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## Lifelong Learning to Increase Employability and Quality of Service: A Pilot Study

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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** Lifelong learning has been one of the most discussed agenda in education today. It is a continuous process to improve one's knowledge, skills and competence based on the learning objectives of the subject matter. There is a critical need to develop and improve the quality of innovative and creative human capital in the event industry to improve the quality of service. **Objective:** The pilot study was conducted to develop a comprehensive model of lifelong learning with a focus on event management education to increase graduates' employability. **Results:** This study used self-administered questionnaire as the primary data collection tool on 30 service professionals in the event industry. The findings of this study will not only advance the body of knowledge within this academic field, but will also help relevant parties to develop a better event management curriculum that seek to improve the quality of service professionals in the event industry. **Conclusion:** Lifelong learning is not only one aspect of education and training; it becomes ever more a fundamental principle of individual's lifelong active participation of social life.

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## INTRODUCTION

Lifelong learning is more essential than ever before in today's global, high technology knowledge economy. The criteria of the interaction process are of a social and societal character, that is, they are determined by time and place. An event is the best platform to adapt both theoretical and practical knowledge for lifelong learning. Knowledge is the word—ubiquitous, ever-changing and reportedly necessary for satisfactory existence in contemporary society. There is a critical need to develop the human capital in the event industry to improve the quality of innovative human capital to include elements of creativity and innovation.

More than ever before, access to up-to-date information and knowledge, together with the motivation and skills to use these resources intelligently on behalf of oneself and the community as a whole, are becoming the key to strengthening competitiveness and improving the employability and adaptability of the workforce (Musetescu, 2011). This paper aims at developing a model for life long learning from events as an educational tool to enhance the knowledge of event management students in their journey to acquire all the necessary information from the experiences of participants for events with a large number of participants and extensive coverage of all the event management function that students will learn in their course of study. This will be an overview of the hands-on aspect of event management.

As indicated by Griffin (1999), the most fundamental assumption of the learning theory is that all learning includes two essentially different types of process: an external interaction process between the learner and his or her social, cultural, and material environment, and an internal psychological process of elaboration and acquisition in which new impulses are connected with the results of prior learning. Enrolling in lifelong learning programs by acquiring new skills will provide opportunities for Malaysians to boost their income and become successful entrepreneurs. Organizations increasingly see the need for ongoing learning and development to achieve both current and future business results. Yet the current economy has created significant pressure to clearly tie learning to the strategic objectives of the business. Organizations, as well, have responded differently to the learning imperative for many reasons, for example, size, profitability, technology, industry, market share, and the influence of national or local government policy. Many organizations *expect* employees to develop. Organizations may provide some access to resources and rewards for employees, but they are expected to be self-directed, often in pursuit of annual development and performance goals. Therefore, this study hope that by

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giving the up-to-date information and letting the students learn from actual practices in the event industry, they will obtain more competitive advantage once they graduate and join the workforce.

Lifelong learning means the continuous development and improvement of the knowledge and skills needed for employment and personal fulfillment through formal and informal learning opportunities. Learning is therefore part of life which takes place at all times and in all places. It shares mixed connotations with other educational concepts, like adult education, training, continuing education, permanent education and other terms that relate to learning beyond the formal educational system. Lifelong learning is the lifelong, voluntary, and self-motivated pursuit of knowledge for either personal or professional reasons. It not only enhances social inclusion, active citizenship and personal development, but also competitiveness and employability (Watson, 2003).

The lifelong learning process also recognizes that, for the individual, the priorities among these objectives can change over the life-cycle and that each objective has to be taken into consideration in policy development (Smith, and Ferrier, 2002). In the specialist opinion, the main lifelong learning characteristics sources of knowledge; educators serve as facilitators for the student's acquisition of knowledge; people learn by doing, or action learning; people learn in groups and from each other; assessment is used to guide learning strategies and to identify pathways for future learning; educators develop individualized learning plans; educators are lifelong learners. Initial training and ongoing professional development are linked; people have access to learning opportunities over a lifetime; learning is put into practice; learners reflect upon learning and analyze their personal development.

