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## Factors Influencing Students' Selection to the Certificate In Food Processing and Quality Control Program at Sik Community College, Ministry Of Higher Education (MOHE), Malaysia

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### Abstract

Selection of field of study is an important matter for every student when furthering their studies in higher education. Each individual has different interests. In determining the success of one's life, the selection of the right course is important, especially in determining a career upon graduation and entering the industry. Individual talent and abilities towards courses offered by higher education institutions are also important to ensure that every individual who chooses a field of study at the Higher Education level achieves excellence in studies. This is a qualitative study that employs a semi-structured interview tool. The goal of this research was to identify the factors that influence students' decisions to enroll in the Certificate in Food Processing and Quality Control Certificate program at Sik Community College. The research was carried out at Sik Community College, Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia. Five informants were chosen at random for the interview session based on sampling. Based on the results of interviews with informants, the study's findings were recorded and reviewed. According to the study's findings, the factor of continuing their studies to a higher level is the main factor for students to choose to take this course, along with job opportunities and family influence factors that also play a role in course selection. As a result, some suggestions for improvement have been made in order to increase student enrollment and the institution may also define student interest to implement promotion for intake to College's Certificate in Food Processing and Quality Control program.

**Keywords:** Community College, Career, Job Opportunity, Family Influence, Higher Education

### Introduction

Community colleges were established to meet the training and skill needs of people of all ages. Furthermore, Community Colleges offer secondary school students the opportunity to continue their studies after completing Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) and

prepare themselves for the job market or furthering their studies to a higher level (Jasli & Siti, 2014). The establishment's history began in 2000, following approval from the Malaysian government's Cabinet at the time. The number of community colleges established nationwide in June 2001 was 10, and after more than two decades, the current number is 104. Malaysia has been seen to be more developed and active in moving towards the formation of a competitive halal food processing industry since 2010 (Noor & Wahid, 2015). As a result, the government has sought to provide fields of study based on Technical and Vocational Training Education (TVET) through various initiatives in the hope of assisting in the formation of a recognized and competitive food processing industry.

The preparation process should be highlighted when producing clean and safe food products. According to Deathrage (1975) low food hygiene quality will affect consumer safety in terms of the level of health that will be affected. This is fundamental to the significance of Community College Food Processing and Quality Control Study program. Sik Community College has provided full-time studies in the field of Food Processing and Quality Control Certificate (SPK) since 2015, in addition to short course studies held throughout the year. Students are exposed to the necessary knowledge and skills in the field of food processing technology and quality control of food products through this field of SPK. The program's primary goal is to train students to become semi-skilled workers proficient in food processing technology. During the two years of study in this course, students will be exposed to various aspects of food processing, such as raw material receipt and handling, preparation, processing, quality assurance, packaging, and product marketing. In relation to that, this research study was conducted to determine the factors that influence the course selection of Sik Community College students on certificate level Food Processing and Quality Control courses.

## **Literature Review**

### **Community College**

The Technical and Vocational Training Education (TVET) division of the Ministry of Higher Education was officially established as part of the 10th Malaysia Plan. TVET was established to address the industry's shortage of skilled labor and to raise awareness and skills in technical and vocational fields in Malaysia. According to the Bonn Declaration (2004), Sustainable Development for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (PTVL) must provide an employee with knowledge, competencies, skills, values, and attitudes in order to produce a responsible and productive citizen who always values quality work that is implemented, resulting in a sustainable society. In 2017, Community Colleges had a marketability percentage of 96.7 percent, according to the Polytechnic and Community College Strategic Plan (2018–2025) (Ministry of Education, 2018). This indicates that community college programs of study are responsive to industry needs.

### **Certificate Course in Food Processing and Quality Control**

Sik Community College offers a Certificate in Food Processing and Quality Control course. The course is divided into four semesters, with one semester dedicated to industrial training. Basic Food Processing Technology, Fish and Seafood Processing, Food Quality Control, Food Packaging, Confectionery Processing, Food Industry, and Food Legislation are among the subjects covered in the Certificate in Food Processing and Quality Control. The subjects taught are designed to produce graduates who are holistic, entrepreneurial, and

well-rounded. Furthermore, having knowledge of this field of food will allow students to apply what they learn later in the industry (Sani & Siow, 2013).

