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LIFELONG LEARNING: The perceptions among teachers of Mukah, a Malaysian coastal district

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Abstract:

In this 21st century, Malaysia is striving towards a knowledge-based nation. This move brings about new demands on the teaching profession. The question is whether teachers themselves are prepared for this mammoth task; teachers must have the passion for lifelong learning in order to promote and impart the skills for critical and creative thinking, and to instil the habit and yearn for self-directed and autonomous learning among their charges. Hence, this study investigated the perceptions of 280 teachers from three secondary and 12 primary schools within Mukah district, a coastal area in the state of Sarawak, on lifelong learning. Questionnaire responses and interviews were analysed and the findings indicated that the majority of teachers had positive perceptions towards lifelong learning. These teachers gave the opinion that they needed to be more knowledgeable than students in this technology era. Conversely, the study also indicated that teachers faced problems and constraints in their quest for lifelong learning. The lack of workplace support, financial commitment, and inadequate resources were some of the reasons cited by the teachers. Based on the findings, recommendations to policy makers, schools and future research are also presented in this study.

Introduction:

Learning starts from the first day and continues throughout one's journey in life, "from the cradle to the grave" as stated by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (1996). Lifelong learning is described as a continuous process and a multi purpose of learning activities taken with the objectives of improving one's knowledge, skills and competence (OECD, 2001). Lifelong learning encompasses all kinds of setting including formal and informal learning one undertakes throughout one's life (The Scottish Parliament, 2001).

The Institute for Education, one of six educational institutes within UNESCO, has held five international conferences on adult education in Scotland and which have led to the publication of 'The Hamburg Declaration' and 'The Agenda for the Future'. Lifelong learning in these reports means the acquisition of knowledge for academic purposes, job demands, as well as personal aspects of learning throughout one's life. The Higher Education and Research Committee of the Council of Europe, cited in the Scottish Parliament (2001), adopted a major project on 'Lifelong learning for social cohesion: a new challenge to higher education' in March 1998. It aimed to develop models of good

practice, policy recommendations to governments and institutions and analytical reports to help promote lifelong learning. The issues highlight a gradual shift from the system of learning to the learners themselves in educational development globally. Learners have now become the central issue in the international lifelong learning contexts and learning becomes increasingly self-directed and learner-centred.

Lifelong learning plays a crucial role in the life of everyone irrespective of one's job, age or status in society. Formal learning in schools and higher institutions are no longer adequate to equip one to face the ever-rising challenges they face daily in this fast-changing world (Ivanova, 2002). There is a need to continue learning throughout one's life to keep pace with what is happening in and around the world (American Association of Retired People [AARP], 2000). In addition, lifelong learning plays its unique role in addressing the gigantic tasks of societal, economic and personal developments within a society (Gray, 2003).

The uniqueness of lifelong learning is also obvious in certain characteristics demonstrated by lifelong learners. Examples of such traits are love for learning, inquisitive, analytical and critical, able to self assess strengths and weaknesses, autonomous, and possess the ability to be organised (Candy, Crebert, & O'Leary, 1994). Being ready for lifelong learning also means learners are able to manage their learning and are aware of their learning styles: what they learn, how they learn and why they learn (Candy, et al., 1994). In addition, lifelong learners are usually self-directed learners in their learning (Ponton, 1999; Prudie, Hattie & Douglas, 1996; Tough, 1982; Tsui, 1991).

Among the issues for lifelong learning is the need for changes. Edwards (1997) maintains that changes are central to the increasing interest in lifelong learning and a learning society. These changes encompass the social, economic, educational and personal changes in the lives of adults. Changes are inevitable with the enormity for knowledge in this modern era (Raghavan, 1998). Development and planning in society often demand a change in mindsets as pointed out by Ibrahim (2002). These changes in mindset include the readiness to learn the different kinds of knowledge in different contexts; to understand how to use this knowledge relevantly; to manage new and old information; to develop personal efficiency and self-esteem in self management; to willingly share information and work collaboratively; to adopt positive attitudes and flexibility; to develop problem-solving skills and develop critical and creative thinking skills (Ibrahim, 2002). A positive outlook towards life allows individuals to be flexible and more ready to adopt new ideas and learning, and in the course of life, they become more creative and critical in their thinking as they journey through their lifelong learning process.

