

Tourism Entrepreneurial Development and Flight Frequency at a Destination: Case Study of Malawi

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Abstract

This paper assesses the role of flight frequency on tourism entrepreneurial development in Malawi. The air transport industry in other African countries is growing stronger and helps to promote tourism entrepreneurial development. Countries such as South Africa, Ethiopia, and Kenya, have developed strong air transport network which is vital in tourism development. On the other hand, many African countries, Malawi inclusive are struggling to develop such air transport network which directly affects tourism entrepreneurial development. Businesses such as travel agencies, tour operators, ground handlers, and airports are highly depending on airline's operation to survive. In an attempt to analyze the scenario in the tourism industry between airline's frequency and tourism entrepreneurial development there was a measure of relationship between the two hence the employment of quantitative approach in addition to in-depth interviews conducted with airline, travel, and tour operations managers to compare the results. The study revealed that airlines have a vital role in tourism entrepreneurial development and that without airlines operating, many businesses would not have existed and should all airlines stop operating in the country, many companies would follow suit. The study also ascertained that high frequency of flights at a destination means more opportunities and revenue for tourism entrepreneurs.

Keywords

Air transport, Tourism entrepreneurial development, Flight frequency, Tourist destination.

Introduction

Tourism development refers to all activities that are associated with the provision of facilities for tourists at a destination (Hayward, 2002). It includes human resource development which involves training the personnel that will help to achieve goals. These well trained employees will develop policies that will be well in line with the expected results, policies like how many visitors a destination can receive at a time and carrying capacity of an attraction area. The other area of tourism development is marketing strategies that support the tourism industry. Responsible marketing that champion the policies made and infrastructure developments that will support different components of tourism such as transport, accommodation, and attractions.

Tourism comprises the activities of persons travelling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than 1 consecutive year for business, leisure, and other purposes (Middleton et al., 2009). International tourism involves people travelling to and staying in countries other than those of their own country of residence for less than a year (International Air Transport Association, 2005). Malawi being one of the landlocked countries needs to have an effective air transport network that will connect the tourists and the destination.

Entrepreneurship is a central force of economic development, as it generates growth and serves as a vehicle for innovation and change (Carsrud and Brannback, 2007). Tourism is one of the economic sectors in which a great degree of involvement is needed by the entrepreneurial sector. There are many factors that lead to entrepreneurial development, and one of the factors is the availability of an opportunity in the market that is viable and profitable (Burrow et al., 2008). Many tourism entrepreneurial

developments such as travel agents, tour operators, ground handlers, airports exist because of other suppliers of tourism products, and services. For instance, ground handlers are there to offer services such as Marshalling and cleaning of aircrafts to airlines that operate at the airport. Travel agents are there to sell airline's seats and charge service fees and other airlines give commission to them. This shows how business opportunities can be created at a destination if it has air transport network operating at the destination.

The study has come about against the background that Malawi is served by relatively few flights a day compared to other countries which make it an unappealing place to visit as a destination. This means that many tourists may prefer other countries to Malawi because of flight service frequency levels. Many airlines that operated in the past such as British Airways and Air France stopped in 2002 and those that came into operation recently like Swift Air in 2011 also stopped. These scenarios led to the loss of jobs and closure of some businesses that relied on their operations. Besides these situations, travel consultants are experiencing scenarios where clients prefer other destinations to Malawi. For example, some passengers who want to come to Africa in Country A or B from Europe to London (LON). After being provided with the details of both Countries A and B, respectively, they choose B based on firstly, the lower fares from LON to Country B. When supply is high, prices go down due to competition. Likewise, when the frequency of flights is high, competition may lower the prices (Baumol and Blinder, 2003). Malawi may be one of the expensive destinations according to fare display on Galileo platform from Europe, America, Asia, and other places around the globe. International tourist's destination choice is based on accessibility and there is comparison of fares among the accessible destinations (Middleton et al., 2009).

Second, a city in Country B is preferred to Lilongwe or Blantyre (LLW/BLZ) based many flights departing from Johannesburg per day at different times that make the route reliable. Left with this condition of expensive and erratic flight traffic into Malawi, what role is played in this scenario to have tourism development through the increase of flight traffic? And what role does increased air traffic play in tourism entrepreneurial development?