#### ***Literature Review:***

##### ***Lifelong Learning:***

Lifelong learning is the continuous building of skills and knowledge throughout the life of an individual. It occurs through experiences encountered in the course of a lifetime. These experiences could be formal training, counseling, tutoring, mentorship, apprenticeship, higher education, etc.) or informal (experiences, situations, etc.) Lifelong learning, also known as LLL, is the "lifelong, voluntary, and self-motivated" pursuit of knowledge for either personal or professional reasons. As such, it not only enhances social inclusion, active citizenship and personal development, but also competitiveness and employability. Adult learning is any 'post-compulsory' learning. Adult learning is not just about formal qualification and includes all forms of skill development activities including formal college education, job related and workplace training, informal and community education, skills updating and refreshing, or general self improvement. In the context of demographic and technological change and globalization, an educated and skilled population represents one of the strongest foundations for ensuring a strong and healthy economy and a socially inclusive society.

The early 21st century began the age of education's globalization with local education institutions continuing their expansion efforts both within and outside the national area, in an attempt to meet growing market demand. The breakdown of geographic boundaries has facilitated both local and global competition. To face this competition many universities and vocational schools moved aggressively into the adult learning market. Today is even easier to serve adult learners utilizing new technologies and the introduction of the Internet, online, blended and e-learning. Continuing education and distance learning organizations lead the way by adopting technologies and flexible operations to support the varied needs of adult learners including lifelong learning. In today's economy the economic growth, development and progress of an economy are subject to investment in people, to the increased role of education and lifelong learning. Specialized literature shows the importance of lifelong learning in the labor market integration and in the increase of work efficiency because by participating in lifelong learning individuals adapt more easily to changes in the labor market and better face strong competition from the global economy. These advantages at the individual level are also supported by advantages at the organizational level, and even at the national level, by the fact that well prepared people are always a long-term investment of society, becoming the support of economic growth and development.

##### ***Motivation of Participating in Lifelong Learning:***

As the global economy has materialized, respective governments have tended to emphasize the need for a competitive workforce that is "up-skilled" and more knowledgeable in an international marketplace. Globalization and the emergence of new players in the world economy have intensified competition. As technological innovation continues apace, many countries are turning production towards high value-added, knowledge-intensive products and services. There are winners and losers as growth and innovation continue to cluster around those which have invested in human capital development and go away from those that do not. It is generally accepted that growth is driven by tertiary education. Universities and other higher education institutions are fundamental to human capital development and innovation and can do much to help labor force to become more innovative and globally competitive. However to do this they need to change, and in some cases change dramatically. Universities and other higher educational institutions need to come out of their ivory towers (Conner, 2009).

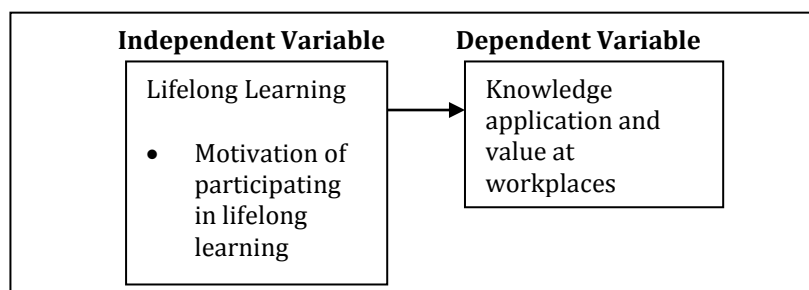
Globalization and individualization have radically changed both the economic system and the personal life world in industrial or postindustrial nation-states. To survive hyper-competition and volatile consumer choice, learning organizations and a workforce engaged in lifelong learning are needed. Constructing “the good life” has become an individual responsibility demanding reflexivity and skills. Globalization and individualization constitute the driving force of the information society. Global hyper competition, markets on the move, and individualized consumer choices make demands upon an increase in technological and cultural intelligence in the organization of work. In the face of continuously changing circumstances, both organizations and employees have to become flexible. Creating the learning company and developing lifelong learning (LLL) with a view to economic competitiveness have become the gospel of the “knowledge economy.”

