UNDERSTANDING POLICY AND PRACTICE IN LIFELONG LEARNING IN MALAYSIA: A CASE STUDY OF RURAL AND URBAN COMMUNITY COLLEGES

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Declaration

This thesis is submitted to the University of Warwick in support of my application for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. I declare that this thesis is entirely my own work and no material from this thesis has been submitted in any previous application for any degree.
Abstract

This study explores the policy and practice surrounding lifelong learning participation in Malaysia. It is thus the first of its kind in the Malaysian context that combines different perspectives and experiences across the various levels that are involved in lifelong learning participation, namely: adult learners (at the micro level), educational institution (at the meso level) and the government (at the macro level). The theoretical framework that is used in this study draws on: learning career theory; the integrated lifelong learning participation model; and social constructivist learning theory. Using a combination of these theoretical frameworks provides an in-depth understanding of how the three levels interact to influence the personal, structural and societal dimensions of lifelong learning participation.

Data from adult learners were obtained through biographical interviews with sixteen participants who were actively enrolled in lifelong learning programmes at two selected community colleges in an urban and a rural setting. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with twenty-eight staff from both colleges and three officers from the central governing body of community colleges. All data were analysed using thematic analysis. Lastly, to understand the dynamics of the government level, eight national policy documents and the broader policy literature relevant to the lifelong learning agenda were examined using documentary analysis, supported by one semi-structured interview with a policymaker.

Findings from the study revealed an interdependent relationship between the three levels. The adult learners demonstrated their agency by enrolling in learning programmes to cope with changes in their work-related identities. They were facilitated by learning opportunities provided by the government through community colleges. In particular, the study reveals that it is the interaction between the three levels that ensures a successful engagement in lifelong learning participation. The study enriches the literature by integrating three theoretical frameworks to explain the Malaysian perspective on lifelong learning participation.
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<td>UNESCO</td>
<td>United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization</td>
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<td>KEMAS</td>
<td>Community Development Department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOHE</td>
<td>Ministry of Higher Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>APEL</td>
<td>Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FE</td>
<td>Further Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COR</td>
<td>Chain of Response Model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLLPM</td>
<td>Comprehensive Lifelong Learning Participation Model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ILLPM</td>
<td>Integrative Lifelong Learning Participation Model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAQDAS</td>
<td>Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICT</td>
<td>Information, Communication and Technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TVET</td>
<td>Technical and Vocational Education and Training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KPI</td>
<td>Key Performance Indicator</td>
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<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-governmental Organisations</td>
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<tr>
<td>NBOS</td>
<td>National Blue Ocean Strategy</td>
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<td>VRS</td>
<td>Voluntary Redundancy Scheme</td>
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Chapter 1 : Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This is a qualitative study on lifelong learning participation in the country of Malaysia. This study is pertinent in an international context and in a local setting, as research shows that adults are increasingly engaged in lifelong learning to cope with global challenges (Youde, 2018; Gouthro, 2017; Boeren, 2017; Makino, 2017). Unlike the majority of research in adult lifelong learning participation that provides large-scale quantitative data, this study explores in-depth perspectives and experiences of various stakeholders involved in lifelong learning programmes; that is the research is not only carried out from the perspective of adult learners but also those who are involved in formulating policy and those who are involved in implementing the policy. The data were collected from 16 adult learners and 28 officers from community colleges in two geographical settings; the urban and the rural. In addition, eight official policy documents that framed the lifelong learning agenda in Malaysia were examined and supported by an interview with a policymaker from the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE). The data gathered provided rich information on different identities and roles that contribute to the execution of lifelong learning policy in the country. Overall, this thesis makes an empirical contribution to the research on lifelong learning participation in Malaysia.

It is important to note that many terms have been used to refer to an adult’s participation in learning in the literature. For example: adult education; lifelong education; continuing education; and lifelong learning (Boeren, 2017). The most often used term in the current literature is lifelong learning. Accordingly, the link between adult education and lifelong learning was documented in the report titled *Belem Framework for Action* which was produced from the Sixth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA VI) that was organised by UNESCO. The report states that adult learning and education is an integral component in lifelong learning process that includes formal, non-formal and informal learning (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2009). In the proceeding section, the term lifelong learning will be discussed and defined.
This chapter sets the stage of the study. The chapter is organised in nine sections: the first section describes an overview of the study; the second explains the background of lifelong learning and the changing discourse of lifelong learning policy at the international level; the third reports on the background of adult education and lifelong learning in Malaysia; the fourth outlines some background information of the country; the fifth reveals the researcher’s personal motivation; the sixth justifies the significance of the study; the seventh states the research aim; the eighth presents the research questions.; and the last chapter illustrates the overall structure of the thesis as well as summarises the content in each chapter of the study.

1.2 Setting the Scene: The changing discourse of lifelong learning

Historically, learning has always been assumed to be an important element for the individual’s survival (Muhamad and Associates, 2004). For this reason, the idea of lifelong learning is not new. It was documented over a century ago in the UK. The Adult Education Committee of the Ministry of Reconstruction produced The 1919 Report which discussed the value of adult education and its role in developing successful democratic societies (Jarvis, 2004; Field, 2001; Smith, 2001). The Report wrote:

> Adult education must not be regarded as a luxury for a few exceptional persons here and there, nor as a thing which concerns only a short span of early manhood, but that adult education is a permanent national necessity, an inseparable aspect of citizenship, and therefore should be both universal and lifelong (Adult Education Committee of the Ministry of Reconstruction, 1919 cited in Field, 2001: 5).

Within the academic literature, the idea that learning as a lifelong process was established in 1926 by Eduard Lindeman through a book titled The Meaning of Adult Education in which he states:

> The whole of life is learning, therefore education can have no endings. This new venture is called adult education-not because it is confined to adults but because adulthood, maturity, defines its limits (Lindeman, 1926 cited in Ross-Gordon, Rose and Kasworm, 2017: 3).
Lindeman emphasised that adult education is distinct from vocational education (Smith, 2004; Field, 2001). The concern of adult education at the time is to relate meaning into the whole of life (Smith, 2004). Besides, in the same period, a leading British adult educator, Basil Yeaxlee also introduced the idea that ‘education as a lifelong process’ in response to economic crisis after the Second World War (Yeaxlee, 1920 cited in Field, 2001: 5).

Subsequently, the introduction of the Faure report (1972) *Learning to Be: The World of Education Today and Tomorrow* by UNESCO has renewed interest in the concept of lifelong education. In the same way, the report proposes the goal of learning is for human development and for people to achieve the fulfilment of man (Faure et al., 1972). The report highlights the role of lifelong education as a platform to address the needs of society, provide equal opportunities and encourage personal development (Faure et al., 1972; Thomas, 1988). Later, in 1996, at the time when neoliberalism was on the rise, UNESCO released the Delors report titled *Learning: The Treasure Within* (Elfert, 2015). Although it was produced in a different political and socio-economic context to the Faure report, the Delors report carried the same vision to advocate humanist aims of education and suggests a direction for education reform in order to overcome the new life challenges (Elfert, 2015; Delors et al., 1996). The Delors report outlines four visions of learning: learning to know; learning to do; learning to be; and learning to live together. These reports established the role of UNESCO as a global advocate for a lifelong learning agenda and addressing a humanist vision of education.

The implementation of a lifelong learning agenda has been shown to benefit the public (Schuller et al., 2017; Field, 2011; Schuller et al., 2004). In a review of the Delor’s Report, Tawil and Cougoureux (2013) highlight that lifelong learning has become a tool for countries to overcome societal changes and issues regarding knowledge society, social cohesion, equality, and democratic participation. Studies also revealed the wider benefit of learning. For example, increasing an individual’s income and employability, enhance positive health and mental well-being, and widening social capital (Schuller et al., 2017; Field, 2015b; Wolf and Jenkins, 2014; Schuller et al., 2004; McGivney, 2002). At the same time, adult learning fosters community involvement through civic participation and leads to social cohesion and
integration in the community (Schuller et al., 2017; Field, 2012). Thus, participation in lifelong learning demonstrated a positive effect on both a personal and community level.

