifelong learning, community education can optimise community participation hence support the sustainability. There is an urgent need for various stakeholders' partnership and collaboration to work together addressing community education. This partnerships and collaborative planning and management demand a set of abilities including strategies for problem solving, public engagement, personal and non-personal communication, a wide range of computer abilities, a commitment to lifelong learning, and a critical thinking are all vital. Collaborations between universities, government agencies, and citizens can improve the quality of community education.

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