There many studies that have done focusing on how flight frequency can improve attractiveness of the destination and how operations of airlines at a destination can benefit the existing businesses such as travel agents, tour operators, hotels, and others (Syratt and Archer, 2003; International Air Transport Association, 2005; International Air Transport Association, 2007) (International Air Transport Association, 2008; International Air Transport Association, 2008; Middleton et al., 2009). However, they have not explored how flight frequency can affect the business trends of the industry. This study was conducted to assess the role of flight frequency on tourism entrepreneurial development in Malawi focusing on those businesses that are directly affected when airlines stop or reduce their frequency at a destination.

Study objective

The research was conducted to examine the role of airlines in tourism development more specifically the relationship between tourism related businesses and frequency of airlines. Therefore, the specific objective of the study was to assess the role of flight frequency on tourism entrepreneurial development in Malawi.

Air transport in tourism development

Air transportation as a means of transporting passengers and freight has gained an important place worldwide. Malawi being a land locked country, air transport plays a critical role in tourism development. Incoming travellers who wish to visit Malawi from long distances such as Europe, America, Asia, west pacific countries, and within Africa, they heavily rely on air transport as a means to come to Malawi. This is also true with outgoing travellers who are returning and Malawians travelling for business and others like tourists out to other countries across the globe.

Air transport has been considered by many as the most fastest, reliable, and convenient mode of transport for both tourists and business people (Fatokun, 2005), International Air Transport Association, 2008). Air transport is the means of transporting people from an origin to a destination by aircrafts (International Air Transport Association, 2005). Air transport operation is supported by many different support services. Accommodation is one supportive service in the provision of air transport. Airlines do provide accommodation to its passengers when at a connection point the flight will spend a night. For example; Ethiopian Airlines (ET) provides accommodation for its passengers travelling from LLW to LON at ADD where they spend a night before connecting to the next flight.

Airlines are also supported by ground transportation networks. Other bigger airports have trains connecting passengers to different airports and different terminals. Shopping malls, car rental companies, travel agents, ground handlers, aviation

services, and many more are part of the supporting services of air transport (Page, 2007). Although airlines are supported by transportation networks, there is a need for business strategy to develop on how to manage its entry into market and how to survive in the market through flight frequencies and tourism entrepreneurial development.

Airline's frequency and tourism entrepreneurial development

According to Goeldner and Ritchie (2012), airline's frequency is the number of times per day, month even annually that a destination receives airlines. Air transport is a reliable and convenient mode of transport for many tourists and business people even on short distances like Mzuzu (ZZU) to LLW (International Air Transport Association, 2007).

A destination that has more flights is more preferred to other destinations due its lower prices and reliability of the place. For instance, if one destination receives six flights per day departing at varying times and the another receives one flight per day and these destinations have same natural resources that attract tourists, many tourists prefer travelling to a place with more flights. The passengers feel safe in the sense that should their first flight delay and make the connection impossible on the booked flight, they can easily be rebooked on the next flight on the same day without incurring other costs from accommodation and time.

The airline industry has led to the development of many enterprises that would not have existed otherwise (Botha et al., 2002; Vitanen, 2013). The industry is, therefore, the backbone of these businesses, and they work hand in hand. As the next section explains how some of the businesses benefit from the operation of airlines in the country, it also shows how airlines benefit from them. Some of the businesses that depend on the operation of airlines include: Travel agencies, tour operators, ground handling companies, accommodation facilities, and other airport related businesses such as airport catering services and car hire companies (Lubbe, 2000; Syratt and Archer, 2003).

Domestic flights and tourism entrepreneurial development

Domestic flights are vital if the country is to encourage tourists and business investors to come and invest in areas that are located far from the main international airports. Since time is a valuable aspect for many business people, increased frequency of these flights would mean good for them (International Air Transport Association, 2005).

In other countries like South Africa, they have a lot of domestic flights with very high frequency. For example: Between JNB and CPT there are over six flights per day in and out with a different time intervals after every departure (Galileo, 2014). This is the case to almost all famous regional cities in South Africa. That puts the country at an advantage because connectivity is easy and cheap for tourists to their desired attraction sites. Tourism entrepreneurial development is also growing fast as compared to other countries that do not have such high frequency of flights at domestic level. The country has many travel agents, tour operators, airports, ground handlers, and other businesses are growing by benefiting from airline operations.

