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YOUTHS' KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICES OF THE PALM OIL INDUSTRY IN MALAYSIA

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Working in the palm oil industry can be challenging, especially those involved in the plantation field. The Malaysians' general perception about palm oil industry revolves around the lower tier of the occupation that contributes to the first impression whenever working at palm oil industry is mentioned. The job includes planters, cultivators, machine operators and site managers. This however is just the tip of the iceberg in the industry. The most publicized due to the workforce issue in this industry would be foreign workers and the settlement of the plantation itself. There are concerns over crimes and social issues arising from this condition. The researcher believes that one way to solve this concern is to derive human resources from the youths of the country. Youths should be exposed to the job opportunities in oil palm industry and efforts should be made to improve on the perceptions of the work related to this industry. This can be done by increasing the youths' knowledge and appreciation on the palm oil industry in Malaysia. This could just be a presumption as there is no reference of the levels of awareness among Malaysian

youths regarding the palm oil industry. Hence, this research aims to investigate the Malaysian youths' knowledge, attitude and application of the palm oil industry. To achieve this objective, a Needs Analysis was carried out from a set of questionnaire designed based on the KAP (Knowledge, Attitude, and Practice) framework and administered to 281 multiracial youths from rural and urban areas around the country. Discussions in this paper will be based on the Needs Analysis of the knowledge and practice among the youths in oil palm and palm oil industry. The paper ends with suggestions on how to stimulate interest among Malaysian youths in this industry.

Keywords

Needs Analysis, Malaysian Youths, Oil Palm, Palm Oil Industry, Knowledge, Practices

1. Introduction

Palm Oil is the major income generating contributor for Malaysian economic (Workman, 2017) yet not many are aware of this fact. The commercialization of palm oil in Malaysia has started at the Tennamaran Estate, Rantau Panjang Kuala Selangor, in 1917 (Khera, 1976). Since then, the industry has been consistent in its contribution which has benefited the mass in many aspects. However, of late, the oil palm industry is facing a shortage of manpower from local workers. Majority of the field workers are from the neighboring countries such as Indonesia, Bangladesh and Myanmar. In 2015 alone, the number of foreign workers in the palm oil industry has reached up to 354,260 people (Simposium Sawit, 2015).

Based on a report from labour Force Survey Report Malaysia in 2014, it is estimated that 1 million local workers are presently working in rudimentary employments like janitors, coworkers, labourers, service workers and refuse workers. They are competing with nearly 800, 000 legal foreign workers of the same work scope (Anas Alam Fazli, 2016). Approximately, there are 8.4 million employees in trades that are demanding for workers with SPM (Malaysian Certificate of Education) and below and they are competing with more than 6.7 million foreign workers from other countries, especially the neighboring countries such as Indonesia, Bangladesh and Myanmar for the same positions which need minimal educational requirements.

Even though the palm oil industry is one of the main top income-generating contributors for Malaysian economy, it is not as visible as other sectors such as services, automotive, administrative. The local population may hesitate to work in this industry due to the conservative

belief that this kind of sector offers arduous job with minimal wages and it could not possibly offer higher career development and further life improvement. On the other hand, foreign workers are generally to have an open attitude towards this industry. They are able to complete their tasks even prolonging labor time due to the benefits of getting extra wages (Zaleha, 2011). However, it is undeniable thatthe influx of foreign workers into palm oil industry has influenced the increase in the crime rates and social problems (Heupner, 2016).Hence, it is timely that the government looks into how to get the locals, especially the youths to contribute to the production and sustainability of the industry, and not heavily relying on the foreign labors.

The abovementioned situation creates a crucial need to get the local youths to be involved in the industry. One of the ways of addressing the issue would be to tap into the youths' knowledge and perception towards the industry. Malaysian youths could possibly contribute to enhancing the labors' productivity. Jung (2015) and Simin Ghavifekr, Rohana Jani & Husaina Banu (2016) stated that a higher education has positive impacts towards the productivity of the labor. This concern calls for a needs analysis to be carried out in order to identify the Malaysian youths' knowledge of the Palm Oil Industry.