#### ***Lifelong Learning Knowledge Application and Value at Workplaces:***

As specified by the OECD in their 2007 report *Qualifications Systems. Bridges to lifelong learning* the strategies for lifelong learning respond to the convergence between the economic imperative dictated by the needs of the knowledge society and the societal need to promote social cohesion by providing long-term benefits for the individual, the enterprise, the economy and the society more generally. The skills and competence of the workforce are major factor in economic performance and success at enterprises levels. For the economy, there is a positive relationship between educational attainment and economic growth. The reality that everyone is facing nowadays the economical, financial and social crisis forces every one of us to do something for a better competitive advantage. And lifelong learning offers this opportunity, first for the individual and his personal development and second for the organizations that have understood that the most important asset is the human resource the. Continuous learning over the work-life needs to become even more of an imperative, as skills acquired in schools and in the workplace become obsolete more quickly and new and more complex skills are needed to respond to accelerating technological change, and to effectively use new information and communications technologies.

#### ***Conceptual Framework:***

In order to conduct this study, lifelong learning is served as independent variable which comprises motivation of participating in lifelong learning. On the other hand, and lifelong learning knowledge application and value at the workplace are labeled as the dependent variable. Therefore, this study proposes the following framework that is illustrated in Figure 1. This is the framework of this study.



**Fig. 1:** Conceptual Framework.

#### ***Methodology:***

The pre-survey was conducted to thirty of postgraduate students' currently full time and part time basis at Universiti Teknologi MARA. The items measurement used for independent variables explained the force reasonable student further their study such as financial and family support and others matters. The data design with multiple answers as to respond in more than one choice. Meanwhile, dependent variables represent the implication of lifelong learning in the workplaces. The scoring on the questions was based on a “4” point Likert scale with “1” being strongly agree and “4” being strongly disagree. To analyze the data, descriptive and correlation analysis had been conducted to test the variables. The descriptive analysis was conducted to test the mean and standard deviation of distribution data while correlation analysis was used to test the hypotheses of this study.

#### ***Findings & Discussions:***

##### ***Demographic Analysis:***

Demographic analysis represents that majority of the respondents were 25 of females students (83.3%) and only 5 of male students (16.7%) participated in this study. In this case, 17 students (56.7%) were currently employed with the government agencies and 13 students (43.3%) were employed with private sectors but

looking for better jobs in future. Majority of the students were employed as at management support and less of them hold higher position in their organization. The result showed in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Demographic Analysis.

Demographic		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	25	83.3
	Male	5	16.7
Employment Status	Employment	17	56.7
	Employment but looking for others job	13	43.3
Current position	Management	9	30
	Support	21	70

### Analysis:

The data then have been conducted descriptive analysis aimed to study the most influences reasons that students encouraged to further their study. The finding from this study as shows in Table 2 explained most of the students agreed because there was a high awareness of importance to further study (mean=1.98) and they want recognition of their qualification (mean=1.80). There was also resulted the other reason influence student to further their study due to career development, job satisfaction and expectations of high salary. They believed that higher of their qualification, and then there is better of their career and gain better income.

One possibility this happens in case of UiTM's students because the high awareness of the importance of the educational influences their life and career development. Most of the students were employed and they believed that learning process will do not stop after they graduated but it is continues learning even they have to commit to their task and duty at workplaces. This finding was supported by many researchers (Boissieu, Cotis, Didier, Saint-Etienne, Bofinger, Franz, Schmidt, Weder, and Wiegard, (2010) explained lifelong learning does not necessarily mean going back to school after graduation, but rather that an individual can continue to learn in a wide variety of settings (i.e. in the workplace).

