Self-directed Learning and Culture: a study on Malay adult learners
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Introduction
Experience is considered as an essential element in adult education and many researchers have considered it as an important element (Boud and Miller (1996b), Brookfield (1995) and Usher, Bryant and Johnston (1997) cited in Merriam, 2001) as it carries with it a rich resource for adult learners. Experience appeared to be highly influenced by historical as well as sociocultural factors, however, not all experience may translate into meaningful learning (Merriam and Caffarella 2001). Other factors also contributed to the successful learning process of adult learners such as self-directed learning, critical reflection and learning how to learn (Brookfield, 1995).

Current trend in adult education seems to have shifted from understanding the adult learners to looking at the socio-political context of adult education (Brockett et al 2003). In the area of self-directed learning, Brockett suggests a few areas that need to looked into and one of them is on the naturalistic point of view, where the concerns should focus on the limits of self directed learning and how does it interfaces with power and conflict in various settings. Hiemstra (2008) concludes that current research on self-directed learning are more focused relationship between learners and self-directed learning and the impact of technology (internet, broadband access) on self-direct learning.

Knowles’s version of andragogy, which is based on humanistic psychology, presents the individual learner as someone who is autonomous, free and growth oriented (cited in Merriam, 2001). However, this view is criticised for leaving out the fact that individuals are shaped by their society and culture, which have their own history and the social institutions and structures defined to a large extent the learning transaction of the individuals (Merriam, 2001, Rogers, 2002).

Brookfield (1995) suggests that more research into cross cultural aspects of adult education is needed to break the dominance of the North America and European in adult learning. He further adds that the elements within certain cultures play a far more significant role in adult learning as compared to the age factor. Hiemstra (1997) also suggests that more research on cross cultural aspects of self directed learning should be undertaken. In Malaysia, cross cultural research is more focussed in the area of management (Asma Abdullah, 1996, Fontaine and Richardson, 2003) and studies on self directed learning (Norzaini Azman,, 2007, Chiu Yong, Kian Sam and Kock Wah, 2007, Shireen Haron, 2003, Daing Zaidah, 2002 Daing Zaidah and Abu Daud Silong, 2002) did not look specifically at culture. The current research into SDL and adult learning are more focused on the aspects of web based and online learning (Hiemstra, 2001, Paige, 2007, Shinkareva, 2006, Oladoke, 2006, Chi Cheng 2007) and the relationship between SDL and the learners (Hiemstra, 2008). Hiemstra (2008) further stresses that future directions on
research into SDL should focus its impact on the learners for as Hsu and Shiue (2005) believe that being self-directed is important among adult learners.

The element of culture plays an important role in adult learning (Brookfield, 1995) and it has been noted that self-directed learning is the central concept in the study and practice of adult education (Garrison, 1997). These two factors are central to adult learning and according to Rogers (2002) culture can shape the growth of self-directed learning among adult learners and he further adds that learner autonomy, an important aspect of self-directed learning (Brockett and Hiemstra, 1991, Guglielmino, 1977, Candy, 1991) is limited by what the culture permits (Rogers, 2002, Hazadiah and Faizah, 2007). Candy (1991) said that:

"adults are powerfully affected by aspects of their backgrounds - including family and prior education - in ways that limit and constrain their ability to be self-directing in certain learning situations" (cited in Booth, 2007)

Brockett and Hiemstra (1991) support this notion by saying that self-directed learning activities "cannot be divorced from the social context in which they occur" because “the social context provides the arena in which the activity of self-direction is played out” and they call for more attention to the way in which global and cross-cultural factors frame this activity (cited in Brookfield, 1993).

The culture of a society is ‘the glue that holds its members together through a common language, dressing, food, religion, beliefs aspirations and challenges. It is a set of learned behaviour patterns so deeply ingrained’ that we act them out in ‘unconscious and involuntary (Asma Abdullah, 1996). Cultural values are emotion-laden, internalized assumptions, beliefs or standards that shape how we interpret our life experiences (Merriam and Mohamad, 2000).