Nevertheless, scholars highlight there is a sharp turn in the later lifelong learning policy discourse from a humanist vision to an economic determinism (Biesta, 2006; Field, 2000; Bagnall, 2000). In a knowledge-based economy, countries focus on economic growth. For this reason, many countries are concerned with investment on building a sustainable human capital and redirected education and training to learning programmes based on the needs of the labour market and industry (Biesta, 2006; Bell and Stevenson, 2006; Jenkins et al., 2003; Little, 2003). Learning programmes that are possibly deemed not relevant to the labour market are no longer offered. At the same time, lifelong learning has always been a contested concept. Some argue that lifelong learning was seen as a ‘magic bullet’ that can solve many issues in society, however, the concept has been used as serving several purposes at societal levels (Hyland and Merrill, 2003; Coffield, 1999). It is argued that industries need lifelong learning for high-skilled workers; politicians need lifelong learning to gain public support; and states need lifelong learning for economic development through the employable population as well as democratic citizens to sustain social development (ASEM, 2002). Thus, the humanistic vision of lifelong learning as in the Faure Report and Delors Report was a ‘political utopia’ in the current discourse of lifelong learning policy (Elfert, 2015: 88).

1.2.1 Definition of lifelong learning in the context of the study

Scholars argue that, defining lifelong learning is challenging and highly complex as the concept illustrates possibilities of individual to learn at all levels (Muhamad and Associates, 2004; ASEM, 2002; Field, 2001). Field states that lifelong learning is a ‘rather loose and all-encompassing term [...] also a way of thinking about and structuring our society’s approach to education’ (2006: 2). Generally, lifelong learning definition emphasises two key aspects: personal development to cope with continuous changes and a societal purpose including democratising knowledge, social inclusion and social cohesion (ASEM, 2002; Field, 2001). Besides, some practitioners, for example, Ettore Gelpi and Paul Lengrand share a radical view of lifelong learning which focus on raising awareness of global issues: human rights,
justice, equality (Field, 2001). Accordingly, the ASEM report highlights the importance of context in defining lifelong learning, as individual and societal needs are different between countries or even within country (ASEM, 2002). Within the context of Malaysia, lifelong learning focuses on the non-formal system, for example, community education, apprenticeships, vocational training and workplace training (Merriam and Mohamad, 2000; Muhamad and Associates, 2004; Kok, 2014). Muhamad and colleagues define adult education in the context of Malaysia as ‘all forms of learning activities that are provided by various institutions in Malaysia to adult learners beyond the age of 17’ (2004: 5). In contrast, the definition of lifelong learning in the Blueprint (national policy document) is ‘Learning that is engaged by everyone of age 15 and above except professional students’ (Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, 2011: 6). The definition that is used by the Blueprint did not recognise traditional learners who continue tertiary education while Muhamad and colleagues (2004) recognised the traditional learners but not informal learning. This research study aims to be inclusive of a diverse range of learners and leans towards how Muhamad and associates have defined the concept to include tertiary learners. For the purpose of this study, lifelong learning is defined as any form of learning activities including formal, non-formal and informal learning, that an individual engaged with throughout one’s life for personal and social development.

1.3 Background of adult education and lifelong learning in Malaysia

The history of adult education in Malaysia stretches back before its independence from the British Empire in 1957. As Hawes (1975) reports several countries in Asia and Africa have a strong tradition of lifelong learning that was inherent in the structure of their society. This tradition of lifelong learning took place in many forms and took place at different stages of an individual’s adult life. In Malaysia, there is a long tradition of Pondok education system (Madrasah) that provides Islamic education to the local community (Leong, 1997). The focus of the learning is to study the Quran and its application to everyday lives (Hawes, 1975). The first Pondok education system was established in Malaysia was Madrasah al-Hadi which was founded in 1917 (Mydin and Ahmad, 2014). This mode of learning still continues to the present day especially in the north and east parts of Malaysia. After the country became independent from British rule on 31st August 1957, education for
adults was more structured. In 1961, the government established the Adult Education Division to focus on the Illiteracy Eradication programme (Jabatan Kemajuan Masyarakat, 2019). In 1970, parallel to the introduction of the New Economic Policy which was introduced to eradicate poverty, the Division was renamed to the Community Development Department (hereafter KEMAS) which had the task of developing training programmes to improve the socio-economic status among the local community, particularly in the rural area. Among the programmes that were organised including household training, work skills training and nursery education. Many adults, particularly in the rural area got the opportunity to learn through KEMAS. To this day, KEMAS remains relevant in its role in providing training as well as become a resource center for the local community.

At the same time, the Ministry of Education plays an essential role in providing a formal educational programme from pre-school to tertiary education. In the year 2000, the government approved the proposal by the Ministry of Education to establish community colleges with a mission to provide a wide range of post-compulsory education for its citizens. In 2005, the Ministry of Education was then further divided into two ministries: Ministry of Education for pre-school to post-secondary education and Ministry of Higher Education (hereafter MOHE) for tertiary education. Subsequently, the newly created MOHE took a prominent role to coordinate the lifelong learning agenda in the country. The community college was governed by this Ministry. In 2007, MOHE launched the National High Education Strategic Plan 2020 and beyond. The Plan outlined seven ‘Thrusts’ of development, these ‘Thrusts’ are another name for strategies proposed by the Ministry. The Sixth Thrust in the Plan is Enculturation of Lifelong Learning which focuses on developing lifelong learning agenda in the country. The Thrust outlines two objectives: to ensure that lifelong learning becomes a way of life for Malaysians; and to make lifelong learning the catalyst for establishing a learning community (Ministry of Higher Education, 2007). Accordingly, the Thrust proposes that community colleges to become a hub for lifelong learning in the country and to strengthen the lifelong learning curriculum for the local community (Ministry of Higher Education, 2007). This Thrust becomes the foundation for the development of another policy initiative; the Blueprint of Enculturation of Lifelong Learning for Malaysia (2011-2020). The Blueprint presents in policy terms the national lifelong
learning framework including clarification of; definitions, strategies, and initiatives to materialise the lifelong learning agenda in Malaysia. The key mission of the Blueprint is to create awareness among citizen to embrace lifelong learning as a way of life (Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, 2011). Similarly, the Blueprint emphasises the role of community colleges as a hub of lifelong learning.

The national lifelong learning agenda continues to be strengthened through the establishment of Open University Malaysia and the introduction of Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (hereafter APEL) initiative. In 1996, the Malaysian government passed through its parliament a bill on *Private Higher Educational Institutional Act*. The decision corresponded with the national agenda towards liberalising the education sector, resulting in the establishment of private universities as well as branch campuses of international universities in the country (Leong, 1997). In 2000, the first private university to provide an Open and Distance Learning (ODL) approach in Malaysia, the Open University Malaysia (OUM) was established. The establishment of the Institution offers a wider opportunity for adults to enrol in tertiary education with a flexible entry requirement as well as a flexible learning mode. As an initiative of flexible entry requirement, the Ministry introduced APEL. APEL is a systematic process to recognise individuals’ achievement in certain areas based on the desired learning outcomes. The individuals needed to prepare a portfolio to show their experiential learning. Then, an assessment will be carried out to accredit their experiences. The accreditation enabled individuals to pursue higher education as well as an exemption for several modules where relevant (Malaysian Qualification Agency, 2019). Thus, the establishment of the Open University of Malaysia, as well as the implementation of APEL, enabled adults with limited academic qualification to get through entry requirements to tertiary education.

### 1.3.1 Community colleges as a hub for lifelong learning agenda in Malaysia

In 2014, over 1.3 million Malaysians benefited from short course programmes by attending these programmes at community colleges (Ting, 2015). The number illustrates that community colleges may have successfully promoted and delivered lifelong learning programmes to the local community. The community college in Malaysia is quite similar to Further Education (FE) in the UK, in terms of providing
alternative learning pathway for post-compulsory education and provide training programmes to local communities (Gallacher et al., 2002).

