

Personal Perception Towards Majoring in Accounting Among Accounting and Non-Accounting Students: Are There Any Differences?

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ABSTRACT

Accounting has always been associated with numbers cruncher, thus, commonly perceived as difficult course. These negative perceptions have contributed in the declining number of students majoring in accounting. Previous research also indicated that accounting enrolment has declined since most of the students are more likely to further their study in new and exciting field such like business, hotel and tourism. Furthermore, they perceived that other programs such like business programs are more easy compare to accounting programs. Nevertheless, there are also several factors that lead students in applying accounting course as evidenced in prior studies. The aim of the study was to analyse factors in terms of personal perception that affect accounting and non-accounting students' decision in choosing accounting as their major. The study also investigates the significant differences in term of personal perception among the students. Overall, the study found that factors like personal perception did affect the students' decision to choose accounting as their major.

Key Words: Accounting, Education

1. INTRODUCTION

Accounting is a process of identifying, classifying, recording and summarising financial transactions relating to a business. It is a medium used by a business to disseminate its financial information to relevant parties for decision making purpose. As accounting has always been associated with numbers cruncher, thus, commonly it was perceived as a difficult course. These negative perceptions have contributed in the declining number of students majoring in accounting. Previous research also indicated that accounting enrolment has declined since most of the students are more likely to further their study in new and exciting field such like business, finance, information system, hotel and tourism. Furthermore, they perceived that other programs such like business programs are more easy compare to accounting programs.

Nevertheless, there are also several factors that influence the students' perception and subsequently affect their intention to major in accounting. The aim of the study is to analyse factors in terms of personal perception that affect accounting and non-accounting students' decision in choosing accounting as their major. The study also investigates the significant differences in term of personal perception among the students.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

People are one of the main resources that play important roles in ensuring the organization achieve its objectives. In order to hire and recruit these people as employee, thus they need to fulfil criteria that have been set by the organization. Nevertheless, it is crucial to find employee with suitable criteria especially in accounting profession. This was resulted from a decline in the number of university students majoring in accounting programs (AICPA, 2000; Barsky & Catanach 2001; Hylton, 2002; Gaetano, 2018).

There are many reasons that contribute to a decline of students enrolling accounting programs. Albrecht & Sack (2000) and Hartwell et al. (2005) stated that salary 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.

In the other hand, students' level of understanding 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). This was resulted as lack of information or marketing material about the accounting programs and profession which should be provided by the accounting educator and practitioner.

Many previous study (Mladenovic, 2000; Hylton, 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. Some of the students perceive that accounting is a boring course that leads them for not choosing accounting programs as their major (Mandilas et al., 2010; Barsky & Catanach, 2001).

Other than that, prior study also has indicated that accounting enrolment has declined since most of the students are more likely to further their study in new and exciting field such like information system, business, finance and data analytic (Chiasson et al., 2004; Barsky & Catanach, 2001; Gaetano, 2018). The students perceived that other programs such like business programs are more easy compare to accounting programs.

Students' perception towards majoring in accounting has received considerable attention in the accounting literature. 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. The aim of the study is to analyse factors in term of personal perception that affect accounting and non-accounting students' decision in choosing accounting as their major. As highlighted in prior studies, one of the factor that lead to a decline in the number of students taking accounting is the difficulty in attracting students to pursue a degree in accounting at the university level. Hence, by listening to the students' perception, it will actually assist interested party to attract more students to enrol accounting course and subsequently retain them to pursue their career in accounting profession (Noor & Bakar, 2013).

Additionally, the present study also investigates the significant differences in term of personal perception among accounting and non-accounting students. The findings could help the accounting academics and policy makers in the accounting sector to develop appropriate strategies to attract students especially those in the high schools that still in a phase to choose their major (Noor & Bakar, 2013).

3. METHODOLOGY

Personal perception has been used as variable in the questionnaire in order to examine factors that influence the accounting and non-accounting students' intention to major in accounting. It is based on study by Cohen & Hanno (1993) with some minor modifications made by Tan & 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 80 questionnaires were used in the data analysis. All usable responses were further analysed using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS).

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The result of the survey is summarized according to a) students' demographics b) personal perception of accounting and non-accounting students towards majoring in accounting c) the differences of personal perception among accounting and non-accounting students towards majoring in accounting.

4.1 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 80 students, (80%) 64 students are female while the other (20%) 16 are male students.

