

**EMPLOYEES' PERCEPTION ON LIFELONG  
LEARNING AND JOB PERFORMANCE: A  
CASE OF OIL PALM ESTATES IN BINTULU,  
SARAWAK**

**AMBROSE EMANG**

**ASIA e UNIVERSITY  
2025**

EMPLOYEES' PERCEPTION ON LIFELONG LEARNING AND JOB  
PERFORMANCE: A CASE OF OIL PALM ESTATES IN BINTULU,  
SARAWAK

AMBROSE EMANG

A Thesis Submitted to Asia e University in  
Fulfilment of the Requirements for the  
Doctor of Business Administration

February 2025

## ABSTRACT

A descriptive study has been conducted amongst oil palm plantations employees' feedback on distance learning for furthering study while working as plantation workers. The intention was to investigate career development and training provided by HRD and HRM of the oil palm estates. Based on the research problems, three study objectives were formulated and to be answered based on respondent's feedback. Since the targeted respondents for this academic exercise were employees at oil palm estates in Bintulu Division only, a self-administered questionnaire was designated to collect the primary data from the respective respondents. The questionnaire comprised of Socio-demographic characteristics, funding and perks for distance learning, retention rate, participation and progress tracking, specialized performance appraisal tools, knowledge transfer motivation, professional development for career progression and job performance. The result presented in Chapter 4, about 75 respondents gave feedback and analyzed to answer the study objectives. The study findings show that most of the respondents claim that they faced difficulties to furthering their study via distance learning while engaged as plantations workers. The entire study constructs recorded significant relationship with job performance. During the study period, the researcher found that the limitations of the study could probably due to the very limited time frame to undergo detail research. Short period for this study to explore on many factors influenced relationship between independents and dependent while working at the oil palm estates. Fortunately, replication study could help to reduce the burden of not meeting targeted specific time given. This study could be more efficient if the timeframe is set longer with in-depth analysis. From the study findings, a number of recommendations to suggest to be adopted inline to uplifting career development in HRD and HRM which contributed to better job performance.

**Keywords:** HRM, HRD, distance learning, oil palm, estate

## **APPROVAL**

This is to certify that this thesis conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in quality and scope, for the fulfilment of the requirements for the Doctor of Business Administration

The student has been supervised by: **Assoc. Prof Dr. Mohd Farid Shamsudin**

The thesis has been examined and endorsed by:

**Dr. Abadan Jasmon**

**Perdana University**

Examiner 1

**Prof. Dato' Dr. Hj. Mohamad Nasir bin Hj. Saludin**

**Asia e University**

Examiner 2

This thesis was submitted to Asia e University and is accepted as fulfilment of the requirements for the Doctor of Business Administration



.....  
**Dr. Khairul Nizam bin Mahmud**

**Asia e University**

Chairman, Examination Committee

26 February 2025

## **DECLARATION**

I hereby declare that the thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the Doctor of Business Administration is my own work and that all contributions from any other persons or sources are properly and duly cited. I further declare that the material has not been submitted either in whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other university. In making this declaration, I understand and acknowledge any breaches in this declaration constitute academic misconduct, which may result in my expulsion from the programme and/or exclusion from the award of the degree.

**Name: Ambrose Emang**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ambrose Emang'.

**Signature of Student:**

**Date:** 26 February 2025

Copyright by Asia e University

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In preparing this thesis, I was in contact with many people, researchers, academicians, and practitioners. They have contributed towards my understanding and thoughts.

First of all, I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mohd Farid Shamsudin, without whom I would have not made this endeavor a success. His dedication to excellence and willingness to read through the many drafts, provide constructive criticism and guide me through the various stages of writing this thesis was invaluable. Without his continued support and interest, this thesis would not have been the same as presented and submitted here.

I am also indebted to Asean e-University (AeU) for giving me this opportunity. Staff and librarians at AeU and Pustaka Negeri Sarawak also deserve special thanks for their assistance in supplying the relevant literatures and venue. I appreciate the assistance and cooperation of my respondents as the research participants, who made themselves available to provide me with their insights, views, and ideas. Thank you for providing information, reports and who have participated in this study.

My fellow postgraduate students should also be recognized for their support. My sincere appreciation also extends to all my colleagues and others who have helped at various occasions. Their views and tips are useful indeed. Unfortunately, it is not possible to list all of them in this limited space. I would like to extend my thanks to Professor Dr. Mohd Zambri Jaafar and Mr. Lade Abo for his views and tips especially during data analysis. Thank you for your advice, moral support and continuous encouragement.

