

FACTORS INFLUENCING STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TO CHOOSE AGRICULTURE AS A PROSPECTIVE CAREER: THE MODERATING ROLE OF CAREER PROSPECT

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Abstract: This research explores the roles of social status and parental influence on student's attitudes to choose careers in agriculture with the moderating role of career prospects among Malaysian students. The survey method was adopted to collect the data from 183 students who enrolled in agricultural related courses. Data of five major sections such as demographic profiles, attitude, social status, parental influence and career prospect were collected by questionnaire. The PLS-SEM technique was used to analyze the data using Smart PLS 3.0. The average age of the respondent is 21 years old with females 66.1% and male 33.9%. The majority are Malay (89.6%), followed by Chinese (6.6%) and Indian (3.8%). This study suggested that social status has significant influenced the student attitude towards careers in agricultural sectors, but not parental status. Furthermore, career prospects moderated the positive relationship between social status and student's attitudes towards an agricultural career. Implications of the findings and suggestions for future research are also discussed.

Keywords: Student Attitude, Career in Agriculture, Career Prospect and Parental Influence

Introduction

Agriculture is commonly considered a foundation of the society since it is meant to satisfy human needs. Agriculture is integrally connected to people and communities, regardless of its repulsive reputation (Webster & Ganpat, 2014). The agriculture industries have been confronted with the labour issued, which led to the inefficient productivity and profitability in the sector (Zaki, Abdul Rahman & Kushairi, 2015). Tiraieyari and Krauss (2018) revealed that, despite its relevance to important demographic trends and growth, there remains scant empirical data on youth participation in agriculture sector in Malaysia. Empirical evidences demonstrated that the career in agriculture is not favoured by students, who see agriculture as the hindmost choice after manufacturing and retail sectors (Amizi, Abdullah & Ali, 2016; Muhammad, Ismail & Rak, 2013; Zaki et al., 2018). Reports from the Ministry of Human Resources also revealed that the trends of workforce participated in the agriculture sector is also declining at the rate of about 10 percent over the past a few years (MOHR, 2017).

There are many factors contributing to the problem, and the negative stigma toward agriculture sector is one of them (Turner, 2014). Agriculture sector has been perceived as having a poor reputation mainly due to the high risk (Afande, Maina & Maina, 2015), labour intensive (Hall, 2013), low salaries (Zaki et al., 2015), menial work (Baker et al., 2013), and limited career prospect (Yadav, 2016). Another contributing factor arises from the fact that students prefer to work in the government sector because of job security and perception of brighter career prospect as compared to private sector or self-employment (Muhammad et al., 2013). Although many factors influence a student's career choice, their attitude towards the agriculture sector do impose a great role in the declining interest towards careers in agriculture (Baliyan & Nenty, 2015). Apart from that, Abdullah and Samah (2014) stressed that there are relatively little studies investigated the attitude of young generation towards careers in agriculture by local researchers. This raises the issue of the need to elucidate and explaining the attitudes of individuals who are likely to enter the agricultural sector. As argued by Abdullah and Samah (2014), Richardson (2009) and Kolstrup (2012), it is necessary to understand an individual's attitude and perception of the industries in order to attract more workforces (Richardson, 2009).

An individual's attitude will clarify his/her feelings toward an object/subject whether he/she possesses a strong belief in the object/subject (Wu & Li, 2011). As affirmed by the affective event theory, an individual behaviour or the action taken in choosing a career is influenced by the combination between thoughts and feelings of the person (Ravi & Nor Aishah, 2016). Having understood students' attitudes toward careers in agriculture can provide a better insight into how to attract and retain more enthusiastic workforce, which is considered vital to the industry development (Abdullah & Samah, 2014; Kolstrup, 2012). Empirical evidence showed that there are strong linkages between youth attitude towards agriculture and their career interest in the sector (Webster & Ganpat, 2014). A person's tendency to become actively involved in an agricultural career may be predicted by considering his/her beliefs about agriculture (Dyer, 1999). In addition, as argued by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975), a person's beliefs, feelings or intentions (attitude) towards an object/subject can influence his/her behaviour. In similar note, a student's tendency to choose careers in agriculture may be predicted by analysing their attitudes towards an agricultural career with the influence of social status and parental influence. Thus, the aim of this study is to explore the student's attitude toward agricultural career and to examine its relationship with social status and parental influence.

