

PERCEPTION OF LOCAL YOUTHS IN MALAYSIA'S EAST COAST REGION TOWARDS THE CAREER PROSPECT IN OIL PALM PLANTATION

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Abstract

The plantation sector, especially the oil palm commodity, is currently the largest agricultural-based contributor to Malaysia economic projection involving both upstream and downstream activities. Due to the rapid expansion in this palm oil industry, there are high labour demands required in this sector. Since the fate of this sector is being put on a stake, recruiting foreign labours is the only way out from this dilemma. As a result, more than 78 % of labour (Azman, 2014) in this sector is mainly came from Indonesia, Bangladesh and the Philippines. Malaysia has become the main attention for the foreign labours to work in this country due to the wages being more competitive and generative working condition, especially in the plantation sector, provides the suitable accommodation compared to their origin country. The pressing issue now is the rising social issues of the illegal foreign workers and the influx of the foreign workers without work permit. One of the best solutions is to hire the local youth to works in oil palm plantation which stayed near the settler's scheme or oil palm plantation. This study was done in order to analyse the pull or push factors in constructing a particular pattern of perception among the selected respondents. Accordingly, they were selected from settler's scheme which owned by Federal Land Development Authority (FELDA) in East Coast Region in the States of Kelantan and Terengganu. A survey method through questionnaire was used to collect data from 82 of local youth between 16 years to 40 years old as focused respondents which were selected using random sampling method. Descriptive analysis was applied based on their demographic factors and the involvement of the local youth in oil palm plantation.

Keywords: Career Prospect, Local Youth, Perceptions, Oil Palm

1. Introduction

The oil palm industry is a major contributor to the net export revenue value of Malaysia agricultural sector that is worth billions; hence, its significance as one of the main contributor to Malaysian GDP (Gross Domestic Product) is justified. Despite being overshadowed by the newly emerging neighbouring country of Indonesia in this commodity production in recent years, Malaysia is currently accounting for producing nearly half of the world's crude palm oil output across the globe where it is forecasted to generate net export revenue exceeding 100 billion in Ringgit Malaysia in 2020. In 2014 alone, the total estimated planted oil palm in Malaysia is approximately 5.39 Million hectares where the state of Sabah has the most extensive area of oil palm cultivation in Malaysia with CPO (Crude Palm Oil) output production capacity surpassing 30% from the total production of this country. In addition, the boost received from this state as the main power house of Malaysian plantation sector with total of 1.51 million hectares which occupy about 28 percent of the total area of oil palm cultivation in Malaysia (MPOB, 2015) has crowned Malaysia to be the second largest industrial player of this commodity in the world where the output commodity was exported to 145 countries across the continents; thus placing it as an agricultural-based economic generator that able to rival the global dominance of oil and gas sector. In addition, the increase in this commodity is expected to continue based on its advantages and its ability to generate income to oil palm cultivation in Malaysia, as well as maintaining the stability of Malaysian micro-economic trajectory by providing job opportunities to the locals. In

relation to this, the rapid expansion of the oil palm plantation in Malaysia which was allocated for 2.03 million hectares in 1990 to vastly 5.39 million hectares in 2014 has caused oil palm industry need towards human work force as the main input generator since the application of mechanization and technological implements are not yet comprehensive and promising for years ahead. As a result, more than 78% of labours that currently occupy this sector are consisting of foreign immigrants originated from Indonesia, Philippines and Bangladesh (Azman, 2014). The Oil palm plantation needs to recruit the locals to sustain this industry due to the competitive wages awarded by Indonesia oil palm industry and the "Plasma Scheme" which were introduced by Indonesia which more attractive (Ahmad, 2010)

