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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

from the time they were 7 years old. The data used for analysis were from the 1991 and 2000 surveys when the respondents were 33 and 42 years old respectively. The findings showed that male respondents who left school earlier had a higher likelihood of finding jobs if they participated in lifelong learning programmes but other respondents were hardly rewarded with salary increments despite their participation in lifelong learning programmes. Jenkins et al. were of the view that in the 1990s, Great Britain had not promoted lifelong learning as a means to improve the economic situation of individuals and the respondents might have joined lifelong learning programmes for personal enjoyment or to fulfil requirements by their organisation rather than to obtain work-related benefits.

Nevertheless, other researchers have found that lifelong learning brings about work-related benefits. Similar to Jenkins et al. (2003), Rothes, Lemos, and Goncalves (2014) found that lifelong learning is more likely to benefit unemployed male respondents with a lower level of education in Portugal. These respondents were more extrinsically motivated to participate in lifelong learning programmes as they believed that they would improve in their work status and economic situation. However, their dropout rate was high. Rothes et al.'s (2014) study involved 310 adult students registered in three types of courses: short courses (50-175 hours), vocational courses (1-2.5 years) and non-vocational courses (4 years). These findings concur in showing that the skills and knowledge acquired from lifelong learning programmes can enhance employment prospects for the respondents who fall into the category of unskilled workers (see also Daehlen & Ure, 2009; Konrad, 2005). Consistent with this, older adults above 45 years old are more inclined to believe that they would not derive much benefits from participating in lifelong learning programmes and they also receive less support from their organisation to participate in these programmes (Kyndt, Michielsen, Van Nooten, Nijs, & Baert, 2011). Since younger individuals are more likely to benefit from lifelong learning, they make up a larger proportion of the participants of lifelong learning programmes. Most of the programmes are vocation-related and participants are motivated by hopes of using the newly acquired skills and knowledge for employment purposes (Awuor & Parks, 2015; Lowe & Gayle, 2015).

Besides lifelong learning for employability, lifelong learning can be beneficial for personal growth. An example of personal growth resulting from lifelong learning is improved self-esteem, and individuals with a higher level of education are more likely to value this than those with a lower level of education (Berker & Horn, 2003). Besides gains in self-esteem, older adults who have worked and return to pursue higher education reported acquisition of new competencies, developing pre-acquired competencies, developing adaptation skills and career progression – all of which are associated with professional benefits (Ambrósio, Sá, & Simões, 2014). However, the 195 adult students pursuing university degrees in Public Administration, Languages and Business Relations, and Information Technology in a Portuguese university also valued their personal development in terms of learning new languages.

Benefits of lifelong learning for older adults who have retired from active work takes on a different meaning. Many of the recent studies on lifelong learning in developed countries revealed that lifelong learning is crucial for a successful aging process (e.g., Zunzunegui, Alvarado, Del Ser, & Otero, 2003). Community well-being for older adults is among the benefits of lifelong learning (Borges & Roger, 2014; Merriam & Kee, 2014). Improvement in mental health is another benefit of lifelong learning for the older adults (Hammond, 2004). Hammond interviewed 145 respondents and 12 instructors and group leaders of lifelong learning in Essex, Nottingham and North London on the effects of lifelong learning on the respondents. The study showed that the older adults had better self-esteem, communication and social integration after participating in lifelong learning programmes. They were also more competent and effective and experienced a faster recovery from their mental health problems. In developed countries where the percentage of older adults is larger (World Economic Forum, 2012), lifelong learning is important in ensuring and enhancing the well-being and quality of life of the aging population.

The benefits of lifelong learning for professional and personal development are clear from the literature. In fact, Majhanovich and Napier (2014) went as far as saying that lifelong learning is the characteristic of the society in the 21st century. Merriam and Kee (2014) gave Thailand as an example of a country which has succeeded in enculturating lifelong learning for the whole country. In Thailand, lifelong learning is required by the law and the Office of Non-formal and Informal Education (ONIE) plays an important role in promoting lifelong learning and creating a learning society.

Access to lifelong learning opportunities

Research has indicated that there are some groups who derive greater benefits from their participation

in lifelong learning, and scholars such as Cross (1981) and Riddell, Weedon, and Holfod (2014) have raised the question of equity of access of lifelong learning opportunities. In Australia, socio-economic status is apparently a strong predictor of participation in lifelong learning. Gorard, Rees, and Ralph's (1999) survey of 1,104 adults in New South Wales, Australia showed that socio-economic status has a stronger influence than educational level in determining who participates in lifelong learning (see also Belanger & Valdivielso, 1997; Field, 2000).

However, in the United States, socio-economic status influences completion of lifelong learning programmes rather than enrolment in these programmes. For instance, Anderson and Darkenwald (1979a) reported that participation is affected by age and educational level but not by the socio-economic status of the participants In their study involving 79,631 adults, 11.5% had participated in adult education [lifelong learning]. However, Anderson and Darkenwald (1979a) found that the drop-out rate among young Afro-American participants from lower socio-economic groups was four times higher than other groups. In another report, Anderson and Darkenwald (1979b) presented the profile of a typical part-time student based on their analysis of the 1975 National Center for Educational Statistics/Bureau of Census survey data, that is, a woman aged 25-34 who is married but does not have children, has completed a college education, is working full-time and has a family income of US$15,000-20,000 per year. The part-time student is likely to be a teacher rather than one working in the health and finance industries as the percentage of participation in lifelong learning among these occupational groups is lower. Houle's (1988) study in Chicago confirm that most of the participants of lifelong learning programmes are in the age range of 20s to 50s, and tend to have a lower level of education. In the interviews, Houle learnt that the respondents were more interested in vocational courses but some of them were motivated by the opportunity to meet others and develop social networks. Houle identified the following factors as important in affecting their participation in lifelong learning: job, educational level, family background, influence of peers, teacher, school and the library. Houle's findings suggest that besides the socio-demographic variables, the publicity on lifelong learning programmes influences participation.

In Malaysia, lifelong learners tend to be younger. Since community colleges have been established under the Ministry of Higher Education for the purpose of enculturating lifelong learning, this review will focus on lifelong learning programmes offered by community colleges – and partly because information on lifelong learning programmes offered by other sectors are not readily available. As an example, most of the 152 participants of lifelong learning programmes conducted by Mas Gading Community College in Sarawak are in their twenties (Amdan, Abdullah, & Johan, 2014). Of these 55% are not employed whereas 23% were working government departments, indicating that a large number of the participants were hoping to use the skills and knowledge acquired either to seek employment or to improve their employment prospects. This deducation is supported by information on their earnings. The monthly salary of 66% of the respondents were below RM1000, which is just above the minimum wage of RM800 in West Malaysia and RM900 in East Malaysia (Sabah and Sarawak). The results of another study (Lee & Michael, 2014) also show that the participants of a computer software application course were planning to use their skills to either seek employment or further their studies. However, they also reported gains in personal development such as interaction and communication skills, and problem solving and decision-making skills. Yet another study conducted in Miri Community College in Sarawak showed that most of the lifelong learners were below 40 years old and hoping to use the new skills and knowledge for work and business purposes (Chong & Abdul Rahman, 2014). Their survey involved 375 out of 11,227 participants of lifelong learning programmes offered between 2011 and 2014. Their results showed that 52% were 25-40 years old and 46% were SPM school leavers (equivalent to Year 12). Nevertheless, there are some programmes for retirees of the armed forces to prepare them for a smooth transition to alternative work or entrepreneurship activities (Mohd Zaitun, Mohd Khalil, & Dady, 2014). In fact, based on this review, it can be concluded that where lifelong learning in Malaysia is concerned, most of the participants of lifelong learning programmes are also in the younger age group, have a lower level of education, and tend to be unemployed – not that different from the United States.