In a collectivist society such as Malaysia (Hofstede, 2005), members of groups do not speak up, or even express a contradictory point of view, instead social harmony is maintained and it is the hidden goal of every communication (Beamer and Varner, 2008). This is done so as to avoid losing face, which is a terrible thing to suffer in collectivist cultures throughout Asia, the Middle East and Africa (Beamer and Varner, 2008). Rossi (2002) who cited Garrison (1992) states that self-directed learning is related to the learners’ learning style personality traits motivation and readiness to accept responsibility and these characteristics emphasis on the individuality of the learners in any learning environment (Rossi, 2002).

**Purpose of the study**

Firstly, even though research into SDL, according to Brockett (2000), seems to have reached a saturation point, he feels that the need to take research into a new level is pertinent and research into the Malay culture and SDL has been minimal (if not, none) (Malaysian Thesis Online, (MYTHO), www.perpun.net). Therefore, the present study intends to investigate the influence of the Malay culture on self-directed learning among Malay adult learners. The study also intends to investigate the relationship, impact and effect of culture (if any) on the Malay adult learners as well. The findings from this study could bridge the gap between the Malay culture and self-directed learning by providing first hand insights into Malay adult learners.
Secondly, it is understood that more adult learners will continue their education and the number is increasing (Hsu and Shiue, 2005), thus more research into adult learning would be able to generate a far better understanding of adult learners especially, in this context, the Malays. Thus, this study intends to provide a model description as well as providing insights into the Malay adult learners and adding to body of literature on adult learning and Malay adult learners in particular.

Thirdly, life-long learning is seen as pertinent concept which must be embraced upon by all for it is a concept that allows a learner to continuously learn throughout his life, be it in a formal or informal environment. Therefore, developing self-directed learning readiness will help to escalate the process of becoming life-long learners among adult learners. This study will provide insights on how culture might play a significant role in developing Malay adult learners into becoming life-long learners as the global market is demanding employees to be more self-directed and continuously developing their skills and knowledge.

**Significance of the study**

Firstly, approximately thirteen millions adult would have enrolled in distance education courses and the trend tends to grow (Hsu and Shiue, 2005) and as economic, social and cultural diversities of a population, increases, varying degrees of lifestyle, interests and needs would require various ways in pursuit of learning (Hsu and Shiue, 2005). The number of students continuing their education via part time or long distance mode has increased by thirty three percent (33%) from 2002 to 2007, according to the Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia (MOHE) (retrieved from www.mohe.gov.my). This number excludes those who are furthering their post graduate education. Based on this, it would be right to assume that more people are enrolling into distance education courses and there will be a greater demand for research in the areas of adult education. On top of that, it would also be significant to say that, the need to understand the learners should be made culturally specific. Brookfield (1995) argues that adult educators must be ready to challenge existing assumptions about adult learners and that the idea of “teaching their own” may prove significant in the development of adult education. Furthermore, it is estimated about 75-80% student population of Open Universiti Malaysia are Malays (55,000 total student population, retrieved from www.oum.edu.my) and Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM) projects to have 200000 students by the year 2010 (retrieved from www.utusan.com.my). Finally, the findings from this study will not only add to the existing body of knowledge regarding adult learners, but will also help to generate better understanding of the Malay adult learners and the influence culture has in their learning process. Hopefully, the findings will also help trainers of adult learners make better informed decisions regarding the policy, training and materials development for adult learning.

**Research Objectives and Questions**

The study is guided by the following objectives:

1. Investigating the cultural influence on the different levels of self-directed learning readiness of Malay adult learners.
2. Investigating the impact of cultural influences on the different levels of self-directed learning readiness of Malay adult learners.
Research questions for the study are as follows:

1. Does culture have any influence on self-directed learning of the Malay adult learners?
2. Does culture have any impact on the self-directed learning of the Malay adult learners?