Literature Review and Hypotheses

Identifying the factors influencing students to choose an agricultural career is a key issue for policymakers in order to design effective policies and strategies. Previous studies showed that attitude towards agricultural sector is influenced by perceived social status (Zaki et al., 2015), education (Mohammed Saleh, 2012), parental influence (Edwards & Quinter, 2011) and gender (Nyaguthii, 2010), which in turn affect student's career choice in an agricultural related field.

Agriculture is one of the potential professions that is actually lucrative and can become a feasible source of investment for youths as well as a viable strategy for reducing unemployment issue if it is made attractive (Maduka, 2015; Zaki et al., 2015). Abdullah, Samah and Othman (2012) did a study among students who enrolled in agricultural related programs revealed that the majority of the young generations see agriculture as a potential sector and provide a great platform for their career development. They believe that the agriculture sector can offer a great prospect in term of income and recognition from the society (Onu & Ikehi, 2013). Career prospects also has been seen to be a pertinent factor that may influence an individual's motivation and attitudes in career decision making (Okurame, 2014). However, there still exists a belief among students that the agriculture sector does not have the ability to offer lucrative and high source of income. Perception towards agriculture as difficult, dirty, dangerous and demeaning career (Zaki et al., 2018) as well as due to the inefficiency and lack of technology in the sector (Johnson et al., 2015) causes them not to think of agricultural sector as their future career choice. In other context, research by Karen et al., (2013) demonstrated that careers in agricultural sector is an important alternative for reducing the problems of unemployment. This study aims to investigate the relationship between social status and parental influence towards students' attitudes to choose agriculture as a prospective career. Career prospect will act as the moderator. Thus, this study also examines whether career prospect will strengthen the positive relationship between social status, parental influence and student's attitude towards an agricultural career.

Therefore, we posited the following hypotheses:

H1: There is a significant relationship between social status and student's attitude towards an agricultural career.

H2: There is a significant relationship between parental influence and student's attitude towards an agricultural career.

H3: Career prospect strengthens the relationship between social status and student's attitude towards an agricultural career.

H4: Career prospect strengthens the relationship between parental influence and student's attitude towards an agricultural career.

Methodology

Data was collected through face to face survey using a questionnaire. The questionnaires were addressed to 200 final semester students who enrolled in the agricultural related course in a public university in Malaysia. From all the distributed questionnaires, the response rate was 91.5 per cent with only 183 students responded. There was five section of the questionnaire. Section A was on demographic information, Section B on attitude towards an agricultural career, Section C on social status, Section D on parental influence and Section E on career prospect as the moderator variable. There were six items used to measure attitude towards agricultural career adapted from Baliyan and Nenty (2015). Social status was measured using six items adapted from Kusluyan and Kusluyan (2000). Parental influence was adapted from Wong and Liu (2011) and was measured using seven items while career prospect was measured using six items adapted from Wan, Wong and Kong (2014). Respondents were asked to

indicate their agreement or disagreement on a 5- point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. Likert scale was used because of the strength and easy to apply (Abdullah & Sulaiman, 2013).

Descriptive Analysis

The analysis of the demographic data demonstrated that male respondents constituted of 33.9 percent while female are 66.1 percent. The average age of the respondents are 21 years old. In term of respondent's race, majority are Malay (89.6 percent), followed by Chinese (6.6 percent) and Indian (3.8 percent). Then, the overall mean score for attitude is 3.99 with the standard deviation of 0.98. The overall mean score for other variables namely social status is 3.86 and parental influence (3.66). The findings demonstrated that respondents have a high level of attitude in choosing agriculture as a career. This situation proves that they are confident in their decision to get involved in agriculture as future career. The findings also clearly indicate that respondents are quite aware about career opportunities in agriculture and have high tendency to opt agriculture as their profession to earn livelihood.

Data Analysis and Results

This study used the SmartPLS 3.0 software to analyze the research model. First, the measurement model was tested, followed by evaluation of the structural model. As recommended by Hair et al. (2017), a bootstrapping with resamples of 5000 was used to test the true correlations between two constructs would be if they were perfectly measured. All constructs are represented by ATT (Attitude), SS (Social status), PB (Parental Influence) and CP (Career prospect).

Firstly, construct validity was determined to assess the reliability and validity of the data. As demonstrated in Table 1, the composite reliability (CR) and Cronbach alpha values were higher than 0.70 which reflect that these constructs possess an adequate level of internal consistency (Hair et al., 2017). All the constructs achieve the minimum threshold value of 0.5 for average variance extracted (AVE) (Ting & Thursamy, 2016) which indicates that the items explain more than 50 per cent of the construct's variances (Hair et al., 2017).

