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Lifelong Learning: The Experiences of Malaysian School Teachers

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ABSTRACT

Lifelong learning has been closely related to the development of human capital from an economic perspective. The focus of this research study is the social and cultural motivating and facilitating factors that might have contributed to the life long learning experience as perceived by the interviewees. Fifteen participants, who have worked as educators or who are currently teaching in various educational settings, which include primary, secondary and tertiary levels, took part in this study. The themes that emerged, from a phenomenological in-depth qualitative interview approach, were analyzed using the constant comparison method. The findings reveal that the process of life long learning experience encompasses various stages, namely dissatisfaction, reflection, decision making, overcoming obstacles, and on-going growth. Both system support from a wider context and micro family support were found to be essential. Various facilitative factors from the local culture were revealed. A model of lifelong learning for school teachers was identified.

Keywords: Lifelong learning, lifelong learning experience, lifelong learning model, school teachers, motivation

INTRODUCTION

Higher tertiary education has been identified worldwide as an engine of economical growth (Brown & Lauder, 2003). Malaysia, aiming to become a developed and high income nation by the year of 2020, views education as a vital means to increase its human capital, thus higher education has been regarded as "catalysts for industry transformation" (PEMANDU, 2010). High amount of funds have been invested in education and it seems that a high return was obtained. The education sector has contributed close to RM27 billions or 4 percent of it Gross National Income in 2009 (Economic Transformation Programme, 2010).

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However, one of the main concerns in the higher education sector in Malaysia is the mismatch between education and the skills needed to meet the increasing demands of a forever changing environment (Kok & Tan 2011). Sulaiman and Burke (2009) found that skills development is needed to address the issues of unemployment among Malaysian graduates. Therefore both formal and lifelong education are needed in the development of human capital in order to keep skills relevant and the workforce competent. In order to facilitate the continued acquisition of knowledge and development of those skills in the world of work, the implementation of the concept of lifelong learning is essential, being beneficial for the development of individuals as well as society (Field, 2005).

Lifelong learning and human capital

This concept of lifelong education was initiated by UNESCO in 1965. Since then the development of adult education began to promote the extension of the education process throughout life. It advocated continuous learning (OECD, 1996), and highlighted the importance of knowledge and skills development throughout life (Europa, 2003). Jacques Delors, the President of the European Commission passionately promoted the "four pillars of lifelong education" in his introduction to "The necessary Utopia" (Delors, 1999). The four pillars of lifelong education include learning to know, learning to do, learning to be and learning to live together. He was of the opinion that education should be viewed in a broader context which includes interaction with society. As the purpose of education is to draw out "the treasure within" individuals and individuals are living within a community, the wider education such as its philosophy, learning climate, practices and the environment within which the individual learner is located should be viewed as a whole.

The dimension of "To Know" is inseparable from the dimension of "To Do", meaning, true knowledge will lead to behavioural change that should enhance occupational skills in the workforce. Furthermore, the dimension of "To Do" which involves engaging in activities, exhibiting behavioural change is bound to have effect on the dimension of "To Be", the learner's identity and the way he leads his life. This has been further described in terms of the development of personality that would enable a person to act with "greater autonomy, judgement and personal responsibility" (Lee, Chia & Nik Hasnaa, 2011). The emphasis on "To Live Together" reminds us that we live in a diverse society and in order to live harmoniously with others who are different from us, we need to learn to know them and to understand their culture, tradition and values. Lifelong learning has been used not only as a mean to cope with the challenges of a rapidly changing workplace in this post modern world which include "uncertainty, risk and insecurity" (Beck, 1992), but also as a way to teach individuals to live in appreciation of others. This concept encourages learners who engage in the lifelong learning process

to develop a positive attitude to diversity and differences so that they respect the values of pluralism, which is essential in this increasingly "globalized village".

In summary, the above mentioned four pillars of lifelong learning, the ultimate goal of lifelong learning experience, are not merely directed towards the betterment of self but also in the relationship with others.

