

DETERMINANTS OF PRIORITY FOR LIFELONG LEARNING: A STUDY OF UNIVERSITI UTARA MALAYSIA CITY CAMPUS STUDENTS

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Abstract

The objectives of the study were to examine students' perceived priority for lifelong learning; and to investigate the factor(s) that influence their priority for lifelong learning. The sample comprised of 234 students from UUM City Campus, who are currently pursuing their studies on a part-time basis. A model was developed to examine the relationships between the factors that are perceived to be associated with lifelong learning participation. Factor analysis and reliability test were carried out on items adapted from Education Participation Scale (EPS) by Boshier and Collins (1983). Five factors were identified that were perceived to influence students' priority for lifelong learning namely, social contact, professional advancement, cognitive interest, external expectation and emotional relief. Regression analysis was performed to examine the relationship between the dependent and independent variables. The results showed that priority for lifelong learning was only associated with adult learners' cognitive interest while other factors were not significantly associated with their priority for lifelong learning.

Introduction

The term lifelong education was first mooted by the United Nations for Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, Faure Committee Report (UNESCO, 1972). Twenty-eight years later, lifelong education was replaced by the term lifelong learning. The concept of lifelong learning is now high on the agenda of many education policy decision makers. Lifelong learning has been regarded as an important component in the formulation of broader social and economic policies in many nations.

The Commission for European Countries (2001) defines lifelong learning as all learning activities undertaken throughout life, which aimed at improving knowledge, skills and competencies within personal, civic, social, and/or employment related perspectives.

Furthermore, UNESCO had advocated that lifelong learning ought to be extended throughout individual's life, include all skills and branches of knowledge, use all possible means, and provide the opportunity to all citizens for full development of personality (UNESCO, 1977).

In view of globalization and technological advancement, there is an urgent need to promote lifelong learning. The implementation of lifelong learning must be preceded by the understanding on lifelong learning. The Malaysian government has also acknowledged the importance of lifelong learning as a main platform to achieve the nation's Vision 2020 that aims to develop Malaysia to become a developed nation.

In order to achieve the aspiration of Vision 2020, the New Economic Model (NEM) was launched by the government this year with the aim of transforming Malaysia to a high income advanced nation with inclusiveness and sustainability by year 2020 (NEM 2010). As knowledge and skills drive labour

productivity and boost efficiency. Lifelong learning can play an important role in helping the nation to achieve our nation's vision.

For this purpose, distance education and part-time learning have been promoted by Malaysian universities. One such university that has committed its resources to promote lifelong learning is the Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM). This Kedah-based university has established a branch campus known as UUM City Campus in the heart of Kuala Lumpur. The branch campus has provided education opportunities to adult learners who are unable to embark their study on a full-time basis due to career and family obligations.

Research Objectives

This study aimed to determine adult learners' priority towards lifelong learning and the factors that were perceived to be associated with adult learners' priority for lifelong learning. Specifically the research objectives are as follow:

1. To examine adult learners' priority for lifelong learning.
2. To determine the factors associated with adult learners' priority for lifelong learning.

Significance of Study

The findings from this study could enhance our knowledge on adults' perceived priority towards lifelong learning and better understands the factors that determine their priority for lifelong learning. The scope of this study was confined to students from the City Campus, University Utara Malaysia, who are pursuing undergraduate and postgraduate programmes on a part-time basis.

Literative Review

Knowles (1984) highlighted that adults will likely to engage in lifelong learning due to the presence of motivation as a form of internal discipline. This is due to the fact that, unlike younger students, adult learners are aware of their responsibilities that must be addressed.

Adults' motivation and accomplishment in learning activities was influenced by the discrepancy between the current and the desired level of proficiency (Knowles, 1984). Knox (1980) defines "proficiency" as the capability to perform satisfactorily if given the opportunity. This performance requires a combination of attitude, knowledge and skill. Hence, adult learning can help to enhance individuals' proficiency in order to improve their performance and effectiveness (Knox, 1980).

In understanding the need for adults participation in learning including self-directed learning programmes, Boshier and Collins (1983) has developed a model that postulates adults' participation in lifelong are associated to various factors such as the need for social contact, emotional relief, professional advancement, external pressure to comply with the norm and, individual's cognitive interest.

