

Government Support in Learning through Lifelong Learning Programmes

Apoyo gubernamental en el aprendizaje a través de programas de aprendizaje permanente

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to identify the extent of government support in implementing LLL programmes for working individuals from the perspective of SME employees. Previous studies had been focussing on involvement of workers in LLL programmes, however very little study in Malaysia had done on government provides support in terms of programme offerings, infrastructure facilities and education funding among SME employees. This study applied a quantitative approach using the cross section questionnaire design. A total of 1148 SME employees were selected as respondents. Correlation coefficients show that SME employees' level of knowledge on the LLL programmes offered (min=2.7, s.d =0.537) and level of readiness to participate in the LLL programmes (min=2.68, s.d=0.536) are at medium level. Level of government support towards level of involvement of SME employees in LLL programmes also at medium level (min=3.07; s.d=0.32).

Keywords: Small and Medium Enterprises, employees, Lifelong Learning, government support.

RESUMEN

El propósito de este estudio es identificar el alcance del apoyo del gobierno en la implementación de programas LLL para personas que trabajan desde la perspectiva de los empleados de las PYME. Estudios anteriores se habían centrado en la participación de los trabajadores en los programas de LLL, sin embargo, muy poco estudio realizado en Malasia sobre el gobierno proporciona apoyo en términos de ofertas de programas, instalaciones de infraestructura y financiación de la educación entre los empleados de las PYME. Este estudio aplicó un enfoque cuantitativo utilizando el diseño del cuestionario de sección transversal. Un total de 1148 empleados de PYME fueron seleccionados como encuestados. Los coeficientes de correlación muestran que el nivel de conocimiento de los empleados de las PYME sobre los programas LLL ofrecidos (min = 2.7, s.d = 0.537) y el nivel de preparación para participar en los programas LLL (min = 2.68, s.d = 0.536) son de nivel medio. Nivel de apoyo gubernamental hacia el nivel de participación de los empleados de las PYME en los programas de LLL también a nivel medio (min = 3.07; s.d = 0.32).

Palabras clave: pequeñas y medianas empresas, empleados, aprendizaje permanente, apoyo gubernamental.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Lifelong Learning Programmes (LLL) is the platform that can benefit SME employees to improve their competencies level in the labour market thus increasing SME productivity and viability. The LLL programmes has a significant contribution in helping the Malaysian government realize the aspirations in the k-economy through a more visionary, creative, innovative and competitive employees in solving their tasks (Wan Idros 2007). However, the question arises whether the implementation of LLL programmes in term of programme features concerning module offerings, learning methods and courses are compatible with the characteristics of SME employees. Until June 2017, the total of the registered employers are just 19,487 (2.14% of 907,605 registered business organisation), involving 2.05 million workers (21% from 9.71 million industrial employees) (SME Annual Report 2017/2018). This low enrolment ratio could adversely affect the composition of the highly educated workforce in the country's labour market and consequently affect the level of intensity of skills and knowledge (Ishak & Zulkifly 2010).

The LLL programmes offer courses based on the cluster. There are four clusters: (i) First Cluster - part-time learning; (ii) Second Cluster - technical and skills learning; (iii) Third Cluster - knowledge and skills enhancement learning; (iv) Fourth Cluster - full-time learning. Mohd Nasran, Mohd Isa & Zolkepli (2016) has reported how flexible learning model provides flexibility to the community, especially the workers to participate in the LLL programmes in the country. The findings show that flexible learning methods could improve the effectiveness of teaching activities, attract participants and provide space for the workers to be involved in learning. Although basically, flexible learning methods are complicated to be implemented effectively, it is not impossible to be realised. Furthermore, due to lack of information and skills learning among the people in this country, most of the employees are not interested in participating in LLL programmes as they do not understand and have no clear information on the courses offered (Jamunarani, 2014). Consequently, there is a perception that only certain group of people could participate in LLL programmes, for instance, individual who has an academic qualification, professionals, high fees and others (Nabil Fikri & Roswani, 2014). From the economic aspect, the ability to have financial resources for access to education is one of the issues that are often discussed. The financial situation limits the opportunities of low- and middle-income groups to engage in learning (Jamunarani 2014; Noor Hasslinie & Noor Zuleika, 2014; Arifin, 2014). Previous studies have suggested that lack of funds from the government in supporting the implementation of the LLL programmes poses several weaknesses. Among others, to save the funding received from the government, institutions are forced to implement saving measures using existing resources whereby lecturers are given additional tasks as the facilitators for the LLL programmes (Wardah, Rohaida, Zulhairi & Zafira 2014). This situation has led to a lack of cooperation from the academicians, besides the programmes implementation structure has yet to reach a satisfactory level (Shawira, Lim, Rosinah & Loo, 2014).

