

The Relationship of Foreign Workers Food Handling Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices and their Job Competency: A Pilot Study

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Abstract

As a result of change in the locals' lifestyle and the booming tourism industry, the food service industry has becoming more attractive. Food and beverage sector is one of the leading sectors in the service area which comprises of both hospitality and tourism industry. This, in turn, has created a high demand for labor in the foodservice, resulting in the increase of employment of foreign workers from 9.1% in 2010 to 13.7% in 2015. As the foreign workers increase in numbers in Malaysia, so does the case of foodborne illnesses. However, to date, there is a lack of attempt to determine the food safety's knowledge status among foreign workers in Malaysia since the previous studies focuses more on specific age groups of local food handlers. Therefore, this study explored how the foreign food handlers acquire their , attitude and practices in food hygiene and does this affect their job competency in food preparation. The expected outcome is a statistical result that showed the need for structured food safety training model tailored specifically for these foreign workers. The findings of the study will ensure that the food has been prepared safely, thus less money will be spent on healthcare cost due to food borne illness.

Keywords: Foreign Worker, Food Borne Illness, Food Safety, KAP, Job Competency.

Introduction

Malaysia is a multicultural country, however, accepting diversity has always been one of the challenges. Kim (2006) mentioned that organization with diverse background can help improve effectiveness by maximizing ones potential. As stated by Sam and Berry (2010), it is only in the recent decades that the degree and intensity of cultural influence have spiked as a result of globalization. In the area of food preparation in Malaysia, the shortage of

manpower has created an opportunity for foreign workers to fill the gap in this sector. According to the Ministry of Home Affairs (2015), the numbers of foreign workers in Malaysia had gradually increased to 2,135,035 in 2015 from 1,918,146 in 2009. Under Section 2 Employment Act 1955, foreign worker is a domestic servant who is not a citizen or a permanent citizen of a country.

Eventhough these workers are needed, managing them is complex, transitional and is governed by variety of laws, policies, and memorandum of understanding which are complicated (Malaysian Employers Federation, 2014). Malaysia approved 15 nationalities to source for foreign worker which are Indonesia, Nepal, Myanmar, India, Vietnam, Philippines, Pakistan, Thailand, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Sri Lanka, Laos, China, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan (MOHA, 2015). They are only allowed to work in 5 formal sector which include construction, manufacturing, services, agriculture, and plantation, with the addition of one minor sector which is maid service that requires low or unskilled jobs. The age range permissible by law is between 18 to 45 years old (Immigration Department of Malaysia, 2015).

These foreign workers are not allowed to work as the front-line workers and work at fast food restaurants (MEF, 2014). Although the government have banned foreign workers from working in fast food outlets (Gho, 2014), few establishment still employ them due to long working hours, low wages, and plenty of hard works causing the local youngsters to not consider working in the service industry (Gho, 2014). Hence making them more demanded in the food preparation sector.

In order to protect the consumers from food borne illness, food handlers must have excellent hygiene practice to ensure no cases of cross contamination. Thus to eliminate this problem, effective food safety training must be provided as it can help strengthen food handling and workplace safety practices. Additionally, food handlers must also master all the skills and acquire the knowledge needed to ensure the safety of food prepared for consumption (Food Standard Australia New Zealand, 2015). Having said that, the foreign workers that were hired in Malaysia has to go for 3 hours training in food hygiene however its effectiveness is debatable due to 1) language barrier; 2) diverse foreign workers origins and background and 3) trainers compatibility in giving out training to international trainees. Thus these shortcomings may have affected the workers competency in carrying out their tasks.

According to Lucia and Lepsinger (1999), job competencies are important prerequisites of job performance (Lucia & Lepsinger, 1999; McClelland, 1973). It is connected to the ability of workers to use knowledges, skills, behaviours and personal characteristics in order to successfully perform professional tasks (Ennis, 2008). Tutu and Constantin (2012) confirmed that there is a positive correlation between job performance and job competency level, standard required job competency level and competency matching index. Job competency consists of the workers' knowledge, skills and abilities which either specific to certain job or to a broader industry. Therefore this study would like to determine the relationship between knowledge of hygiene among foreign workers with their job competency in food preparation in the restaurants.

Method

The primary objective of the study is to examine determinants of food hygiene knowledge among foreign workers in relation to job competency. A quantitative approach was the most suitable method of gathering data and information in order to obtain a significant meaningful data. According to Sekaran (2003), the use of questionnaires enables the researcher to obtain the data needed in a short period of time. The sampling frame for this study are the restaurants in Shah Alam. Based on *Laporan Tahunan Majlis Bandaraya Shah Alam* (2015), there are 1,936 license issued to food handlers / restaurants excluding council kiosk, stalls, night and morning market, and also hawkers.

