UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

EDUCATIONAL TRANSITION IN SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING AMONGST SELECTED ADULT DISTANCE LEARNERS OF UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

WAN ZAWAWI BIN WAN ISMAIL

FPP 2007 12

EDUCATIONAL TRANSITION IN SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING AMONGST SELECTED ADULT DISTANCE LEARNERS OF UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

By

WAN ZAWAWI BIN WAN ISMAIL

Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia in Fulfilment of the Requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

March 2007

DEDICATION

To

My Dear Wife

ROBIAH BINTI OMAR
For her endless love, support and trust

Our Beloved Children

WAN MUHAMMAD AKMAL, WAN MUHAMMAD HAFIZ, WAN MUHAMMAD FARIS, WAN NUR AIN NABILAH, WAN MUHAMMAD GHAZI AND WAN MUHAMMAD HANIF
For their endless love, support and patience

Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of the Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Chairman: **Prof. Turiman bin Suandi, PhD**

Faculty: **Educational Studies**

The need to change and employ the necessary learning skills are essential for successful learning considering their other responsibilities in life which is part and parcel of being an adult learner. One solution is for the adult learners to undergo an educational transition from the earlier mindset to the needs of the current environment and to be self-directed in their learning thus assuming the responsibility for their own learning by building and employing the necessary skills to deliver the desired results in learning.

This study examined the educational transition in self-directed learning by looking at the respondents' prior beliefs, the phases that they went through as adult distance-learners at the Universiti Putra Malaysia. The study was guided by three research questions: (1) What were the learners' prior beliefs about learning? (2)

How do adult distance-learners experience the phases of self-directed learning? and (3) How do they employ self-directed learning as adult distance-learners?

A qualitative research design was employed for this study which was deemed appropriate, given the research questions which were to obtain a view into the respondents' life-worlds and to understand their personal meanings constructed from their life experiences. Data were primarily gathered through interviews on six selected respondents based on the criteria set by the researcher.

Three conclusions were drawn from this study. First, adult learners do have a set of beliefs which are; learning would change their lives, mode of teaching and learning and also on their ability to face the challenges prior to their engagement as adult distance-learners at the Universiti Putra Malaysia. Second, adult distance-learners went through five different phases of learning to be self-directed which includes the phases of disorientation, exploration, transformation, adaptation before they are able to come to terms with learning as distance-learners or the reconciliation phase. Third, after going through the phases of learning, adult distance-learners do employ self-directed learning skills in their learning. The employment of skills such as personal diagnosis, communicative, resource identification and time management had helped adult distance-learners in their transition from being recipients to pursuers, seekers and creators of knowledge in a distance learning environment thus enhancing the successful completion o their learning endeavor.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Doktor Falsafah

TRANSISI PENDIDIKAN DALAM PEMBELAJARAN KENDIRI DI KALANGAN PELAJAR JARAK JAUH TERPILIH DARI UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

Oleh

WAN ZAWAWI BIN WAN ISMAIL

Mac 2007

Pengerusi: Prof. Turiman bin Suandi, PhD

Fakulti: Pengajian Pendidikan

Perubahan daripada kepercayaan terdahulu tentang pembelajaran dan melengkapkan diri dengan kemahiran belajar yang terbaik adalah penting kepada setiap pelajar dewasa memandangkan pelbagai tanggungjawab yang perlu ditanggung sebagai seorang dewasa. Satu cara penyelesaian ialah dengan memahirkan diri dengan konsep pembelajaran kendiri di mana mereka bertanggungjawab di atas pembelajaran serta membina dan mengaplikasikan pelbagai kemahiran belajar untuk mempastikan kejayaan dalam pembelajaran.

Kajian ini melihat kepada apakah kepercayaan terdahulu responden sebelum mendaftar sebagai pelajar jarak-jauh, fasa pembelajaran yang mereka lalui dan bagaimana mereka membina serta mengalpikasi kemahiran pembelajaran kendiri sebagai pelajar di Pusat Pendidikan Luar, Universiti Putra Malaysia. Kajian ini berpandukan kepada tiga soalan: (1) Apakah kepercayaan terdahulu pelajar tentang pembelajaran dewasa? (2) Bagaimanakah mereka melalui fasa-

fasa pembelajaran kendiri sebagai pelajar dewasa? dan (3) Bagaimanakah mereka mengaplikasi kemahiran pembelajaran kendiri dalam pelajaran?

Pendekatan kajian secara kualitatif dengan teknik pengumpulan data secara temubual telah telah dijalankan bersesuaian dengan persoalan kajian yang bertujuan untuk menghayati dan memahami makna yang tersirat pada diri responden berdasarkan kepada pengalaman mereka sendiri. Sesi temubual telah dijalankan bersama enam orang responden yang dipilih oleh penyelidik berdasarkan kriteria yang telah ditetapkan.