Background on lifelong learning in Malaysia

In the United States, Europe and Australia, lifelong learning has been promoted since the 1980s and 1990s but it is a recent emphasis by the Malaysian government. For Malaysia to become a developed nation by the year 2020, lifelong learning is seen as a necessary investment to move towards a knowledge-based economy in the information communication technology era. To ensure realisation of a knowlege-based economy, the government has invested in education and human capital training, particularly in lifelong learning (Mustapha & Abdullah,

2006). The sixth thrust of the National Higher Education Strategic Plan (NHESP) is enculturation of lifelong learning. Lifelong learning enables individuals to reskill and upskill, and in the process gain socio-economic benefits.

Based on the blueprint of lifelong learning for Malaysia 2011-2020, lifelong learning is defined as learning undergone by individuals aged 15 and above with the exception of professional students (*Blueprint on enculturation of lifelong learning in Malaysia 2011-2012*, Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, 2012a). Professional students are defined as full-time students in school, college, training institutions and universities with the goal of entering the workplace for the first time after the studies.

Enculturation of lifelong learning is implemented through various ministries. For example, under the Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, community colleges are specifically set up for the enculturation of lifelong learning. As of June 2009, 56,056 learners have been enrolled in short-term courses at community colleges (Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, 2012b, p. 11). The latest report in Utusan Melayu (2014) shows that more than 1.3 million Malaysians have benefitted from the lifelong learning courses offered by the 90 community colleges, and the groups benefitting are the senior citizens, police personnel, women, and the disabled. As projected by Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia (2012), there is an increase in the number of lifelong learners in Malaysia.

The main investor in lifelong learning in Malaysia is the government although funding mechanisms have been put in place for the industry to offer lifelong learning programmes (e.g., The Human Resources Development Fund). Over the years, the government has increased investment in lifelong learning programmes through various ministries and government agencies. The socio-economic indicators pooled from various economic reports showed an increase in allocated budget for education and training from 23,058 million in 2005 to 37,668 million in 2009 (Ministry of Higher Education, 2012, p. 11). An example is Skim Latihan 1Malaysia implemented in 2011. The investment of 100 million brought about a spike in the number of participants in lifelong learning programmes. Since the primary role of lifelong learning is "for Malaysia to come out of the middle income trap it is in, its people from the lower education level need to have their qualification upgraded" (Ministry of Higher Education, 2012, p. 12), it is important to find out whether the lower income group has access to upskill and reskill through lifelong learning programmes.

While government agencies may collect feedback from participants at the end of lifelong learning programmes, the data are restricted; the data collected may vary from agency to agency. Therefore, there is a need for a large scale study of the impact of lifelong learning programmes on participants. The findings of the study would provide a database on the impact of lifelong learning programmes for reference in policy formulation human capita development in the context of Malaysia's goal to achieve the status of a high income nation and a knowledge-based economy by the year 2020.

Purpose of the Study

The study examined the benefits of non-formal lifelong learning for personal and professional development in Malaysia. The specific objectives of the study were to:

1. determine economic and non-economic benefits from job-related lifelong learning programmes;
2. determine economic and social benefits from non job-related lifelong learning programmes; and
3. examine participants' suggestions for improvement of lifelong learning programmes.

In this paper, the term "lifelong learning programmes" will be used to refer to non-formal programmes (*Direktori Pembelajaran Sepanjang Hayat Peringkat Nasional 2012/2013*, Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, 2012) which encompass:

- Cluster 2 (technical skill-based course less than 6 months), and
- Cluster 3 (self-development courses that do not lead to award of formal qualifications)

Non-formal lifelong learning programmes do not include Cluster 1 which encompasses part-time study programmes at certificate, diploma, degree and postgraduate levels, including e-learning (e.g., Long distance degree programmes offered by Universiti Sains Malaysia). Non-formal lifelong learning programmes also do not include Cluster 4 which refers to part-time study programmes for adult learners at certificate, diploma, degree and postgraduate levels. For this study, lifelong learning programmes are for participants aged 15 and above.

Methodology

Research Design

For this study, a survey research design was chosen to study large scale patterns of lifelong learning patterns in Malaysia. Surveys can study a big population at relatively low cost and in a shorter time compared to qualitative designs that delve into individual experiences. “In fact, survey research is often the only means available for developing a representative picture of the attitudes and characteristics of a large population” (Check & Schutt, 2012, p. 160). The survey covered the 2013-2014 period and involved participants of lifelong learning programmes offered by six ministries as follows:

1. Kementerian Sumber Manusia (KSM, Ministry of Human Resources),
2. Kementerian Kemajuan Luar Bandar dan Wilayah (KKLW, Ministry of Rural and Regional Development),
3. Kementerian Pembangunan Wanita, Keluarga dan Masyarakat (KPWKM, Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development), Kementerian Pendidikan Tinggi (KPT, Ministry of Higher Education),
4. Kementerian Pertanian dan Industri Asas Tani (KPIAT, Ministry of Agriculture and Agro-based Industry), and
5. Kementerian Belia dan Sukan (KBS, Ministry of Youth and Sports).

The headquarters of the six ministries of the federal government are based in Kuala Lumpur and Putrajaya but there are branch offices in each state in Malaysia. The agencies offering the lifelong learning programmes are also found all over Malaysia, and therefore the participants of the study are from all parts of Malaysia.

Sample selection

The minimum sample size was determined based on the database provided by the six ministries who were requested to supply 10 participant's contact details for each of their lifelong learning programmes offered in 2013-2014 to Planning, Research and Policy Coordination Division, Ministry of Education. Table 1 shows the minimum sample size for the six ministries based on 95% confidence level and response rate of 70% based on a review of existing literature on survey response rates. Social science research traditionally rely on 95% confidence level (Kellstedt & Whitten, 2013).

The response rate for telephone surveys in Western settings had decreased over the years. Curtin, Presser, and Singer (2005) reported that the return rate for the General Social Survey in the United States was in the range of 73.5%-82.4% in the years 1975-1998 and 70.1% in the year 2002. Other researchers stated that even with the best effort, it is too difficult and expensive to obtain survey response rates exceeding 70% (Nulty, 2008). For mailed questionnaires, the accepted response rate in social surveys is 50% (Babbie, 1973; Kidder, 1981; Richardson, 2005). Based on the literature review, the response rate for the present study was fixed at 70%, and this was used for the calculation of the minimum sample size to target for each of the six ministries.