2. Research Issues

Research in palm oil industry in Malaysia has been focusing on the scientific and economic aspect of the industry. At the time this research was proposed, no studies have identified youths growing up around this industry as their subject of investigation. Their levels of knowledge, attitude and practices with regard to products of and career opportunities in palm oil industry have not been empirically substantiated. Hence, it is timely that this research is done to gauge on the youths' knowledge about the industry that has been one of the main contributors to the Malaysian economy.

With respect to education, the Malaysian educational system always change and improvise its system to ensure the youths of the country are equipped with updated knowledge and competence in various skills. Saadiyah (2010) mentioned that Malaysia, due to the history of colonial era, has gone through many changes in various fields which results in a multilingual education and implementations of educational syllabus policies as well as the unique pattern of multilingual medium of instruction to convey knowledge. Many have focussed on the learning and teaching issues especially in the rural areas. Some of these studies implied the rural schools

are lacking behind in terms of current knowledge due to their remoteness or physical inaccessibility to the areas. Ardi Marwan, Bambang Sumitono and Nora Mislan (2012) mentioned that schools in rural Malaysia play a significant role in helping a nation educate its people however; however, they often receive less attention from the government in its reform agenda. This is likely due to the fact that the office of education is usually located in urban areas and the remoteness of rural school (Wreikat, et.al. 2014; Marlyna Maros, et. al., 2010; Mitra, Dangwal, & Thadani, 2008). With the location of the oil palm plantation largely to be in areas far away from the centre of development, hence the cities; the research took into consideration these factors and issues in education to relate to its findings.

3. Theoretical Approach and Analytical Frameworks

Two frameworks were used in formulating the questions and analysis of the findings. They are namely Needs Analysis and the Knowledge, Attitude, and Practices model or better known for its acronym KAP. The former was used for the analysis and the latter for questionnaires as the tool for this research. The frameworks allowed gathering and analysis of data that looks into the needs of the youths with respect to Knowledge, Attitude, and Practices in relation to palm oil industry in Malaysia. This paper will present the cumulative results of two of the three aspects.

3.1 Needs Analysis Approach

According to Hyland and Hyland (2006), needs analysis is a key feature in the academic courses. Currently, needs analysis "has become a form of educational technology represented in a range of research methodologies that can be applied before, during or after language courses" (Hyland, 2003b). According to Benesch (2001), needs analysis in English for Academic Purpose (EAP) consists of gathering data about the target situation as the basis for designing EAP courses and materials.

West (1994) believes that the concept of needs has never been clearly defined. However, needs has been interpreted in different ways. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) offer a useful classification of needs into "necessities", "lack" and "wants". By necessities they mean what the learner has to know in order to function effectively in the target situation. "Lacks" for them represent the gaps between the target proficiency and what the learner already knows. Finally, they see "wants" as the subjective needs of learners.

As far as language needs is concerned, the findings have been related to language needs in improving classroom tasks. Many studies have been conducted based on needs in the classroom setting but have not investigated students' academic needs in a larger context. Zhu and Flaitz (2005), observed that students' academic experience encompasses their experience outside of the classroom in the institutional setting as well, and that students' classroom performance can be influenced by their interactions with people in the larger institutional context. Thus, it is deemed necessary to investigate the needs of the students when it comes to the types of knowledge and skills required with regard to their general knowledge outside the classroom, and this experience can be transformed into the types of activities in the classroom.

