

ENTRY LEVEL JOB SEEKERS' PERCEPTIONS AND ASPIRATIONS (A Case of Universiti Utara Malaysia Graduating Students)

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Abstract

This paper looks into the students' perceptions and aspirations towards their first employment as an entry-level job seeker. Study of Devlin and Peterson (1984) were adopted. Seventeen factors will be asked towards the graduating students of Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM). The result revealed that the students' perceptions and aspirations as entry-level job seeker indicate career development opportunity and self-development opportunity as the most important factors toward their first employment.

INTRODUCTION

Volatility of business environment has urged organizations to attract the graduating students to work with their organizations. Organizations that are able to recruit, motivate, and retain them are going to have a competitive advantage. Therefore, companies that offer comprehensive training with planned, on-the-job experience, complemented by enlightened supervision and opportunities for ongoing professional development, will be more successful in retaining their valued and highly skilled people (Zidle, 1998). Moreover, human resource managers of organizations need to find ways in their effort of luring potential graduating students to work with them.

This study explores perception and aspiration factors of Universiti Utara Malaysia's (UUM) graduating students towards their first employment.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Devlin and Peterson (1984) focused part of their study on factors perceived to be important in entry-level jobs by graduates in the US and New Zealand. They discovered that students' focus and perceptions change as time passes. Their findings revealed that the US students, opportunity for advancement and opportunity for self-development were ranked the highest, followed by challenge and responsibility, working conditions, and type of work. On the other hand, job title, company reputation, and locations of work obtained low scores. Meanwhile, the New Zealand students also highly rated opportunity for advancement and opportunity for self-development. These were followed by challenge and responsibility, type of work, and training. On the other hand, job title, job location, and reputation were the lowest rate value (Devlin and Peterson, 1984).

The same study of Devlin and Peterson was replicated over the Universiti Sains Malaysia's (USM) graduating students (Asaari, 1995). It was discovered that top five important factors were opportunity for self-development, opportunity for career development, feeling of achievement/recognition, working conditions, and employer that provide training. Meanwhile, least important factors were job title, location of work place, company reputation, flextime, and use of skills. Further analysis by academic majors discovered that opportunity for self development and opportunity for career development were regarded as the most important factors for all academic majors: Accounting/finance, human resource management, and marketing. Those findings were consistent with the finding by Devlin and Peterson (1984).

Anderson et al. (1991) study discovered the basis for developing strategies to attract students to pursue marketing careers. Moreover, they discovered that students' perceived a particular career must be meaningful, prestigious, socially relevant, and provided an opportunity for creativity. Further, students' perceptions of marketing as a career and were interested in clarifying how students view what marketing has to offer them and how educators can use this information to influence their students' choice of marketing as a major and as career field. They discovered that the students grouped by major (human resource management, marketing, and accounting/finance) had different perceptions from the marketing major. Marketing students responded positively on whether to pursue a career in marketing. The non-business students responded neutral. On the other hand, accounting/finance students responded with low means as they had declared their choices.

Chacko (1991) reported that students perceive a variety of reasons that attracted them in pursuing a career including money, prestige, aptitude, lifestyle, and the working environment. Further, the students perceived that education was the means toward the goal of obtaining a job in the profession that they found attractive. Meanwhile, Holland (1985) discovered that people often choose professions with environments that will match their interest, likes and dislikes. He also discovered that students major in accounting because they perceived work environment and lifestyle of the professional accountant match their own abilities and interests. Further, Chacko (1991) confirmed the study by Holland (1985) that students who decide to major in accounting seem to have matched their interests, competencies, and preferences with the perceived environment of the accounting profession.

Barnard (1938) indicated that selection of major played an important role in determining the students career choice. Student's choice of major is a function of their purposes, desires, impulses of the movement, and perceived alternatives. On the other hand, The Olsten College seniors found that the graduating class was pragmatic, directed, and concerned with future financial and professional growth. The graduates also stressed power, money, and rapid promotion in evaluating their career success (Anonymous, 1989).

Moravec and Wheeler (1989) discovered that while students look for long-term values, such as professional growth and promotion, many employers provide only limited

information about such opportunities to job candidates. However, Parmley et al. (1987) at Southwest Missouri State University revealed that student's choice of employer was based on potential for future earnings, promotion opportunities, and employer location.

A study on Japanese students, Lutfy (1988) indicated that they were making new demands on companies in Japan on factors such as job satisfaction and high wages. The newly hired were pushing for more responsibility and opportunity to prove them while they were still at their junior executive level.