The convenience sampling was applied in this context as it is based on the most accessible respondents selected due to their convenient accessibility and proximity to the researcher. The study involved foreign workers as the unit of analysis who are currently working in foodservice sector in Shah Alam. Due to the unavailability in estimating the population of these workers, the rule of thumb proposed by Roscoe (1975) were used in determining the sample size. Roscoe (1975) proposed that sample size larger than 30 and less than 500 are appropriate for most research.

A pilot test was carried out before the actual survey in order to ensure that the questionnaire was designed appropriately to fit the research objectives. The questionnaire comprised of five sections. Each sections addresses different elements and dimensions in assessing the determinants of food hygiene practices among foreign workers namely food handlers' knowledge, attitude, practices, training effectiveness and job competency. It is important to note that, several established instruments were considered for this study and all measures used were based on scales validated in prior research. In this study, all items in the dimensions were measured using a 5-point Likert scale as presented in Table 1 below:

Table 1

Measurement for Likert scale

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree

Close-ended questionnaire using Likert scale was selected for this study because of its reliability and ability to provide a greater volume of data rather than any other scales particularly when measuring people attitude and opinions towards different aspects (Babbie, 2007). According to Sekaran (2003), the survey instrument should be straightforward for the respondents to answer the questions in the most consistent manner in order to obtain the useful data and response. In this study, the questionnaire was constructed in three languages, namely Malays, English and Bengali, to ease the understanding of the questions asked. All questions were proof read and counter checked by professional language expert.

Questionnaires consisted of six (6) parts; demographic profiles, foreign workers' knowledge, attitude, food handling practices, training, and job competency. For the demographic profiles it consists of age, gender, food handlers training attendance, typhoid injection, country of origin, education level, and number of month working in food and beverage production line. There were 11 questions for knowledge, 8 questions for attitude, 9

questions for food handling practices, 11 questions for training effectiveness, and 5 questions for job competency. These questions were adopted and adapted from Bas, Ersun & Kivanc (2006), Sani & Siow (2014), Angelillo, Viggiani, Greco, & Rito (2001), Lin & Shariff. (2008) and Akkermans, Brenninkmeijer, Huibers, & Blonk (2012).

Result And Discussion

A pilot study was carried out in order to check and clarify the questionnaire on the right use of terms, meaning and relevance of each item. Pilot test also enables the researcher to check whether the questionnaires used were deemed suitable for Malaysian context. Pilot study was executed with a total of 30 randomly selected respondents. The respondents consisted of foreign workers who work in foodservice sector.

It was posited by Malhotra (2004) that extensive pretesting is a must before a particular survey instrument were to be used in a field study. Therefore, pilot study is imperative for every survey instrument as according to Pallant (2005), questionnaires adopted from other researchers also require pilot study so that the instrument work well with the intended population. The Cronbach's alpha for each section in the survey instrument was measured with the use of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20.0.

Table 2

Cronbach's alpha for pilot study

Variable	No of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Food handlers' knowledge	11	0.703
Food handlers' attitude	8	0.802
Food handling practices	9	0.711
Training effectiveness	11	0.657
Job competency	5	0.850

Table 2 shows the result from the Cronbach's Alpha test. According to the rules of thumbs, the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of a particular scale should be above 0.7. Checking the reliability of each scale with the particular sample is necessary (Pallant, 2005). The values are shown in Table 2, which shows the Cronbach's Alpha for each variable are above 0.65. Thus, all items in the variable are reliable for further usage for the research.

Conclusion

Having a good constructed study and questionnaire will enable better data collection and deciphered better results. All the Cronbach Alpha values are above 0.6 thus showed that the questions are valid and reliable for statewide data collection. The questions asked within the scope of the objectives and specific to the targeted area of study. The respondents are the right unit of analysis to help in explaining the relationship between KAP of food hygiene among the foreign workers and their job competency.

Several important goals for the evaluation of foreign workers' food handling training can be envisioned. The ultimate objective of this study is for foreign workers to have appropriate food handling training that could help them prevent food borne illnesses. Additionally, this study was conducted to identify the level of knowledge, attitude and practices of these workers in relation to food handling training.

By learning about these workers level of knowledge, this study can determine whether the available training is adequate for them or they need some special training. Employers can use this study to educate their foreign worker which will enhance the hygienic environment in their respective establishments. Moreover, it will help to better understand the foreign workers with the development of suitable training. Additionally increase labour productivity as well as preventing the spreading of food borne illnesses in a long run.

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