

Predictors Influencing Job Satisfaction among Simpang Renggam Youths towards Willingness to Work in the Oil Palm Plantation of Renggam Estate

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Abstract

Malaysia's oil palm sector has grown significantly over the years. However, it is not backed up with an adequate workforce and currently heavily dependent on foreigners as most locals tend to stay away from working in oil palm plantations. Kulim (M) Berhad's Renggam Estate too is having similar difficulties in meeting its labour requirements. Thus this study aims to determine the predictors that may influence the local youths' satisfaction towards working at Renggam Estate in terms of work environment, salary and benefits, social status, government policies, and social facilities. The study was conducted by using quantitative method through survey using a structured questionnaire on 367 local youths in Simpang Renggam, Johor who were selected by using cluster sampling technique as the respondents. It was found that work environment and social status are the two most significant predictors of job satisfaction. Overall, this study had shown that Renggam Estate should improve its work environment and the local youths' perception of plantation jobs in order to attract them to work at Renggam Estate.

Keywords: Job Satisfaction, Work Environment, Salary and Benefits, Social Status, Government Policies, Social Facilities

Introduction

The rapid growth of Malaysian oil palm industry is not backed up with an adequate workforce as the sector is relying heavily on foreign workers. As of December 2016, it was estimated that 330,185 of 429,351 workers in oil palm estates in Malaysia were foreigners (Azman et al., 2018). By region, the portions of employment of foreigners were 63.66% in Peninsular Malaysia, 86.39% in Sabah, and 74.54% in Sarawak (Ramli et al., 2011). The over-dependence

on foreign workforce may expose the country to security threat and instability of the oil palm industry. According to Abdul Rahman (2017), if the number of foreign workers is reduced by 30%, Malaysian export earnings could drop by as much as RM10 billion. Moreover, when their permits expire, the foreign workers would leave with the skills that they have acquired, and the employers have to recruit new intakes which may pose a direct pressure to production cost, resulting in lower output productivity and profit of the company.

Kulim (M) Berhad is among the private companies in Malaysia that has been engaging foreigners to work in its oil palm plantations. Out of a total of 2,574 workers at Kulim (M) Berhad-Renggam Estate, 79% of them are foreigners. Majority of them are Indonesians (90%) while only 8% of them are from Bangladesh and the rest from India. They usually work in the areas of low-level mechanisation, such as harvesting and collecting fruits, weeding, and general work - the job scope considered by many locals as undesirable due to its remote location and lack of social facilities (Ramli et al., 2011). Besides having to depend heavily on foreign workers, the average age of the local workers hired in Renggam Estate is 50 years old. This implies that the company should involve more local youths in its career succession planning.

Currently, the ratio set by the government for oil palm estates hiring foreign workers is 8:1 (i.e., 8 ha to one worker). The ideal land-labour balance for oil palm plantations in Malaysia is 10:1, as noted by (Ismail et al., 2015). However, the current land-labor ratio at Renggam Estate is 11:1, which indicates that the company is having a labour shortage. This situation will affect Renggam Estate's operation severely as it might negatively impact the overall cost of production. This issue can be resolved by encouraging the local younger generation to work in the plantations (Jasni & Othman, 2016). As the future of the nation, the new talent among the youths could be the catalyst for the industry and reduce the company's dependency on foreign workforce (Abdullah et al., 2016). Recruiting more local youth labor in oil palm sector may also resolve social and security issues to foreign workers and the higher recruitment costs (Ayob et al., 2014). Furthermore, the oil palm plantation is the most stable sector in the industry. There are many job positions available in the sector and the jobs come with many benefits. Therefore, the local youths who are seeking for jobs near their localities should take advantage of these career opportunities.

However, it is not easy for the company to draw the interest of the local youths. Many locals tend to stay away from the career opportunities in oil palm sector as they perceive them as 3D jobs, which are dirty, dangerous, and difficult occupations (Azman et al., 2018; Kamaruddin et al., 2018). They find the jobs unattractive compared to the jobs in other sectors like manufacturing, private and public sectors. The younger generation also gravitates more towards working in urban areas despite having to end up with much lower net income. According to Ayob et al. (2014), most local youths are not attracted to work in oil palm plantations because of the heavy work and no fixed salary. Furthermore, relying too much on foreign workers may create a risk when the workers are no longer interested to continue working in Malaysia (Borneo Post Online, 2017). The rising economy in Indonesia for instance has also been causing problem for Malaysia to attract new expatriates and retain current Indonesian workers.