Malaysia is catching up with global changes and has adopted the concept of lifelong learning to meet the challenges of developing the nation into a knowledge-based economy and a learning society. Ruslan (2005) pointed out three main reasons why lifelong learning is significant in Malaysia: the pressure as a result of globalisation, rapid technological changes, and Malaysia's changing demography. The population of Malaysia is expected to increase to 28.9 million in 2010 and the working age group of 15 to 64 is expected to increase to 65.7 per cent (Government of Malaysia, 2001b). This

increase calls for the need to provide more employment and training opportunities for the working group, which further emphasises the significance of lifelong learning. This learning, as described by Malaysia's Prime Minister, Datuk Sri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, is a form of human capital and the framework to ensuring a sustainable tomorrow (Abdullah, 2002).

The contexts of lifelong learning both locally and internationally demonstrate a close relationship between lifelong learning of teachers and education in general and lifelong learning among teachers and educators in particular. The learning trend has moved from the traditional teacher-centred learning to the self-directed and autonomous learning among learners of today. The pressing issue at this moment is how prepared are the Malaysian teachers in facing these gigantic tasks at hand.

As argued by Sugrue and Thuama (1977), a vital aspect of lifelong learning deals with the roles played by teachers. It is essential that teachers become more skilful as facilitators throughout the learning process. They can help learners identify their needs and realise how resources can be brought to bear on these needs. The traditional training model faces critique as being lacking in focus, intensity, follow-up and coherence with distinct goals for performance of learners. The emphasis now is to teach self-inquiry skills, individualise instruction, teaching within a team, and the open or on-line classroom, in an effort to improve learning attitudes and to develop critical and creative thinking skills among the students. Pupils need to be led to discover their own individual interests, to seek solutions and attain self-motivation towards their own learning (Cornford, 2000).

Teachers are key personnel in realising the national goal of a knowledgeable society in Malaysia. Essentially teachers need to be lifelong learners themselves in order to shoulder the heavy responsibilities entrusted to them and be capable of positively influencing the students in their thoughts, behaviours and lifestyle (Ibrahim, 2002). The findings of this study could provide useful information about the extent teachers in Mukah are involved in lifelong learning and the problems they encounter in their learning. It constitutes constructive feedback that can be used for the design of more define and practical strategies to help cultivate lifelong learning among teachers. In addition, it could serve as a useful guideline either to implement lifelong learning from a grass-root level or a springboard for further actions to be taken to make lifelong learning a reality in Mukah.

Lifelong learning in this study refers to all learning activities carried out by the teachers both (a) formally such as pursuing a graduate degree or masters degree and (b) informally such as taking up a hobby or learning something on their own for self enrichment and better oneself to face life challenges. To date, little is known as to how teachers themselves view the significance of lifelong learning: what they think is important for them to know and learn, how they would like to engage in lifelong learning, the extent to which they are already involved in both the formal or informal lifelong learning as well as the problems they encounter in lifelong learning.

This study aimed to find out the perceptions of teachers in Mukah district towards lifelong learning. Mukah district refers to the coastal town of Mukah division and is located in the central zone of Sarawak, Malaysia. According to the Mukah Education Department survey in 2002, Mukah has a population of 46,182 people of which 496 were teachers from three secondary school and 28 primary schools. Out of the 496 teachers in Mukah, 105 are graduates and 391 are non-graduate teachers.

Specifically, the researchers would like to find out:

- a. The reasons why teachers in Mukah participated in lifelong learning;
- b. The patterns of lifelong learning among teachers in Mukah; and
- c. The obstacles faced by teachers in Mukah in their lifelong learning.