### **Career Opportunity Factor**

Before deciding to continue their studies, a student will research what career options are available if they continue their studies in that field. It is critical to provide young people with information about careers related to their studies so that they can prepare before entering the industry. Alsagoff (1989) believes that students' understanding of learning, which includes practical applications, is critical because a person's perspective on a situation determines his understanding and actions in that situation. Furthermore, students can enjoy the fun of their practical (Hashim, 2003). This is due to their ability to see a problem's solution in a realistic manner. Furthermore, practical work can help them practice the theories they learn and give them an idea of what they will be involved in if they enter the workforce later on.

### **Opportunities to Pursue Higher Education**

One of the factors that motivates students to enroll in community colleges is their desire to continue their education beyond the certificate program. It has been demonstrated that the position or name of an IPT itself is a motivating factor in student selection. Universities or higher education institutions that are well-known in a field that has always been the primary goal and focus of most students (Mohamad & Md Tap, 2002). The Food Processing and Quality Control Certificate is offered at the Sik Community College level, and among the institutions that students frequently choose after graduating are Sultan Haji Ahmad Shah Polytechnic, Tuanku Syed Sirajuddin Polytechnic, and Tun Syed Nasir Syed Ismail Polytechnic (PTSN) to continue their studies to diploma level, and some are even interested in connecting to a degree level. This is due to the fact that the students' desire to continue their studies is an important factor in their selection. According to Atan (2003), deep interest against something allows one to be better prepared to learn with diligence.

### **Family Influence Factor**

According to Sia (2010), a number of students choose to pursue higher education because of the influence of others, such as opinions from parents and relatives. They frequently follow their parents' advice, so before making any decision, they will first listen to their parents' advice. Furthermore, for some families who own their own businesses, the children are already exposed to an entrepreneurial environment, which motivates them to continue their studies in related fields. According to studies conducted by the School Relations & Diversity Outreach Office and the Institutional Research Office (2008), family influence also plays a role in assisting students in making the decision to continue their studies at institutions of higher learning.

### **Methodology**

This study's data were gathered using a qualitative approach method. For this study, intake session I 2021/2022 students of the certificate in Food Processing and Quality Control were used for this qualitative approach. They were chosen because they were thought to have a general understanding of food processing and quality control after finishing their first semester at Sik Community College. Five informants were chosen at random for the interview

session based on the sampling and the targeted population. According to Creswell (1998), for phenomenological studies the recommended participants were 5 to 25.

A semi-structured interview was used as the instrument in this qualitative approach. This method is used to gather data from informants. This interview method was carried out by asking open-ended questions that were predetermined prior to the interview, and the questions were related to the students' knowledge and interest in the field of food processing and quality control. The purpose of this interview is to evaluate the factors that influence students' choice of the Certificate in Food Processing and Quality Control course. The researcher conducted the data collection process through this group interview process, and the interview session lasted one hour. These interview sessions were also videotaped for future reference and documentation.

## Findings

### Profile of Informants

The five students chosen are from semester 2 (two) of Sik Community College's Food Processing and Quality Control Certificate Program. Four of them were female students, while the fifth was male. Their biographies are as follows:

**Table 1:** Informant's Profile

Informant	Gender	Age	Education Level
1	Male	19	SPM
2	Woman	20	SPM
3	Woman	19	SPM
4	Woman	20	SPM
5	Woman	22	Diploma

### Informant's Feedback Based on Career Opportunity Factors

The first question asked to assess informant's knowledge of career opportunities in food processing and quality control was, "Did you know about career opportunities in food processing and quality control before?" Based on the pattern of responses, it can be concluded that four out of five informants gave nearly the same answer. They stated that they were aware of jobs in food processing and quality control prior to attending Sik Community College.

