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## Participation of Local Youth Workers in Construction Industry and Strategies for Improvement: A Study in Kelantan and Terengganu

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### Abstract

The objectives of this study are to identify the factors that contributed to the low participation of local youth workers in the construction industry and to identify strategies to increase the participation of local labour in the construction industry. Labor shortages in the construction sector are due to certain reasons such as poor involvement of local workers especially local youth workers. In Malaysia, local young people would rather be unemployed, rather than working in the construction industry. The study involved the use of 100 respondents from Kelantan and Terengganu State, the techniques used in the study include interview and questionnaire in the process of data collection and the data were analysed using regression analysis. The outcomes of the study revealed that, the respondents are on the opinion that the driven forces behind the local workers lack of participation in the construction industry are linked with the unfavourable working condition of the sector such as uncomfortable, unsafe, unhealthy working conditions, wage compensation and image in construction site. In the future, four main strategies for improving the involvement of local youth workers in construction should be implemented. The first among the strategies is to concentrate on training as well as encouragement for all the categories of workers. Second, job status and the reputation of construction workers on site are to be improved. Finally, in the construction sector, the government and all organisations need to strengthen safety standards and procedures. This research is helpful for construction industry employers and staff, academicians, policy makers, researchers and organisations, as well as non-academicians. The training institute, especially future graduates, benefits from this study as an early preparation before entering the labor market.

**Keywords:** Local Youth Workers in Construction Industry and Strategies

### Introduction

As a consequence of the RM7.3 billion injection steps implemented by the government, the construction industry today reported an increase in contracts from both the public and

private sectors. The construction sector is projected to rise by 4.3 per cent in 2002 and 5.0 per cent in 2012, based on statistics released by the Ministry of Finance. Since experiencing turbulent times following the 1997 financial crisis. As a consequence of the local construction industry's rapid growth, in addition to qualified and educated workers, this industry requires a lot of manpower, it is also able to produce quality work in the time period and cost needed at the end of the work.

In fact, however, Malaysia is very dependent on foreign labour nowadays. Foreign labour recruitment raises numerous issues, including the quality of work that does not meet the client's requirements. The government has implemented the hiring of 93,025 foreign workers in 2012, according to economic figures. Three key sectors cover the recruitment of foreign workers, namely the construction, agriculture and manufacturing sectors. This study aims to analyse the degree of local labour participation and identify the factors that draw young people to engage in the field of construction, based on the issues discussed earlier. In order to reduce the rate of dependence on foreign labour, the young people in our country must respond to the government's challenge of joining the difficult, dirty and dangerous (3D) jobs market. There are estimated to be more foreign employees who do not have a valid permit than employees who come by contract. The number of foreign workers brought into the country was previously disputed by many Malaysians because they feared that more foreign workers would flood the job market and enjoy basic facilities in the country, while there were still many locals who did not have employment, particularly graduates.

It is also necessary for the government to do something so that local employees can fill most of the vacancies in the 3D sector. The Government and the Construction Industry Development Board (CIDB) have initiated several initiatives to involve more employees particularly local youth in the construction industry (CIDB, 2010). The formation of the Malaysian Building Academy is one of the programmes. This curriculum offers instruction for construction skills, such as the Youth Capacity Training Program (Abdul-Aziz et al., 2008). Unfortunately, the development of different programmes and training courses related to the construction sector has not yet received the anticipated response from local young people, and the overall participation of young workers has not yet met the government's goal of improving the job patterns of young people employed in this sector.

Therefore in order to promote the involvement of local skilled labour in the construction industry, the justification for local young people unable to enter the industry must be recognised and overcome. Local youth engagement has become central to generating growth and national development. Securing Malaysian competitiveness is a valuable asset and is the biggest challenge in the construction industry (CIDB, 2015).

### **Literature Review**

The factors that affect the less interested local workforce to be addressed are linked to low wages, unattractive jobs, bad image and working environment (unsafe, unhealthy, dirty) and economic factor, from previous study on poor participation of local youth in the construction industry. These factors will be further defined below. Compared to other sectors, the unattractive aspect is that the wage is paid according to quantity or productivity which is too poor compared to other sectors. Since this sector is risky and competitive, contractors will most probably not use a fixed wage structure. Low-skilled foreign workers with poor educational backgrounds are involved in it, making local people think that such work is not for them. This would lead to the construction industry being shunned by locals, leading to

further dependence on foreign workers. These create a negative perspective on working in the building sector.

