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AN ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH ON MALAY WOMEN TRADERS IN BALIK PULAU, PENANG

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Abstract

This article describes the ethnographic research methodology. It is a comprehensive overview of a social phenomenon or problem studied. Ethnographic method allows the researchers the opportunity to learn and experience the activities carried out by the community studied in their natural social setting. It includes the data collection techniques combined in the fieldwork which are in-depth interviews, participants observations and document data sources. This article also provides justification for the methods employed. The advantages of qualitative approaches as compared to quantitative approaches have been described in this article as well. The use of qualitative approaches can provide a comprehensive overview of a social phenomenon or problem studied. This study illustrates the situation and events that occur in society and describes various business activities that take place among the Malay women traders in Balik Pulau. It also describes the types of transactions, the form of their business activities and the category of the elements of competitiveness of Malay women traders in Balik Pulau, Penang.

Keywords: Qualitative research, ethnographic studies, in-depth interview, observation.

1. Introduction

This study is an ethnographic study. Data collection is the pulse of an investigation. The objective of this research is to achieve the goal of the study if the data collection method is efficient and appropriate with the type of research. Data collection is important to illustrate how data is collected and it aims to provide an understanding of the background of the study area, the community to be studied and so on. In the next section, the location of this study is clarified and the research process is described in stages.

2. Problem Statement

The use of qualitative approaches can provide a comprehensive overview of a social phenomenon or problem studied. Although there is disagreement in terms of the number of approaches that support qualitative research, focus, sample type, data collection method, data analysis and survey, findings in all approaches are similar (Merriam, 2009). According to McQueen and Knussen (2002), ethnographic approaches are able to provide an in-depth explanation of a social reality that may have a picture of the behavior, culture and beliefs shared with members of society. Normally, ethnographic researchers will participate in community or human groups for a certain period of time to find out as much as possible about the group studied (Seidman, 1991; McQueen & Knussen, 2002). Therefore, this study chooses to use ethnographic approaches to data collection in the field. The purpose of using ethnographic research is to understand the worldview and human way of life in a natural context.

3. Research Questions

This research is to investigate the experiences of the Malay women traders who carried out the Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) business in Balik Pulau.

Who are the Malay women traders?
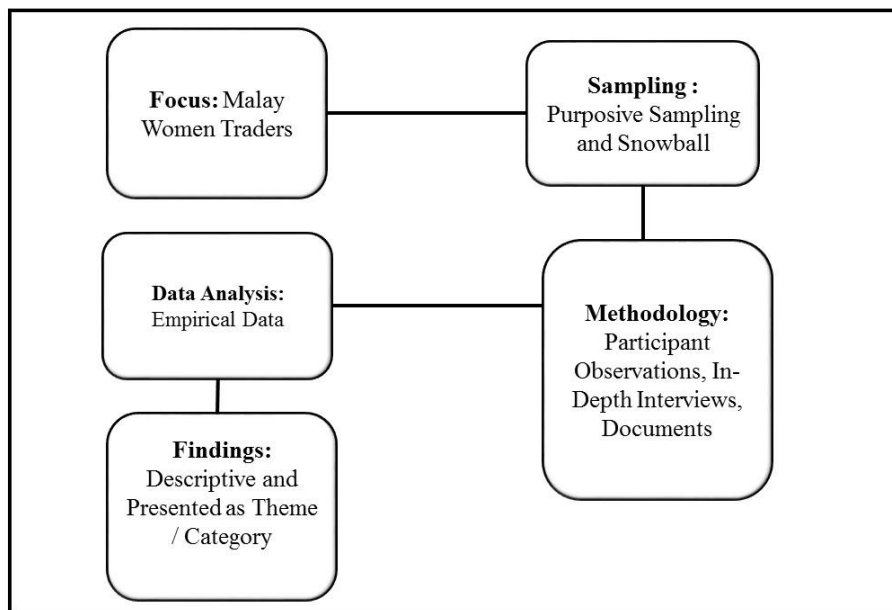How they set up their businesses and to capture their experiences in setting up the business.