Lifelong learning in Malaysia

Malaysia has adopted human capital theory as the dominant theory in lifelong learning. Developing human capital was one of the six main thrusts highlighted in the National Education Blueprint 2006-2010, and the human capital theory is closely related to economic development (PEMANDU, 2010; Tenth Malaysian Plan 2011-2015). A study by Ghebllawi and his associates (2011) have confirmed that the development of lifelong learning in Malaysia was largely initiated by the government and closely connected to employability and productivity. This is in line with the development in many countries (Aston & Sung, 2003; Coleman, 2003), where the promotion of lifelong learning is aimed at developing human capital and thus promoting a healthy economy (Peter, 2007). Hence, lifelong education is viewed as an investment for imparting economically useful knowledge and developing skills. However, Peter (2007) reminds us that lifelong learning should not be limited to its instrumental utility. Hence, this human capital theory may not sufficiently describe the notion of lifelong learning experienced by the lifelong learners. Firstly, the benefits of lifelong learning should not be limited to economic gains, as it is found that lifelong learning has many other benefits such as transformative and empowering effects on individuals (Bennetts, 2003), creation of wisdom, values, compassion and the construction of meanings (Ikeda, 2001). Secondly, there are challenges and obstacles to be overcome when learning is extended throughout life such as coping with fragile learning identities (Gallacher *et al*., 2002). Furthermore, adult learners are often faced with many challenges as they need to balance several social and family responsibilities while engaged in learning. Human capital theory does not address issues such as motivating, or facilitating factors in learning. Therefore this paper focuses on those elements of the external environment that serve as motivating factors that enable or facilitate learning.

Motivating and facilitating factors in lifelong learning

Motivation in learning has progressed from using a behavioural approach to focusing on students' needs (Brophy, 1983), and also on the effect on learning (Nisan & Shalif, 2006). The former uses rewards and punishments, whereas the latter focuses on intrinsic motivation. According to Deci and Ryan (1985, 2000), intrinsic motivation is largely based on the internalization of social expectation which arose from a social learning theory perspective (Bandura, 1977). Intrinsic motivation describes self-determined activities which seem to be innately a quality of a person which is

similar to the construct of 'locus of control' (Heider, 1960).

Maslow (1943) proposed a hierarchy theory of needs to explain human choices of behaviours. His "needs hierarchy theory" includes basic needs at the bottom and self-actualization at the top. According to this theory, taking up learning opportunities, be it formal or informal, could be understood as a means to fulfill the need to cope with challenges from the environment. In a constantly changing society, people tend to seek education in order to upgrade their knowledge and skills in order to cope with the challenges of work. All the above mentioned motivation theories basically have their foundation in the psychology of learners, and are relevant to lifelong learning, because research shows that motivation is essential for learning (Gallo & Ronaldo, 2011).

Cross (1981) proposed a chain-of-response (COR) model for lifelong learning. She held that learning activities should be viewed as series or a chain of behaviours or activities. The assumption of her model was that participants have an inner logic guiding them to various kinds of learning activities, "whether in organized classes or self-directed, is not a single act but the result of a chain of responses, each based on evaluation of the position of the individual in his or her environment" (Cross, 1981, pp. 125). She holds that a seven-stage process of adult learning is initiated from within and it involves the learner's own self-evaluation, attitude, motivation, life transitions, opportunities and barriers, information and decision making.

The model proposed by Cross advances our understanding of lifelong learning as it takes into consideration the internal processes involved, especially the effects of life events and transitions (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999; Ng, 2006).

However, both need approaches such as that of Maslow's and Cross's models have been criticized for being highly psychologically focused and for discounting the effects of the external environment. It was proposed that individuals could function in a lineal and unaffected manner regardless of the influences or impacts of their context or environment. The critics of those psychologically focused models nevertheless believe that because individuals live within a society, the interaction between environment and individuals is important.

Subsequently, building on Cross' model, Ng (2006) developed a complementary lifelong learning model which incorporates several sociological factors. While Cross started with self-evaluation, Ng started with the triggering factors, hence contributing to our understanding of the lifelong learning concept by adding on the antecedent sociological factors. Cross also suggested that self-evaluation is the triggering motivation of lifelong learning, while Ng argued that it is external sociological factors that trigger contemplation of learning. In short, Ng stresses that, since individuals live within a community, the context of the environment in which the individuals are located is important.