According to Boshier and Collins (1983), adult learners need to foster a better relationship with their peers or other individuals, to develop new friendship, to fulfill a desire for group activities and/or to be accepted by others. Education can be a means to fulfill the social needs of these adults.

Second, adult learners also wish to get relief from boredom, to overcome the frustration of day-to-day living, to temporarily escape from other weighty responsibilities. The essence of this factor is the use of education by adults as a getaway from their boredom or frustration.

Third, adult learners may wish for career advancement such as obtaining higher salary, to secure a promotion, to seek for a better job and/or to acquire respect from peers. Generally, the priority of these individuals is career-oriented.

Furthermore, adult learners may also engage in learning activities in order to comply with the current trend so that they will not want to be left behind. Encouragement and recommendation by external parties such as government, education providers, employers, colleagues or friends may have an impact on individuals' desire and their priority for lifelong learning.

Adult learners may also wish to gain knowledge because they are unable to accept the lack of knowledge or skills on a particular field. They may also engaged in learning to seek knowledge or to get personal enjoyment from the process of learning.

In this study, Boshier's EPS formed the basis in developing the research framework. The dependent variables are adapted from Boshier's EPS, which comprised of social contact, emotional relief, professional advancement, external expectation and cognitive interest that are perceived to determine adult learners' priority for lifelong learning. (Figure 1)

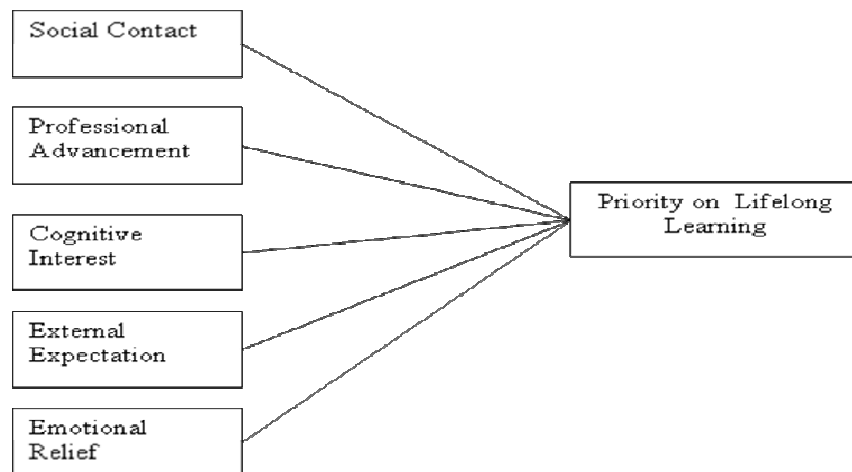


Figure 1: Research Framework

The research hypotheses to be examined are as follow:

- H1 There is a significant relationship between social contact and adult learners' priority for lifelong learning.*
- H2 There is a significant relationship between professional advancement and adult learners' priority for lifelong learning.*
- H3 There is a significant relationship between cognitive interest and adult learners' priority for lifelong learning.*
- H4 There is a relationship between external expectation and adult learners' priority for lifelong learning.*
- H5 There is a significant relationship between emotional relief and adult learners' priority for lifelong learning.*

Research Methodology

The population of the study consists of students from City Campus, Universiti Utara Malaysia. Sampling frame was obtained from City Campus administrative unit. Respondents sample were randomly selected from the sampling frame. The respondents were currently pursuing a degree, master or doctorate programmes. Survey approach namely self-administered questionnaire was used to solicit information from the respondents. Three hundred questionnaires were distributed to the respondents. A total of 234 usable questionnaires were returned. This represented a response rate of about 78%.

Questionnaire Design

The questionnaire was divided into three sections. Section A comprised of items to obtain respondents' demographic background. Section B comprised of 22 items. These items were designed to identify the factors that determine adult learners' participation in lifelong learning programmes. These items were measured based on a 5-point scale, anchored at 1 with 'Strongly Disagree', and at 5 'Strongly Agree'. Section C, comprised of four items measure in ordinal scale to solicit information about students' priority for lifelong learning.

