Faculty of Cognitive Science and Human Development

INFORMAL WORKPLACE LEARNING AMONG NOVICE TEACHERS:
A STUDY IN KUCHING DIVISION, SARAWAK

Ki Yen Ping

Master of Science
(Human Resource Development)
2010
INFORMAL WORKPLACE LEARNING AMONG NOVICE TEACHERS:
A STUDY IN KUCHING DIVISION, SARAWAK

Pembelajaran tidak formal di tempat kerja di kalangan guru pemula:
Satu kajian di Daerah Kuching, Sarawak

KI YEN PING

A Research Paper Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for
the Degree of Master of Science (Human Resource Development)

Faculty of Cognitive Science and Human Development
UNIVERSITY MALAYSIA SARAWAK
2010
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

First and foremost, I would like to offer my sincerest gratitude to my supervisor, Associate Professor Dr. Hong Kian Sam for the valuable guidance and advice. He inspired me throughout my project with his patience and knowledge. His willingness to motivate me contributed tremendously in producing this project paper.

Special thanks to the Dean of the Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development, Dr. Shahren Ahmad Zaidi Adruce and Dr. Hasbee Hj. Usop, the Deputy Dean for Research and Postgraduate Studies, for their support and encouragement. My sincere thanks also go to all my lecturers at the Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development, University Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS).

In addition, I would like to express my highest appreciations to the school principals of SMK Tunku Abdul Rahman, SMK Petra Jaya, SMK DPH Abdul Ghapor, SMK Green Road, SMK Sungai Maong, SMK Matang Jaya, SMK Matang Hilir, SMK Kuching High, SMK Semerah Padi, SMK Jalan Arang, SM Teknik Kuching and SMK Batu Lintang. Their willingness to assist in the data collection process at their respective schools has helped in the completion of this
project. I would also like to thank all the teachers from these schools who participated in this research.

Finally, I would like to dedicate this project paper to my parents, family members and course mates with love. Without their supports, valuable feedbacks and persistent help, this research would not have been possible. In conclusion, thank you to all who had contributed directly and indirectly in helping me to complete this study.
ABSTRACT

INFORMAL WORKPLACE LEARNING AMONG NOVICE TEACHERS:
A STUDY IN KUCHING DIVISION, SARAWAK

The purpose of this study was to investigate the types of informal learning activities that the novice teachers in Kuching Division engaged in at work and the level of novice teachers’ engagement in informal learning activities. More specifically, this study explored the individual and organizational factors affecting novice teachers’ engagement in informal learning activities, the relationship between level of informal learning engagement and organizational culture in school, and the differences in the level of novice teachers’ engagement in informal learning activities based on gender. This study was a cross-sectional survey research. A total of 85 usable questionnaires were returned out of 100 questionnaires distributed to the randomly selected novice teachers from ten schools in Kuching Division. Findings in this study showed that novice teachers were only moderately involved in workplace informal learning activities. The findings also showed moderate but significant positive relationship between school culture and the level of informal learning engagement among novice teachers. However, there was no significant difference between males and females novice teachers in the level of engagement in workplace informal learning. In addition, the findings also indicated that novice teachers learnt most frequently from their own
trial and error activities. Novice teachers’ informal learning activities were mostly influenced by their interest in the current professional field and job environment. The findings of this study including the various activities and factors that influence informal learning engagement are useful to human resource development practitioners for prioritizing informal learning interventions. Furthermore, there is currently little local empirical research on the individual learning and learning organization concept. Thus, this research can also address the gap especially through its findings on the relationship between informal learning engagement level and organizational learning culture in school.
ABSTRAK