The community colleges were established in 2001 to provide post-compulsory education in vocational courses for school leavers. The courses include accounting, architecture, engineering and hospitality. In addition, the community colleges offer ranges of lifelong learning programmes for the local community. Initially, there were 12 community colleges developed in 2001 and this then expanded to 94 community colleges scattered between the urban and the rural area in the country. This spread of community colleges made it accessible and convenient for Malaysians who lived in both urban and rural settings. As the hub of lifelong learning in the country, community colleges offer diverse, current and customised programmes which are relevant to the locals’ need (Subramaniam, 2012). The programme that is designed for the local community is called short course programmes. The short course programmes are mostly short-term vocational skills, or any programmes based on the demand from local community, these ranged from personal development, skills training, worker retraining and hobbies courses (Ali, 2015; Subramaniam, 2012). For example, tailoring, cooking, computer application, business management and entrepreneurship courses. The enrolment of short course programme was made as flexible as possible to meet the needs of participants which included: flexible course timings, convenient location, minimal course fee and no formal pre-requisites to join the course. Thus, with these characteristics, the community colleges facilitate lifelong learning enrolment for the local community.

1.4 Research setting: Malaysia

Malaysia is one of the developing countries in South-east Asia that has adopted a parliamentary democratic system of government under a constitutional monarchy. The country consists of two regions: Peninsular Malaysia (West Malaysia) and Borneo Island (East Malaysia) as illustrated in figure 1.1. There are 13 states and 3 federal territories. Each state and territory is divided into districts for administrative purpose. The federal territory of Putrajaya is the centre for the government administration of Malaysia. There are three major ethnic groups in the country: Bumiputera (Malay and indigenous) at 67.3%, Chinese 24.5%, Indian at 7.3% and others at 0.9% (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2016). For the aim of achieving
national integration, Bahasa Malaysia has been designed as the national language and English as the second language. In term of religions, officially, Islam is the federal religion and other religions can be practiced freely in the country. The total population in 2018 is 32.6 million (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2019), with the biggest proportion of people at the age between 15 and 64, which accounts for 69.7% of the population. In addition, Malaysia is expected to experience an ageing population in 2020, when the percentage of the population aged 65 years and over reaches 7.2% (Department of Statistic Malaysia, 2016). The increase in ageing population may require the country to design support systems for social and economic well-being of the population. For example, providing training programmes that enabled adults to learn new skills or update their skills. This scenario suggests there is a high need of learning opportunities for ageing population in the country.

Figure 1.1: Map of Malaysia

1.4.1 Economic context

Malaysia has undergone great changes in its economy from its independence from the British Empire up until the present day. The main economic activities before and after independence were agricultural production and mining of mineral resources. However, in the 1970s, Malaysia started to concentrate on industries and manufacturing, mainly in textiles, garment and electronic product. The national macroeconomic indicators showed that the share of manufacturing in GDP was increased almost double between 1985 and 1995 (Ariff, 1998; Jomo, 2016). The fast
transition showed a quest for rapid economic growth that continues to be a national focus. Also, in the 1990s, the country continued to experience accelerated change from an input-driven to a productivity driven growth strategy through the introduction of a knowledge-based economy (The Government of Malaysia, 2001a). As Malaysia is moving towards a knowledge-based economy, there is a high demand for production of knowledgeable workers. However, the statistic on Malaysian labour force in 2010 showed that 73.8% of the Malaysian labour force has moderate level skills, which refer to the acquisition of academic qualification were only at secondary and primary level of education (Ghebllawi and Ahmad, 2011). Consequently, the country focuses in developing a nation of lifelong learners to enable Malaysians to meet the changing needs as well as to maximise individuals’ potential through reskilling and upskilling opportunities (The Government of Malaysia, 2016).

1.4.2 Public education system

The Malaysian education system adopts a ‘6+5’ basic formal schooling structure. Generally, the six-years compulsory primary level education is called National School. At the end of the National School, students need to sit for a primary school achievement test (UPSR). Then, students pursue secondary school. There are three types of secondary school in the country: academic school; technical and vocational school; and national Islamic school. The first three-years of secondary school is known as lower secondary level. Similarly, to complete this stage, students need to sit for lower secondary assessment (PT3). After that, they continue to two-years of upper secondary school. Before finishing this level, there is a one standard national examination which is the Malaysia Certificate of Education (hereafter SPM) (Ministry of Education Malaysia, n.d.). Generally, the SPM certificate is seen as a steppingstone for an individual whether to continue study at the tertiary level or to be employed in any job in the country. A structure of the Malaysia education system can be found in Appendix A.

1.4.3 The importance of socio-cultural factors

The socio-cultural milieu plays an important role in understanding a society (Giddens, 2005; Jarvis, 2013). As Jarvis asserts that ‘people hold beliefs, ideologies,
an understanding of the world, a familiarity with culture and language that enable them to function meaningfully in their world’ (2012: 197). Within the context of Malaysia, the social order is based on patriarchal dominance, the concept where women’s subordination to men (Hirschman, 2016; Noor and Mahudin, 2016). Therefore, traditionally, there is a division of labour in Malaysian communities where men are the breadwinner of the family, while women are expected to carry out responsibility for housework and family care. Some scholars suggest the division of labour could be attributed to a collective familial Asian culture (Noor and Mahudin, 2016; Hofstede et al., 2010). Even though research show that there is a shift in gender role for dual-earner family in the present society, however, the traditional division of labour is still strong (Noor and Mahudin, 2016).

1.4.3.1 Malaysian cultural value

Although there are many ethnic groups in Malaysia, some common cultural values are shared in the society. Abdullah (1996) outlines five Malaysian cultural values:

i. Respect for elders: It is a part of the hierarchical-based structural society in the country. The youngsters are expected to show respect when they interact with elders. The elders are considered as ‘wise people’ that could provide life advice for youngsters (Ibid: 27).

ii. Collectivistic orientation: Individual’s identity is attributed to the group where they belong. For this reason, individuals are concerned on the impact of their behaviour to the group or family.

iii. Harmonious relationship: Malaysians value harmonious relationship and do their best to avoid conflict. Within this value, individuals are inclined to hide their true feeling as opposed to be opened and express their feeling freely. The intention is to avoid disagreement that may bring discomfort to the other person as it is considered as counter-productive to a harmonious relationship.

iv. Concern for face saving: Face saving is a phenomena that is unique to the Asia (Oetzel and Ting-Toomey, 2004; Kim and Nam, 1996). Abdullah describes face as ‘maintaining a person’s dignity by not embarrassing him as an individual’ (1996: 30). Also, embarrassing a person will be seen as shameful for the group, family or community where they belong.
v. Religious orientation: Abdullah explains the value as ‘a tendency to look at development in a holistic manner in which both material and spiritual dimensions are equally important. Focusing on one without the other does not make for a balanced world view’ (1996: 20).

Even though cultural value will vary based on number of factors, it is anticipated that these cultural values may be demonstrated by participants in this study. Thus, this may reveal different results in contrast to the UK which emphasis an individualistic cultural value.

1.5 Personal motivations

My motivation to explore this research topic stems from my experience firstly as a teacher and as a short course programmes organiser at a rural community college in Malaysia. With my academic background in Information Technology, I was in charge of organising computer courses for the local community. It was an interesting experience as the community college learners were different from traditional learners. Many learners did not come from a formal learning background. For example, there was an incident that I still remember vividly. I was teaching a short course on Microsoft Office, and there was an elderly gentleman trying to move the mouse cursor from one end of the screen to the other. However, he was trying to do this by physically moving the mouse from one edge of the table to the other. Eventually, towards the end of the course, he had made significant progress. I was absolutely stunned as this highlighted to me that it does not matter what age you are if you were determined to learn and the resources were there you could do so. Throughout years of working, I felt an incredible sense of fulfilment seeing how participants progressed and it sparked my passion for teaching in the lifelong learning sector. Furthermore, through my interactions with participants and the local community, I realised how short course programmes not only could facilitate the participants to have some learning awareness but also as a knowledge sharing platform, where they could talk about their hopes and challenges with others who have a similar interest. I believed that community colleges are a hopeful place to begin a lifelong learning journey and the best place to empower the community to keep learning.
At the same time, there has been increased development in community colleges around the country, which has created more opportunities for the community to have continuity in learning. Moreover, the government has assigned the community colleges to take the lead in providing and acting as a hub of lifelong learning institutions in the country. Nevertheless, despite this government mandated support there is a challenge in encouraging the community to take the opportunity to learn. I believe many factors are involved including awareness, marketing, flexibility and financial considerations e.g. affordability. As a part of the workforce behind the institution, I felt a call to explore this emergent trend in increased development for lifelong learning programmes and also to identify issues and challenges at the national and international level. Within this study, I investigate on the policy and practice of national lifelong learning policy based on well researched and theorised international perspectives.