Keehan (1985) discovered that students indicated preferences for career opportunities, training facilities, free education, evening training, and job security. Moravec, Wheeler, and Hall (1989) found that a peak performer's characteristics were found to be a strong emphasis on improvement, a high degree of risk taking and initiative, and solid team building or networking skills.

Gooding (1988) discovered that values are changing and so are attitude about work. People want more than security and money, and they are voicing up their desire for opportunity growth in their careers, ability to learn from work experiences, and expanding their knowledge and skills. Meanwhile, Fitz-enz (1990) indicated that foundations on which career development systems are built: company need and employee need. Moreover, career development programs used training as tool to retrain and develop people.

In summary, several observations can be made from a review of the relevant literature. First, there are many factors that future knowledge workers perceive to be important in seeking jobs such as money, prestige, aptitude, lifestyle, work environment, power, financial growth, professional growth, promotion, employer location, job satisfaction, higher wages, and the list is not exhaustive. Second, research also indicates that these perception change over time. And finally, the selection of major also plays an important role in the graduating students choice of career.

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to identify factors that determine the graduating students' perceptions and aspirations in determining their career choice. The studies by Devlin and Peterson (1984) were reviewed to provide guidance in determining the factors that affect undergraduate student perceptions and aspirations about their potential employer. Further, the study attempts to answer the following: What factors are perceived to be important by the future knowledge workers in pursuing their career?

Variables

Factors used for measuring future knowledge workers perception and aspiration in selecting their career choice were adopted from Devlin and Peterson (1984). The factors of dependent variables are as follows:

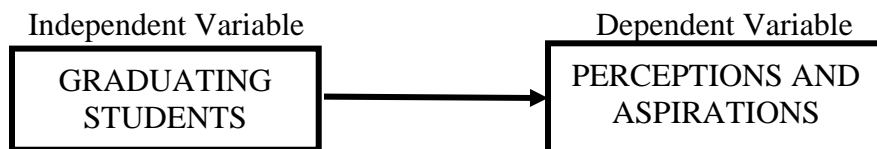
1. Opportunity for career development.
2. Opportunity for self-development.
3. Job that can provide challenge.
4. Job that gives responsibility.
5. Working conditions.
6. Nature of work assigned.
7. Employer that provide training.
8. Job that provide security.
9. Interpersonal relationship.
10. Freedom on the job.
11. Location of work place.
12. Company reputation.
13. Job title.
14. Salary.
15. Use of skills.
16. Feeling of achievement or recognition.
17. Flexitime.

Further, information on demographic factors was also collected such as age, gender, major, hometown, choice of employment sector, and family background.

Theoretical Framework

The aim is to demonstrate the factors of the students' perceptions and aspirations. The model underlying this research is depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Theoretical Framework



Sample and Questionnaire

The sample for the study was taken from final year business undergraduate students of Strategic Management classes at UUM. A questionnaire was administered randomly to 150 students, but only 125 responded; thus representing 83.3% participation from the graduating class of 2000/1.

The questionnaire was divided into 2 parts that sought demographic information, and perceptions and aspirations on important factors. The measuring instrument contained 17 factors based on Devlin and Peterson (1984) studies. Students were asked to rate the factors that they desire on a Likert 5-point scale ranging from least important (1) to most important (5).

RESULTS

The majority of the respondents were female (70.4%) as compared to male (29.6%). By ethnic group, Malay was represented by 76%, Chinese was 20%, Indian was 1.6%, and others by 2.4%. Meanwhile, the respondents were grouped into 3 categories according to their age as depicted in Table 1.

Table 1: Age Range

Age	N	%
20-22	84	67.2
23-25	36	28.8
26-28	1	0.8

Academic major were depicted in Table 2:

Table 2: Academic Major

Academic Major	N	%
Business	20	16.0
Human Resource	7	5.6
Finance	17	13.6
Accounting	62	49.6
Marketing	3	2.4
Operations	3	2.4
Banking	1	0.8
International Business	2	1.6
Education	7	5.6
Tourism	3	2.4

As for background of students' family occupation, the result was depicted in Table 3.

Table 3: Occupation of Father and Mother

	Occupation	N	%
Father	Government	25	20.0
	Private	38	30.4
	Pensioner	45	36.0
	Others	8	6.4
Mother	Government	17	13.6
	Private	13	10.4
	Pensioner	5	4.0
	Housewife	88	70.4

Choice of working sector by students, they preferred to work in the private sector (87.2%), as compared to the private sector (9.6%). Students were asked on their hometown and their preference of the location of work. Table 4 depicted the above results.