Table 1. Sample size calculation for survey of lifelong learning participants

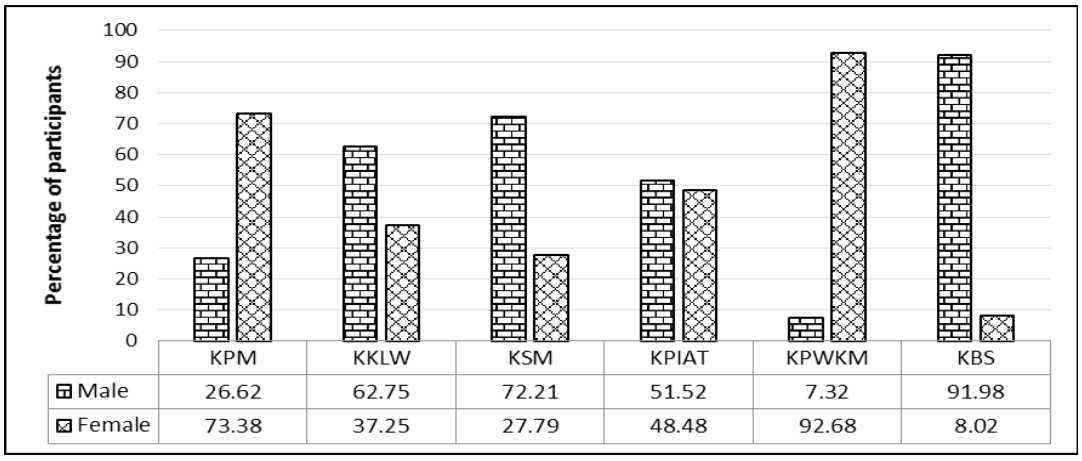
	Given database for survey[1]	Minimum number[2]	Targeted sample size[3]	Actual sample size after survey
KPM	200,000	323	1,110	1,033
KKLW	123	90	90	102
KSM	1,267	258	400	403
KPIAT	70	58	60	66
KPWKM	82	66	70	82
KBS	773	228	250	237
Jumlah	202,265	1,023	1,980	1,923

[1]Number of participants with complete contact details
[2]Minimum number calculated based on 95% dan 99% confidence levels and response rate of 70%
[3]Targeted sample size took account of the larger database provided by some ministries to obtain survey data on a larger range of courses offered by these ministries

The *sample size calculator* from National Business Research Institute was used (https://www.nbrii.com/our-process/sample-size-calculator/) to calculate the targeted sample sizes for the six ministries. This sample size calculator was designed for studies intended for decision-making, which fits the purpose of the present study because findings on social and economic benefits gained by participants of Malaysian lifelong learning programmes can be used for policy making. Some modifications were made to survey a larger sample size for ministries which provided a larger database to obtain data for a larger range of courses. The outcome of the survey was 1,923 participants from lifelong learning programmes offered by the six selected ministries in 2013-2014.

Participant description

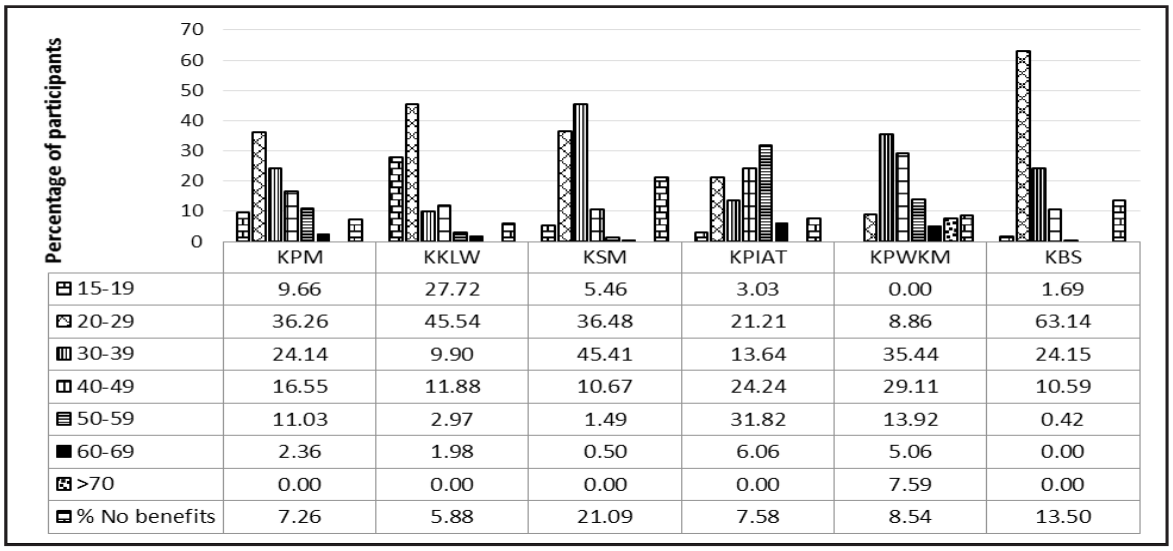
Out of 1,923 participants, 46% were male and 54% were female (Figure 1). KPIAT had a gender balance in the participants attending lifelong learning programmes in 2013-2014 but there were more female participants for KPM and KPWKM and more male participants for KKLW, KSM and KBS programmes. The gender proportion depends on the type of programmes. For example, KPWKM offers programmes on making various kinds of food which cater to a female audience whereas KBS programmes on electrical wiring and power maintenance are mainly attended by men.



	KPM	KKLW	KSM	KPIAT	KPWKM	KBS
Male	26.62	62.75	72.21	51.52	7.32	91.98
Female	73.38	37.25	27.79	48.48	92.68	8.02

Figure 1. Percentage of male and female participants for lifelong learning programmes offered by the six selected ministries

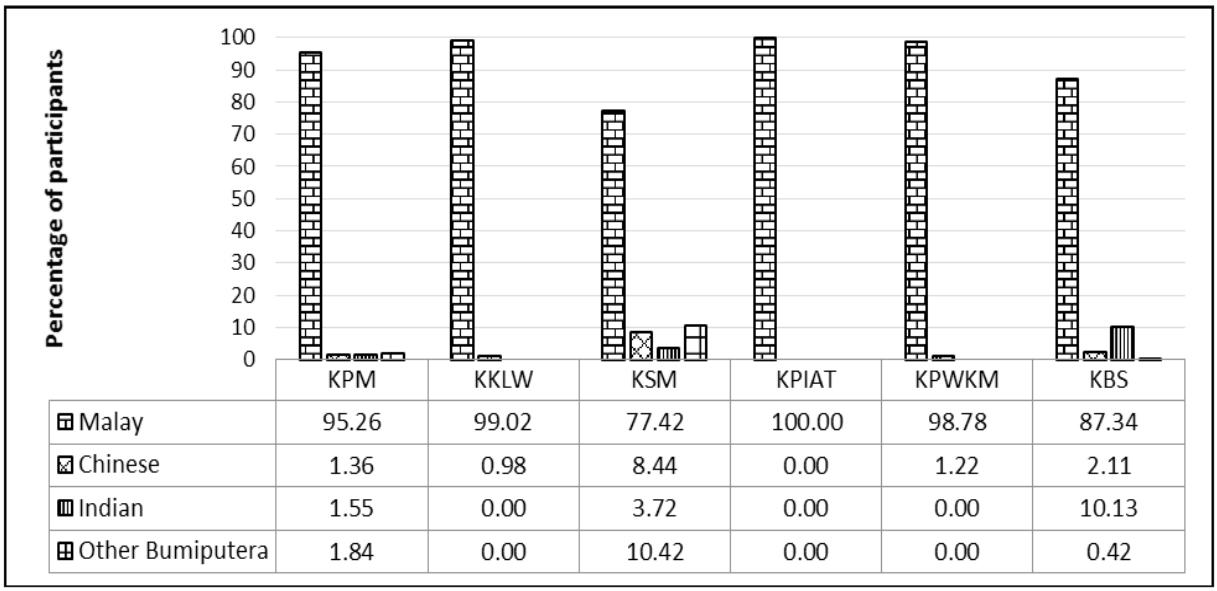
Most of the lifelong learning programme participants were 20-29 years old (Figure 2). The participation is the lowest among the 15-19 and more than 60 years old groups. KPIAT programmes attracted participants in the 50-59 age group. Because of the small percentage of retirees, lifelong learning for community well-being for older adults is not relevant (see Borges & Roger, 2014; Merriam & Kee, 2014).