1.6 Significance of the study

Studies on adults’ learning that were written over the past twenty years have mainly focused on several countries in the West, for example, England, Scotland, European countries and Canada. On the contrary, there has been less attention in the literature on Eastern countries. A review of the literature by Merriam and Kim (2008) revealed a distinct difference of worldview between western and on non-western perspectives on learning and knowing. For example, for non-western societies, learning is communal which mean ‘learning is the responsibility of all members of the community because it is through this learning that the community itself can develop’ (Merriam and Kim, 2008: 73). The research found that the individuals’ motive to learn was usually to contribute to the community; which is in contrast with the Western notion of personal independence (Merriam and Kim, 2008). The comparison provides a possible disparity of findings between west and east in terms of social and cultural differences. Therefore, more studies, particularly in the Asian countries are necessary to provide a greater understanding of the need to vary an adult’s education approach based on a country’s culture.

Furthermore, a review of the literature on adult’s participation in learning around the world shows limited research on the educational institution as the implementer of lifelong learning programme; as well as mid-level factors between the government’s
aspirations for the programme and learners’ need. Many studies focus on adult learners who participate and experiences in learning through educational institutions. Accordingly, the opportunity for adults to participate in learning programmes are often linked to institutional factors, such as information about learning programmes that are offered, accessibility to enrol at the institution as well as the course schedule (Cross, 1981; Boeren, 2016). In the same way, studies report adult learners to take the opportunity of learning from subsidised learning activities and initiatives by the government (Ng, 2008; Bloomer and Hodkinson, 2000; Cieslik, 2006). Therefore, the studies showed that a positive interaction between the three levels: adult learner, educational institution and government may produce effective participation in lifelong learning programmes. Thus, it would be pertinent to create a research study from the perspective of macro and meso levels as well as the voice of the adult learners who are engaged in lifelong learning programmes.

Lastly, a review of the local literature on lifelong learning in Malaysia shows that studies in the area were mainly carried out by researchers from the Open University of Malaysia. The studies examined institutional barriers and the perception of the community on Open and Distance Learning. Also, the studies highlighted the role of Open University Malaysia in pioneering the Open and Distance Learning approach in the country (Ali, 2005; Bahroom and Abdol Latif, 2016; Fadzil, 2014; Aziz et al., 2013; Mohamad et al., 2014). Besides, 70% of the studies in the literature employed quantitative or mixed method research approach. Several qualitative studies among professionals on factors that contributed to their lifelong learning experiences revealed a complex process in lifelong learning (Kok, 2014; Mohamad et al., 2004; Mohamad et al., 2014). The studies suggest that investigation on individual learning should not only be viewed from personal perspectives. The results demonstrated a multifaceted interaction between individuals and the environment in influencing adult’s participation in learning. For example, individuals are less likely to participate in learning because of less comprehensive lifelong learning policies in organisations. The findings suggest that lifelong learning implementation needs collaboration and integration between learners and environmental factors.

Therefore, the current study seeks to broaden the availability of qualitative data on the issue of lifelong programmes from the three perspectives (learners, educational
institutions and the government) are timely and relevant. Also, the study is crucial as it makes a contribution to limited research on Asian literature on lifelong learning participation. At the same time, the current study captures the moment of implementation of lifelong learning policy as it is presented in the *Blueprint of Enculturation of Lifelong Learning for Malaysia (2011-2020)*. It is hoped that this research will provide important empirical evidence and reflection of the current practices and could improve lifelong learning provision in the country.

1.7 Research aim

The research aim is to examine Malaysia’s lifelong learning policy and its implementation by community colleges as the hub of lifelong learning institution in the country. Also, the study explores adult learners’ biographies and learning experiences in lifelong learning programmes. Through this exploration, the findings illuminate the interaction between the three levels of stakeholders in terms of lifelong learning participation.

1.8 Research questions

This research is carried out to answer five research questions on lifelong learning provision in Malaysia as follows:

i. What are the aims of the Malaysia’s lifelong learning policy?

ii. How do community colleges implement lifelong learning policy?

iii. What are biographies of participants in lifelong learning programmes?

iv. How do learners’ experience lifelong learning programmes?

v. What are the recommendations to inform lifelong learning policy and practices?

1.9 Thesis structure

Figure 1.2 illustrates of the structure of this thesis. This figure is a guide to navigate the chapters in this thesis as well as to get an overview about the research process. This thesis consists of eight chapters with four chapters deliberating the findings and discussion chapters.
Figure 1.2: The structure of thesis
The current chapter discussed the overview of the study. The second chapter on literature review discusses the role and characteristics of government and educational institution in facilitating or deterring an adult’s participation in learning. The literature also draws on empirical studies on factors that influence adult’s participation in learning which includes life transition, socio structural as well as socio-cultural factors. Furthermore, the theoretical frameworks sections lay out the theoretical frameworks of the study: Learning Career; Social Constructivist Learning Theory; and Integrative Lifelong Learning Participation Model. These theories fit together to explain the complex nature of adult’s participation in learning within three levels, the government, educational institutions and adult learners.

The third chapter on methodology justifies the research paradigm and research method used to yield information from three different groups of participants. The chapter explains research activities that were carried out before, during and after the data collection process. For example, preparing interview tools and analysing the data. Finally, the chapter addresses sections on positionality and ethical considerations.

The fourth chapter presents findings of document analysis of eight official documents as well as an interview with a policymaker. The results reveal the major aims of Malaysia lifelong learning policy is economic determinism for the state’s economic growth. Nevertheless, there is a continuous concern to keep a balance orientation between the humanist and instrumental values within the policy.

The fifth chapter reveals the research findings comparing the implementation of lifelong learning policy between the urban and the rural community colleges. The results show that the institutions have different challenges based on its setting, for example, the public transport network and approach to delivering short course programmes. Besides, there is a situation when Headquarters (an organisation that governed community colleges) view society in homogenised with no diversity when comparing the performance of community college in organising short course programmes through Key Performance Indicator (KPI).

The sixth chapter illustrates biographies of sixteen adult learners in four categories in relation to work-related identity: unemployed, self-employed, in-employment and
retired. Findings reveal four scenarios of the relationship between learning and agency: for identity changes; for betterment in life; to adapt positional changes and for a better future of others.

The seventh chapter presents findings on factors that influence adult learners’ learning experiences. Four factors that emerged from the analysis are institution, learning environment, a variety of classroom activities, teachers’ approaches. These factors may encourage or discourage participants to engage in short course programmes.

This last chapter brings together the theoretical frameworks and empirical evidence from the findings to answer the research questions. Based on the discussion, a heuristic model that shows the interdependence between macro, meso and micro was produced. Also, the chapter elucidates recommendations to the policy and practices for lifelong learning participation based on the research findings.

1.10 Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter provides an overview of the study in the area of adult education and lifelong learning. At the international level, there is a changing discourse of lifelong learning from a humanist vision to an instrumental concern that focuses on industry needs. Consequently, the international discourse may influence on developing countries, such as Malaysia in the development of national lifelong learning policy. Malaysia has shown improvement in the policy and practice in adult education and lifelong learning. For example, the establishment of Community Colleges, approval for development of private institutions and APEL initiative that enable people to enrol in HE based on their experiential skills.