Informant 2 stated, for example:

*"Quality assurance assistant, quality control assistant, and food provider in the hospital are the job opportunities that I am aware of in the field of food processing and quality control."*

Informant 4 expressed a similar viewpoint:

*"Before deciding to attend Sik Community College, I conducted internet research to learn about the various job opportunities in the food service industry and as well as a Quality Control Assistant."*

Informant 1, on the other hand, gave a different response:

*"Because this field was not my first choice when applying, I had little knowledge of the job opportunities available in the field of food processing and quality control. However, I now have a clear picture of the work I want to do in the field of food processing and quality control, such as halal officer and food technology officer."*

*"In your opinion, to what extent can this field guarantee your career in the future?"* is the second question on the factor of employment opportunities in the fields of food processing and quality control. Based on this question, every informant gave a positive response and expressed confidence in their future prospects in the field of food processing and quality control. Informant 3 provided the following feedback, for example:

*"If I do not receive any offers from the industry after graduation, I am confident that I can afford to open my own food business by applying everything I learned during my two years at Sik Community College."*

*"While in college, we were exposed to a wealth of information about food processing and how to maintain food quality. So, armed with this knowledge, I am confident that when I launch my own food company, I will be a successful entrepreneur."*

The final question for the job opportunity factor that students are asked is, *"What career field do you prefer and why?"* On average, most informants expressed a desire to work as a Food Quality Control Assistant because they enjoy conducting analyses to determine the quality of food. Others express an interest in working in the field of research for the same reasons they are interested in doing analysis.

Informant 2 stated:

*"I am interested in working as a quality control assistant in the food industry because the field of quality control employs a variety of analytical methods to determine food quality."*

Informant 4 also agrees with this statement, which is as follows:

*"I also want to be a quality control assistant because I'm really interested in doing analytical methods on food to determine its cleanliness and quality."*

In response to informant 1, he stated: *"I'm interested in becoming an assistant food technology officer after getting some experience at Sik Community College. This is due to the fact that the scope of duties of an assistant food technology officer includes everything I learned in college, including conducting food product analysis."*

### **Informant's Feedback Based on Factors to Continue Their Studies to a Higher Level**

The first question asked when studying these factors to assess the selection of students to enter the field of food processing and quality control was, *"Are you interested in continuing your studies after graduating from community college?"* Based on this question, all five informants expressed a desire to continue their studies. Informant 2, for example, stated his position as follows:

*"I want to continue my studies after completing this certificate program but it also depends on my family's current financial situation," she says. "However, I am relieved to know that there is some funding or study loans available for anyone who wants to continue their studies to a higher level."*

Informant 3 expressed the same enthusiasm in his statement, which is as follows:

*"After completing the certificate, I intend to continue my studies to the diploma level, owing to my strong interest in food processing and quality control."*

The second question, based on the factor of continuing the studies is, *"If you want to continue your studies, do you enroll in the same field, which is food processing and quality control?"* Based on this question, three informants indicated an interest in furthering their education in the same field. While one Informant expressed a desire to stay in the field of biotechnology, the other remains undecided about whether to stay in the same field or change fields.

Informant 2 said:

*"For the time being, I am undecided about whether to stay in the same field or change careers. However, my current preference is for food processing."*

Informant 3, on the other hand, stated the following:

*"Before accepting the offer to attend Sik Community College, I had already planned to further my studies in the field of food processing and quality control."*

Informant 4 shares the same viewpoint, namely:

*"I'd like to stay in the same field of food processing and quality control because I'm more interested in knowing and learning more about it."*

The third question was, *"How far do you want to advance in your studies?"* Based on this question, three out of five informants expressed a desire to continue to the diploma level, while the other two intend to continue to the highest level, which is the doctor of philosophy level.

Informant 1 explained his stance as follows:

*"My goal is to continue my studies up to the diploma level, and I see the Sultan Haji Ahmad Shah Polytechnic and the Tun Syed Nasir Syed Ismail Polytechnic as viable options."*

Informant 4 also expressed similar interests:

*"Tuanku Syed Sirajuddin Polytechnic is my first choice for furthering my studies in the field of halal food to the diploma level. This is due to the fact that halal food is one of the branches of food technology".*

Informant 3 stated:

*"I aspire to advance my studies to the highest level, which is doctor of philosophy." That is why I believe the Food Processing and Quality Control Certificate Course offered here provides me with the opportunity and the path to realise my dreams."*

Informant 5 expressed the same enthusiasm:

*"I already have a diploma in microbiology. So, my goal now is to complete my studies to the bachelor's degree level and then to the doctor of philosophy level."*

### **Informant Feedback Based on Family Influence Factors**

The first question asked to the informants based on this factor was, *"Are any of your family members involved in food industry activities?"* Of the five informants, only two had family members involved in the food industry.

