

Employers' provision of lifelong learning programs for their workers

La provisión por parte de los empleadores de programas de aprendizaje permanente para sus trabajadores

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ABSTRACT

According to the Blueprint on Enculturation of (lifelong learning) LLL for Malaysia: 2011-2020, there is still an absence of a full-fledged lifelong learning policy for industries to provide for their workers. As a consequence, there is still lack of awareness and participation in LLL programs among the industries and the workers themselves, lack of monetary support on the part of the employers to assist their workers to attend LLL programs, and lack of government monitoring of LLL implementation among the industries and lack of collaboration between industries and higher learning institutions. A survey was conducted on 664 respondent of SME's employer. Findings showed majority of employers (80%) believed in the importance of LLL but did not believe it will change the attitude of their workers and the effectiveness of learning while working. When asked about whether they will impose certain conditions if their workers want to study while working, slightly more than 50% said no because the workers have to fund their own study and it is their personal responsibility to pursue LLL programs. On collaborating with the public higher learning institutions (PHLIs), most employers will use them mainly only for soft skills trainings. However, they tend to spend only 4% on soft skills trainings. Findings also found that employers' perception of the effect of LLL on their workers' good work attitude, increase general learning skills and work productivity was just moderate.

Keywords: Lifelong Learning, Employers, Small And Medium Enterprise, Higher Learning Institution, Engagement Level.

RESUMEN

Según el Blueprint on Enculturation of (aprendizaje permanente) LLL para Malasia: 2011-2020, todavía existe una ausencia de una política completa de aprendizaje permanente para que las industrias proporcionen a sus trabajadores. Como consecuencia, todavía existe una falta de conciencia y participación en los programas de LLL entre las industrias y los propios trabajadores, la falta de apoyo monetario por parte de los empleadores para ayudar a sus trabajadores a asistir a los programas de LLL y la falta de monitoreo gubernamental de la implementación de LLL entre las industrias y la falta de colaboración entre las industrias y las instituciones de educación superior. Se realizó una encuesta sobre 664 encuestados del empleador de PYME. Los resultados mostraron que la mayoría de los empleadores (80%) creían en la importancia de LLL pero no creían que cambiaría la actitud de sus trabajadores y la efectividad del aprendizaje mientras trabajan. Cuando se les preguntó si impondrán ciertas condiciones si sus trabajadores quieren estudiar mientras trabajan, un poco más del 50% dijo que no porque los trabajadores tienen que financiar su propio estudio y es su responsabilidad personal seguir los programas de LLL. Al colaborar con las instituciones públicas de educación superior (PHLI, por sus siglas en inglés), la mayoría de los empleadores las utilizarán principalmente solo para capacitaciones en habilidades blandas. Sin embargo, tienden a gastar solo el 4% en entrenamientos de habilidades blandas. Los resultados también encontraron que la percepción de los empleadores sobre el efecto de LLL en la buena actitud laboral de sus trabajadores, aumentar las habilidades de aprendizaje general y la productividad del trabajo fue moderada.

Palabras clave: aprendizaje permanente, empleadores, pequeñas y medianas empresas, institución de educación superior, nivel de compromiso.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Malaysia is in the middle-income country with the total income per capita GDP (USD) 9,503 (Malaysian Department of Statistic, 2016). Skilled and knowledgeable labour is necessity of human capital which comprise professional and semi-professional (Ruhizan et al. 2013), in order to move slightly to the status of high income country. From 32.4 million of residents, only 27.3 % were skilled workforce from the total number of 14.67 million workforce in Malaysia (Malaysian Department of Statistic, 2018; TalentCorp Malaysia, 2017). This gap shows that country is still lagging behind in its efforts to achieve develop nation status based on percentage of less than 50% skilled and semi-skilled workforce. This is coupled with statistics until June 2017, the number of employers (companies) registered with the Human Resources Development Foundation (HRDF) is 19,487 involving a total of 2.05 million employees from Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) of 907,065 population. (*Majlis Dewan Rakyat*, 2017; Economic Census 2016). It is estimated that only 2.15% of employers are aware of the importance of contributing to HRDF as an effort to increase the number of skilled workforce of the country. The government is aware of this, but through the Blueprint on Enculturation of Lifelong Learning (2011-2020) there is a gap in implementing the Lifelong Learning (LLL) policy to the industry (Guan Eng Chan, 2014). As a consequence, there is still lack of awareness and participation in LLL programs among the industries and the workers themselves, lack of monetary support on the part of the employers to assist their workers to attend LLL programs, and lack of government monitoring of LLL implementation among the industries and lack of collaboration between Small and Medium Enterprise (SME) industries and Higher Learning Institutions (HLIs).