The problem which raised to recruit the local youth, according to Norsida (2008), is that they claimed that available jobs in agricultural sector are burdening and tiring to be executed. In conjunction, past studies have indicated negative perceptions and attitudes among the local youth as to why they are not interested to work in oil palm plantation (Gidakou, 1999). Lack of knowledge or skill is found to be another factor affecting the interest of youth for participation prospect (Frick et al., 1995). Simultaneously, the alarming social issues among unemployed local youth in settlers' scheme such as hanging culture, misuse of drugs and pre-marital relationship have lured the attention from government (HusinJunoh, 2011). Based on Ann Wang Seng (1994), the social defection activities caused by unemployment have contributed a negative impact on their attitude. Hence, unemployment gives personal implication encompassing the aspects of psychology, social and financial (Shadare & Tunde, 2012). Thus, this defective community must be diverted and rectified into a mechanism that able to refrain them from wrongdoings through employment in this sector. All benefits and facilities required by the workers who have a high basic salary, housing, water and electricity, allowance, Employees Provident Fund (EPF), medical benefits, school aid, insurance and others should be given to local people and revised from time to time for compatibility (Ramachandran & Shanmugam, 1995). This paper aims to identify factors affecting the perceptions among local youth in East-Coast Peninsular Malaysia towards the career prospect in oil palm plantation sector.

2. Method

A research using surveying through questionnaire was applied as the core methodology to acquire the raw data from the selected respondents. Respondents ranging from 16 to 40 years old were selected from a local youth community that live in FELDA settler's schemes which centralized in east-coast Peninsular Malaysia, encompassing the states of Kelantan and Terengganu as the primary research location radius. They were studied in the aspects of socio-demographic profiles, general perception towards the plantation sector as a prospect career, attraction and repulsion elements that serve as the push and pull factors in influencing their perception development towards perceiving this sector in a particular tendency, perception regarding the availability of foreign labours and their personal perspective view on the factors affecting the participation prospect among the locals. All 82 of them were randomly selected as research's sample within 500 m of residential distance from the plantation site up to 3 km in FELDA Kemahang in Tanah Merah, Kelantan and FELDA Chalok Barat in Setiu, Terengganu.

In this study, attraction and repulsion factors were categorized as the independent variable in these four components while their developed perceptions that were influenced by these factors were categorized as the dependent variable. In advance, the independent variable were derived from attraction and repulsion factors that possible emerged from four studied aspects or components. These four studied components that represent the independent variable were economic profitability or advantage, working surrounding or environment, social facilities and infrastructures and social status of employment. Significantly, their general perceptions on this sector have been identified from the answered questionnaire that comprehensively devised where the independent variable was structured into forming likert-

based questions that in purpose to study the possible attraction and repulsion elements that influence the perception development among the selected respondents.

A Descriptive analysis was conducted to analyse the demographical profiles of the respondents which include distance of residential area to the closest plantation, age, gender, educational background, parents' involvement status in agricultural field, marital status occupational status race and religion. Factorial analysis was applied in order to identify the number of factors affecting the perception development among the selected respondents. The relationships between socio-demographic profiles and the selected components which exert either attraction elements or repulsion elements in influencing a particular pattern of perception were analysed using non-parametrical test of Kruskal-Wallis test and Mann-Whitney U test.

Also, a Reliability analysis was executed in order to analyse the data internal consistencies within the structured likert scale-based components where Cronbach alpha was used as the indicative for the data reliability index (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). As suggested by Nunnally (1978), the Cronbach's Alpha reliability test should have a minimum value of 0.6 for the data to be considered as consistent in the early stage of research.

3. Analysis of Data

Based on the study by Houghton (1993), the distance affects the availability of labour market within the industry. Therefore, the radius within at least 5 km distance between a plantation with residential area will certainly attract at highest possible rate of the available local community which is in this case is the local youth as the studied group within that residential area for working in that plantation. Hence, this study was conducted among 82 respondents ranging from the age scale of 16 to 40 years old from two different states centralized in the east-coast region of peninsular Malaysia which was Kelantan and Terengganu where 41 of the respondents were from Terengganu and another 41 respondents were from Kelantan. Table 1 below presents the complete socio-demographic profiles of the selected respondents.