In the construction industry, the poor image of work is generally believed to stem from the nature of work, which is often described as dirty, difficult and dangerous. But the real reason why construction work is so poorly regarded has much more to do with the idea of hiring workers than with nature itself. The definition of employment has always been bad for many construction workers around the world (ILO, 2001). In addition, poor images of the building industry make it more extreme in the minds of local workers (Abdul-Rahman *et al.*, 2012). The dependence on foreign labour only rendered the industry dependent on low-value-added operations that only require lower skill levels and offer low pay.

According to Mohamed *et al.* 2012, it was reported that the potential instability of increased activities at the same time involves violence, culture and illegal strikes by foreign workers. The economic factor is the rapid growth of the Malaysian economy in the last decade, provided the ability for people to work, which leads to a shortage of skilled labour because workers can afford to be selective. The area of construction work should not be labelled as dirty and undignified work. Construction work should be considered to contribute to the success of Malaysian economic development as works that involve expertise, physical and mental power, imagination and value. To attract local interest in the construction sector, negative views of others need to be altered first (Jakada *et al.*, 2020; Farouq *et al.*, 2020; Hamid *et al.*, 2013).

### **Methodology**

The population for this study is drawn from contractors registered in Kelantan and Terengganu State, where a total of 300 were registered on the basis of CIDB records (CIDB, 2015). The sample size of 100 for this analysis represents the total population (Alkhwaja *et al.*, 2020; Sekaran & Bougie, 2003). The questionnaire was distributed to the respondents via different ways of collecting their input for the purpose of data collection, such as online surveys, email, phone calls and even direct questionnaires. The result analysed by means of Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) and Eviews programme. The questionnaire was broken down into three sections: Section A, Section B, and Section C by means of scale likert suggested by Brown, 2012. Section A is the demographic information of the respondent. Section B deals with the number of existing employees and the extent of weak local youth engagement in the construction industry. Section C addresses methods for recruiting local young people to enter the building industry.

### **Analysis**

All respondents who responded to the study consisted of those working with the sample of 100 Construction Company in Kelantan and Terengganu. Most respondents worked with contractors whose building construction is their main category of business. The job designation of the top three respondents is Site Supervisors, with 40 percent being the highest percentage. Next is the Site Engineer with 30 percent and followed by construction site staff with a 30 percent. Critical factors affecting those who are less interested in working in the construction industry have been established, based on the study in part B. Respondents seem to strongly agree with the 4.87 index average that the most important factors influencing the local workforce away from the industry are uncomfortable working conditions (dirty, humid, dusty, etc). Local construction staff are at high risk of becoming subjected to

dangerous and hazardous working conditions, with an average score of 4.58, the second highest ranking of critical factors.

The perceived record of workplace safety has led to the decrease in the number of employees willing to join the sector. With an average index of 3.40, respondents have agreed that temporary employment status and workload dependent on projects and unsecured employment are very significant because these variables have impacted the local workforce that is less involved in this sector. Wages and income make locals stay away from this business, respondents believe. One of the crucial variables that has the same meaning as the average index of 3.10. is also a weak image in the eyes of the workforce because of the recruitment of uneducated and unskilled foreign employees. From the report, to discuss the strategies for recruiting local young people to enter the construction industry.

Firstly, a construction workforce unit should be formed by the company to track the placement of trainees at project sites. Training centres can assist to ensure that the course of their careers is not affected by trainees. If this occurs, the training provided to the country is a waste. After preparation, this monitoring may also ensure consistency or operation after training. The second of the strategies in the teaching programme is compulsory industrial instruction. Before the training completion certificate is given to them, trainees are expected to go through the industrial training process. If appropriate, it should be directed by the relevant ministries that contractors, in particular those executing government projects, are required to provide this industrial training to introduce trainees to the real world of contracting.

In order to address the specific needs of the sector, the third approach is to reform the current curriculum. With this the trainees who have completed training not only see their careers on the construction site alone as trained employees, but are able to serve as project managers, estimators of project costs as well as calculators of material quantity. For low-class contractors, this capacity is particularly useful since most contractors in this group do not have in-depth expertise in this regard. If required, the government imposes additional requirements on every contractor through the appropriate government agencies to list the energy of local qualified workers trained as their employees before granting or renewing licences. This is to guarantee that the trainees know that there is value in the work market for the training certificate received.