The questionnaires were presented in English and Bahasa Malaysia. Pretest and pilot test were conducted to test the validity of the items. Feedback from both tests was used to further improve the questionnaires items before field work was conducted.

Results and Discussions

Background of Respondents

The background of the respondents was presented in Table 1. There were 55.1% female respondents and 44.9% male respondents. The majority of the respondents were Malay (76.5%), followed by Indian (13.3%) and Chinese (8.1%). It was found that majority of the respondents were between 20-29 years old (57.7%), whilst only 2.6% were under the category of 50 years old and above. In terms of marital status, 56.8% of the respondents were single while 43.2% were married.

A big majority (94.4%) the respondents were working full-time. Respondents who were on part-time employment and unemployed were 4.7% and 0.9% respectively. Private sector employees represents more than half (67.5%) of the respondents, followed by government sector (28.2%) and respondents who were self-employed (4.3%). About half (49.6%) of respondents were holding executive positions, 23.2% of the respondents hold junior positions, while 27.2% of the respondents were senior managers.

In terms of respondents monthly income, 38% of the respondents earned a monthly income of between RM2000-RM3000, while 23.1% earned a salary of less than RM2000. Only 16.2% of the respondents with income between the range of RM3000-RM4000, while 22.7% of the respondents earned more than RM4000. The majority of the respondents were pursuing master programme (58.6%), undergraduates programme (35.8%) and doctorate programme (5.6%).

Table 1: Respondents' Background

Variable	Frequency	%
Gender		
Male	105	44.9
Female	129	55.1
Race		
Malay	179	76.5
Chinese	19	8.1
Indian	31	13.3
Others	5	2.1
Age		
20-29	135	57.7
30-39	69	29.5
40-49	24	10.2
50 and above	6	2.6
Marital Status		
Single	133	56.8
Married	101	43.2
Employment Status		
Full time working	221	94.4
Part time working	11	4.7
Not working	2	0.9
Working Sector		
Government sector	66	28.2
Private sector	158	67.5
Self-employed	10	4.3
Current Position		
Junior Staff (Operation Staff)	54	23.2
Executive Officer (Supervisor/ Executive Level)	115	49.6
Senior Management (Assistant Manager and above)	63	27.2
Monthly Income		
Less than RM2000	54	23.1
RM2000-RM3000	89	38.0
RM3001-RM4000	38	16.2
Above RM4000	53	22.7
Programme Pursuing		
Undergraduate Programme	83	35.8
Master Programme	136	58.6
Doctorate Programme	13	5.6

Respondents' Priority for Lifelong Learning

To examine respondents' perception on priority for lifelong learning, descriptive analysis was conducted. Table 2 indicates almost two-third (72.6%) of the respondents perceived lifelong learning is 'a very high priority in their life'. This is followed by 'It is important, along with other priorities' (26.9 %). The results inferred that a big majority of the respondents perceived lifelong learning is an important priority in their life.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistic for Priority on Lifelong Learning

What priority does lifelong learning have in your life?	Frequency	%
It has a very high priority	170	72.6
It is important, along with other priorities	63	26.9
It is not yet a high priority but may become one	1	0.5
It is unlikely to become a high priority	0	0

Factors Associated With Priority for Lifelong Learning

Descriptive analysis was conducted to determine factors influencing students' priority for lifelong learning. Out of five dimensions, it was found cognitive interest obtained the highest mean with 4.33 followed by professional advancement (4.02). This indicated that respondent believed cognitive interest was the most important factor that determines their priority to pursue lifelong learning. The respondents moderately agreed that social contact and external expectation were determinants in their priority for lifelong learning with the mean of 3.55 and 3.14 respectively. Emotional relief had the lowest mean score among the five dimensions.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistic of Five Dimensions

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
Social Contact	3.55	.948
Professional Advancement	4.02	.970
Cognitive Interest	4.33	.682
External Expectation	3.14	1.080
Emotional Relief	2.81	1.034

Regression Analysis

Regression analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between the dependent and independent variables. Factors that are perceived to influence priority for lifelong learning namely, social contact, professional advancement, cognitive interest, external expectation and emotional relief were included in the regression model in order to determine the variance caused on the priority for lifelong learning (dependent variable). The results were shown in Table 4, Table 5 and Table 6.

