

RESEARCH ARTICLE

TEMPORAL DYNAMICS OF TOURISM SERVICE BUSINESS ACTIVITY IN A SMALL COASTAL TOWN OF MALAYSIA

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ABSTRACT – Small coastal towns often rely on service-based economies that shift with tourism demand and local community needs. While this dual dependence sustains livelihoods and attracts visitors, it also introduces vulnerabilities such as seasonal fluctuations, overreliance on weekend tourism, and unequal benefits for residents. Despite their importance, the temporal dynamics of service business activity in such towns remain underexplored, particularly in emerging economies where tourism and local services drive development. This study examines the temporal patterns of service businesses in Sedili Besar, Malaysia. Quantitative data were gathered through questionnaire-guided interviews with operators across food and beverage, tourism, retail, and financial services. Results reveal a strong weekday–weekend contrast: weekdays are dominated by essential services for locals, whereas weekends see surges in tourism-related businesses such as restaurants, accommodation, and recreation. The findings highlight a hybrid livelihood model where resident needs and visitor demand coexist but remain unevenly distributed across time. Heavy reliance on tourism-driven weekend activity heightens economic vulnerability, particularly during disruptions to visitor flows. This study contributes to small-town development research by underscoring temporal dynamics in shaping service economies and offers policy insights on balancing tourism growth with essential services that support community well-being.

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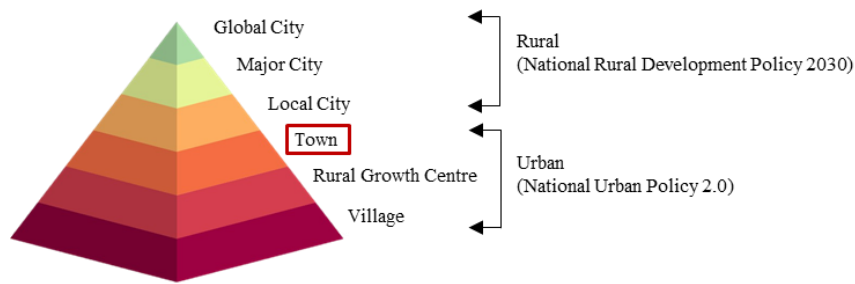
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INTRODUCTION

Small towns play a critical role in Malaysia's urban system, functioning as service and economic centres for rural populations. Under the Second National Urban Policy (DPN 2.0), towns (pekan) occupy the third tier of the national hierarchy, following major and intermediate cities, and are mandated to provide essential facilities such as schools, clinics, and police stations (PMO, 2016) (Figure 1). Beyond service provision, towns also serve as economic hubs accommodating small businesses, local markets, and trade activities that sustain daily livelihoods (Vandercasteelen et al., 2018; Saleh et al., 2015). Similar roles are emphasised in the Rural Development Policy (DPLB 2030), which defines towns as rural settlements with urban characteristics and populations typically below 10,000, supported by schools, markets, ICT centres, and religious institutions (KPLB, 2018; Esa & Kamarudin, 2025). Weekly events such as night or morning markets reinforce their economic and social significance, positioning towns as nodes of inclusive rural development (Agergaard et al., 2019; Saleh et al., 2012).

International and Malaysian scholarship highlights the contribution of small towns to rural transformation. By linking rural hinterlands with larger cities, towns reduce regional disparities and improve access to services (van Grunsven & Benson, 2020; Toerien, 2018). They also strengthen local economies through service-based enterprises, which generate employment, attract visitors, and stimulate spending (Mayer & Knox, 2010; Halseth & Meiklejohn, 2009). Yet, their economic performance is uneven. Many towns are heavily dependent on single sectors, whether agriculture, manufacturing, or increasingly, tourism (Li et al., 2019; Jolliffe & Farnsworth, 2003). Such reliance creates structural vulnerabilities: fluctuating incomes between peak and off-peak periods, overexposure to shocks such as pandemics or disasters, and the narrowing of economic opportunities (Jang, 2004; Getz & Nilsson, 2004; Wirth et al., 2016; Saleh et al., 2015). These vulnerabilities are particularly visible in coastal towns where tourism emerges as a primary growth driver. While tourism injects income, stimulates infrastructure, and fosters community-based initiatives such as homestays and handicrafts (Hampton et al., 2024; Kamarudin, 2016), it also amplifies risks of instability. Visitor demand is highly uneven, producing cycles of surges and lulls that affect both businesses and essential services (Donaldson, 2021; Hall & Page, 2014). The COVID-19 pandemic exposed these weaknesses, with tourism-dominated towns facing sudden economic collapse (Esa & Kamarudin, 2025). Consequently, the sustainability of small coastal towns hinges not only on tourism promotion but also on understanding the temporal rhythms that shape service economies.