There are (51.3%) 41 students who took accounting courses and the other (48.8%) 39 students took non-accounting courses during diploma. Most of the non-accounting courses comprise of business, banking and finance.

4.2 Personal Perception of Accounting and Non-Accounting Students Towards Majoring in Accounting

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). Table 1 presents the mean score of personal perception among accounting and non-accounting students. It is an average score of a group of students regards to personal perception towards majoring in accounting.

Based on the highest mean value, both accounting and non-accounting students believed that majoring in accounting will lead to a career in which they can earn high salary and at the same time provide chances for them to advance their career path. This result aligns with previous studies by Giladi et al. (2001), Abdullah & Zakaria (2006) and Ghani et al. (2008). Students select accounting as a major because students believe it will lead to an advancement opportunity with competitive salaries. Interestingly, they agreed that accounting major is a boring academic major as showed in prior studies by Mandilas et al. (2010) and Barsky & Catanach (2001) and they also believed that accounting major lead to a career that offers limited job availability, however, the mean value is lower.

Table 1 Mean Score of Personal Perception

Personal perception	Accounting students (mean score)	Non-Accounting students (mean score)	Differences (mean score)
Earning a high initial salary	4.2683	4.2821	-.01376
Having a career in a field that works with numbers	4.1707	3.9487	.22201
Entering a field with broad exposure to business	4.0000	4.0256	-.02564
Entering a field that offers a chance to establish a private practice	4.0732	4.1282	-.05503
Start a career in which one works with people	3.9512	3.6667	.28455
Beginning a career in a field which is exciting	4.0732	3.8974	.17573
Choosing an academic major which is boring	3.1951	2.9487	.24640
Choosing a career with high earnings and advancement	4.2927	4.1538	.13884
Choosing a major which requires a large amount of classwork	3.5366	3.5128	.02376
Choosing a career that provides high social status	3.9756	3.8462	.12946
Choosing a major with difficult courses	3.5854	3.3846	.20075
Choosing a major that prepares me for a field with limited job availability	3.3659	3.3846	-.01876

Test for difference in means are based on t-tests.

*Significance differences between students with and without accounting background (p<.05).

4.3 The Differences of Personal Perception Among Accounting and Non-Accounting Students Towards Majoring in Accounting

Personal perception with positive mean indicate that accounting students perceived that choosing accounting as a major is more likely lead to the outcome as listed in the question while negative mean of personal perception indicate that non-accounting students believed that choosing accounting as a major is more likely lead to the outcome in the question.

An independent samples t-test was performed in order to investigate the significant differences in term of personal perception among the students. Based on Table 1, there were no significant differences between accounting students and non-accounting students pertaining to personal perception. It shows that both group of students agreed that choosing accounting as their major will lead to all the 12 outcomes.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The present study is conducted to investigate factors in term of personal perception that affect accounting and non-accounting students' decision in choosing accounting as their major. Additionally, the present study also investigates the significant differences in term of personal perception among the students.

Personal perception has been used as variable in the questionnaire in order to examine factors that influence the accounting and non-accounting students' intention to major in accounting. It is based on study by Cohen & Hanno (1993) with some minor modifications made by Tan & 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. Meanwhile,

the least frequently cited factors that led the students to choose accounting as their major were accounting major is a boring course and accounting major lead to a career that offers limited job availability.

In terms of significant differences, the study found that there were no significant differences between accounting students and non-accounting students pertaining to personal perception. It shows that both group of students agreed that choosing accounting as their major will lead to all the 12 outcomes

Overall, the study found that factors like personal perception 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 disseminated by the employers to the students especially those in the high schools that still in a phase to choose their major.

As highlighted in study by Keneley & Jackling (2009), an important cause for the shortages of professional accountants in many parts of the world is the difficulty in attracting students to pursue a degree in accounting at the university level. Hence, by listening to the students' perception, it will actually assist interested party to develop appropriate strategies in attracting more students to enrol accounting course 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 on students' intention to major in accounting.

Secondly, the study used personal perception as variable in order to examine factors that influence the accounting and non-accounting students' intention to major in accounting. Hence, future research may examine other variables such as intrinsic motivation and culture to have a better insight regards to factors that influence students' intention to major in accounting

Despite these limitations, it is hoped that the findings of this study will contribute towards further effort and research to encourage students to pursue their study in accounting course.

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