PEMBELAJAAN TIDAK FORMAL DI TEMPAT KERJA DI KALANGAN GURU PEMULA: SATU KAJIAN DI DAERAH KUCHING, SARAWAK

Tujuan kajian ini adalah untuk meninjau jenis aktiviti pembelajaran tidak formal yang guru pemula di Daerah Kuching mengambil bahagian semasa bekerja dan tahap penglibatan mereka dalam aktiviti pembelajaran tidak formal. Secara khususnya, kajian ini menerokai faktor-faktor individu dan organisasi yang mempengaruhi penglibatan guru pemula dalam pembelajaran tidak formal, hubungan antara tahap penglibatan guru dalam pembelajaran tidak formal dengan budaya organisasi di sekolah dan perbezaan antara tahap penglibatan guru pemula dalam pembelajaran tidak formal berdasarkan jantina. Kajian ini berbentuk kajian survei keratan-rentas. Sebanyak 85 soal selidik yang lengkap telah berjaya dikutip balik daripada 100 soal selidik yang diedarkan kepada guru-guru pemula yang dikenal pasti secara rawak dari sepuluh buah sekolah menengah di Daerah Kuching. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa tahap penglibatan guru pemula dalam aktiviti-aktiviti pembelajaran tidak formal adalah sederhana. Hasil kajian juga menunjukkan bahawa terdapat hubungan signifikan yang sederhana positif antara budaya sekolah dengan tahap penglibatan guru pemula dalam pembelajaran secara tidak formal. Akan tetapi, hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa tidak wujud perbezaan yang signifikan antara lelaki dan wanita dari segi tahap penglibatan guru
pemula dalam pembelajaran tidak formal. Tambahan lagi, hasil kajian juga menunjukkan bahawa guru pemula paling kerap belajar melalui aktiviti-aktiviti “cuba dan jaya”. Aktiviti pembelajaran tidak formal sering dipengaruhi oleh minat guru pemula terhadap bidang pekerjaan yang diceburi. Dapatan kajian merangkumi pelbagai aktiviti dan faktor yang mempengaruhi penglibatan guru pemula dalam pembelajaran tidak formal amat berguna untuk pengamal pembangunan sumber manusia bagi merancang aktiviti intervensi pembelajaran secara tidak formal. Tambahan lagi, kajian empirikal dalam konteks tempatan tentang pembelajaran individu dan konsep organisasi pembelajaran adalah terhad. Kajian ini dapat mengatasi jurang tersebut terutamanya dengan dapatan kajian tentang hubungan antara tahap penglibatan guru pemula dalam pembelajaran tidak formal dengan organisasi budaya pembelajaran di sekolah.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgement</td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstrak</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table of Contents</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Tables</td>
<td>xii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Figures</td>
<td>xiii</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Chapter One: Introduction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.0 Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Background of the Study</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Research Problem</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 Research Objectives</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4 Research Questions</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5 Research Hypotheses</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.6 Conceptual Framework</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.7 Significant of the Study</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.8 Limitations of the Study</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.9 Definitions of Terms</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.9.1 Learning</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter Two: Literature Reviews

2.0 Introduction 20

2.1 Learning 20

2.1.1 Learning Theories 23

2.2 Informal Workplace Learning 24

2.2.1 Types of Informal Learning Activities 27

2.3 Factors Affecting Informal Workplace Learning 31

2.4 Informal Workplace Learning Among Novice Teachers 36

2.5 Effect of Organizational Culture on Informal Workplace Learning 40

2.6 Summary 45

Chapter Three: Research Methodology

3.0 Introduction 46

3.1 Research Designs 46
Chapter Four: Results

4.0 Introduction 54
4.1 Reliability Analysis 54
4.2 The Respondents’ Demographics 56
4.3 Types of Informal Learning Activities 57
4.4 Level of Novice Teachers’ Engagement in Informal Workplace Learning Activities 59
4.5 Individual Factors Affecting Informal Workplace Learning Engagement 59
4.6 Organizational Factors Affecting Informal Workplace Learning Engagement 61
4.7 Relationship between Level of Informal Learning Engagement and Organizational Culture 62
4.8 Informal Workplace Learning’s Culture 65
4.9 Differences in the Level of Novice Teachers Engagement in Informal Learning Activities based on Gender

4.10 Summary

Chapter Five: Discussions and Conclusions

5.0 Introduction

5.1 Summary of Research

5.2 Discussions of Findings

5.2.1 Types of Informal Learning Activities that the Novice Teachers Engaged in at Work

5.2.2 Level of Novice Teachers’ Engagement in Informal Workplace Learning Activities

5.2.3 Individual Factors Affecting Informal Workplace Learning Engagement

5.2.4 Organizational Factors Affecting Informal Workplace Learning Engagement

5.2.5 Relationship between Level of Informal Learning Engagement and Organizational Culture

5.2.6 Differences in the Level of Novice Teachers Engagement in Informal Learning Activities based on Gender

5.3 Implications of the Study

5.4 Recommendations for Future Research

5.5 Conclusions
References 82

Appendix 1 Letter to Respondents 94

Appendix 2 Survey Questionnaire 98
## LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2.1</th>
<th>Key Features of a Learning Organization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table 3.1</td>
<td>Research Samples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3.2</td>
<td>Results of Pilot Study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3.3</td>
<td>Data Analyses Used in the Study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.1</td>
<td>Reliability Analyses Results of the Questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.2</td>
<td>Demographics of the Respondents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.3</td>
<td>Responses of Types of Informal Learning Activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.4</td>
<td>Responses of Individual Factors Affecting Informal Workplace Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.5</td>
<td>Responses of Organizational Factors Affecting Informal Workplace Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.6</td>
<td>Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test of Normality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.7</td>
<td>Interpretation of the ‘r’ Value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.8</td>
<td>Pearson Correlation Analysis Results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.9</td>
<td>Responses of Informal Workplace Learning’s Culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.10</td>
<td>Differences in the Level of Novice Teachers Engagement in Informal Learning Activities based on Gender</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1  Research Framework of the Study

