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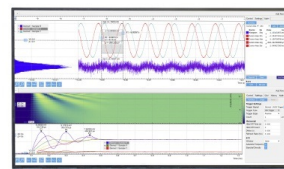
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Factors Influencing Perception Towards Agriculture Field in High Level Education Among Public University Students in East Coast Region

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Abstract. The agriculture sector has been the backbone of economy especially for producing agricultural products, food security, and the employment generation. However, sadly the intake patent for agriculture field in the public university in Malaysia shows the lowest number. Most youths are not interested in agriculture education in university due to their perception that agriculture courses are not as attractive as other courses. This study is aimed at determining the factors influencing the perception towards the agriculture field in high level education among public university students from across the East Coast Region, in Malaysia. Data that were collected through a questionnaire were analysed using descriptive analysis to achieve the aim of the study. The findings demonstrated that attitude was the most significant factor influencing the perception towards agriculture in high level education. Hopefully, this study can help other research to gain the perception of the students towards agriculture in the future.

INTRODUCTION

The agriculture sector is a very important field to supply food demand to all the people in Malaysia. However, nowadays the enrollment in agriculture education is very low compared to other fields of study. Based on the High Education Statistic 2015- 2018 [1], the student intake (Figure 1) shows that agriculture has the lowest demand which is only 4,306 intake in 2018 compared to Health and Welfare (9,053), Education (12, 034), Art & Humanities (18,079), Science, Mathematics & Computing (29,401), Engineering, Manufacturing & Construction (37,119), and Social Sciences, Business and Law (64,701). Agriculture education programmes give the student a chance to pick up a wide assortment of learning of agriculture and the opportunity in business. The agriculture sector is important for food security, employment generation and financial development, however, most of the youths in Malaysia refuse to choose the agriculture field because it is not attractive [2], and the salary is low in the agricultural sector compared to non-agriculture [3] sectors. As supported by Kamaruddin et al. [4], most of the youths in Malaysia have a negative perception towards the agriculture sector. Agriculture education is very important to teach to a small community of students who wants to learn about it. The people do not have a clear perception about agriculture education and the learning process.

The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) is one of the most significant theories to determine the factors influencing perception towards agriculture in high level education through three main determinants. These are attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control [5]. Based on the study by Vincent [6], many students do not enroll in agriculture education because of the teacher, who portrays that the culture in the agriculture sector is not good. In contrast with Esters and Bowen [7], the attitudes of students are influenced by the parent or guardian, to learn about agriculture education and to join agriculture education. Abdullah and Samah [8] concluded that most students from these four agriculture institutes are encouraged by their social environment to get involved in agriculture. Another strong influence is based on the subjective norm, i.e. the financial incentives to continue their study, and the family attitudes about the career choice of their children [9]. Through this behaviour, students can determine and can decide based on their confidence whether they want to learn agriculture education or otherwise. Thus, this study provides a better understanding of the factors influencing the perception towards the agriculture field in high level education among public university students. The results from this study could also provide some recommendations to help the Ministry of Education and government to develop a strategy in addressing the issue of negative perception that has an implication on youths, to choose the agriculture field.

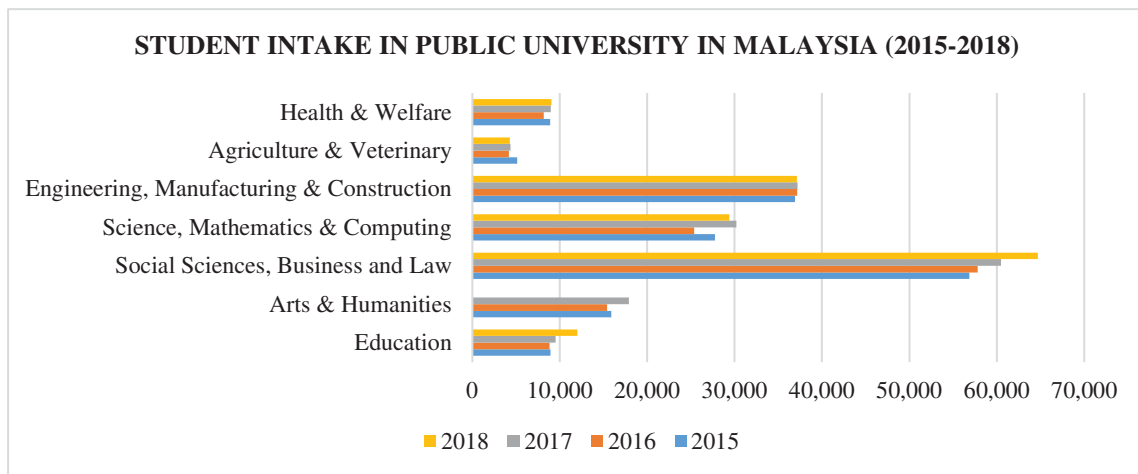


FIGURE 1. High Education Statistic 2015- 2018: Minister of Education Malaysia [1].

METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Sample

A quantitative research design was used for this study in order to gather information from the respondents. This study was conducted in the East Coast Region, in Malaysia, i.e. Kelantan, Pahang and Terengganu state, that have public universities that offer the agriculture field. To assess the reliability of the study, pre-test data were collected among 30 public university students in Kelantan. Then, 200 students from public university in the East Coast Region, in Malaysia, were selected as the respondents for this study using the simple random sampling. A name list of the public university students as the sample framework was obtained from each public university. The instruments that were used comprised five sections, namely, the demographic profile, perception towards agriculture field in high level education, attitude, subjective norm, and perceive behavioural control. All items were measured using the Likert Scale range 1 to 5, which is represented from strongly disagrees to strongly agree.

