

39. Perception of Barriers in Labour Market Attachment among Marginalised Youth in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Role of youth in society is very prominent for its future. Youth unemployment rate today challenges the generation growth in most countries. The rate of unemployment among young people is soaring and they are finding difficulties in identifying careers that matches their skills and qualification. In year 2012, youth represents 61% or 8 171 200 of Malaysia's total of 12 675 800 labour force and 64% or 7 820 400 youths represent the country's 12 284 400 total employment published. It is more prominent among youth from marginalised communities. A pilot study was designed to explore the potential limitations or perception of barriers among the marginalised youth in labour market attachment. Closed-ended questionnaires were designed based on the past published research findings and administered online and manually on a random selection. 80 samples in the age group of 15 to 40 responded to the questionnaires. Collected data underwent descriptive analyses in SPSS. The analysis underlined the following as key contributors, lack of working experience, lack of confidence, low academic qualification, poor communication skills and poor language proficiency as the obvious barriers. The findings show that 49% of the participants agreed that lack of working experience is an important barrier for them to enter the labour market. 46% and 38% of youth respectively consider lack of confidence and low academic qualification are the next potential factors that hinder them from being employed. This study has assisted us in identifying the basic factors that being perceived by the marginalised youth in Malaysian community as the barriers in labour market attachment. The next step of action is to engage the employers in a similar pilot study to identify the employers' perception of labour market attachment among the marginalised youth in Malaysia.

Keyword: Perception of barriers, labour market attachment, marginalised youth

Introduction

In all countries, youth plays a vital stakeholder role in the society. The prosperity of a country is believed to rely on the development of youth in the communities. However, youth unemployment has become a significant problem in most of the industrial countries, and youth commonly faces higher risks of being unemployed than adults (O'Connell & Russell, 2005). The rate of unemployment among young people is soaring and they are finding it more challenging to find a job. According to the Labour Force Survey Report Malaysia 2012, an unemployment rate of the country is at 3.0% in the year 2012. Nevertheless, the youth, mainly the school leavers aged 15 to 24, is the most affected compared to the other groups. Unemployment rate by the age group of 15 to 19 and 20 to 24 reached 15.5% and 8.8% respectively. It reveals the youth unemployment rate in the country of at least thrice as high as the unemployment rate in the country, and it has undoubtedly pointed to an alarming issue in the labour market (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2013).

Entering the labour market has become a major challenge worldwide where all authorities are seeking solutions to overcome this prominent matter. Getting a job and trying to retain in the workplace is an essential stage in life. In the labour market, employers have their demand for labour, and they employ labour to carry out their production. Therefore, inflow of skilled workforce is encouraged in all countries, particularly aiming to inject some new blood into the labour market. Nevertheless, today's youth encounters fewer opportunities in being employed, and this phenomenon is specifically obvious in youth from marginalised communities. Marginalisation is illustrated by McGraw-Hill (n.d.) as the practice of alienating a social group from the mainstream of the society, placing that group legally or socially on the 'margins' of the society (Kashiwabara et. al, 2007). This situation basically occurs when a group of people is actively excluded from the society and they have

relatively inadequate access to social resources such as education and health services, housing, income, leisure activities and work (Kagan et. al, n.d.).

A range of negative conditions, inclusive of poverty, lack of family guidance and support, and negative peer pressure can create risks and therefore contribute to cumulating disadvantaged situations of vulnerable youth (Thornburg, Hoffman & Remeika, 1991). Hence, the youth from marginalised communities with poor living situation and poor access to information intensely confront the disengagement towards labour market demand. Generally, youth undergoes transition from school to work to enter the society or labour market, and to contribute to the economy of the country. This is the phase where most youth, particularly those from marginalised communities, comes across stumbling blocks and this circumstance potentially forms unemployment. Therefore, this pilot study is mainly focusing on aiding the youth from marginalised communities to explore the perceived barriers in the labour market attachment.