Research Methodology

This is a survey research strategy which involves the structured collection of data from a sizable population (Fox and Bayat, 2007; Marczyk et al., 2005). The researchers used descriptive study which is the exploration and description of phenomena in a real life situation (Laws, 2003). Since the research was focusing on the airline’s operations and beneficiaries of airline’s operation to analyze the situation in the industry, the methods applied were relevant. Interviews and questionnaires were used during the collection of primary data, and these are very useful tools for primary data collection (Walliman, 2011). The researchers also applied observation method as another way of primary data collection.

Study area and size

The study was carried out in BLZ, LLW, and ZZU cities of Malawi. Respondents included: Travel agencies, Kamuzu International Airport (KIA), Mzuzu Airport and Karonga Airports, one hotel in Karonga and in LLW, two curio sellers, and two ground handlers. The area and size of the participants were appropriate due to the fact that Malawi has a small number of businesses that directly rely on the operation of airlines. The researchers focus was on businesses that solely rely on the operation of airlines and concentrated on well-known travel agencies, tour operators, airports, and ground handlers plus few other businesses that do benefit from airlines in Malawi.

Analysis

The qualitative data was analyzed thematically, and excel was used for quantitative data (Walliman, 2011). Thematic analysis is where data is analyzed according to the main themes of the data collected (Laws, 2003). Main themes of the study were identified from the data that was collected and the researcher’s arranged them as headings of the analysis and conclusions were drawn from the main themes. This approach of analysis helped the researchers to come up with real issues affecting the industry in as far as flight frequency is concerned in Malawi.

Results and Discussions

Respondent’s demographic information

The initial plan was to interview 17 people, and all arrangements were made. However, due to unforeseen circumstances the research was carried out with 15 respondents which were a fair response to the research as it represents 88% response rate. The participants included both females and males. There were 6 females and 9 males involved who responded to the interviews. This represented 40% and 60%, respectively. The participants were between 20 and 60 years with some of them over 10 years’ experience and others new in the industry with a minimum of 5 years’ experience.

The role of flight frequency on tourism entrepreneurial development in Malawi

Flight frequency is relating to the number of times the airport or a destination receives flights (International Air Transport Association, 2005). As, already said many tourism entrepreneurs benefit by charging service fees to the airlines that operate in the country through service. How does flight frequency relate to entrepreneurial benefits? If an entrepreneur for example, a ground handler benefits by United States Dollars (USD) 2500 from one airline that operates once in a day, if the airline operates twice

a day it means the charge would double which could be equal to USD 5000. The more airlines the country receives, the more airlines entrepreneurs will have to provide their services to. On the other hand, if the airport does not receive any flight it means the airport and the ground handler will have no revenue. In case of Air Malawi alone, research had revealed when it stopped operating it was losing 10 million Malawi Kwacha which was equivalent to 44,444 USD per week.

After Air Malawi was liquidated, South African Airways continued to offer international flight operations and become a monopoly in the absence of Air Malawi. There were 5 international frequencies and 2 frequencies between LLW and BLZ. Kenya Airways had 10 frequencies per week between LLW and Nairobi whereas Ethiopian Airlines had 7 frequencies per week between Malawi and Ethiopia.

The passenger figures for airports have shown a declining trend from 2008/09 to 2010/11. Some of the contributing factors were the shortage of foreign exchange which forced air operators to pull out some services and fuel availability which had become a real challenge. However, an increasing trend is observed and projected for 2011/12 and 2012/13, respectively. This was a result of other airlines such as South African Airways, Ethiopian Airlines, and Kenya Airways, which increased days of service to close the gap left by Air Malawi for the international business. Currently, the gap left by Air Malawi for the domestic flights still exists in this year 2015, and there are no signs of resuming domestic flights to increase flight frequencies (Table 1).

Airport Development Limited (ADL) had generated less income between 2012 and 2009 and one reason was due to problems that Air Malawi was going through. Prior to this period, ADL was performing well and after the period it was also shown that financial situation improved. However, the results have further shown that 243 employees of Air Malawi lost their jobs during the same period.