While there are many other models in lifelong learning, this paper focuses on the interaction between individuals and

the environmental motivators for learning, therefore Cross's and Ng's model will be preferred. This approach emphasizes the importance of environment and is supported by Vygotsky (1987). However, he also pointed out the need for learners to take responsibility for their own learning. While acknowledging the effect from the environment, individuals play an active role in learning to make it meaningful. It is not the issue of whether the triggering event or the contemplating mind is more important, rather it is the interaction between the two. Therefore, the intrinsic motivation can be triggered or enhanced through a positive response from the environment (Law *et al*., 2009).

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Drawing on the synthesis of Cross's and Ng's work, this research seeks to understand and discover the following from the participants:

1. The facilitating factors, both the external environmental and the micro perspectives, which might have contributed to their lifelong learning experiences.
2. The participants' common lifelong learning experiences.

METHODOLOGY

This is a qualitative phenomenological inquiry-oriented research study which focuses on in-depth narrative interviews to draw out the participants' stories (Seidman, 2006). Two researchers were involved in the data collection and data analysis processes. The purposive sampling method was used in recruiting fifteen research participants (seven males and eight females) who had engaged in lifelong learning experiences. The participants were recruited through snowball sampling and their ages ranged from 45to 65 years. All but two of the participants were interviewed two times, half an hour to two hours per participant. Since both researchers were over 50 years old, perhaps the participants felt quite comfortable interacting and mingling with the researchers as they both might be viewed as part of the group members who pursuing lifelong learning. Consequently, it was very easy and natural for them to engage in processes of disclosing their past, and talking about their present and the plan for the future. They were encouraged to explore their inner thinking and feeling through their sharing of their struggles or difficulties as they traveled in their learning journey. The commonality of all of the participants was that they either have worked as educators or are still working at various educational institutions at the time of interview. Two of the participants are retirees. One of the retirees is currently doing his Masters course while the other one had worked as a technician with a government agency and is now a foundation student. The next twelve participants are currently teaching in schools with six of them at elementary level and the other six at secondary level. The last two participants, on the other hand, are university lecturers, though they were secondary school teachers before.

Semi structured questionnaire was used during the interview with the participants. The participants' stories were recorded,

transcribed and further analyzed for common themes. The themes which emerged from this phenomenological qualitative interview approach were analyzed using the method suggested by Creswell (1998). Common themes from the verbatim responses were analyzed and constant comparison method was done in order to focus on the deep and lived experiences provided by the participants.

All the participants had given their consent for the interviews to be recorded as they were assured that their personal identity would be kept anonymous. In their sharing about their past experiences, they discovered how their decisions to participate in this learning journey have made impact in their lives and the lives of their significant others. This narrative approach of storytelling from a retrospective perspective is thus capable of producing social knowledge of qualitative aspects such as the meaning making process and of revealing patterns for the phenomenon under studies, thus "explains what is going on in this world" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967)

Data analysis followed rigorous constant comparison techniques developed by Strauss and Corbin (1998). Excerpts were quoted using the original spoken English of the participants without "tidying up " to retain the voice of the participants.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Motivating factors and various stages involved in the process of lifelong learning were uncovered.

(A) Motivating factors

Two overarching motivating factors (refer to diagram 1) were discovered in this study. One was the external support from the government (Ministry of Education) and the other was the micro and socio-contexts that have contributed to the participants' lifelong learning endeavors. From the participants' narrative accounts of their learning journeys, it is apparent that lifelong learning would not be possible without the macro supports from the system such as the NKRA scheme and the support of their family members, colleagues and friends.

Many participants mentioned the NKRA scheme, one of the strategic initiatives implemented in line with the 10th Malaysia Plan to upgrade all primary and secondary teachers to degree level. Consequently, there was a massive recruitment of teachers' into various degree programs starting in 2011.

> *"Most teachers are very happy to sign up as long as it is fully supported by the government, so I also signed up. There is an atmosphere of learning and we will car pool to attend course together"*
>
> (Female primary school science teacher, 18 years teaching experience from Skudai, Johor).

Other participants said:

> *"My parents help me to take care of young children during the weekends when I need to travel to another city to study."*
>
> (Female, primary school teacher, of 7 years teaching experience, from Ipoh)

> *"When I am not around, my husband helped me to oversee and supervise children doing homework, especially for my secondary school son. Without my husband's help, I will be torn apart."*
>
> (Female, primary school teacher, of 7 years teaching experience, from Ipoh)

(B) Process oriented with various stages

The findings show that the lifelong learning as experienced by these participants was process oriented with various stages, namely: dissatisfaction, reflection, decision making, overcoming obstacles, and on-going growth. The enabling and facilitating factors that prompted and supported their lifelong learning were revealed. A learning model was derived from these participants.