Objectives

This pilot study focuses on the perception of barriers in the labour market attachment among youth from marginalised communities in Malaysia. The main objectives of the study are:

- To explore the barriers on employment outcomes
- To identify the potential limitations or the perception of barriers in the labour market attachment among youth from marginalised communities

Literature Review

In the Barriers to Employment Success Inventory, BESI (JIST Publishing, 2002) which was designed to help identify major barriers to getting a job or career success, the barriers included five components, such as personal and financial barriers, emotional and physical barriers, career decision-making and planning barriers, job-seeking knowledge barriers, and training and education barriers. Some of the items listed are having low self-esteem, lacking energy or drive, lacking career-specific skills and poor or unstable living situation. It shows that youth is experiencing different barriers to attach to the labour market. It is agreed by McQuaid and Lindsay (2005), noting that a person may be unemployed due to personal factors such as lack of suitable skills, lack of institutional infrastructure like suitable childcare or transport in their area, and labour demand factors involving employer preferences. Each of these, and other factors, may have singly or jointly a profound impact on a person's employability. The researchers further mentioned that personal circumstances which include a range of socioeconomic contextual factors related to individual social and household circumstances may affect the ability, willingness or social presume for someone to take up an employment opportunity. In this context, household circumstances can be divided into direct caring responsibility (for example children or elderly relatives), other family and caring responsibilities, including financial commitments to children, emotional and time commitment to family members.

Singley (2003) referred to the literature reviews focused on policy-relevant work in the United Kingdom, Australia, the United States of America, Canada and New Zealand, identified a host of employment barriers for all beneficiary types at the personal, family, social/community, and institutional levels. For the most part, Singley described barriers included in the personal, family and social/community sections are not specifically work-related but do have an impact on employment.

A survey of over 1,000 active job seekers was conducted in the Baltimore region during June and July of 2013 to determine the scope of barriers to employment opportunity (RDA Global Inc., 2014). The survey highlighted six major barriers to employment opportunity, inclusive of education, training and skills barriers, industry and career barriers, transportation and housing barriers, social barriers, structural racism, and system limitations. It is important to identify the key barriers in order to help low-income residents gain the education, skills, and other capacities necessary to connect to economic opportunities.

Another Community Assessment Survey carried out by Community Action of Nebraska (CAN) in June and July, 2012, presented what the respondents viewed as barriers to advancement in their job. The survey was mailed out to 10,000 randomly selected households across Nebraska to better understand employment. Survey participants were presented with 16 different barriers to

employment. Of all respondents, 33.4% reported that they were experiencing barriers to improving their employment situation. Limited job opportunities were identified as the top barrier by 40% of all respondents, followed by another three subsequent barriers included education level, physical health issues, and cost of training respectively (Community Action of Nebraska, 2012).

Youth from different regions faces different barriers in labour market attachment. An online survey was conducted for approximately six months, available from early December 2009 to May 2010 to primarily understand the experiences of those unemployed as well as their perceived barriers to employment. A total of 250 participants responded to the survey, and nearly one-third (32.1%) of the unemployed respondents felt that they were not working due to a lack of available jobs. The unemployed survey participants further identified needs for social capital in the forms of more work experience and education to improve their chances of obtaining a job (Will, Milligan & Akapnitis, 2011). Lack of experience often acts as a barrier for youth in finding a job as employers require employees with experience to meet the requirement of the organisation. Greene and Staff (2012) referred teenagers always lack education and experience, making them less wanted employees than older workers. Therefore, they are often the first to be fired and last to be hired. Nevertheless, a study by Coppola et. al (2002) suggested that previous work experience is the one variable which appears to substantially reduce unemployment duration among young people, irrespective of where they live and the kind of education they have received, thereby representing a powerful indicator of productivity to potential employers.

Youth is confronting the confusion in utilising the suitable communication formalities in a working environment. Thus, language difficulties and their cultural background influence on the language can be a contributor as the barrier for youth to enter the labour market. A survey conducted by the National Association of Colleges and Employers in 2010 emphasised the importance of good communication skills to an employer. In fact, employers consistently rank good communication skills at the top of the list of potential employees. Hence, it shows that communication skills are essential to everyone as they are how we give and receive information and convey our ideas and opinions with those around us (Office of Disability Employment Policy, 2012). Malaysian communities commonly practise Bahasa Malaysia as the official language, and English as the international language, particularly in the workplace. Both languages influence employment mechanisms in the Malaysian job market today. Therefore, it becomes more challenging in a multi-racial country as in Malaysia where the youth as employees are required to communicate with other races. According to Chang (2004), proficiency in English, an ability to present ideas, explain issues and problems, to speak up in a constructive manner, to resolve problems, to understand the issues and problems faced by the company and to come up with workable solutions to problems, are all good communication and interpersonal skills sought by employers (Daud et al., 2012). In an organisation, possessing good communication skills with good language proficiency by the employees leads to opinion expression in a more efficient way to achieve the goals set by the organisation.