Research framework and data analysis

The research framework was constructed based on and adapted from the Theory planned Behaviour (TPB) to identify the factor influencing the perception towards the agriculture field in high level education among public university students. Descriptive analysis was employed to analyse the data collected, especially to summarise the socio-demographic information into a more simple summary in order to evaluate the relationship between independent variables which are p attitude, subjective norm, and perceive behavioural control with perception towards the agriculture field in high level education.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Demographic profile

Most of the respondents were females which 62% and male 38%. The most participated race in this study was the Malays, which comprised 94% of the respondents. Correspondingly, most of the respondents' age is between 18-25 years old (94.5%). Pertaining to the educational level, the degree level (56.5%) showed the highest percentage, those who had contributed as respondents. On the other hand, UMK students showed the highest percentage (61) of answered questionnaire (Table 1).

TABLE 1. Demographic Background of Respondents

Characteristics	Frequency (n=200)	Respondents (%)
Gender		
Male	76	38.0
Female	124	62.0
Race		
Malay	188	94.0
Chinese	5	2.5
Indian	5	2.5
Others	2	1.0
Religion		
Islam	188	94.0
Buddhism	5	2.5
Hinduism	5	2.5
Others	2	1.0
Age		
18-25 years	189	94.5
26-35 years	10	5.0
36-45 years	1	0.5
Marital Status		
Single	193	96.5
Married	7	3.5
Educational Level		
Diploma	81	40.5
Degree	113	56.5
Master	6	3.0
Type Institution		
UMK	61	30.5
UiTM	60	30.0
UMT	9	4.5
Unisza	23	11.5
Politeknik	38	19.0
Others	9	4.5

Factors influencing perception towards agriculture field in high level education

Table 2 demonstrates the actual scores for each factor influencing the perception towards agriculture in high level education. The dependent variable which is the perception towards agriculture in high level education has the highest mean score ($M = 4.30$, $SD = 0.621$), this is followed by attitude ($M = 4.22$, $SD = 0.628$), subjective norm has the lowest mean score ($M = 3.76$, $SD = 0.819$), and perceived behavioural control ($M = 4.13$, $SD = 0.678$). The perception towards agriculture in high level education among university students in East Coast Region is recorded as the highest mean score. Thomas and Zacharias [10] also support that youths have positive perceptions towards the agricultural sector. However, some of the research have revealed that most youths have negative perceptions about agriculture because it is not attractive [2] and not profitable [11]. Olaniyi, Adebayo and Akintola, [12] conclude that there are

differences in the perception about agricultural among youths. The next score is attitude. Based on the score level, it can be concluded that a majority of the students was interested in agriculture education. This was supported by the study by Abu et al. [14], where the youths' inclination towards agro-food was also a high mean value. Agreed by previous study, youths who have agriculture knowledge have positive attitudes, to choose university agriculture programmes [13].

The third-highest mean score is perceived to be behavioural control; regarding their perception towards agriculture education the students agreed that their behaviour was influenced. This is supported by Abdullah and Samah's [8], research where they have found that the mean score for perceived behavioural control towards agriculture is also a high mean score. Lastly, the subjective norm shows a moderate mean score of 3.76. This is because of the social environment where friends, the community, and family do not encourage them to know about agriculture-based education. However, the students approximately agree that the social environment can influence them to know more about and to gain perception towards agriculture education. Based on the study by Abdullah and Samah [8], the mean score for subjective norm $M = 4.05$ is in contrast to this study that has a high mean that influences the social environment which is involved in agriculture. Based on the brief elaboration and data that are presented in Table 2, it can be concluded that the number of students' perception towards agriculture in high level education is positively influenced.

TABLE 2. Factor influencing perception towards agriculture field in high level education

Variables	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	SD
Perception towards agriculture field			4.30	.621
Low (1.00 – 2.33)	0	0		
Medium (2.34 – 3.66)	32	16.0		
High (3.67 – 5.00)	168	84.0		
Attitude			4.22	.628
Low (1.00 – 2.33)	2	1.0		
Medium (2.34 – 3.66)	36	18.0		
High (3.67 – 5.00)	162	81.0		
Subjective Norm			3.76	.819
Low (1.00 – 2.33)	14	7.0		
Medium (2.34 – 3.66)	70	35.0		
High (3.67 – 5.00)	116	58		
Perceive Behavioural Control			4.13	.678
Low (1.00 – 2.33)	1	0.5		
Medium (2.34 – 3.66)	44	22.0		
High (3.67 – 5.00)	155	77.5		

CONCLUSION

200 university students in the East Coast Region University were involved in this study. All the variables in this study, which is attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioural control has a relationship with the perception towards agriculture in high-level education. In general, the findings show that they were moderate mean value for all independent variable which are attitudes is $M = 2.80$, subjective norm mean value $M = 2.51$ and lastly, perceived behavioural control mean value $M = 2.77$. Moreover, a dependent variable which is the perception on agriculture in high level educational has also been recorded as a moderate mean value ($M = 2.84$). Besides, the result of this study also shows that there is a relationship between attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioural control towards the perception on agriculture in high level education among university students, with a significant level at 0.627, 0.407 and 0.617, respectively.

Based on the result, this indicated that attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioural control affected the perception towards agriculture in high level education among students. Moreover, according to Spearman's correlation, the students accept the perception towards agriculture in high-level education but not in high value correlation.

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