

Perceptions of Female Adolescents on Job as Skilled Labour in the Construction Industry of Malaysia

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Abstract

Shortage of local skilled workers still exists in the construction industry of Malaysia and this in general may affect its sustainability in the long term if the problem is allowed to continue. Presently, the main contractors have to employ foreign workers from less developed countries in order to fulfil the needs of manual manpower since construction in Malaysia is largely a labour intensive industry. However, the employment of foreign workers is not the solution which the country should adopt as their presence brings a lot of socio-economic problems to the country apart of having poor skills in performing construction work. It is suggested that the construction industry of Malaysia should not only attracting local male youth but also start to encourage female to become construction skilled workers to widen up the pool of talents. The present paper reports the findings from a survey conducted among female adolescents in Selangor in order to have some understanding on how female perceived the job as construction skilled workers in the construction industry of Malaysia.

Keywords

Female adolescents, Women skilled workers, Foreign workers, Construction industry, Sustainability

Introduction

The roles of the construction industry have become more important over the past 60 years with more mega projects being constructed in line with the government's desire to make Malaysia a developed nation. Traditionally, construction is a male dominated industry. Nevertheless, the nature of the work which strongly associated with '3D' image – being Dirty, Difficult and Dangerous and other poor descriptions have caused the job as skilled workers as not favourable to the local male youth (International Labour Organization, 2001a). Presently, there are a lots of

efforts being done by the government and the policy makers to resolve the problem including fully mechanizing the industry. however, the initiative has yet to show significant acceptance by the stakeholders due to various issues including high capital cost, poor supply chain and many more (Kamar, Azman, & Nawawi, 2014). Therefore, the need of manual skilled workers is still high in the construction industry of Malaysia.

Over the past years, surveys and studies conducted by researchers relatively focused on examining why the traditional manpower - local male youths are not interested to become skilled workers. However, it was mentioned in the Latham Report that one of the reasons why shortage of local skilled worker continued to happen include the failure of the industry to attract both genders but only focus to the male (Latham, 1994). In Malaysia, it can be seen that the distribution of employed persons in the labour market appeared to be segregated based on gender and construction is among the sectors which have large disparity on the number of males and females (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2013, 2014, 2017).

In Malaysia, the condition of job as skilled workers can be discussed in two different perspectives either positively or negatively. On the positive side, according to the ILO (2001), buoyant demand and shortage of local workers have kept wages at a higher level as compared to job in other sectors. This is supported by a study by Abdul Rashid Abdul Aziz (2001a) who found that only 10.7% local workers who are dissatisfied with the wages. Perhaps, the absence of standardization in the wages for skilled workers is the main reason for the low pay. In Norhidayah Md Dom et al., (2012) for example, some construction workers were paid based on day works and some were based on the kind of skills possessed. And in Shiadri, (2008) the empirical findings shows that labour were paid neither on skilled nor day works, but based on the financial capabilities of the employers. According to the CIDB (2002), the construction industry of Malaysia has yet to find the appropriate bench marking to determine the salary for skilled workers as different trades involve different sets of skills and strength.

On the other hand, generally, society perceived construction as a very unattractive industry. The image of construction is mentioned to be very poor and this is found to be the main barrier that shun local youth away from joining the construction industry (Abdul Rahim Abdul Hamid, Singh, Aminah Md Yusof, & Nur Ashikin M. Abdullah, 2011; Zakaria Mohd Yusof, 2005). Hence, it is not surprised when the International Labour Organization (ILO) reported that the local youth in Malaysia would rather being unemployed than have to work at construction sites (International Labour Organization, 2001b). Hence, it is expected that not many people would advise anyone to work in the construction industry as skilled workers. This explained why application from local youth to join construction training institutions and academies is always low. The CITA aspires to tackle these issues and proposed to continue investment in human capital development in construction and enhance control and balance of workforce supply (CIDB, 2016). Table 1 highlighted the lists of societies' perceptions on the job at construction sites.

Methodology

The questionnaire was issued to female adolescents within Year 9 to Year 11 of schooling since these are the crucial stages for students as they are at the crossroads of their career decision. For

Year 9, it is also a crucial stage as students will have to make important decision in the next coming year whether to study in the Art or Science or other streams including the vocational college. It is a pivotal decision as most students will follow career related to their field of interest in the respective streams.

Next, the samples chose for this study will only be limited to female adolescents schooling within the state of Selangor. This is due to some limitation which include the period allowed to do the survey by the Ministry of Education since the activity may interrupt examination, and teaching and learning process. Hence, moving from one state to another is impossible to be completed within short period. Selangor is ought to be the best choice since the highest construction output is in this state with 41.4%. Therefore, the exposure of female adolescents towards the job in the construction industry can be assumed as higher in Selangor as compared to other states. Thus, their opinion would be more significant rather than the opinion of students in other states whereby the construction activity is low.

