

Point of Selection of Working Adult to Further Their Study in Higher Education Institutions: Evidence from Pahang State of Malaysia

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Abstract—Various initiatives have been taken to educate future young graduates, without denying the significance of working adult's perception towards the selection and opportunity offered by Higher Education Institutions. Thus, this research was conducted to determine the factors of choosing the right Higher Education Institution among working adults, and the potential of the institutions available in Pahang State. The method used for data collection within the study is the questionnaire survey which deals with potential/future working adults. The questionnaires were distributed to various industries in Pahang area and the data set used for the analysis consists of 136 respondents. All identifying information; namely age, gender, race, and the highest level of education had been recorded as independent variables. Implication of this research will determine the intention of working adult in pursuing the offered program, predict the interest of working adult, and fulfil the industry's needs. In conclusion, this study presents Higher Education Institutions as educational players for the sustainable growth of higher education in Pahang State.

Keywords—*working adults; Higher Education Institutions; further study; Pahang State*

1. INTRODUCTION

Higher education institutions (HEIs) in Malaysia are placed under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE). The education sector has constantly attained the highest national development budget, which represents the commitment of the Malaysian government towards the education field. Thus, this paper will discuss several results obtained from the study related to the reasons of selecting the Higher Education Institute in Pahang State among the focus group which is the working adults.

Understanding the working adults' perspective, highlighting the individuality of each working adult's experience, and raising awareness of the relevant courses? In higher education are several crucial points to be reviewed in this study. As a result, this paper will be useful to assist both private and public higher education institutions in order to provide the best content of courses

specifically for working adults. This can be implemented for the purpose of fulfilling their careers needs and the requirement from the industry at present.

A. Statement of the Problem

There are lacks of studies in the past that had been completed in exploring various factors which may affect the working adults' decision in choosing a course to further their study. Therefore, this study aims to explore the factors that lead to the decision making of most working adults in furthering their study.

B. Objectives of the study

In order to meet the current needs of industry, it is crucial for the focus group to comprehend and explore the programs offered at HEIs. This is because failure of understanding the necessary and beneficial programs = can cause disadvantage to both parties; which are the institution, and the focus group due to lack of related knowledge obtained while taking the course. Therefore, the following objectives are set for this study.

- To identify the underlying factors that affect working adults' selection.
- To explore solutions that can be implemented in fulfilling the needs of working adults' demands to further their study in HEIs.

C. Significance of the study

Analysing the factors that influence the focus group's selection of institutions is critical for several reasons. Primarily, it provides a thorough understanding of the working adults' decision making process and the reasons behind it. Secondly, the information obtained can be used by the organizations to improve their marketing strategy. Recognising the rationale of choosing certain institutions can also help HEIs to produce better expectations of the institutions, as well as constructive strategies to attract more clients; including the working adults. In addition, it provides empirical evidence for the organizations to work toward better changes.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

It is crucial to understand the explanatory examples of issues that have driven the selection and expectation of working adults to further study in any potential Higher Education Institutions in Pahang.

The increasing numbers of working adults who had joined the commodification of education, have changed the industry of higher education to a different category of businesses with the financial bottom line is said to contribute to more diverse perspective on both working adults, and experienced students (Sabri, 2011). Whilst too much is written about the needed expectations of working adults from higher education, 'the reality as experienced by the working adults' is significant as an added value in understanding the learning process (Entwistle, 1991), and raising the quality of higher education. These demonstrate the difficulty in researching the expectations and perceptions of working adults, largely due to the persistent nature of participation in higher education, which are formed and influenced by working adults themselves (James, 2002). Through the previous research by Shafie and Nayan (2010), most of working adults are not aware of the current phenomenon since they hardly see the connection between what they learn in class with the real job situation that they will venture later on. Additionally, most employers today are concerned about finding good workers who have higher order of thinking skills; such as learning, thinking creatively, reasoning, decision making, and problem solving (Shafie and Nayan, 2010). According to Poole and Zahn (1993), and Washer (2007), most working adults possess at least diploma, and are equally concerned about the job reliability and necessity. Therefore, they should have progressed a lot once they completed their study in higher education as compared to when they first started. They further added that the development and teaching of good employability skills should be implemented in the institution's curriculum.