Category	Functions / Facilities
Administration	Local authority offices; government offices; shops, markets, supermarkets; hardware/agriculture shops; workshops
Commerce & Business	General retail; commercial services; small enterprises
Small & Medium Industries	Resource-based factories and processing industries
Transportation	Bus stations; jetties; taxi stands; car rental services
Finance	Banks; money changers
Social Facilities	Health: clinics, hospitals Education: schools, colleges Security: police, fire stations Religion: mosques, churches, temples Recreation: gyms, community halls
Tourism Facilities	Hotels; chalets; guest houses; homestays

Source: adapted from Esa & Kamarudin (2025); Ali (2019)

Figure 1. Urban heirarchy system in Malaysia and the position of town with its functional types within the national planning policy

One dimension that remains underexplored is the temporal dynamics of service business activity. Existing studies largely address seasonality, distinguishing between high and low tourism seasons at regional or national scales (An & Alarcón, 2020; Baum & Lundtorp, 2001; Butler, 2001). Less attention has been given to micro-scale patterns such as daily or weekly variations in service activity, particularly the contrasts between weekdays and weekends. For towns that act simultaneously as service providers for residents and destinations for visitors, these temporal dynamics have direct implications for resilience and sustainability. This article addresses that gap by examining service business fluctuations in Sedili Besar, a small coastal town in Johor, Malaysia. The study investigates how weekday–weekend patterns shape business performance, livelihoods, and community well-being, contributing to debates on small-town development in emerging economies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Small Coastal Towns in the Urban Hierarchy

Globally, small towns are defined by modest population sizes, limited administrative capacity, and simple economic structures (Zhao et al., 2025). Functioning as transitional spaces between rural and urban areas, they provide services, connect markets, and mediate flows of goods and people. Common features include populations under 50,000, reliance on small-scale service and trading activities, and close integration with surrounding rural landscapes (Tacoli, 1998).

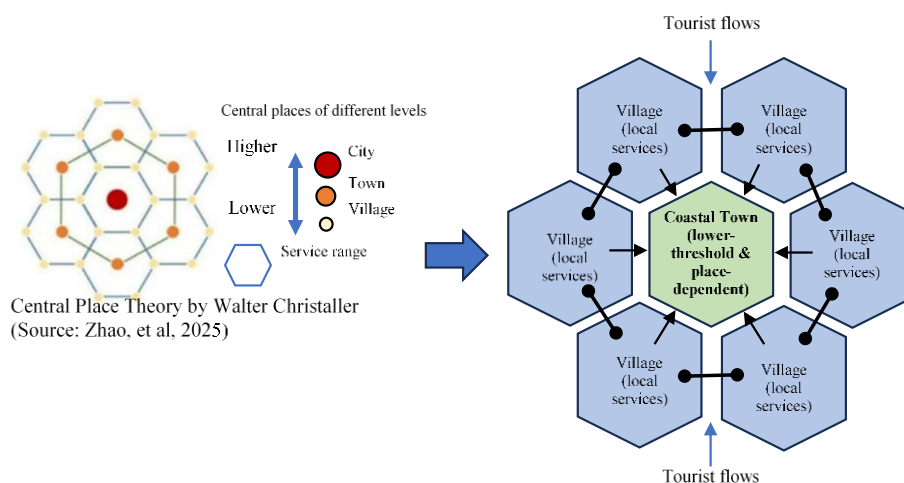


Figure 2. Adapted Central Place Theory diagram into a coastal town driven by tourism development as a lower-threshold but highly place-dependent settlement

