# Natives' Perception on Myanmarese Immigrant in Langkawi Island, Malaysia

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**Abstract**

This article examines the natives' perception of Myanmarese Malay Muslim immigrant in Langkawi on the issues and the impact of economy, social and environment perspective by using the frequency analysis, descriptive analysis and multiple regression analysis. The study highlights on the impact of wages competitiveness in the local construction activities, disruption of small sea fishing activities and the impact of environment of the immigrant's

dwelling area. The objectives of the research are to examine the response and perception of the community towards the existence of the Myanmarese Malay Muslim Immigrant on the issue of the study. These result confirmed to what has been discussed among the public especially concerning the wages competitiveness between immigrant and the natives. Similarly, on the independent variable of polluted dwelling surrounding their dwelling area, the results showed that there are deep concerned of the natives regarding the polluted environment. From the analysis of the study many respondents are strongly agreed and agreed on the event that the immigrants present a threat to local security and the immigrants were impervious of any legal enforcement.

**Keywords:** Immigrant, natives, wages competitiveness, environmental impact, disruption of fishing activities.

## 1. Introduction

Since the immigrant issue becomes an international issue currently, there are many factors such as economy, politic, and social factor that contributed to the issue of immigrant. The most obvious reason in the global migration is the pushed and pulled factors. Amongst the variables of the pushed factors are not enough jobs in the home country, few opportunities, primitive condition of standard of living, political fears, poor medical care, not being able to practice religion, loss of wealth, natural disasters, death threats, slavery, pollution, poor housing, powerful landlords, bullying, and poor chances of finding courtship.  On the other hand amongst the pulled variables factor are better job opportunity in the host country, better living condition, political and/or religious freedom, Better enjoyment, better education, better medical care, better security, family links, and better chance of finding courtship. In Malaysia most of the immigrants related to an economics reason and they are in the form of foreign workers and they are coming to Malaysia because of the wages differential and jobs opportunity comparatively to their mother land.

Myanmar Muslim comprising of descendent Malay, Arab, Rohingya, and others comprising of 5 percent of the total population of Myanmar (Nordin, 2009). Total population of Myanmar in 2005 is about 50 million people. Since 1980s out of this percentage, 250,000 people become a refugee are Rohingya people staying along the border of Myanmar and Bangladesh. Concurrently, majority of the Myanmarese Malay Muslim are located at the southern part of Myanmar along the border of Myanmar and Thailand.  Most of the Myanmarese Malay Muslim staying in this area and their economic activity involve in small fishing.

After 1988, a significant number of Burmese left the capital to border areas opposite to Thailand and stayed among the ethnic minority population. Lack of freedom and human rights violations seem to be the major force that drove people from Myanmar (Chantavanich, 2007). Nonetheless, the influx of immigrants continued because of the economic staleness in Myanmar.

The earliest arrival of the Myanmarese Malay Muslim immigrants in Langkawi somewhere in the late of 1970s is around 100 people comprising of female and children. Ten years later in 1988 a large group of Myanmarese Malay immigrants arrived in Langkawi, and they were placed at Bukit Malut, Langkawi as their temporary dwelling. These immigrants keep on

coming from time to time and it was estimated around 2000 people in 1990s and now the estimated figure rises to around 6000 people. Normally immigrants have clustered in a small number of geographic area (Borjas, 2006). Currently the children of the earlier batches of immigrants are schooling in the government school nearby the settlement area. The failure to plan for the housing needs of immigrants has led to squatter settlements, which have encouraged ethnic concentration and community formation (Castles, 2000).

The geographical closeness between southern Myanmar and north Malaysia enable easy access into this country. Additionally those with family ties who had entered Langkawi earlier find such entry even easier with family members providing refuge and protection in the initial part of their way.

Since the mass arrival of the Myanmarese Malay Muslim immigrants in late 1980s, their main activity is as the small fisherman and as the unskilled workers. There were occasions where these male immigrants were fighting with the natives, but when it becomes the police case, the local natives were blamed by the police on the ground these immigrants were protected by the authority and they are having the immunity against the law. Foreign workers in large numbers were seen as security threat as the rising crime rate and incidence of highly contagious diseases were associated with them (Kanapathy, 2006).