Stage One: Reflection and Evaluation

The narratives of the participants revealed that their lifelong learning experiences started with life reflection or life evaluation. The event that triggered off changes typically was a deep sense of dissatisfaction and unhappiness at some point of time in participants' lives. It was followed by some evaluation as participants reflected on their life experiences whereby:

(1) they compared their life with other people around them; (2) they felt bored with their work doing the same teaching chores, thus feeling a burning need for a change; (3) they were challenged by the rising demands of their jobs in term of new skills and competencies; (4) they were motivated to pursue a long hidden dream as they had felt that they had completed their family responsibilities or had reached a turning point in life such as retirement.

A few participants disclosed that they had compared their salaries with recent graduates who had just started teaching but are earning a higher salary. To date, the salary scale for non-degree holder teachers is DG29 to DG32, but a degree holder is on scale DG41, which is a big jump in terms of starting salary. Thus, their main motivation was to earn a better salary.

Turner (2002) summarized the experience of employees in the United Kingdom who had taken responsibility for their own learning and development in the phrase, "Lifelong learning equals to lifelong earning" which describes the job market reality that education is a way to social mobility and an increase in one's status and prosperity (Brown & Lauder, 2003).

Besides salary comparison with their colleagues, the demands of changes in workplace also played a role in their decision

to continue their study. The following are some of their statements:

> *"We have to update ourselves with abundant of knowledge, the world is changing."*
>
> *"I remember I felt really bored of day in and day out repeating the same teaching course. I was 38 years old then. I felt like I won't be able to bear such boring routine schedule if I were to continue teaching for 20 more years. I was looking for a change, something more challenging"*
>
> (Female, primary school Home Science teacher, 24 years of teaching experience, from Kulim, Kedah).

One participant signed up for a Masters course after his retirement.

> *"When I finally retired, I asked myself, what is next?"*
>
> (Male, 58, secondary school teacher, retired after 32 years of teaching, from Ipoh, Perak).

Stage Two: Opportunity and Decision Making

The decision making process for engaging in lifelong learning shows that the participants were motivated after a critical life review and they took action, responding positively to the opportunities available to them. Some of the important factors influencing their decision to return to education were better access to relevant information, good support network from family and friends, and attractive government incentives, and support system.

The financial support scheme from an eco-systemic environment, such as the NKRA scheme from the educational system mentioned earlier, is essential to motivate lifelong learning.

This participant grasped the opportunity available and made the decision to sign up a degree course:

> *"I signed up when I was 48 year old because I have to wait till all of my three children were in the secondary schools. Then the following year, new regulation for application of biasiswa (scholarship) had changed and was only available for those teaching staff under the age of 46. I was very lucky. But my colleagues commented that I won't be benefited much after my graduation as I was quite aged then. The whole degree course cost fifteen thousands, but with sponsorship, I only paid $120 per term and $360 per year. I would regret it very much if I never did it. It was like making up for the loss and pursuing my dream."*
>
> (Female, 53, primary school teacher with 33 years teaching experience, from Kampar, Perak).

The *biasiswa* mentioned above is a government scholarship provided to enable teachers to upgrade themselves in the

teaching profession. Due to the increase in salary scale from DG32 to DG 41, many of the participants were motivated by the monetary benefit. This particular participant had waited until three of her sons entered secondary schools before taking up this opportunity. With hindsight, she commented she was lucky as it was the last time that 48 year old applicants were accepted, as the policy changed in the subsequent year to limit the applicant's age to 46. Therefore responding quickly to the opportunity available was important.

Stage Three: Supports and Overcoming Obstacles

After the decision making stage, the participants' journey towards the completion of a four year degree course was not easy as all but one of the applicants were still holding full time teaching positions. Their challenges included having to balance their many responsibilities to families, children, and work. Occasionally, they questioned their own rationale for signing up for the courses. There were also times when some felt like giving up. However, the encouragement and support they received helped them to persevere until the completion of their studies.

