

Motivational Factors that Influence Student Work Attitude

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ABSTRAK

Majikan mencari pekerja yang mempunyai sikap kerja yang positif di samping mempunyai pengetahuan teknikal dan kemahiran. Oleh itu, pelajar mestilah mempunyai sikap kerja yang positif jika mereka mahu berjaya di tempat kerja. Kajian ini cuba mengenal pasti faktor-faktor motivasi yang mungkin mempunyai hubungan dengan sikap terhadap kerja di kalangan pelajar program diploma di Universiti Pertanian Malaysia. Faktor motivasi termasuklah: (1) aspirasi pendidikan, (2) aspirasi pekerjaan, (3) sebab memasuki program, (4) keagamaan, dan (5) persepsi pelajar terhadap nilai kerja ibu bapa. Persampelan rawak berkelompok digunakan untuk menentukan sampel responden. Sampel yang terdiri daripada 686 pelajar program diploma terlibat dalam kajian ini. Dapatan menunjukkan bahawa sebab memasuki program, keagamaan dan persepsi pelajar terhadap nilai kerja ibu bapa mempunyai hubungan dengan sikap kerja. Pemboleh ubah ini, kemudiannya, dianalisis untuk menentukan koefisien regresi berganda 'semi-partial'. Dapatan menunjukkan sebab memasuki program tidak menyumbang secara signifikan kepada varians dalam sikap kerja. Walau bagaimanapun, keagamaan dan persepsi pelajar terhadap nilai kerja ibu bapa menyumbang kepada varians dalam sikap kerja. Kedua-dua pemboleh ubah ini digunakan dalam analisis peramal terbaik sikap kerja pelajar program diploma di Universiti Pertanian Malaysia.

ABSTRACT

Employers look for employees who have positive work attitudes besides technical knowledge and related skills. Students, therefore, should have positive work attitudes to be successful in the workplace. This study is an attempt to identify the motivational factors that may be associated with work attitudes of students at Universiti Pertanian Malaysia. The motivational factors include: (1) educational aspirations, (2) occupational aspirations, (3) reason for entering the programme, (4) religiosity, and (5) student perception of parental work values. A cluster random sampling was used to determine the sample of respondents. The sample consisted of 686 diploma programme students. The results indicated that the reason for entering the programme, religiosity and student perception of parental work values were related to work attitude. These variables were further analyzed to determine the semi-partial multiple regression coefficients. The findings showed that reason for entering the programme did not account for a significant unique proportion of the variance in work attitude. However, religiosity and student perceptions of parental work values accounted for a significant unique proportion of the variance in work attitude. These two variables were used in the stepwise multiple regression analysis. It was found that the two variables were the best predictors of the work attitude of diploma programme students at the Universiti Pertanian Malaysia.

INTRODUCTION

Employers desire that their employees show positive attitudes toward work. Kraska (1990) stated that it is generally true that employers look for employees who show positive attitudes toward their work, to other employees, and the workplace. Likewise, Crains (1984) reported that employers are concerned with the dependability

and proper attitudes of students more than grades or overall quality of their schools.

Poor work attitudes affect performance on jobs; and the majority of the terminations and refusals to promote employees are due to poor attitudes of the workers (Beach 1981). A poor work attitude is the main reason that causes students to lose their jobs (Oinonen 1984), and is also one of

the primary reasons that cause unemployment among youths (Copa 1981).