	KPM	KKLW	KSM	KPIAT	KPWKM	KBS
15-19	9.66	27.72	5.46	3.03	0.00	1.69
20-29	36.26	45.54	36.48	21.21	8.86	63.14
30-39	24.14	9.90	45.41	13.64	35.44	24.15
40-49	16.55	11.88	10.67	24.24	29.11	10.59
50-59	11.03	2.97	1.49	31.82	13.92	0.42
60-69	2.36	1.98	0.50	6.06	5.06	0.00
>70	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	7.59	0.00
% No benefits	7.26	5.88	21.09	7.58	8.54	13.50

Figure 2. Percentage of lifelong learning participants classified according to age group for the six selected ministries

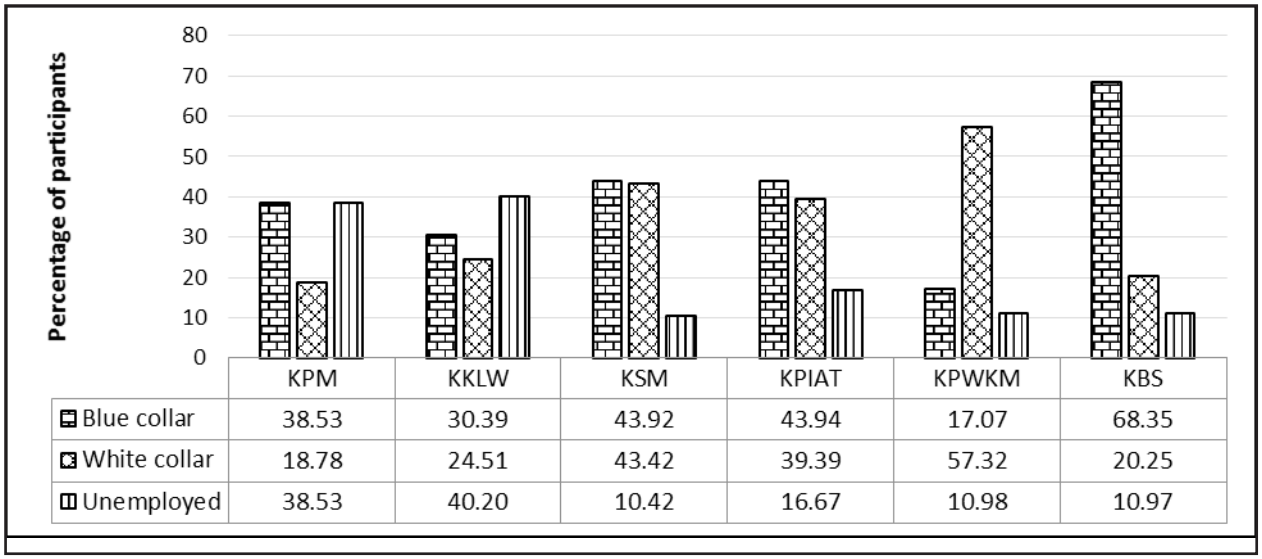
A majority of the participants of lifelong learning programmes were Malay (93%, Figure 3), and the pattern is similar across ministries. Only 3% were Chinese, 3% Indian, and 3% other Indigenous. The Malay is the majority ethnic group in Malaysia accounting for 50.33% of the 30.26 million population, followed by the Chinese (21.76%), Other Indigenous (11.80%) and Indian (6.52%) (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2014).



	KPM	KKLW	KSM	KPIAT	KPWKM	KBS
Malay	95.26	99.02	77.42	100.00	98.78	87.34
Chinese	1.36	0.98	8.44	0.00	1.22	2.11
Indian	1.55	0.00	3.72	0.00	0.00	10.13
Other Bumiputera	1.84	0.00	10.42	0.00	0.00	0.42

Figure 3. Percentage of participants by ethnic group for lifelong learning programmes offered by the six selected ministries

Among the 1,923 participants surveyed, 33.94% held white collar jobs such as managers and teachers whereas 40.37% had blue collar jobs such as technicians, clerks and welders, and 21.30% were unemployed (Figure 4). Going by ministry, KBS and KPM programmes catered to blue collar workers whereas KPWKM programmes catered to white collar workers. In this study, job is used as an indicator of socio-economic status. According to Figueiredo and Elkins (2002), social status can be determined from their job, prestige of the job, income and self-evaluation.



	KPM	KKLW	KSM	KPIAT	KPWKM	KBS
Blue collar	38.53	30.39	43.92	43.94	17.07	68.35
White collar	18.78	24.51	43.42	39.39	57.32	20.25
Unemployed	38.53	40.20	10.42	16.67	10.98	10.97

Figure 4. Percentage of blue and white collar jobs held by participants of lifelong learning programmes offered by the six selected ministries

Instruments

A questionnaire was formulated for the study on social and economic benefits of lifelong learning programmes offered by six selected ministries. For the purpose of this paper, the relevant items are:

1. Name of the lifelong learning programme attended

2. Economic returns with financial benefits (e.g., salary increment, additional income, and promotion for job-related lifelong learning programmes; career advancement, setting up business, and advance business for non job-related lifelong learning programmes)

3. Non-economic benefits (e.g., additional opportunities for training, additional job responsibilities, and employer recognition of new competency for job-related lifelong learning programmes; and self-development and new skills and knowledge for information sharing for non job-related lifelong learning programmes)

Other items on the source of information and payment of fees are not relevant. The questionnaire and protocol for the telephone survey were pilot tested on two participants of a lifelong learning programme and found to be suitable. Subsequently the questionnaire was improved by adding a question which allowed the participants to say that they did not derive any benefits from attending lifelong learning programmes.