Methodology

A 42-item questionnaire and interview were the instruments used in this study to investigate the perceptions of teachers towards lifelong learning in Mukah District. Six primary schools and three secondary schools were identified and selected. A total of 280 teachers volunteered to take part in the survey. The respondents consisted of 134 teachers from the three secondary schools and 146 teachers from the twelve primary schools in Mukah district identified, and comprised of graduates and non-graduates, experienced as well as novice teachers. The questionnaire items and interview questions were adapted from the national survey of AARP (2000)

The sets of questionnaire were distributed to the respondents in person and the respondents were assured of anonymity. The questionnaire consisted of two sections. The first section asked the respondents to provide data on demographic features. They were asked to tick the appropriate box to each piece of information. In the second section, they were asked to rate along a four-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Disagree and 4 = Strongly Disagree) each statement asking for their perceptions towards lifelong learning.

Interviews were conducted with the respondents. Two teachers from each school volunteered to be interviewed. Open ended questions were used and the interviews were recorded and then transcribed.

A pilot test was conducted on 25 teachers. A 20-item questionnaire and five interviews increased the validity especially on the item construction and suitability of questions asked. Interviews were done to capture the information that might have been missed out by the questionnaires.

The responses from the questionnaire were analysed quantitatively. Similar responses were grouped in the same categories to find the number of counts. Responses from the interviews were noted to support responses from the statements.

Results and Discussions:

Pilot study finding

All 25 respondents in the pilot study indicated their involvement in lifelong learning of different types and all expressed their strong support to be involved in lifelong learning. The most commonly stated reason for continuing their learning “is the need to keep up with what is happening around them”. This is followed by “the reason to upgrade self”. None of the respondents felt that learning was a waste of time. All of them expressed their preference to learn things of interest to them. A total of 20 of the 25 respondents felt that teachers should take up computer learning to improve their job performance. All the respondents felt that heavy workload hindered them from continuing their learning and learning was unlimited by age. They also expressed their hope that more facilities for learning be made available to encourage teachers to cultivate lifelong learning in Mukah district.

Socio-demographic profiles

Of the 280 teachers who participated in this study, there were 177 (63.2%) females and 103 (36.8%) males. Table 1 below shows a break down of the 280 respondents according to their ages and years of experience. In terms of age, majority of the respondents (42.1%) were within the range of 31-40 years age group. The next age range is the 20-30 years which constituted 35.7% of the respondents. This is followed by 19.6% from the age group of 41-50 years. In terms of length of service, 32.1% of the respondents had below five years of service while 17.5% had 6-10 years of teaching experience. This is followed by 22.1% of the respondents who had 11-15 years of teaching experience. In addition, 13.9% of the respondents had 16-20 years of teaching experience, 10.0% had 21-25 years and only 4.3% of the respondents had been teaching for 26-30 years. Out of these 280 respondents, 50.0% of them indicated their intention to continue learning whereas 31.4% of them indicated they had no intention of doing so. There were 10.7% of the respondents who had already undergone tertiary education and 7.9% who were, at the time of the research, taking distance learning or full time study. Thus, there is clear indication that teachers in Mukah at the time of the study, felt that it was important to continue learning and to go for formal learning such as pursuing an academic degree or following certain courses in higher educational institutes.

Table 1 Break down of respondents by age and years of experience

Age (Years)	Percentage (%)	Years of Teaching	Percentage (%)
20-30	35.7	< 5	32.1
31-40	42.1	6-10	17.5
41-50	19.6	11-15	22.1
		16-20	13.8
		21-25	10.0
		26-30	4.3

Perceptions of Teachers towards Lifelong Learning

The perceptions of teachers in Mukah towards lifelong learning included their general perceptions, reasons for learning, patterns of learning and obstacles faced in their learning.

Table 2 below shows distribution of respondents according to their general perceptions towards lifelong learning in Mukah. In general, majority of the teachers in Mukah have positive perceptions towards lifelong learning. The figure indicates that teachers in Mukah are already practising lifelong learning as critical thinking is among the characteristics of lifelong learners. Thus, it is clear that teachers in Mukah are already lifelong learners who are deeply aware of the pressing need to continue learning both for personal enrichment and continuous professional development as well as for societal changes.