In addition, there are many security events and services that seek to provide exposure and instruction on safety practises, such as green card programmes and so on. However the programme is only the beginning and there are no routinely performed actions and follow-up programmes on safety instruction. There is no effective safety training course planned at the construction site for all construction workers. In order to provide additional feedback and in an attempt to increase the level of safety, minimise injuries and provide a working atmosphere for the construction industry as a secure employment area, as well as for the petrochemical industry, continuing education programmes in the field of safety training should be planned. Security manuals have been provided to provide guidelines on safety, health and welfare activities at construction sites and to provide awareness of solutions to safety issues, according to the International Labor Office. This is to give the impression that the job industry is secure at the construction site and that safety procedures will prevent accidents in the lives of staff, health, and also the resources of the skilled workforce at the project site. The need for safety training at all levels of construction workers is one of the aims of employee safety and health policies that must be present in coordinating and managing safety. Training standards are particularly required for staff in industries that are identified as

hazardous, such as scaffolding workers and crane operators, where other employees at the job site would be affected by any errors (ILO, 1995).

Robert and Rubio (1991) suggested that preparation is one of the fundamental components of occupational safety and health management that makes safety programmes more successful. It also adds that safety preparation and instruction are key components of a successful safety programme. Supervisors and workers need to recognise the safety procedures and processes of the organisation linked to hazards in their business environment. When entering a construction site for the first time, workers should be provided with a safety orientation training programme that covers company and project safety procedures, safety rules, construction site orientation, safety prevention equipment as well as training requirements as stated by OSHA. Health Preparation and Induction Courses are among the safety services that can be introduced at the construction site (Levitt & Raymond, 1987).

In the programme, to have a more safety-oriented approach when doing work, workers need to be provided safety training related to their profession. They can be compensated for completing their project, as planned, according to Kumar & Abdullah (2013), as also reported in that applicants should not expect significant wage increases or maybe employers can provide additional benefits to secure their preferred candidate. Like performance-related rewards for top performers as an incentive. The accommodation of the site must be sufficiently favourable for the average Malaysian staff, and this strategy will attract local workers and boost the reputation of the construction industry. Kumar & Abdullah (2013) also endorsed where the construction firm does not provide construction workers with any electricity for sanitation facilities. They have also proposed ensuring that working conditions for construction work are available. Employers would boost the welfare of the workforce, potentially increase their productivity and increase their morale to work harder.

Table 4.1: Factors influencing youth involvement in construction

Factor	Statement	Rank	Min score	Level
Wages	Wages paid are very low	5	3.10	High
Image	I will be seen as uneducated, low class and low quality people if I am working in the construction industry	4	3.40	High
Work environment	Unsatisfactory work environment	3	3.40	High
Responsibility	Construction work involves very difficult task.	6	4.00	High
Environment	The work environment is not satisfactory	1	4.87	Very high
Safety in construction	safety Construction site is not a very safe place working	2	4.58	Very high

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the respondents concluded that the first three major factors that contributed to the low involvement of local youth workers in construction industry were linked to uncomfortable, insecure and unhealthy working conditions and temporary employment status. Nonetheless, it is important for the stability of the Malaysian economy that the issues are discussed. In order to have young people entering the construction industry, there is social value and community benefits. It offers opportunities for local young people of all ages. Without significant action, though, this will not happen. In articulating the business case for reform and helping to improve those programmes still in place, the government needs to take a stronger lead. To make the sector more welcoming to local youth, cultural change is essential; removing a perceived atmosphere of bullying would benefit everyone. Working on this will boost the construction industry's reputation, demonstrating it as a new and friendly industry, somewhere to make a career. Opportunities for training and entering the industry at various stages of life need to be promoted. While it is important to ensure that young people will enter the workplace with appropriate skills, this is not a reason to neglect others. For government and industry alike providing support for apprenticeships and courses for those selecting a new profession should be a priority. Contractors need to ensure that they can guarantee job placement for those in training. Retention is also important for good employees to stay on. This involves better conditions, flexible working policies and a pledge to help local young people who want to enter the leadership process. This would offer an enticing career path, but would also establish a more diverse leadership that, in turn, is more likely to attract and employ a diverse workforce.

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