**Literature Review**

*Self-directed Learning*

Garrison (1997) and Knowles, Holton, and Swanson (1998), state that self-directed learning is part and parcel of the psychological and social development of adulthood (cited in Terry, 2006). Adults who are fully self-directed take full control of their learning endeavors, but not all adults are fully self-directed (Hatcher, 1997 cited in Terry, 2006). Psychological and social maturity, are factors that are integral in determining self-directedness of an adult (Knowles et al 1998 cited in Terry, 2006). Self-directed learners are said to demonstrate greater awareness of their responsibility in making learning meaningful and monitoring themselves, thus making them more effective learners and social beings (Turner, 2007).

Garrison (1997) states that self-directed learning is the central concept in studying adult learners, albeit with considerable amount of criticism and confusion surrounding it. Similarly, Jarvis (1992) pointed that self-directed learning is term shrouded in vagueness that regularly occurs in adult education literature but lacks precise definition (cited in Cranton, 2001). Different scholars have presented different perspectives on SDL, where some see it as a process (Merriam Caffarella and Baumgartner, 2007), as personal attributes (Knowles, 1988) and others as both (cited in Song and Hill, 2007, Booth, 2007). Self-directed learning, according to Garrison (1997), is an approach where learners are motivated to assume personal responsibility and collaborative control of the cognitive and contextual process in constructing meaningful and worthwhile learning outcomes (Garrison, 1997 p.18). Knowles (1975) defined self-directed learning as:

"process in which learners take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in identifying their learning needs, formulating learning goals, choosing learning resources, employing suitable learning strategies, and assessing learning outcomes" (p. 167, cited in Chi Cheng, 2007).

Hiemstra states that “self-directed learning is seen as any study form in which individuals have primary responsibility for planning, implementing, and even evaluating the effort” (Hiemstra, 1994). Wilcox (1996) shared similar ideas of self-directed learning when she defined it as a process of learning in which learners function autonomously, taking responsibility for planning, initiating, and evaluating their own learning efforts (Wilcox, 1996). Self-directed learning readiness is seen as a learning behavior which allows students to continue learning on their own initiative (Chi Cheng, 2007) while Cranton (2001) sees self-directed learning as a goal, a process and a learner characteristics that changes with the nature of the learning (Cranton, 2001 in Merriam and Caffarella, 2001).

Le Juen (2001) sees self-directed learning as learners’ capabilities and motivations used to define and satisfy learning goals with whatever resources required (cited in Chiu Yong, Kian Sam and Kock Wah, 2007). Grieve (2003) suggests that the extent to which learners participate in a program and show self direction depends on factors such as their past experiences with education, how they perceive the roles of the teacher and learner, and how they interpret the

**Culture**

Defining culture may not yield a single definitive explanation for hundreds of definitions have been put forth by scholars and culture itself is a large and inclusive concept (Beemer and Varner, 2008). In its most basic explanation, as Triandis points out, culture “functions to improve the adaptation of members of the same culture to a particular ecology, and it includes the knowledge that people need to have in order to function effectively in their social environment” (Triandis, 2000, cited in Samovar, Porter and McDaniel, 2007).

Despite being a multicultural society where each ethnic retains its own identity and culture, all Malaysians, regardless of ethnicity, share common cultural values. Based on research done by the Malaysian Institute of Management as well as foreign scholars, Asma (2006) has managed to identify the five common cultural values of Malaysians (Asma, 2006, p.98). Malaysia is considered to be a collective society whereby the needs of the group is above the needs of the individual and Malaysians are seen to prefer group or family oriented activities. The concept of ‘we’ is upheld at home or the workplace regardless of ethnicity, individualism is suppressed in favour of the ‘family unit’ and to maintain harmony and loyalty to the group (Asma, 2006). Malaysia is also considered to be a hierarchical society (Asma, 2006) as can be seen in Hofstede’s Cultural Dimension where Malaysia is at the top of all the countries surveyed in terms of Power Distance (Hofstede, 2005). Asma (2006) explains that this has clearly shown that Malaysians have already accepted the fact that there will be distance between the leader and those being ruled, that there will be inequality in the distribution of power. Respect must be given to the elders for they are older thus wiser and should be the leader and to show disrespect is considered as rude and will bring shame (Asma, 2006, p.99). Jamaliah (2000) further adds that by respecting the elders would signal not only respect but also proper upbringing, being well-bred and enhances one’s standing in the society and for the Malays failure to do so would be considered as kurang ajar or not the product of good upbringing (p.10). It is understood Malaysia is fast becoming a modernised nation with a lot of multinational and global interests, and the cultural values of the East and West may influence the Malaysian society today (Merriam and Mohamad, 2000).

