

Generation Y Perceptions of Employment in the Plantation Sector

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Abstract

The plantation sector is the backbone of the Malaysian economy and contributes to export earning, job opportunities, and improvement of living standards of the people. However, it has a negative image and is seen as merely a dirty, commands poor salary, and is not favoured by Generation Y. This research examines the perception of 175 students of Agriculture Institute, employed in the plantation sector and factors influencing them to choose a career in the sector. This study was carried out using a questionnaire. Cronbach's Alpha values for each question, namely, perceived occupational status, perceived occupational package, and social status are 0.805, 0.951, and 0.771, respectively. Results show students had positive perceptions of work in the plantation sector. Factors such as medical facilities, good pension plans, and provision of pre-employment training are topmost priority to choosing a career in the plantation sector. These findings are important for industry players to design jobs to be more attractive and dynamic because this factor has always been identified by students. Future research may explore the selection of agricultural study and how it influenced students to pursue careers in the agricultural sector as entrepreneurs or self - employed persons.

Keywords: *Generation Y, perception, plantation, employment*

1. Introduction

Agriculture sector is the world biggest provider of job opportunity where 40% of global workforce was employed in this sector (Pagesse, 2012). Malaysia's total population is about 28 million where 49.76% of the total population were active workforce. Since the last ten years, the country's unemployment rate has been consistently between 2% - 4%. It was also evident that the male labour force participation rate was at 80.5% as compared to female at only 49.5%. In term of age distribution, 50.2% was dominated by employees whose age group is between 15 – 34 years old, age group between 35 – 54 years old constituted 42% and only 7.8% by those whose age group is between 55-64 years old (Malaysia Statistic Department, 2014). It should be noted that the retirement age for Malaysian is 60 years old. Hence, this suggests that within next five years period, the Malaysian workforce shall be dominated by those whose current age group is between 15 – 34 years.

Those employees whose age group is between 15 - 34 years are groups of young people who are born after 1980 and are widely known as the Generation Y. Researchers use different terminology to reflect those born after 1980 such as Millennials (Borges *et. al.*, 2010), Echo Boomers (Dwyer, 2009), and Internet Generation (Voorveld & Goot, 2013). Cara (2006) indicated that the characteristics of Generation Y include inflated self-esteem, very high sense of entitlement, belief that anything is possible, educated and tech savvy. Dhawan (2012) describes Generation Y as always stirring up new ideas, creative, and innovative. In term of job preferences, they have high preference for a permanent position that will guarantee job security, prefer to work in a prestigious firm, very concern about work life balance and attentive to career opportunities (Soulez and Soulez, 2014). This generation need to be understood, nurtured and geared their interest towards agriculture sector as they are the assets and future leaders of the country especially in leading the management of country's agricultures in the potentials.

In Malaysia, the generation Y role as the successor to the continuity of development and vital source of labour in the future especially in the agricultural sector cannot be ignored. Moreover, the Government through National Key Economic Areas determined that the agricultural sector is very important to continuity of the country's development as a whole. Unfortunately, a survey by the Rubber Industry Smallholders Development Authority (RISDA) in 2013 revealed that the average age of farmers in Malaysia was 57 years old reflecting the deficient of interest among generation Y in the agriculture, specifically in the plantation sector.

Agriculture in Malaysia is divided into two categories, namely plantation and smallholder agriculture. Commercial agriculture refers to agricultural activities involving the plantation sector such as palm oil, cocoa, rubber, livestock, aquaculture, and various upstream

industries. The plantation sector is considered as an ongoing investment covering areas of more than 40 hectares (MPOB, 2014). The plantation sector is the backbone of the economy by its increasing contribution to national development. Growth in this sector would contribute to the gross domestic product and export earnings, create job opportunities, and improve the living standards of the people, especially in rural areas (MPIC, 2011).

