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Investigating Heritage Street’s Revitalization: Adult’s Learning Experience

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Abstract

Adult learning is considered as lifelong processes since it began at the point where we realize that every single moment is an opportunity for new knowledge in which will end at the time we leave this world. Understanding this learning process and continuously supports on the universal right to learn, we require a proper external and eternal preparedness. Adult learning is an interactive and creative way of accepting and transmitting new information in strengthening the equal right to remain relevant to the current needs. However, in certain circumstances the process of gaining knowledge has its limitation of aim, period and cost. This paper, unveils an adult interactive learning as project-based through interviewing method. Being adult learners, we wish to share our perspective-taking to achieve the insight of the contour of others’ in order to understand a vast realm of experiences beyond our own. The aim of applying interactive adult learning is to understand and extract as much as possible the knowledge and understanding critical views from the heritage observers and experts in the area of knowledge of urban heritage revitalization. The psychological setting in this ‘learning and teaching environment’ is through adult learners’ consideration that heritage observers and heritage experts play a role as ‘mentor’ as they are expert in their field and researchers as ‘mentee’ who are new in the field. Hopefully, this process of learning encountered the diversity of learning processes so that it will elevate researcher’s mind to reach beyond the urban heritage revitalization’s cognitive skills and professionalism.

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1. Introduction

According to Brookfield, S.D. (1992) there are four major areas in adult learning: Self Directed Learning, Critical Reflection, Experiential Learning and Cross Cultural Learning. Preparation amongst adults is crucial

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especially forming an inner self awareness that informal and incidental learning can occur as part of the journey to accumulate knowledge. There are no issues of compulsion or lack of motivation for adults to learn since a majority of them are self motivated despite their background and circumstances which includes life changes, unequal opportunities, high competition amongst colleagues, broken marriages such as divorce, death and retirement. The existing scenario on adult learning is that they are self driven because of self motivation to learn new skills, to expand networks and to enhance career in order to gain more respectful position in the workplace. Normally, the main purpose for adults to learn is to better their position or to make a change to the better person.

1.1. Adult Learners: Andragogy

Kendrick, (2011) describes that there are four main differences between andragogy and pedagogy. The difference are in terms of demands of learning, learning relevancy, aims of learning, and permanence of learning that makes the role of instructor differs for the two main groups of learners. In andragogy, the first character of the learner is self motivation and at the same time being able to balance between social and educational life. Secondly, in terms of experience, adult learners have a tremendous amount of life experiences. Thirdly, adult learners’ destination is crystal clear and self driven. Finally, an adult learner has high probability to stay in the learning environment due to their continuous open-minded approach for self improvement. Non adult-learners can devote more time for learning but their presence requires high monitoring from instructors since their aim is blurred due to the lack of life experiences. They merely learn for information and believe that whatever they are learning has limited relevancy to their life. Therefore, learning permanency in the learning process for non-adult learners has to be made compulsory to avoid disappearance after instruction.

1.2. Adult Learner’s Learning Experience

In understanding both the andragogical and pedagogical scenarios, we may find a contradicting situation in terms of background. Adult learners are consistently and intelligently balanced between personal, social and study life especially when they are on a study leave for a PhD degree, which is a competitive privilege and must be accomplished within a specific time frame. Therefore, in search of a new interpretation on urban heritage revitalization, the research requires a creative and innovative mind. The adult learning approach shall include activities which need to be varied, open-ended and within a conducive study environment of the heritage field and experts. The vast experience and networking establishments gained from the industry as an urban designer and architect shall be a blend of the recent research experiential learning style such as application of software for simulations, case study, psychodrama, role play, short term training and internship. This blend of learning activities enriches the adult’s learning experience. Naturally, adult learners are volunteers in terms of learning mode; therefore, it is possible to include any fresh and new methods which enliven themselves with new experience and excitement.

1.3. Heritage Street’s Revitalization

Architectural conservation of individual heritage building within the ownership boundary does not help in terms of the overall heritage’s revitalization. The effort to enliven the whole cluster of the heritage area shall promote an overall urban design approach through creation of lively public places along the heritage street. Heritage streets’ revitalization is not limited to maintaining built heritage but also promoting the cultural heritage in order to enhance an inviting atmosphere. Prior to the real interview sessions which was conducted in March 2012 to May 2012; which involved face-to-face interviews; a pilot study was earlier conducted in August 2011. The pilot interviews were conducted in the selected commercial and historic street in Kuala Lumpur. The specific venue of the pilot study was in Jalan Doraisamy. The interview sessions were focused on the public end-users as
the interviewees only as part of the adult learners’ exercise to develop skills in interviewing. The selected audience was very much informal and based on heritage streets on-site convenient sampling. The sessions were conducted in a very conducive and relax mode to suit the public end-users’ level. Majority of the end users did not only assist the researcher with the answers but also give their feedback of the questionnaire design. For the pilot test of the questionnaire the sessions did not involve any high profile experts since the aim was to test the research instrument only. This is a real pilot study by all means to test the reliability, validity, lengths and structure of the questionnaire. The result and further discussion of this pilot study can be referred to at Samadi, Z. et al. (2012). The following figures present the existing heritage street (Fig.1) as compared to revitalized heritage street in Melaka as shown in Fig.2.