On the other hand, it was discovered that all beneficiaries of airline’s operation in Malawi were at more advantage when the country receives more airlines. One participant from one of the car hire companies commented that they have more customers when more flights arrive at the airport.

“More flights means more business which means we will purchase more vehicles for the business and employ more people,” said car hire company representative during an interview.

Table 1: Passengers handled at Chileka and KIAs

Year	Chileka International Airport	KIA
2007/08	85,239	146,900
2008/09	84,951	143,378
2009/10	68,423	136,377
2010/11	68,853	112,465
2011/12	72,847	132,456
2012/13	81,200	145,230

*Projections. Source: Department of civil aviation.
KIA: Kamuzu International Airport

A curio seller at Karonga Airport was quoted complaining: “Only three on board, my business is going down because of that.”

This was a time when a Paladin Jet was about to arrive, and there was an enquiry from the ground handling supervisor to know how many passengers were coming on that flight. The same was the case with a Bartender at the airport. The more people the airport receives the more money they make. The same airport had the accommodation partner that complained a lot when the jet reduced its frequency which reduced their revenue at the lodge.

“More flights mean more money, more options for our clients, we can employ more people and open new branches for our business.”

Participants shared those as their benefits should more airlines start operating in Malawi.

Figure 1 shows how flight frequency affects the business trends of a ground handler. The Figure 2 indicate the impact of a number of flights on revenue collected, as indicated 16 flights which is the lowest, yields USD 1200 and 34 flights on the higher frequency yields USD 2550. Higher frequency means more money for the entrepreneur.

All participants were affected by the stoppage of Air Malawi (QM). Participants from the southern and central parts of the Malawi were affected, but they were still enjoying the services of the other airlines which are still operating. The northern region however was in big problems, the stoppage and liquidation of Air Malawi meant suspension of the services of a handling company at Mzuzu Airport which only operates on request basis that led to the reduction of employees the company had. The same company operates at Karonga Airport and only surviving from the business of Paladin Jet, which operates at least one flight a week. This has also affected the revenue the airports collect from airlines. “Our revenues have dropped a lot” said one official at the airport.

Airports benefit from airlines by charging fees for airport use. Common fees include: Landing, navigation, extension, passenger departure, and parking fees. For airports, more flights means more money collection from the airlines because charges are charged per flight service, which means that if the same airline is going to land and depart 3 times a day the charge per flight will be times three. The higher the frequency of airlines at the airport, the more money the airport makes. For example two airports had their income increased in one of the months when Paladin Malawi was reducing its employees that led to their jet flight to fly 4 times a day for 1 week between LLW and Karonga (KGJ) airports. This means that they collected 3 times as much as they did when it was only flying once a day. The Figure 3 shows how airport’s revenue is affected by flight frequency.

ADL benefits from airline’s frequency

The airports rely on the operation of airlines to make money. All domestic airports such as KGJ, ZZU, Kamuzu International, and Chileka were heavily affected by the stoppage and liquidation of Air Malawi. This reduced the number of flights airports