One participant faced a two hour drive once a fortnight to another university (UTHM in Batu Pahat) which is more than 150 miles from her hometown in Johor Bahru. She felt that she had learnt to organize her time more effectively so that she could prepare lessons for her full-time teaching job, finish the course assignments on time, arrange for home-stay, and plan for the traveling time. Each course lasted for 10 weekends. She had classes from 8am to 10pm on Saturday, and 8am to 12pm on Sunday. It took perseverance as she usually had to stay up late to do her research and writing.

> *"But, it really is worth all the efforts. When I compare myself with other colleagues who have young children, who need to struggle to balance between family, career and studies, I consider myself fortunate."*
>
> (Female, 40, primary school science teacher, 18 years of teaching experience, from Skudai, Johor).

This realization occurred during her conversations with other colleagues. This participant considered herself to be lucky because she found out that some of her female colleagues with young children had a much harder struggle to manage their time.

It was found that women in this study have to overcome more obstacles to learning than did the male participants. Traditionally women deal with multiple roles and family tasks and therefore face more obstacles to learning.

> *"A group of supporting course-mates helps a lot. I need not drive since my other colleague is driving, so a group of us car-pool when travelling from Ipoh to Penang on alternate weekends".*

Besides overcoming the travel difficulties and sharing domestic tasks, elderly participants struggled with learning to utilize and be familiar with the modern information communication technology (ICT).

> *"As I am in my age of 60, so it was tough for me to use the modern information communication technology (ICT). But the young people in my class helped me a lot."*
>
> *"It was the younger classmates who did the assignment very fast using computer, but I was really slow."*

Information technology has transformed the way we learn and communicate with others. Elderly people may need help in adapting to these changes.

Soul searching question: "Why am I doing this?"

This is a very difficult question which kept confronting the participants. When facing with unceasing demands and challenges, the participants kept questioning their motives for their commitment to lifelong learning.

> *"I felt guilty sometimes, as I was not there for my children, to supervise them for their school work".*
>
> (Female, 50, primary school Home Science teacher, 24 years of teaching experience).

Negative comments from loved ones made participants think hard. Those moments of reflection and critical soul searching enhanced the decision to study.

> *"My wife once told me 'Stop doing all those study and examination. It is our children turn now and our time is over'. When I finished my MA, she said, 'So what?' Those negative comments motivated me a lot. I wanted to show and let people know, I can do it."*
>
> (Male, 65, Assistant Professor, retired from government sector, administrative position in a private university, from Perak).

Another participant had gone through a process of self doubt. She asked herself some soul searching questions, and eventually she realised that it was her need for self-improvement that sustained her through the difficult process.

> *"It was a great challenge for me. Alternate weekends, I had to attend my tutorial classes which were from 9am to 5pm. There were assignments and examinations. It was very stressful. At times I felt like giving up, and I kept asking myself why do I commit myself to such a task I am no longer young?"*
>
> (Female, 50, Secondary school teacher, 27 years of teaching experience, Ipoh, Perak).

Postponement and temporary exit

Two of the female participants waited for their children to enter secondary school before signing up for a degree course. But by that time they are already in their mid and late forties. A male participant postponed his studies due to work commitments which required him to travel extensively.

> *"I have to postpone the idea of study. After my full retirement I have more time and financially stable I felt that it is time for me to pursue my dream for tertiary education."*
>
> (Male, 65, Consultant in Malayan Employer Association, from Kuala Lumpur).

More female than male participants postponed their studies because of family responsibilities, especially taking care of young children. Postponement among male participants was mainly due to the heavy work load of their jobs and their responsibility for family finances. However, they finally got to return to studies. They described the return to studies as pursuing a "dream".

> *"And now I have more time and financially stable I felt that it is time for me to pursue my dream for tertiary education."*
>
> (Male, 65, Consultant in Malayan Employer Association, from Kuala Lumpur).

> *"I waited till my children have gone to the university. And 3 years ago I decided to uproot my family from Alor Star to Kampar to pursue my dreams for a university education."*
>
> (Male, 65, Foundation student at UTAR, 32 years working experience as technician in Drainage and Irrigation Department of Ministry of Public Services).

One of the participants who was 65 and currently a lecturer in a private university, said he was like "a little boy who always enjoys study" so his dream never ceased and eventually he got his PhD degree when he was 64.