Decades ago until recently, numerous studies have proven that the amount of time and effort the working adults put into academic and other activities are indirectly related to the level of learning and development (Chickering and Gamson, 1987; Ewell and Jones, 1996; Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005). This can be seen since the institutions allocate their resources and organize their curriculum, learning opportunities, and other support services (Kuh, 2003). These areas also provide an indication of how schools where these working adults learned can make them a successful individual, generally defined as persevering, acquiring, and achieving individuals. (Kuh, 2001). This is important in influencing their commitment, expectations, and subsequent perceptions, as well as experiences. (Lowe and Cook, 2003). Determination of quality assurance should consider how working adults engage, and how institutions can encourage and support the purposeful studies (Coates, 2005).

3. METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to investigate the main factors that influence working adults in making their decision to select a course in higher learning institutions in the state of Pahang, Malaysia. Hence, the design of this study is a descriptive study.

A. Respondent

Participants in this study consist of 136 working adults who are currently working in Pahang and have the intentions to further their study. A set of questionnaire was distributed to the respondents.

B. Procedure

Human resources from various companies were contacted for the purpose of distributing the questionnaire. After discussion and confirmation from the human resources manager via phone calls, the research team walked-in and distributed a set of questionnaire to the employees personally during working hour. Before that, respondents were informed about the purpose of the research and how to fill in the questionnaire. Provided with a list of courses in Master degree and Bachelor degree in Business program that may attract their interest in the future, respondents were asked to fill in the questionnaires and each questionnaire needed only 10 to 15 minutes to be completed. Both companies and employees were randomly picked out from a population list of existing companies in Pahang state. However, the companies selected came from various backgrounds such as; banking sector, IT and multimedia, tourism, educational, financial and insurance, oil and gas, as well as hotels and manufacturing. The questionnaires were classified according to five Likert scale; '1' Strongly Disagree, '2' Disagree, '3' Neutral, '4' Agree and '5' Strongly Agree. Reliability of the instrument was tested in pilot study involving 90 respondents. Result from pilot study have proven that all questions are high in terms of validity and reliability ($\alpha = .90$).

C. Measures

This study consists of three components that contribute to the influence factors among working adults in making decision to further their study in Bachelor degree and Master degree levels in higher learning institutions. SPSS version 19.0 was used for data analysis. The study observed three components to be measured. The first component referred to the relevance of the program; including course compliance with the current state of the job requirements and industry, as well as the extent to which this level of education can assist company in the future. The second component referred to the necessity of the designation for four questions program, which includes company benefit from the program, staff benefit from the program, current working environment requirement, and continuous learning in working environment. Meanwhile, final component is the impact of the program, accessed through basic skills, thinking skills, and the capacity of information skills.

4. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Through the analysis, it was found that the internal consistency and reliability for each item were high. The cronbach alpha scored 0.839 for relevance factors, 0.843 for necessity factors, and 0.997 for impact factors. The data was scattered normal.

A. Discussions on the demographic profile

Table 1: Demographic profile

Variable	Frequency	Percent (%)
Gender	Male	36.8
	Female	63.2
Race	Malay	82.4
	Chinese	14.7
	Indian	2.9
Age	23-28	8.8
	29-34	38.2
	35-40	29.4
	Above 40	23.5
Level of Education	Diploma	23.5
	Bachelor Degree	63.2
	Master Degree	10.3
	Professional Qualification	2.9

According to Table 1, 36.8% (n=50) respondents are male, and 63.2% (n=86) are female. Majority of the respondents aged between 29 to 34 years old (n=52), 35 years old to 40 years old (n=40), above 40 years old (n=32), and 23 years old to 28 years old (n=12). The respondents' income ranges from low income (MYR2, 000) to middle income class (MYR5, 000). Meanwhile, 82.4% (n=112) from the respondents are Malay, 14.7% (n=20) are Chinese, and 2.9% (n=4) are Indian. The highest education level is Master degree (10.3%, n=7). However, most respondents are Bachelor degree holder (63.2%, n=86), followed by Diploma holder (23.5%, n=32), and professional qualification (2.9%, n=4).

B. Perceptions on the highest level of education needed

Statistics pertaining to the level of programs studied by working adults in the public and private universities suggested a scenario which reflects a slight competition between both types of institutions. Based on the results from the questionnaires, more than 57.4% (n=78) of working adults are interested in pursuing a Master Degree, compared to Bachelor degree. On the other hand, 25.0% (n=34) of working adults in higher education institutions are interested in pursuing a Bachelor Degree. Another 17.6% (n=24) of working adults in higher education institutions are interested to obtain Professional Qualification Certificate. The differences in the percentage of working adult in each level of program reflect the complementary nature of higher education institutions as they are clearly catering for different needs. The Bar chart represented by Fig. 1 will further explain the level of education needed.