Nevertheless, a review of the literature shows that there is a limited study based on a qualitative approach in Malaysia to yield an in-depth understanding of national lifelong learning policy and practice. Thus, this study employs a qualitative research approach to examine the discourse of lifelong learning policy in Malaysia, the challenges that faced by the community colleges during the implementation, and the biographies and experiences of adult learners who engaged in lifelong learning programmes. Five research questions were developed for the study. Lastly, the
structure of the thesis that is presented provides a base for further exploration of the study in the following chapters.
Chapter 2 : Literature Review and Theoretical Perspectives on Adults’ Participation in Learning Programmes

2.1 Introduction

Chapter one established the context for this study of adult learners’ participation in lifelong learning programmes in Malaysia. The chapter also explains the rationale to examine the interactions of the government, learning providers and adult learners in lifelong learning participation. This chapter aims to locate this study in pertinent literature which explores the discourse in this area and how participation in lifelong learning has been investigated in previous research. In addition, this chapter also examines theories and models that have been developed on adults’ participation in learning. This chapter consists of two main sections: a review of literature on lifelong learning participation and a discussion on theoretical frameworks that underpin this study.

2.2 Section one: Literature review

This section reviews the literature on lifelong learning and adult participation in learning. The section is organised into three subsections to get a full picture of the phenomena. The first sub-section discusses the role of government as the macro-level structure that influences participation in lifelong learning. The second sub-section focuses on the meso-level which is educational institutions. Lastly, the third sub-section takes a closer look at micro-level factors that influence adults’ participation in learning.

2.2.1 Framing the government role in lifelong learning: The macro level

Lifelong participation in learning has been a focus of interest from international organisations, for example the UNESCO, the OECD, the EU and the World Bank (Biesta, 2006; Holford and Špolar, 2012). These organisations have developed lifelong learning frameworks, policies and strategies for lifelong learning development. For example, the UNESCO Institute for lifelong learning supports its member states in developing policies and strategies on lifelong learning through workshops, policy sharing and policy review (Yorozu, 2017). The fundamental goal is to provide education for all as a human right to individual personal development
and a meaningful life (Faure et al., 1972; UNESCO, 2000). Nevertheless, scholars posit there is a major shift in the lifelong learning agenda from a humanistic focus on personal development and a meaningful life to one of economic determinism, which is further argued to be driven by capitalism and globalisation (Coffield, 1999; Bagnall, 2000; Crowther, 2004; Biesta, 2006). This shift to economic determinism has changed the landscape of lifelong learning policy and changes the focus of learning programmes to those that are directly contributed to economic growth of the country rather than individual personal development. In spite of this shift, many countries’ lifelong learning policies have been directly influenced by the policies of these international organisations (Biesta, 2006; Bell and Stevenson, 2006).

This thesis frames the influence of these international organisations and the governments’ policies using the concept of the ‘macro-level’. Boeren describes the macro level as ‘broader structural factors situated and decided at the level of countries or region’s power’ (2016: 110). These ‘structural factors’ include financial system, initial schooling system, lifelong learning policy, labour market structure and social protection (Rubenson, 2006; Boeren, 2016). Thus, lifelong learning participation may differ between countries as result of how the macro-level and these ‘broader structural factors’ are prioritised, put into policy and consequently how they are implemented. The government plays a key role in prioritising and allocating funding for lifelong learning strategies, for instance establishing educational institutions that offer learning opportunities that are relevant to meet the needs of its citizen (Boeren, 2016). At the same time the government has a pivotal role in promoting and creating awareness of the importance of learning throughout the lives of its citizens. Involvement at the governmental level in the lifelong learning agenda ensures that learning opportunities are more likely to be received positively (Ng, 2010).

A growing body of literature reveals that macro-level structure plays a significant role in individual participation in lifelong learning. Studies on lifelong learning participation at the macro level show that participation rates in lifelong learning programmes are directly related to the different types of government support that are in place (Rubenson, 2006; Rubenson and Desjardins, 2009; Kilpi-Jakonen et al., 2015). For example, Rubenson (2006) revealed that governments which providing
strong public policy support promoted and ensured equal opportunities among citizens, which not only facilitated participation but also ensured higher rates of citizen participation in learning programmes. Rubenson and Desjardin (2009) assert the interaction of structural factors (the way governments offer support) and individual’s disposition is significant in determining adult participation in learning. This study compares participation in adult education in the Nordic (Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Finland) welfare state with that of non-Nordic countries in Europe. The Nordic welfare state policies had encouraged individuals to learn as they could foresee a value in participation in learning and how it could improve their career prospects. This has created a civil society that encouraged learning for both social and personal development. The findings suggest the 'conditioning of values and perspective on opportunity structure' had contributed to a high number of participants (Rubenson and Desjardin, 2009: 202). Thus, the welfare state contributed to positive individual participation in learning through the way policies were constructed. As a result, these Nordic countries have successfully encouraged lifelong learning through the role of the government in creating awareness, funding initiatives and effective strategies (Rubenson and Desjardin, 2009). The research further confirms the link between macro level influences and the impact on lifelong learning participation strategies. Other studies have also shown that a state’s labour market (e.g.: liberal market or coordinated market), national institutional structure (social and economic) and educational policy influence adults’ participation and orientation in learning (Boeren, et al., 2012; Kilpi-Jakonen et al., 2015). Another example of influence at a macro level is that of the South Korean government. The government fostered citizen learning through a strategy called Academic Credit Bank System (ACBS) begun in 1996. The strategy encouraged citizens’ participation in lifelong learning by rewarding them through professional development accreditation. Subsequently countries such as Canada and Malaysia have benchmarked this strategy to be implemented in their respective countries (The Government of Malaysia, 2011; Usher, 2014).

In the same vein studies on adults’ participation in learning at the individual level also reveal the importance of the government’s role in determining the level of lifelong learning participation (Ng, 2010; Bloomer and Hodkinson, 2000; and Boeren et al., 2012). For instance, Ng (2010) conducted a qualitative study on that of
adults in Singapore. Findings from the study revealed the government played a pivotal role that influenced the adults’ participation in learning. These adults reported their involvement was largely due to government subsidy. A large-scale study on the motives of learning among adults across twelve European countries by Boeren et al., (2012) revealed different patterns of motive between countries. The findings suggested that the structure of the educational system and labour market contributed to the different patterns of motive. The study concluded adults’ motives for participating in learning were influenced by three factors: the labour market, state education and social policy. Thus, studies show that individuals too affirmed and validated the significant role of government in their participation in lifelong learning.

Findings from the studies above highlight the pivotal role of macro-level input (the government and international organisations) in lifelong learning participation. Government policy, funding and support enabled an individual to gain access to and enrol in a range of learning programmes. However, none of the studies examined both the government (macro) and the individual (micro) levels in one study. Therefore, this study examines Malaysian lifelong learning policy to understand the government’s role in setting the lifelong learning agenda and interviews adult learners to investigate factors that influence their participation. The findings of the current study may show the interaction between national aspiration and individual position in lifelong learning participation. The next section shows how the literature also highlights the importance of broader contexts, including the role of educational institutions in lifelong learning participation.

2.2.2 Institutional barriers to lifelong learning participation: The meso level

Traditionally learning has been dedicated to children and young adults; therefore, many educational institutions have an important administrative and strategic role. As lifelong learning programmes become recognised in policy, educational institutions must then implement these policies and facilitate the delivery of the programmes. To do this educational institutions need to make adjustments to their procedures to recruit learners from a different background (Clayton, 2012; Crossan et al., 2003; Schuetze and Slowey, 2002). The educational institution’s culture gradually changes with the presence of non-traditional students who were historically excluded from learning programmes (Schuetze and Slowey, 2002). For this reason, the educational
institution’s procedures have been perceived as one of the barriers to participation in learning among adults. The institutional barrier is described as practices and procedures that limit adults’ participation in learning (Cross, 1981; Smith, 2010; Boeren, 2016; McGivney, 2002). Boeren and colleagues refer to the educational institution as a ‘meso-level’ barrier which includes ‘a set of factors relating to the specific programmes, such as the composition of class groups, the didactical methods and the admission requirements’ (2010: 58). She further describes the ‘meso-level’ as the supply side which is characterised by organisational factors, while potential learners are the demand-side who are influenced by socio-economic and cultural factors. Given the description and reviewed literature, there are possibly five aspects of institutional barriers: access to information, admission procedures, enrolment fees, programmes offered and modes of study (Cross, 1981; Darkenwald and Merriam, 1982; Schuetze and Slowey, 2002; Baert and Rick, 2006; Rubenson and Desjardins, 2009; Saar et al., 2014; Boeren, 2016).