3.2 KAP

A KAP survey is formulated based on the three elements Knowledge, Attitude and Practices. It is a set of standardized questionnaires which allows researchers or analysts to analyze quantitative and qualitative evidence regarding an issue (Wang et al., 2015). According to Zahedi, Sizemore, Malcolm, Grossniklaus & Nwosu (2014), a KAP survey allows a demonstrative study of a particular population to collect data on certain parameters: what is perceived, presumed, and accomplished towards a specific topic. KAP survey tells us what people know about certain things, how they feel and also how they behave. The Knowledge possessed by a community refers to their understanding of any given topics; Attitude refers to their feelings towards this subject as well as any preconceived ideas that they may have towards it; and Practice refers to the ways in which they demonstrate their knowledge and attitude through their actions. Understanding the levels of Knowledge, Attitude and Practice will enable a more efficient process of awareness creation as it will allow implications of the study to be tailored more appropriately to the needs of the community; hence the inclusion of Needs Analysis in this study.

The three elements in KAP model functioned as the base for designing the questionnaire of this research. They made up the second part of the questionnaire where each questions were designed to fit into the criteria in these three elements which are outlined in the framework. To give the reader a clear research operation on the application of this model, hereby the paper presents the questions formulated for this study to test the subjects' knowledge and practices on palm oil industry in Malaysia.

(Questions were provided in both Malay and English language in the original questionnaire):

Knowledge

Tick (/) where applicable.

True or False

- Palm oil is less suitable for cooking and frying.
- Palm oil is more expensive than other vegetable oils.
- Palm oil can be used in making chocolates.
- Palm oil can be used to make soap.
- Palm oil trunks are not suitable to be made as furniture.
- Dessicated palm residue can be used as organic fuel.
- Palm oil has a lower vitamin content than soybean oil.
- 'Santan' is one of the products made from oil palm fruits.
- Oil palm fruits can be used in making 'kuih'.

Circle the right answer.

- Palm oil is the _____ biggest income contributor for the country.

a) 1
b) 2
c) 3
d) 4
e)

- The state which produces the most oil palm is _____.

a) Johor
b) Perak
c) Pahang
d) Terengganu

- A government agency in charge of the palm oil industry in Malaysia is known as

a) MPOB
b) FELCRA
c) MPOB
d) KESEDAR

Practice

Choose according to the scale given.

- I aspire to be involved in the palm oil industry after graduation.
- My family uses palm oil-based cooking oils such as minyak cap buruh, vesawit, sri murni, etc.
- I will not work in the palm oil industry because it is a field that requires physical exertion and high strength.
- I will work in the palm oil industry as it is able to give good returns.
- I always read the label on products that I buy to make sure that they do not contain any palm oil ingredients.

4. Method of Data Collection

The data was collected at two schools which are nearby the plantation and two schools at the urban area. The schools at the plantations are also considered as rural schools due to their distance from the major cities. The urban schools were included as a way of comparing the youths' knowledge, attitude and practices with respect to palm oil industry of the country. As previous studies have shown that the students from rural area tended to perform less academically (Wreikat, et.al. 2014; Marlyna Maros, et. al., 2010; Mitra, Dangwal, & Thadani, 2008). This study would like to investigate if living near or surrounded by palm oil plantation makes the youths more knowledgeable, and have better attitude and practices with respect to palm oil compared to their urban counterparts.

The youths who were involved in this study were in the age of 16 and 17, which are suitable for the study as they are close to the final age of high school and will soon be selecting majors and areas of study at the tertiary level of education. Part of the bigger objectives of the study is to expose as many youths as possible to the palm oil industry, hence 16 and 17 age groups were ideal as they are at the stage of preparing for their important national exam as well as prepare for life after high school. The data was collected at the end of the second semester after their final exams, one school at a time, and done in the schools' library where all the students who were present at the schools the day the data was collected, were asked to convene. At the end of the process, a total of 281 responses were collected. The data collection process began with a talk from the representative from the Malaysian Palm Oil Board (henceforth, MPOB) and followed by Q and A session for about 1 hour. This session was mainly to introduce

students to MPOB and its role in the palm oil industry and to raise awareness to the students on available careers in palm oil industry. The session also functioned as an ice-breaking activity prior to answering the questionnaire that was distributed after the Q and A session. The questionnaire were designed following KAP's procedure and used published references as point of testing scientific and general knowledge, attitude and practices for palm oil. The questions were in Yes/No format, multiple choice form, and choosing a ranking from a likert scale. To verify the validity and reliabilty of the questions, the set was sent to researchers who have published using KAP method.