Table 2: Distribution of respondents by the general perceptions of teachers towards lifelong learning in Mukah

Statement	Agreed (%)	Disagreed (%)
I think that learning is a lifelong process.	99.7	0.3
I feel that teachers should be given more exposure to new ways of learning.	97.5	2.5
I feel that I should continue learning even after teacher training.	97.5	2.5
I experience the simple joy of learning something new everyday.	96.5	3.5
I am in the opinion that teachers should continuously upgrade their teaching.	95.7	4.5
I feel teachers should take up computer learning to improve their job performance.	93.2	6.8
I think learning means knowing new things.	91.4	8.6
Learning is unlimited by age.	90.0	10.0
I believe I can learn anything and everything I want.	88.6	11.4
I have already learned enough at my age.	9.3	90.7
I do not want to learn any more because I have other preferences in life.	14.6	85.4

Table 3 below shows distribution of respondents by the reasons they participated in lifelong learning. The most common motivation for lifelong learning among teachers in Mukah is related to the notion that teachers need to be more knowledgeable than students in this technology era. This is reflected in the significance of lifelong learning in Malaysian contexts which was pointed out by Bax (2003). The need to keep up with what is happening around them coincides with the findings by The American Association of Retired Persons survey (2000). The other reason why teachers in Mukah participated in lifelong learning was to increase their general knowledge. This concurs with the definition of lifelong learning as given by the OECD (2001). The findings showed that teachers in Mukah felt strongly that they needed to continue learning to be more

confident in facing the students as well as to meet the demand of new teaching strategies for effective teaching and learning process to take place.

Table 3: Distribution of respondents by the reasons they participated in lifelong learning

Statement	Agreed	Disagreed
I think teachers need to be more knowledgeable than students at this technology era.	97.9	2.1
I am in the opinion that teachers should continuously upgrade their teaching.	97.5	2.5
I feel a need for learning to keep up with what is happening around me.	97.5	2.5
I learn with an aim- to increase my general knowledge.	96.7	3.3
I want to improve my job skills through continuous learning.	96.7	3.3
I am determined to learn no matter what problems I encounter.	84.3	15.7
Continuous learning increases my chance of promotion.	82.9	17.1
I aim for a raise in salary after my degree.	81.8	19.2
There is not much raise in salary even when I have extra qualification.	41.5	58.5

A large majority of the teachers learned to improve job skills, which is in line with the aims of the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) in organising the Lifelong Learning Expo 2005 - to create opportunities for job skill training like workshops and seminars on job application skills, and to create more learning centres. There was also a change in attitude among the respondents where 84.3% of them stated that they were determined to learn no matter what problems they encountered. This seems to concur with the characteristics identified by the Prime Minister of Malaysia, the two most powerful motivators in lifelong learners- attitude and desire to better oneself (Ramlan, 2005).

From the reasons given, it can be seen that teachers in Mukah learn more for the purpose of personal development both in confidence, knowledge and competence (OECD, 2001). The result is further supported and elaborated in the findings from the interview. These reasons reflect the positive perceptions of teachers in Mukah towards lifelong learning.

In addition, a further statement but which looks at salary as the reason teachers participated in lifelong learning drew varying responses. The statement, “There is not much raise in salary even after I have extra qualification”, was agreed to by senior teachers, that is, those who had been serving for many years. This is by virtue of the structure of the salary scale which seems to favour teachers who have been teaching for only three to five years; they enjoy a comparatively bigger raise in salary as they move from non-graduate to graduate salary scale. Many of the ‘young’ teachers agreed that it was the raise in salary whereas older teachers disagreed to it. Similarly, the reason for learning in the statement “I am for a raise in salary after my degree”, ‘younger’ teachers agreed to the statement but teachers with more years of teaching did not think that it was the raise in salary they aimed for; they learned to increase knowledge, to enrich self, and to build confidence, as explained by findings from the interviews.

