

Students' Perception Towards Majoring In Accounting: A Study In Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Pahang

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ABSTRACT

Human capital is one of the main resources that play significant roles in ensuring the organization achieve its objectives. They need to fulfill the criteria that have been set by the organization if they want to be in the organization. It is crucial to find employees that meet those criteria especially in accounting profession. This was due to a declining number of university students majoring in accounting programs. Prior researches show that there are many reasons contribute to a declining number of students enrolling in accounting programs. Thus, present study will focus on three factors which are personal perception, perception of important referents and perceived controls in order to better explain and affect the relationship between students' perception and their intention to major in accounting. The questionnaires were distributed to semester four and semester six students who enrolled Bachelor of Accountancy in Universiti Teknologi MARA Pahang. This research will provide valuable information and better understanding on factors that influenced their choice of majoring in accounting.

Keywords: *accounting, perception, students, Universiti Teknologi MARA*

Introduction

The performance of any organizations actually reflects the people performance in the organization. Good performance of human capital is probably because they are fully equipped with the skills and knowledge. They are the main resources that play important roles in ensuring the organization achieves its objectives. Thus, in order to hire and recruit these people as employees, they need to fulfill criteria that have been set by the organization. Getting the right employee to do any task in the business is very important especially in professional professions such as medical, legal, accounting and so on. Demand for professional accountant is increasing but the people with accounting qualification are getting lesser. According to Noah, P.B. and Anthony, H.C.J. 2001; AICPA,(2002) this was resulted from a decline in the number of university students majoring in accounting programs.

Many studies have been done in order to understand factors that can influence the students' perception and subsequently affect their intention to major in accounting or other disciplines. Carolyn et al. (2005) reported that remuneration has been suggested as a major reason that affects the students' interest in majoring accounting programs. Misunderstanding about the accounting profession has led them to underestimate the salary of accounting profession. These are may be the reasons that contribute to a decline of students enrolling accounting programs. They perceived the basic salary of an accountant is not promising.

Students' level of understanding with regards to the role of accountant and how an accounting education and career can benefit them also has an impact towards the declining in the number of university students majoring in accounting programs, Chiasson et al.(2004). Lacking of information or marketing material about the accounting programs and profession which should be provided by the accounting educator and practitioner is one of the reasons why students are not interested in pursuing accounting course.

Negative perception towards the accounting education and profession is a major reason why students do not favor accounting course. Lin et al.(2002) found that students tend to have negative perception towards accounting education and practice, thus it has contributed in the declining number of students majoring in accounting.

Accounting also considered as a boring course. Mandilas et al. 2010; Noah, P.B. and Anthony, H.C.J. 2001 reported that some of the students perceive that accounting is a boring course that leads them for not choosing accounting programs as their major .

Previous research also indicated that accounting enrollment has declined since most of the students are more likely to further their study in new and exciting field such like information system, business and finance (Chiasson et al., 2004; Noah, P.B. and Anthony, H.C.J. 2011). The students perceived that other programs such like business programs are more easy compare to accounting programs.

Literature Review

Accounting has always been associated with numbers cruncher. Calero (2006) found that there is a relationship between the greater the perception that accounting requires complex number skills, then the less likely that students would be interested in pursuing a career in this field. Research done by Mladenovic (2000) found that students' negative views towards the accounting profession were associated with their image of complex numerical skills being required. Study by Albrect and Sack (2000) showed perception of accountants as people who "wear green eye shades, are narrow and boring, who worked alone and who do tedious numbers related work." Negative perception in accounting is mainly, mechanical and repetitive 'number crunching', Cory (1992). While a study by Cohen and Hanno (1993) found that students chose not to major in accounting because they perceived it to be too number-oriented and boring.