5. Findings and Discussion

5.1 Knowledge

There were 12 questions to analyse the youths' level of knowledge on palm oil. For the purpose of coding and analysis, each question is indicated by the alphabet K to signify Knowledge and followed by the question number. Here are two examples:

K2 – Palm oil is more expensive than other vegetable oils.

K8 - '*Santan*' is one of the products made from oil palm fruits.

The highest score was 12 and the lowest, 1. The total scores are summarized in the following Table 5.1.1.

Table 5.1.1 *Total Marks Based on Schools and Location of Schools*

Total correct scores	**Urban (Freq. and %)**			**Rural (Freq. and %)**		
	SMK U1	**SMK U2**	**Total**	**SMK R1**	**SMK R2**	**Total**
1	1 (100.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (100.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
3	0 (0.0)	3 (100.0)	3 (100.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
4	1 (11.1)	8 (88.9)	9 (100.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
5	8 (44.4)	3 (16.7)	11 (61.1)	5 (27.8)	2 (11.1)	7 (38.9)
6	11 (31.4)	3 (8.6)	14 (40.0)	10 (28.6)	11 (31.4)	21 (60.0)
7	22 (41.5)	8 (15.1)	30 (56.6)	13 (24.5)	10 (18.9)	23 (43.4)
8	18 (31.6)	5 (8.8)	23 (40.4)	8 (14.0)	26 (45.6)	34 (59.6)
9	23 (41.8)	1 (1.8)	24 (43.6)	9 (16.4)	22 (40.0)	31 (56.4)

10	14 (41.2)	2 (5.9)	16 (47.1)	4 (11.8)	14 (41.2)	18 (52.9)
11	8 (57.1)	1 (7.1)	9 (64.3)	0 (0.0)	5 (35.7)	5 (35.7)
12	1 (50.0)	1 (50.0)	2 (100.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
Total	107 (38.1)	35 (12.5)	145 (50.5)	49 (17.4)	90 (32.0)	139 (49.5)

The scores were further converted into grades from Excellent to minimum based on the scores of the grading system used in schools. For example, grade Excellent representing the schools' grading system for 'A' defines a score of correct answers from 85 to 100 (10-12 correct answers), and grade 'D' or Minimum refers to a score of 0-49 (correct answers below 6).

The following is the categorization of the grades and the respondents' scores on their knowledge about palm oil. The majority exhibited a Satisfactory level (C), which was scoring between 6-8 of the 12 questions correctly.

Table 5.1.2 *Grades for the Respondents' Knowledge on Palm Oil*

Marks	**Grade**	**Frequency**	**Percent**
49 and Below	Minimum	66	23.5
50 – 69	Satisfactory	165	58.7
70 – 84	Good	34	12.1
85 - 100	Excellent	16	5.7
Total		281	100.0

Table 5.1.2 shows that majority, i.e., 231 or 82.2% of the respondents' knowledge on palm oil rests largely at the Satisfactory and below satisfactory levels. Responses at Satisfactory level made up the highest percentage, i.e., 58.7% or 165 respondents. This means that the 165 students were only able to answer 6 or 7 questions out of the 12 questions correctly. Those who exhibited better knowledge through having more questions answered correctly only constituted 17.8% (the Good and the Excellent). The diagram below illustrates the distribution clearly.