**Malays**

The word ‘Malay’ itself is an ancient term and can be found in ancient manuscripts by Marco Polo and Yijing in the early twelfth century and later to the days of the Kingdom of Srivijaya and the Melaka Sultanate in the early thirteenth century (Reid, 2001, Omar Din, 2007, in Mat Zin and Mohd Shukri, 2007). The term Malay started to be used to refer to the people of Melaka, who consisted of Melakans, and other ethnic group towards the end of the Melaka Sultanate who spoke the Malay language and loyal to the Sultan of Melaka (Reid, 2001).
The Malays, the majority in Malaysia, are Muslims by practice and definition (Kling, 1995) and Islam has a fundamental influence in the Malay society. In addition, the Malay language is the central element in defining the Malays. This can be seen in the definition of Malays by the Federal Constitution:

‘...a person who professes the religion of Islam, habitually speaks the Malay language, conforms to the Malay customs... (Malaysia, Federal Constitution, 160(2)).

The culture of the Malays in the peninsula is the result of a weaving together of many strands and it is constantly changing and being subjected to new influences (Ryan, 1983, p.28). However, the Malay society has retained the influence of religion (Islam) and it has an important role in the fabric of society and control not only their spiritual beliefs but also their way of life (Ryan, 1983 p.28) and despite strong influence of various other cultures such as Hinduism and Western values, the Malays strongly adhere to the tenets of Islam (Jamaliah, 2000, Anwar Din, 2007). Malay culture greatly values the capacity of a person to be ‘sensitive’, ‘considerate’ and understanding of others and therefore always speak with care lest the other person has his or her feelings hurt (Goddard, 2002, p.44). Goddard (2002) goes on to cite Wilson (1967) and Rogers (1993) on the importance placed by the Malays on the need to be harmonious in personal relations and to maintain or watch over other people’s feelings during interaction (p.44).

**Research in Malaysia on Self-directed Learning**

Chiu Yong, Kian Sam and Kock Wah (2007) conducted a study on the acceptance of e-learning on distance adult learners and their readiness for self-directing. The study was conducted on adult learners from an open learning university and one hundred and fifty respondents were used. Their findings indicated that majority of the distance learners showed average level of readiness, (52%), while 30% showed low or below average readiness and only 13% indicated high level of readiness for self-directed learning as well as e-learning. One of the reasons cited by Chiu Yong, Kian Sam and Kock Wah (2007) is that the learners are educated in a face to face traditional classroom environment and shifting into distance learning mode requires further assistance from the institution of higher learning that they are enrolled in. According to Le Juen (2001) distance learners need to show at least an above average level of readiness to enroll in distance learning (cited in Chiu Yong, Kian Sam and Kock Wah, 2007).

Norzaini Azman (2006) conducted a study on the self directed learning readiness of undergraduates in a local university and her research has revealed several significant findings. One of her findings indicated that self directed learning readiness appears to be positively associated with work experience and she postulated that this could be due to the fact that respondents have learned to become more self-directed as they accumulate work experience (Norzaini Azman, p. 176). She also found that students’ capacity to be self-directed was not associated with their academic achievement (Norzaini Azman, p. 175). Her findings, even though in contrast to findings by other researchers (Pao-Nan, Wei-Fan, 2008), suggested that self-directedness do not correlate with high academic achievement. Shireen Haron (2003) conducted a study on the relationship between self-directed learning readiness and facilitation of self directed learning and academic achievement of two universities and found that there is a strong relationship between self-directed learning readiness and achievement. However, her findings on the relationship between age and self directed learning readiness are in contrast to
ideas forwarded by Knowles (1980) who stresses that as an individual matures and ages, his or her concept moves from dependent to being a self-directed human being. Norzaini Azman’s (2006) findings suggested otherwise as there were no relationship between the SDLRS scores and the age of the respondents in her study. In contrast, a study by Daing Zaidah, Abu Daud Silong and Bahaman (2002) found that their respondents indicated age and work as the major factors for them to be ready for online learning. This finding is similar to what has been indicated by Knowles (1980) that age is a factor in developing self-directed learning readiness.