In Malaysia, towns are classified as the third tier in the national hierarchy, below major and intermediate cities (PMO, 2016). They typically host fewer than 10,000 residents, provide basic services for rural hinterlands, and sustain economies through retail, markets, and small businesses (KPLB, 2018). Coastal towns further depend on fishing, marine-based

industries, and tourism due to their geographical setting (Amir et al., 2015). Central Place Theory by Christaller in 1933 provides a useful framework for conceptualising these roles. As shown in Figure 2, it posits that settlements form hierarchies based on the range and threshold of services, with smaller towns offering basic facilities and larger cities more specialised ones. Despite criticisms of its rigid economic assumptions (Ali, 2019), the theory remains influential in planning, particularly for understanding how small towns act as service nodes. In coastal contexts, however, its application requires adaptation. Many towns sustain “lower-threshold” services such as homestays, seafood restaurants, and handicraft markets, that rely not only on resident populations but also on fluctuating tourist demand (Table 1). Their viability is therefore highly place-dependent, shaped by natural and cultural assets like beaches, fisheries, and maritime heritage. Malaysian planning frameworks, such as the National Rural Physical Planning Policy 2030 (DPFDN), acknowledge this dual role, identifying small towns as both service hubs for rural populations and catalysts for tourism-driven development (PLANMalaysia, 2017). This dual character underscores their strategic importance in sustaining livelihoods while enhancing regional resilience.

Table 1. Characteristics of a town based on literature review

Characteristic	Description	Example	Source
1. Economy	Traditional and community-based economy; depends on agriculture, fishing, and rural tourism as main sources of income	Traditional economic activities of town residents	Bosworth and Venhorst (2018); Plan Malaysia (2017); Mazumder et al. (2009); Šimková (2007)
2. Basic service centers	Provides basic services such as grocery stores, farmers’ markets, health clinics, and logistics services to support daily needs	Grocery stores, clinics, farmers’ markets	Esa dan Kamarudin (2025); Ali (2019); Saleh et al. (2012); Plan Malaysia (2017)
3. Role as economic intermediary	Acts as a link between rural areas and large cities by marketing agricultural products and bringing in essential goods	Town as intermediary market center	Plan Malaysia (2017); Zhao et al. (2025)
4. Demography / social: Small-scale populations	Populations usually fewer than 10,000, reflecting the composition of rural communities	Small rural towns	Kementerian Pembangunan Luar Bandar (2018); Plan Malaysia (2017); Shafii dan Miskam (2011)
5. Demography / social: Harmonious community and social life	Close community ties characterized by mutual cooperation and strong social cohesion	Mutual help culture, cooperative networks	Ali (2019); Saleh et al. (2012); Shafii & Miskam (2011)
6. Access to basic education and health services	Basic education and healthcare are available, but specialized needs require travel to larger cities	Primary schools, local health clinics	Ali (2019); Esa & Kamarudin (2025)
7. Physical: Simple spatial layout	Compact layout with residential and business areas located close together for easy mobility	Clustered housing and shops	Plan Malaysia (2017); Ali (2019)
8. Physical: Basic infrastructure facilities	Equipped with roads, mosques, primary schools, and weekly markets as economic and social hubs	Rural road networks, weekly market centers	Ali (2019); Saleh et al. (2012); Shafii dan Miskam (2011); Rostam (2001)
9. Physical: Strategic location in rural areas	Located along main roads, coastal or rivers, enabling function as collection and distribution centers for agricultural produce	Coastal/ river-based or roadside towns	Kementerian Pembangunan Luar Bandar (2018); Plan Malaysia (2017)

Service Businesses and Tourism in Coastal Towns

Service businesses constitute the backbone of small-town economies, providing essential goods, generating employment, and sustaining community life (Esa & Kamarudin, 2025; Zapletalová, 2009; Tacoli 1998). In Malaysia, towns accommodate diverse enterprises ranging from grocery stores and repair shops to tourism-oriented services such as homestays and seafood outlets (Ali, 2019; Shafii & Miskam, 2011). These businesses not only meet daily needs but also strengthen rural–urban linkages and foster income diversification. Tourism has become a particularly powerful growth driver in coastal towns. It attracts external capital, supports infrastructure development, and creates multi-tiered employment (Hampton et al., 2024; Siow et al., 2015; Page, 2014). Government-led schemes such as the Rural Tourism Master Plan and community homestay programmes embed cultural participation within local economic strategies (Ali, 2019). However, reliance on tourism introduces vulnerabilities. Seasonal demand generates unstable incomes and precarious jobs (Jolliffe & Farnsworth, 2003), while over-dependence limits economic diversification and heightens exposure to shocks (Tacoli, 1998). Competition from larger urban centres and external disruptions, such as the COVID-

19 pandemic, further expose the fragility of tourism-dependent economies. Table 2 outlines key vulnerabilities of service-based economies in coastal towns.