## 2. Review of the Related Literature

Malaysia has relied on the regional labor market for low to medium skilled workers since the early 1970s to fuel growth and facilitate structural adjustment without a hollowing-out effect on the economy (Kanapathy, 2006). Further, the orientation of national policies since 2002 from short term counter cyclical measures to more medium and longer term measures to address structural rigidities has contributed to a stronger and healthier economy that is able to weather external shock (Kanapathy, 2007). The economic prosperity had boosted demand for workers in many economic sectors and in addition the decreasing international comparative advantage in labour intensive products required the business to have cost cutting (Chantavanich, 2007).

The number of immigrants at that particular time comprises a substantial portion and it is worrying the host country's population. The complex ethnic balance is a result of colonial labor import for the tin mine and rubber plantation (Castles, 2000).

Immigrant who have high levels of productivity and who adapt rapidly to condition in the host's country labor market can make a significant contribution to economic growth. Meanwhile, the nation as a whole gains from immigration but immigration increases the size of the economic pie available to native (Borjas, 2006).

Malaysian politics are shaped by the country's geographical, racial, religious and culture diversity (MYREN, 2006). Malaysia is a unique country with a history of tradition diversified based on the ethnic groups, as well as migration for purpose of trade, work, religious and social contact. The differences in per- capita income are a key determinant of the size and direction of migration flow (Borjas, 2006). Successful economic management has led to a rapid economic growth and industrialization since 1980s, making Malaysia into a 'second-wave tiger economy' with severe sectoral labor shortages (Castles, 2000).

Malaysia is dominantly a host country, however, there are strong evidences to suggest that many of its citizens are working and residing abroad (Kassim, 2005). The government of

Malaysia has maintained of accepting immigrant based on humanitarian and refugee intake especially for Muslim immigrant from Indochina after the end of the Vietnam War in 1975 as well as refugee from Myanmar on the humanitarian and religious ground in 1970s and 1980s. Both asylum seekers and refugees are considered as illegal immigrants in Malaysia (MYREN, 2006).

At least in the short-run, immigrants will boost the supply of labour in matched skill groups in the host country, increasing competition for jobs and thereby depressing the wages of the similarly-skilled in the market (Aydemir, 2007). Malaysia dependence on foreign workers has been increasingly in the last 15 years from 4% in 1990 to 12% of the country's workforce in 2005 (Kassim, 2005).

Employment of the immigrants leads to a loss in revenue through their remittances, delays automation and mechanization, suppresses local pay, imposes a heavy toll on social amenities and socials services, reintroduction diseases once under controlled in Malaysia, a threat to security (Kassim, 2006). In year 2008 Malaysia lost in revenue a total of RM17 billions when foreign workers from all sectors of economic remit money to their respective countries (Selamat, 2009).

The angry and frustration expressed by the natives is consistent with the finding by Borjas. The immigrants flow consists mainly of low-skill workers will exacerbate the economic problems by native low skill workers and will likely create severe cultural and social dislocation (Borjas, 2006).

With having Mykad they are considered as Malays and Bumiputeras and could enjoy many privileges such as alienation of government land, the right to vote, a discount on the real estate and etc. Some of them have been allocated to a better housing scheme within the island that never enjoyed such privilege by the native.

## 3. Research Design

For this function of the study we focused on the survey method by using the questionnaires. To investigate and to quantify the socio economic impact of the immigrants in Langkawi we represent a simple research model with regard to the study conducted.
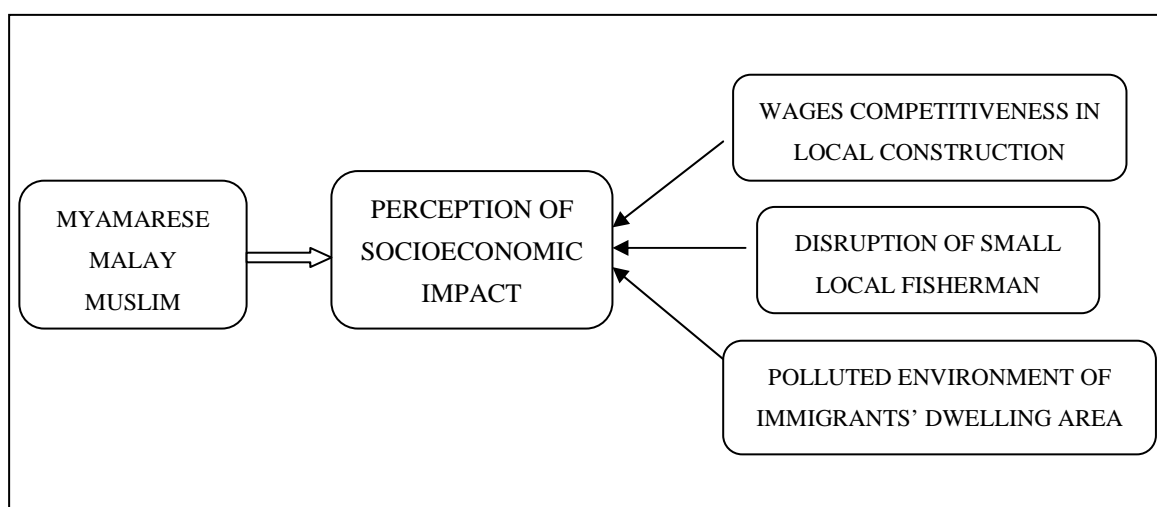
## 4. Multiple Regression Analysis