In order to encourage more local youths to work in the oil palm sector, the company must first understand the factors that can influence their perceptions toward working in oil palm plantations. Based on the study by Kamaruddin et al (2018), the study will look at the influence of work environment, salary and benefits, social status, government policies, and social facilities on job satisfaction. The outcome of the study may bring insight for the

Renggam Estate's management to come up with better strategies on how to attract the local youths in joining the estate workforce and consequently reducing the company's dependency on foreign labour. The information derived from this study may also be useful for other companies in the oil palm sector to better understand the significance of job satisfaction predictors in preventing labour shortage, and ultimately creating a more effective and strategic blueprint in managing their human capital.

Research Objective

- to determine the predictors that may influence the local youths' job satisfaction hence willingness to work at Renggam Estate

Literature Review

According to previous studies such as Kamaruddin et al (2018); Benrazavi and Silong (2013), an individual's willingness to apply for job in an organization can be influenced by job satisfaction. Job satisfaction refers to how individuals feel about their future job and different aspects of their work (Buntaran et al., 2019). Several studies have shown that a worker's desire to work in an organization is influenced by job satisfaction determinants, which depend on the nature of the job and the worker's expectation of the job (Morgan et al., 2010). In the context of oil palm plantations, a study by Kamaruddin et al (2016) revealed five key determinants of job satisfaction which are: work environment, salary and benefits, social status, government policies and social facilities.

Work environment refers to the workers' living and working conditions which could affect their motivation at work (Kumar et al., 2014). Positive work environment is found to have a positive effect on job satisfaction (Manaf et al., 2019; Bahrani, 2015) while severe working conditions tend to cause dissatisfaction among workers (Bakotic & Babic, 2013).

The salary and benefits provided by the company also play an essential role in recruiting and retaining workers. An attractive level of salary and benefits is found to have positive effects on worker's skills, job satisfaction and willingness to work (Tillman, 2013). Other studies which found significant correlation between job satisfaction and salary and benefits include (Zulkefli et al., 2022; Kamaruddin et al., 2016).

Social status perception refers to the impression formed about people's status based on their job (Pascal & Kurpius, 2012). Previous studies like (Kamaruddin et al., 2016; 2018; Abdullah et al. 2015). have also shown that job satisfaction is significantly correlated with social status where the lower the social status perception is, the less satisfied people to work in oil palm plantations. This is because people tend to categorise those who work in oil palm plantations as having a low status in the society. Hence, millennials in particular are not interested in working in oil palm plantations because the jobs are not considered as glamorous jobs and have bright future (Kamaruddin et al., 2016; Munisamy, 2013).

Meanwhile government policies are described as the full package of welfare enjoyed by employees, consisting of housing, schooling, retirement plan, healthcare provision, retirement plans, safety policies etc. (Kamaruddin et al., 2018). Government or employer's policies are found to have a positive relationship in improving the job satisfaction of employees in an organisation (Leung & Liu, 2018; Johari et al., 2018). Good policies which can improve employees' economic and subjective well-being tend to attract new employees to apply the jobs in the organisation (Johari et al., 2018).

Social facilities refer to the basic workplace amenities which contribute to the physical comfort and quality of life such as clean drinking water, sanitation, electricity, housing

drainage etc. (Odeku & Odeku, 2014; Kumar et al., 2014). Social facilities are found to be associated with employees' welfare hence contribute to job satisfaction and willingness to work (Sameer, 2015). Workplace amenities also play a role in supporting employee attraction and retention (Milican, 2016). In Kamaruddin et al (2018), social facilities are found to have a significant relationship with job satisfaction of the youths to work in oil palm plantations.

Based on the literature review, a research framework was constructed as shown in Figure 1 below. Five variables are considered as predictors to Job Satisfaction which are Work Environment, Salary and Benefits, Social Status, Government Policies and Social Facilities.