Data collection and analysis procedures

Representatives of government agencies under the six selected ministries were invited to attend a meeting on 29 September 2014 with the assistance of Planning, Research and Policy Coordination Division, Ministry of Education. The purpose of the meeting was to explain the study and to seek their cooperation in supplying information on lifelong learning programmes offered by their ministry in 2013-2014. The government agencies were requested to submit contact details of 10 participants for each lifelong learning programme offered to Planning, Research and Policy Coordination Division, Ministry of Education. Based on the targeted sample size for the six ministries, enumerators were given a set target and asked to use the telephone survey protocol for the survey. They filled in the questionnaire during the telephone call. The questionnaire data sent by the enumerators were keyed into Excel sheets by a research assistant. Frequencies and percentages of participants reporting various social, non-economic and economic benefits from participating in lifelong learning programmes were computed.

Limitations of the study

Two limitations of the study arose from incomplete and inaccurate data received. First, a proportion of the data was incomplete because the participant contact details were missing. This reduced the population size of participants to be surveyed because the minimum sample size was calculated based on this.

Second, some data were inaccurate. In some cases, in-house training was reported as lifelong learning by some government agencies although the scope of the lifelong learning was clearly specificied in the meeting on 29 September 2014. However, when the enumerators found this out, these participants were not included in the survey. In other instances, some participants who were telephoned claimed that they did not attend the programme. Their names could have been submitted by their employers but they did not eventually attend the lifelong learning programme. Finally, a proportion of the participants could not be reached using the telephone numbers given.

Even with a large proportion of participants refusing to participate in the study, not answering the telephone calls and not replying sms sent by enumerators, the study succeeded in surveying the impact of lifelong learning programmes on 1,923 participants.

Results and Discussion

The results in this section are presented based on the three objectives of the study. Out of 1,923 participants, 50% attended lifelong learning programmes related to the job whereas the other half attended programmes not related to their job.

The two types of economic returns from job-related lifelong learning programmes studied were promotion and salary increment. In the telephone survey, they were asked whether they were given promotion and salary increment after participating in the lifelong learning programme but if they did not think that their job promotion or salary increment was due to skills and knowledge acquired from the lifelong learning programme, they would answer "no" to the question. Job promotion is accompanied by a salary increase but lifelong learning participants can be given salary increments without a promotion.

Figure 5 shows that participants who attended KBS programmes were more likely to be promoted (27%) and to be given salary increment (30.38%). The percentages for the other ministries were less than 10%. Examples of KBS programmes are electrical wiring (single-phase, three-phrase), electrical generator, and main switchboard. These are clearly job-related skills for technicians which could have helped them to perform better in their jobs. We have information from another part of the questionnaire which is not the focus of this paper, that is, the person who pays for the course fees. For a majority of the KBS participants, the fees were paid by themselves (71.31%) or their family (12.24%). Only 16.03% of the KBS participants had their fees paid by their employers, indicating that generally employers do not provide much additional training for their technicians as they are expected to have the skills already but if the technicians were motivated enough to attend professional development programmes at their own expense, then they were rewarded with salary increment and/or promotion.

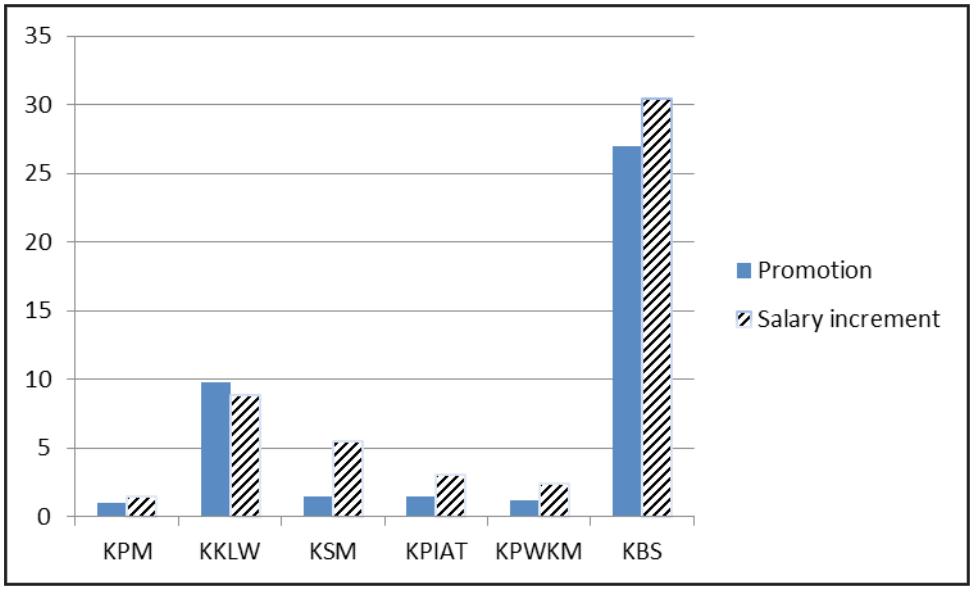


Figure 5. Percentages of participants who were promoted and given salary increment after attending job-related lifelong learning programmes

Three types of non-economic returns from job-related lifelong learning programmes were examined, namely, additional responsibilities in the workplace, more opportunities for training and praise for new skills. These benefits are classified as non-economic benefits because the participants do not directly obtain monetary gains but recognition of their higher level of competence at their workplace.

When employees are entrusted with a bigger scope of job responsibilities, this shows their employers' recognition of their enhanced skills and knowledge. The bigger scope of job responsibilities may open the way for future job promotion and salary increment. Figure 6 shows that a substantial proportion of participants were given additional responsibilities after they attended job-related lifelong learning programmes: 45.12% of KPWKM participants, 43.94% of KPIAT participants, 33.76% of KBS participants, 30.39% of KKLW participants, and 23.08% of KSM participants. However, the percentage was the lowest for KPM participants (10.16%). Many of the lifelong learning programmes offered by KPM were sewing, grooming and cooking-related but the job-related ones include computer and graphic design skills. In this present era, employees are expected to have computer skills.

The pattern of results is similar for further opportunities for training. In career path planning, employers often send their employees for on-the-job training to equip them with new skill sets. For example, lecturers in public universities are required to attend a minimum of 42 hours of job-related training per year. Although the employees do not obtain monetary gains from the training, the employers have to allocate funds for their training (course fee, travel expenses). Figure 6 shows that a substantial proportion of participants was given more opportunities for training after attending job-related lifelong learning programmes organised by KPIAT (51.52%), KPWKM (46.34%), KKLW (35.29%) and KSM (28.54%). However, participants who attended job-related lifelong learning programmes offered by KPM (10.84%) and KBS (18.99%) were less likely to be given additional job responsibilities. As mentioned above, computer and graphic design skills may be in the job description, and employers may not see the point in investing in this form of training. In fact, the current trend in Scotland indicates that employers believe in apprenticeship more than training (Lowe & Gayle, 2015).

