



THE ROLE OF CPEC INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS ON RESIDENTS' QUALITY OF LIFE: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF THE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

The research objective was to study the effects of CPEC on the resident's quality of life and exploring the mediating role of the tourism development. To obtain the study objectives a questionnaire was designed to collect the data from the study area using random sampling. The current research utilizes PLS-SEM for empirical analysis by using SmartPLS 4 software. The results found that CPEC has a substantial impact on the resident's quality of life and tourism development. Also, this study demonstrates that significant positive connection between tourism development and quality of life of the study area. Therefore, based on the PLS-SEM results, the government should expedite the CPEC projects and start new projects in Gilgit-Baltistan. However, to counteract the negative environmental effects of the CPEC, appropriate long-term sustainable planning is needed. Last but not least, energy crises is the main factor affecting tourism in the area. Therefore, government should initiate a mega project of energy to overcome the energy crises in Hunza.

Keywords: Quality of life, CPEC, infrastructure project, tourism development

1. Introduction

China's President Xi Jinping initiated the "Belt and Road Initiative" (BRI) in 2013. Earlier, the BRI was known as One Belt and One Road and in Chinese it is "yidaiyilu". The BRI is the new version of the Silk Road. The main aim of BRI initiatives is to connect countries mainly for enhancing the trade and connect China with rest of the world. CPEC is one of the corridors among BRI. The major investments under CPEC are in energy and infrastructure projects in Pakistan. On the other hand, Pakistan-China have long relations have 75 years of history and both countries are sharing the border of (523 km). The China-Pakistan relationship is not limited not economy but extended to social, culture, science and technology. China Pakistan Economics Corridor (CPEC) has key implication for the social and economic development of Pakistan. Therefore, it is called as the "China Pakistan economic corridor is game changer" for Pakistan. The projects under CPEC are beneficial for the economy (Fazal et al.,

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2023) and it will improve the quality of the education (John et. al, 2020). Likewise, the projects like CPEC have great contribution in enhancing the tourism development and increasing quality of the life of people (Wang et al., 2023). On the other hand, CPEC will enhance trade, economy and social development (Ismail et al., 2023). Also, the outcomes of the CPEC projects are inflow of foreign direct investment, improvement in energy and infrastructure in Pakistan (Afzal et al., 2023).

Gilgit-Baltistan is gateway of CPEC and it connects China and Pakistan through Khunjarab. The improved infrastructure and construction of tunnels along the KKH have attracted a large number of domestic tourists to the area. Therefore, A massive inflow of domestic tourists to the region due to the expansion of Karakoram High Way (KKH) under CPEC project. Therefore, a lot on investment in tourism sector as a result of increase in the income and living standard of the people. On the other hand, the large influx of the tourists has adverse effects on the environment, culture and society for example pollution, traffic congestion and increase in the prices of the land and other goods. Also, there is less potential of agriculture exports to China from Gilgit due to higher competition (Spies, 2023). Similarly, the study of (Abbas, 2019) find out the adverse effects of CPEC on fisherfolk in Gwadar. The main challenges of the CEPC are security, political instability and terrorism (Shahzad et al., 2023; Anwar et al., 2023). Also, for sustainability of the CPEC projects political stability is required (Afzal et al., 2023; Ashraf, 2023).

The main goal of the current research is to explore the influences of the CPEC on the infrastructure development and improvement in quality of the life of the residents of the Hunza. Secondly, the study has explored the influences of the CPEC on tourism development. Last but not the least, the current research examines the effect of tourism development on quality of life of the residents. To achieved the desired objectives the data has been collected from the selected villages of the districts Hunza. The data has been collected through self-administered questionnaire from local people engaged in various business activities and other stakeholders. The research has utilized the “Partial Least Square Structural Equation Modelling” (PLS-SEM) for empirical analysis.

The current research has numerous significances from academic and policy point of view. The results of the study have policy recommendations for the policy makers and it has an academic contribution in the research related to the CPEC. The article is structured into four sections overall. The first portion covered the study's goals, and significance. The literature review is in the second portion., while the third section contains the material and methodology. The final section contains policy recommendations and concludes the entire article.

2. Literature Review

A large number of studies have discover the role of CPEC on economy (Karim et al., 2020a; Karim, Muhammad & Ullah, 2020b), infrastructure (Alam et al., 2023), technology (Khan, Baig & Muhammad,

2020), tourism (Hameed, Ali, & Khan, 2022; Baig & Zehra, 2020) and environment (Nazneen et al., 2022; Sultan, Baig and Ghayas, 2021, Muhammad et al., 2020; Zhang, Andam, & Shi, 2017). The current study of Muhammad et al., (2023) examine the influence of knowledge of CPEC on tourism development and support for CPEC using the PLS-SEM technique. The results have shown the positive effect of the knowledge of CPEC on support for CPEC and tourism development. On the other hand, Gul et al., (2023) argues that tourism development in Pakistan as a result of the CPEC. However, they urge for sustainable tourism strategy and coordination between provincial and federal government for improvement in tourism in tourism infrastructure.