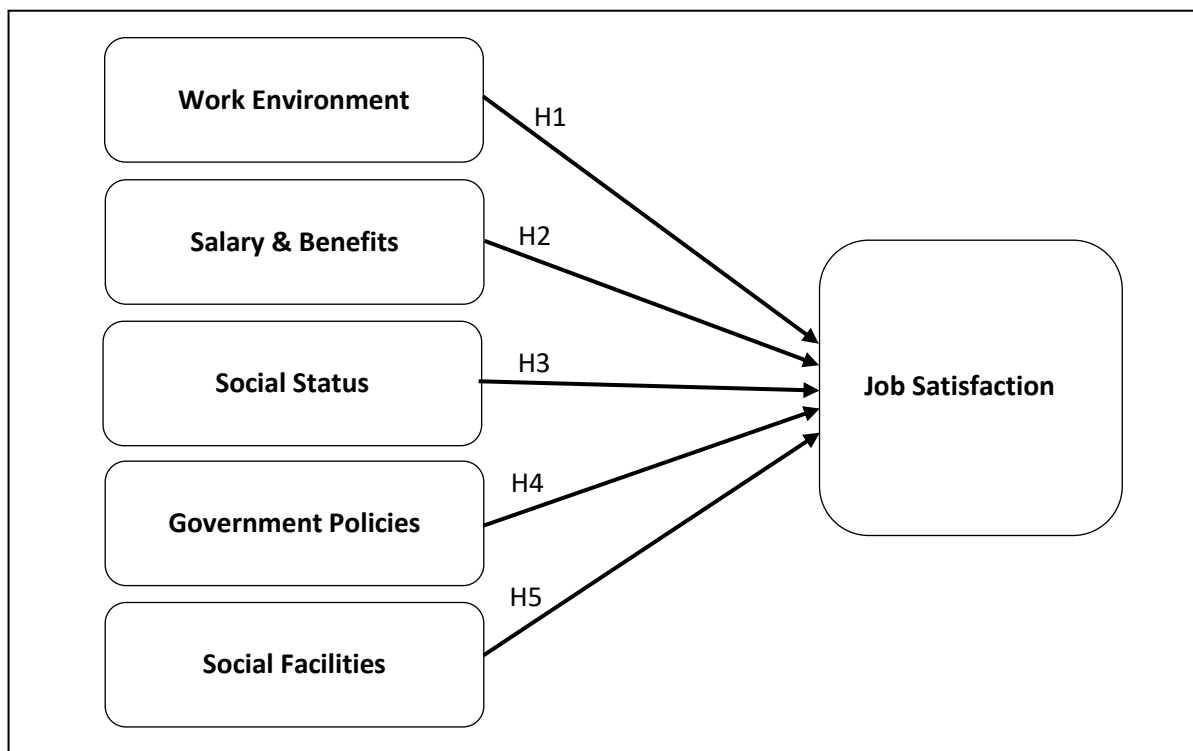


Figure 1: Research Framework

Several hypotheses were developed for the study which are:

- H1: Work Environment is a significant predictor of Job Satisfaction
- H2: Salary and Benefits is a significant predictor of Job Satisfaction
- H3: Social Status is a significant predictor of Job Satisfaction
- H4: Government Policies is a significant predictor of Job Satisfaction
- H5: Social Facilities is a significant predictor of Job Satisfaction

Method

The study was conducted using a quantitative approach where data were collected through a survey using structured questionnaires. The questionnaires were distributed to 367 respondents who were selected using cluster sampling technique among the male youths in the group age of 16-40 who lived in the region of Simpang Renggam. According to Krejcie and Morgan (1970), the sample size was deemed sufficient for the total population of 7,516 youths in Simpang Renggam (Department of Statistics, 2019).

The questionnaire was adapted from Kamaruddin et al (2018) and consisted of 25 items divided into eight sections: 1) demographic information; 2) job satisfaction; 3) work environment; 4) salary and benefits; 5) social status; 6) government policies; and 8) social

facilities. All items were presented using a five-point Likert Scale ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree. Data collected from the survey were then analyzed using the statistical tool SPSS version 26.

Results and Discussion

The demographic profile of the respondents is illustrated in Table 1 below.

Table 1
Demographic profile of respondents

Demography	Frequency	Percentage
	n	%
Race		
Malay	346	94.3
Chinese	6	1.6
India	7	1.9
Others	8	2.2
Age		
16-20 y/o	7	1.9
21-25 y/o	116	31.6
26-30 y/o	40	10.9
31-35 y/o	85	23.2
36-40 y/o	119	32.4
Family history in oil palm sector		
Yes	270	73.6
No	97	26.4
Interest to work at Renggam Estate		
Yes	233	63.5
No	134	36.5
	367	100.0

Out of 367 local youths who participated in the study, the samples were predominantly Malay (94.3%). Most of the respondents were in the age group of 36 to 40 years old (32.4%) and 21 to 25 years old (31.6%), the most suitable target group to do physical work in the field. Majority of the respondents claimed that they have family members who currently work or used to work in oil palm plantations (73.6%). This implies that they have a general idea about working in oil palm plantations. Majority of the respondents also had shown interest in working at Renggam Estate (63.5%). This indicates that Renggam Estate had plenty potential candidates who could be recruited as plantation workers.