Notably, service businesses in coastal towns experience temporal fluctuations i.e. daily and seasonal cycles shaped by local and tourist activity. Tourism seasonality, defined as temporal imbalances in demand, service access, and employment, adds complexity to service provision (Butler, 2001; Baum & Lundtorp, 2001). Weekend or holiday peaks often contrast sharply with weekday lulls (Jolliffe & Farnsworth, 2003), introducing variability even in essential services like supermarkets or banks (Page, 2014; Ali, 2019). These fluctuations impact economic sustainability by placing pressure on small businesses and essential service access (Jang, 2004). They also affect community resilience, as dependence on tourism cycles can undermine the broader economic functionality of towns (Hampton et al., 2024; Donaldson, 2021). Yet, much of the existing literature focuses on macro-level seasonality; micro-scale temporal pattern, like weekday versus weekend dynamics, remain underexplored in developing-country contexts. This study addresses that gap by examining Sedili, a coastal town in Johor, Malaysia, focusing on how weekday-weekend service fluctuations affect business performance and local economic resilience.

Table 2. Vulnerabilities of service-based economies in coastal towns

Vulnerability	Impact on local economy
Seasonality	Unstable incomes, temporary unemployment
Dependence	Lack of diversification, high exposure to shocks
Global disruptions	Tourism/business closures, reduced external demand
Urban competition	Outmigration, loss of business to larger centers

Source: adapted from Hampton et al. (2024); Johnson & Lichter (2019); Ali (2019); Getz & Nilsson (2004); Jolliffe & Farnsworth (2003)

Temporal Dynamics of Service Businesses

A critical yet understudied aspect of coastal town economies is the temporal fluctuation of service activity. Tourism seasonality is well-documented, typically measured by annual or seasonal peaks and troughs (Butler, 2001; Baum & Lundtorp, 2001). However, micro-temporal patterns such as weekday versus weekend contrasts, remain largely neglected, especially in developing-country contexts (Jolliffe & Farnsworth, 2003). For small towns, such fluctuations are significant because they influence both tourism services and essential facilities. Weekend surges may increase demand for restaurants, accommodation, and recreation, while weekday periods sustain grocery outlets, clinics, and town services primarily for residents (Saleh et al., 2015; Šimková, 2007). These rhythms affect economic sustainability and community resilience, shaping whether towns can balance the needs of residents with those of visitors (Donaldson, 2021). This study builds on the literature by examining weekday-weekend dynamics in Sedili Besar, Malaysia, a coastal town where service businesses straddle both community needs and tourism demand. By analysing how business activity shifts across time, the research provides new insights into the resilience of small-town service economies in emerging economies.

RESEARCH METHODS

Population and Sampling

The study focused on tourism service business activities within the research area, i.e. town of Sedili Besar, Johor (Figure 3) (MDKT, 2022). These activities were grouped into three main categories namely; tourism services, food and beverage services, and retail and financial services, inline with earlier discussion in Figure 1 and literature review section. Since no secondary data on the number of businesses was available, a comprehensive site inventory was conducted to identify the existing service businesses within the study boundaries. These businesses were then classified into the three categories listed above (Table 3).

Table 3. Inventory of service businesses in Sedili Besar town

Business type	List of businesses
Tourism	Bayu Jemala Inn; Sea Horizon Resort; AR Homestay; Homestay Family 5A; Angah Boban Homestay
Food & Beverage	Celop Celop 5A; Raja Kari Siam; East Coast Menu; Kedai 3 Beradik; Kedai Makan Dahlia; Ziemah Ikan Bakar; Medan Selera Ikan Bakar; Kedai Moksu Piah; Cendol Faza
Retail & Financial	DRM Mart Enterprise Grocery Store; Orkid Supermarket



Source: adopted from PlanMalaysia (https://scharms.planmalaysia.gov.my/laman_utama/)