Since there is one dependent variable and three independent variables therefore, the most appropriate regression analysis method to be applied is a multiple regression.

However, this research model could be expressed in the mathematical terms and the estimated regression model as follows:

Native Perception= $a + b_1\alpha + b_2\beta + b_3\delta + e$
Where;

| | |
|---|---|
| Native Perception | = Natives Perception of Myanmarese Malay Muslim Immigrant |
| $a$ | = Constant |
| $b_1, b_2, b_3$ | = Regression Coefficient |
| $\alpha$ | = Wages competitiveness of local construction (WCLC) |
| $\beta$ | = Disruption of small local fishermen (DSLF) |
| $\delta$ | = polluted environment of immigrant dwelling area (PEIDA) |
| $e$ | = error term |

Eventually, several statistical methods will be used such as coefficient of correlation (R), coefficient of determination ($R^2$) and T-statistic (t-stat).

## Data Analysis and Interpretation

Therefore, even when validated measures are used, it is always a good idea to check for the interterm consistently reliability using the Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of the independent and dependent variables. Reliabilities less than 0.6 are generally considered to be poor, 0.6 and above considered to acceptable and those over 0.7 are considered to be good.

Table 4.1 below reports the results of reliability analysis for the study independent variables. Cronbach's alpha value for all variables is more than 0.7 and is considered good. This means that the instrument is reliable and understandable by the respondent.

**Table 4.1** Reliability Test

| Variables | No. of item | Cronbach's Alpha |
|---|---|---|
| Wages competitiveness | 5 | 0.887 |
| Disruption of small fishermen | 5 | 0.860 |
| Polluted environment | 5 | 0.881 |

**Table 4.2** Wages Competitiveness

| Employer prefer to hire MMMI | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Strongly disagree | 0 | 0 |
| Disagree | 2 | 1.66 |
| Neutral | 8 | 6.66 |
| Agree | 70 | 58.33 |
| Strongly Agree | 40 | 33.33 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Total | 120 | 100 |

From the above table 4.2, we notified that 33.33% (40) of respondents are strongly agreed while 58.33% (70) of respondents agreed that the employers prefer to sub-contract the jobs or/and recruit Myanmarese Malay Muslim immigrant rather than local people, whereas only 6.66% (8) of respondents are neutral. However, 1.66% (2) of respondents is disagreed. None of respondents is strongly disagreed.

**Table 4.3** Stealing Local Fishing Equipments Belongings

| Steal local fishing equipments belongings | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Strongly disagree | 4 | 3.33 |
| Disagree | 12 | 10 |
| Neutral | 15 | 12.5 |
| Agree | 53 | 44.16 |
| Strongly Agree | 36 | 30 |
| Total | 120 | 100 |

From the above table 4.3, we notified that 30% (36) of respondents are strongly agreed while 44.16% (53) of respondents agreed that the immigrants like to steel local fishing equipments belongings, whereas only 12.5% (15) of respondents are neutral. However, 10% (12) of respondents are disagreed. The rest of respondents 3.33% (4) are strongly disagreed.