Hence, in general, this study was conducted;

- (i) To identify level of knowledge and readiness of SME employees to get involved in LLL programmes
- (ii) To identify level of government support towards level of involvement of SME employees in LLL programmes
- (iii) To identify relationship between government's level of support and SME employees' level of involvement in LLL programmes.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study applied the survey research design on SME employees using grouped multiple layered sampling techniques. The rationale for this sampling technique is based on the selection of sample types such as SME category (micro, small and medium), SME sectors (service and manufacturing) and location of studies based on the highest number of SMEs in the country (Selangor, Wilayah Persekutuan Kuala Lumpur and Putrajaya, Johor and Perak). This technique is used due to the overwhelming number of SME employees population of about 14.76 million SME employees (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2017). Next, in determining the size of the sample, the researcher applied the opinion of Krejcie & Morgan (1970) that the minimum number of samples of about 2 million SME employees at the study sites was 1108. Descriptive statistics were used to answer the research objective one and two by including frequency distribution, percentage, mean and standard deviation. To answer the third objective, Pearson's correlation analysis was used to assess the strength of the relationship between the two variables using the correlation coefficient (r). The Correlation Coefficient (r) is a relative value in the form of a power-scale indication between +1 to -1. Before the actual data was collected, researchers had conducted pilot studies on 45 SME employees around the districts of Bangi, Putrajaya and Shah Alam. Data from the pilot study was first analysed using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 20.0. Correlation value for each item is greater than 0.25 while alpha Cronbach value in assessing the reliability of the instrument is 0.945. There were 37 items measured by three constructs namely (i) program offerings; (ii) infrastructure facilities and (iii) financing.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

With reference to research objective 1 (Table 1 and Table 2), in overall, Table 1 show that SME employees knowledge on the LLL programmes were at moderate-low level (min = 2.7, s.d = 0.537). In generally, studies on LLL programmes in this country also show that the people are still in a situation that is lack of information that leads to incorrect perception (Jamunarani 2014; Nabil Fikri & Roswani 2014). Accordingly, the government as a policymaker, programmes providers and the industries also need to collaborate so that the workers, especially SME employees, would get clear information from various aspects such as program quality, delivery method and education funding. In addition, government and programmes providers should promote LLL programmes in a more extensive and effective manner. Advertising using the digital technology is so well placed to be the key to open the door to lifelong learning.

Table 1: Level of SME Employees knowledge on LLL Programmes

Employees knowledge on LLL Programmes	Min	Standard Division (s.d)
Programme offerings	2.64	0.511
Infrastructure facilities	2.41	0.409
Education funding	2.27	0.340
Total	2.70	0.537

SME employees readiness were also at moderate-low level (min = 2.68, s.d = 0.536) where the financial preparedness is the lowest level of readiness (min=2.27; s.d=0.340) (Table 2). A study conducted by Santhi Raghaven, Mohd Ghazali, Loo, Ariff., & Rames (2014) among workers found that several barriers prevent workers from getting involved in LLL programmes due to financial constraints, lack of employer support, lack of information, concerns over partial commitment between work, family and study, and afraid of failure. According to Nor Aishah, Ganefri and Saliza (2013), generic knowledge and skills acquired through formal education can be used in many business contexts, therefore self-preparation and perception to get involved in LLL programmes needs to be implemented from the beginning and cultured within the organization.

Accordingly, the implementation of LLL programmes is expected to be reviewed, well planned and streamlined to attract employees and employers to get involve. As the practice of LLL culture could not be established within a short time, then the exposure, practice, offering of a conducive program structure and meeting the needs and requirements of employers and employees as well as continuous support from the government are necessary for the effort to develop the human capital at an optimum level.

Table 2: Level of Readiness of SME Employees to Get Involved in LLL Programmes

Readiness of SME Employees to Get Involved in LLL	Min	Standard Division (s.d)
Education planning	2.61	0.515
Mental and physical preparedness	2.52	0.492
Financial	2.36	0.373
Total	2.68	0.536

Table 3 shows that SME employees felt that the level of government support to engage in LLL programmes is still at a moderately low level (min=3.07; s.d=0.32) which is Education Funding is the lowest level (min=2.84, s.d=2.73). The Government may provide special incentive giveaway for the employers who sends their workers to LLL programmes and tax exemption for these employers in ensuring the exact taxed income to be distributed among the workers as education and training allowances (Zarina, Nor Aishah & Muhammad, 2018). This is because SMEs employees need more funding from government because of their lower salaries.

Table 3: Level of Government Support

Government Support	Min	Standard Division (s.d)
Programme offerings	3.23	3.23
Infrastructure facilities	3.00	3.00
Education funding	2.84	2.73
Total	3.07	3.07

With reference to research objective 3 (Table 4), Pearson correlation test finding, the value of r is 0.311 and $p = 0.000$, i.e. $p < 0.05$. It means that there is a weak relationship between the level of government support and the level of employee engagement in LLL programmes based on the perspective of the SME employees. Interestingly, the result shows that although the level of government support is low, the relationship is still significant. However, the researcher has the opinion that SME employees are less informed about the support system that the government has implemented for workers who are engaged in the LLL programmes. This can also be seen in the moderate-low level of knowledge among SMEs employees for the first objectives of the study (Table 1). Therefore, Malaysia government needs to improve mechanisms and infrastructure to facilitate LLL programmes as a tool to enhance knowledge, skills and quality of SME employees (Zarina, Nor Aishah & Lilia 2019).

Table 4: Relationship between the Level of Government Support and the Level of Employee Engagement in LLL Programmes

Variable	r	Significant
Government support	0.311	0.000

4. CONCLUSION

Studies on the decisive determinants of involvement and barriers of SME employees to engage in LLL programmes has been widely conducted in developed countries. However, in-depth study on the issue has not received much attention in developing countries. Therefore, this study contributes significantly to the literature in this country particularly because individual career development through education exists not only from individual internal response but also from the support of external influences, especially the policymakers. As the education and income level of SME employees in this country is relatively low and moderate, the government supports through education and training programmes is very important and need to improve towards the optimum level. Among others, are the development of new modules and the enhancement of existing modules, especially courses that are in line with industry needs and requirements. A diversified module could provide better choices to the community, especially workers and employers, to engage in LLL programmes.

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