Methodology

Questionnaire

Quantitative closed-ended questionnaires were designed based on the past published research findings and administered online and manually on a random selection. This questionnaire consisted of two parts. The first part (Part A) was regarding the respondents' basic demographic information such as gender, age range, ethnicity and place of residence. The second part (Part B) was designed to explore the respondents' top five employment barriers. In this section, 28 employment barriers were included for respondents' reference, and the respondents were asked to select the top five main barriers in attaching themselves to the labour market based on their perception. Nevertheless, respondents were encouraged to list their own perceived barriers if they found any. The questionnaire was developed in both English and Malay version at respondent's convenience and better understanding.

Sampling

In this pilot study, the pre-set criteria were youth from urban and rural areas, who are in the age range of 15 to 40 years old. To categorise youth among the marginalised communities, the

researcher studied youth with the household income below RM 1,500 in rural areas and RM 3,500 in urban areas. Questionnaires were distributed to the mentioned group randomly. A total of 80 participants responded to the questionnaires and the collected data was then further analysed.

Data Collection

At the beginning, the survey questionnaire was shared online in Facebook to reach the potential participants. Due to the inability of the targeted group to access the information online, the questionnaire was also transferred into printed hardcopy to be distributed randomly to the participants. The participants were not given any time restriction on completing the questionnaire to ensure the flexibility and sincerity of participants in giving the responses. Nevertheless, the participants were estimated to manage and complete the questionnaire within 20 minutes.

Statistical Analysis

The data collected through quantitative method was analysed with the use of the statistical programme, Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22. The researcher conducted some descriptive statistics for all major variables. In the study, the data was tabulated and coded, after which, computed and presented in the form of frequencies and percentages. The results of the analysis were summarised and presented in tables and figures. The researcher further analysed the data based on place of residence to identify the group differences.

Results and Discussion

Profile of Participants

From the pilot study of the youth's perception of barriers in the labour market attachment, 80 completed and usable questionnaires were considered for analysis. Of the total 80 participants, the respondents were split evenly across the gender and place of residence. There were 40 male and 40 female. Meanwhile, 41 of the respondents were from rural areas and 39 of the respondents were from urban areas. In terms of ethnicity, the surveyed respondents consisted of 39% (n=31) Malay, 26% (n=21) Chinese and 35% (n=28) Indian. Table 1 describes the demographic profile of the respondents.

Table 1
Description of respondents' demographic profile

Variables	Category	Total	
		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	40	50
	Male	40	50
Ethnicity	Malay	31	39
	Chinese	21	26
	Indian	28	35
Place of Residence	Rural	41	51
	Urban	39	49

Youth's Perception of Barriers

The survey asked the respondents to rate the factors they perceived as the top five barriers in labour market attachment. Data reveals that 49% (n=39) of the respondents perceived that lack of working experience is the main barrier for them to enter the labour market. This is possibly due to the scenario of high competition between experienced professionals and inexperienced youth who are new in the workplace. The situation creates such perception in youth that they are lack of experience and therefore inferior compared to their seniors, and it hinders them from being employed. World Youth Report (United Nations, 2013) highlighted the global youth unemployment rate, which has long exceeded that of other age groups. It affirmed that young people with less experience and fewer skills than many adults often come across particular difficulties getting into work. This circumstance gradually leads to imperceptible frustration and complaints. They wonder if they can get a job if all

jobs require candidates with more experience. Thus, lack of working experience is one of the most significant barriers that worries the marginalised youth.

Data also shows that 46% (n=37) of the respondents stated lack of confidence as another barrier in the labour market attachment. Kagan (n.d.) declared that people who are marginalised have relatively little control over their lives and the resources available to them. They may become stigmatised and are often at the receiving end of negative public attitudes. Their opportunities to make social contributions may be limited and they may develop low self-confidence and self-esteem. This finding is parallel to the 2013 Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) report, noting that many young people in this day and age are lack of confidence, and they find interview situations, particularly stressful as they do not have previous working experience and they do not know how to 'promote' themselves to a potential employer (Clark & Formby, 2013).