An educational programme will not appear effective if students have a negative work attitude when they seek employment upon completion of their programmes. Wall (1966) stated that any country's economic progress is based on educational attainment, degree of training, skill level, attitudes toward work and change, and aspirations of its people. Berryman (1987) suggested that the next wave of educational reform should consider the inclusion of world-of-work values and attitudes in the school curriculum. The ever increasing emphasis on positive work values and attitudes has made many people tend to agree that students exiting from any educational or training programme should possess positive work values or attitudes if they want to succeed.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The main purpose of this study was to determine the relationships between selected motivational factors and the work attitude of students enrolled in the Diploma programmes at the Universiti Pertanian Malaysia. At the same time, this study attempted to determine if a significant portion of the variance in student work attitude could be explained by the selected motivational factors. The motivational factors studied included occupational aspirations, educational aspirations, reason for entering the programme, religiosity, and student perceptions of parental work values. The results of this study will contribute to the knowledge base regarding student work attitudes, which would be useful to administrators, educators, and counselors in assessing the impact of motivational factors on student work attitude, and also in designing appropriate guidance programmes to meet student needs. The knowledge gained from this study could also be related to career behaviour, career development, and career choice; and benefit current career counseling programmes, recruitment programmes, and career planning for future students in the various Diploma programmes at Universiti Pertanian Malaysia.

METHODS

Population and Sample

The population of the study consisted of students enrolled in various diploma programmes at

Universiti Pertanian Malaysia during the 1992/93 school year. The list of students was obtained from the registrar's office of the university. The total number of diploma students at the Serdang campus of Universiti Pertanian Malaysia for the 1992/93 school year was 1676.

The cluster random sampling technique was used to select the sample for the study. Selection was based on the programme and year of study. Each selected programme and year of study formed a cluster. In all, there were twenty clusters. Of these, eight clusters were randomly selected to form a sample consisting of 686 students.

Instrumentation

The instruments were developed to measure work attitude, perception of parental work values, and religiosity. Religiosity was measured by the responses of subjects as to whether religion was an important part of their lives. Prior to pilot testing, the instruments were reviewed for content and face validity by a panel of experts consisting of faculty members at Universiti Pertanian Malaysia. Instruments were pilot tested with a group of 30 diploma students who were not in the sample of the study. The reliability of each of the instruments was analyzed by using the Cronbach's alpha to produce internal consistency coefficients. The reliability coefficients for the work attitudes, perception of parental work values, and religiosity instruments were .90, .71 and .83 respectively.

Data Analyses

For each variable of interest, descriptive data were analyzed as frequencies and measures of central tendency by using the appropriate statistics for the type of data. The dependent variable, work attitude, was treated as interval data. The Pearson product moment correlation coefficient (r) was used to determine the relationships between work attitude and religiosity and also between work attitude and student perceptions of parental values. The relationship between reason for entering the programme (categorical data) and work attitude (interval data) was determined by dummy coding the levels of the independent variable. The multiple correlation coefficient (R) was then used to determine the relationship between the two variables. Semi-partial multiple regression coefficients were calculated for each independent variable to

determine the unique contribution of the variance in work attitude by each of the independent variables. A stepwise multiple regression analysis was completed to determine which motivational factors could best predict student work attitudes.

RESULTS

Of the 686 anticipated respondents, 618 (90%) returned the questionnaires. Four responses were incomplete and were not used in the analysis. Subsequently, only 614 (89%) of the returned questionnaires were analyzed.

Of the 614 respondents, 322 (52%) were males, and 292 (48%) were females. The majority (89%) of respondents were Malays, and their average age was 19.6 years.

Work Attitudes of Respondents

The work attitude of respondents is reported in Table 1. In general, respondents had a positive work attitude (Mean = 4.1, sd = 0.3).

Motivational Factors

About one-half of respondents aspired to obtain the Ph.D. Degree; 69 (11%) the Masters Degree, and 105 (17%) were undecided about the highest level of education they aspired to attain.

The respondents in the study hoped to join a variety of occupations. The largest percentage (17%) wished to take on administrative jobs; 16% aspired to become teachers; while 12% hoped to become lecturers. The other professions included business, accountancy, social work, and engineering.

More than 177 (29%) of the respondents reported that interest was the main reason why they enrolled in the programme; 25% said they did not have any other choice in furthering their education. The other reasons were: to find jobs (21%), for self-satisfaction (9%), and family advice (8%). Less than one percent said that peer advice made them enroll in the programme.