Last, I would like to say thank you to my family members for their continuous support and encouragement to my wife and children, thank you for your love, support and

tolerance. Without this support from family, this thesis would never have been completed, and it is as much their accomplishment as mine.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ABSTRACT</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>APPROVAL</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>DECLARATION</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b>	<b>vi</b>
<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS</b>	<b>viii</b>
<b>LIST OF TABLES</b>	<b>xi</b>
<b>LIST OF FIGURES</b>	<b>xii</b>
<b>LIST OF ABBREVIATION</b>	<b>xiii</b>
<b>CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>1</b>
1.0    Background of the Study	1
1.1    Problem Statement	33
1.2    Research Questions	39
1.3    Objectives of the Study	40
1.4    Significance of the Study	40
1.5    Scope and Limitation of the Study	41
1.6    Chapter Summary	41
<b>CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW</b>	<b>44</b>
2.0    Introduction	44
2.1    Distance Learning Opportunities	47
2.1.1    Issues in Distance Learning	49
2.2    Human Resource Development and Human Resources Management	51
2.2.1    Human Resources Development (HRD)	52
2.2.2    Human Resource Management (HRM)	57
2.2.3    HRD vs HRM	62
2.2.4    Human Capital Management and Development	68
2.2.5    The Role of HRM in the Oil Palm Industry	70
2.3    Transfer of Technology	75
2.4    Smart Farming	79
2.4.1    Smart Farming Technologies	79
2.4.2    Smart Farming in Malaysia	80
2.4.3    Challenges of Smart Farming in Oil Palm	81
2.5    Job Performance- Competency Gap	83
2.5.1    Issues in Performance Management	96
2.6    Employees Turn Over	98
2.7    Career Development	100
2.7.1    Employee Commitment	100
2.8    Research Framework	101
2.8.1    Funding and Perks for Long Distance Learning	103
2.8.2    Retention Rate in Oil Palm Industry	108
2.8.3    Participation and Progress Tracking	112
2.8.4    Specialized Performance Appraisal Tools in HRD/HRM	114
2.8.5    Knowledge Transfer Motivation	117
2.8.6    Challenges in Oil Palm Mechanisation	123
2.8.7    Professional Development for Career Progression	124

2.9	Chapter Summary	125
<b>CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY</b>		<b>127</b>
3.0	Introduction	127
3.1	Research Design	127
3.1.1	Purpose of Study	128
3.1.2	Study Setting	129
3.1.3	Time Horizon	129
3.2	Qualitative Method	130
3.3	Research Instrument	132
3.3.1	The Purpose of Using a Questionnaire	133
3.3.2	Questionnaire Design	133
3.3.3	Questionnaire Administration	135
3.3.4	Previous Study for Questionnaire Components	136
3.4	Population and Sampling	166
3.4.1	Target Population	167
3.4.2	Sampling Frame and Location	168
3.4.3	Sampling Elements	168
3.4.4	Sampling Technique	168
3.4.5	Sample Size	169
3.5	Chapter Summary	170
<b>CHAPTER 4 STUDY FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS</b>		<b>172</b>
4.0	Introduction	172
4.1	Respondents' Demographic Background	174
4.1.1	General Demographic Changes	175
4.1.2	Sarawak Population Projection	178
4.1.3	Bintulu District Profile	188
4.2	Funding and Perks for Learning	192
4.3	Retention Rate	198
4.3.1	Turnover Intention	200
4.3.2	Motivation	200
4.4	Participation and Progress Tracking	205
4.4.1	Labour Productivity	205
4.4.2	Wages	207
4.4.3	Benefit	207
4.4.4	Positive Climate	208
4.4.5	Appreciation (Reward)	209
4.5	Specialized Performance Appraisal Tools	212
4.5.1	Performance Appraisal Process	215
4.6	Knowledge Transfer Motivation	218
4.7	Professional Development for Career Progression	224
4.8	Job Performance	231
4.9	Conclusion	235
<b>CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION</b>		<b>237</b>
5.0	Introduction	237
5.1	Conclusion	237
5.1.1	Study Objective No 1	238

5.1.2	Study Objective No. 2	239
5.1.3	Study Objective No. 3	240
5.2	Recommendations	240
5.3	Closing Notes	247
<b>REFERENCES</b>		<b>249</b>
<b>APPENDICES</b>		<b>260</b>
Appendix A- Questionnaire		260