Informant 2 said:

*"My mother works as a fried banana vendor in our family."*

Informant 3 is in a similar situation, as follows:

*"My mother works as a seamstress, but she frequently receives orders to make some food products, such as traditional Malaysian kueh and local chips."*

The second question asked, *"Are you interested in the field of food processing and quality control based on the experience of your family members who work in it?"* According to the questions, only two informants had family members who worked in this field.

For example, informant 2 said:

*"Although my mother is a food entrepreneur, my interest in this field is not based on my mother's experience as a food entrepreneur."*

Informant 5 also agrees with this statement:

*"My mother, like me, is a food entrepreneur, but my interest is in research, which is why I chose the field of food processing and quality control."*

*"What improvements can you make to help your family members who work in the food industry?"* was the final question asked to conclude this interview session. The same two informants responded to the previous question.

Informant 2 expressed his thoughts as follows:

*"Perhaps, using what I learned in college, I can assist my mother in improving the process of producing fried bananas by ensuring food hygiene and safety to ensure the food produced is safe and of high quality."*

In response to informant 5, he stated:

*"In terms of improvement, perhaps I can assist my mother in increasing sales revenue from an entrepreneurial standpoint." This is because we are also exposed to the field of*



*entrepreneurship at Sik Community College, and I am confident that I will be able to apply what I have learned to help my mother."*

### **Discussion, Implications and Conclusion**

The factors that motivate a student to choose a program of study in a higher learning institution are very important for every administrator of the institution to know. This is to ensure that the curriculum design and mode of study offered to prospective students are in accordance with their needs. In addition, the study program designed and offered must be able to provide a career path and obtain recognition from local Quality Assurance Agencies or professional bodies, so that it is easy for graduates to continue their studies to a higher level.

Almost all of the informants in this study had similar opinions based on their responses. According to the interviews, all five informants were pleased with their decision to continue their studies in the field of Food Processing and Quality Control at Sik Community College. They had basic knowledge of this field at first, but after seven months as Sik Community College students, their skills and knowledge improved.

According to the findings of this study, the majority of informants have learned about the field of work in food processing and quality control. This indicates that a small number of students will research the field before deciding to pursue it. According to Borchert (2002), one of the most important decisions a student must make in order to determine their future is career choice. These outcomes will have long-term consequences for them. Davies (2003) agrees with this statement, arguing that students must be confident in the course they choose and that the course can provide good career opportunities.

Furthermore, the second factor influencing students' decision to take this course is their desire to continue their education. Five informants expressed a desire to continue their studies to the diploma level, and some aspired to the highest level of education, namely doctor of philosophy (PhD). This is due to the fact that by continuing their studies, students can expand their knowledge in the field of their choice. Higher education institutions are the best places for students to find authentic and reliable sources of information (Jusoh & Arshad, 2006). Furthermore, according to Joseph Sia (2010), college facilities, funding, and appealing promotions are all important factors in students' decisions to continue their studies at the next level.

The third factor that influences students' decision to take this course is family influence. According to the findings of the interviews, only two informants have family members who work in the food industry. However, they claim that their interest in this food processing and quality control course is not based on the experience of family members who work in the food industry. However, after studying food processing and quality control subjects, the informants are confident in their ability to assist and further develop the food industry run by their family members. According to the findings of this study, the opportunity to pursue their studies is the main factor that motivates students to choose the course certificate in Food Processing and Quality Control at Sik Community College. There is no denying that career opportunity factors and family influence factors play an important role in assisting students in making decisions about what field to pursue.

The findings from this study can contribute to institutions of higher learning in terms of improving the study curriculum, methods of program implementation, as well as a good career path after students graduate. These factors have been proven to influence students in choosing the program of study that they will be pursuing. The institution administrator needs

to look into this matter to ensure that the programs offered at Sik Community College are able to attract prospective students and be more competitive.

In the future, various promotional methods can be used with close cooperation between government agencies and surrounding agencies to convey information on the Food Processing and Quality Control Certificate Course, and hopefully, with more students in the field, this can further improve the quality of the food industry in Malaysia, particularly the food processing and service industry.

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