**Table 2:** Descriptive Analysis of Influences Continues Study.

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation
To get a job anywhere or somewhere else	1.57	.504
To change the type of work I am doing	1.63	.490
To gain promotion	1.68	.498
To gain a rise in earnings	1.47	.507
To gain job satisfaction	1.67	.479
To help me towards a future course of learning	1.57	.504
To get a recognized qualification	1.80	.407
More and more people having taken part in it	1.97	.183
To get an increasingly important qualification or certificate	1.53	.507
To obtain learning experience	1.67	.479
To enrich my leisure activities	1.77	.430

In addition, there was also found that a financial factor in Table III also influences students to further study. This can be explained nowadays there is the opportunity that provided by the organization to support the employees who is interesting to further study (mean=2.00). A scholarship not just from the organizational but from government or other agencies influence the intentions of the employees to further study (mean=1.93). More than that, there is another financial source that encourages the employees to continue study is a bank loan. The bank provides facilities such as low interest and affordable payment for an individual to get loan for further study (mean=1.93). Even though there have put some investment which means here loss their wages (mean=1.80), loss of their leisure time (mean=1.67), high cost of material/equipment (mean=1.50) and travel cost (mean=1.40) it did not discourage them to further study.

One possible reason this explained by case of UiTM's student was there are many opportunities for them to further their studied in terms of financial factors. It is not limited sources because the communities such as government, organization and others institution understand the importance of further studies. In other words, there are so called as social support from their family, colleagues and others. With this support, it encourages and strongly influences them to continue their study to next levels such as Master and PhD.

**Table 3:** Financial Factors.

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation
Self	1.17	.379
Family Financial Support	1.73	.450
Employer/Organization Scholarship	2.00	.000
Bank Loan	1.93	.254
Others Scholarship	1.93	.254

Another findings the implication of lifelong learning founds that most of the respondents agreed that loss of wage (mean= 1.8 std= .407) was highly give impact on their life. In addition, the respondent also claimed that loss of benefit such as leisure time, spend time with family (mean= 1.67; std =.479) and less agree with travel cost (mean= 1.40; std=.408). One possible reasoned this happen because most of them used their salary and wages to support their expenses during their studied. Even though there were supported by the financial institutions and scholarship but there is limitation for them to spend wisely. In addition, there has to sacrifice their time with their family and others due to commit attends classes every weekend. This also mentioned there is less of time with family and friend since on weekdays there were working and spend weekends for their classes. There was the critical implication that most of the respondents felt about continuing learning. However, these reasons did not influence their motivation to further their studied. They believe recent investment will return back to them with more and greater benefits to them and their family in future.

**Table 4:** Implication of Lifelong Learning.

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation
Loss of wage	1.80	.407
Loss of benefits, such as leisure time, the time spend with your family	1.67	.479
Material and equipment cost	1.50	.509
Travel cost	1.40	.408

### **Conclusion and Future Recommendation:**

Lifelong learning is not only one aspect of education and training; it becomes ever more a fundamental principle of individual's lifelong active participation of social life. Adult professional training is to be found in every curricula targeted at re-activating national economy, and it aims at transforming the actual system of professional training institutions, completing it with necessary components that forecast and achieve professional re-orientation and training in advance labor force for activities that use new technologies and request creativity, innovation and high professionalism.

The role of education and lifelong learning in economic development and quality of life is captured in a variety of studies. Thus, studies such as the Franco-German Council of Ministers 2010 stress the role of continuing education in the quality of life and sustainable development of any economy (Aceleanu, 2011). Increasingly more often at the academic level, there are discussions about the indissoluble link that exists between the education and prosperity or economic development or quality of life. The experts stress the importance that education had and continues to have in achieving a higher level of living. The relationship between education, employment and quality of life is very complex. On the one hand, the influence of education is visible in all aspects related to the welfare of the individual and his level of satisfaction. On the other hand, employment, income levels and working conditions are influenced by the educational level of the individual. Studies show that a higher level of education enables the individual a better labor market insertion, increases the chance to adapt to the labor market demands and it positively influences the quality of life. For future recommendation, there are many factors that influence the motivation and recommended to be tested to the large number of respondents at different colleges or university.

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