4. Purpose of the Study

This study is to find out about the Malay women traders and SMEs in Balik Pulau by using ethnographic approach.

5. Research Methods

Research on Malay Women Traders in Balik Pulau applies qualitative approaches as a key in collecting research data. The use of qualitative approaches can provide a comprehensive overview of a social phenomenon or problem studied (Othman, 2009). The inquiry process in this qualitative research aims to understand social issues through comprehensive and complex picture based on deep informal views and in real situations (Creswell, 2013; Othman, 2009). According to Phillimore and Goodson (2004), qualitative approaches have a high potential to explore issues that have not been studied in depth.

Qualitative research is used to gain an in-depth understanding of social reality and interaction and assessment given to Malay women traders derived from survey informants comprising Malay women traders who conduct business. Generally, qualitative research defines any research that generates insights that are not through statistical procedures or other forms of computation (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, Othman, 2009). Creswell (2013) Snape and Spencer (2003) state that qualitative research provides advantages in terms of holistic data breakdown and is able to explain the complexity of social phenomena (Nabilah, Rohaya Abdul, Ghaziah, Shireena Basree, & Norshidah, 2010; Punch, 2001) and dive into the realities of informants (Nabilah et al., 2010). This is because qualitative research involves problems or issues that require exploration, deep understanding, empowering individuals by sharing stories, hearing opinions and understanding issues in the context of informants (Creswell, 2013). Therefore, qualitative research is used because quantitative measures and statistical analysis simply could not explain the social phenomena that occur (Creswell, 2013; Othman, 2009; Merriam, 2009). Based on the submissions, the study of empowering Malay women traders uses a qualitative research approach as the main support in collecting research data. Through six approaches contained in qualitative research, Case Studies, Critical Research, Narrative Studies, Phenomenology, Ethnography and Grounded Theory. Figure 01 is the details of collecting data using an ethnographic approach.

Figure 01. Qualitative Approach Framework

Figure 01 describes the process mentioned by Merriam (2009) which uses ethnographic approaches in qualitative research. The research in Balik Pulau will adopt Merriam's study fieldwork. Firstly, the main focus of this study is the Malay women traders who carried out the Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) business in Balik Pulau. Secondly, informants are selected using the purposive sampling technique and snowball sampling techniques. The sampling technique is chosen through the selection of samples that have certain characteristics of the informants. Through this sampling technique, the researcher began the fieldwork in Balik Pulau. According to Neuman (2003), the sample of the study was selected using snowball

sampling, also known as network (network), referral chain (referral sampling). This sampling procedure is used primarily when researchers are unable to obtain a list of subject names in populations with multiple characteristics. In this procedure, researchers have identified a small number of subjects with characteristics to be studied. After the subject is interviewed, informants (chiefs) are asked to name other subjects in populations that have the same characteristics. Therefore, this sampling depends on the reference made by the informant. Once the population has been identified, the selection of informants is determined by the researcher. Thirdly, the researchers used three data collection methods, namely participant observation, in-depth interviews and document data sources. Fourth, the data analysis collected will be presented in categories according to the theme.

Ethnographic methods can give researchers the opportunity to learn and experience the activities carried out by community groups studied in their environment (Palmer, 2001; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). It is important for an ethnographic researcher to understand something sought based on the perspective of the society being studied itself (Fetterman, 1989). In this way, various social meanings can be derived from the community itself rather than through the assumption of research solely on the social phenomena that occur.

Ethnographic research has been used widely by anthropologists such as Malinowski, Boas, Radclife-Brown and Mead since the 20th century (as cited in Creswell, 2013). The term ethnography itself means portrait of a people (Othman, 2009). This is because the data strength obtained through ethnographic research can interpret the socio-cultural data from the perspective of the subject (Othman, 2009) and produce statements from the more accurate and sensitive communities than the data collected through quantitative research (Whipple & Nyce, 2007) .

Information in ethnographic studies is collected through an observation visit using observation techniques, interviews, analysis document, live history research and diary writing (Othman 2009; Merriam, 2009). According to Goode (2010) ethnographic researcher has a skill of observing and listening in the context of daily life of the person to be studied for a long period of time in a closer way. Hence, ethnographic research records and makes every aspect of the phenomenon occurring within the community make sense in social research (Whipple & Nyce, 2007).