38% (n=30) of the respondents agreed that low academic qualification is another factor that carries a direct influence over their employment. As stated by Miller and Porter (2005), youth who did not finish high school is less successful in the labour market than those who received a high school qualification. The finding is as well parallel to the study of Subramaniam (2004), who highlighted one of the reasons for not working among youth in Sabah is due to low qualification. Low educational attainment and lack of skills become a hindrance for unemployed youth to the employability. He agreed to Gitter and Scheurer (1997) who referred youth with less than a secondary education fares worse than those who have completed their secondary schooling.

Poor communication skills and poor language proficiency carried the weightage of 35% and 33% respectively, as the potential barriers towards employment among youth from marginalised communities. They understood that fluent communication skills were not expected for all jobs, particularly low skilled jobs such as cleaning and delivering. Yet, as they were looking ahead to a better job, they highlighted the importance of sharpening their communication skills to be hired in the workplace. ManpowerGroup (n.d.) referred communication skills as one of the specific '21st century workplace skills'. It is supported by the survey conducted by the National Association of Colleges and Employers in 2010, which mentioned that communication skills are ranked first among a job candidate's 'must have' skills and qualities (Office of Disability Employment Policy, 2012). Hence, there can be no doubt that communication skills are one of the most influential barriers of labour market attachment among marginalised youth in Malaysia.

Youth's perception of language proficiency as one of the barriers is confirmed by Dustmann and Fabbri (2003) who emphasised the significance of language proficiency in determining employment probabilities. As language may help to acquire information about optimal job search strategies, those who are not sufficiently proficient in the required language may have difficulties in convincing prospective employers of their qualifications. Language proficiency has important implications for employability, especially given the increasing significance of the private corporate sector as an employer (University of Colombo, 2004). It is the medium in the workplace and it is the most important vehicle to present oneself. Marginalised youth were aware that their level of language proficiency, particularly in English, was too low to get a job and they were pessimistic about their chances of finding employment without further improvement. Table 2 shows the participants' perception of barriers in labour market demand.

Table 2
Participants' perception of barriers in the labour market demand

Perceptions of barriers	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Working experience	39	49
Confidence	37	46
Academic qualification	30	38
Communication skills	28	35
Language proficiency	26	33
Attitudes	22	28
Limited job opportunities offered	21	26

Perceptions of barriers	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Expected salary	17	21
High competition in labour market	15	19
Family commitment	15	19
Technical skills	14	18
Choosy	14	18
Leadership skill	12	15
Work ethic	12	15
Job mismatch	9	11
Discrimination	9	11
Personal appearance	9	11
Transportation	9	11
Education system	8	10
Inflow of foreign workers	7	9
Restriction from family	7	9
Social stigma	7	9
Criminal conviction	7	9
IT skills	6	8
Family influence	5	6
Self-motivation	5	6
Peer influence	5	6
School transition impact	3	4

According to Shuid (2005), the findings from a study by a team of researchers from a local university disclosed that lacking communication skills is one of the reasons the local graduates fail to market themselves. The researchers emphasised skills in English as the most common issue of concern raised by employers (Darmi & Albion, 2012). Carol et. al (2011) further stressed the importance of English at the workplace as the language is widely used, either as the main language or bilingually with Malay, Mandarin or Tamil. Nevertheless, Maros (2000) believed language use in the commercial sector is determined by the communicative functions and needs of the organisations. In the Malaysian context, the customer distribution which is mainly local, could have affected the patterns of language use in the organisations studied (Bhar, S., Bakar, N. A. A. & Eng, C. Y., 2012). Thus, other languages, for instance, Mandarin and Tamil, might be utilised among workers in the companies. It has shown the significance status of other languages in the country.