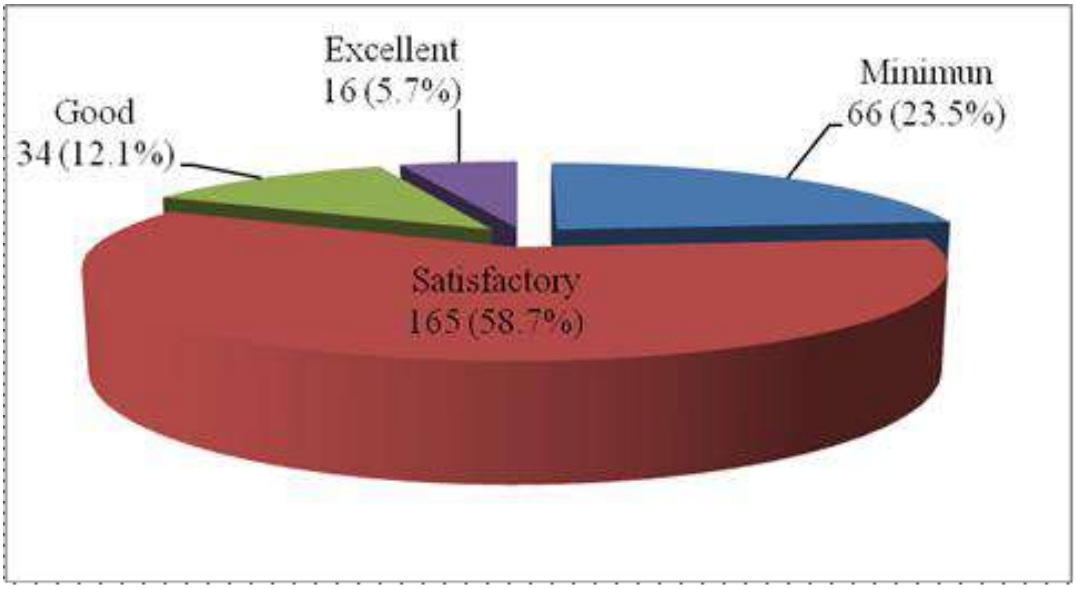

Diagram 5.1 *Respondents' Grades for Knowledge*

The results were also presented in relation to the urban-rural category of the schools. The table below illustrates the distribution of knowledge performance.

Table 5.1.3 *The Grades based on Urban-Rural Categories*

Grade	**Urban (Freq. and %)**			**Rural (Freq. and %)**		
	SMK U1	**SMK U2**	**Total**	**SMK R1**	**SMK R2**	**Total**
Minimum	21 (31.8)	17 (25.8)	38 (57.6)	15 (22.7)	13 (19.7)	28 (42.4)
Satisfactory	63 (38.2)	14 (8.5)	77 (46.7)	30 (18.2)	58 (35.2)	88 (53.3)
Good	14 (41.2)	2 (5.9)	16 (47.1)	4 (11.8)	14 (41.2)	18 (52.9)
Excellent	9 (56.2)	2 (12.5)	11 (68.8)	0 (0.0)	5 (31.2)	5 (31.2)
Total	107 (38.1)	35 (12.5)	142 (50.5)	49 (17.4)	90 (32.0)	139 (49.5)

Table 5.1.3 shows that the two extremes were from the Urban schools and the satisfactory scores were from the Rural schools. In other words, those from the Urban areas may know a lot about oil palm or may know just half of the specific and general information about it. These two extremes constituted the lesser percentage of the 281 participants from both school categories, yet while 11 respondents from the Urban region made out to Excellent grade, only 5 made it to that grade from the Rural area, half of the number of Excellence from Urban schools. This somehow substantiates claims made in prior studies on levels of academic achievements among the rural schools, that they basically fared not as highly as their urban counterparts. This pattern has been associated with the trio socio-politico-economic factors in learning.

The majority of the respondents made up the middle group, i.e. the groups that scored Satisfactory and Good, and the ones from the rural area scored higher in both of these categories compared to their Urban counterparts. However, although respondents from the rural areas scored more on these two categories, for Good, the difference was marginal, i.e, 4 students only. This could be a possible indicator that youths in both areas gained quite a good knowledge on certain aspects of oil palm industry.