In the field of anthropology, observation techniques are considered as the main method of collecting data (Cheu, 1991) and this is also a collection of data in ethnography. Whyte (1955) considers the participant's observation as a researcher who uses as much time as possible to engage in the social activities of the subject being studied. Therefore, researchers need to take some time and not just be friendly to explore the intricacies of community life to be studied (Whyte, 1955, as cited in Cheu, 1991). Then the knowledge of the community and the local way of life can be obtained in the document in detail.

This study is descriptive to illustrate and describe the situation and events that occur in society and also to have an in depth view about the phenomenon occurring between Malay women traders in Balik Pulau. The actual task of the researcher is to observe and explain what is happening throughout the field study. The writing of the study was carried out in a form of description that describes the activities of women traders on display and their daily lives as well as the involvement of local communities in business ventures.

5.1. Methods Of Collecting Research Data

The process of collecting qualitative research data involves six main activities starting from (i) identifying locations and individuals to be reviewed, (ii) accessing and building rapports, (iii) collecting data, (iv) recording information, issue in the field and finally (vi) keeping data (Creswell, 2013). Through this study, data collection is conducted in triangulation, using various research methods and taken different data sources to support the data collected (Creswell, 2013; Ritchie, 2003). It is important to ensure that multiple data collection methods are obtained for a complete picture of the phenomenon investigated and useful for cross-checking of information collected (Lim, Abdul, Abdullah, & Mohd Yunus, 2010). Therefore, more accurate and convincing findings on the concepts studied can be produced. Thus, research on women traders in Balik Pulau has applied more than one method of data collection because the reliability of collected data can be enhanced (Creswell, 2013; Nabilah et al., 2010).

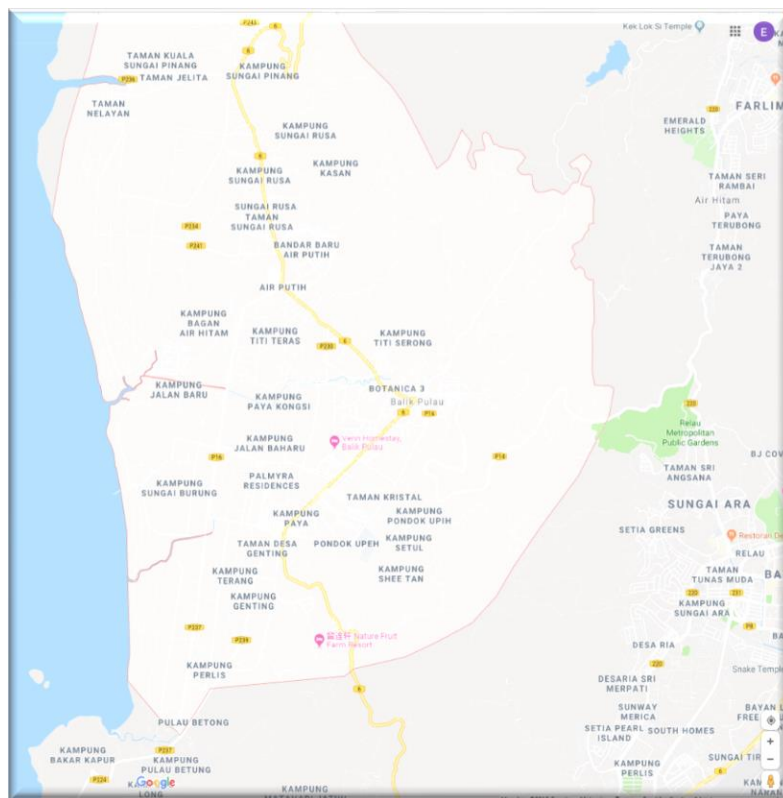### 5.1.1. Research Location: Balik Pulau, Penang