In general, the population of Year 9 to Year 11 female students in Selangor is around 186,000 ($N = 186,000$). Using Yamane formula, the sample size required is 392 ($n = 392$). To gather 392 required respondents, a total of 1000 questionnaires were distributed to 10 selected schools.

After 2 months, finally, 580 questionnaires were returned back to the researcher. However, after a detail screening of the documents, only 365 can be accepted for analysis. 215 questionnaires were rejected due to many missing answers. Apart from that, the researcher also received 10 feedbacks through Google Doc instrument. This gave a result of 375 responses which equal to 95.66% response rate.

The first part of the questionnaire established socio-demographic information and the second part of the questionnaire comprises of 11 sub-questions which the students were asked to express their view by indicating their level of agreement based on 7-score of Likert scale for each of the statement.

Results

The questions asked the respondents to indicate their level of agreement for each of the statement in the questionnaire based on 7 points Likert scale (1- strongly disagree, 2 - disagree, 3 - slightly disagree, 4 - neutral, 5 - slightly agree, 6 - disagree, 7 - strongly agree). For ease of discussion and to grasp the opinions of the female adolescents towards the job as skilled workers, the interpretation used are: '1.00-3.99' will be interpreted as 'Disagree', '4.00-4.99' will become 'Neutral' and '5.00 to 7.00' will become 'Agree'.

Overall, the highest mean was reported for 'Physical Demanding' ($M = 5.18$). The lowest mean is for 'Dirty and Unattractive' ($M = 3.56$). There are six items with neutral opinions which are for 'Hot Weather & Loud Noise', 'Long Training', 'Difficult Job', 'Long Working Hours', 'Complex & Difficult Machines' and 'Mixing Cement, Wheel Barrow & Sand Digging'. The

summary of findings on the opinions of female adolescents on the job as construction skilled workers is shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Summary of Findings on the Opinions of Female Adolescents on the job as Construction Skilled Workers

Item	Characteristic of Work as Construction Skilled Worker	Mean	Opinions
Work Environment			
B1	Dirty & Unattractive	3.56	Disagree
B2	Dangerous & High Accident	5.02	Agree
B3	Hot Weather & Loud Noise	4.85	Neutral
Remuneration			
B4	Low Wages	3.69	Disagree
Pre-Requisite Requirement			
B5	Long Training	4.69	Neutral
Nature of Work			
B6	Difficult Job	4.46	Neutral
B7	Long Working Hours	4.59	Neutral
B8	Complex & Difficult Machines	4.53	Neutral
B9.	Physically demanding	5.18	Agree
B10.	Mixing Cement, Wheel Barrow & Sand Digging	4.28	Neutral
B11	Not Interesting	3.74	Disagree

Discussion

There are 11 items presented under four different clusters i.e. work environment, remuneration, pre-requisite requirement and nature of work. Overall, the means range from 3.56 to 5.18. From the 11 items, only two items have the mean range above 5.00. One from the cluster of work environment (B2 – dangerous and high accident) and the other one is from the cluster nature of work (B9 – physically demanding). The results indicate that the ‘3D image’ – being dirty, dangerous and demanding about construction which had been frequently discussed and highlighted by previous researchers still exists and has yet to be significantly improved. For items B3, B4, B5, B6, B7, B8 and B10, the mean range was between 4.28 and 4.85.

This mean that majority of the students choose to be neutral towards the statements. The researcher viewed ‘neutral’ feedback as a positive view by the female adolescents towards the job as construction skilled workers. Neutral feedbacks denote that the female adolescents in this study did not completely regard the job as unattractive although there are a lot of negative stigma captured from literature. For questions related to remuneration and the nature of working environment under B1, B4, the means are below 4.00 which shows that the respondents do not agree that the job has poor offers. And surprisingly, the general question which was asking about the female adolescents; opinion whether do they agree that the job as skilled worker is not interesting, the mean is 3.74. This indicates that the female adolescents’ in this study did not agree that the job as construction skilled workers is uninteresting.

Conclusions

This study has presented the findings on how female adolescents locally view the job as construction skilled workers. In general, it was discussed earlier that the workers in the construction industry is traditionally male. In the context of addressing the prolong problem of shortage of local skilled workers, the industry should consider attracting female to become the skilled workforce so that its dependency on unskilled foreign workers can be reduced. Generally, the construction is viewed as an unattractive industry, therefore the traditional local male youths are reluctant to work in this sector. However, the results from this study indicate that the female adolescents do not view the job as construction skilled workers negatively. Out of 11 items which was posted in the survey, only 2 items were viewed as unfavourable from the perceptions of the female adolescents i.e. the work characteristic is dangerous and highly exposed to accident; and the work is physically demanding. Therefore, the policy makers should view there is a potential for female adolescents to be attracted so that they will consider the job as construction skilled workers as a career option.

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