One major initiative by the government to encourage participation among generation Y in agricultural sector is through formal education in agricultural related field of study. Universiti PUTRA Malaysia, Institut Pertanian Malaysia and Polytechnic are among several educational entities that emphasis on agricultural related formal educational programs. Increasing enrolment in agricultural courses in the related educational entities seems to draw a brighter future of the Malaysian agricultural sector. However, employers are complaining that Malaysian are shying away from this sector as it involves difficult, dangerous and dirty jobs (Rammolai, 2009). This has led employers to employ foreign workers as the major labour force in this sector. In other words, does Malaysians generation Y do not prefer to be in the agricultural sector. If so, where does those who enrolled in the agricultural courses end up in term of their career. As such, this exploratory study aims to explore and identify the types of work sought by this generation who enrolled agriculture education, their expectations pertaining to career development, the willingness to work in the plantation sector, and whether the works are in line with their qualifications. The finding will provide some useful insight to the related authorities in developing strategic approach to encourage participations of this generation to prolong the consistent contribution by the agricultural sector to the country's development.

2. Literature Review

The advent of Generation Y into the workplace is bringing about changes that need to be given more attention. Generation Y are the most digitally sophisticated generation to date and they are looking for a sustainable environment offering a social structure within both physical and virtual environments (Controls, 2010).

This generation needs must be given attention by employers although the plantation sector nowadays needs professionals who are innovative and are risk takers and who apply diversified approach to increase production. As such, the labour source required by the plantation sector today are those who are well trained with practical skills and ready to take challenges in order to assist the plantation sector to prosper by ensuring the production of clean and safe food through sustainable practices (Hamid and Auwal, 2012). Empirical evidences revealed that Malaysians are reluctance to be employed and have low level interests in agriculture sector because they perceived it as low wages category of employment, menial type of work with high accountability and responsibility, and have pessimistic view of the

future development of the sector (Spena. *et al.*, 2009). However, in other countries such as in Nigeria, about 80 percent of youth residing in rural areas were involved in the agricultural sector (Adekunle, 2009). Hence, the Y generations perceptive towards agricultural sector need to be understood as they will be the main labour force in the next five years. Moreover, Karen *et al.* (2012) predicts that the agricultural sector would be the main source of employment for the younger generation in the next decade because higher value agriculture would use service more intensively and create job opportunities (Karen *et al.*, 2012).

The involvements of students have been investigated by several researchers reflecting their integral role in agricultural sector that has direct impact on a country's GDP. Majority of those who intended to work in the agricultural sector are being influence by their family and educational background. In similar context, the level of behavioural attitudes, subjective norms, and social valuation and inclination towards agricultural entrepreneurship was found to be high among students whose educational background is related to agricultural field of study (Farah, 2014).

In terms of career, most students expect that their future career and jobs shall provide them opportunity to work in a team, a friendly environment, able to enhance their skills, experience, and knowledge, and to have feedbacks from results of their work (Spena *et al.*, 2009). This suggests the need to dismiss family and community members' perceptions and expectations in determining their future career. In order words, the young generations need to be well equipped with relevant knowledge and skills to dismiss perceptions that agricultural sector does not offer a professional career which guarantees a bright future (Ismail, 2013). Aissetou *et al.* (2011) asserted that although agriculture has an important function to ensure food security and livelihoods, and even when coupled with training and learning, production, added values, marketing, and long-term development policy, many would still not consider pursuing further in agriculture. This is due to the perception that employment in agricultural sector fails to provide the prestige and luxury they desire as compared to the likes of engineering, medicine, and information technology. Subsequently, many avoid agriculture as their career option. Therefore, employment and job opportunities for graduates of agriculture are limited by their perceptions as well as social influences but not by the sector itself.

The labour shortage has been seen as the major contributing factor to the inefficiencies of productivity and profitability and yield in agricultural sector. In line with this, the higher learning institutions were encouraged to offer related tertiary education. Via the projected increase in the country's GDP through commercial plantation and agricultural sector, more agricultural related job opportunities are to be created as a strategy to minimize the country's unemployment rate. In similar notes, the government encouraged the higher learning

institutions not only to provide ample knowledge but also to mould them to be self-employed as modern farmers or entrepreneurs of agriculture (Marinah *et al.*, 2013).