Figure 02. Balik Pulau in Map Penang

This study was conducted in Balik Pulau, Penang (Figure 02). Balik Pulau is the most developed area in the western part of Penang. Historically, Balik Pulau is the earliest area developed in the southwest. Balik Pulau is the place of tourist attraction during the weekend. The original inhabitants of Balik Pulau consist of Malay immigrants from several other states including Kedah (Mohd Nasser, 2016). However, this village is one of the villages located in the suburbs of the "Urban Periphery" which has been separated

from the jungle hills stretching in the central part of Penang. In addition, there are 13 villages located in Balik Pulau including Kampung Sungai Rusa, Kampung Permatang Pasir, Kampung Sungai Pinang, Kampung Simpang Empat, Kampung Perlis, Kampung Pulau Betong, Kampung Jalan Bahru, Kampung Genting, Kampung Terang, Kampung Sungai Burong, Kampung Pondok Upeh, Kampung Kongsi and Kampung Titi Teras.

6. Findings

Fieldwork is a collection of information in the context or scope of the target group's working or living (Creswell, 2013). Fieldwork is one of the primary data collection strategies for anthropology and is the best way to explain how the human group lives through direct information and direct involvement of researchers in the study (Foster & Kemper, 2010). Hence, social interactions face-to-face with 'real people' and direct observation in a natural social setting can be done (Neuman, 2011). For that purpose, researchers have been living with a host family in Kampung Sungai Pinang, Balik Pulau.

This foster family is also one of the Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) entrepreneurs who have been introduced by the Village Head, Pak Long. Makcik Idah, is a SME product entrepreneur in Sungai Pinang village. She is a native of Kampung Pulau Betong, Balik Pulau. After remarrying, she bought a house and settled with her family and stepchildren in Kampung Kuala Sungai Pinang. Fieldwork began as early as the first day of the researcher to step foot in Balik Pulau again in January 2018 and the interview process lasted for 9 months starting on July 1, 2018 and until March 2, 2019 for the data collection process. Implementation of fieldwork in this research is divided into two stages, the first stage, and the researcher stay for three nights each week for the next four months. Second stage, the researcher goes back to Balik Pulau within once a week and at the invitation from informants when they hold a *gotong-royong* event, *kenduri*, *tahlil* and so on.

During the first four months of the course, the researcher lived with aunty Idah and his family. Although the specific period of time is not specified in fieldwork and observation, it is a prerequisite for ensuring that a researcher conducts an intensive outreach study in order to understand the hidden reality behind the social phenomenon studied (Cheu, 1991). In addition, the researchers are able to review changes that occur through informant behavior or study environment. Prior to fieldwork, the researchers met aunty Idah and explain the purpose of the researcher's presence in the village. After she gave permission to the researcher to stay at her home, the researcher came back the next day and began fieldwork.

On the first day of fieldwork, the researcher met aunty Ani, who was the key informant introduced by aunty Idah and her best friend. She is 56 years old, and is the only entrepreneur selling nutmeg cordial drinks in Balik Pulau area. She is well-known among the entrepreneurs community in the village. Through this informal interview, the researcher gets a preliminary view of the economic activities of traders and makes an appointment with aunty Ani for formal interviews.

Staying with the community here allows researchers to build close and friendly ties with informants as well as locals. Generally, before starting fieldwork, researchers need to build rapport because the relationship between researcher and informants can influence the accuracy of the data presented and collected. First of all, the researcher should be accepted in the communities studied. Self-appearing is crucial in forming a prelude relationship among members of the community to gain trust (Hammersley &

Atkinson, 1995). Compatibility and trust need to be established at the beginning of the researcher entering the study area to launch data collection (Cole, 2005). This situation creates an environment where members of the community feel comfortable with the presence of the researcher so researcher can observe and record information about their lives. For example, the first week of the researcher's stay at the study site, most of the people in the population were hesitant and were being less cooperative when the researcher wanted to start a conversation. However, after knowing that the researcher was living in the village, the villagers often greet each time whenever seeing the crew of the researcher traveling back to the village. Even informants are more approachable and there are some informants who were willing to be part of the study informants and were feeling more comfortable to be interviewed.