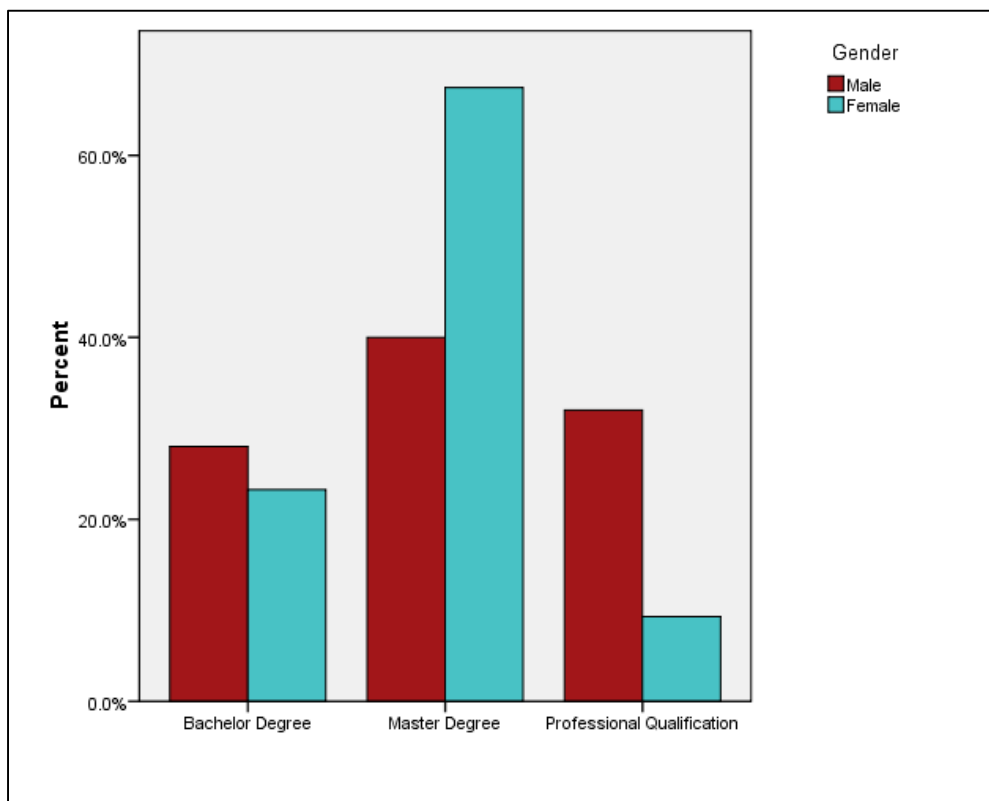


Figure 1: Analysis of selection on the highest level education needed

From the results, most working adults are interested to pursue in Master Degree compared to Bachelor degree because 63.2% (n=86) of working adults have already possessed their Bachelor degree. In addition, the results may occur due to the expand knowledge of field related to the current areas, and the advantage of the outstanding resources available in professional field. The increasing amount of working adults in pursuing their studies to higher level is supported by the Malaysia Higher Education System which is applied by MOHE and aimed to achieve 100 researchers, scientists, and engineers per 100,000 work forces by the year 2020. It also aims to improve the quality of academic staff by increasing the number of academic staff in higher education level especially those with PhD qualification.

C. Selection on discipline of program

From the analysis, it has been revealed that the perceptions on discipline of program are depending on the interest and the current working situation among the working adults in organisations as shown in Fig. 2. Based on the questionnaire results, it is found that more than 79.4% (n=108) of working adults are interested to pursue their study in Management and Business discipline. On the other hand, 19.1% (n=26) of working adults in higher education institutions are interested in Financial and Accounting discipline. Another 1.5% (n=2) of working adults are interested in Education and other disciplines.