Figure 2.1  Model for Transfer of Learning

Figure 2.2  Relationship between Teachers’ Action Level, Mental Level, and Changes in Behaviour in Informal Workplace Learning Activities
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the study, comprising of the background of the study, problem statement, research objectives, research questions, research hypotheses, research framework, significance of the study, limitations of the study, and the definition of terms.

1.1 Background of the study

Teachers play an important role in the development of human capital as Malaysia strives to achieve a knowledge-based economy by the year 2020 (Hariati Azizan & Chew, 2007). The Educational Development Master Plan (PIPP) aims to bring about a new era of education reform and to develop the country education system to attain a world class standard. To achieve this aim, one of the strategic steps is to increase quantity and quality of its teachers (Yaacob Wan Ibrahim, 2007).
Improvement in students’ learning is undoubtedly dependent on the curricular and instructional competencies of teachers (Malakolunthu, 2005). McLagan (1999) states that school teachers of today face far greater pressures and uncertainty than ever before.

According to Syed Azizi Wafa, Ramayah, and Tan (2003), a country’s nation building process and success depends on its teachers. Teachers are valuable human resources that a country should invest in effort to mould and nurture the young minds of the nation. Undeniably, it is the teachers who make a difference, regardless of how good the curriculum, infrastructure or teaching aids are. The United States of America in its No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 ensures that the nation put in place high quality professional development for its teachers (Borko, 2004).

However, for most novice teachers, the first few years of teaching are a “sink or swim” experience. Novice teachers who are less confident may be lived in frustration and depression, leading to decision to leave the profession. In fact, nearly half of all new teachers leave teaching within the first five years (Boles & Troen, 2002). A novice teacher may find himself or herself having a lack of opportunities for professional learning opportunities due to a lack of time, lack of proximity to learning resources, lack of meaningful rewards for learning and limited decision-making power (Lohman, 2000). This problem is compounded by complaints of teachers burdened with increasing paper works.
A step towards developing teachers’ quality is through continuous professional development of teachers (Fullan, 1991; Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996). However, the opportunities for formal professional learning may be limited in the teaching profession, workplace informal learning is a crucial mode of learning for teachers, especially novice teachers. Organizations can achieve their ongoing change goals and visions through workplace learning. Workplace learning in an organization can be classified as either formal or informal. It has been reported that 80 percent of the learning in organizations is informal (Cross, 2007). A learning workplace exposes teachers to actual practice rather than to simply descriptive of practice on the wall. It involves opportunities for observation, deliberate evaluation and feedback by expert teachers. Teacher professional development is essential to develop a school (Borko, 2004).

Formal learning is defined as learning based on direct instruction in which learners engage in lectures, discussions, simulations, role-plays and other structured activities. These activities are based on specific learning objectives and are designed to enable learners to master predetermined outcomes (Enos, Kehrhan, & Bell, 2003). Informal learning refers to activities initiated by people in work settings that result in the development of their professional knowledge and skills. Informal learning can be either planned or unplanned and structured or unstructured. Examples of informal learning are talking and sharing resources with others, searching the internet, and experimenting with new techniques or tools (Cofer, 2000; Lohman, 2000).
Cheetham and Chivers (2005) believe that informal learning exists in the workplace through implicit process that leads to the acquisition of knowledge without consciousness or any explicit awareness but it is really helps in teachers’ decision making process. Traditionally, teacher educators assumed that teaching skills are learned through formal training programs. Nevertheless, research showed that many teachers’ job skills are learned on the job through informal methods (Enos, Kehrhan, & Bell, 2003). Eraut (2004) too found that informal support from people in the workplace was more important to the beginner than help from formally designated mentors. Interestingly, he also reported that the corridor as a formal space in the school as workplace is also a space for informal learning occurs among new teacher. Teachers engaged in informal learning their first year on the job. They also declared that learning skills informally helped them maintain their own personal and emotional balance.