Table 1: Sample Characteristic

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Age		
<20 years old	11	13.41%
20-30 years old	53	64.63%
31-40 years old	18	21.95%
Total	82	100%
Gender		
Female	29	35.4%
Male	53	64.6%
Total	82	100%
Marital Status		
Married	34	41.5%
Divorced	2	2.4%
Single	46	56.1%
Total	86	100%
Educational Level		
No formal education	1	1.2%
UPSR	2	2.4%
SRP/PMR	3	3.7%
SPM	38	46.3%
Vocational Certification	5	6.1%
STPM/STAM	5	6.1%
Diploma	9	11.0%
Bachelor Degree/Master Degree/PhD	19	23.2%
Total	82	100%
Race		

Malay	81	98.8%
Chinese	1	1.2%
Total	82	100%
Religion		
Islam	82	100%
Total	82	100%

Table 1 above shows that majority of the respondents are male representing 64.6% compared to the female respondents representing just 35.4% from the total sample size. Most of the respondents come from the age group of 20 to 30 years old, single in marital status and currently hold SPM (*Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia*) or Secondary Certificate in term of educational level. In terms of race or ethnicity, 98.8% or exactly 81 of them are Malay while only one respondent is a Chinese, but all of them are Muslims. Statistically, only one of the respondents claimed to have no formal education from any level of educational institution in Malaysia which makes only 1.2% out of 82 respondents while the rest 81 respondents have at least UPSR level of certification until degree level of education as the highest certification in various field of studies.

According to Anderson (1994), besides friends and surrounding factors, family background is the deciding factor of influencing and developing their children for their future where career option or preference is considered one of them. Therefore, social influence involving family background is one of the most significant and crucial factors that should be heavily focused by every researcher in this field since parents and their way of raising the child are the biggest influence towards forging, shaping, moulding and building the very initial perception of child towards how well they perceive the life aspects that are being served along their development path, as well as their projection of learning curves. In short, what the child may become in person or personality, think and act are massively influenced by the way of raising and action shown by the parents.

Table 2: Involvement Status of Parents in the Field of Agriculture

Parents	Involvement Status	Frequency	Percentage
Father	Yes	51	62.2%
	No	31	37.8%
Mother	Yes	20	24.4%
	No	62	75.6%

Based on table 2 above, 62.2% of the respondents have their father working in agricultural sector which is almost twice the percentage of respondents who are not having their father work in this sector. This profile indicates that more than half of the respondents are being raised with agricultural background families. On the other hand, most of their mothers do not involve or participate in this sector as a career since only 24.4% of them having their mothers participate in agricultural sector. In general, it was concluded that more than half of the respondents have stated that they were raised with a family background close to agricultural field.

Table 3: Distance of the Nearest Plantation from the Respondent's House

Distance from the Plantation Sector (km)	Frequency	Percentage
0.5-5.0 km	55	67.07%
5.1-30.0 km	27	32.92%
Total	82	100%

Table 3 shows that more than 60% of the respondents are living in their houses with a distance of 5 km or less to the nearest plantation, compared to the other respondents with more than a 5 km distance from the nearest plantation. By judging from this scale, transportation is no longer a significant factor when it comes to distance to hinder or restrict the respondents from working in that particular plantation if and only if they are interested enough to participate at the first place. Therefore, the selected respondents for this study are the most appropriate and suitable test subject to be treated as the benchmark in representing the general profile of Malaysian local youth community towards viewing the agricultural sector as a first choice for a prospect career by being the closest related community to this sector especially in term of demography and geography.

4. Result and Discussions

This study has utilized 31 items from four studied aspects as the components of independent variable where factorial analysis was used to measure the possible attraction and repulsion elements on developing a particular pattern of their perception towards the career prospect in oil palm plantation. Based on table 4 below, the result of Cronbach's Alpha shows positive internal consistencies on the studied components of every studied component since the estimated values of coefficient alpha were higher than the standard index of reliability test which is 0.6 (Nunnally, 1978). Conclusively, there are internal consistencies among their reaction on the possible attraction and repulsion elements based on the four studied aspects indicating that the study based on the devised questionnaire is fit and ideal for further data analysis with the third studied aspect of social facility and infrastructure showed the highest reliability index of 0.903 compared to the other aspects where the first studied aspect of economic profitability showed the lowest reliability index of 0.822 among the other components.