**Table 4.4** MMMI Threats Local Security

| MMMI threats local security | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Strongly disagree | 1 | 0.83 |
| Disagree | 4 | 3.33 |
| Neutral | 7 | 5.83 |
| Agree | 76 | 63.33 |
| Strongly Agree | 32 | 26.66 |
| Total | 120 | 100 |

From the above table 4.4, we notified that 26.66% (32) of respondents are strongly agreed while 63.33% (76) of respondents agreed that the immigrants give a threat to local security, whereas only 5.83% (7) of respondents are neutral. However, 3.33% (4) of respondents are disagreed. The rest of respondents 0.83% (1) are strongly disagreed.

**Table 4.5** MMMI Immune of any Legal Enforcement

| MMMI immune of any legal enforcement | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Strongly disagree | 6 | 5 |
| Disagree | 10 | 8.33 |
| Neutral | 24 | 20 |
| Agree | 29 | 24.16 |
| Strongly Agree | 51 | 42.5 |
| Total | 120 | 100 |

From the above table 4.5, we notified that 42.5% (51) of respondents are strongly agreed while 24.16% (29) of respondents agreed that the immigrants were immune of any legal enforcement, whereas only 20% (24) of respondents are neutral. However, 8.33% (10) of respondents are disagreed. The rest of respondents 5% (6) are strongly disagreed.

**Table 4.6** Poor MMMI's Settlement Condition

| Poor MMMI's settlement condition | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Strongly disagree | 6 | 5 |
| Disagree | 10 | 8.33 |
| Neutral | 24 | 20 |
| Agree | 29 | 24.16 |
| Strongly Agree | 51 | 42.5 |
| Total | 120 | 100 |

From the above table 4.6, we notified that 42.5% (51) of respondents are strongly agreed while 24.16% (29) of respondents agreed that the immigrants living in a poor settlement condition, whereas only 20% (24) of respondents are neutral. However, 8.33% (10) of respondents are disagreed. The rest of respondents 5% (6) are strongly disagreed.

**Table 4.7** Impact on Tourism Industry

| Impact on tourism industry | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Strongly disagree | 2 | 1.66 |
| Disagree | 6 | 5 |
| Neutral | 18 | 15 |
| Agree | 34 | 28.33 |
| Strongly Agree | 60 | 50 |
| Total | 120 | 100 |

From the above table 4.7, we notified that 50% (60) of respondents are strongly agreed while 28.33% (34) of respondents agreed that the immigrants give a negative impact on the tourism industry, whereas only 15% (18) of respondents are neutral. However, 5% (6) of respondents are disagreed. The rest of respondents 1.66% (2) are strongly disagreed.

**Table 4.8** Regression Analysis

| Variables | Results | t-test |
|---|---|---|
| Intercept | 4.559 (1.183) | 3.85 |
| Wages Competitiveness | 0.532 (0.176) | 3.021 |
| Disruption of Small Fishermen | 0.112 (0.132) | 0.849 |
| Polluted Environment | 0.362 (0.115) | 3.143 |
| R square | 0.723 | |
| Adjusted R Square | 0.708 | |

Multiple regressions evaluate the natives' perceptions of socioeconomic impact towards Myanmarese Malay Muslim immigrants. Based on the result presented on the table 4.8, coefficient showed by $R^2$ is 0.723 and adjusted $R^2$ is 0.708. This means that 72.3% variation in native people perception can be explained by variation in overall Independent variables (IV) namely wages competitiveness, disruption of small local fishermen, and polluted environment. Meanwhile, the other 27.7% of the changes in native people perception are

explained by other factors, which are not included in this research. However, 70.8% of adjusted R square of variation in natives' perception can be explained by variation in multiple independent variables (IV).

From the above table, the t-statistic for wages competitiveness ($\alpha$) is 3.021, the number of observations in this research is 120 and number of independent variable is 3. Degree of freedom is equal to the number of observations minus the number of independent variables minus one, which is shown below:

Number of observation (n) = 120
Number of independent variable (k) = 3
Degree of freedom = n – k – 1
$$= 120 - 3 - 1$$
$$= 116$$

Since the degree of freedom is 116, the critical t – value from the t – distribution table is 1.980. Therefore, at a 95% confidence interval and at a significant level of 0.05, the calculated t – value is more than t – distribution table (3.021 > 1.980). Therefore there is a statistically significant relationship between natives' perception and wages competitiveness.