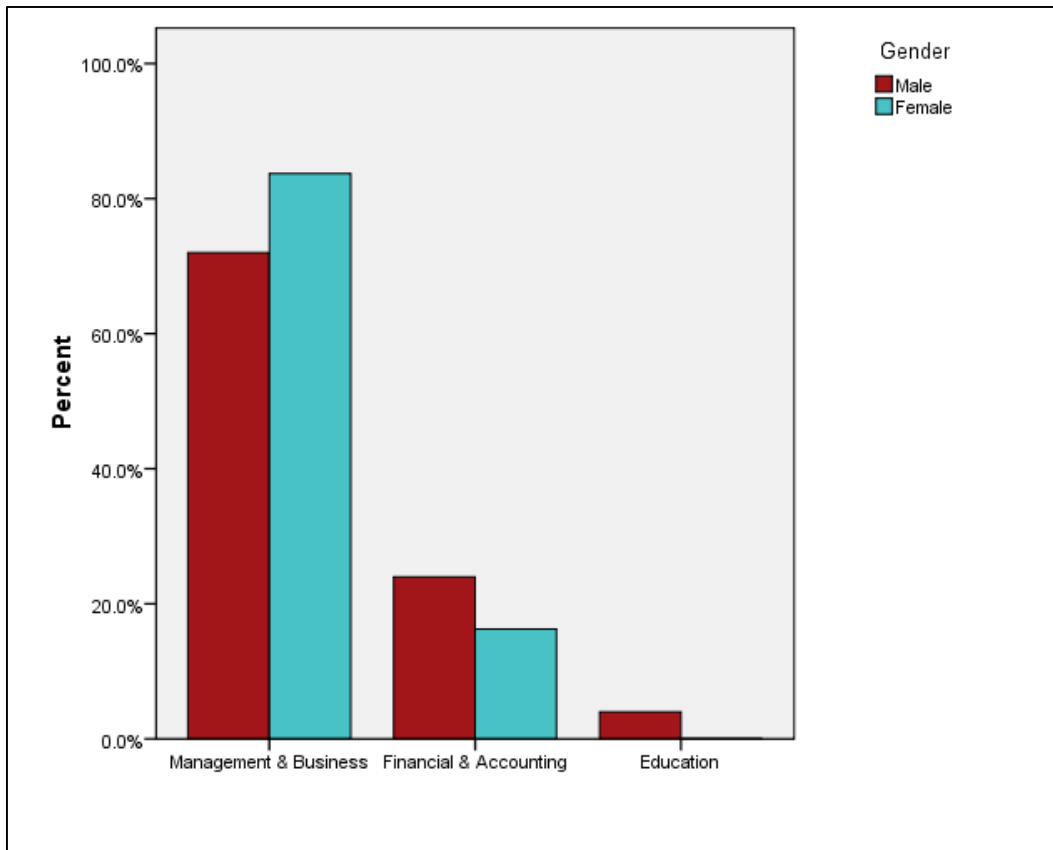


Figure 2: Analysis of selection on discipline program

D. Discussions on the factors which influence the respondents to further study

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) results found that 18 items in this study can be divided into six different factors. However, this study only took three factors (the eigenvalues greater than 1) leaving only nine items. Therefore, the eight items were excluded from further investigation as they were not representing any specific factors. Thus, the items were then categorized into three main factors. The first main factor is relevance of the program (RP) that consists two items; the relevant of program offered (RP1), and levels of education offered that match the industrial needs (RP2). The second factor is the necessity of the program (NP). Items categorized under this factor are; “It is critical to have this level of qualification in your organization (NP1)”, “current working environment demands staff to further study in these programs (NP2)”, staff qualification from the programs benefits your organisation in the future (NP3)” and “continuous learning is necessary to meet the working demand in your industry (NP4)”. Meanwhile, the third factor is the impact of the program (IM). Items under this category are “this program contains thinking skills (IM1), this program contains resource/capacity skills (IM2)” and this “program contains information skills (IM3)”. The eigenvalues are tabulated in Table 2.

E. Differences between male and female in point of selection in furthering Study to Higher Education Institutions

Through the research analysis, it is found that there are differences between male and female perceptions towards the factors that influence them to further their study. According to Table 3 below, the female respondents focus more on the relevance of the program offered (mean=4.465) compared to male respondents (mean= 4.320). Meanwhile, the female respondents agreed that levels of education match with industrial needs are more important (mean=4.372) compared to male’s perception (mean = 4.320). It is also clear that the female respondents are willing to further their study so that they can perform their job better. This results were proved through items NP1 (mean= 4.395) and NP2 (mean=4.553), while the male respondents indicated the mean of NP1 s (4.280) and NP2 (4.080). The result is in line with previous study conducted by Wilton (2008) who found that women are more focus in developing their career.