Based on the issues and challenges facing the country in promoting LLL to the workers especially, SME employers should play more important role in helping to achieve this country's aspirations. This is based on labour statistics for the year of 2016, 64.7% (5,652,560) of the total number of working residents is made up of workers from the SME sector compared to 3,079,678 workers from the large industrial sectors. This is understood because the larger number of workers come from the larger number of SME companies which is 907,065 of them compared to 13,559 large companies. (Economic Census, 2016). Many researchers such as Holcombe (1995), Chandler (1998), Otero and Rhyne (1994), and latest by Ahmad Zahiruddin et al, (2012) agreed that SMEs are the main 'driving engine' of economic growth and hence, it act as stimulants towards reducing poverty and unemployment of a nation. Although this issue exists for more than half a decade in Malaysia, there is less detailed study on the involvement of SMEs' employers on lifelong learning programs to their workers, the status of their collaboration with Higher Learning Institutions (HLIs) and the impact of LLL programs among SMEs employer.

This study used Kirkpatrick's "Four-Level Training Evaluation Model" in order to explain LLL implementation situation from the employer perspectives (Kirkpatrick, 1976). This model illustrated four level of evaluation from bottom to the top such as reaction, learning, behaviour and result. Evaluation of reaction refers to employers' satisfaction in the involvement of LLL programs for their workers who attend the programs provided by higher learning institutions while working. Then, evaluation of learning refers to workers' achievement after attended and learned the skills and knowledge from LLL programs. Next level is evaluation of behaviour which evaluates workers' transfer of learning (applied) on their behaviour or performance after attending the LLL programs. The fourth layer which is the evaluation of result evaluates the impact of LLL on their organizations' performance such as sales or profit. This model has made substantial contribution to the training evaluation model and it is empirically proven in assessing level of training effectiveness since 1959 (Miller, 1996; Holton, 1996).

Thus, this research will identify i) engagement level of SME's employer to involve in LLL programme, ii) collaboration status between SMEs and Higher Learning Institutions (HLIs) in providing LLL programs to their workers and iii) the impact level of LLL programs among SMEs' employer.

2. METHODOLOGY

The survey design was used in this study. About 664 employers were randomly selected from 397,525 Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) population in three states such as Selangor, Kuala Lumpur and Johor. A questionnaire was by the developed by the researchers based on the literature review. A pilot test of the questionnaire was administered on the 30 samples before collecting the real data. The reliability coefficient of the whole items was found to be 0.847. Some of the items with low reliability coefficient were dropped and some were modified. The survey was carried out for five months from August to December 2015. Descriptive analyses such as the frequency and percentage were used to present the employer and company profile, engagement level of SMEs employer, collaboration status between SMEs industries and Higher Learning Institutions (HLIs) and impact level of LLL program among SMEs employer.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 show the distribution of the respondent according to level of higher education, sex, age, race, company area, status of business registered and type of business. After doing the screening process based on certain criteria such as size of company, type of business and income level, 664 respondents were selected as samples. In term of education background, 79.6% of the SMEs employer are educated and out of that, 60% of them were male employers. 457 (68.8%) of the SMEs employer have at least bachelor degree for their academic qualification. The age of the SME's employers showed that 83.3% of them were young employers (below 40 years old). In terms of race, about 46.2% of the SME's employer were Chinese, 37% were Malays, 13.3% were Indian and 3.5% were others. The percentage of each race of SME's employer was not congruent with the ratio of the Malay, Chinese, Indian and other number of populations in the country is similar with the study done by Nor Aishah (2011). The Malays made up of more than 60%, the Chinese made up of more than 25% and the Indians made up about 10% of the number of populations. Most of the company were

sole proprietorship (252) and limited companies (260) from the total 664 companies studied. In terms of type of business, 64.3 % were in service and the rest were in manufacturing.

Table 1: Employer and Company Profile

Items	Statements	Frequencies (n=664)	Percentages (%)
A. Employer's Profile			
Level of Education	Non-Formal Education	5	0.8
	Certificate(UPSR/PMR/STPM/Vocational)	44	6.6
	Diploma	86	13
	Degree	457	68.8
	Master	64	9.6
	Doctor of Philosophy	8	1.2
Sex	Male	438	66
	Female	226	34
Age	Less than 30 years	209	31.5
	31 – 40 years	344	51.8
	41 – 50 years	94	14.2
	More than 51 years	17	2.6
Race	Malay	246	37
	Chinese	307	46.2
	Indian	88	13.3
	Others	23	3.5
B. Company's Profile			
Area of Company	Selangor	310	46.7
	Kuala Lumpur	254	38.3
	Johor	100	15
Type of Business	Services	427	64.3
	Manufacture	237	35.7

Objective 1: Engagement Level of SME's Employer to Involve in LLL Programme.