Another study was conducted by Daing Zaidah Ibrahim and Abu Daud Silong (2002) on the barriers to self-directed learning in a virtual environment. They found that there were several barriers that prevented the respondents from becoming active learners in the virtual environment—situational, institutional and dispositional. Their findings indicated that under the dispositional categories, age and inhibition were deterrent factors when it comes to self-directed learning. The respondents in the study indicated that it was difficult for them to compete with the younger generations and thus making the whole learning program difficult. Inhibition reflected more on the social status of the respondents as they have already reached a certain age and were only doing their first degree, some of them felt shy to describe to people on their current status as undergraduates.

A study by Norliya, Norhayati and Nor Rashimahwati (2008) on the relationship between personality traits and self-directed learning of undergraduates indicated that there is a positive and strong correlation between personality traits and self-directed learning. They conducted a study on graduating students in a local university and found that the aspect of positive orientation to the future has the highest overall mean which indicated that the learners were ready for self-directed learning. Their overall findings indicated clearly that most learners are ready for self-directed learning as a new learning style in tertiary education.

**Methodology**

**Research Design**

The present study is a case study and employed the qualitative approach. A case study is seen as appropriate with the objectives of the research and as Merriam (1988:7) stated that a case study is fitting when “a bounded system can be identified as the focus of the research and when the purpose of the investigation is to provide a rich, intensive description of a single entity and the phenomenon surrounding it”. Furthermore, Babbie (2007) stated that qualitative approach is appropriate in order to study attitudes and behaviour in a natural setting. Numerous researches over the past decade on SDL have used the quantitative approach, and Brockett (2000) suggested that more studies on SDL should employ the qualitative approach. Qualitative approach may yield findings that quantitative studies cannot measure (Hiemstra 2001) and provide deep understanding of the research which can never be extracted via other research strategies (Dzikiria, 2006).

Initially, a set of questionnaire, Self-directed Learning Readiness Survey (SDLRS) (Guglielmino, 1977) was distributed to a group of respondents, identified by the parameters (Malay, adult learners) set for this research. SDLRS measures the level of self-directed learning of the respondents and was developed by Guglielmino (1977). It is a 58-item five-point Likert-type questionnaire and designed to measure the complexity of attitudes, skills and characteristics.
that comprise an individual’s current level of readiness to manage his or her own learning (www.guglielmino734.com).

Upon completion and tabulation of the questionnaires, three selected respondents were chosen for the study. The questionnaire did not form any part of data analysis and was used just to identify the selected respondents. These respondents represented the two categories of self-directed; ‘high self-directed learners’ and ‘low self-directed learners’. The odd number of respondents was due to the inability of the rest of the group to participate in the study. Two respondents selected were two from the high SDLRS score and one from the low SDLRS score. The two respondents who scored high on the SDLRS will be referred to as PH 1 and 2 respectively and PL1 for the respondent who scored low on the SDLRS. The respondents (PH 1and 2 as well as PL1) were required to keep a journal entry and the journal entries were written based on their journey as an adult student and they were asked to write how they cope with their life as an adult learner and factors that influence their readiness towards self-directed learning. The analysis was done by identifying similar patterns among the three respondents by using the constant comparative method (Silverman, 2005). At the end of the study period, a semi structured interview was conducted to determine and triangulate findings from the journal entries. The respondents were interviewed separately to ensure there was no biasness in their responses and that they were not influenced by the other respondents’ answers.