Role model

There were a few participants who felt that they were encouraged by some role models around them and after taking up the learning process, they themselves hoped to be role models for others.

> *"I remember there was one assignment, my other classmates took only an hour to complete while I sat there for 5 hours. It was a new subject for me, I really put my focus down on that subject, I told myself if they could do it, I also can do it. Since I was a matured students, I didn't want just get a pass, I wanted to be a role model for my own children."*
>
> (Primary school teacher, 26 years of teaching experience).

She herself was inspired by a sixty-year old former headmaster whom she met in the university. He looked quite elderly with grey hair and he hoped to pursue a PhD after a degree course. All of his children graduated from university and he was a "free man" in his golden age. With a lot of time, he was pursuing a high degree. After speaking with him, she concluded, "We should not put a full-stop to learning."

Another mother shared:

> *"I felt that I am so fortunate to do assignments together with my teenage son. Every night he studies for his examination and I also busy with my home work. He cannot complain because I am also doing the same."*
>
> (She has 20 years teaching experience and she is teaching in a secondary school in Perak state).

Stage Four: On-going Growth

When asked in what ways they have benefited from this learning process, the participants said that they had gained new knowledge and learnt new teaching strategies that could be applied in the work place. Most mentioned they were happy because the last pay drawn before their retirement would affect the amount of the pension they could look forward to. Most importantly, they were proud to have the recognition of having completed a degree course. It showed that they had done something significant in their lives. Besides, they also shared that they had become very different people; more confident, daring to take risks and able to perform better at work, more competent, and able to face other challenges in their lives.

> *"Previously I wanted to stay in my comfort zone, but now I have grown a lot and more confident to take on new courses. I feel that I am more equipped and feel very much refreshed to teach the students."*
>
> (Female, 50, primary school Home Science teacher, 24 years of teaching experience).

This lifelong learning journey was found to be transformative and rewarding (Kok & Low, 2011). While not meant for drawing generalizations, the following diagram of the learning model serves to describe the overall lifelong learning experience of the participants which encompassed various stages as a result of interaction with the environment:

The diagram (Fig.1) presents a visual summary of the findings.

DISCUSSION

Environmental motivating factors in lifelong learning, both the macro and micro will be discussed in this section. Interpersonal relationships were found to be a motivational factor in the complex process of lifelong learning.

Environmental motivating factors

The facilitating factors found in this study confirm previous research findings on the

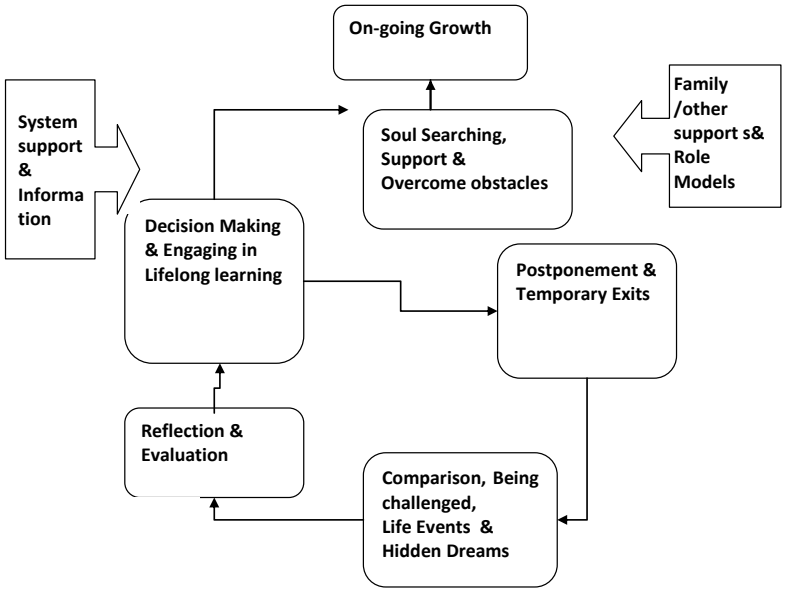

Fig.1: Lifelong learning model derived from school teachers

importance role of motivation from the environment (Pan, 1977; Law *et al*., 2009) which has its theoretical framework from Bronfenbrenner (1979) where family, and community play a role in learning. The similar pattern in the learning process also highlighted the relational aspect in learning. Just as Cross (1981) conceptualized lifelong learning as a chain of activities instead of a single isolate event, the findings of this research found that lifelong learning should be conceptualized from a large community. What actually constitutes lifelong learning is a complex process and should not be viewed from personal and individualized perspectives.