Carolyn et al. (2005) found that underestimation of starting salaries in accounting may be a contributing factor to the decline in accounting majors. They also found that accounting would be useful for someone who wants variety in work. In order to achieve this, Saudagaran (1996) argued that the first accounting class should provide students a broad-based introduction to accounting rather than the narrow book-keeping perspective offered under the traditional approach. Schmutte (1998) stated that changes in client requirements, the technology and information revolution, the development of innovative and complex financial instruments as well as the globalization of the economy have placed increased pressures on accounting practices. Carolyn et al. (2005) believe that degree in accounting would be useful to someone who wants challenging work. Cohen and Hanno (1993) attempted to predict and explain the choice of accounting as a major and have found that students chose not to major in accounting because they perceived it to be boring. This was supported by Francisco, Noland and Kelly (2003) which reported that "quality of work" issues are the most significant issues raised by students. Students thought accounting work was uninteresting and boring.

Cory (1992) found that the stereotypical accountant's image in society is poor one. This was supported by Bougen (1994) which stated that accountant is viewed as being dull, boring and unimaginative and is characterized as methodical, impartial and conservative. In 2005, Carolyn et al., stated the movie industry has even been blamed for creating an image of a boring accountant. To overcome these negative perceptions, Mladenovic (2000) suggested nontraditional teaching methods such as cooperative learning and case-based learning, are more effective than traditional lecture-based methods which provide only limited success. Ahmadi et al. (1997) discovered that the second largest factor that led to accounting being chose was career status, which contain advancement opportunities and social status as well as financial rewards.

Crooker (1999) stated that negative perceptions of the profession, together with heavy workloads required in accounting courses, discouraged students who also possessed a high creativity of cognitive ability from choosing an accounting major. Paollilo and Estes (1982) found job security and job availability were considered as labour market attributes. Study by Sugahara et al. (2008) found accounting profession should not be viewed simply as being procedural but rather should be seen as a dynamic career that can take you anywhere in the business world. Heiat and Brown (2007) found that students are influenced in their choice of major by a genuine interest in the subject matter. On the other hand, Geiger and Ogilby (2000) found students' experiences in the first course were major factors in the decision to major in accounting. While a study by Jones and Fields (2001) stated that the technical demands of introductory accounting led to discouragement, failure and overall poor students' perceptions of the accounting profession and curriculum

and were supported by Jackling (2002) which reported that introductory accounting courses did not produce positive perceptions of the accounting profession for students. In addition, Albrecht and Sack (2000) showed that students' lack of information about accounting careers as a major contributing factors associated with the decline in accounting enrollments. These are the reasons why instructors need to play important part in disseminating information about accounting programs and profession as stated by Geiger and Ogilby (1998) Stivers et al.(2011) suggested that for the accounting profession to be successful in the future, it is imperative that educators make substantive changes to accounting curricula and ensure that graduates can meet the skill needs of business community.

Data Collection

Three variables were used in the questionnaire to study the factors that affect the students' decision to major in accounting which were personal perception, perception of important referents and perceived behavioural control based on Cohen and Hanno (1993) with some minor modifications based on Tan and Laswad (2006). The data collection method was carried out using personally administered questionnaire. The questionnaires were distributed among degree students who took accountancy courses in Universiti Teknologi MARA, Pahang. The students were largely drawn from Part 4, 5 and 6 since they were still in a beginning phase of learning accounting courses.

Of the 90 questionnaires distributed, 89 questionnaires were returned, yielding a response rate of 99%. However, of the 89 questionnaires returned, only 86 questionnaires were completed, yielding a response rate of 96% and all 86 questionnaires were used in the data analysis. All usable responses were further analysed using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS).

Results and Discussion

The result of the survey are summarized according to a) students' demographics b) the influence of personal perception's outcomes on students' decision to choose accounting as their major; c) the influence of important referents on students' decision to choose accounting as their major and d) the influence of perceived behavioural control's factors on students decision to choose accounting as their major.

Students' demographics

The mean age of all students is at 22.48 years old. The youngest student is 21 years old while the oldest student is 26 years old. Out of the 86 students, (75.6%) 65 students are female while the other (24.4%) 21 are male students. There are (54.7%) 47 students who took accounting courses and the other (45.3%) 39 students took non-accounting courses during diploma. Most of the non-accounting courses comprise of business, banking and finance.