**Sampling**

The respondents consisted of 20 Malay post graduate students from a local university who are pursuing their Master’s degree in Education. The demographical data of the respondents is as follows:

![Work Experience (Years) Table 1: Work Experience](image)

Majority of the respondents are fresh graduates or new hires in the workforce. Twelve out of the twenty respondents have less than three years working experience where as only four have more than nine years of working experience. This group of respondents mainly consisted of young recently graduated professionals.
Table 2: Gender

The group comprised ninety percent female and only ten percent male (2) and majority of the female respondents are working as lecturers or teachers in public and private learning institutions in the country.

Brief description of the respondents

The first highly self-directed adult learner (hereafter known as PH1) is still single and a teacher in a rural area in Pahang and has been teaching English in primary school for the past 15 years. She completed her degree through distant education and decided to enroll into the Masters program at a local university out of the desire to improve herself further. She currently lives with her parents and sister.

The second highly self-directed learner (hereafter known as PH2) is an English lecturer in a public university in Pahang, is also single and related to PH1. She completed her degree in TESL from a local university through the distance education mode. She has a jovial and friendly manner to her personality and very well liked in her workplace.

Respondent for the low self-directed learner (hereafter known as PL1) is an English lecturer in a public university in Pahang and has a few years of teaching experience. She is a graduate from a local university and has only joined the teaching fraternity recently and currently pursuing her Master’s degree in Shah Alam Selangor. She has just enrolled in the course and currently is in her third semester.

Findings

In her journal entry PH1 (respondent with high self-directed learning readiness level) commented that the subject that she was taking was quite new and difficult for her, thus she was having trouble in the beginning of the semester. However, after consulting her lecturer who advised her to relate her study to her experience, she decided to work even harder and concentrated more in class in order to grasp the subject better. However, later in her journal entry, she wrote that her lack of understanding of the subject matter would not stop her from performing in the subject as she knows that she is not a quitter and began to deliberate on the subject and finally managed to form better understanding of it.

I do have fear but that is not going to stop me from performing my best in this subject or stop me from participating in the class discussion. No way!
This seemed to indicate how determined she was to finish her study and reflected the self-directedness in her. Her attitude is similar to what is proposed by Guglielmino (1977) where highly self-directed learners will use their initiative as well as independent pursuit of learning to gain better insights and knowledge of the subject that they are studying and employ their basic study skills and problem solving skills to overcome barriers to learning. PH 1 related during the interview that her reason for continuing her study stemmed from her desire to learn something new and that she is intrinsically motivated and she is not after promotion or any external reward for her endeavour. This appeared to be in tandem with the characteristics of a self-directed learner where love for knowledge is paramount (Guglielmino, 1977).

She also wrote that she was quiet because she wasn’t sure of what to say and that most of her classmates were much older, more experienced than her thus having more things to say during class or group presentations. There was a sense of inferiority and this stemmed not from her lack of knowledge but more from the fact that her ‘status’ as a primary school teacher is seen as inferior to the others who teach at higher level of education-secondary school and college.

“I noticed that after attending three classes, I still have problem in participating in the discussion, I did join in a few times only when I knew the topics.

However, that did not stop her from being actively involved in the classroom discussion and her love of knowledge and learning helped her to overcome the fear and participated in class activities.

So, I am a little fish in a big pond and is that scare me? Not really actually!

During the interview she mentioned that it is in her nature to ask questions and voiced out her opinions and sometimes due to her persistent questioning, arguments or dissatisfaction ensue. However, she said that she knows when to stop pursuing a matter especially when she feels that her questioning and probing would begin to cause discomfort. Nonetheless, sometimes, according to PH1 she would continue to voice out her opinions but not in public but in a private conversation. More often than not, PH 1 found herself taking into account other people’s feeling in order to maintain the positive face of the person she was talking too or arguing with. This behaviour is carried into the classroom as well as at her workplace. Sometimes according to PH 1 she has to withhold her impulse to ask questions during class presentations especially from those who are older than her, because she feels that it may be impolite to ask too many questions and if the presenter fails to respond correctly, it may affect his or her positive face. This can be seen as the influence of culture taking over her drive to explore more about something. The idea of maintaining the positive face of others (Brown and Levinson, 1987) may have stemmed from her upbringing as PH 1 considers herself to be a conservative person who strongly believes in the traditional Malay cultural beliefs and folklores and that respecting the elders is considered as very pertinent in her lifestyle.