Similarly, Khan et al., (2023) explore the repercussions of the CEPC on cultural and heritage tourism. Their results have shown the huge potential of rise in cultural tourism and economic growth as results of the CPEC. However, the success of the CPEC depends on the political stability and proper implementation is key to obtained maximum benefits from the project. Also, Shang et al., (2022) study highlights that CPEC infrastructure projects have enhance the tourism development and these projects have direct influence on the behavior of the people. Likewise, the research of Baig et al., (2020) also shows that CPEC playing an important role in development of Gilgit Baltistan and huge number of tourist flow in the region is due to CPEC. Moreover, Nazneen et al., (2022) argues that the infrastructure provides ease of access to the tourist destination and the recent increase in tourism demand is due to the CPEC projects. The research of Nazneen et al., (2019) also shows the community support for tourism as a result from CEPC road and infrastructure projects.

On the other hand, Haq and Farooq (2016) forecast the effect of CEPC on various dimension in all provinces of Pakistan and find that CPEC projects will create employment opportunities and rise in the income of the households. Moreover, at district level the quality of life and well-being will improve in those districts with higher level of poverty and low level of well-being. Similarly, Kanwal et al., (2020a) examined the influence of the CEPC on quality of life of the people of Pakistan and China and the result showed a positive attitude of people towards CPEC project and it has a significant effect on quality life and employment in both countries. Similarly, researcher found that influence of infrastructure development has significant effect on local community. The study of Aman et al., (2022) also showed that quality of the life of the residents have been increase due to CPEC. Saad, Xinping and Ijaz (2019) conducted study by taking sample of 445 respondents to explore the perceived social and economic goals. The study demonstrated that improvements in life quality, job possibilities, and poverty reduction due to CPEC. However, people perceives that less improvement related to environmental protection and quality of education. Likewise, Rashid et al., (2021) explore the influence of CPEC infrastructural and development of Balochistan and northern areas. They used structural equating modeling method. The data was collected from the local population and the collected data consists of 63% males and 56% females. Their finding showed that the CPEC is improving the quality of life of

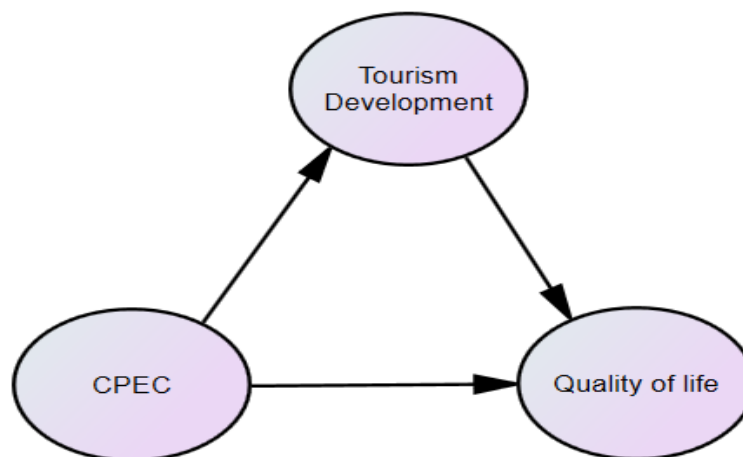
the people. Their study recommend that government should developed strategies related to CPEC in the region. The study of Alam, Ali and Jadoon (2021) also find that CPEC will create various economic opportunities in Pakistan due to which increase in economic growth, peace and development. Similarly, Menhas et al., (2019) also declared CPEC as an important element for socio-economic development of Pakistan.

Kanwal, Pitafi, Malik, et al., (2020b) results showed that CPEC project boost the Pakistan economy through employment opportunities and show positive response of Pakistani respondents towards CPEC project. Similarly, they found the benefits of CPEC and local community interest towards CPEC. However, Awais et al., (2019) enforces that sustainability in terms on economy, society and environment should be ensured in implementation of the CEPC projects. The research of Sun et al., (2020) find that improvement in educational facilities will improve and social interaction due to infrastructure projects. While, the results also indicated that the adverse effects of the CPEC are destruction of historic sites, noise and pollution. Similarly, Tehsin, Khan and Sargan (2017) discusses the economic and security dimensions of the CPEC. They mentioned that CPEC projects will enable Pakistan to overcome its energy issues and it would enhance employment opportunities. However, they put emphasis on human capital and sustainable development in implementations of CPEC projects.

Material and Methods

The current utilizes PLS-SEM technique to examine to test the hypothesis of the study. A self-administered questionnaire is developed to collect the data from the study area. The study used random sampling technique and the total sample size was 139. There are several advantages of using this technique as compared to the SEM for example the technique can be used with small sample size.