Fig.1. Day and Night view of heritage streets in Penang.

Fig.2. Night views of revitalized heritage streets in Melaka.

2. Methodology

In this research, the investigation of heritage streets’ revitalization enquiries required the application of triangulation method. Triangulation is the term given for the use of applied three angles of approach or qualitative method, literature and on-site observation/experiment i.e. triangular views to evaluate the findings. The first research approach is from the ‘producer’s’ angle which refers to the applied architect and urban designer’s methods of data collecting based on on-site observation/experiment. The second approach is conducting a public survey to end-users in which it is often discussed as obtaining on-site’s public views as a source of public participants. The third approach is collecting data from heritage experts from the local authority who acted as the heritage city controller which are the World Heritage Offices both in Penang and Malacca. Other experts included in the heritage expert/observers lists were academician from Universiti Teknologi MARA, Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) and Kementerian Kesenian dan Warisan (KEKWA). The researcher plays the role as an interviewer in conducting the research. The first two methods applied which are the technical part or
the hard skills as an architect and urban designers are not shared in this paper. Only the final method applied which is the psychological or soft skills through semi-structured face-to face interview with the expert is shared.

- First step: List of experts in heritage revitalization and limitation

A list of heritage experts, both international and local was made by the researcher throughout initial stage of the research which was done during the compilation of the literature review. Then, the list was evaluated to ensure that interview method success. Practicality, cost effectiveness, time constraints, opportunities and convenience are the most important factors in selecting the experts. Due to these limitations of cost, the list of experts is limited to local heritage observers and experts only. Prior to the interview sessions, a set of preliminary interview questionnaires was sent to the experts to give them enough preparation prior to the interview. This is done to ensure the success of the interview. All supporting materials were made available during the face-to face interview. During the real interview, the sessions were a memorable moment due to well-preparedness and win-win situation due to a meaningful info-sharing and interest update for both parties.

- Second step: Sampling and validating the expert list

Sampling is one of the most crucial parts in conducting research. Even though a list of local and international heritage experts was made, further information in terms of contact number, email addresses and university affiliation shall be included. This listing process becomes shorter because of the elimination of experts from the list due to incompleteness of their on-line information. The researcher has to off sample due to insufficient info. Even though there are many heritage experts recognized in this field, but online information and identification is essential. In this study, the sampling frame is limited to local heritage experts/observers with complete on-line contact information and actively producing on-line publication.

- Third step: Questionnaire Design

A questionnaire is a research tool or an instrument to measure the degree of accuracy of answers from interviewees. It is essential to design questionnaire to be readable, accessible, legible and simple to be completed. There are two important properties for the questionnaire design is reliability and validity. Depending on the type of data and the type of measurement that the researcher intends to get from the data collection the choice can be made from the range of questionnaires design in order to be quantitatively measured or qualitatively measured.

2.1. Questionnaires Design

The following Table 1 describes the design in composing a set of Questionnaires.
Table 1: Composing Different Scale of Questionnaires Design

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Whom do you ask?</td>
<td>Demographic Data.</td>
<td>Simple Factual.</td>
<td>% of frequency.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Nominal/Ordinal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Data.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| What is your preference?  
(Aim and objectives) | Rating Scale.          | Preference.      | % of Frequency Choice. |
|                      |                        | Likert scale (1-5,1-3). |                     |
| Who will benefit the answers?  
(Significance of Answer) | Producer/Controller/End User. | 3 options. | % of frequency of the Selected Options. |
| What is your opinion on...? | Support/Reject.        | Yes/No.          | % of Frequencies of Yes and No. |
| What is your stance in this argument?  

2.2. Questionnaire Lengths, Structure and Sample of Questionnaires.

The pilot test interview session was properly timed to begin and end within one hour per session for each interview. Besides that, there are advantages of having the pilot test prior to the real interview. The test provides opportunities for the researcher to improve the design of the questionnaire, re-evaluation and performances checking. The pilot provides an advantage to reduce the psychological stress or interviewing fright and further increase the confident level and interpersonal skills of interviewing.

Table 2: Sample of Semi-Structured Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>QUESTIONS FOR AN EXPERT.</th>
<th>ANSWER. (Additional Comments).</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>What is your profession in heritage?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>When you involve with revitalization project?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>What is your definition on revitalization?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>How do you think heritage revitalization is an important strategy?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Why do you revitalization is possible to be implemented in heritage street?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Where and When is heritage street ranking possibly to take place?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>What is active or passive shop front?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>What is the percentage of active shop front in any heritage street?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>When do you support revitalization effort on heritage street?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>What is your design principle for reviving heritage streets?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The questionnaire which was employed in this research as shown in the sample is the simplified version for the purpose of paper publication. The real question paper had a bigger space for annotation to allow the interviewers to scribble down during the interview process. The authors have chosen this type of questionnaire structure to demonstrate one type of questionnaire can elicit direct and factual answer but the interviewer can extend by asking the interviewee on their extra comments in order to gain more information. The additional notes may record on which particular project that the interviewee has involved previously. In answering question number six for example, the interviewee may want to share his/her idea on heritage streets rating that he heard and read before. The interviewee may share his/her own references to support his/her idea. Therefore, this type of preliminary questionnaires allows greater flexibility and less formal within the period of audio recording.