Table 1: Internal Consistency And Convergent Validity

Construct	Item	Loading	Cronbach's	AVE	CR
Attitude	AT1	0.784	0.934	0.753	0.948
	AT2	0.888			
	AT3	0.918			
	AT4	0.831			
	AT5	0.900			
	AT6	0.878			
Career Prospect	CP1	0.893	0.886	0.700	0.874
	CP2	0.891			
	CP6	0.713			
Parental Influence	PB4	0.929	0.914	0.822	0.933

	PB5	0.863			
	PB6	0.926			
Social Status	SS1	0.871	0.786	0.803	0.891
	SS6	0.921			

For the purpose of examining discriminant validity, Henseler et al. (2015) heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correlations criterion is used as shown in *Table 2*. HTMT approach is an estimation of the correlation between the two constructs if they were perfectly measured (Hair et al., 2017). A correlation between two constructs that close to 1 indicates that there is a lack of discriminant validity. In this study, the measurement model's discriminant validity is satisfied as shown in *Table 2*.

Table 2: Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) Analysis

	1	2	3	4
1 Attitude				
2 Career Prospect	0.577			
3 Parental Influence	0.366	0.457		
4 Social Status	0.778	0.745	0.389	

Hypothesis Testing Results

In this study, the structural model was evaluated by referring to the R^2 value, beta (β) and the corresponding t-values via bootstrapping procedure with a resample of 5,000 (Hair et al., 2017). The bootstrapping result is presented in *Figure 1*.

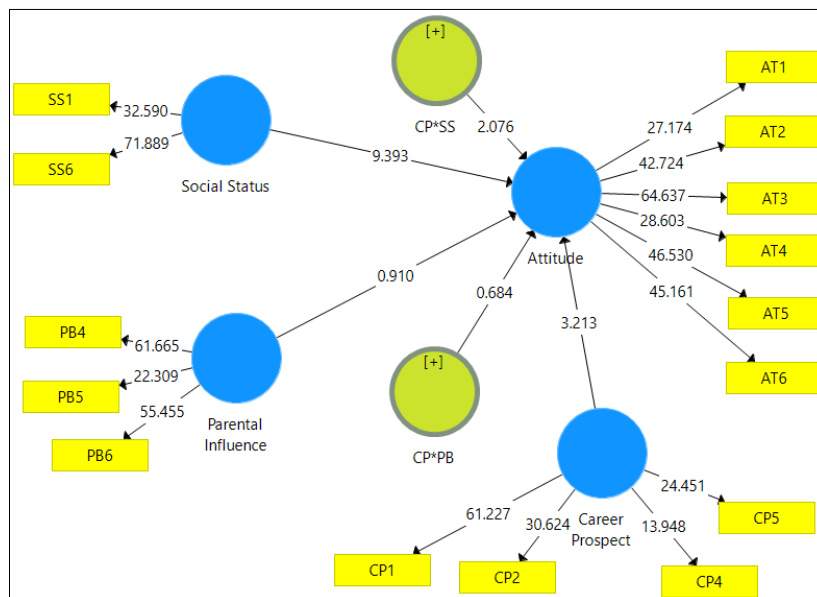


Figure 1: Bootstrapping Result

Next, Table 3 summarizes the hypotheses testing result. It was demonstrated that H1 was supported, where social status shows a significant and positive relationship with student's attitude towards an agricultural career ($\beta = 0.496$, $t = 9.393$, $p < 0.01$). Career prospect also moderates the relationship between social status and student's attitude towards agricultural career ($\beta = 0.094$, $t = 2.076$, $p < 0.05$). This gives support to H3. However, parental influence did not demonstrate a significant relationship with student's attitude towards an agricultural career. Similarly, career prospect also did not moderate the relationship between parental influence and student's attitude towards an agricultural career. The findings do not support H2 and H4.

Table 3: Hypotheses and Results

Hypotheses	Relationship	Direct effect (β)	T-Statistics	P Values	Supported
H1	SS \rightarrow AT	0.496	9.393	0.000*	Yes
H2	PB \rightarrow AT	0.099	0.910	0.363	No
H3	CP*SS \rightarrow AT	0.094	2.076	0.038**	Yes
H4	CP*PB \rightarrow AT	-0.038	0.684	0.494	No

* $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$

Discussion and Conclusion

Descriptive analyses revealed that the mean value of student's attitude towards careers in agriculture demonstrated by this study is higher (mean value = 3.99) as compared to Ravi and Nor Aishah (2016) findings (mean value = 3.25). This suggests that awareness and acceptance towards agriculture as a career among students is improving. Meanwhile, the mean value for all the predictors of this study is more or less equivalent to previous studies conducted by Thompson and Dahling, (2012).