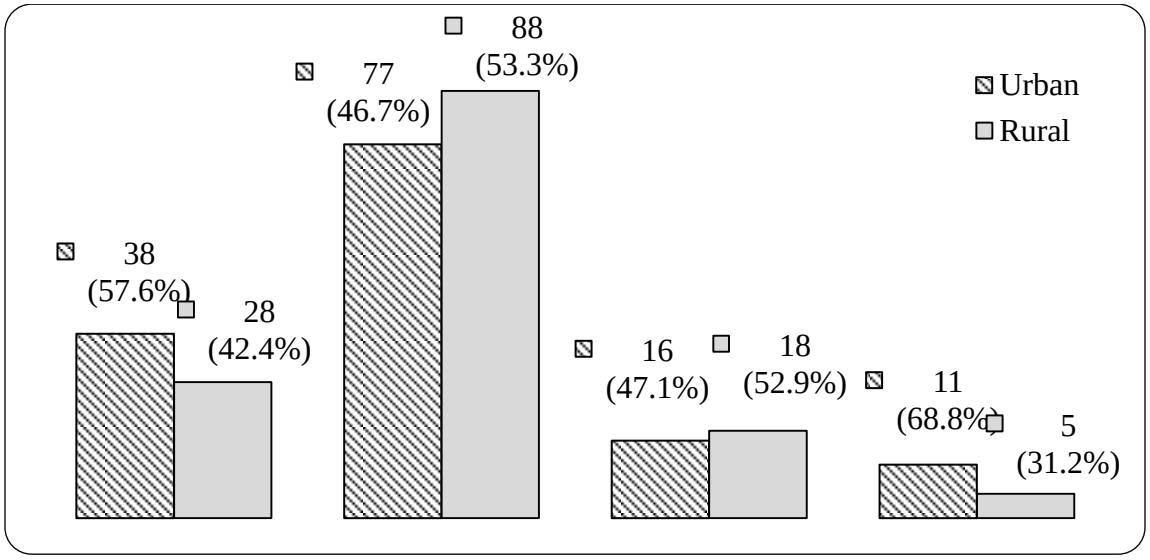

Diagram 5.1.2 *Respondents' Grades based on Schools' Location*

Analysis on Question K2

K2 – Palm oil is more expensive than other vegetable oils.

The correct answer for this Knowledge question is False, palm oil is not more expensive than other vegetable oils. The findings show that 52.4% of students from the Urban schools answered this wrongly, compared to 47.3% from rural area who erred on this question, a difference of 7 students. There are at least two reasons why students from the plantation area know more of this fact compared to their counterparts; one, because they live in plantation area and are more familiar with palm oil than other vegetable oils; or, two – because it was a good guess.

However, even though there are differences in the number of right or wrong answers between the respondents from the urban and the rural schools, the t-test shows that there is no significant difference in the performance between the two locations. The following shows the t-test result:

Table 5.1.4 *A t-test on the difference in knowledge based on school locations*

Location	N	Min	SD	t-value	Sig P
Urban	142	2.00	.834	.000	1.000
Rural		139	2.00	.692	

*significance level p<0.05

5.2 Practice

The element of Practice refers to the ways in which the respondents, or youths in this case, demonstrate their knowledge and attitude through their actions. There are 5 questions to measure this element on the youths and the results show that the mean scores for all schools are at the average level. This means that on average, the knowledge on palm oil related products was put into practice in everyday needs. There is neither high nor low value associated with the practices. It might be something that is not prioritized consciously but used and manifested subconsciously on regular basis.