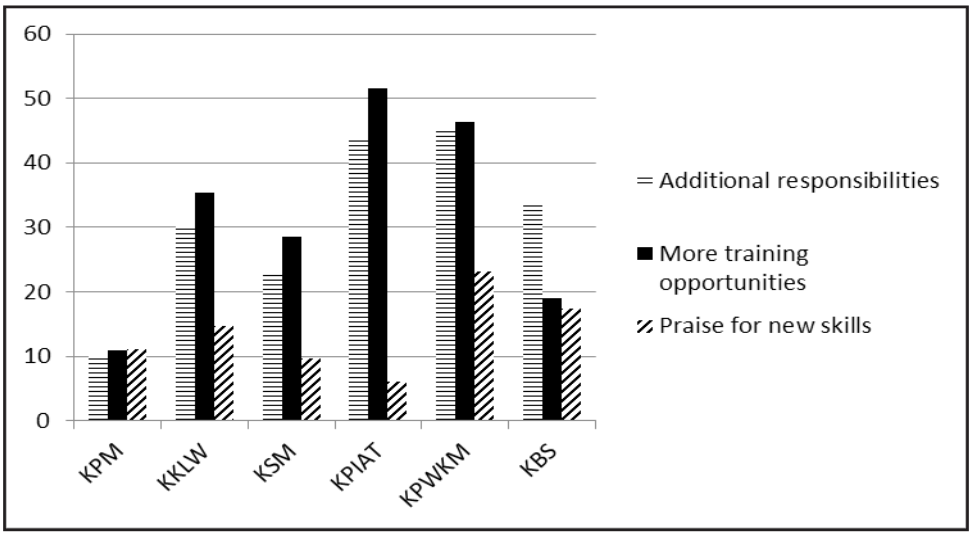


Figure 6. Percentages of participants reporting non-economic benefits after attending job-related lifelong learning programmes

Figure 6 shows that it is not the Malaysian culture for employers to praise their employees for new skills as the percentages are below 25%. Among the ministries, KPWKM (23.17%) participants were the most likely to get employer recognition of enhanced work capabilities. The KPWKM lifelong learning programmes were mainly on health, entrepreneurship and grooming. It is possible that most of the KPWKM participants were women who might have been working in professions which needed knowledge of health and skills in entrepreneurship and grooming, which makes it more likely for them to receive compliments on new skills in these areas. Verbal praise is regarded as a strategy to increase productivity without incurring monetary expense (salary increment, promotion) but it is not popular in this setting. Recognition of better work capability is more often acknowledged in the yearly performance appraisal, which translates to better bonuses and perhaps greater salary increment than the annual increments.

An overall comparison of the results show that not all job-related lifelong learning programmes bring economic returns to the participants. KBS participants are the most likely to enjoy both economic and non-economic returns because the lifelong learning programmes were technical-skills based. Because of this, they were willing to pay for the fees themselves instead of relying on their employers. In other words, they were willing to invest in lifelong learning for their professional development. For participants of lifelong learning programmes offered by KKLW, KSM, KPIAT and KPWKM, the additional skills and knowledge acquired may open the way for upskilling in the form of more opportunities for training and additional responsibilities (for them to practise their new skills) but they had not gained monetary rewards at the time of the study. The results also show that it is not beneficial for participants to attend computer and graphic design lifelong learning programmes in terms of gaining economic and non-economic returns; therefore, these programmes are mainly for self-improvement but not to the level of upskilling.

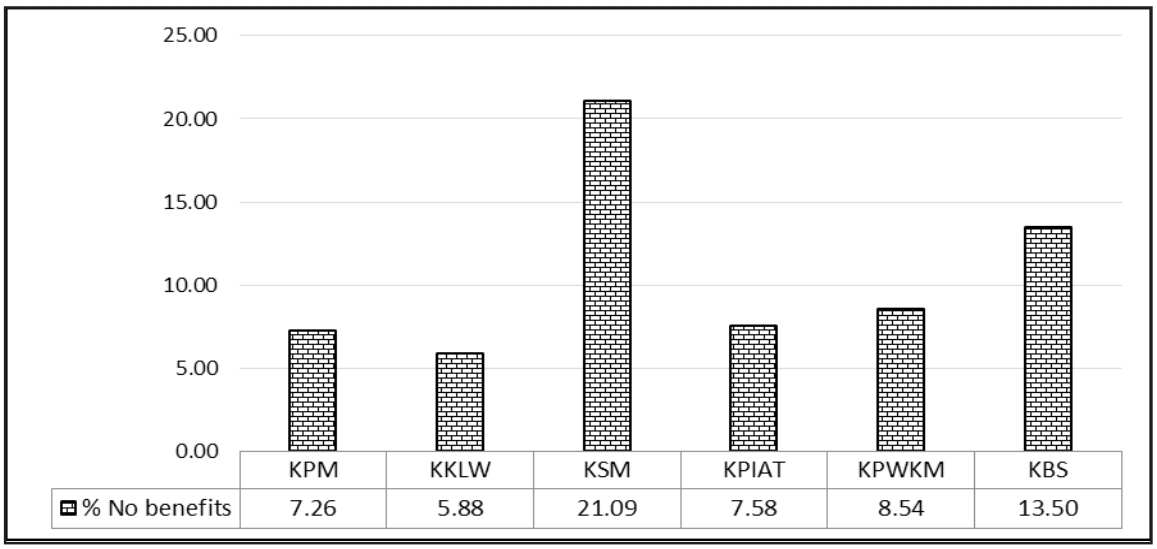


Figure 7. Percentage of participants not gaining any benefit from job-related lifelong learning programmes

Government agencies which offer lifelong learning programmes may assume that lifelong programmes bring benefits to participants, whether economic or non-economic. However, the findings of this study challenges this assumption. For example, 21.09% of 403 KSM participants reporting not gaining any benefit from job-related lifelong learning programmes (Figure 7). Figures 5 and 6 confirm the low relevance of KSM programmes for professional development because the benefits tend to be non-economic rather than monetary. Next, despite rather high percentages of KBS participants reporting economic and non-economic returns from lifelong learning programmes, 13.5% of the 237 participants stated that they did not benefit from the job-related lifelong programme they attended in 2013 or 2014. These results suggest that the types of lifelong programmes offered need to be constantly reviewed so that they focus on more useful skills for professional development.

Economic and social benefits from non job-related lifelong learning programmes

The economic benefits from participation in non job-related lifelong learning programmes are different from job-related programmes. Three possible forms of economic benefits were examined in this study: earning additional income, setting up business, and getting a job. Figure 8 shows that KPWKM participants have the most opportunity to earn additional income with the new skills acquired from lifelong learning programmes on health, grooming and entrepreneurship (25.61%). The percentages were much less than 16% for the other five ministries.