Personal perception

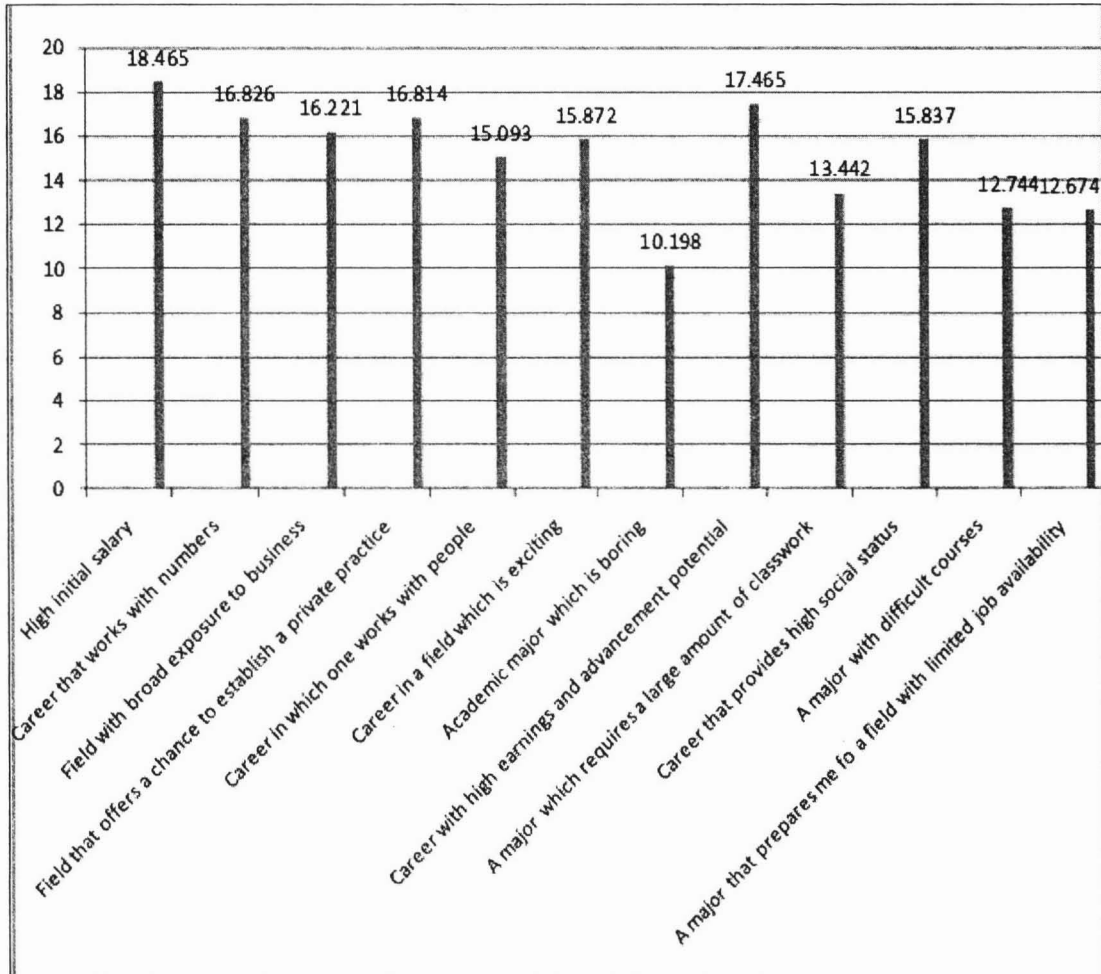
The survey listed variety factors of personal perception that influence students to choose accounting as their major. First, they were asked on the level of outcomes of personal perception based on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (extremely bad) to 5 (extremely good). Later, the students were asked to evaluate the likelihood that each of the outcomes of personal perception would occur if they choose accounting as their major based on 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (very unlikely) to 5 (very likely). The evaluation of outcomes level of personal perception for each subject is multiplied by the corresponding likelihood of the outcomes of personal perception would occur in order to rank the factors of personal perception that influence students' decision to choose accounting as their major.