PH1 wrote in her journals that the blessings of those who are older and wiser than her were important to her in order to succeed in her studies. She felt that her immediate superior and her parents must consent her quest for educational excellence and she considered this as a form of motivation for her to continue her studies.
I believe approval or consent from my father, mother and my boss, which in this case my headmaster and as well as my lecturers is very important for me so that what I do, somehow gets their blessing. I will not worry what the outcome will turn out to be as long as I get their blessing.

There seems to be a strong sense of Malay cultural influence in PH 1 and when asked to comment during the interview, PH 1 agreed that culture has a strong hold in her. Nonetheless, to a certain extent, her self-directed learning characteristics took over in the classroom or at the workplace. What can be deduced is that cultural influences, especially the concept of face, juxtaposed with her self-directed learning characteristics in her quest for academic excellence.

PH 2 (respondent with high self-directed learning readiness level) can be considered as a ‘veteran’ in becoming an adult learner and has spent the last seven years pursuing her tertiary education via the distance education mode and was accustomed to the problems that came with it.

My Degree in TESL, I took it as ‘an out campus student’ (PLK), when I was a teacher in 2002 and I started my Master, six months after I finished my Degree. Basically my ‘out campus’ learning is continuous from 2002 until now which is nearly seven years.

During the interview, PH 2 said that she took up teaching profession by chance but now she is enjoying it and initially she pursued her post graduate degree out of requirement at the workplace but now she thrives on gaining new knowledge in her class. She said that she likes “new things” and by learning more it will “help me (her) to learn more”. This seems to be a very clear indication of her love for knowledge as indicated by Guglielmino (1977) as one of the characteristics of SDL. On top of that, PH 2 also mentioned that she liked challenges and would take on any assignment even though she has limited knowledge of the task because according to her, she would go about finding, securing and gathering all the things she needed to complete the task. PH 2, during the interview, displayed all the characteristics of the highly self-directed learner as mentioned by Guglielmino (1977).

PH 2 also mentioned that being an adult learner has made her sacrificed a number of things especially her personal time (vacation, family gathering) and this has caused uneasiness among family members except for her immediate family who understood and supported her. She mentioned missing a number of ‘kenduri’ or family gatherings, which in a Malay custom is an important family function (Nagata, 1972). PH 2 said that most of her neighbours and relatives were unaware of her learning endeavour and the odd learning time (classes in Shah Alam) and coupled with the fact that she is still single had caused many unwanted rumours. Many of her neighbours questioned her whereabouts and those who knew she was studying were assuming that she had failed due to the time taken to complete her studies. All this stemmed from the influence of the collective society in which the Malays are in (Hofstede, 2005). Collective society thrives on the idea of group harmony (Asma, 1996) and to break away from that would generate rumours and unwanted gossip. PH2 also indicated that the most important part is that her parents understand her situation and give consent to all her undertakings as a student.
Some of our relatives and neighbours, who did not understand or not having any idea on PLK learning would assumed that we fail in our study due to the time taken to complete our learning. Our parents will be the victim of course. Perhaps this is also due to the fact that we seldom there during the family gathering and perhaps due to the facts that we are women and not married. It is a bit awkward to explain everything to them the reason we travel every weekend but as long as our parent understand it – that will be enough.

However, PH 2 seemed to take this lightly and viewed it as a motivational factor for her to push further in her journey as an adult student. Instead of letting this matter demotivate her, she has turned the situation into something positive. This can be seen as taking control of one’s own learning and identifying learning goals and objectives which are in tandem with self-directed learning behaviours (Guglielmino, 1977).

PL1 (respondent with low self-directed learning readiness level) reflected in her journal entries that she understood that she needs to be self-directed in order to complete her study. She clearly indicated that as an adult learner, she has to be self-directed in order to be successful and that her life as a Master’s student is vastly different from that of her undergraduate days.