Tiga kesimpulan telah dapat dibuat hasil dari kajian ini. Pertama; Pelajar dewasa mempunyai satu rangkaian kepercayaan terdahulu sebelum mendaftar sebagai pelajar jarak-jauh. Kedua; Pelajar dewasa secara jarak-jauh telah melalui beberapa fasa dalam pembentukan pembelajaran kendiri yang terdiri dari fasa disorientasi, eksplorasi, transformasi dan adaptasi sebelum mereka menjadi selesa dengan corak pembelajaran yang terbaru iaitu fasa rekonsiliasi. Ketiga; Selepas melalui fasa yang tersebut diatas, kajian mendapati bahawa responden telah mengaplikasi kemahiran pembelajaran kendiri iaitu penilaian kendiri, pengumpulan maklumat, kemahiran komunikasi dan juga pengurusan masa dalam pembelajaran mereka yang bakal membantu mereka dalam mempastikan kejayaan dalam usaha mereka sebagai pelajar dewasa.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge those that helped in making this study a success, not only in the results uncovered, but also as a worthwhile learning experience in performing research.

To begin, I want to thank the committee members for my study; Prof. Dr. Turiman bin Suandi as Chairman, Prof. Dr. Azimi bin Hj. Hamzah, Dr. Khairudin bin Idris and Assoc. Prof. Dr. Hj. Azizan bin Asmuni, for sharing their valuable time, suggestions, and support. Unquestionably, their input has improved the quality of this study and its results.

Second, I would like to acknowledge the Department of Professional Development and Extension Education, Universiti Putra Malaysia especially Prof. Dr. Maimunah Ismail, Puan Khiriah, Pn. Suhayu, Pn. Siti Rodiyah (Along) and others who made me realize the solidarity of the members of the department in helping me throughout my studies there. Thanks to the department for a very memorable experience.

Third, I would like to thank the members of the Faculty of Education, School of Graduate Studies and others who has helped me along the way during my days as a graduate student at the university.

Fourth, I want to acknowledge the participants in this study. Thank you for your time and effort in being involved in this research. You have demonstrated a strong will to be successful in your learning and I enjoyed knowing you.

My deepest appreciation to my family, especially my ever loving wife, Robiah binti Omar and our children, Wan Muhammad Akmal, Wan Muhammad Hafiz, Wan Muhammad Faris, Wan Nur Ain Nabilah, Wan Muhammad Ghazi and Wan Muhammad Hanif for their support throughout my studies.

And above all, I bow my head to my creator Allah the Almighty for the many blessing that He has showered upon me. Alhamdullillah for all the blessings and I attribute all my abilities and convey my utmost gratitude to You.

I certify that an Examination Committee met on 2nd . March 2007 to conduct the final examination of Wan Zawawi bin Wan Ismail on his Doctor of Philosophy thesis entitled "Educational Transition in Self-Directed Learning Amongst Selected Adult Distance-Learners of Universiti Putra Malaysia" in accordance with Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (Higher Degree) Act 1980 and Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (Higher Degree) Regulations 1981. The Committee recommends the candidate be awarded with the relevant degree. Members of the Examination Committee are as follows:

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This thesis submitted to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. The members of the Supervisory Committee are as follows:

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Date: 10 MAY 2007

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the thesis is based on my original work except for the quotations and citations which have been duly acknowledged. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted for any other degree at Universiti Putra Malaysia or any other institutions.

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WAN ZAWAWI BIN WAN ISMAIL

Date: 20 March 2007

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

EEC   External Education Center

IDEAL Institute of Distance Education and Learning

UiTM   Universiti Teknologi MARA (MARA University of Technology)

OUM   Open University Malaysia

PBMP Pengajaran Bahasa Melayu sebagai Bahasa Pertama
     (Teaching of Bahasa Melayu as a First Language)

TESL   Teaching of English as a Second Language

UKM   Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia

UPM   Universiti Putra Malaysia

USM   Universiti Sains Malaysia

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

The democratization of education had encouraged adults to participate in learning programs either by enrolling in on-campus programs or via other modes of learning such as online and distance learning. Due to the rapidity of change, the continuous creation of new knowledge and the ever-widening access to information, the number of adults who are continuing their education is increasing throughout the world today.

One of the most popular modes chosen by adults to continue their learning is via the distance learning programs. Miller (1997) and Minton (2004) agreed that distance-learning is intended primarily to meet educational needs of adult prevented by work, family and other obligations from attending classes at traditional campus locations or class times. The concept of being able to have some control on how, what and when to learn in distance-learning programs is deemed to be the pulling factor for adults to engage in learning (Keegan, 1986). Distance-learning programs had reached geographically dispersed audiences through the use of better and advanced telecommunication and information technologies thus increasing access to programs previously limited to on-campus students.

The study of adult participation in distance learning programs, which is relatively quite new, has been blossoming with a number of researchers and theorists who had have contributed a great deal to the field. Wedemeyer (1981), Keegan (1986), Peters (1988), Moore (1994) and Holmberg (1995) to name a few; have made strides toward establishing definitions and understandings of distance learning as a distinct discipline. The central characteristic of distance learning, which is the separation of the learner from the teacher or instructor runs as a common thread in all of them. It was also agreed that distance learning is an educational process in which someone is removed in space and/or time and the teacher conducts a significant proportion of teaching.