2.2.2.1 Access to information

The first issue in institutional barriers is limited access to information on learning opportunities, particularly educational resources that match learners’ needs (Moore et al., 2013; Boeren, 2016). Studies suggest educational providers should vary their medium of promotion according to group of intended learner (Moore et al., 2013; Boeren, 2016; Ng, 2008; Hake, 2014). For example, organising outreach promotional strategy for a marginalised group of adults. Moore et al. (2013) argue that it is not enough to provide potential learners with information about course programmes and learning activities. They also need to be equipped with relevant advice and guidance based on their own personal situation. The advice and guidance could help the potential learners, particularly the underrepresented to get some idea how to overcome barriers or issues which they may be concerned with, including health problems, learning difficulties and welfare support. Therefore, diversifying promotional strategy as well as interacting with intended learners could reduce institutional barriers.
2.2.2.2 Admission procedures

The second issue is admission procedures, which refers to the flexibility of entry requirements and registration arrangements set by the educational institution (Schuetze and Slowey, 2002; Boeren, 2016). For instance, providing a flexible admission procedure for non-traditional learners that differs from traditional entry requirements; for example, instead of A-level qualification, work experience can be considered. The admission procedure could be attributed to the degree of institutional autonomy and decentralisation of decision-making from the central-state government (Schuetze and Slowey, 2002; Boeren, 2016). An educational institution with less bureaucracy and more autonomy may facilitate the process of adults’ enrolment in learning.

2.2.2.3 Tuition fees

Turning to the third issue, which are tuition fees. Studies report an increase in tuition fees for many educational institutions, particularly in higher education, have inhibited adult participation (Boeren, 2017; Saar et al., 2014; Clayton, 2012). Besides a high tuition fee, an increasing cost of living and transport are also contributing to financial constraints on participation (Schuetze and Slowey, 2002; Saar et al., 2014). For this reason, financial assistance and the possibility of some flexibility in tuition payment may facilitate adults’ participation. Subsequently the availability of study bursaries by authorities may reduce the constraints of a financial burden. This is a fair practice. However, states may have a different scheme of funding in education to provide for the needs of the student (Saar et al., 2014; Ross and Moore, 2016; Boeren, 2017).

2.2.2.4 Flexible mode of study

The fourth issue is the need for a flexible mode of study for adults which is from ‘traditional mode’ to ‘lifelong learning mode’ (Schuetze and Slowey, 2002; Thomas, 2002; Boeren, 2016). The lifelong learning mode offers learning programmes that are organised in a modular way or on a flexible course schedule where learners are likely to have autonomy in their learning. For example, extensive scheduling such as evening or weekend classes helps adults to manage their attendance with their
commitments. Besides, nowadays there are many online learning programmes that allow adults to learn at their own pace.

### 2.2.2.5 Variety of programmes offered

Studies suggest states that offer a high diversification of learning programmes in term of the types of institution available, and the length and content of programmes managed to reduce institutional barriers (Hefler and Markoswitsch, 2010; Saar et al., 2014). Accordingly, the availability of many kinds of learning programme increase chances for adults to enrol in a programme that is relevant to their needs.

The next section explores individual factors at the micro level that contribute to adult participation in learning.

### 2.2.3 Life transition as a stimulating factor in adults’ participation in learning: The micro level

Transition and change in life seem to be the characteristics of contemporary experience of modernity in many areas of adult life (Ingram et al., 2009; Field, 2015a). Giddens (2005) asserts that habit and routine are no longer a reliable guide for decision making in life. In the same way Bauman describes ‘each social routine or institution, every relationship and practice, is fluid and open to change; there are no fixed points on today’s social compass’ (Bauman, 2005 cited in Ingram et al., 2009: 2). These claims suggest transition and change take place at anytime and anywhere for everyone. This phenomenon has drawn the attention of many researchers, covering many issues of change including technology, education, career and identity. For example, the careers of many people are characterised by greater frequency of changing jobs than was formerly the case when people would often spend their working life with one or two organisations (Ingram et al., 2009; Boeren, 2016). Thus, transition is inevitable, and employees are expected to get ready for life transition and change. It is this transition for personal level which Boeren (2016) framed as the ‘micro-level’. These cultural shifts foreground an important question; how should contemporary adults navigate a career path, and look for ways to effect their life transition?
Research in adult transition focuses on understanding the problematic situation that led to transition and exploring individual response to the problem. For this reason scholars find that transition can be investigated within three main concepts: identity, agency, and structure (Ecclestone, 2009; Biesta et al., 2011). The transition in identity involves modifying of individual habitus and disposition by social interaction. On the other hand, transition in agency refers to ‘the ability to exert control over one’s life’ (Biesta et al., 2011: 6). Lastly, transition in structure focuses on the rules, culture, setting and normative expectation involved in understanding individual changes. The combination of findings from these three concepts helped to elucidate the context of life transition in policy discourse and practice (Ecclestone, 2009: 126). In addition, studies reported that adults use their agency by participating in learning activities in an amount of time through ‘the dynamic interplay’ between their past experience, present situation and future direction (Ecclestone, 2007: 125; Emirbayer and Mische, 1998; Biesta and Tedder, 2007). The agency refers to as ‘a dialogical process by and through which actors immersed in temporal passage engage with others within collectively organized contexts of action’ (Mische and Bayer, 1998: 743). The interplay of the agency may vary within different contexts-for-action and depend on the availability of economic, cultural and social capital (Biesta and Tedder, 2007). Consequently, the concept of agency is significant in helping the researcher to understand how adult learners developed their learning identity (Merrill and West, 2009). Within the context of this study, adults illustrate their agency by taking responsibility for their learning to help them to have autonomy of their life (Knowles et al., 2005). Thus, transition portrays a shift in identity and agency and is inextricably linked to the influences of structural factors such as race, class and gender.

Educational scholars have demonstrated that life transition or its triggering factor can be a direct contributing factor in an adult’s participation in lifelong learning (Field, 2012; Ingram et al., 2009; Withnall, 2006; Ng, 2010). For example, Biesta and colleagues suggest that adults participate in learning as ‘individuals respond to events in their lives, often in order to gain control over aspects of their lives’ (2011: 6). Other scholars used the term ‘triggering factors’ to describe life transition or a turning point that contributed to an adult’s participation in learning programmes (Ng, 2010; Ecclestone, 2007; Biesta and Tedder, 2007; Merrill, 2004). In a similar way,
researchers assert that adults are likely to participate in learning as a result of their present situation and as a meaning-making process of managing change (West, 1996; Kim and Merriam, 2004; Hodkinson et al., 2008; George, 1993). The ‘triggering factors’ can include; divorce, bereavement, loss of job, and financial problems which lead to disruption and adults’ reflecting on their lives; and consequently, considering participation in a learning programme. Subsequently, many studies in adult participation in learning have employed biographical and life history as a method of data collection as it enables individuals to reflect on their ‘agentic orientation’ (Ecclestone, 2009: 21). Participation in learning activities helps adults to cope with their life transition. While life transition stimulates adults to engage in learning, socio-structural and socio-cultural factors influence their decision to learn.