This study also revealed that out of four hypotheses formulated only two demonstrated a significant influence on student's attitude. Results of the analyses revealed that students demonstrated a positive attitude towards an agricultural career with the influence of social status. This is in line with the previous study by Abdullah et al. (2012) that youths showed the great attitude towards a career in agriculture with the influence of social status. Thus, it is suggested that the greater perception on social status, the greater the student's attitude towards an agricultural career.

Parental influence has been recognized as a predictor of career choice. Numerous studies have emphasized that parental influence strongly affect an individual decision making on their future career (Edwards & Quinter, 2011; Fouad et al., 2016; Wong & Liu, 2010). Parents and family are the people that have a great influence on an individual career choice especially among youth because they are in the earlier stage of career decision. Empirical evidence revealed that despite pursuing his/her own dreams career, youth are likely to accept their parents' recommendation (Edwards & Quinter, 2011). Similarly, Baliyan and Nenty (2015) conducted a study on the attitude of students in Botswana towards making agriculture as a career choice. They revealed that family background, innovativeness and personality impacted student's attitude towards career decision making. However, parents with an agricultural background wished their children to secure a better job as professionals rather than working in the agriculture sector due to the difficulties they have experienced before (Adebo & Sekumade, 2013). In summary,

parental influence may more likely to affect an individual's attitude in choosing agricultural sector as their future career path.

Other studies also demonstrated social status have a strong relationship with career choice (Obiunu & Ebunu, 2013). James and Denis (2015) empirically found that the majority of students in Uganda regarded agriculture as a prestigious career to pursue. Their study revealed that students are interested in an agricultural related career because they believed agricultural sectors can provide better career development and demonstrate high job significance as agriculture is seen as the main contributor to their country's economic development (Zaki et al., 2015). Schappel (2012) further emphasizes that social status has becomes the most essential elements to be considered by an individual in charting their career development. Researches such as Saad et al. (2016) and Zaki et al. (2015) also argued that the low socio-economic standard and prestige associated with the agriculture sector are the prime reason that promotes a negative attitude among young generation towards an agricultural career. Thus, further understanding on the influence of perceived social status on an agricultural career should be done in greater depth (Zaki et al., 2015).

The pattern of findings revealed by moderator analysis provided some support for the hypothesis that career prospect played a significant role in moderating the relationship. Only one demonstrated a significant moderating role of career prospect on the relationship between the independent variables and student's attitude towards an agricultural career, out of two moderating effects formulated. This suggests that career prospect will strengthen the significant and positive relationship between social status and attitude towards an agricultural career. Findings of this study is consistent with the results of previous studies by Hung et al. (2018) who empirically demonstrated that career prospect in terms of salary satisfaction moderated the relationship between career commitment and attitude. Another study by Webster and Ganpat (2014) also revealed a positive effect between career prospect and attitudes among youths who are already involved in agriculture.

In contrast to previous studies by Egbo (2017), revealed a non-significant role of parental influence on student's attitude towards agricultural careers. The possible reasons could be seen from the respondent's profile. Respondents of this study are students whose age is between 19 to 24 years old who are classified as Y-generation. Among the unique characteristics of the Y-generation are ambitious, achievement-oriented, confident (Brown et al., 2015), aim to be distinctive in their lives and school (Ruble, 2013), high job expectation (De Hauw & De Vos, 2010; Ng et al., 2010) and placed greatest importance on individualistic aspects of a job (Ng et al., 2010). Due to these unique characteristics and the realistic expectations of their future career seem to eradicate the role of parental influence in charting their future career.

In summary, this study highlights the importance of social status to be considered in choosing an agricultural-related career. With the rising numbers of graduates in the labour market and saturation of employment in the government sector, graduate unemployment issues will accumulate over time. Thus, the agriculture sector is expected to tackle the issues by becoming the most critical sources of employment near future (Haggblade et al., 2015). The study also suggests that a more systematic approach through the public is needed to enlighten the importance of the agriculture sector towards the community. Thus, we can induce positive attitudes among parents and encourage more youths to choose agriculture as a career path. Working together, the education and related government agencies can play a major role to attract youth to work in the agriculture sector, as well as provide them with the latest information of the prospect offered by the sector. Although the present study provides some

promising results, further researches are needed especially on the roles of self-efficacy to determine the student's belief in their capability to achieve their dream career in the agriculture sector.

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