Table 4: Students' Hometown and Working Location

Region	Hometown		Working Location	
	N	%	N	%
Northern	53	42.4	43	34.4
Central	30	24.0	60	48.0
Southern	9	7.2	6	4.8
Eastern	30	24.0	13	10.4
Sabah & Sarawak	3	2.4	2	1.6

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study is to determine the important factors that influence graduating students' perceptions and aspirations as being an entry level job seeker. Moreover, the finding was almost similar to the finding of Devlin and Peterson (1984). This study discovered that the top five important and bottom five least important factors were:

Top 5 most important factors:

	<u>Mean</u>
1. Opportunity for self-development.	4.5840
2. Opportunity for career development.	4.5600
3. Job that provide security.	4.5440
4. Working conditions.	4.4400
5. Interpersonal relationship.	4.3840

Bottom 5 least important factors:

	<u>Mean</u>
1. Job title.	3.6371
2. Nature of work assigned.	3.6452
3. Location of work place.	3.7440
4. Job that can provide challenge.	3.7680
5. Flextime.	4.0407

The rankings suggest that the students perceive career development and self-development as the most important factors in determining their choice of employer. This shown that the students want to maximize their high performance and willing to prepare themselves in the desire to move up the corporate ladder. On the other hand, the students perceived that job title, nature of work, work location, challenging job, and flextime were the least important to them. The students indicated that salary was not important factors that motivate them as entry-level job seeker. The students were more concern on the external factors in determining their perceptions and aspirations.

Moreover, comparison between male and female students revealed that the male students state career development and job security as the most important factors of their perceptions and aspirations. Job security was one of the important factors to the male students as they will be the main income earner in the family. Therefore, the male students will look for jobs that provide security as indicated by Maslow in his famous

Hierarchy of Needs. On the other hand, female students indicated that self-development and career development as important factors. Further, the least important factors were almost similar between male and female students.

The finding also discovered that Malay and non-Malay students share similar perceptions and aspirations as entry-level job seeker. They indicated that self-development opportunity, career development opportunity, and job security were the most important factors to them. Further, they tend to agree on the least important factors of job title, nature of work, and work location. This result indicated that Malay and non-Malay students shown no significant difference in their perceptions and aspirations as the entry-level job seeker.

Based on academic major, the finding revealed that business, finance, and accounting majors shared similar perceptions and aspirations of career development opportunity, and self-development opportunity as their important factors towards their first employment. Meanwhile, the rest of the majors, human resource, education, marketing, operations, banking, international business, and tourism, were varied among their important factors towards their first employment. On the other hand, the least important factors among majors were almost similar. Again, the result also indicated that academic majors do not have any significant difference in the perceptions and aspirations of the students as they look forward for a job as an entry-level job seeker.

In term of salary, majority (39.2%) of the students were asking more than RM1,600 per month. Based on the correlation between the students' hometown and working location, the correlation revealed that 66.4% of the entry-level job seekers were looking for jobs that within the vicinity of their hometown. On the other hand, about 30 students were willing to relocate from their hometown to "big city" where more job opportunities that are available.

CONCLUSION

As the nation move towards the year of 2020 - the vision of the Malaysian Prime Minister in making Malaysia as an industrialized nation, future workers need to be prepared and equipped with knowledge and expertise through formal education at university level. Moreover the change in the perceptions and aspirations of future workers need to be taken into consideration, as they will affect the Nation's Planning. A versatile workers need to be prepared in facing the challenge of globalization.

In order for the HR managers in attracting the potential workers, they need to provide career path that give the opportunity for career and self-development, and job that provide security. Further, the salary offered also need to be attractive as the amount will be part of the decision that determine their acceptance on the first job. Meanwhile for corporations that have various branches throughout Malaysia, their opportunity to hire the potential workers will better especially the work place is within the vicinity of their hometown. Meanwhile, some of the graduating students are willing work in Central Region (Kuala Lumpur and Selangor) as more job opportunities are available.

For university, the lecturers need to guide the students of their career development and the factors need to be integrated within the course outline. Further, the School of Management of UUM need to relook into their courses offered and to ensure their graduates are versatile towards preparing the future workers with the right knowledge and skills. Moreover, career placement center needs to play an important role towards giving the career guidance to the students. Finally, strategic alliance needs to be arranged between the university and the corporations in match making the students toward their first employment.

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