Urban vs Rural

Figure 1 portrays the urban and rural respondents' perceptions of employment barriers. The data reveals that 42% (n=17) rural respondents perceived low academic qualification as an important barrier for them to enter the labour market compared to poor communication skills and language proficiency. It is due to the ability to access formal education and higher education facilities is always limited in rural areas compared to the facilities available in larger urban areas and cities. Even though there are formal schools in most areas, distance and travelling time is again a challenge for many youth (Scottish Government, 2012). Similarly, a survey conducted with 172 youth in rural Pennsylvania in 2006 highlighted that, all of the youth pointed out the lack of financial resources to attend additional schooling or training was the major barrier to achieving employment goals (Ferry, 2006). It explains the rural youth's desires in attending higher education and they understand that better academic qualification promises better opportunities in job search.

As most respondents refer language proficiency in Malay and English, urban respondents of different ethnicity who are in frequent contact with the both languages easily develop the four language skills, which are reading, writing, listening and speaking. Hence, only 28% (n=11) urban

respondents referred poor language proficiency as the barrier in the labour market attachment. However, rural respondents claimed that they are only familiar with their mother tongue and they have no confidence in using Malay and English. It is parallel to Gobel's findings (2013) stated that the difference between urban and rural depends on the societal context. Rural respondents are not commonly using the languages, particularly English, as an everyday language either for transactions or conversations. As the languages are not spoken everywhere with equal frequency but given the opportunities, urban respondents are able to develop more confidence in language acquisition and proficiency compared to rural respondents. Therefore, more rural respondents referred poor language proficiency as the employment barrier.

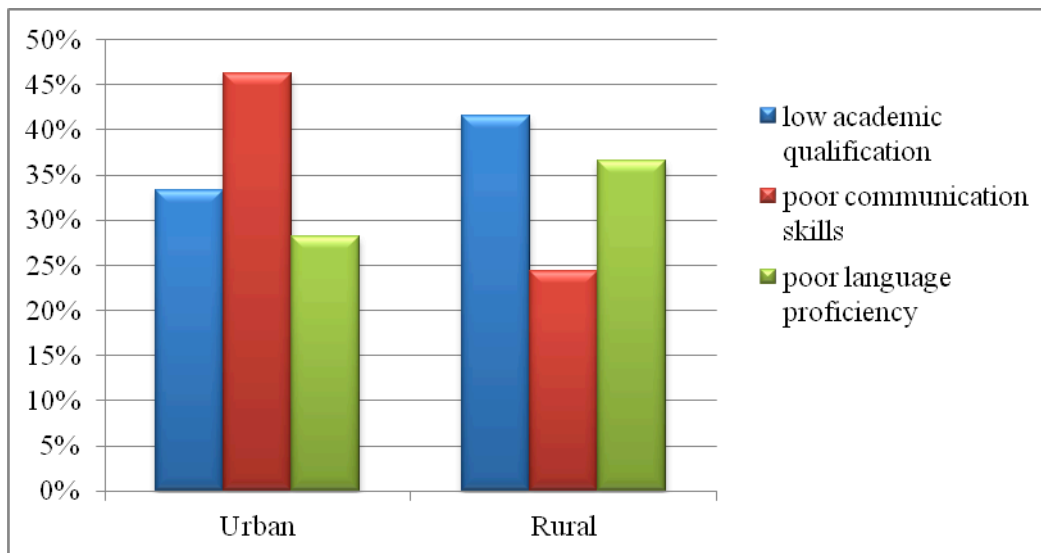


Figure 1
Rural and urban respondents' perceptions of barriers in labour market attachment

It is interesting to notice that most of the urban respondents (46%) viewed poor communication skills as one of the most significant barriers, whereas only 24% rural youth (n=10) considered communication skills as one of the top five employment barriers. The urban youth generally referred communication skills as one of the most significant barriers possibly due to the lack of interaction and communication. In this fast paced society, most urban parents work to earn a living for the family and the hectic life indirectly thickens the family communication gap.

Conclusion

This pilot study showed the potential barriers perceived by the youth from marginalised communities to attach in Malaysian labour market demand. It is important to reveal their perceptions of barriers in labour market attachment. This study has assisted us in identifying the basic factors that being perceived by the marginalised youth for determining their employment opportunities and career prospects, especially in contributing to the possibility of 'secure' and 'better' jobs. The next step of action is to engage the employers in a similar pilot study to identify the employers' perception of labour market attachment among the marginalised youth in Malaysia.

Acknowledgement

The researcher would like to thank the committee of the Long-term Research Grant Scheme (LRGS/2013/UMK-UKM/SS/04), for the support given in completing this research.

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