3. Methodology

This exploratory study was conducted in an agricultural institute located in the Klang Valley, Malaysia. A total of 175 final year students attending two-year courses for certificates in agriculture, participated in this self-administered survey. The students' perception of employment in the plantation sector, perceived occupational status, perceived occupational package, and social status were measured. All measurements were adopted and adapted from Christina (2012) and Yim *et al.* (2014). All items were measured using Likerts Scale with a range of 1 to 5, which represents 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree' to measure social status, and 'least priority' to 'highest priority' to measure perceived occupational status and perceived occupational package.

The questionnaire used comprised four sections. Section A aimed to collect the respondents' demographic profiles. Section B measured their perceptions of employment in the plantation sector, the jobs preferred, the types of entrepreneurship, and the perception of someone working in this sector. These variables were measured using 18 items. Samples of items were used to investigate the students' intentions of working in the plantation sector and their needs. Section C measured the respondents' perceived occupational status, perceived occupational package, and social status. Perceived occupational status was measured using 15 items. Sample items included hot working environment and no opportunity for career development. Perceived occupational package were measured using 15 items. Sample items included benefit for children education, welfare, and job security. Meanwhile, social status was measured using six items. Sample items included being proud of their careers in this sector and community respects for career in this industry. Thirty respondents participated in the pilot study. The results of the pilot study revealed that the coefficient value of all studied variables were above 0.7, indicating a good level in terms of reliability (Sekaran, 2011).

4. Results and Discussion

Table1 shows the demographic data of the respondents. Out of 175 respondents, male respondents constituted 65.1 percent, and female 34.9 percent. Most of the respondents were those in the age group of 19-22 years old. A large number of the respondents had family agricultural background, i.e. 55.4 percent (97), of which 72.2 percent (70) were male and 27.8 percent (27) female. Respondents who were not of agricultural background comprised 56.4 percent (44) male and 43.6 percent (34) female. All students were Malays. About 171 respondents had SPM certificates and the remaining 4 were diploma holders not related to agriculture. They also expected the average monthly income of RM1500 per month upon initial employment.

Table 1: Demographic profile of respondents

Variables	Frequency	Percentages
Gender		
Male	114	65.1
Female	61	34.9
Family background		
Agricultural	97	55.4
Non agricultural	78	44.6
Ethnicity		
Malay	175	100
Chinese	0	0
Indian	0	0
Other	0	0
Educational level		
Primary school	0	0
Secondary school	171	97.7
University (Diploma)	4	2.3

Table 2 indicates the respondents' levels of acceptance towards working in the plantation sector upon graduation. The findings showed that students had positive perception of the work in the plantation sector. About 92.6% of respondents preferred to be employed, compared to 7.4% who intended to be self-employed as plantation entrepreneurs. These results were almost in line with the statement of the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (2014), that Malaysians' tendency to become entrepreneurs stood only at 11.6 %. A total of two respondents chose to be plantation contractors, two intended to operate an oil palm nursery, one intended to be a contractor to supply labour, seven chose to become entrepreneurs in the agricultural product business, such as chemicals, fertilisers, agricultural equipment, and no one selected plantation adviser. The majority chose to become product business entrepreneurs because perhaps the task in this area was seen as easier and took a shorter period of time. The task only involved supplying products compared to the other types of entrepreneurs who required a long time to carry out the tasks before getting paid. No respondent was interested in becoming plantation advisers as they believed that there were not yet competent due to the lack of experience. In addition, the study found that the majority of the respondents preferred to be job seekers rather than job creators. This is contrary to the Malaysian government intention to produce many entrepreneurs among citizens of Malaysia.