2.3. Questions Wording

In selecting a proper wording and language to be used in the questionnaire, the researcher had to identify the potential respondent’s language ability. Based on the researcher’s experience with the one-to-one interview sessions the public survey, in which only involved on-street end users, did not require the interviewees to fill up questionnaire on their own. The interviewers filled up the questionnaire based on the interviewee’s answers. The questionnaire also acted as semi-structured questionnaire for interviews session in which the questions are standardized and make simple for communicating purpose. No jargons were used and all wordings are kept simple and easy. However, the heritage experts’ interviews required high English proficiency with modification to break formality and to create comfort zones.

- Fourth step: Interviews Schedule and Conducting Interview

Once the pilot study was completed, the next stage of the research was conducting the interviews with heritage experts. Even though a preliminary set of questionnaire was sent to the interviewees; a printed set was made ready for the interview sessions. This action was considered necessary for the researcher’s psychological preparedness to meet the heritage experts. For this purpose, telephone appointments were arranged to re-confirm email appointments. During sessions in Penang in March, April and May 2012, nine personnel from Think City Office Sdn Bhd, Majlis Perbandaran Pulau Pinang (MPPP), George Town World Heritage Incorporation (GTWHI) and Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) were interviewed. The adult learners, who are also one of the researchers had to arrive a day early; luckily, all of the scheduled interviews were successfully conducted with full cooperation and professionalism. This session were audio recorded with permission and transcribed by the researcher for further coding processes.

3. General guidelines, ethics and one-to one interview

As a researcher it is advisable to avoid unprepared interview sessions. Prior to the interview sessions, the adult learner/researcher/cum interviewers had done an investigation on the interviewee’s personal and professional background. Ethically, with the heritage experts who are willing to share experience in handling, managing and sponsoring many conservation projects are highly appreciated.
The information on expert’s previous projects, career, novelty advice and interest has created a fruitful interview session. The interview normally starts with a short introduction. This is acts as ice breaking session and asking permission for audio-recording. By introducing the research topic, followed by step by step of the interview questionnaire had finally brought the session deeper into the final part of the semi-structured questionnaire and share a diversification of ideas.

The extra background information reading on the interviewee’s bio-data, extra curricula and recent hot issues on architectural heritage also helped in the liveliness of the interview sessions. The minimum duration of those interviews took about two hours and the longest one was completed in three and half hours. Before the end of each session, the researcher has acknowledged the interviewees with personal gifts such as a book and souvenirs as tokens of appreciation. The above given figures are some photos of the interview sessions with personnel from Majlis Perbandaran Pulau Pinang (MPPP) and staffs from Majlis Bandaraya Melaka Bersejarah (MBMB).

3.1. Transcriptions, Coding and Evaluation

The consecutive step after interview sessions was the transcription process. The researcher did the transcription task right after each interview to avoid procrastination in handling many audio recordings. Once the audio were manually turned into textual manner, other codings of similarity and pattern for evaluation purpose followed after completion of all interviews.

4. Result and Discussion

Since this is an on-going research, therefore this paper only shares the researcher’s experience in going through adult learning process. At this moment, the final output of the interview’s evaluation is still in progress. The literature provides secondary data in terms of unobtrusive research input in the initial stage of designing the interview questions. The on-site data collection and expert is considered as obtrusive research which involved interactive participant from participants/respondents. However, in this study only people are obtrusively selected
by the researcher were included and evaluated. The following figure shows the simplified approach in triangulation research process as experienced by the adult learner in her investigation of the heritage street’s revitalization.

![Fig.5. Multi-views deduction from the three main key-players in heritage revitalization’s field](image)

5. Conclusion

Any innovations of adult teaching and learning are not a universal remedy to solve the global educational lifelong learning processes. Even though interview is considered as one of the traditional ways of transmitting information and knowledge the process requires high interpersonal skills. The particular attention on verbal and body language during an interview is essential to maintain a positive communication throughout the session. The proper methods and ethics of questioning may bring in a new perspective for both the interviewer and interviewees. A diverse viewpoint from experts in promoting the new strategies of revitalization in heritage streets’ on how the reality of the on-site heritage street management including dealing with consultants, developer and controller has given a new insight to the adult learner. It is easier to say than to be done, but sharing experience can provide a sense of understanding and increase sensibility towards current issues. It has further develops an interest in the real heritage revitalization’s field. Besides that, the interviewing experience has improved professional link and collaboration with the heritage experts. Based on the recent interview experience, it is clear that verbal and body language is sensitive in different cultures, background and level of education. Learning how to communicate effectively through verbal and nonverbal cues has helped a lot in applying the interviewing skills to maintain our reputation and professionalism as an adult learner conducting research for a higher learning institution.

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