Table 5.2.1 *Mean and Standard Deviation (SD) for Practice*

	Urban			Rural		
	SMK U1	SMK U2	Total	SMK R1	SMK R2	Total
Mean	2.6819	2.5824	2.6576	2.9990	3.1955	3.1257
SD	.63530	.56433	.61820	.54967	.53256	.54492
Interpretation of Mean	Average	Average	Average	Average	Average	Average

However, taking a closer look at how each school answers the questions, there is a significant difference between the urban and the rural scores. The following table gives a clear picture of the difference:

Table 5.2.2 *The t-test showing the difference in responses for Practices*

Location	N	Mean	SD	t-value	Sig P
Urban	139	2.6576	.61820	-6.684	.000
Rural	138	3.1257	.54492		

*Significance level is at p<0.05

The t-test analysis in Table 5.2.2 above shows a significant difference in the mean scores (P = 0.00, p < 0.05) in the palm oil practices between youths from urban schools (min = 2.66, SD = 0.62) with youths from rural schools (min = 3.13, SD = 0.54), hence, rejecting $H_0$8 in the study

which is "There is no significant difference in the mean score of the practices between the urban and rural school students".

The t-test analysis shows that practices on palm oil related products among rural respondents is higher than youths in urban areas. This result means looking at the five questions assessing their practices, they basically show the rural youths who live in or around the palm oil plantation manifested knowledge and positive attitude toward the products by using them more than their urban counterparts. These practices could be seen in the responses from two out of the five questions, P2 and P4 as the following.

P2 - My family uses palm oil-based cooking oils such as *minyak cap buruh, vesawit, sri murni,* etc.

Table 5.2.3 *Frequency of overall responses to P2*

	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Disagree (SD)	24	8.5
Disagree (D)	20	7.1
Neutral (N)	47	16.7
Agree (A)	67	23.8
Strongly Agree (SA)	118	42.0
No answer	5	1.8
Total	281	100.0

Majority of the respondents agreed with this statement, that in practice, their families use palm-oil based cooking oils to prepare their meals. A total of 65.8% were in this category as opposed to 15.6 percent whose family did not use palm-oil based cooking oil. A closer look at the percentage form gives quite a balance interpretation of Agree and Strongly Agree Urban-Rural responses (see Table 5.2.3), however, Table 5.2.4 of statistical mean score and standard deviation show a clearer difference. Here it substantiates that the practices with regard of using cooking oil out of palm oil among the rural youths is stronger than the urban youths.

Table 5.2.4 *Frequency and percentage of P2 responses according to location of schools*

	Urban (Freq. and %)			**Rural (Freq. and %)**		
	SMK U1	**SMK U2**	**Total**	**SMK R1**	**SMK R2**	**Total**

SD	15 (62.5)	5 (20.8)	20 (83.3)	2 (8.3)	2 (8.3)	4 (16.7)
D	8 (40.0)	2 (10.0)	10 (50.0)	4 (20.0)	6 (30.0)	10 (50.0)
N	24 (51.1)	9 (19.1)	33 (70.2)	5 (10.6)	9 (19.1)	14 (29.8)
A	27 (40.3)	10 (14.9)	37 (55.2)	13 (19.4)	17 (25.4)	30 (44.8)
SA	31 (26.3)	8 (6.8)	39 (33.1)	24 (20.3)	55 (46.6)	79 (66.9)
Total	105 (38.0)	34 (12.3)	139 (50.4)	48 (17.4)	89 (32.2)	137 (49.6)

Table 5.2.5 *Mean dan Standard Deviation (SD) item P2*

	Urban (Freq. and %)			**Rural (Freq. and %)**		
	SMK U1	**SMK U2**	**Ave. Mean**	**SMK R1**	**SMK R2**	**Ave. Mean**
Mean	3.49	3.41	3.47	4.10	4.31	4.24
SD	1.367	1.328	1.353	1.153	1.051	1.088
Interpretation Mean Score	Average	Average	Average	High	High	High

The following analysis shows the responses towards question 4.

P4 - I will work in the palm oil industry as it is able to give good returns.