Table 2: Students' job preferences and types of entrepreneurship

Job preference	Type of entrepreneurship	Frequency
Self employed	Plantation contractor	2
	Oil palm nursery	2
	Contractor (labour supply)	1
	Supplier of agricultural inputs	7
	Plantation adviser	0
To be employed	-	151

Total	-	163
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As demonstrated in Table3, a total of 97.4% of male respondents and 85.2% of female respondents had high positive acceptance towards working in the plantation sector. In general, most students showed interests to work in the plantation sector. These data also indicated gender did not affect the decision to choose jobs in the plantation sector. These data are similar to study by Durosaro *et al.*, 2012, found that there is no significant difference between gender and career choice among senior students. Cross-tab revealed that 55.4 percent of the respondents' has agricultural family background. A total of 70 male students were of agricultural family background compared to 44. For female students, a total of 27 students were of agricultural family background and 34 students were not. As shown in Table 3, 93.1 percent of the respondents indicated their willingness to work in the plantation sector. However, only 55.8 percent of them are with agricultural family background and 44.2% are with non- agricultural family background. This study revealed that students with agricultural family background and intent to pursue careers in plantation, is 93.8% and 6.2% were not interested to pursue employment in the plantation sector after graduation. Nnanna *et al.* (2014) revealed that students who tended to work in the agricultural sector were those whose parents were engaged in agricultural activities. This finding suggest that the student's family background demonstrated some influence on the students' intention to further their studies in the field of agriculture and subsequently worked in this sector.

Table 3: Students' willingness to work the plantation sector

Gender	Students' willingness to work in the plantation sector		Total	Family background		Total
	Yes	No		Agricultural	Non agricultural	
Male	111	3	114	70	44	114
Female	52	9	61	27	34	61
Total	163	12	175	97	78	175

Students without any family agricultural background also showed willingness to participate in the plantation sector upon graduation. About 92.3% chose to work in the plantation sector, compared with 7.7% who have no such interest. Learning methods also had influenced the perception of students to work in the plantation sector. This information was tabulated in Table4.

Table4: Crosstab between students' family backgrounds and working in the plantation sector (n = 175)

Family background	willingness to work in the plantation sector	Not willingness to work in the plantation sector
Agricultural	91	6
Non agricultural	72	6
Total	163	12

This study has also identified the needs or requirements of the students if they were to work in the plantation sector. The researcher compiled these requirements as an occupational

package and it consists of three main factors, i. e. compensation and benefits, career development, and job security.

Table5 shows the requirements of the students in terms of compensation and benefits, such as higher wages, provision for housing facilities, loan, transportation to work, and children education and welfare. The results of this study indicated that the welfare of the children education (mean = 4.09) as their top choice compared to other needs.

In career development, the researcher identifies that the students preferred training before starting work in the plantation sector with a mean of correlates to convenient scope of work followed by the kind of jobs that match their academic qualifications, unlimited job development opportunities, employment opportunities, career development, and easy scope of work.

For job security, the students favoured free medical facilities (mean = 4.15) compared with security through insurance (mean = 3.93), the use of mechanised work environment (mean = 3.96), job security (mean = 4.03), and good pension plan (4.07).

Table 5: Perceived occupational package

Statements	Score frequency (percentage) (1) least priority to (5) most priority						
	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	SD
Compensation & Benefits							
Offer of lucrative salaries	8	17	44	62	44	3.08	1.104
Provision for house	3	12	23	84	53	3.97	0.943
Provision for loan	5	23	28	67	52	3.82	1.085
Transportation to work	6	10	25	73	57	3.98	1.027
Children education / welfare	5	14	23	61	72	4.09	1.030
Career development							
Enhancement of career opportunities	7	7	36	83	42	3.83	0.957
Provision for training before starting work	4	12	22	77	60	3.66	0.952
Convenient scope of work	5	16	46	77	30	4.05	0.975
Type of work appropriate with academic qualifications	7	8	30	80	48	3.90	1.013
Opportunities are not limited	6	11	40	68	50	3.87	1.016
Job Security							
Security through insurance	4	8	28	88	76	3.93	0.883
Appropriate working environment / mechanization	3	8	33	76	51	3.96	0.922
Job security	9	6	23	73	64	4.03	1.024
Good pension plan	10	10	15	65	75	4.07	1.122
Free medical care	3	8	25	65	74	4.15	0.937

The researcher also investigated the perceptions of students, if someone was working in the plantation sector, and listed and ranked them as in Table6. Students have chosen the hot work environment as the main factor to be faced in this sector.