Figure 1: Theoretical Framework



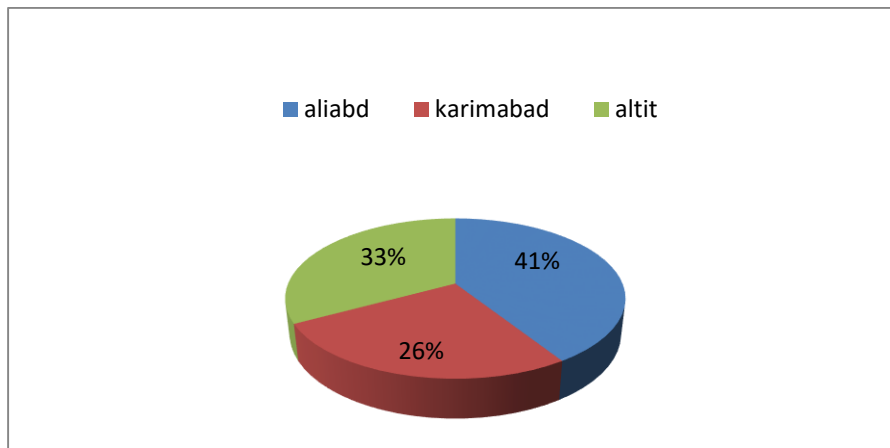
From figure 1, in current study there are total three constructs i.e., CPEC, tourism development (TD) and quality of life (QL). The construct tourism development (TD) acts a mediator in the study. In current research the items of the constructs were adopted from the previous studies (Shang, Pitafi & Rashid, 2022; Nazneen, Xu, & Ud Din, 2021 etc.). Initially, descriptive analysis has been carried out and validity and reliability test are conducted before assessing the structural model (Hair et al., 2017).

3. Data Analysis and Results

3.1 Demographic Information

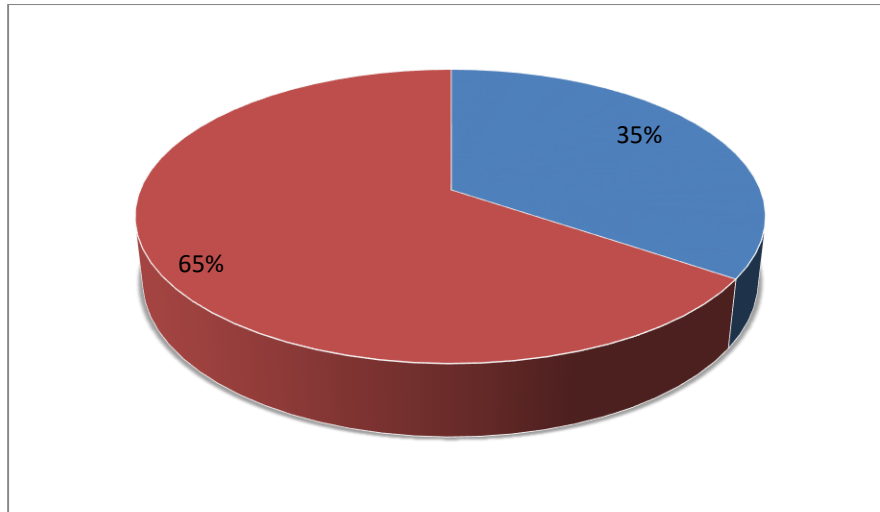
The data is collected from three main villages (Aliabad, Karimabad and Altit) of central Hunza which is the hub of tourism in Hunza and these three villages comprises majority of the population of Hunza. Overall, 41% of the data is collected from Aliabad, 26% from Karimabad and 33% from Altit village.

Figure 2 Residential Area



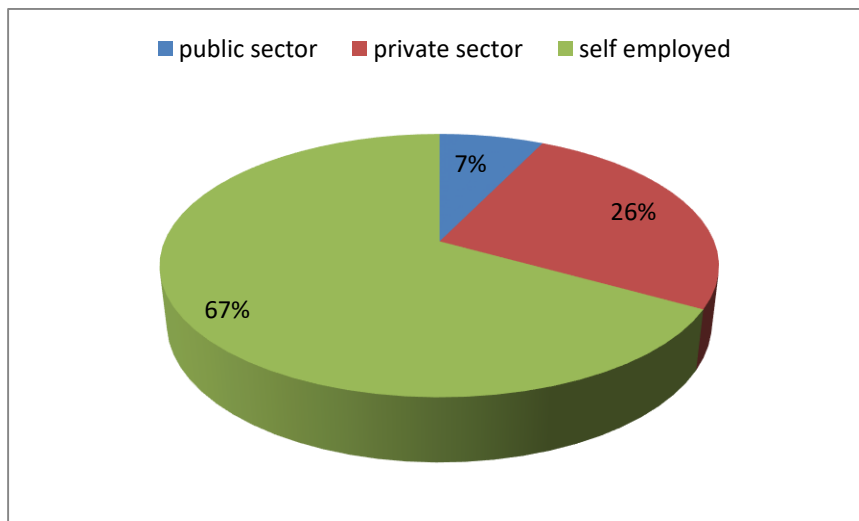
Similarly, Figure 3 shows the data collected from the male and female respondents in the study area. The researchers have collected data from the 65% male respondents and 35% from the female respondents in the study area.