Table 5.2.6 *Frequency and percentage of responses for P4*

	Frequency	**Percentage**
Strongly Disagree (SD)	26	9.3
Disagree (D)	52	18.5
Neutral (N)	95	33.8
Agree (A)	62	22.1
Strongly Agree (SA)	42	14.9
No answer	4	1.4
Total	281	100.0

Table 5.2.6 shows that one third of the respondents were being neutral about this statement. The reason could be to play safe about it or it could also be that they did not know much about the industry, hence could not give their definite agreement or disagreement on the statement. However, a closer look at the responses show that, youths at the urban schools have disagreed more on working at the palm oil industry compared to their rural counterparts. The bar

chart below shows the responses from the urban schools on the left (stripe) bars and responses from the rural schools on the right (solid) bars are. From left to right are the Likert's scale responses of Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, and Strongly Agree.

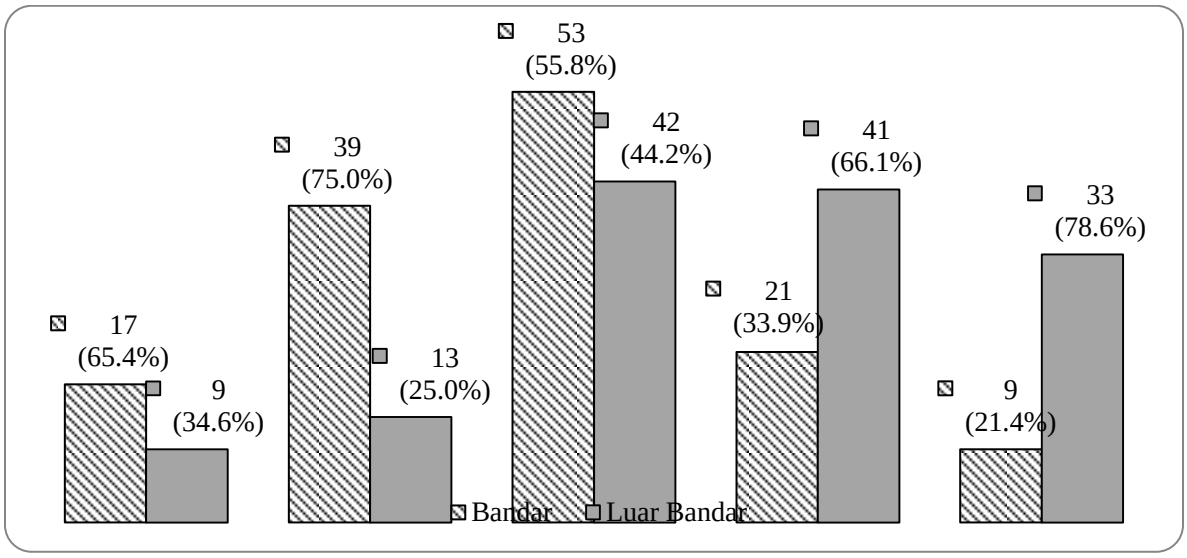

Diagram 5.2.1 *Responses toward P4 according to Location of Schools*

6. Conclusion and Implication

The discussions thus far show that although there are positive results in terms of knowledge and practice among the youths with respect to oil palm industry, there are differences in terms of agreement or disagremeent to the items in the questions. As hypothesized, the rural youths who grow up in or around palm oil plantation are bit more knowledgable about the industry. As introduced in the earlier part of the paper, there is an existing problem in palm oil industry with regards to involvement of the locals. There seems to be more foreigners working in the production sector while Malaysia has a pool of youths who could be trained as skilled labors and experts in the industry. The research has shown that youths in Malaysia have not acquired strong knowledge and practice about palm oil. Hence, the young people of the country particularly, should be exposed to the job opportunities in oil palm industry, at the same time efforts should be made to improve on the perceptions of the careers related to this industry. This can be done by increasing the youths' knowledge and appreciation on the palm oil industry in Malaysia. One of the effective ways of handling this is by incorporating the knowledge and products of palm oil in the text books. This will increase awareness among Malaysians

regarding the palm oil industry. Reviere (1996) has stated that the existing needs and the ideal needs could be realized if the society is ready to embrace the change, here, the change in perception of the industry. Continuous effort should be made at various levels of society in order to increase awareness on the importance of the industry to the country and job opportunities available in the sector.

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