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Enculturation of Lifelong Learning: Working Women in Malaysia

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Background

- Malaysian's Vision 2020 – working towards a developed nation
- 21st century – focus on development of human resource skilled, efficient, productive and knowledgeable
- This implies that plans and strategies need to be developed appropriately to ensure that these aims are achieved

Cont...

- With an expanding population reaching 43.3 million and a working age group (15-64) of 26.2 million in 2020, there is a need for more employment and training opportunities.
- While formal education at colleges & universities remains an important component of the country's education system, the development of human capital can be further enhanced through enculturation of lifelong learning (LLL)

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- LLL has become the 3rd pillar in Malaysia's 10th and 11th economic plan – 10thMP and 11thMP
- This is reflected in Malaysia New Economic Plan (NEP) which stipulates 3 goal:
 - i. a high income economy
 - ii. Inclusivity
 - iii. Sustainability

cont...

- For that purpose, according to Malaysia's LLL Blueprint, LLL is defined as 'learning engaged by everyone of age 15 to 64 and above except professional students'



Lifelong Learning (LLL)

- The study on the concept of lifelong learning (LL) in the universities in seven European countries (France, Germany, Greece, Spain, Sweden, UK and Norway) indicates that there is no universal definition of lifelong learning.
- However, it is proposed that lifelong learning involves those novel forms of teaching and learning that equip learners or individuals to encounter with competence and confidence the full range of working, learning and life experiences.
- Thus, the aims of lifelong learning are: personal development, social cohesion and economic growth (Kokosolakis, 2001).

Cont...

- As women's participation in the formal workforce is a major contribution to Malaysia's economic well being, efforts in improving women's status in their participation in the economic development should also be given great priority in the government's policy and planning.



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- This does not only include educational and health concerns but also providing them access to opportunities at the workplace for self development.
- Most existing programmes and research for women in lifelong learning often concentrate on focus groups such as rural women, women from low income families, special populations, and single mothers.
- There is yet to be research focusing on the plights of working professional women in relation to their needs for self development at home and the workplace.

LLL among women

Study indicating limitations in career and educational advancement for women (Ezati, 1983:):

1. Geographic immobility – job relocation is easier for men than women.
2. Limited bargaining power – confined to one location leads to little or no bargaining power for position advancement.
3. Limited job market – colleges and universities are seldom in close proximity for convenient commuting.
4. Nepotism and institutional inbreeding – majority institutions covertly forbid the hiring of any relatives

Cont.....

5. Inability to combine family and career – the ideal time for achieving quality professional status is between the ages of twenty five and thirty five which happens to coincide with the optimum years for bearing children.
6. Public mindsets – childcare is the responsibility of women.
7. Housework – caretaking responsibilities confined to women at home.
8. Part-time employment – women seen as part-time employees who do not need career advancement.
9. Childcare provisions – few institutions provide childcare facilities which burdens the working women.



LLL among women

- These studies on LLL on women have mostly focused is on rural, single mothers and low-income women.
- To date, there is no programme that specifically address the problems of LLL among working women; specifically women who hold jobs from clerical to middle management posts.
- Women in this group may face possible barriers to self-development in terms of opportunities for promotion, access to programmes that enhance psychosocial well-being and opportunities to better financial security.



Proposal

- Therefore, it is timely that research be conducted on the needs and barriers of working professional women for their self development.
- It is also significant that a cross-comparative study comparing women's situations in various countries; particularly among the ASEM Network 4 members – Denmark, Hungary, China, Korea, Thailand, Japan and Malaysia be conducted.
- Cross comparative findings and solutions can inform and influence decisions made on policies regarding the development of professional working women.

Methodology

The research questions posited are:

1. What are the specific needs (education, career development, family-work management, social-psychological enhancement, and financial security) of working professional women?
2. How do the working professional women perceive these needs to be fulfilled?
3. What are the barriers to self development as perceived by working professional women?
4. How can these barriers be overcome?



Instruments

Questionnaire & Interviews:

to gather views and opinions from a cross-sectional population of working professional women

Preliminary findings (Malaysia):

- 46.7 % of Malaysian women contributed to the labour force.
- The agency under the MWFCD namely the *National Institute for the Empowerment of Women* (NIEW) was established in 2006. The target groups under this agency are women and family comprising women, family, children, senior citizens, persons with disabilities, the destitute, victims of disaster and Non-Government Organizations.
- MWFCD also contributed to the formulation of new policies and legislation, amend and update the existing ones; conduct advocacy initiatives and implement programmes and activities especially at the grass root level.

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- One of the main policies related to working women is the policy of including 30% women at decision-making level.
- Hence, there was a 30% increase in the number of women officers in the public sector particularly at the principal positions level (JUSA Officers), Vice Chancellors of Universities, Members of Local Government Councils (LGC), judges, district officers and senior police and army officers.

Cont.....

In relation to barriers to self-development for working professional women in Malaysia:

- cultural,
- Sociological
- Gender
- societal perceptions of the place and role of women in the home, work place and society at large

These have impact on these women's psychological needs and motivation for self-development.

Summary

- This is a preliminary findings, there is still a need to gather data on the proposed RQs
- There is a need to gather cross-comparative study among ASEM N4 to gather data for recommendation in decision and policy making

Implications

The findings and reports of such research would be significant to:

- generate recommendations for possible interventions for women's career development,
- improve gender equity in organizations particularly at higher levels of leadership,
- raise women's awareness of the common aspirations and challenges to self-development
- The data would also contribute to decisions on policy making in addressing workplace flexibility and in reducing the tension among working professional women caused by the dilemma in choosing between family and self-development.



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Thank You!
Terima Kasih!