As shown in Figure 1, the most cited responses by students based on mean ranking were earning a high initial salary (18.465), choosing a career with high earnings and advancement potential (17.465), having

a career in a field that works with number (16.826) and entering a field that offers a chance to establish a private practice (16.814).

It was followed by other factors of personal perception that led students to choose accounting as their major which were entering a field with broad exposure to business, beginning a career in a field which exciting, a career that provides high social status and a career in which one work with people. The least frequently cited among the factors listed as influencing accounting major decisions were choosing a major which requires a large amount of classwork, choosing a major with difficult courses, choosing a major that prepares them for a field with limited job availability and choosing an academic major which is boring.

Figure 1: Personal Perception



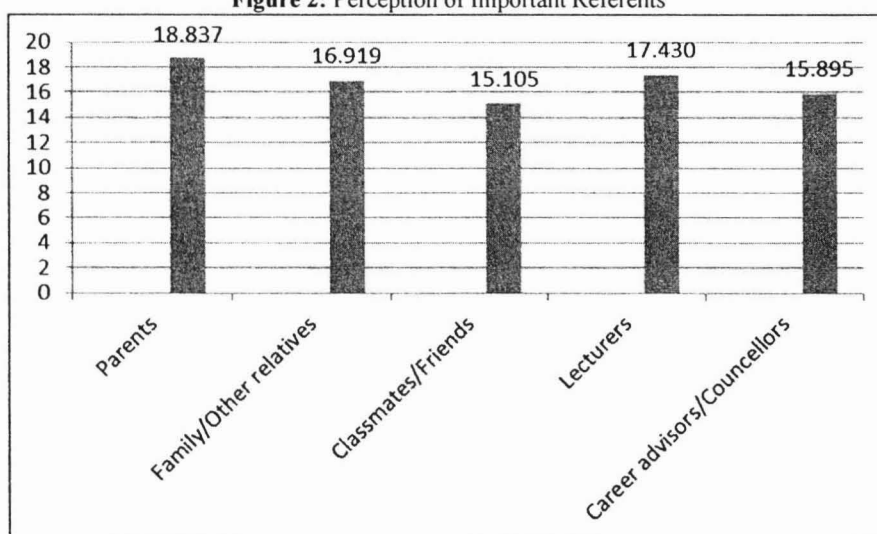
From the findings, salary potential and career advancement have been suggested as major reasons that influence students to choose accounting as their major. Thus, it is suggested for company to create an attractive salary package and a structured career path which will attract the students to further their studies in accounting courses.

Perception of important referents

In this part, the students were asked to rank the influence of the important referents on students' decision to major in accounting. First, they were asked on the level of importance to comply with referents' opinion based on 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (very unimportant) to 5 (very important). Then, they were asked to indicate the level of agreement with statement that their referents' thinking that they should major in accounting based on 5-Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). In order to determine the degree of influence by important referents on students' decision to major in accounting, the evaluation of importance level to comply with referents' opinion for each referent is multiplied by the corresponding level of agreement with referents' statement pertaining to their thinking that students should major in accounting.

As shown in Figure 2, the survey found that parents were the most influential referent with mean ranking of (18.837), followed by lecturers, family/other relatives, career advisors/councillors and the classmates/friends. Thus, important referents need to equip themselves with accounting knowledge and current issues to affect and subsequently influence students to choose accounting as their major.