Figure 3. Study area – Sedili Besar town, Kota Tinggi, Johor

To determine the minimum required sample, the following sample size adjustment formula was applied (refer to Taherdoost, 2017; Chuan, 2006):

$$n = \frac{N \cdot Z^2 \cdot p(1 - p)}{e^2(N - 1) + Z^2 \cdot p(1 - p)}$$

where:

n = sample size required

N = total population (number of businesses = 16)

Z = Z-score corresponding to confidence level (for 80% confidence, $Z=1.28$)

p = estimated proportion of population (0.5 used for maximum variability)

e = margin of error (0.10)

Substituting the values:

$$n = \frac{16 \cdot (1.28^2) \cdot 0.5(1 - 0.5)}{0.1^2(16 - 1) + (1.28^2) \cdot 0.5(1 - 0.5)} \approx 9$$

Thus, the required sample size was 9 respondents, proportionally distributed across the three categories as shown in the following Table 4.

Table 4. Study sample distribution according to type of tourism service business

Type of business service	Number of entrepreneurs	Number of respondents required	Number of responses obtained
Tourism	5	3	3
Food & Beverage	9	5	3
Retail & Financial	2	1	1
Total	16	9	7

Data Analysis

The survey data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential methods. Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, and mean scores) were used to summarize respondents’ backgrounds and views on different service sectors. A 4-point Likert scale measured how effective each sector was in supporting the town’s economy. Mean scores were classified as low, medium, or high impact based on set ranges. This method was used for Tables 6, 7, and 8 to compare the impact of tourism, food and restaurant, and town services on Sedili Besar’s economic resilience and to identify which sectors contribute most to the local economy.

RESEARCH FINDING

Profile of Respondents

The study was conducted in March 2024 using field observations and questionnaires involving local business operators in tourism, food and beverage, and retail services in Sedili Besar town. Participants included business owners and

employees selected based on the variety of business types and their importance to the local economy. This approach helped identify business performance trends, levels of dependency, and key challenges and opportunities. A total of seven ($n = 7$) respondents took part in the study, as shown in Table 4. The analysis focused on respondents' age, gender, education level, race, religion, marital status, and household income to understand the socio-demographic background of those involved in the three main service sectors. Table 5 shows that most respondents in Sedili Besar were female (57.1%) and aged 56–64 (42.8%). All were Malay Muslims, and most were born and raised in Sedili Besar (85.7%). Over half had completed SPM/PMR (57.1%), while only a few had higher education. Most respondents (71.4%) earned more than RM4,000 per month, showing a generally stable financial background.

Table 5. Profile of respondents ($n=7$)

Attribute	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	3	42.8
	Female	4	57.1
Age Category	26–40 years	2	28.6
	41–55 years	2	28.6
	56–64 years	3	42.8
Race	Malay	7	100.0
Religion	Islam	7	100.0
Place of Origin	Born and raised in Sedili Besar	6	85.7
	Moved to Sedili Besar (1985)	1	14.3
Education Level	SPM/PMR	4	57.1
	Certificate/Diploma	1	14.3
	Bachelor's degree and above	2	28.6
Estimated Monthly Income	< RM 2,500	1	14.3
	RM 3,001 – RM 3,500	1	14.3
	> RM 4,000	5	71.4

Source: Research fieldwork in 2025

Temporal Dynamics of Current Service Business Performance Trend

The analysis of service business performance in Pekan Sedili Besar reveals clear temporal dynamics across the tourism, food and beverage (F&B), and retail and financial sectors. In all three categories, business activity intensifies during weekends, underscoring weekends as the town's peak economic period. As shown in Table 6, tourism services recorded higher customer traffic (mean = 3.80) and revenue on weekends, reflecting strong seasonality and time dependence. Extended operating hours were observed, although staffing levels remained relatively unchanged (mean = 2.20), suggesting that operators relied on existing resources to meet demand. This highlights the sensitivity of tourism businesses to temporal fluctuations, particularly weekend visitation by tourists.