Table 4: Model Summary of Five Dimensions and Priority on Lifelong Learning Model Summary^b

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.209(a)	.044	.023	.453

- a. Predictors: (Constant), Social Contact, Professional Advancement, Cognitive Interest, External Expectation and Emotional Relief.
 b. Dependent Variable: What priority does lifelong learning have in your life?

The results from Table 4 indicated the regression coefficients (R) of the five independent variables are 0.209 and the adjusted R square is 0.044. It inferred 4.4% of the variation in priority for lifelong learning was accounted by the independent variables. The regression model was also significant at $p = .069$ ($p < .01$)

Table 5: ANOVA Analysis for Five Dimensions and Priority on Lifelong Learning ANOVA^b

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	2.133	5	.427	2.078	.069(a)
	Residual	46.811	228	.205		
	Total	48.944	233			

- a. Predictors: (Constant), Social Contact, Professional Advancement, Cognitive Interest, External Expectation and Emotional Relief.
 b. Dependent Variable: What priority does lifelong learning have in your life?

Table 6: Coefficient Analysis for Five Dimensions and Priority on Lifelong Learning Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	3.211	.214		15.025	.000
	Social Contact	-.058	.039	-.121	-1.509	.133
	Professional Advantage	.027	.037	.056	.725	.469
	Cognitive Interest	.104	.046	.155	2.284	.023
	External Expectation	.047	.033	.110	1.399	.163
	Emotional Relief	.004	.033	.009	.129	.898

- a. Dependent Variable: What priority does lifelong learning have in your life?

Table 6 indicated only cognitive interests was significant in determining adult learners' priority for lifelong learning with $p < 0.023$. However, social contact, professional advancement, external expectation and emotional relief were found to be insignificant. The results of regression analysis are summarized in Table 7.

Table 7: Summary of Hypotheses Testing Results

Hypotheses		Result
H1	There is a significant relationship between social contact and adult learners' priority for lifelong learning.	Rejected
H2	There is a significant relationship between professional advancement and adult learners' priority for lifelong learning.	Rejected
H3	There is a significant relationship between cognitive interest and adult learners' priority for lifelong learning.	Supported
H4	There is a significant relationship between external expectation and adult learners' priority for lifelong learning.	Rejected
H5	There is a significant relationship between emotional relief and adult learners' priority for lifelong learning.	Rejected

Conclusions

Priority for lifelong learning was investigated using four items measured in ordinal scales. results disclosed that majority of the respondents (72.6%) had placed lifelong learning as a “high priority” in their life. The result indicates the respondents were aware of the importance of lifelong learning.

The results also indicate that cognitive interest is ranked with the highest mean (4.33), followed by professional advancement (4.02), social contact (3.55), external expectation (3.14) and emotional relief (2.81). The findings indicate the main drivers for lifelong learning among the respondents are mainly cognitive in nature and for the purpose of career advancement. This is in line with the era globalization and rapid technology advancement. Adults are aware that additional skills and knowledge are necessary to move ahead of others amid the intensely competitive environment. The need for additional skills or knowledge has become the catalyst that drive adult learners' participation in lifelong learning.

Cognitive interest was the only factor that indicates significant relationship with priority on lifelong learning. Cognitive interest represented the love for learning and interest to seek new knowledge for personal enrichment. This finding is also in agreement with studies that identified participants' motivation for learning, is oriented towards cognitive interest (Danner, Danner, and Kuder, 1993; Kim & Merriam, 2004).

The managerial implication of this study is the needs of individual learners should be prioritized and the learning programmes are designed to the advantage of the individual learner and the employer (Cervero, 1995). In order to attract adult learners, education providers could provide experience that acts as an internal force to drive the individual to progress towards a goal (Wlodkowski, 1986). Furthermore, it is suggested by O’Kell (1986) that the truly motivated lifelong learner would pursue learning without external pressure. The intrinsic factors such as desire for personal growth (Lathlean et al., 1986; Whiteley, 1989) utilizing existing knowledge to enhance their professional competency (Fawcett & Strickland, 1998) might served as a driving force to induce the participation of adults in lifelong learning for the context of cognitive interest.

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