Descriptive analysis was carried out to measure the respondents' perception towards each study variable and the results are shown in Table 2. In terms of job satisfaction, majority of the respondents have a positive perception and good level of satisfaction towards working in oil palm plantations. In terms of work environment, the respondents mostly agreed that working in plantations will provide them with flexible working hours, good working conditions and workplace safety. However, they did not perceive working in plantations as easy work. This is true considering the job scope in plantations requires them to do hard physical work to complete the assigned tasks. In terms of salary benefits, majority of the respondents agreed that by providing salary on monthly basis, food allowance during working hours,

incentives and basic needs, and education allowance can attract them to work in the plantation sector. This also indicates that they prefer the monthly salary scheme rather than the daily wage scheme, consistent with the findings in (Zainol, 2015).

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean	Standard
	M	SD
Job Satisfaction		
Happy to work in plantation sector	3.62	0.877
Working in plantation gives satisfaction	3.62	0.715
Will encourage others to work in plantation sector	3.49	0.765
Working in plantation sector fits with interest	3.23	0.743
Work Environment		
Safe and convenient	3.30	0.800
Clean, comfortable and peaceful	3.51	0.830
Easy work	2.81	0.824
Flexible working hours	3.58	0.887
Salary and Benefits		
Provide salary on monthly basis	3.78	0.992
Provide incentives and basic needs	4.07	0.824
Provide food allowance during working hours	4.35	0.705
Grant education allowance	4.42	0.716
Social Status		
Rebranding of the job title	4.23	0.607
Raising plantation jobs to semi-skilled workers	3.74	0.706
The use of uniforms	3.54	0.797
Government Policies		
Easy and cheaper housing scheme (home loan)	4.67	.597
Retirement fund	4.68	.653
Social Facilities		
Computer and internet access	4.18	.833
Up-to-date sports and recreational facilities	4.46	.669
Access to markets, shops and grocery stores	4.38	.694
Health facilities	4.55	.579

In terms of social status, most respondents agreed that rebranding of the job title to enhance the social status of plantation worker, raising the status of plantation jobs to semi-skilled, and the use of uniforms can attract them to work in the plantation sector. The results were also in line with Zainol (2015) where improving the social status of the job can enhance the willingness of the youths towards working in plantations. In terms of government policies, the respondents mostly agreed that a secure and cheaper government housing scheme (in the form of a home loan) and retirement fund provision can attract them to work in the plantation sector. Currently, the government's housing scheme through Perbadanan PR1MA is only available in urban areas. Therefore, improving the accessibility of this scheme to people in rural areas could help increase the willingness of the younger generation to work in

the plantation sector, as also noted by (Kamaruddin et al., 2015). In terms of social facilities, the respondents mostly agreed that providing access to computers and Internet, sports and recreational facilities, markets and grocery stores, and health facilities to workers in the plantation area can attract them to work in the plantation sector. The results indicate that these basic amenities are perceived as important factors to consider by the youths as they are related to their physical comfort, welfare, and quality of life.

Correlation analysis was also carried out to investigate the relationships between Job Satisfaction and the predictors. The results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Pearson correlation coefficient

Variable ^a	n	JS	WE	SB	SS	GP	SF
JS	103	1.000	0.744**	0.540**	0.646**	0.368**	0.283**

^a.JS – Job Satisfaction, WE – Work Environment, SB – Salary and Benefits, SS – Social Status, GP – Government Policies, SF – Social Facilities

** .Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

The results indicate that all predictors have a positive and significant relationship with Job Satisfaction. The findings also supported Kamaruddin et al (2018) that job satisfaction towards working in oil palm plantations can be influenced by the youths' perception of the work environment, salary and benefits, social status, government policies, and social facilities provided by the oil palm companies to their workers. The highest Pearson correlation value is between JS and WE ($r=0.744$) which implies that the work environment has the strongest influence on job satisfaction. The Pearson correlation value is moderate for JS-SS ($r=0.646$) and JS-SB ($r=0.540$) which indicates the influence of social status and salary and benefits on the respondents' satisfaction with working in oil palm plantations is moderate. Meanwhile, the Pearson correlation value is fairly low for JS-GP ($r=0.368$) and JS-SF ($r=0.283$) indicating the weak influence of government policies and social facilities on job satisfaction.