2.2.3.1 Socio-structural influences in adults’ decision to learn

Studies show significant relationship between adult participation in learning and socio-structural factors such as social class, ethnicity and gender (Gorard and Rees, 2002; Lee, 2014; Merrill, 1999; Boeren, 2009). The concept of socio-structural that applied in social practices was explained by Bourdieu ‘as dynamic cause and effect: as a structured structure and a structuring structure’ (Bourdieu, cited in Grenfell and James, 1998: 14). There is a constant link between individual agency to learn and their socio-structural position (Grenfell and James, 1998). For example, an annual survey by a National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) in the United Kingdom since 1996 on adult participation in learning shows that socio-economic class remains the most important factor determining learning participation. The upper class shows a consistent pattern of lifelong learning participation after completing compulsory education (NIACE, 2014). Similarly, an analysis by Boeren (2009) of adult participation in learning among European citizens shows a ‘Matthew effect’, where the highly educated were more active in participation in learning than low-educated individuals. The ‘Matthew effect’ is said to occur when an advantaged group benefits more than a disadvantaged. Furthermore, studies have found that those with low educational attainment show a negative attitude towards learning due to bad experience at school (Illeris, 2014; Boeren, et al., 2012; Desjardins et al., 2006). For example, studies of marginalised groups of low income learners have found that early learning experience, traumatic experience in adulthood, poor self-
concept, and socio-cultural history influence adult learners’ noncompletion in learning or negative perception of learning (Crowther et al., 2010; Groen and Hyland-Russell, 2010; Kasworm and Carolina, 2012). This leads us to the conclusion that adults with high needs of increasing their skills and knowledge are less likely to participate in adult education courses. Conversely those with positive experience of school have higher confidence levels and are more likely to engage in learning. Thus socio-structural aspect could explain possibility for individual to exercise their agency in lifelong learning.

2.2.3.2 Socio-cultural value shapes adult’s orientation to learning

The literature also reveals socio-cultural values influence adults’ orientation to learning (Lee, 2014; Merriam and Mohamad, 2000; Merriam and Kim, 2008). The central concepts of the socio-cultural concentrate on shared values, beliefs, and meaning among members of a group, distinguishing it from others (Merriam and Mohamad, 2000; Jarvis, 2003; Hofstede et al., 2010). Fry defines culture as something that ‘shapes the way people make a living, the social units in which they live and work and the meanings they assign to their lives’ (1990: 129); Abdullah as ‘a collection of behaviour pattern relating to thoughts, manners and actions which members of society have shared, learned and passed on to succeeding generations’ (1996: 2). In light of these definitions, culture may be regarded as constructed by earlier generations, continuously practised, reproduced and adapted by the new generation and shaping an identity of a group. Thus, understanding cultural values is important to explain adults’ participation and experience in learning (Ng, 2008; Field, 2004).

Studies have been conducted to explore differences between Western and Eastern culture, particularly concerning learning orientation (Hudson and Ramamoorthy, 2009; Hofstede et al., 2010; Merriam and Kim, 2008). The most prevalent cultural value differences are between individualism and collectivism. The individualism-collectivism concept was first introduced by Hofstede and Bond (1984) in their work on cultural dimension theory. The culture of individualism is more pronounced in developed and Western countries, while collectivism is prevalent in developing and Eastern countries (Merriam and Mohamad, 2000; Hofstede et al., 2010). However, Hofstede and colleagues also claim that the differences between individualism and
Collectivism are not based on countries but ‘organic homogenous societies’ (2010: 21). Since there is a limited possibility of obtaining this type of data, data from countries are used for cross-cultural research (Hofstede et al., 2010). It is important to highlight that the degree of individualism–collectivism varies between countries as well as within them. Individualism–collectivism is defined by Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov as:

Collectivism stands for a society in which people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups, which throughout people’s lifetime continue to protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty (Hofstede et al., 2010: 225).

Collectivism accentuates interdependence and cooperation within the group they belong (Merriam and Mohamad, 2000; Hofstede et al., 2010). In the same way Bochner (1994) asserts that people in a collectivist group describe themselves in relation to their group belonging. As an eastern country, the collective culture prevails in Malaysia. This value was demonstrated in a study by Abdullah (1996) which focused on Malaysian organisational behaviour. Collectivist society, she states, ‘tends to be concerned about the impact of one’s behaviour on other people’ (Abdullah, 1996:11). Thus, there will be a presence of collective value among participants in this study.

Several studies have been conducted to understand the non-Western cultural value in adult learning (Merriam and Mohamad, 2000; Reagen, 2005; Merriam and Kim, 2008; Yang, 2011). According to Merriam and Kim (2008) eastern countries appear to extend the western model of learning by enhancing abstract and theoretical knowledge to hands-on, practical experience. A review by Merriam and Kim (2008) revealed three themes of non-western learning orientation. Firstly, learning is communal, which means there is a sense of interdependence in involvement in learning. This theme could directly be attributed to the value of collectivism, where individual learning must benefit or contribute to the social wellbeing of others. Secondly, learning is lifelong and informal. Learning is structured by community problems and issues; therefore, the setting of learning is community-based and informal. Thirdly, learning is holistic. Learning and education include developing good individual character, and a spiritual person rather than the mind. Another study
by Merriam and Mohamad (2000) on how cultural values shaped learning participation in older adults in Malaysia demonstrated that learners express communal orientation in two ways: learning as a medium of interaction with others; and learning as a preparation to enhance the wellbeing of others. Thus, the studies demonstrated the influence of socio-cultural value in adult’s orientation to learning. Figure 2.1 summarises factors that influence adults’ participation in learning.

![Figure 2.1: Factors that influences adults’ participation in learning](image)

**2.2.3.3 Community-based education as a platform to cope with life transition**

Generally, there are three types of learning: formal, non-formal and informal. Formal learning refers to a learning process that is organised at an educational institution with a structured system of education and leading to recognised qualifications (Coombs and Ahmed, 1974; European Commission, 2000). On the other hand, non-formal learning is learning that takes place alongside compulsory education, which include programmes that are organised by community centres, trade unions or non-governmental organisations and entails a less daunting curriculum than that of formal learning (Coombs and Ahmed, 1974; European Commission, 2000). Lastly, informal learning may include a lifelong learning activity through daily practice and unintentional exposure to a learning environment (Coombs and Ahmed, 1974; European Commission, 2000). Some adults prefer formal learning through enrolment in higher education; some participate in non-
formal learning at the local community, while others partake in informal and independent learning projects through charity or volunteering (Withnall, 2006). Formal education in the context of community education started with the establishment of community colleges by Henry Morris in Cambridgeshire before the Second World War (Jarvis, 2014). The idea was then extended to other places, in which the school or educational institution become a centre point of community-based education as the location is strategic and accessible to the local community. Reflecting on this idea, Eric Midwinter, concluded that education ‘must be viewed as a total, lifelong experience, with the home and the neighbourhood playing important parts, and everybody contributing to and drawing on this educative dimension of the community’ (Midwinter, 1975 cited in Jarvis, 2014: 50).

Community-based education programmes have been implemented worldwide with different approaches tailored to the local context. Historically, community-based education is linked to education for radical action by the community - radical when people start to question their condition and develop action to change the status quo in their society (Jarvis, 2014; Ledwith, 2005; Freire, 1972). Education helps to raise awareness in the community as its members reflect on social symptoms and construct a collective meaning to force some change in society (Freire, 1972). An example of radical education is Freire’s ideas on liberation against illiteracy and poverty in Latin America through *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Even though the current practice of community-based education is more neutral, the notion of liberation remains (Jarvis, 2014). Furthermore, Connolly explained, ‘*community education is a flexible, emancipating process, which enables people to become more agentic in their own lives, and to bring about change in their worlds*’ (2003:9).

Community-based education provides a liberal approach to adult learning and makes changes in their life (McIntyre, 2012). A report on lifelong learning strategy in Scotland describes community-based education as:

> learning opportunities (mainly targeted at excluded/disadvantaged groups and individuals) provided in local communities, developed substantially in negotiation with participants (both in terms of content and delivery), and which empower them to address relevant issues in their lives, and that of their community (Scottish Executive, 2003: 9).
Community-based education focuses on real issues where the individual situated in and their communities. The idea is to provide knowledge or skills for the community to overcome their situation. While community-based education responds to individual learning needs, the change will transfer to the community as the ‘personal is on a continuum with social and cultural’ (Connolly, 2003: 16). In a broad sense, community-based education supports adults in reflecting on their situation, developing their potential and interconnected with the community.