In the case of independent variable of disruption of small fishermen, the calculated t – value is less than t – distribution table (0.849 < 1.980). Therefore there is a statistically insignificant relationship between natives' perception and disruption of small fishermen.

A similar result we observed as wages competitiveness for polluted environment where the calculated t – value is more than t – distribution table (3.143 > 1.980). Therefore there is a statistically significant relationship between natives' perception and polluted environment.

In addition, based on the unstandardized beta coefficient, wages competitiveness (beta=.532, p<0.004) significantly predicted native people perception of socioeconomic impact. Disruption of small fishermen (beta=.112, p>0.400) is not significant predictor of people perception. Whereas Polluted Environment (beta=.362, p<0.003) are significant predictor of Langkawi native people perception.

Therefore, from the above explanation, we can derive regression equation as:

Native Perception = 4.559 + 0.532$\alpha$ + 0.112$\beta$ + 0.362$\delta$

4.559   = constant
$\alpha$        = Wages Competitiveness
$\beta$        = Disruption of small local fishermen
$\delta$        = Polluted environment

## 5. Discussion and Recommendation

This paper concentrates on the natives' perception towards the settlement of the Myanmarese Malay Muslim immigrants such as on the issue of wages competitiveness, disruption of small local fishermen and on the polluted environment of their dwelling area.

The results show that the natives put on a blamed on the settlement of the immigrants in Langkawi on several issues highlighted. Knowledge obtained from this study is considered as a contribution to social science study in general and socioeconomics study in particular.

The empirical results indicate the natives' perception towards the existing of the immigrants in Langkawi more towards the disadvantages of the natives. Politician and the authorities must do some things to clear the negative perception of the natives towards the settlement of the Myanmarese Malay Muslim immigrants. The authorities need to explain and justify to the mass the significant of the settlement of the said immigrant in Langkawi once and for all. The number of immigrant keeps on increasing from time to time and is consistent with the immigrant theories such as the push-pull theory, migration movement due to prior relationships and immigrant theories of incorporation: assimilation.

From the result obtained in the regression analysis,

1. Wages competitiveness between immigrants and natives, and polluted environment of the immigrant dwelling area are significantly reflecting the opposing of the natives on the settlement of the immigrants in Langkawi. This is consistent with the analysis done by the previous researchers on the immigrant issues domestically and internationally.
2. Meanwhile, disruption of fishermen is not significant predictor of natives' perception.
3. The current economic situation has lead to questions over the value of wages competitiveness of the immigrants. Public opinion supports the view that immigrants take natives' jobs due to immigrants are willing to accept the lower wages. This is consistent with the law of demand and supply suggests that immigrants could reduce wages by increasing the supply of workers.
4. Polluted environmental in general and immigrants' dwelling area in particular is an essential issue in the tourists' island of Langkawi. This empirical result signifies the polluted environment variable as the importance issue especially in attracting domestic and foreign tourists. In this research, the relationship between immigrants and the environment is an essential component of rational and honest decision making concerning immigration.

## 6. Concluding Remarks

There are few determinants of the incoming immigrant to the host country, amongst others are the attraction of the economic performance and job opportunities in the host country, the colonialism factor, better economic environment, education and health facilities, political stability, freedom of worships, roots of the family and assimilation and many more. Concurrently there are pushing factor of the outgoing immigrants such as the poor economic performance in the homeland, less job opportunities, poor economic environment, education and health facilities, unstable political condition, freedom of political activities, religious matters, and many more.

The uncontrolled of the cheap labors will slowdown the process of automation in the various business sectors is what the government aims for to be a developed nation by year 2020.

Generally, the results of the analysis of the natives' perception on the Malay Muslim Myanmarese immigrant in Langkawi are correlation with the previous studies of immigrants

domestically and in other international context. These findings confirm to what has been discussed among the public regarding the group of immigrant namely Malay Muslim Myanmarese immigrant in Langkawi especially concerning the wages competitiveness between immigrant and the natives.

Similarly, on the independent variable of polluted dwelling surrounding their dwelling area, the results show the deep concerned of the natives regarding the polluted environment. From the analysis of the study many respondents stay neutral on the issue of immigrants are protected by a hidden agenda of HR policy but many respondents are strongly agreed and agreed on the event that the immigrants give a threat to local security and the immigrants were immune of any legal enforcement.

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