Table 6: Perceived occupational status

Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation	Ranking
Status of work in the plantation sector is low	2.29	0.946	10
The salary on offer is unreasonable	2.82	1.099	4
Hot working environment	3.19	1.035	1
No opportunity for career development	2.13	0.902	13
The risk of accidents at work is high	3.10	1.033	2
Susceptible to disease	2.44	1.027	8
No basic infrastructure such as kindergartens, place of worship	2.73	1.210	5
No uniform provided	2.56	1.073	7
Academic qualification not equivalent / higher	2.62	1.039	6
Last job options	2.29	1.131	11
Inheriting the family work	2.95	1.219	3
There is no guarantee for bright future	1.71	0.800	15
No work skills	2.10	1.039	14
Influenced by family / friends	2.42	1.043	9
Lagging the latest technology such as the internet	2.21	1.124	12

Table7 presents the social status related to jobs in the plantation sector. The researcher has compiled a list by ranking. The students placed the pride to work in the plantation sector as a priority. The results of this study showed similarities to a survey conducted by Marinah *et al.* (2013) which states that majority of students who pursued their studies in the field of agriculture were influenced by self-awareness. Students were also willing to make changes in the perception to bring society to discard the myth that agriculture is low status, and does not require high skills.

Table 7: Students' perception of social status

Items	Mean	Std. Deviation	Ranking
Family would be proud of my selection of the plantation sector	3.88	1.030	4
Nature of work in this sector is 4D, namely dangerous, dirty, difficult, and demeaning	2.56	1.203	6
Community respects this employment	3.65	1.031	5
This employment is most important in community	4.05	0.906	2
Employment in this sector is very valuable to the community	4.03	0.884	3
I'm proud of my career in this sector	4.23	0.908	1

5. Discussions and Conclusion

A total of 92.3% of students who had no family background in agriculture were keen to work in the plantation sector. The factor that may be affecting this decision was that the curriculum they learned in institutions gave them the confidence to pursue a career in agriculture. This statement was also supported by a study conducted by Rachel *et al* (2014). Anisa *et al* (2013) states, the courses taken by students could influence them to choose a career in the same field of study. Kochung *et al.*, 2011, reports that learning experience influenced most of the students' career choices. Unfortunately, most of them preferred to be job seekers compared to job creators. Norhasni (2007) also finds the wage earner mentality with the private or public sector, and the lack of encouragement and support from family and society, as well as the lack of knowledge about the procedure to be followed to become entrepreneurs had impeded the involvement of the students. The Malaysian government should revise and enhance the curriculum, such as, to include industrial training to give them experience and awareness.

The study contributed to the knowledge of students' perceptions of employment in the plantation sector. The findings provided deeper understanding of the values and expectations of Generation Y of employment in the plantation sector, namely perceived occupational packages. Employers should pay attention to the needs and expectations of Generation Y, which were different from previous generations. These research findings indicated that it was important for industry players to design jobs to be more attractive and dynamic because this factor had always been identified by students as the main factor which influenced them, whether or not to join this sector.

This study also had its limitations. 100% of the participating students were of ethnic Malay, and as such did not reflect the actual composition of the population consisting of various races, such as Chinese, Indian, Bumiputra Sabah, and Bumiputra Sarawak. These data showed that the Chinese had little interest in the agricultural sector, as they preferred venturing into business just like their forefathers (Ismail *et al.*, 2013). Further studies should be conducted to determine whether other races were no longer interested in the agricultural sector and instead placed their priorities in other sectors, such as services, construction, or business. The researcher also suggested that future research widen the sample size to other universities throughout Malaysia.

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