## LIST OF TABLES

<b>Table</b>		<b>Page</b>
Table 2.1	Differences between Human Resources Management and Human Resources Development	65
Table 2.2	Employer Perspective vs Employee Perspective	102
Table 3.1	Questionnaire Components	134
Table 3.2	Sampling Size Based on Raosoft Calculator	170
Table 4.1	Breakdown of Respondents According to Gender	175
Table 4.2	Population Distributions of Malaysia by Regions 1970-2010	177
Table 4.3	Sarawak: Population by Administrative District 2010 & 2017	180
Table 4.4	Population Forecast 2006-2050, Northern Region of Sarawak	184
Table 4.5	Population Forecast 2006-2050, Central Region of Sarawak	184
Table 4.6	Population Forecast 2006-2050, Southern Region of Sarawak	186
Table 4.7	Sarawak Population Distribution According to District	188
Table 4.8	Independent Oil Palm Smallholders in Sarawak by District	191
Table 4.9	Funding and Perks for Learning	198
Table 4.10	Retention Rate	203
Table 4.11	Participation and Progress Tracking	211
Table 4.12	Specialized Performance Appraisal Tools	217
Table 4.13	Knowledge Transfer Motivation	223
Table 4.14	Professional Development for Career Progression	230
Table 4.15	Respondents' Feedback on Job Performance	234

## LIST OF FIGURES

<b>Figure</b>		<b>Page</b>
Figure 2.1	HR Models: The Harvard Framework	102
Figure 2.2	Proposed Research Framework	103
Figure 4.1	Ethnic Compositions of Respondents	191
Figure 4.2	Performance Appraisal Process	216

## **LIST OF ABBREVIATION**

4D	Difficult, Dangerous, Dirty and Demeaning
APEL	Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning
B40	Below 40 percent
CBS	Credit Bank System
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 19
CPS2	Nigeria's Clonal Palm Series 2
DBA	Doctorate in Business Adminstrative
DELIMa	Digital Educational Learning Initiative Malaysia
DV	Dependent Variable
EC	Electrical Conductivity
EP	Employee Performance
EPF	Employees Provident Fund
EPU	Economic Planning Unit
FELDA	Federal Land Development Authority
FFB	Fresh Fruit Bunch
GIS	Geographical Information System
GNI	Gross National Income
HCD	Human Capital Development
HCM	Human Capital Management
HLIs	Higher Learning Institutions
HPOs	High Performance Organizations
HR	Human Resource
HRD	Human Resource Department

HRDC	Human Resource Development Corporation
HRDF	Human Resource Development Fund
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
DV	Dependent Variable
IESALC	International Institute for Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean
IoT	Internet of Things
JS	Job satisfaction
KPIs	Key Performance Indicators
LiDAR	Light Detection and Ranging
LLL	lifelong learning
MACRES	Malaysian Remote Sensing Agency
MARA	Majlis Amanah Rakyat
MCO	Movement Control Order
MOE	Ministry of Education
MOHE	Ministry of Higher Education
MOHR	Ministry of Human Resources
MOOCs	Massive Open Online Courses
MPOB	Malaysian Palm Oil Board
MQA	Malaysian Qualifications Agency
MSPO	Malaysian Sustainable Palm Oil
NDP	National Development Policy
NEP	New Economic Policy
NMC	Non-Malaysian Citizens
NST	News Strait Time

NVP	National Vision Policy
OD	Organizational Development
OEM	Original Equipment Manufacturer
OER	Open Educational Resources
OTIF	On Time, In Full
OUM	Open University Malaysia
PA	Performance Appraisal
PMO	Prime Minister Office
PSMB	Pembangunan Sumber Manusia Berhad
PSMB	Pembangunan Sumber Manusia Berhad
QA	Quality Assurance
ROI	Returns on Investments
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
RSPO	Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil
SCORE	Sarawak Corridor of Renewable Energy
SDF	Skills Development Fund
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SOPB	Sarawak Oil Palms Berhad
SOPPOA	Sarawak Oil Palm Plantation Owners Association
T&D	Training and Developing
TUNAS	Tunjuk Ajar dan Nasihat Sawit
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UCTH	University of Calabar Teaching Hospital
UNDP	United Nation Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

UPM Universiti Putra Malaysia

UTM University Technology Malaysia

UUM Universiti Utara Malaysia

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.0 Background of the Study

In these current contemporary conditions, education is often named a major contributing factor towards determining the relevance of workers from various sectors or industries such as agriculture. Industries such as agriculture are fast moving towards higher mechanization as newer and more modern methods are being adopted to increase both yield and production rates. However, many players in the agriculture industry especially in Asian countries have been slower to realize the benefits of an educated workforce and are contented to continue using unskilled labor for the majority of tasks especially due to the lower cost of unskilled labor.