1.2 Research Problem

With the current rapid development in Malaysia, the expectations on teachers in educating the nation’s children is increasing and workplace learning among teachers in the teaching profession is becoming ever more critical. However, not much is known on the Malaysian novice teachers’ awareness of their work environments from the point of view of learning (Krauss & Khaw, 2008).
Novice teachers are limited by their inadequacy of background experiences as educators (Meyer, 2004). According to Rich and Almozlino (1999), expertise and experience are not identical but experience is a necessary component of expertise. Novice teachers lack of experiences to organize their thinking into useful constructs to predict future events (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1993). The teacher turnover problem has seriously affects beginner teachers despite the fact that the rate is high for the entire teaching occupation. This field has always lost lots of newly trained teachers early in their careers, long before their retirement years (Johnson & Birkeland, 2003; Lortie, 1975; Murnane, Singer, Willet, Emple, & Olsen, 1991).

Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner (2007) state that more than 90 percent of adults are engaged in hundreds of hours of informal learning. It has also been estimated that although billions of dollars are spent each year on formal training programs, great majority of learning in the workplace is still informal.

Previous studies on informal workplace learning in other fields tend to attempt to develop greater understanding of the types of work-based informal learning activities and contextual factors that can promote or inhibit informal learning (Boud & Middleton, 2003; Ellinger & Bostrom, 1999; Ellstrom, 2001; Kwakman, 2003; Lohman, 2000). However, less study were conducted to investigate how certain characteristics of employees and work environment influence engagement in specific informal learning activities. This is a critical area
of investigation in conjunction with the growing reliance on informal learning as the main criteria in developing the knowledge and skills needed to handle increasingly complex and ambiguous problems in workplace effectively (Doombos, Bolhuis, & Simon, 2004).

Informal learning is an ill-defined concept that lack theoretical foundation and the literature on this topic is patchy (Joe, Sarah, Marta, Claire, & Elliot, 2000). Methods and indicators for measuring the conditions that are conducive to informal learning are seriously under developed. This is due to lack of current theories of workplace learning and not enough frameworks on informal learning. Most of the studies are qualitative in nature and limited to specific organizations or occupations (Skule, 2004). Informal learning is largely invisible since it is either taken for granted or not recognized as learning. Thus, employees seem to lack of awareness of their own learning (Eraut, 2004).

The development of teacher communities is a difficult and time consuming work (Grossman, Wineburg, & Woolworth, 2001; Stein, Smith, & Silver, 1999). Teachers’ involvement in informal learning is inhibited by four aspects of their work environment, which are lack of time for learning, lack of proximity to learning resources, lack of meaningful rewards for learning and limited decision-making power (Lohman, 2000). Recent studies have provided some insights on the informal
learning experiences of teachers but the degree of generalizability of the findings to all public school teachers is low (Lohman, 2006).

There is always a wide gap between educational theory on best teaching practices and the practical application of these methods in school classrooms. Nowadays, teachers are required to teach more content and subjects with greater numbers of students having emotional, social, and learning problems. In addition to teaching responsibilities, the decentralization of decision making in school requires teachers to play an increasingly active role in the management and operation of schools. These changing role expectations have resulted in many new learning needs for teachers, especially novice teachers to engage in informal learning (Berg & Yonnie, 2008).

Due to the importance of informal learning in workplace and responding to a need to examine novice teachers who always deal with ambiguous in their profession, this quantitative study was carried out to explore informal workplace learning among novice teachers in Malaysia and the impact of gender and school culture on informal workplace learning.
1.3 Research Objectives

The main aim of the study was to identify the nature of informal learning and how it took place in secondary school setting among novice teachers. Specifically, this study aimed at:

i) identifying the types of informal learning activities that the novice teachers engaged in at work,

ii) determining the level of novice teachers’ engagement in informal workplace learning activities,

iii) identifying the individual factors affecting novice teachers engagement in informal learning activities,

iv) identifying the organizational factors affecting novice teachers engagement in informal learning activities,

v) examining the relationship between level of informal learning engagement among novice teachers and organizational culture in school, and

vi) identifying the differences in the level of novice teachers engagement in informal learning activities based on gender.
1.4 Research Questions

Therefore, this study attempted to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: What were the types of informal learning activities that the novice teachers engaged in at work?

RQ2: What was the level of novice teachers’ engagement in informal workplace learning activities?

RQ3: What were the perceived individuals factors that affected novice teachers’ engagement in informal learning?

RQ4: What were the perceived organizational factors that affected novice teachers’ engagement in informal learning?

RQ5: Was there a relationship between level of informal learning engagement among novice teachers and organizational culture in school?

RQ6: Was there any difference in the level of novice teachers engagement in informal learning activities based on gender?

1.5 Research Hypotheses

Research questions 1, 2, 3 and 4 were descriptive in nature. Research questions 5 and 6 on the other hand were reflected in the following research hypotheses.