

Students' Intention to Participate in Urban Agriculture Program in Malaysia

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Abstract Recently, urban agriculture has been promoted in Malaysia to guarantee sources of food for the nation by 2020. In line with the new food policy, Universiti Putra Malaysia is planning to form a group of long-term student volunteers to train urban residents in implementing urban agriculture. Considering that students' participation in the program has a significant impact on the marketing of urban agriculture, it is essential to identify students' intention to participate for such a university program. Data were collected from 438 undergraduate students from the faculty of agriculture using a structured questionnaire. Results indicated that majority of students are intent to participate in the program. In conclusion, the university students' intention to participate in urban agriculture is at a high level.

Keywords: University Students, Urban Agriculture, Participation, Future Intention, Malaysia

Introduction

Urban agriculture (UA) is playing a significant role in promoting community development, food security, income opportunities, and economic growth in developing countries (Frayne, McCordic & Shilomboleni, 2014). Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) has introduced UA programs to people living in urban areas. The university has been trying to encourage city people to perform some farming activities in limited spaces of their backyard or balcony as a source of food for the nation by 2020. UPM goal is to become a centre for guaranteeing food and green spaces for urban areas. To promote UA, UPM have started to encourage students to participation in community service and to train urban residents implementing UA. It is anticipated that a larger percentage of university students will participate in the program in Malaysia. However, the extent to which university students intend to participate in the program is uncertain. Given the important benefits of community service to students' academic and personal development, their future career development and civic engagement, the main question is, would students intend to participate in the program during college? Finding answer to this question at the early stages of the program might help university policy-makers in readjusting the program and resources toward eliminating the barriers to participation to maximize the number of volunteer students. Thus, this study focused on university students' intention to participate in the program in the future. The purpose of current study is to examine students' intention to participate in UA program; a community project which leading by UPM.

We have been unable to identify research focused on examining students' intention to participate in an UA program in Malaysia. This article contributes by identifying such factor. Based on a first research project carried out in Malaysia to survey the university students' behavioural intention to participate in UA, the paper aimed to: (1) provide an overall description of respondents, and (2) examine students' intention to participate in UA in the future.

Literature Review

UA is very important for food security in developing countries. It contributes to urban food security, recycling of nutrients, community development, opportunities for leadership development, income generation, a social safety net for poor populations and the maintenance of green spaces (Stewart et al., 2013). There is a need to place an emphasis to the role that youth can play in UA (Muhammad-Lawal et. al., 2009). Involving youth in UA program is very important as one strategy to promote youth interest in the agriculture (Gwanya, 2008). Recently, Malaysian government is aiming to change the perception of youth towards agriculture which was the third biggest contributor to the economy. Youth involvement in UA is important to reduce our country's dependency on imports, as well as providing job opportunity for young people (Mohamad Kamal Abdul Kadir, 2013). University decision makers expect that majority of students will devote their time voluntarily for UA community service in future. According to the Youth Participation in Development (DFID, 2010), promoting youth participation can take many forms, from encouraging youth volunteering in community development projects, to empowering young people to offer their perspectives on world issues, to having youth serve as members of advisory boards, become peer mentors, and lead development programs, non-profit organizations and small businesses. According to the theory of planned behaviour, intention or willingness to perform behaviour is the instant precursor to the individual engagement in the behaviour (Brayley et al., 2015). In fact, intention or willingness to perform behaviour is determining the readiness to perform behaviour (Ajzen, 2011). Intention to volunteer has shown to have strong and positive relationship with voluntary behaviour (Chancon et al., 2007).

Methods

Data were collected from the undergraduate students at faculty of agriculture using a quantitative method. The survey was adopted from previous study (Chancon, Vecina, & Davila, 2007; Greenslade & White, 2005; Hyde & Knowles, 2013; Warburton & Terry, 2000). Only a subgroup of questions from the questionnaire is used in this particular publication. A total of 438 students completed the survey. Variables of the study were measured based on 7-point Likert scales from 1 to 7. Participants were asked to indicate the likelihood that they would participate at some points in the future on a 7-point scale (1 = extremely unlikely, 7 = extremely likely). "I will participate in the UA program," "I will consider participating in the UA program," "I will volunteer for the UA program at some point?" and "How likely is it that you would participate in the UA program during your free time". Descriptive analysis was used to describe the respondent's sociodemographic variables.

Findings and Discussion

1. Demographic profile of the respondents

Sociodemographic profile of the respondents is shown in Table 1. Results show that out of the 438 respondents, 71.5% were female. Students were mainly Malays (92%), followed by Chinese (3.9%) and Indians (4.1%). Majority of respondents reported that their family involve in agricultural activities (53.9%). However, only 138 respondents 31.5% reported that their parents work in the agricultural sector. 60.7% of students have past voluntary experience. The results also show that most of the respondents were 21 years old and above (329 persons, 75.1%), while 24.9% were of ages below 21 years. As for the GPA, 96.3% of students had GPA above 3 (See Table 1).

Table 1

Categorized Demographic Profile of Respondents (n=438)

Characteristic	f	%
Gender		
Male	125	28.5
Female	313	71.5
Age		
Below 21	109	24.9
21 and above	329	75.1
Race		
Malay	403	92.0
Chinese	17	3.9
Indian	18	4.1
GPA		
Below 3	16	3.7
3 and above	422	96.3
Level of education		
Diploma	3	0.7
Bachelor Degree	435	99.3
Family involvement in agriculture		
No	202	46.1
Yes	236	53.9
Parents work in the agricultural sector		
No	300	68.5
Yes	138	31.5
Volunteer experience		
No	172	39.3
Yes	266	60.7

2. *Students’ intention to participate in urban agriculture in the future*

Five items were asked with students to determine their’ intention to participate in UA program. Based on the seven-point scale used, the overall mean rating for volunteering intention was 5.39 with a standard deviation of 1.0. This implies that, in general, the university students’ intention is at a high level. Students recorded high mean score for all items: with mean scores ranging from 5.39 to 5.44, students rank first item “I will participate in the UA program “as highest (M = 5.44) (Table2). The overall mean of response on intention to participate in the program was divided into three levels for reporting purposes. Majority of students, 68.4% (n=300) had a high intention to participate; 31.1% (n=136) had a moderate intention to participate and 0.5% (n=2) had a low intention to participate (Table 3). In accordance with the ratings of below 3.0 is low, 3.01-4.99 is moderate, 5.00-7.00 is high, as the indication of level of intention, the students appeared to have been rather highly intended to participate in the program. Therefore, the overall mean rating implies that students will patriciate in the program.

Table 2
Youth intention to participate in UA

Items	Mean	SD
-I will participate in UA program	5.44	1.10
-I will consider partiicipating in the UA program	5.40	1.10
-I will paprtiicipate in the UA program at some point	5.43	1.08
-How likiely is that you would participate in the UA program during your free time?	5.33	1.09

Table 3
Level of youth intention to participate in UA

Level	f	%
Low (1.00-3.00)	2	0.5
Modarte (3.01-4.99)	136	31.1
High (5.00-7.00)	300	68.4

Conclusion

Findings showed that majority of students are intent to participate in UA program; a community volunteer project which leading by UPM. Strategies for providing them with skills and knowledge development in UA are required. In addition, priorities can be focused on supporting students’ access to information through workshops, seminars, journals, and

practical training on UA. Future studies could include a longitudinal study to determine if students actually follow up on their stated intentions. Finally, qualitative approaches might be used to understand better students' decision-making regarding participation in such a program.

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