Table 4: Reliability Test of Coefficient Alpha

Components of Studied Aspects	Cronbach' Alpha	No of Items/Factors
Economic Advantage/Profitability (EP)	0.822	8
Working Surrounding/Environment (WS)	0.853	10
Social Facility and Infrastructure (SFI)	0.903	8
Social Status of Employment (SSE)	0.862	5

In advanced statistics, factorial analysis was done in order to provide a confirmatory test of the measurement theory of the constructs and this test also explains how the variables are being measured logically and systematically represents the constructs that are involved in the theoretical model. The results of KMO and Bartlett's Test for each of the four studied aspects are shown below where the tabulated values show that the model is fit with the acquired data from the respondents.

Table 5: KMO and Bartlett's Test Studied Aspect 1 (EP)

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.702
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	325.458

df	28
Sig.	.000

Table 5 showed the suitability of the data for factorial analysis on studied aspect 1 was accepted since Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) showed the value of 0.702 which exceeded the recommended value of 0.5 and considering the Barlett's test was highly significant ($p=0.000$, $p<0.05$).

Table 6: KMO and Bartlett's Test Studied Aspect 2 (WS)

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.783
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	361.994
	df	45
	Sig.	.000

The table 6 showed the suitability of the data for factorial analysis on studied aspect 2 was accepted since Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) showed the value of 0.783 which exceeded the recommended value of 0.5 and considering Barlett's test was highly significant ($p=0.000$, $p<0.05$).

Table 7: KMO and Bartlett's Test Studied Aspect 3 (SFI)

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.865
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	580.416
	df	28
	Sig.	.000

The table 7 showed suitability of the data for factorial analysis on studied aspect 3 was accepted since Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) showed the value of 0.865 which exceeded the recommended value of 0.5 and considering Barlett's test was highly significant ($p=0.000$, $p<0.05$).

Table 8 : KMO and Bartlett Test Studied Aspect 4 (SSE)

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.842
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	199.158
	df	10
	Sig.	.000

The table 8 showed suitability of the data for factorial analysis on studied aspect 3 was accepted since Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) showed the value of 0.842 which exceeded the recommended value of 0.5 and considering Barlett's test was highly significant ($p=0.000$, $p<0.05$).

Based data tabulation above, the overall Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (MSA) on four of the studied components (Factor Analysis was done separately on the four studied aspects) showed greater value surpassing the minimal requirement of 0.5 (Brett, 2012). Theoretically, the overall (MSA) result shows an evidence of strong and adequate correlation among the four studied aspects in this study. The third studied aspect regarding the aspect of social infrastructure and facility showed the highest value of 0.865 followed by the fourth studied aspect of social status of employment with the value of 0.842, second studied aspect working surrounding or environment with the value of 0.783 and the first studied aspect of economic advantage or profitability with the lowest value recorded among the rest which is 0.702. Significantly, all these values indicate that factor analysis was suitable with the variables from these components. On the other hand, The Barlett's Test of Sphericity in all studied aspects showed the value of 0.000 which implied that there were significance levels that indicate the factor analysis were useful enough with these components data.

Conclusion

This study provides the evidence that perceptions of local youth on repulsion and attraction factors on these four components have relationships with these components of independents variable based on the factor analysis and the descriptive analysis. The KMO shows strong evidence on the correlation with the four components of the repulsion and attraction. This study provides that the perceptions from these four components factors revealed that, the main repulsion elements that currently responsible in contributing a negative perception among the respondents are insufficient wage rate payment method on daily basis in the aspect of components EP (Economic Profitability) and the aspect of components WS(Working Surrounding and Environment) which involved higher in risk, heavy and 3D job(Difficult, Dangerous and Dirty)

Despite the respondents being more repulsed by showing a negative perception due to the effect of the identified push factors, they also manifest a constructive form of perception by being attracted to some of the pull factors that considered as very crucial in confining their interest. These pull factors include the improvement of basic facilities and infrastructures and the prospect of rebranding and revitalizing the status of plantation-based labours from general workers with the lack of skills to operators with developed fully skills operators.

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