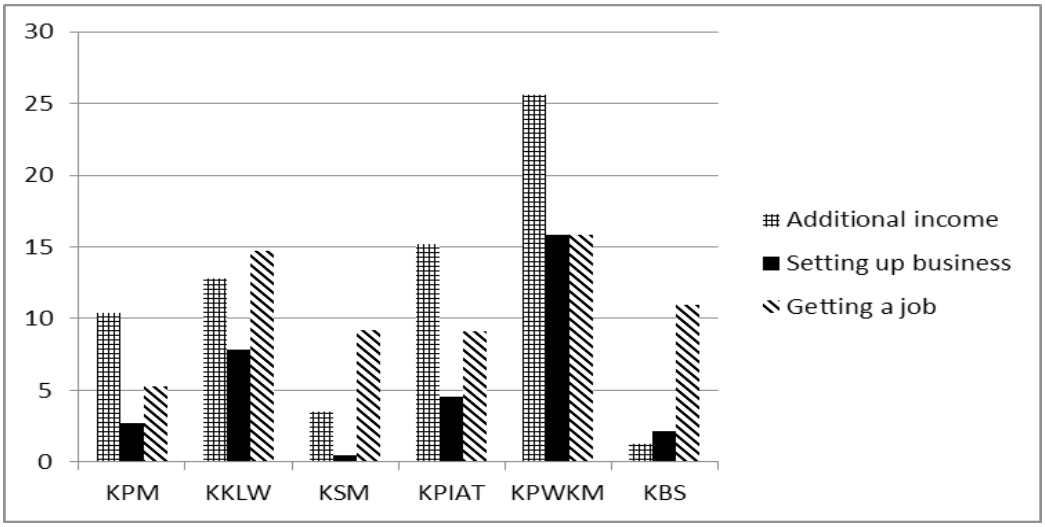


Figure 8. Percentage of participants reporting economic benefits after attending non-job related lifelong learning programmes

Similarly, the KPWKM participants are the most likely to set up business (15.85%), followed by KKLW (7.84%). The percentages are less than 5% for the other ministries. Examples of setting up business as reported by the particpants are taking orders for sewing head scarves and making cakes through online business websites. The percentages of KPWKM participants setting up businesses are lower than those reporting additional income – a larger proportion may earn some extra income on an ad-hoc basis but do not venture into establishing small-scale businesses.

The pattern of results for getting a job are different from the other two economic benefits of non job-related lifelong learning programmes. The programmes offered by five ministries are useful in increasing the employability of 9-15% of the participants. The percentage of KPM participants getting a job after attending lifelong learning programmes is lower (5.23%), but the sewing, grooming, cooking and computer and graphic design skills help them to earn some additional income.

An overall comparison of the results show that the forte of KBS is job-related lifelong programmes but not non-job related programmes. For non-job related lifelong learning programmes, KPIAT and KPWKM programmes are useful in generating income. Examples of KPIAT programmes are fish farming, bottling and other forms of food processing. These programmes equip participants with skills to venture into small businesses.

Next, the results on the social benefits from non job-related lifelong learning programmes are described. The term "non-economic" which was earlier used for job-related programmes is not used here, but the benefits are clearly social benefits and are not attached to monetary gains of any kind: self-development and new skills and knowledge for information sharing.

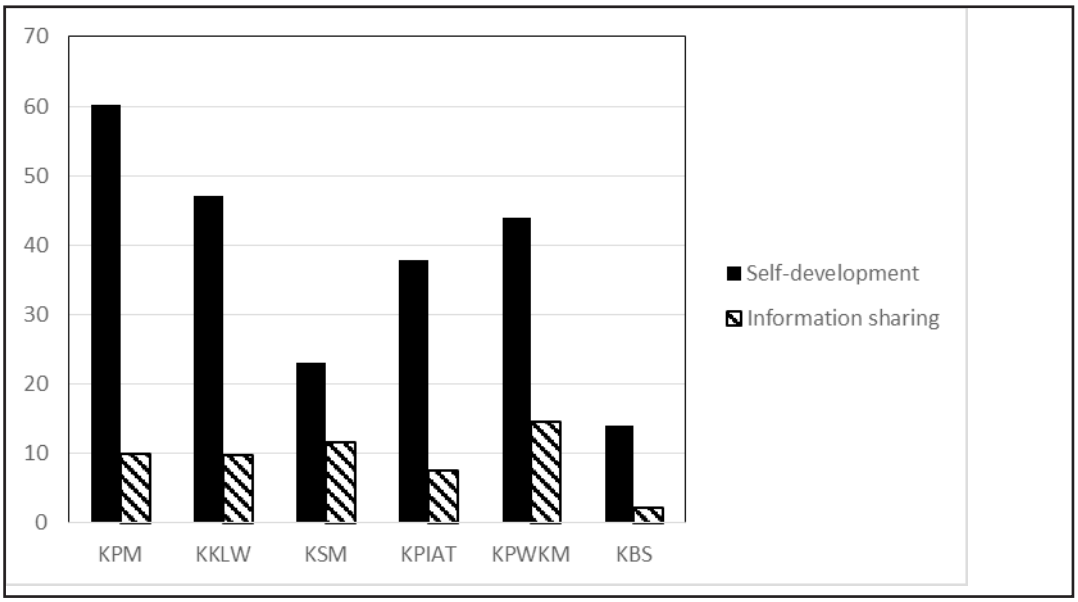


Figure 9. Percentage of participants reporting social benefits after attending non-job related lifelong learning programmes

The large proportion of participants reporting self-development after attending non job-related lifelong learning programmes indicate that this is the main benefit; the percentages range from 23% to 61%. Participants felt more confident of themselves, and they could use the new skills for themselves or their family (e.g., cooking, sewing, vegetable growing). KBS is the only ministry with a relatively lower percentage (13.92%, Figure 9), and this is to be expected because the forte of KBS lifelong learning is technical skills for professional development of technicians and not personal growth.

In comparison with self-development, fewer participants reported sharing the new skills and knowledge with others, as indicated by percentages of less than 15% for the six ministries (Figure 9). However, among the six ministries, participants attending non job-related lifelong learning programmes offered by KPWKM (14.63%) were the most likely to share the information with others. Some of the participants were teachers and lecturers in various institutions, and they shared the information with their students. Other participants passed on their newly acquired knowledge and skills to their friends and family.

Overall, non job-related lifelong learning programmes offered by the ministries (except KBS) can be assumed

to bring about personal development to the participants and some additional income. Self-development encompasses character development, which Kolej Komuniti Kos Lanas (2015) reported as the main social benefit of their lifelong learning programmes (see also Hammond, 2005). An example of personal development course is the Mandarin course offered by community colleges, where the participants are mainly non-Chinese who want to learn the language for basic communication (Soong & Ting, 2014). A small proportion used their newly learnt knowledge and skills to engage in entrepreneurial activities or to get new jobs. This indicates that the non job-related lifelong learning programmes have the potential to enable reskilling to take place, albeit for a small number of participants. When the gains are merely personal growth, policy makers and funders of lifelong learning are likely to regard it as having intangible returns. Even in Australia where the emphasis of lifelong learning is on improving employment prospects, "most workers do not move into a different occupational or skill levels post training" (Clemans, Newton, Guevara, & Thompson, 2012, p. 3). Clemans et al. also found that workers are not motivated by employment and higher wages alone when they pursue lifelong learning; in fact, their motivation for skill-building is their social and personal wellbeing. Based on the Australian case, Clemans et al. argues that lifelong learning that is not for the purpose of employment (entering it, maintaining it, or retraining for it) enhances human capital potential by ensuring "health and personal wellbeing and community cohesiveness" (p. 17).

Participants' suggestions for improvement of lifelong learning programmes

Finally, the participants' suggestions for improvement of the lifelong learning programmes are described. The last question in the survey was whether participants had any suggestions to improve lifelong learning programmes. Indirectly, this would reveal their dissatisfaction with some aspects of the lifelong learning programmes. Some participants had no comments. Altogether 723 responses were collected from 723 participants (Table 2).