Table 4 below shows distribution of patterns of lifelong learning among teachers in Mukah. Of the 280 teachers who participated in this study, the majority believed in learning through experience. This is further elaborated by the interviewees that they learnt through their own experience and from the experience of others. Boud pointed out that “among the traditional learning practiced by adult learners is the andragogical tradition where adult learners’ experience is considered to be the foundation and the most important resource for learning” (cited in Usher, Bryant & Johnston, 1997, p. 36). A near equal percentage of respondents chose reading as a way to improve themselves while others learnt through talking and mixing around with people. Internet was another way which teachers in Mukah found useful in their learning. They found that on-line discussion improved their learning.

Most teachers expressed a preference to study on their own which reflected a characteristic of self-regulated learners where learners go through the process of goal setting, time management, learning strategies, self-evaluation, self-attributions, seeking help or information and important self-motivational beliefs (Zimmerman, 2000). The respondents are proactive in their efforts to learn because they are aware of their strengths and limitations. As self-regulated learners, they are able to translate their mental abilities into academic skills, driven by personal goals (Zimmerman, 2000). Interestingly, self-regulated learners seldom learn in isolation but they grasp every opportunity to collaborate and interact with others as reflected in the findings, that is, the respondents sometimes learnt through group discussion and collaboration with peers. More than half of the teachers learnt a lot just by listening to radio or television programmes as these are easier assets to obtain information or knowledge.

Table 4: Distribution of patterns of lifelong learning among teachers in Mukah.

Statement	Agreed (%)	Disagreed (%)
I believe in learning through experience.	98.6	1.4
I usually read to improve myself.	98.2	1.8
I learn through talking and mixing around with people.	94.0	6.0
I find internet very useful for my learning.	89.3	10.7
Online discussion improves my learning.	77.8	22.2
I prefer studying on my own.	69.3	30.7
I learn a lot by listening to radio and watching television.	55.7	44.3
To me learning refers to learning from higher educational institution	36.0	74.0

The findings show that teachers in Mukah were actively participating in various kinds of learning both formally and informally. They were adult learners who realised the importance of continuous learning of all forms in all areas of their lives and they sought to regulate their own learning to achieve their individual goals in learning.

Table 5 below shows distribution of obstacles faced by teachers in Mukah district in their lifelong learning. The findings revealed that environmental factors such as a lack of distance learning centres, lack of support from work place, heavy workload, and lack of

resources in Mukah district constituted the major obstacles faced by teachers in their learning.

The reasons why teachers did not favour the full-time programme are elaborated by the findings from the interviews. Most in-service teachers had settled down to build their family in Mukah, and the full-time course demands participants to be away from home. They had to leave their families behind, and they encountered extra expenditure like house rent, food, transport and other living expenses while they were away from home. The half-pay salary was a big financial burden especially to those teachers who already had various financial commitments, for example, servicing a loan taken on a car or a mortgage on a house. Thus, most teachers expressed their intention to continue formal learning through distance learning instead of full-time study.

Table 5: Distribution of obstacles faced by teachers in Mukah district in their lifelong learning

Statement	Agreed (%)	Disagreed (%)
My obstacle to learning is that there are no PJJ centres in Mukah.	95.0	5.0
I think support from work place is important for me to further my studies.	94.6	5.4
I don't want to learn because I can't find time to do it.	82.5	17.5
Financial commitment deters me from pursuing tertiary education.	61.0	39.0
Family commitment prevents me from furthering my studies.	60.0	40.0
A lack of resources in Mukah prevents me from continuing my studies.	57.9	42.1
Heavy workload hinders me from continuing my learning.	50.7	49.3
I think it is very stressful to start studying again after years of teaching.	47.5	52.5

A further reason stated by the teachers includes support from their work place. The support, the teachers felt, was important for them to further their studies. The interviews revealed that teachers were more able to concentrate on their studies if their school authorities exempted them from extra activities, which were sometimes carried out on Saturdays. Unfortunately, Saturday was the only time they could attend their distance learning lectures. In addition, heavy workload in schools often left teachers with no time for their studies.

