

Lifelong Learning for Personal and Professional Development in Malaysia

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Abstract

The study examined economic and non-economic benefits of non-formal lifelong learning for participants. A survey of 1,923 participants of non-formal lifelong learning programmes offered by six ministries in Malaysia showed that 50% participated in programmes that are related to the jobs and 50% participated in non job-related programmes. In the category of job-related lifelong learning programmes, participants of technical skills-based programmes are the most likely to enjoy salary increment and promotion. For others, the employment benefits are in the form of additional opportunities for training and increased job responsibilities. Besides bringing about personal development, non job-related lifelong learning programmes also endowed participants with useful skills and knowledge to earn additional income, get a job, and set up small businesses. For lifelong learning programmes to bring about better economic returns, the findings indicate that the programmes need to be structured based on skill levels (basic to advanced) and market surveys need be conducted to determine industry needs.

Keywords: non-formal lifelong learning, economic returns, personal development, professional development

Introduction

Lifelong learning refers to learning throughout life. Lifelong learning is not restricted to learning in formal education systems and includes vocational learning as well as “learning leading to self-development or self-actualisation” (Cropley, 1980, p. 2). This means that self-directed learning activities are pursued not only for professional development but also for personal development. In this paper, lifelong learning for professional development is defined as learning of new skills and knowledge for the purpose of career advancement whereas personal development encompasses personal growth in self-esteem, knowledge and skills as well as networking.

Adult learning, a synonym for lifelong learning more commonly used in Europe, is conceptualised as having six characteristics: (1) voluntary participation; (2) respect for self-worth; (3) collaboration; (4) praxis [practice]; (5) fostering of a spirit of critical reflection; and (6) an aim of nurturing self-directed, empowered adults (Brookfield, 1985). In countries like the United States and Australia, lifelong learning is also referred to as continuing education. For example, the Institute of Continuing and TESOL Education at the University of Queensland offers academic, technical and vocational programmes of two to seven weeks for international students and professionals (The University of Queensland, 2015). Vocation-related training tends to be prioritised by policy makers in allocation of resources (Tight, 1998a, 1998b) and the focus is on the returns from the investment in lifelong learning (Cohn & Addison, 1998; Jenkins, Vignoles, Wolf, & Galindo-Rueda, 2003). However, in recent years, employers in Scotland have changed their priority from supporting lifelong learning to apprenticeship (Lowe & Gayle, 2015).

Benefits of lifelong learning

Lifelong learning enables individuals to acquire useful skills which increase their employability. This is one of the main findings of Jenkins et al.'s (2003) study. The data for this study were drawn from the National Child Development Study conducted in Great Britain. The 5,127 respondents in Jenkins et al.'s study were tracked