Table 2. Participants' suggestions for improvement of lifelong learning programmes

Suggestion	Frequency
1. Offer courses with levels (from basic to advanced)	112
2. Ensure suitable course duration (many requests a longer time)	112
3. Offer courses related to industry and current market demands*	68
4. Improve the course environment (equipment, environment, enough materials)	61
5. Increase frequency of courses to open up opportunities to public to attend lifelong learning programmes (don't restrict participation)	58
6. Increase variety of course content (scope, topic, new information)	55
7. Increase advertising and promotion of lifelong learning programmes	47
8. Invite experienced lecturers	45
9. Increase use of practical and interactive approaches	42
10. Reduce fee (e.g., allow loans or special schemes)	39
11. Work towards certification of courses	24
12. Increase the number of locations in which the courses are offered (especially in rural areas)	24
13. Organise courses at suitable times (e.g., holiday and weekends, and not at night)	22
14. Offer financial aid for business	3
15. Contact agencies that can offer jobs	2

The most frequent requests are for programmes with levels (basic to advanced) because this allows participants to learn skills at a suitable level (112 requests). Some participants felt that the lifelong learning programme they attended was either too basic or too advanced. There were just as many requests for programmes with a suitable duration – 112 requests. Most of the requests were for a longer duration. A lot of the programmes were 1-day courses or 5 to 7 days but KKLW offered a number of 6-month long programmes in 2013 and 2014 like refrigeration and tailoring. The third most frequent request was for the government agencies to offer courses related to industry and current market demands (68 requests). The participants wanted lifelong learning programmes which would bring economic returns, such as jobs and enhanced career opportunities. Examples of courses requested by participants include:

a. finance: financial management, business, GST, accounts,
b. DIY (do-it-yourself) skills: home repair, landscape,
c. technical skills: PDP, environmental protection, hybrid engine EEV, autogear, CVT, electric and solar cars, CIDB NPOSS (OSHA), Microcontroller,
d. information technology skills: computer software dan hardware C++ language applications, network, website management, Adobe Photoshop, ICT,
e. engineering skills: Red Hat Certified System Administrator (RHCSA), Red Hat Certified System Engineer (RHCE), CISCO Certified Entry Networking Technican (CCENT), CISCO Certified Network Associate Routing and Switching (CCNA), CCNP Routing and Switching Certificate, HSE, OKU,
f. culinary skills: traditional cakes, cooking and preserving food,
g. farming skills: farming, animal husbandry, and mushroom cultivation,
h. others: work life balance, herbal medicine, Mandarin, religion (Al-Quran), face and body massage, decoration, head scarve sewing, funeral management

There was also dissatisfaction with the management of the lifelong learning programmes, which led to suggestions to improve the following aspects:

a. Improve the course environment (equipment, environment, materials)
b. Increase variety of course content (scope, topic, new information)
c. Invite experienced lecturers
d. Increase use of practical and interactive approaches as they felt that there was too much one-way communication and inadequate practice
e. Increase frequency of courses to open up opportunities to public to attend lifelong learning programmes (do not restrict participation)

Most of these suggestions concerned the quality of the lifelong learning programmes, and only one was on accessibility or opportunity to participate in the programmes. As many as 47 participants also felt that advertising and promotion of lifelong learning programmes should be heightened.

From the participants' perspective, for lifelong learning programmes to be more beneficial, the programmes need to focus on market demands and be pitched at different levels. The programmes should also provide certification of skills so that the participants can use the certificate of attendance for getting new jobs or advancing in their career. This is the idea of APEL (Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning) mentioned in the *Direktori Pembelajaran Sepanjang Hayat Peringkat Nasional 2012/2013* (Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, 2012). This study shows that the lifelong learning programmes that need recognition are those targeted at enhancing the skills of blue collar workers as this would enable them to upskill. This is in line with Strategy 3 of the National Higher Education Strategic Plan (NHESP), where enculturation of lifelong learning among the blue collar workers would move the country towards a knowledge-based economy.

Research has consistently shown that lifelong learning programmes benefitted men who stopped schooling earlier than usual more than any other group because they learnt skills which enabled them to find employment or get a wage increase, whether the studies were conducted in the United Kingdom (Jenkins et al., 2003) or in Portugal (Rothes et al., 2014). Findings have also concurred on the dominant orientation of the lifelong learning programmes towards professional development (Awuor & Parks, 2015; Daehlen & Ure, 2009; Konrad, 2005; Kyndt, Michielsen, Van Nooten, Nijs, & Baert, 2011; Lowe & Gayle, 2015). Because of the vocation-orientation, more young people are attracted to participate in the lifelong programmes (Anderson & Darkenwald, 1979a, 1979b; Houle, 1988) – a similar trend is observed in the present study as well as other studies conducted on community colleges in Malaysia (Amdan, Abdullah, & Johan, 2014; Chong & Abdul Rahman, 2014; Lee & Michael, 2014). Personal development also takes place even though the programmes are targetted at professional development (Ambrósio, Sá, & Simões, 2014; Berker & Horn, 2003), thereby achieving both thrusts of the goal of lifelong learning in Malaysia (Ministry of Education, 2015). In this light, it is more economically worthwhile to support lifelong learning programmes aimed at professional development as it brings both economic returns and personal growth benefits to the participants. Furthermore, studies on lifelong learning in other countries also focus on economic returns, for example, supply and demand (Coffield, 1999; Cohn, & Addison, 1998; Jenkins et al., 2003; Plewis & Preston, 2001).

Conclusion

The 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 the other 50% participated in programmes that are not related to their jobs. The participants are mainly Malay, aged 20-29, and a majority are either unemployed or holding blue collar jobs. In the category of job-related lifelong learning programmes, technical skills-based programmes are the most likely to equip the participants with noticeably better skills and knowledge which result in their employers giving them salary increment and promotion. For participants who attended programmes which are less technical in nature, the employment benefits are in the form of additional opportunities for training and increased job responsibilities which give them the opportunity to demonstrate their higher level of competence in the workplace. This may lead to future promotion and salary increments. Undoubtedly, non job-related lifelong learning programmes brings about personal development but there are also monetary benefits. On average, about 20% of the participants used their newly acquired knowledge and skills to earn additional income, get a job, and set up small businesses (including online businesses). This shows that even non job-related lifelong learning programmes have good economic returns for participants. Policy makers and funders who invest in lifelong learning programmes would also view this as good returns from the investment. As the bulk of lifelong learning programmes, whether job-related or not, do not bring about much economic returns, we recommend that the programmes be structured based on skill levels (basic to advanced) and market surveys be carried out to determine industry needs so that the skills and knowledge taught are useful for professional development of the participants. Considering the resources put into provision of lifelong learning programmes, the focus should be on professional development rather than personal development because the latter can be assumed to occur whenever there is lifelong learning. There is, however, a place for lifelong learning programmes focusing on specific skills that individuals may be keen to acquire such as culinary or information technology skills for personal development but these programmes should also be structured based on skill levels so that the participants can reap better returns. Future research on lifelong learning in Malaysia should focus on the impact of lifelong learning from the perspective of employers, in particular whether the professional development that is assumed to occur results leads to better productivity for the organisation.

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