Workers in the palm oil industry often times are faced with difficulties to enhance their professional development especially for the purpose of career progression, this can be mainly attributed to the lack of accessible courses available related to their industry. It is only the most tenacious of these oil palm industry workers who undertake the extra effort it takes to actively pursue continuous education to develop their careers. However, these workers that have furthered their studies have voiced discontent that the incentives to furthering their studies such as through career progression are virtually nonexistent.

This can be attributed to a number of reasons, most likely due to the policies of the workplace department responsible to plan staff education and career progression namely the Human Resource Department (HRD). Thus, a major underlying factor related to various issues can be linked to Human Resource (HR) Development. Regardless on the statement of cause being put forth it is still imperative to carry out

research delving into the subject matter in a scientific and objective manner to produce clear results. This includes taking into account important variables including independent variables such as workers age and linking it to dependent variables especially level of further education and job performance when conducting the study to determine any correlation.

Having an effective and competent human resource department is a major determining organizational strength which allows an organization to tackle and prevail over challenges within a competitive environment (Armstrong & Taylor, 2020). The true value of human resource is clearly shown through mandatory regulations in place in Malaysia regarding the management of employees. The Employment Act 1955, decrees staff recruitment, contract for services, payment of wages, statutory deductions from wages, employment and labour relations, employment rights of women and their protection, conditions for their work and regulates employers by the way they manage employee issues by setting strict guidelines for handling complaints, inquiries, harassment investigation, inspection and punitively handle offences and penalties.

HRD is an abbreviation of Human Resource Development, this can best be described as a systematic process to improve efficiency towards achieving organisational goals. The Human Resource Development Act of 2001 allows for the imposing and gathering of a Human Resource Development Levy which main purpose is to promote the development as well as training of all workers within an organization in the country.

The Human Resource Development Corporation (HRDC) (which is known in Bahasa Malaysia as *Pembangunan Sumber Manusia Berhad* (PSMB)) was established as a means for fund administration by the Corporation for affairs related thereupon reflecting directly on governmental interventions pertaining to Human Resources in

the country. PSMB is under the auspices of the Ministry of Human Resources. However, all processes related to employees' development as well as activities initiated with this aim comes under the approvals of the Management of the organization.

According to Fernandez et al. (2020) there is no confirmed rule that employees will develop with trainings that are carried out within the organization over a short or extended time frame. Therefore, based on the employees' level and manner of skills or knowledge development required, the training development programmes must be designed and implemented accordingly. Within the framework of continuing professional development, the existence of life-long learning programs may enhance professional development; these programs are often provided by higher learning institutions in the vicinity of an organization.

Employees join these life-long learning courses for professional development mostly. Any life-long learning programme is designed to provide positive experience which influences positive behaviours at work. Human resource practices in any organization is shown to affect outcomes in employee behaviour and attitudes at work (Tannady et al., 2020).

Recently, a number of studies have been carried out to investigate the human resource development impact on a variety of factors (Kerdpitak & Jermsittiparsert, 2020; Pham, 2020; Satish & Rechanna, 2020). Mainly the current study intends to seek and identify the impact of human resource development on workers who have embarked on distance education programmes for their professional development. The employee in this study particularly focusses on those from palm oil industry. The study is concerted to understand the way HRD manages its employees as they embark and complete their distance education courses. The study attempts to understand if they the

employees of palm oil organizations who embark on a distance learning program are indeed able to impart that experience and knowledge into their work. Life-long learning is supposed to influence work performance positively.

There is hardly any point in approving employees' request for leave and approving budgets allocated for staff to further their studies through distance learning courses while working, if they are not going to be impact fully contributing all that learnt knowledge and skills and attitude to the job due to constraints in the organization. This is the paradox for all HR Department Managers. After allocating budgets and giving approvals, is there a system to track employees' performance and whether these employees would feel demoralized and demotivated once they have completed the programme that they intend to leave the company and join another company for a far more challenging role. Human Resource Development is a critical function to ensure employees are trained, educated and retained on the job to contribute valuable knowledge.

Distance education is required for organizations that are located further away from urban settings like in Sarawak. As per a statement by the Sarawak Oil Palm Plantation Owners Association there are close to 80 member companies. With a probability of having about 100 management staff (all local and non- field) in each company, there is highly likely close to 8000 over management employees in palm oil companies in Sarawak. It becomes a necessity to understand the level of enthusiasm, participation and outcomes from distance learning from these Management level employees.