Table 6. Mean scores of service business operations in Sedili Besar ($n = 7$)

Service category	Indicator	Weekday (Mean)	Weekend (Mean)
Tourism Services	Customer Traffic	2.60	3.80
	Revenue	2.60	3.80
	Local Customers	2.20	1.60
	Staffing	2.60	2.80
	Service Provision	2.20	2.80
	Operational Adjustment	2.00	2.20
Food & Beverage	Customer Traffic	2.80	4.00
	Revenue	2.80	4.00
	Local Customers	1.40	1.33
	Staffing	2.60	2.67
	Service Provision	2.40	3.67
	Operational Adjustment	2.20	3.67
Retail & Financial	Customer Traffic	2.80	4.00
	Revenue	2.40	4.00
	Local Customers	2.00	2.00
	Staffing	2.20	3.00
	Service Provision	2.20	3.00
	Operational Adjustment	2.20	2.80

Source: Research fieldwork in 2025

F&B services demonstrated the most consistent performance, with all respondents reporting significantly higher customer traffic and revenue during weekends (mean = 4.00). Businesses also extended operating hours (mean = 3.67) and introduced additional services, such as special menus, to capture increased demand. However, reliance on external customers was evident, as local patronage remained low (mean = 1.33), posing challenges for sustaining demand beyond weekends. Retail and financial services likewise peaked during weekends, with maximum scores across customer traffic, revenue, and service provision. Longer operating hours and increased staffing were also reported, reinforcing the weekend-centric nature of these businesses.

A critical cross-sectoral issue is the declining participation of local customers, attributed to shifting consumption patterns, economic pressures, and weekend-focused business models. This dependence on tourists and peak periods increases vulnerability, especially during off-peak times or external disruptions. Overall, the findings suggest that Pekan Sedili Besar's service economy is heavily concentrated around weekends, with tourism identified as the most seasonally sensitive sector and F&B businesses as the most responsive through operational adjustments. From an urban and economic planning perspective, strategies are needed to both strengthen service capacity during peak weekends and diversify demand throughout the week to enhance local economic resilience.

Economic Dependence of Sedili Besar Town on Service Businesses

Table 7 shows that Sedili Besar's economy depends mainly on tourism, followed by food and beverage and retail/financial services. Tourism is the strongest sector, with high reliance on visitors for business success. Hotels and homestays depend heavily on tourist arrivals, and more than half of their customers are foreign tourists. This makes the sector vulnerable to global issues such as economic crises and pandemics. Although tourism supports the local economy, relying too much on foreign visitors creates risk, so the area should diversify by promoting local tourism and community-based activities.

Closely linked to tourism, the F&B sector plays a supportive yet elastic role. Businesses in this sector show strong dependence on tourist arrivals (mean = 4.00, High), with demand surging when tourism is thriving. At the same time, moderate reliance on the local economy (mean = 2.67–3.33, Moderate) suggests that F&B enterprises can partly sustain operations through local demand during downturns in tourism. This dual reliance positions the F&B sector as both a beneficiary of tourism growth and a partial cushion against its volatility, albeit with limited resilience. In contrast, the retail and financial sector contributes only marginally to Sedili Besar's economy. With low dependence scores (mean = 0.75–1.00, Low), its role remains secondary. The limited demand for financial services among tourists, who often rely on digital payments or external systems, further weakens its integration into the local economy. However, improving financial infrastructure, especially through digital banking and mobile payment systems, could indirectly strengthen other sectors.

Table 7. Level of economic dependence of Sedili Besar Town on service businesses and by sector (n=7)

Service sector	Indicator	Mean score	Dependence level	Rank
Tourism	Economic dependence on hotels and homestays	3.80	High	1
	Tourist presence directly affects profitability	3.80	High	1
	>50% of customers are foreign tourists vs. locals	3.80	High	1
	Tourism is influenced by F&B and financial services	3.60	High	2
Food & Beverage	Economic dependence on restaurants, cafes, stalls, minimarkets	2.67	Moderate	3
	Tourist presence directly affects profitability	4.00	High	1
	>50% of customers are foreign tourists vs. locals	4.00	High	1
	F&B businesses influenced by tourism and finance	3.33	Moderate	2
Retail & Financial	Economic dependence on banks, post offices, ATMs	1.00	Low	1
	Tourist presence influences demand for financial services	1.00	Low	1
	>50% of customers are foreign tourists vs. locals	0.75	Low	2
	Financial services influenced by tourism and F&B	1.00	Low	1

Source: Research fieldwork in 2025

Taken together, these findings highlight a highly interconnected but uneven economic structure in Sedili Besar. Tourism functions as the primary pillar, with F&B acting as a complementary sector that amplifies tourism's impacts, while retail and financial services remain underdeveloped. The heavy reliance on foreign tourism represents a structural vulnerability, underscoring the importance of diversification strategies that strengthen local demand and broaden economic participation. Enhancing retail and financial services, while fostering domestic-oriented F&B and tourism offerings, could reduce external dependency and build a more resilient service economy.