Another reason indicated by the teachers and which constitutes a big obstacle is the obvious lack of resources in Mukah. The findings from the interviews indicated that participants who were taking distance learning encountered great difficulties in finding information from books needed in their studies. Academic books for tertiary level and journals were not available from the library. For those teachers who sought non formal and informal learning, there were insufficient learning facilities such as language learning centres and no vocational classes for adults to continue their learning. Other obstacles faced by teachers in Mukah district included personal factors like health issue and time

management. Despite the obstacles faced in their learning, the teachers in Mukah district were determined to continue learning, if given the chance.

Findings from Interviews

Interviews were conducted on nine secondary school teachers and nine primary school teachers. The findings revealed similar responses to the questionnaires but with additional information on other reasons and patterns, as well as obstacles of lifelong learning among the teachers in Mukah. With the exception of one teacher, all teachers expressed the need to continue learning for similar reasons such as learning to keep up with the latest technologies, to upgrade skills and knowledge to meet the challenging world, to catch up with the development of the world-the notion that teachers should be more knowledgeable than students, to feel more confident, to gain more knowledge and learning to learn new things.

Out of the 18 teachers interviewed, 12 of them found Internet very useful in their learning while ten of them preferred reading. They preferred to learn at their own pace and at their own time. They found Internet convenient as they could have more control over what they liked to learn. The wide resources on-line is an eye-opening experience for a few of the interviewees as learning becomes limitless to them.

Among the obstacles faced by teachers in Mukah was a lack of resources. Fourteen out of the eighteen teachers interviewed stated that insufficient resources had a negative impact upon their motivation to continue learning of any form. This is especially so in the Mukah library where the teachers expressed regret for the obvious lacking of up-to-date resources. These teachers expressed strong determination to continue learning of any form as they felt that the obstacles they encountered were insignificant, compared to the desire and intention to continue learning, for personal benefits and continual professional development.

Conclusions and Recommendations:

Conclusion

The survey on the perceptions of 280 teachers of different backgrounds and age groups provides an understanding to the practice of lifelong learning in Mukah district. The findings reveal positive perceptions of the teachers towards the concept of lifelong learning. The most popular reason why these teachers opt for lifelong learning is that teachers should be more knowledgeable than students especially in this technological era. In addition, most teachers express their preference for the Internet as a useful tool in their learning. Incidentally, the study indicates that these teachers are already lifelong learners who are actively participating in different kinds of learning in Mukah district. A lack of distance learning centres constitutes the biggest obstacle faced by the teachers. Despite the obstacles, teachers in Mukah district have expressed their determination to continue learning.

This study highlights four important issues at hand. First, the positive perceptions of the teachers towards the concept of lifelong learning determine the pace for lifelong learning among teachers in Mukah district. These positive perceptions show that teachers are

already familiar with the concept and they are ready to move on to other stages of lifelong learning. It serves as a strong foundation for policy makers to decide where to come into the scene of lifelong learning among teachers in Mukah district.

Secondly, this study shows that teachers in Mukah district learn for specific reasons related to their personal development. To be successful, teachers need to strike a balance in all aspects of development including professional development, skills and competence, language proficiency, social and interpersonal relationship as well as leadership roles. This study, therefore, provides useful information for both policy makers and curriculum designers to devise programme that will cater to a more wholesome development for teachers.

Thirdly, the study shows a preference for informal learning as compared to a more rigid formal learning environment for teachers in Mukah. This trend of learning coupled with the fact that the majority of teachers learn by experience highlight the characteristics of self-regulated learning among teachers. Teachers in Mukah show their critical skills in deciding what to learn and how to go about their own learning which can best meet their own personal needs.

Finally, the study suggests that lifelong learning of teachers in Mukah district is hindered by environmental factors such as a lack of distance learning centres, a shortage of resources, a lack of professional development for teachers, heavy workload and a need for support from work place in their learning. They display their determination to face their own personal obstacles such as family commitment and financial constraints but they are unable to handle those factors. Knowledge of the obstacles faced by teachers provides useful information for policy makers to identify the areas of need and their roles in handling the issues at hand.