The religiosity of respondents is reported in Table 1. As a whole, respondents indicated that religion was a very important part of their lives (Mean = 6.6, sd = 0.6).

Student perceptions of parental work values is also reported in Table 1. In general, respondents perceived their parents had "moderately positive" work values (Mean = 5.8, sd = 0.7).

TABLE 1
Summary statistics for the measures of student perceptions of parental work values, religiosity, and work attitudes.

Variable	Mean	SD	Min	Max	No. of items
Religiosity	6.7	0.6	2.6	7.0	8
Perceptions of parental work values	5.9	0.7	2.6	7.0	10
Work attitude	4.1	0.3	2.8	4.8	25

n = 614

Scale for religiosity and student perceptions of parental work values (1) Strongly disagree, (2) Moderately disagree, (3) Slightly disagree, (4) Uncertain, (5) Slightly agree, (6) Moderately agree, and (7) Strongly agree. Scale for work attitude: (1) Strongly disagree, (2) Disagree, (3) Uncertain, (4) Agree, and (5) Strongly agree.

Relationships Among Variables

The relationships between the motivational factors and work attitude are shown in Table 2. The occupational and educational aspirations were not found to be significantly related with work attitude. These findings indicated that regardless of occupational and educational aspirations, respondents have positive attitudes toward work. However, religiosity, reason for entering the programme, and student perceptions of parental work values were found to be significantly related with student work attitude. Students' perception of parental work values correlated more highly with student work attitude than any other factors (r = .41). The data revealed that reasons for entering the programme could be arranged in the following order of priority: (1) self-satisfaction, (2) to find jobs, (3) interested in the programme, (4) no other choice for further study, (5) parental advice, (6) peer advice, and (7) other reasons which included the possibility of being promoted into the programme, and using the programme as a stepping stone to higher level courses.

A semi-partial correlation coefficient was calculated to determine the unique portion of the variance in work attitude that could be explained by each of the variables that was significantly related with work attitude (Table 3). Students' perceptions of parental work values accounted for 14% of the variance in work attitude when the effects of the other factors were removed (sr² = .1426, F = 106.5, p<.001). Reason for entering the programme accounted for 1.5%

of the variance in work attitude, but it was not significant ($sr^2 = .0151$, $F = 1.88$, $p > .05$). Religiosity accounted for only .5% of the variance in work attitude ($sr^2 = .0058$, $F = 4.33$, $p < .001$).

TABLE 2
Relationships between motivational factors and work attitude

Characteristics	Correlation coefficient	Significance (p)
Occupational aspirations	.03 ^r	.24
Educational aspirations	-.01 ^r	.44
Reason for entering the programme	.15 ^{sr}	.02
Religiosity	.17 ^r	.00
Perceptions of parental work values	.41 ^c	.00

r = Person product moment correlation coefficient
R = multiple regression correlation coefficient

TABLE 3
Squared semi-partial multiple regression coefficients of work attitude on independent variables

Independent variables	K _a	K _b	sr ²	F
Perceptions of parental work values	7	1	.1426	106.65**
Reason for entering the programme ^c	2	6	.0151	1.88(n.s)
Religiosity	7	1	.0058	4.33*

R² = .1909

Adjust R² = .1802

df. (8,605)

** p < .001

* p < .05

K_a = Number of independent variables

K_b = Number of independent variables ontrolled

c = Dummy coded into six variables set for this analysis

TABLE 4
Stepwise multiple regression of work attitude on the significant independent variables

Independent variables	R ²	R ² increment	F
Perceptions of parental work values	.1688	.1688	124.24*
Religiosity	.1758	.0070	65.14*