*In becoming an adult learner, it is true that in a way I have to be self-directed. This is true especially when it comes to doing assignments. I need to be self-motivated to do it.*

She wrote that she needs to be self motivated so that she will be able to complete all her work. PL1 also mentioned that as an adult learner, she knew what her goals are in her study and readied herself towards achieving those goals. In her journal, she mentioned that she would spent most nights at the office to complete her assignments as well as other work related matters and sometimes she would even sleep in the office in order to complete her tasks and assignment. Although PL 1 scored low on the SDLRS, her behaviour indicated that she is highly self-directed and in direct contrast to her scores.

*My routine is every Thursday night; I will be at the office till morning to settle all of the assignments. But of course, I need to prepare for the materials beforehand to make sure I can finish them on time...During those years, initially, I did not know what I want to be or which field I was going to join after I finished my studies. But now, I know my goals.*

All the respondents were brought up in the Malay environment with varying degree of cultural influence and this can be seen in their classroom behavior. PH 1 clearly stated that she is a very traditional Malay person who was raised up in a *kampung* surrounding and upholds Malay cultural beliefs which some of them, according to her may not seem practical. On the other hand, PH 2 also considered herself to be a traditional person but she feels that she is not as traditional as PH 1. She is more open to things and do not believe strongly in certain Malay traditional...
beliefs. In contrast, PL 1 was raised in an urban area and she was not influenced by culture so much as she was growing up.

The findings from the study have indicated that culture has a role in the self-directed learning readiness of adult learners. Analysis from PH 1 indicated that culture is a strong influence in guiding her to continue her education. However, PH 2, although related to PH 1 is not totally influenced by culture. She allowed culture to guide her but her actions while pursuing her education are more influenced by her self-directedness. On the other hand, PL 1 also indicated that the cultural barriers are minimized when she is in the classroom, indicating that she does not allow culture to inhibit her learning process.

The findings from the study can be summarized below:

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<th>Influenced by culture</th>
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<tr>
<td>PH1</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PH2</td>
<td>Partly influenced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PL1</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Implications for Higher Education**

Cultural factors need to be taken into account in the classroom as it can be seen from the above research that cultural factors influence the respondents to a certain extent. In the Malay classroom, it is important for the teacher/instructor to understand that cultural factors are important elements which may affect their behaviour and classroom interaction strategies. Refusal to participate in the classroom activities or shyness when asked to contribute in a discussion or timidity should not be generalized as having limited subject matter proficiency. As can be seen in the findings above, reluctance to partake in a discussion may stem from cultural factors that may influence their behavior. In addition there are certain elements of culture which are reciprocal, for example maintaining *face* as suggested by Brown and Levinson (1987). Maintaining *face* can work both ways between the instructor as well as the students. Students may not pursue a subject for fear of causing the teacher/instructor to lose *face* and also perhaps not to endanger the others in the class from losing *face*.

Development of materials for higher education should take into account the element of self-directedness as well as the cultural elements of the society. It is pertinent for teachers/instructors to be aware of cultural factors that influence the Malay lifestyle and their behavior must reflect cultural awareness especially when dealing with the Malays. For instance, timidity or quietness should not be seen as a sign of weakness but could be culturally related. Thus, intercultural communication skills should be introduced to the learners as well as the instructors to ensure communication in the classroom is not inhibited.
**Conclusion**

This study seems to indicate that culture could be a strong influence in the development of self-directed learning readiness of the respondents and may affect their communication and learning strategies in the classroom. Although the influence may vary according to individuals, it cannot be denied that culture has the capacity to either inhibit or encourage or perhaps promote self-directed learning. It also has the strength to not only reduce behaviours to a point of obedience and conformity but also encourage oneself to challenge everything. Culture also has the potential to affect the communication strategies employed by adult learners where silence may be seen as submission, compliance and comprehension or the lack of it. Thus, it is pertinent to take into consideration the influence of culture, especially the concept of face as it will have a significant impact on the development of self-directed learning readiness of adult learners and on the adult learners themselves.

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