Moore (1994) stated that the physical separation in distance learning required them to be more alert of changes, independent, self-motivated and being capable of coping with learning problems on their own. Even though these traits are quite synonymous to adult learners, Schwittman (1982) argued that it might also be a stumbling block to them due to the lack of capability to be self-directed in their learning. This may be due to the influence of their beliefs about learning prior to their engagement as learners. Therefore there is a need for adult learners to address these beliefs and undergo a paradigm change where they need to accept the notion of being responsible to their own learning to be successful. These learners sometimes have initial hesitancy in accepting that they must be

self-directed in learning and take personal ownership of their own learning because of self-doubts about learning abilities or because of misinformation about the nature and practice of learning itself.

The ability to change or the educational transition of adults from being recipients of knowledge and meet the challenges of being adult distance learners where they take ownership of their own learning is a crucial matter that needs to be addressed. Banerjee (2002) stated that students in distance learning environment need to adjust to new ways of learning and thinking in order for them to be successful. Muirhead (2002) also added that the learners need to develop new cognitive skills to enable them to learn, evaluate and monitor their learning. The ability to adapt to change and a shift in their mindsets about learning will enhance their ability to be successful. Therefore, for adult learners to achieve success in learning, a major upheaval in mindsets is needed to be accomplished for them to adopt and adapt the self-directed learning strategies in their learning.

In discussing adult learners' beliefs about learning, Durr (1994) stated that these beliefs by adult learners might be due to a set of previously established mindsets that provide a guideline for the adult learners' behavior in their approach to learning. Therefore, Long (1994) proposes that there is a need for these learners to undergo a shift in their beliefs before becoming more accepting towards being self directed in their learning.

Learners need to adjust their mindsets to fit in with the new learning systems thus enhancing their capabilities to learn as adult distance learners. Adults therefore, need to be well prepared and self-directed to face the challenges of learning in order to be successful in their learning.

Zemke (1998) stated that even though self-directed learning may be a natural attribute to adult learners, but years of other directed education have turned many into passive learners. Self-directed learning is propagated by a number of scholars such as Tough (1971), Knowles (1975), Brookfield (1984), Caffarella and O'Donnel (1987) Hiemstra (1994a) and Gugleilmino and Gugleilmino (2001) as a proven and effective alternative to learning in many situations and part of the methodology employed to train and educate adults. Gugleilmino (1977), Hiemstra (1987) and Caffarella (1993) among others agreed that adults both desire and enact a tendency towards being self-directed in learning as they mature. The notion of being self-directed in learning is considered as a motivating aspect to adults who mostly have other responsibilities that required their attention apart from acquiring knowledge (Knowles, 1984; Cantor, 1992; Hiemstra & Brockett, 1994; Gugleilmino & Gugleilmino, 2001).

Hiemstra (1994b), Robotham (1995) and Gugleilmino & Gugleilmino (2001) agreed on the key issues, which are; adult learners should be able to identify their own learning needs, objectives, locate resources, carry out

their own learning plans and also evaluate their own learning outcomes. Self-directed learning requires a certain amount of independence and maturity thus quite suitable for adult learners rather than the younger set of learners.

Hiemstra (1994b), Lunyk-Child, Crooks, Ellis and Ofosu (2001) and Gugleilmino & Gugleilmino (2001) agreed with Taylor (1986) that adult learners must go through different phases of learning before being self-directed. Taylor (1986) stated that these learners would go through the phases of disorientation, exploration and reorientation before reaching the state of equilibrium where they will be quite stable in their studies. Lunyk-Child et.al. (2001) adds up that while going through the phases of being self-directed, the learners' also need to be aware and understand the increased responsibility of being self-directed apart from the support from the faculty in facilitating a self-directed learning environment. Lunyk-Child et.al. (2001) also stresses that without these understanding, the learners will not be able to really grasp the notion of being self-directed resulting to being disoriented throughout the entire process of learning.

Therefore the transition from learner being a passive recipient of the knowledge to being the thinker, creator and seeker of information would help enhance their learning. Therefore being able to be self-directed in learning is a must for adult learners for one to be successful in the fast

changing environment of the world today (Brookfield, 1986; Boone, 1990 and Knowles, 1998). Roberson (2002) summarizes that self-directed learning is a very potential form of learning that will enable adults to adjust to changes in their surrounding.

Distance-Learning in Malaysia

The evolution of distance learning in Malaysia started with the Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) offering its first distance-learning program via the Distance Learning Unit in the 1971/72 academic sessions with the initial enrolment of 86 students registering as distance-learners (Dasuki, 1993). This is followed by the Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), in 1990 offering diploma courses in Public Administration, Business Administration and Banking (UiTM, 1995).

The Medical Faculty of Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) followed suit with a four-year advance degree program in the field of family health in 1993. This program was launched with the cooperation of the Health Ministry and also the World Health Organization with the aim of producing specialist in public and family health especially in the rural areas. A number of 79 students enrolled in the program (UKM, 1993).

Distance learning in Malaysia has come a long way since its introduction and until now almost all public and private institutions of higher learning are