Based on objective 1, engagement level of SME's employer to involve in LLL programs are measured from SME's employers' perception of importance and readiness in providing LLL programs to their workers. Table 2 shows 535 employers (80%) believed in the importance of LLL programs but more than 64% of them did not ready to provide LLL programs for their workers. The reasons were they did not believe it will change the attitude of their workers and the effect of learning on the workers' works. With reference to Table 3, when asked whether they will impose certain conditions if their workers want to study while working, slightly more than 50% (524) of SME's employer said "No". seventy-nine percent from the 524 employers believed that workers have to fund their own study and it is personal said responsibility to pursue LLL programs. On the other hand, 43.3% from the total 664 SME's employers said they would impose certain condition on their workers if they want to study while working and funded by them. It seems that employers' most preferred reason for funding their workers' LLL programs is they "will be more committed" as compared to "will increase their performance" which scored the lowest percentage (5.4%). The second reason is "will learn new job skills" and followed by "will not hop job". When asked the reasons for not funding their workers' LLL programs, most of the employers (47% from 664) gave the reasons as "it is not in the company's plan", followed by the believed it is "worker's own responsibility", and they did not "see the need for better qualification" on the part of the workers. Norasmah et al. (2012) believed that attitude is the crucial element to be a successful in their field as well as to sustain and retain their worker.

Table 2: SME's Employer of Importance and Readiness of LLL Programs

Items		Frequencies (n=664)	Percentage (%)
Importance	Yes	535	80.7
	No	129	19.3
Readiness	Yes	427	64.3
	No	237	35.7

Table 3: Condition Imposed by SMEs Employer

Items	Reasons	n=664	%	Items	Reasons	n=664	%
(43.3%)	Yes	332	50	(56.7%)	No	312	47
	Will be more committed				It's not in company's plan		
	Will increase performance	35	5.4		Worker's own responsibility	212	32
	Have to learn new job skills	193	29		Don't see the need for more qualification	104	15.7
	Will not hop job	94	14.1		To avoid demand for higher wage and position	29	4.4
Others	10	1.5	Others	12	1.8		

Objective 2: Collaboration Status Between SME and PHLI in Providing LLL Programs to Their Workers.

Based on table 4, from the total of 664 SME's employers, only 199 (30%) of them said they used the public higher learning institutions in terms of sending their workers to get soft skills trainings. Most of them to focus on soft skills training at these institutions (78%). However, these employers tend to spend only 4% on soft skills training in total. The rest 465 (70%) SME's employer used private higher learning institutions for most of their LLL programs. They used those institutions for vocational, hand-on and practical training. In addition, majority of SME's employer will allow only part time learning mode for their workers to pursue study while working.

Table 4: Type of LLL Programs Provided by Public Higher Learning Institutions (PHLIs) and Private Higher Learning Institutions (PriHLIs) to SMEs

Type of programs	PHLIs 30 %		PriHLIs 70%	
	Frequencies (n=199)	Percentage (%)	Frequencies (n=465)	Percentage (%)
Vocational	14	7.0	284	61
Soft skill	93	78.0	9	2
Hand-on	12	6.0	77	16.5
Practical	18	9.0	28	6.1

Objective 3: Perceived Impact LLL Programs on Workers among SMEs Employer

Despite 64% of the employers said they were not ready to provide LLL programs for their workers, they agreed on the good impact of LLL on them. For example, 76% agreed that the LLL programs will develop good work attitude and 63% will increase in learning skills. Specifically, for the good work attitude, they agreed that workers who attend LLL programs will become more efficient, committed, open-minded and confident to work with less supervision. For learning skills, employers believed that it will effect workers work productivity, improve quality of work, develop good organizational culture and help to build positive perception about the company. However, when it comes to LLL programs will affect workers' productivity, most employers just moderately believed it will (68%). This implies that employers agreed on personal impact. May be this explains why most of them were not ready to provide LLL programs for their workers. Many studies had found the positive impact of lifelong learning (training) on workers' work and companies' performance (Bryan, 2006; Hashim & Ahmad, 2006; Jones, 2004).

Table 6: Impact Level of Lifelong Learning (LLL) Programs among Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) Employer

Items	Degree of Agreement (N=664)					
	Disagree		Moderate		Agree	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Good work attitude	27	4	133	20	505	76
Increase in learning skills	27	4	219	33	418	63
Increase in work productivity	46	7	452	68	166	25

4. CONCLUSION

The finding showed contradictory stands on the part of employers. They agreed on the importance of LLL programs on their workers but on the other hand they were not ready to provide LLL programs for their workers. In terms of using the public higher learning institutions for providing LLL programs for their workers so that the cost will be cheaper, it seems that they mostly sent their workers over there mostly for learning soft skills rather than vocational,

hand-on and practical skills. For the future, through structured programs or campaigns, government authorities could change SMEs' employers perceptions on sending their workers on LLL programs from a 'cost' to an 'investment' for their companies growth. Only by changing this perception, will those employers be willing to invest in the human capital development through LLL programs. In addition to that, a lot need to be done in terms of policies and re-look into the needs of the lower positions workers right to attend LLL programs.

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