Recommendations for Policy Makers

Teachers who have gone through certain professional development should be given credits so that they can accumulate them to attain certain requirements for a raise in salary or a chance for promotion. Every teacher should also be given equal opportunities to attend courses, at least an in-house training every year, and be sent to attend a more detailed professional development at least once in three years. This is so that they can keep up with the current development in education to improve their teaching. In addition, it is recommended that teachers with more than ten years of teaching experience be exempted from teaching practice when they follow the full time study of specific teaching development programme and distance learning. Their teaching experience can be credited and taken into consideration to fulfill the requirements of teaching practice.

Knowing that there is a difference in perceptions between younger and older teachers and the fact that older teachers do not enjoy a distinct raise in salary, it is suggested that policy makers conduct more in-depth studies on the present salary scale in relation to the years of service. As promotion and earning an academic degree are among the reasons for teachers to continue learning, more opportunities for continual learning should be created. These opportunities create pathways by which teachers are given more chances

for promotion, efforts to prompt more in-service teachers to seek higher academic qualification.

Nevertheless, findings from the interviews also showed that some teachers were discouraged when applying to continue their learning in masters in education. A wider choice of subjects and fields of study should be offered to these teachers. The procedures for applying for study loan and application for the course should be made simpler so as to attract more teachers to seek higher academic qualification.

In addition, it is seen that a lack of distance learning centres is the main obstacle faced by the teachers in Mukah. Thus, there is a pressing need for policy makers to seriously consider the possibility of setting up distance learning centres to cater to the increasing number of teachers who are interested in taking up distance learning. The obvious preference for distance learning instead of full time studies indicated by teachers in Mukah reflects the need for a more flexible way of learning which can better cater to the specific needs of in-service teachers. It is recommended that more studies can be done to modify and adjust the distance learning programmes to make it more suited to a form of professional development for teachers.

Further to that, policy makers should provide more opportunities for learning through Internet as teachers in Mukah found that a useful tool in their learning. More courses on how to better use the Internet for their learning and teaching, as well as more hands-on learning will prove beneficial to the teachers. At present, the setting up of the village Internet centre is a big welcome to the general public in Mukah but it is hoped that more facilities on Internet and on-line services be provided specially for teachers to upgrade themselves in information communication technology skills in their teaching.

Recommendations for School

As respondents of this study feel strongly that the school authority is a motivating factor contributing to their involvement in lifelong learning, school principals and other teachers in the same school need to be understanding and ensure less work load be given to those teachers who are currently taking up formal learning through distance education. It is also suggested that these teachers be temporarily relieved from outside school activities on Saturdays as most of their weekends are all taken up by their studies. Informal activities such as monthly informal gatherings allow teachers the opportunities to meet with each other and catch up with the latest development in teaching profession. Talks and seminars on motivation, health, leadership, finance, management and computer skills will appeal to teachers in Mukah as they can learn informally in the absence of rigid formal learning.

Recommendations for Future Research

Since the findings reveal a difference in perceptions between the younger and older teachers, more detailed studies can be done to identify the causes for the differences in opinions in relation to gender, age groups and the years of service and how these variables affect one another. In addition, future studies can be done to see whether there are any differences in perceptions between rural and urban school teachers: primary and secondary school teachers, ordinary teachers and teachers with specific posts such as the

principals or assistants. These different areas of study will provide a more complete picture of the context of lifelong learning among teachers in Mukah.

Another area of research is to determine whether there is any correlation between the perceptions of teachers with regards to the reasons for learning, the patterns of learning and the obstacles faced by teachers in their learning. The correlation between these variables and how the different aspects affect lifelong learning would provide a more holistic picture of the practice of lifelong learning among teachers. Studies can also be conducted on specific groups of people such as lecturers, principals, headmasters, education officers, undergraduates, students or even the general public, to see how perceptions of lifelong learning differ for each group of people.

Finally, future studies can be done to identify specific aspects of lifelong learning which teachers may want to be involved with such as professional development, personal enrichment, work place learning, relationship with others, job skills and competence, language proficiency, hobbies, health awareness, culture, public speaking, leadership training and community services in teachers' lifelong learning.

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