* p < .001

R² = .1688

Prediction of Student Work Attitude

A stepwise multiple regression analysis was used to determine which motivational factors would best serve as predictors of students' work attitudes. As shown in Table 4, student perceptions of parental work values and religiosity were sufficient predictors of work attitude. Student's perceptions of parental work values explained the greatest portion of the variance (R² = .1688). The equation for predicting the work attitudes of diploma programme students at Universiti Pertanian Malaysia was:

$$Y = 2.7056 + .1802X_1 + .0451X_2 \quad (1)$$

DISCUSSION

Employers need employees with good attitudes toward work. Programmes aimed at developing positive work attitudes in students could contribute to the employability of graduating students. The findings of this study showed that, as a whole, diploma programme students at Universiti Pertanian Malaysia have a positive work attitude (Mean = 4.1, sd = 0.3). The low standard deviation, however, indicates that not much variation exists among students in work attitude. In other words, the respondents belong to a homogenous group. This homogeneity has both positive and negative impacts on the students and the programme. Students are likely to share many of the same challenges, frustrations, and hopes, which could contribute to a diploma programme environment. Conversely, the homogenous group of students may not bring a healthy diversity of beliefs and aspirations to the programme.

Based upon the stepwise regression analysis, two motivational factors can be used as predictors of work attitudes of diploma programme students at Universiti Pertanian Malaysia. These factors are students' perceptions of parental work values and religiosity.

The findings of the studies by Perrone (1957), Wagman (1968) and Winter (1981) showed that the perceived work values of parents were related to student work attitude. Mannheim (1988), in a study of the Israeli high school students, revealed that parents' values and work attitudes significantly explained the variance in adolescent work attitudes. The findings of these authors are congruent with the findings of this study.

The similarity in the findings of these studies indicate that regardless of the society and culture of students, parents play a critical and vital role in developing their children's work attitudes.

There are several ways by which parents can carry out this task. Among others, they can occasionally bring along the children to their workplace to see the work they perform. Further, parents can send their children to workshops where ways of developing positive work attitudes are taught. Besides, parents should take the initiative to attend seminars or workshops on how to develop positive work attitudes in their children. In addition, parents could show a positive attitude toward work through their behavior and thinking. Children usually observe the behavior of their parents, and they learn behavior through imitation (Bandura 1977).

Religiosity was also found to be an important factor that influences work attitude. Parents, lecturers, the community, and the Islamic Center of the University can play their roles in sustaining religiosity of the students. Parents should encourage and motivate their children to learn more about religion. Lecturers might consider the inclusion of religious teachings relating to work attitude in their courses. The community should provide the places and support for the teaching of religious subjects. The Islamic Center of the University should conduct various religious activities for students.

A finding of this study also showed there was that a significantly low positive relationship between reason for entering the programme and work attitude. About 25% of respondents indicated that the main reason they enrolled in the programme was that they did not have any other option when they chose to further their studies. There is a possibility that students were offered places in the programme, not on their preferences but on the places available in the programme. Due to the difficulty of getting places in the higher learning institutions in the country, students tend to accept whatever offer they get.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based upon the findings of this study, the following recommendations are offered:

1. Parents, teachers, and the community should project positive work attitudes for the younger generation to imitate.

2. A course on religious knowledge and work ethics should be offered to help students understand the interrelationship between religious doctrines and living a useful life.
3. Information about the realities of career patterns, work environment, institutional bureaucracies, and common work-related frustrations should be provided to prepare students for employment after graduation.
4. Students should choose areas of study in which they are interested. They would then be more likely to find satisfaction in their programme of study which in turn will help them develop positive attitudes toward work in the area of their choice.
5. The scales of work attitude, religiosity, and student perceptions of parental work values should be tested further with prospective and currently enrolled students. Of particular relevance would be a longitudinal study involving subjects from the time they apply for admission to a diploma programme through their first five years of work. The instruments used in this study should also be tested with the students of other institutions to confirm their reliability.
6. This study should be replicated with students from various cultures and groups in Malaysia to confirm or disclaim the results of this study; or to detect changes in work attitude over time.
7. Qualitative studies examining the relationship between student characteristics and work attitude should be conducted for comparative purposes. These qualitative methods should include case studies, in-depth interviews, and participant observations.

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