In addition, the researchers is able to know and understand their informant and respects the lives of villagers at the research site and are available to collect various data (Creswell, 2013). For example, entrepreneurs get down to business at different times depending on the type of business they are working on. Then the routine of business activities selling food (*roti canai*) is done as early as 6.00 am and only return home at around 12.00 noon. The informants are usually interviewed only after 12.00 pm.

Similarly, one of the informants is a businesswoman of a biscuit and a cake "viral". Mrs Noor is known as Acik Noor starting her business as early as 9.00 am, but in the morning she is busy preparing for biscuit and cakes. Her time allocated for interviews was around 10 am until 1 pm as her worker had come to work and she had time to entertain every inquiries of the researcher. If the researcher come on a Sunday it's harder for her to cooperate because on that day the number of customers will increased and also book a cake for wedding and birthday parties will also increase on the weekends. Therefore, the researcher will only begin the interview process on weekdays for informants such as Acik Noor. Similarly, Mrs. Fadilah who prefers to be called Acik Ilah told us that her daily routine starts at 7.00 am. She and her husband will arrive at the shop at around 6.45am every day except for Sunday. However, if she receives a booking from a customer, she and her husband will go down the field to complete a customer booking. The limited time is best spent by the researcher to inform the informants not to be disturbed by the questions posed to the informants. However, Acik Ilah will be busy around 7.00am until 12.30 pm only because she needs to prepare donut for delivery and for sale at her own shop. Every day Acik Ilah will produce about 400 donuts including, bigger donut, small donut and toppings donut for daily sale. The interview process should be done after lunch to provide space for informants to take a break before the interview process. Interestingly, Acik Ilah always shares the information about her experience when she first started to venture into business. She will always contact the researcher and will provide additional feedback or information to the researcher.

However, an informant who is producing nutmeg, cordial and nutmeg juice shared a different experience. Her products can be kept long so her daily routine starts with no time. She who has been working for D'Rossa business for 13 years shares the activities of producing nutmeg, cordial and nutmeg juice at night. According to her "... *siang makcik akan menyiapkan segala bahan-bahan mentah dan malam baru proses...*" so she is not too attached to working hours. She added "*makcik akan buat jus bila ada mood ".. mood mai baru buat..*" However, from field observations, the most appropriate time to interview Mrs.Ani was around 10am until noon because at that time she was not busy and there was a time she did not produce nutmeg juice because the juice still in stocks.

Hence, the routine of these informants can only be known when researchers stay with the community. Occasionally, interviews with informants are conducted in the late afternoon until the evening which is difficult to implement if the researcher does not live in the village. In other words, staying with the communities surveyed gives researcher the opportunity to get the story of the social and economic events that occur and always have the opportunity to repair and supplement the study information (Firth, 1966).

While in the area of study, researcher has tried to adapt to the environment and play a role as a researcher and some of the members of the community. As an ethnographer, there are two roles in the study area and it changes over time. The first is 'acquaintance', where the researcher is treated as guests whose meals are served, conversations are quite limited during the stage of adapting to the environment and getting acquainted with the village community. In the second stage is 'acceptance in society' where researchers are accepted as one of the experts in the family and the society being studied and their identities are also changing. Formerly I was known as a Universiti Sains Malaysia student. As time goes by I was adopted by Acik Idah.

In the early stages of involvement in the study area, the researcher took time to understand the everyday life of the local community and to join in the activities. There are times when the researcher will be a complete participant by participating in activities that are carried out at the event of a ceremony or entertainment in the village.

7. Conclusion

The discussions in this article justify the selection of qualitative research approaches through the ethnographic method used in this study. The advantages of qualitative approaches are in terms of data acquisition, detail and accuracy in explaining the phenomenon of the study. The ability of ethnographic research is describing the socio-cultural elements of the community and understanding from the perspective of the community being studied is used in this study. The combination of data collection methods that are field-based, in-depth interviews, observations and participation in support of the data collection in the field (Creswell, 2013; Ritchie, 2003) illustrates the overall phenomenon studied and helps cross-check information (Lim et al., 2010) which have been collected.

Acknowledgments

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