A multiple regression analysis was then carried out to conduct a hypothesis testing and determine the degree of influence of the predictors on the dependent variable (job satisfaction). The results are shown in Table 4.

Table 4

Multiple regression coefficient

Model ^a	β	t	F	R ²
1 (Constant)	0.630	0.462	29.746**	0.605
WE	$\beta_1=0.529^{**}$	5.906		
SB	$\beta_2=0.098$	0.902		
SS	$\beta_3=0.268^{**}$	2.704		
GP	$\beta_4=-0.017$	0.162		
SF	$\beta_5=-0.074$	-0.711		

a. Dependent variable: Job Satisfaction

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

As shown in the table, the predictors WE, SB, SS, GP, and SF explained 60.5 percent of the variance in job satisfaction ($R^2=0.605$). The regression model is also significant with $F=29.746$ and with a p -value <0.01 . This indicates that the overall regression model is a good fit for the data where at least one of the predictors statistically and significantly predicts job satisfaction.

The standardized beta coefficient value compares the strength of the effect of each individual predictor on job satisfaction. The higher the value of the beta coefficient, the stronger is the effect (Kahane, 2007). It can be seen in the table that only WE and SS are significant predictors in the model. Therefore, the general form of the equation to predict job satisfaction is,

$$JS = 0.630 + 0.529WE + 0.268SS$$

Based on the results, it can be concluded that only Work Environment and Social Status are significant predictors of Job Satisfaction hence only hypotheses H1 and H3 are accepted.

The results were consistent with previous studies such as Manaf et al (2019) and Bahrani, (2015) that the work environment has a significant influence on job satisfaction. The better the perception of potential workers towards the company's work environment, the more likely they are to be satisfied in working for the company. In other words, if the workplace in the plantations is perceived as clean, comfortable, and safe by the local youths, the more likely they are to work at Renggam Estate.

The results also supported Kamaruddin et al (2016; 2018); Abdullah et al (2015) that social status has a significant influence on job satisfaction. The better the perception of potential workers towards the job's social status, the more likely they are to apply for the job. In other words, if the status of plantation jobs is rebranded and raised to semi-skilled, the more likely the local youths are to have the willingness towards working in the plantations.

However, the results did not support the findings by Kamaruddin et al (2018) regarding the influence of salary and benefits, government policies, and social facilities as predictors of job satisfaction. The reason for this is probably because of the difference in sample population since Kamaruddin et al (2018) conducted their study throughout Malaysia while this study focused only on the male youth population in Simpang Renggam, Johor. In other words, the results indicate that although salary and benefits, government policies, and social facilities can influence job satisfaction in general, they are not significant enough as job satisfaction predictors in the context of local youths in Simpang Renggam.

Conclusion

The objective of this study is to determine the predictors that may influence the local youths' job satisfaction hence willingness to work at Renggam Estate. The study found that only Work Environment and Social Status are the significant predictors of Job Satisfaction. Therefore, only hypotheses 1 which is Work Environment is a significant predictor of Job Satisfaction, and hypothesis 3 which is Social Status is a significant predictor of Job Satisfaction are accepted.

It can be concluded that work environment and social status are the two factors that must be considered by Renggam Estate in order to attract more local youths in Simpang Renggam to work in its oil palm plantations. Thus, the company should improve its work environment by providing a clean, comfortable and safe workplace in the plantations. This can also be done by improving the conditions of its housing facilities, providing transportation to the workers, implementing safety regulations and practices, and providing other necessary incentives to the plantation workers. In addition to that, the company has a sufficient number of workers. This is because the fieldwork in the plantations could be hard, and so by providing enough manpower, the amount of workload can be evenly distributed among the workers thus reducing their hardship.

Efforts must also be made by the oil palm companies and other regulatory bodies like FELDA, RISDA, Youth Ministry, and Education Ministry to eliminate the negative perception of Malaysian youths towards plantation jobs. This can be done by developing youth labor employment programs to raise their awareness about the benefits, security, and availability of the jobs in the plantation sector. The locals can also be invited to experience the work culture themselves by visiting the estates. Other than that, educating the local youths about agriculture skills should start at the primary and secondary levels. This is because some of these school leavers may not be able to further their studies to the tertiary level. If they have some basic agriculture skills, they might have interested to sharpen their skills by joining the oil palm plantation sector. By encouraging more local youths to work in oil palm plantations, the companies' dependency on foreign workers could be reduced and this would consequently resolve the unemployment issues among the local youths.

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