According to the researcher which have more than 10 years' experience in plantation with Sarawak Oil Palm Group of company in Bintulu. The common situation faced by the employees at Sebaju Plantation such as; logistic matter. It took

them 5-6 hours driving to the nearest town for them to further their study. With these matter in directly, will affect the moral of the employees. Network problem, as we know most of the plantation are based in rural area, the telecommunication network is the worse problem to the employees to do online study. Financial restriction, no motivation, no encouragement from the management and family members are part of the issue to the employees to further their study. This is the prime reasoning for conducting to this research, for the purpose of identifying the problem and solution method for the employees to further their study for their future career. Researcher believe with the employees vast current of experiences, well training method, higher education application and support from the employer and family members, the employees can perform well and contributing to the successfully of the company.

### **i. Lifelong Learning**

3L or LLL is often widely regarded as the third pillar for our country's human development agenda, this in tandem with the country's formal education system (primary, secondary and tertiary education systems of Malaysia). 3L also concerns the provision of additional opportunities for increasing and improving basic skills and giving learning opportunities at a higher level. Towards this end, 3L also supports citizenry enrichment; it assists in producing well rounded individuals with more holistic talent. Malaysia has to strive towards developing an inclusive knowledge society where every person has the same chances to adapt to the demands of social and economic changes while also being able to participate actively in the shaping of the Malaysia's future. The relevant ministries have launched a number of major initiatives in regards to 3L, this is especially true with the launch of the Blueprint on Enculturation of Lifelong Learning for Malaysia, 2011-2020 (3L Enculturation Blueprint).

## **ii. Institutions Offering 3L**

Malaysia is home to many institutes which offer 3L catering to a variety of focusses. Among these institutions are the Technical and vocational education and training (TVET) programmes designed for the community. Community colleges often tailor 3L programmes in the form of short courses various age groups and categories including a number of which that can be accumulated as course credits. The establishment of community colleges has given rise to wider availability of work-based learning programmes at the diploma level which is well suited to working adults. There is also a wider availability of Polytechnics that also have work- based learning courses. These technical courses can all lead towards further advanced studies at various public and private higher learning institutions (HLIs) which provide 3L learning at the bachelors and postgraduate levels.

## **iii. Demand for 3L**

The current enrolment for 3L participants, has surpassed the 10% annual growth rate target set for the HLIs. In 2013, 3L enrolment was 45% of the regular (full-time) HLIs enrolment. Community colleges recorded the highest number of 3L participants in 2013. In fact, between 2002 and 2013, community colleges registered 1.3 million participants in the 3L courses, with the number of participants increasing from 1,800 in 2002 to 277,080 in 2013. Public universities are second in 3L participation with 131,000 (27%) enrolment in 2013. Public universities offer 3L through distance learning programmes to complement their on-campus fulltime conventional programmes. Registration in 3L programmes offered by ODL institutions was 13% (65,000) of total 3L participation in 2013.

#### **iv. 3L Initiatives and Future Challenges**

The 3L Enculturation Blueprint outlined three strategies targeted at upgrading mechanisms and infrastructure, enhancing public awareness and participation, ensuring continuity and appreciation. There are several ministries, governmental agencies, non- governmental organisations, HLIs, and private companies currently conducting 3L activities. This may lead to overlapping of activities and duplication of efforts and resources and the quality of these programmes may also vary significantly; In order to provide a wider access for 3L participation by several target groups (for example, the marginalised group, the physically challenged, those with learning difficulties, the indigenous, and senior citizens), improved infrastructures, and mechanisms to manage learners with special needs are required.

Many 3L programmes are currently not recognised by formal education institutions, limiting opportunities for lifelong learners to further education. The Ministry is committed to supporting any and all pursuits which encourage and empower Malaysians to acquire - and upgrade - the knowledge, values, skills, and understanding they will require throughout their lives. This provision of lifelong learning is essential for the development of the country as it will lead of life. Lifelong learning is also essential to the development of an inclusive knowledge society. To that end, the Ministry will work with HLIs to increase public awareness of 3L programmes and to create a framework to recognise prior learning. HLIs are also encouraged to develop more innovative programmes that meet the needs of a wider audience (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2015)

#### **v. Strategies to Encourage Lifelong Learning**

The current actual status of lifelong learning in Malaysia is difficult to pinpoint, although any effort to encourage better understanding, awareness and participation