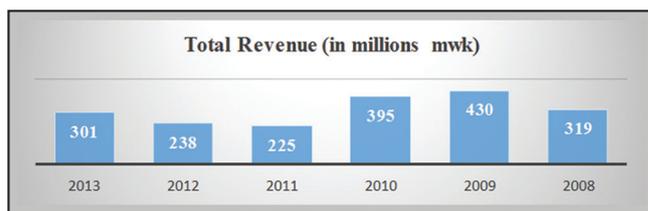


Figure 1: Airport Development Limited total revenue trends between 2008 and 2013

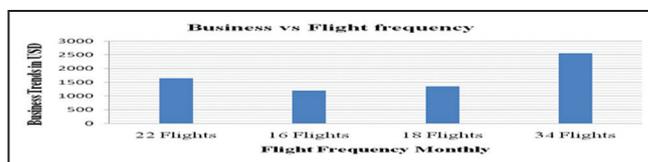


Figure 2: Excel output showing business trends for a ground handler



Figure 3: Excel output showing business trends for an airport

received and dropped their revenues. At a time when Ethiopian (ET) and Kenya Airways (KQ) reduced their flights coming into Malawi, many businesses were affected. Airports did not receive the projected numbers for that financial year. However, ADL reported that the liquidation of Air Malawi affected the number of flights, passengers, as well as actual freight traffic into Malawi through the KIA and BLZ International Airport (BLZ) in the 2012 and 2013 (Nation Malawi Newspaper, 2013). It was discovered that not only passengers who were disadvantaged but also ADL felt the pinch of Air Malawi fall which shows the importance of having more flights operating in the country. This clearly shows that the more flights the airport receives, the more money it makes and the more passengers these flights carry, the more money for the airports, and this is the same with Cargo. Through the airport, the government collects a number of charges from the passengers and aircrafts that operate in and out of the country. The charges include parking, departure, navigation, and extension fees where necessary.

ADL lamented that:

“The new airline, (Malawian Airline) should start operating as soon as possible because it had greatly affected passenger numbers at KIA.”

However, there some problems that hinder operations of many flights in the country. Among these include bilateral air service agreements and liberalization of airspace; while others pointed out to infrastructure development as one of the challenges in air transport in Malawi.

“With only three flights operating in Malawi, when they arrive at once at KIA they cause congestion both in the arrival and departure

halls,” said respondents and this calls for the need to expand and rehabilitate the airports in preparation for more airlines.

After assessing the role of airlines in entrepreneurial development and flight frequency effects on business and how airport infrastructure in Malawi affects the frequency of flights, it raises this question does Malawi need more flights now? If yes, what measures should be taken? The next section discusses these key issues from the participant’s point of view.

Is there a need for more flights in Malawi?

The participants in this study indicated that they benefit a lot when the destination receives more flights (high frequency), and this provides more opportunities for entrepreneurs in tourism businesses. However, the question that was debatable was whether Malawi needs more flights now or not. It is interesting to note that out of the 15 (93%) of participants; one participant (7%) believes that Malawi does not need more flights operating in and out now. It was commented that *“the airline’s market is already saturated with flights while passenger numbers do not increase hence no need to have more flights.”* It was argued that the government needs to promote tourism first which will attract demand from tourists, and that will mean more people travelling into Malawi which will need more flights.

This argument attracts the attention of the authorities at the destination, there are needed to give a reason to airlines to operate in the country, this is creating demand for airlines. However, destination choice is influenced by many factors, and one critical factor is accessibility. After destination management organizations have prepared the place very attractive for tourists, there is a need for the place to be accessible. Long-haul tourists and other travellers to land locked countries like Malawi have air transport as their only convenient and fastest mode of transport. Therefore, the country will be more attractive if it has attractive sites and high frequency of flights which will make it reliable in terms of air transport. This finding is in line with (International Air Transport Association, 2005) and (Middleton et al., 2009) who recommend high frequency of flights at a destination as one-way of attracting travellers to the destination. On the other hand, however, as indicated by 93% of the participants who were of the view that Malawi needs more flights in and out which could give them an opportunity to sell more airlines that will give their clients more options and boost their business. *“More flights will bring more tourists in the country.”* This is underscored by Middleton et al. (2009) and International Air Transport Association (2005) who state that long-haul international tourists compare a number of factors before choosing destinations, and one of the factors is accessibility. Accessibility is also looked at in terms of route reliability and frequency of service.

The debate above by participants has shown that many business entrepreneurs need more flights to grow in business, and more flights will attract more travellers to Malawi and create demand for new airlines. Thus, far the study has shown that Malawi needs more flights to operate in and out. However, the question would be how could Malawi increase flight frequency? How can the government increase flight frequency in Malawi?

The study has already indicated that Malawi needs more flights which will promote the development of tourism entrepreneurial

development. The figure shows participants views on how the government can increase flights.

As shown in Table 2, 34% of the participants thought that better airports would attract more airlines in the country. 93% of participants were quoted in an interview saying;

“Many airlines have their own policies not to fly to destinations without airports with wider runways which can make the whole aircraft fit in the runway,” “Some airlines are huge that at times if they land on our airport, their wings are off the runway which they do not want.”

This is also true with other airport facilities like departure and arrival terminals as already highlighted that if the three flights arrive at once at KIA, they cause congestion both in the arrival and departure halls.