Table 8. Level of economic dependence of Sedili Besar town on service businesses (n = 7)

Indicator	Mean score	Dependence level	Rank
Local service businesses are more dependent on local residents than visitors/tourists	1.78	Low	4
Town's economic function depends on fisheries, tourism, and service businesses that support local growth	3.89	High	1
Economic sustainability can be maintained through the three main service sectors (tourism, F&B, retail and finance)	3.44	Moderate	2
Government and community provide support/incentives for economic development	2.22	Low	3

Source: Research fieldwork in 2025

The final section of data analysis (Table 8) evaluates the overall economic dependence of Sedili Besar on service businesses. The highest score (mean = 3.89) indicates strong linkage between the town's economy and its fisheries, tourism, and related services, reflecting an externally driven growth model anchored in natural and cultural assets. Moderate dependence (mean = 3.44) is observed for sustaining growth through tourism, F&B, and finance, suggesting untapped potential that could be strategically strengthened. By contrast, service businesses show low dependence on local residents (mean = 1.78), highlighting limited community purchasing power and the town's reliance on visitors. Government and community support is also rated low (mean = 2.22), exposing institutional gaps and weak incentives for long-term resilience. Overall, Sedili Besar's economic structure is externally oriented but lacks robust internal support systems, emphasizing the need for policy intervention, community empowerment, and diversification strategies.

DISCUSSION

The findings reveal that Sedili Besar's service economy is primarily sustained by fisheries, tourism, and related service industries, which collectively form the town's economic backbone (mean = 3.89). This pattern mirrors other Malaysian coastal regions, where tourism often acts as a "white knight" for rural livelihoods by generating jobs and income, though risks arise if growth is not managed sustainably (Siow et al., 2015). Local residents' limited role as consumers, reflected in the low dependence score (mean = 1.78), highlights a structural vulnerability: external demand, mainly tourists, dominates, while the local circulation of income remains weak. The moderate confidence in tourism, food and beverage, and retail/finance sectors as long-term stabilizers (mean = 3.44) indicates cautious optimism but also reveals fragility. Weak institutional support (mean = 2.22) further constrains resilience, underscoring the importance of stronger governance and coordinated action. Prior studies stress that institutional collaboration i.e. linking government, private actors, and communities, is critical to sustain tourism development in small towns (Amir et al., 2015). Tourism's strong connections with F&B and financial services align with national trends: Malaysia's hospitality and restaurant sector generates significant income multipliers, nearly RM0.85 for every additional ringgit of demand (Mazumber et al., 2009). However, Sedili Besar's reliance on foreign visitors raises concerns about vulnerability to external shocks. Similar experiences across Southeast Asia show that coastal economies dependent on international tourism face heightened risks from global crises, ecological stress, and socio-spatial inequalities (Hampton et al., 2024).

CONCLUSION

Overall, Sedili Besar demonstrates considerable growth potential through tourism and its related services. Yet moving from economic fragility toward resilience requires deliberate interventions. Key priorities include: (1) diversifying demand by promoting domestic tourism and agro-tourism experiences (e.g., community-based homestays, cultural trails); (2) strengthening governance through incentives and capacity building for micro-entrepreneurs; and (3) investing in inclusive services such as digital financial platforms to stimulate internal economic circulation. These measures can help Sedili Besar evolve into a more balanced, resilient, and inclusive service economy, echoing sustainable tourism pathways observed in other rural Malaysian contexts.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Khairul Hisyam, as the corresponding author, was responsible for constructing the paper, reviewing the literature, interpreting the data, and proofreading both the draft and final manuscript.

Ahmad Azri, as co-author, contributed to data collection and data analysis.

Both authors contributed intellectually to the development of the paper and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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