Figure 3 Gender



The figure 4 shows the information about respondent profession of the study area. The majority of the data is collected from the people engaged in various business activities i.e., around 67% from self-employed. Similarly, 26% of the respondents’ professions are private sector and 7 % of the respondent’s profession is public sector.

Figure 4 Respondent profession



4.2 Construct Reliability

From Table 1 the composite reliability meets the construct reliability as all loadings are greater than 0.70. Likewise, Cronbach's Alpha estimates indicate the degree of variability in latent construct as the items loading are beyond the value 0.70 (Latan & Noonan, 2017; Hair et al., 2013). In addition, latent variable achieved Construct Reliability as their AVE measures exceed the level of 0.5 (Hair et al., 2013; Wong, 2013).

Table 1 Construct Reliability

	Cronbach's Alpha	rho A	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
CPEC	0.881	0.892	0.906	0.55
QL	0.938	0.942	0.948	0.645
TD	0.906	0.907	0.926	0.641

From table 2 the value of HTMT is less than the values suggested by Henseler et al. (2015) and Gold et al., (2001). On the other hand, Kline (2011) suggest that the value should be less than 0.85.

Table 2. Heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT)

	CPEC	QL	TD
CPEC	0.881		
QL	0.711	0.938	
TD	0.821	0.812	0.906

4.3 Structural Model Results

The first hypothesis tested in the current study is “*CPEC projects have positive and significant effect on quality of life of residents*” The results from Table 3 shows that the corresponding value of the probability is less than 5 % and the sign of the coefficient is positive. Hence the results shows that CPEC projects are enhancing the quality of the life (QL) of the study area. Similar outcomes were attained by Rashid et al., (2021) and Aman et al., (2022)

Similarly, the second hypothesis of the study is “*CPEC projects have positive and significant effect on tourism development (TD)*”. The sign of the coefficient is positive and corresponding probability value is 0 which shows that the results are supporting the hypothesis. In other words, it indicates that CPEC projects are contributing the tourism development.

Lastly, the third hypothesis which is investigated in the current study is “*tourism development has positive and significant effect on quality of life of residents*”. The results from table supports the hypothesis which means that tourism development is key factor for enhancing the quality of the life of people. In sum, the outcomes of the structural modes showed that CPEC projects are positively and significantly contributing in the TD and QL of the residents.

Table 3 Structural Model Path Coefficients

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	P Values
CPEC -> QL	0.224	0.229	0.092	2.423	0.016
CPEC -> TD	0.742	0.747	0.05	14.78	0
TD -> QL	0.586	0.586	0.071	8.245	0

Lastly, the model fit is tested using the “Standardized Root Mean Square Residual” (SRMR) which “measures goodness of fit of a projected and estimated model” (Brown, 2006). From table 4 the value of SRMR is 0.067, which is less than the threshold value 0.08, hence it is concluded that model developed is well fitted.

Table 4 Model Fit

	Saturated Model	Estimated Model
SRMR	0.067	0.067

4. Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

The study objective was to examine the influences of CPEC projects on quality of life (QL) of the people and its effects on the tourism development (TD). For this purpose, questionnaire was designed to collect the data from the study area. The data is collected from Aliabad, Karimabad and Altit and the total sample size was 139. The results of PLS-SEM found that there is a positive and influential effect of the CPEC on the resident's quality of life in line with the studies of Aman et al., (2022) and Saad et al., (2022). Similarly, CPEC is positively influencing tourism development in the area. The studies of Li et al., (2020) and Mamirkulova et al., (2020) also showed that Belt and Road initiatives are enhancing tourism and increasing the quality of life of the people.

Furthermore, people also see CPEC as contributing to an improvement in infrastructure, health facilities, and job prospects. The researches of Menhas et al., (2019) and Alam et al., (2021) also found positive effect of the CPEC on economy and society. Therefore, based on the outcomes of the study this study suggests that government should expedite the CPEC projects and initiate new projects in Gilgit-Baltistan in general and Hunza particular. However, proper long term sustainable planning is required to overcome the adverse effects of the CPEC on environment. Lastly, the main limitation of the research is the limited scope of study area and future research can be carried out including the other districts of Gilgit-Baltistan.

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