Figure 2: Perception of Important Referents

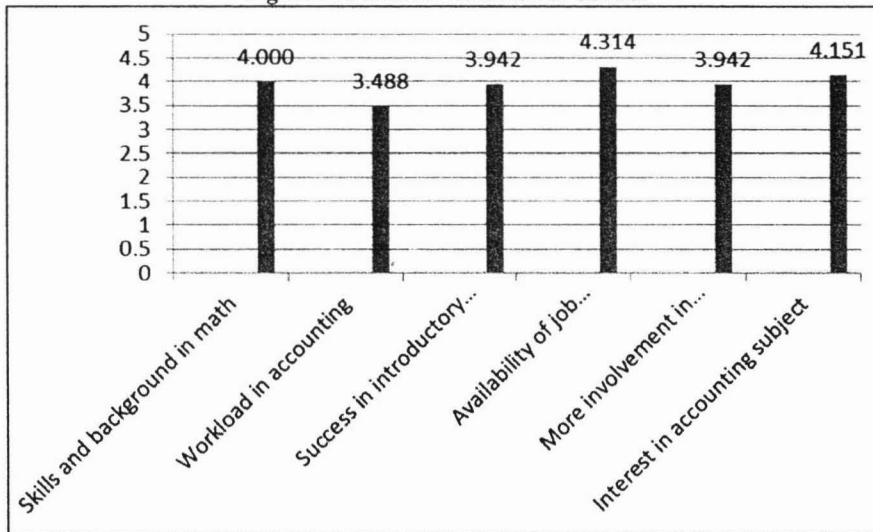


Perceived behavioural control

In this part, the survey listed variety factors of perceived behavioural control that influence students to choose accounting as their major. The students were asked to indicate the extent of agreement with the statement pertaining to perceived behavioural control based on 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

As shown in Figure 3, the availability of job opportunities received the highest ranking in influencing students to major in accounting based on mean of (4.314) followed by the other factors which were interest in accounting subject, skills and background in math, success in introductory courses and more involvement in extracurricular activities. Thus, it is suggested for companies to create more job opportunities relating to accounting especially for the fresh graduates in order to sustain their interest and decision to choose accounting as their major.

Figure 3: Perceived Behavioural Control



Conclusion

The present study is conducted to investigate the factors that affect the students' decision in choosing accounting as their major. There were three variables used in the questionnaire to better explain the factors that affect the students' decision to major in accounting which were personal perception, perception of important referents and perceived behavioural control based on Cohen and Hanno (1993) with some minor modification based on Tan and Laswad (2006). The questionnaires were distributed among degree students who took accountancy course in Universiti Teknologi MARA, Pahang. The students were largely drawn from Part 4, 5 and 6.

From the analysis of personal perception, the study found that the most cited factors that led the students to choose accounting as their major were salary potential and career advancement and the least frequently cited among the factors was choosing an academic major which is boring. On the other hand, the students were asked to rank the influence of the important referents on students' decision to major in accounting. The survey found that parents were the most influential referent followed by lecturers, family/other relatives, career advisors/councillors and the classmates/friends.

Meanwhile, for perceived behavioural control, it was found that the availability of job opportunities received the highest ranking factor in influencing students to major in accounting and the lowest ranking factor was more involvement in extracurricular activities. Overall, the study found that factors like personal perception, perception of important referents and perceived behavioural control did affect the students' decision to choose accounting as their major. Thus, ideas and cooperation among the academicians, employers and practitioners are really important and needed in order to improve the weaknesses of accounting programmes and structures at university level. Notwithstanding, materials about the accounting profession which comprise of salary structure, career path and advancement need to be widely disseminate by the employers to the students especially those in the high schools that still in a phase to choose their major.

By listening to the students' perception, it will actually help people who are interested in attracting more students to enrol in accounting course as their major and subsequently retain them to pursue their career in accounting profession. Nevertheless, the present study is subject to several limitations. First, data for the study were collected from one university only which is Universiti Teknologi MARA Pahang. Thus, the generalizability of the results to other universities is restricted. Hence, more research in the area is needed in order to improve the understanding of the effects of personal perception, perception of important referents and perceived controls on students' intention to major in accounting.

Secondly, the samples were largely drawn from Part 4, 5 and 6 students who already took degree in accountancy in Universiti Teknologi MARA Pahang. Thus, future research may consider disseminating the questionnaire to high school students who yet deciding any courses major in order to enhance the understanding of the effects of personal perception, perception of important referents and perceived controls on students' intention to major in accounting. Finally, the present study only used questionnaire survey to collect the data for analysis. Thus, future research may consider using triangulation method in collecting the data such like integrating the interviews and questionnaire survey in order to enrich the findings of the relationship between personal perception, perception of important referents and perceived controls on students' intention to major in accounting.

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