The findings also indicate that 14% recognize the need to improve the economy. This was stressed due to concerns with forex shortages sometimes which at one point affected ET and KQ that stopped issuing tickets in Malawi. They could not transfer their money to their home countries. 16% believe that having the right competencies in the tourism and aviation industry can greatly help to improve flight frequency in Malawi. Malawi like many African countries has a shortage of skills in the tourism and aviation industry. There good ideas but if there not the right people to implement them, then they are meaningless. 7% on security matters and 27% on opening competition to other airlines. Many airlines have intentions to start flying in Malawi, but the government is very slow to issue licenses to allow them start operations, this is due to control of the market/routes. Some airlines are just waiting from the government to give a go ahead for them to start their business. Finally, 2% indicated that Malawi needs to market itself first before introducing more flights.

These results on measures to be taken by the government to increase flight frequency are underscoring the findings that many researchers have already recommended on how to improve air transport network at a destination. International Air Transport Association (2005), International Air Transport Association (2007), International Air Transport Association (2008), Middleton et al. (2009), and Syrratt and Archer (2003) also gave similar recommendations on how to improve flight operations at a destination. Harrison and Husbands (2011. p. 268) outlined four tourism industry’s primary needs with respect to air transport and these include: *“Good geographical coverage, particularly from primary markets, adequate frequency of service, competitive air fares to and from the primary markets and lastly, efficient, attractive informative and user friendly airport infrastructure from customs, ticketing and baggage handling through to leaving the airport.”*

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study objective was to assess the role of airlines on tourism entrepreneurial development in Malawi. The research has revealed that many enterprises benefit a lot from airlines and that some would hardly exist if airlines stop operating in the country. The first entrepreneur that would not survive without operation of airlines is a ground handler whose business is to welcome and

Table 2: Excel output on measures to be taken to improve flight frequency in Malawi

Measures	Frequency	Percentage	Measure percentage	Cumulative percentage
Build better airports	15	34	34	34
Improve the economy	6	14	14	48
Train tourism and aviation personnel	7	16	16	64
Need to tighten Security	3	7	7	71
Open competition to foreign airlines	12	27	27	98
Market Malawi first	1	2	2	100
Total	44	100	100	

clean airlines. A scenario at Mzuzu Airport is a classic example, with no commercial flight operating there; there is no need for it to have a ground handler for such services. Other businesses that depend much on airlines are travel agencies and tour operators. Many tourists compare accessibility of the destination and a destination that receives more flights is more desirable than those with few or low frequency. High flight's frequency is considered vital for growth to many businesses in the tourism industry and eventually high supply reduces prices of air transport to the destination. The new airline, (Malawian Airline) should start operating as soon as possible to all domestic airports previously operated by Air Malawi in additional international routes currently in operational. Problems that hinder operations of many flights in the country such as bilateral air service agreements and liberalization of airspace and infrastructure development of air transport in Malawi should immediately be addressed. There is a need to expand and rehabilitate the airports in preparation for more airlines in order to ease the challenge of congestion both in the arrival and departure halls including related passengers and relatives' needs at the airport such as restaurant and waving bay.

The general recommendation is that; as a way of attracting more visitors from around the globe, the governments need to increase the number of flights operating inside and outside their countries. Although, this may be seen as a solution, it should also be taken into consideration that it goes together with travellers demand and supply from both generating and receiving countries. Therefore, Government of Malawi needs to address the following to increase flight frequency in Malawi:

- To rehabilitate and construct better airports that can accommodate new airlines and bigger aircrafts
- To improve the economy. A strong economy will help to facilitate payments made by airlines to their home countries; therefore the urgent need to speed national airlines in place of Air Malawi could improve the economy
- To consider opening up competition to other foreign airlines that at the moment wish to start flying in Malawi but due reluctance by government to issue license they are failing.

This study focused much on how flight frequency affects the business of tourism entrepreneurs and not how tourism entrepreneurial development affects the business of airlines. Further areas to study could be:

- The relationship between airlines and travel intermediaries focusing on how airlines benefit from intermediaries
- The other area could be how airlines' frequency at a destination can be used as a promotional tool to attract more tourists.

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