

TRENDS AND CHALLENGES IN ADULT AND CONTINUING EDUCATION

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Introduction

Systematic effort to educate adult citizens in the country can be traced as early as the fourteenth century. Although numerous institutions carried various educational and training programs, there is an absence of comprehensive and empirical knowledge on the practice of adult and continuing education in Malaysia. This research seeks to answer these questions: (1). Who are the adult and continuing education (ACE) providers in Malaysia? (2). Who are the ACE stakeholders? (3). What and why are the programs offered? (4). How are the programs delivered? (5). What are the facilities available? and (6). What the issues and challenges encountered (by the providers)?

Adult and continuing education providers refer to institutions that offer educational programs to those 18 years old and above whom seek education outside the formal schooling system. The programs can be both formal and non-formal.

Materials and Methods

A listing of institutions that offer educational program to adult was obtained from various sources. Based on the list, 565 institutions were randomly sampled. A total of 373 (66%) institutions responded to a survey. The survey questionnaire consists of closed and open-ended questions. The instrument asks for detail of adult education programs conducted by the institution in 1996. This includes the programmes' title, client, approach, rationale, and issues and problems encountered. The questionnaires were personally sent to and collected from institutions in the Klang valley. Data from institutions outside the valley were collected through mail. The data were analysed by using the SPSS for Windows program for descriptive statistics. Case studies on a number of institutions were also carried out for detail of the programs.

Results and Discussion

Adult and continuing education are actively carried out in Malaysia for the public and institution's employees. Mapping the field in relation to the program's sponsor shows that providers can be categorised according to the country's major organisational set up; public sector, private sector and non-

governmental organisations (NGOs). This framework shares some common elements to that of Apps (1990). The Malaysian public or government sector is tax supported, the private sector is profit oriented, and the non-governmental organisation is non-profit institution. The public sectors include National Public Administration Institute, Department of Agriculture, Public Health Institute, Department of Community Development, Defense Ministry, Selangor Museum and National Library. The private sectors include Private Higher Institution of Education, Dutch Baby Milk Industry, Motorola, TT Engineering and Manufacturing, Aetna Universal Insurance, and Hong Kong Bank. The non-governmental organisations include Poverty Elevation Foundation, Malaysian AIDS Council, Consumer Association, Sisters in Islam, National Evangelical Christian Fellowship, and Malaysian Institute of Accountants. Other criteria that can be used to describe the field are related to "special interest group". The category include those related to agriculture, community, higher education, training and consultation, services, manufacturing and business. Major ACE programs provided are those that are work related and market driven. These include programs related to; personal development, management, professional/technical training, and computerisation. The programs offered reflects the country's needs for: skilled manpower for the expanding industrial needs, upgrading managerial capability, improving efficiency and increasing productivity of the workforce, and the use of information technology to improve work efficiency and quality. Issues of concern to the providers can be inferred into matters related to; learners and their participation, facilities and resources for learning, lack of experienced facilitators, structure, policy, funding and programming. The challenges implicit in the study suggest that: (1). ACE programs must be holistic-biased, encompassing not only work-related matters but also covering dimensions for social, spiritual and life enrichment, (2). to maximise the use of limited resources, there is a need for further strengthening of collaboration between providers, (3). the field can be further strengthened with networking of the professionals and practitioners in an organised establishment, and (4). a staggering number of diverse institutions that provide a myriad form of adult education call for coordination of the providers.

Conclusions

Adult and continuing education plays a critical role in the nation and individual development. Malaysia is in need of putting adult and continuing education as one of the country's forefront agendas.

References

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