Female respondents also looked for study program that can benefit their current company (mean=4.535) and viewed learning as a necessity to fulfil their working demand (mean=4.721) as a whole. Meanwhile, the mean score of male respondent are lesser than that of female respondents which are 4.210 for item NP3, and 4.560 for item NP4.

Table 2: Total Variance Explained

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	5.777	28.884	28.884	5.777	28.884	28.884	4.350	21.749	21.749
2	2.996	14.982	43.865	2.996	14.982	43.865	2.981	14.907	36.656
3	2.129	10.645	54.511	2.129	10.645	54.511	2.467	12.333	48.989
4	.998	8.201	62.712	1.640	8.201	62.712	2.010	10.048	59.037
5	.985	7.473	70.185	1.495	7.473	70.185	1.827	9.136	68.173
6	.931	5.367	75.552	1.073	5.367	75.552	1.476	7.379	75.552
7	.886	4.432	79.984						
8	.808	4.041	84.025						
9	.657	3.285	87.310						
10	.558	2.789	90.099						
11	.484	2.422	92.521						
12	.455	2.275	94.796						
13	.314	1.569	96.365						
14	.233	1.163	97.528						
15	.161	.803	98.331						
16	.140	.699	99.030						
17	.125	.627	99.657						
18	.069	.343	100.000						

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

Table 3: Factors comparison between male and female

Group Statistics				
	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
The relevant of program offered (RP1)	Male	50	4.3200	.47610
	Female	86	4.4651	.59156
Level of education offered match to industrial needs (RP2)	Male	50	4.3200	.47610
	Female	86	4.3721	.57831
It is critical to have this level of qualification in your organization (NP1)	Male	50	4.2800	.45826
	Female	86	4.3953	.49471
Current working environment demand staff to further study in these programs (NP2)	Male	50	4.0800	.57155
	Female	86	4.4553	.58308
The staff qualification from the programs benefits your organisation in the future (NP3)	Male	50	4.1200	.60000
	Female	86	4.5349	.54984
Continuous learning is necessary to meet the working demand in your industry (NP4)	Male	50	4.5600	.50662
	Female	86	4.7209	.45385
This program contains thinking skills (IM1)	Male	50	4.8640	.47610
	Female	86	4.9670	.37354
This program contains resource/capacity skills (IM2)	Male	50	4.7200	.47610
	Female	86	4.8372	.37354
This program contains information skills (IM3)	Male	50	4.6800	.47610
	Female	86	4.7605	.35060

Nevertheless, the female respondents also sought for program with better impact factors compared to male respondents. In addition, the female respondents considered that thinking skills (mean=4.967), information skills (mean=4.761), and capacity/resource skills (mean=4.837) are all important factors that can influence their decision-making to further their study compared to their male counterpart, where the score for male respondents recorded 4.864 for thinking skills, 4.680 for information skills, and 4.720 for resources/capacity skills. The results of this current study are parallel to the research from Shafie and Nayan (2010) where they discovered that female respondents are most likely to have higher respond to employability skills as compared to male.

From the analysis, it can also be concluded that the program impact factors (IM) are the most prominent factors that influence the decision-making of working adult to further their study in HEI's (mean=4.787), followed by program necessity factors (NP) (mean=4.419), and relevance factors (RP) (mean=4.382).

CONCLUSION

This research was conducted to gauge the perceptions towards Higher Education Institutions selection in Pahang State. Through the examination of the important components in higher education institutions, the findings revealed that most of the respondents have positive selection to further their study in Higher Education Institute. However, the selection factors were found to be highly related to course contents and the relevancy to their job and working demands. Through this study, it is also clear that furthering study among working adults was highly influenced by the needs to improve knowledge in the specific areas, with the purpose to facilitate the working adult to get promotions in their respective organizations. Three main factors were marked as the biggest influence for the working adults; namely relevance of the program, necessity of the program, and impact of the program. As for the end result of the study program, it should meet the demand of working condition, and is beneficial to develop working adult's career.

For future research, a study pertaining to the factors that influence working adults, SPM (Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia) and STPM (Sijil Tinggi Pelajaran Malaysia) graduates should be carried out. Overall, this study has successfully contributed new knowledge which can assist both public and private higher education institutions to offer the best course contents for their students and potential students. The related Industries will also gain beneficial inputs through this study by providing a suitable course contents. The findings in this study are also valuable for the societies in helping them making wise decision to select the right courses that are compatible to the industrial's needs

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