Traditionally, motivation theories were constructed on a two dichotomy extreme, which is either intrinsic or extrinsic classification. The former depicts a motivational construct that is driven from within and seen as a preferred way of learning compared to the latter which is seen as being driven by external rewards. The findings of this study reject the above simplistic dichotomy classification, as it was evidently found that there was complex interactions between individuals and the environment. It was found that most of the participants rose to the occasion when challenged by external environmental factors. Both the presence of challenges and supports were found. Challenges include the demands from work and coping with the forever changing environment. The environmental supports include the macro (NKRA scheme initialed by Malaysian government) and micro aspects (practical help from the immediate family and friends). On one hand reflecting upon and making the

decision to engage in lifelong learning is intrinsic, on the other hand, learning may not be possible without the environmental supports from both the macro and micro system These supports facilitate and sustain learning, help the learners to overcome obstacles to learning. Therefore, it would not be correct to attribute the learning solely to external rewards even in the cases that participants were motivated by a rise in salary as there was a complex interaction between individuals and environment which involved meaning making process (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006; Ikeda, 2001).

Interpersonal relationships: a complex of interactive processes in learning

Lifelong learning is viewed as a contested concept, compounded by multi-dimensional aspects; neither simple dichotomy classifications nor theories of linear construction can sufficiently explain its complex learning process. Bandura (1977) has rightly located the complex learning process in a social context, whereas many psychological motivational construct that derived from Maslow's approach (1943), such as locus of control and intrinsic motivation theory approach (Heider, 1960) will be individualised focused. Coffield (2000) criticized a pure psychological motivational construct as being a lack of interpersonal relationships. When examining closely the common lifelong learning patterns of the participants presented in this study, the relational aspect was found to be heavily loaded with emotions. There was a strong sense of human bonds and support in the experience of lifelong learning as revealed by the participants. Firstly it was due to comparisons with colleagues that the participants felt frustrated and dissatisfied; the postponement of learning was caused by social and family responsibilities; the facilitating factors that enable and sustain learning also came from the family and learning communities, from colleagues and friends; role models were also available from the context within which the individuals interacted. Lastly, the self-identity of the learners was transformed (Gallacher *et al*., 2002).

Gallo and Ronaldo (2011) acknowledged the limitation of intrinsic motivation theories and hold that the extrinsic motivators in learning are important. Hazidi and Hamid (2011) who conducted research on the motives of in-service teachers pursuing a bachelor degree on teaching programs also found that the study's participants had given similar answers such as "being left behind" "feel pressured" "was forced to get ready". Those answers were the consequence of their response to changes in their environment. Ng's research findings (2006) have showed that interaction triggered life reflection, which subsequently facilitate the decision to engage in lifelong learning. Socio-cultural and contextual factors indeed play important roles in motivating and supporting lifelong learning (Law *et al*., 2009). Those emotions were the result of complex interaction processes with the people in the environment. The role of emotions arising from the interpersonal relationship that promote and sustain lifelong learning cannot be undermined.

LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

This research has some limitations. First, it is not meant as a generalization, the model presented reflects only the common pattern of learning experiences of a handful of high status professional people who engaged in formal education. There are many people outside the government sector or educational system who are not qualified to apply for sponsorship for formal education. They may want very much to fulfill their long felt education needs and ambitions, but do not have the money to fund learning. Their learning experience may be different. Second, the factors gathered in the research may be situational; dependent on the context of the research. It revealed values from the support system of Malaysia, a collectivist context where family support normally is valued.

Field (2000) has highlighted the phenomenon that few opportunities were presented for unskilled workers and this may create new inequalities. It is hoped that similar learning opportunities can be expanded to people from a wider range of social backgrounds to develop a learning community and society (Gorard & Rees, 2002).

CONCLUSION

The findings of this research highlighted the motivational aspects of lifelong learning which were absent from an economic or human capital approach. It also highlights the importance motivational factors from the environment. Both the macro and micro supports are needed to facilitate and sustain lifelong learning. Motivation for lifelong learning would include the aspect of complex interpersonal interactions.

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