Studies reveal that community-based education is an important source of learning for adults, helping them to cope with a life transition due to its convenient location and non-threatening environment (Ng, 2010; Gallacher et al., 2002). Most learning programmes offered in community-based education are designed to be less daunting and involve lower risk of failure than academic counterparts (Ng, 2008; Gallacher et al., 2002). The characteristics of community-based education that sits between formal and informal learning may make people feel safe and comfortable to enrol. Thus many adults with low social status or who have negative learning dispositions are likely to participate in community-based education (Crossan et al., 2003; Boeren, 2016). Furthermore, studies show that participation in non-formal or community-based learning is often a stepping stone to more formal learning (Gallacher et al., 2002). Thus community-based education not only offers a supportive learning environment but also opens a pathway for adults to make changes in their life. This study investigates on short course programmes based on the concept of community-based education organised by community colleges.

2.4.3.1 Developing social support through social interaction in learning

In their study on community-based learning at two FE colleges, Gallacher, et al. (2002) found that adult learners value the informal and supportive attitude of tutors and members of staff in these institutions. The finding suggests a ‘horizontality’ in the learning relationship where staff balance their roles of providing informal support and encouraging learners to achieve formal learning qualifications (Gallacher et al., 2002: 26). The implication drawn from this is that tutors need to be aware that being available, listening and promoting a constructive view of themselves through friendly relations are important and make a significant impact on the learners (Gallacher et al., 2002; Fink, 2013). In a study on adult learners’
experience, Reiff and Balin (2016) describing adult learners experiences within three learning domains: cognitive, affective and psychomotor. The findings showed that adults’ cognitive and psychomotor functions are less engaged when affective issues such as feeling respect and safe are not adequately acknowledged. The study highlights that learners’ affective aspect is pertinent to determine an adult’s positive or negative learning experience as well as the acquisition of knowledge (Reiff and Ballin, 2016). Ultimately it is argued that constructive and egalitarian relations are entangled with concern for the affective aspect of adult learners, which helps to develop a positive disposition in learning.

Studies also show that positive learning experience helps to increase adult’s confidence as well as supporting the development of social capital (Crowther et al., 2010; McIntyre, 2012; Field, 2015b). For example, McIntyre (2012) examines the relationship between participation in community-based adult learning (CBAL) and the development of social capital through a life-history approach. The study reveals how some learners develop confidence through social interaction during the learning process. For example, a participant stated, ‘When I go into these groups now, I go in and I’m all bubbly and it gives me more confidence’ (McIntyre, 2012: 613). Learners reported how they regained confidence after they had chance to meet others in a similar situation to theirs and build social support as a way out of isolation. They then gradually demonstrate a trusting relationship with peers. Subsequently some learners were encouraged to contribute to the wider community through involvement in civic engagement (McIntyre, 2012). Some learners joined organised groups and volunteer activities. Studies also show that many adult learners recover their social capital that had become weakened through circumstances when they are engaged in learning (McIntyre, 2012; Crowther et al., 2010; Field, 2005). The significant impact of development and recovery of social capital was an important outcome of participation in community-based learning. However, this value is often ignored in policy (McIntyre, 2012; Gallacher et al., 2002).

Studies reveal that adult learners demonstrated learning progression in different ways: personal, social, economic and education (McIntyre, 2012; Lohman, 2005; McGivney, 2002). On findings from McIntyre (2012), personal progression refers to learners’ development of greater confidence, increased self-esteem, change in
attitude, and other significant progression that related to learners’ circumstances. Social progression refers to better social interaction and participation in voluntary activities serving the community. For economic progression some learners manage to get a job. Lastly, educational progression shows there are ranges of progression in learning: some learners move to a more advanced level of learning, and some feel the need to go back to a more fundamental level. Thus participation in community based education is considered a lifeline that supports the learner’s progression (McIntyre, 2012).

Studies also report that a number of adults become stuck in a ‘comfort zone’ in community-based learning and they were less likely to progress (Wright, 2013; Crossan et al., 2003). In some cases, learners were not aware of the benefit of progression. On the other hand, Wright argues that adults who participated in childcare programmes suggest that their decision to learn was to support ‘their existing lives rather than seeking to move on’ (2013: 90). They used the learning as a tool to integrate their lives and not as a progression towards qualification.

### 2.2.4 Summary of section one of literature review

The literature review shows that there is a range of studies that highlight various factors that influence lifelong learning participation. Many studies show the importance of the macro-level structure set by the government in encouraging lifelong learning participation. Participation rates may differ between countries due to their financial, schooling and adult education systems, labour market structure and social protection. For example, a study of the Nordic Welfare state regimes demonstrates a high enrolment in learning as a result of the role that the government played in structuring the labour market. The government valued people’s participation in learning. In the same way, studies at the individual level showed that individuals were taking advantage of learning opportunities provided by the government.

At the meso-level the literature reviewed has revealed five aspects of institutional barriers that can both limit or enable adults’ ability to learn: access to information, admission procedure, enrolment fees, programmes offered and mode of study. Educational institutions need to interact with potential learners to be able to provide
advice and guidance to help them overcome learning barriers. At the same time the educational institution is also impacted by government strategies for financial assistance to learners (e.g. scholarships, grants, bursaries). The literature shows that educational institutions that reduce these barriers may encourage adults’ participation and engagement in learning.

The literature further shows that adults participate in learning programmes at a ‘micro level’ due to life transitions or triggering factors. Many adults return to learning in light of their needs and context. Equally important, the literature highlights that socio-structural and socio-cultural factors influence an adult’s decision to learn. Cultural values may inform types of learning that are relevant to the community. Furthermore, community-based education becomes one of the adults’ platforms to learn for its concept that is convenient to access as well as offering a less daunting environment. Thus, the current study helps to provide evidence on lifelong learning participation at three local levels: individual, educational institution and governmental.

2.3 Section two: Theoretical frameworks

This section explains the theoretical framework within which it helps to explain the interaction of the three levels identified: macro-level (government), meso-level (educational institution) and micro-level (adult learners). In the same way, this second section is also divided into three subsections. The first focuses on the concept of learning career advanced by Bloomer and Hokinson (2000). The second subsection discusses social-constructivist learning theory. Finally, the third subsection explains the Integrative Participation in Lifelong Learning Model (ILLPM) proposed by Boeren (2016).

The reason for using these theories is to enable the researcher to get an in-depth understanding of the multi-faceted perspective on adult participation in learning. These theories have been employed in other studies in this area. Researchers have been using Learning Career (Cieslik, 2006; Crossan et al., 2003; Gallacher et al., 2002); Social Constructivist Learning Theory (Chang, 2018; Kasworm, 2010; Kasworm, 2005) and Integrative Lifelong Learning Participation Model (Boeren,
to examine on adult’s participation in learning, but no study has ever used the three theories simultaneously in one study.

Figure 2.2: Theoretical perspectives

2.3.1 Theoretical underpinnings for the micro level: Learning Career

The concept of ‘learning career’ was introduced by Bloomer and Hodkinson (2000) based on an empirical study of young people’s enrolling in formal learning in Further Education. The development of the learning career was derived from the work of the Chicago School, where Goffman describes career as ‘any social strand of any person’s course through life […]’ (1968: 119). Bloomer and Hodkinson (2000) refer the social strand as learning. In the social process of learning an individual move to different social space, constructs meaning from learning and develops dispositions to learning (Cieslik, 2006; Bloomer and Hodkinson, 2000). The learning career is described by Bloomer and Hodkinson as ‘career of events, activities and meanings, and the making and remaking of meanings through those activities and events, and it is a career of relationships and the constant making and remaking of relationships, including relationships between position and disposition’ (2000: 590). Accordingly, an individual’s learning career is transformed through life challenges, for example growth of a relationship, bereavement or loss job. This theory has both subjective and objective dimensions as it recognised an individual’s
position and acknowledged individual’s subjective experience (Bloomer and Hodkinson, 2000; Crossan et al., 2003). The learning career is established through three broad theoretical perspectives: Symbolic Interaction by Herbert Mead (Mead, 2001; Charon, 2006), Habitus by Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1977; Grenfell and James, 1998) and the Theory of Situated Learning by Lave and Wenger (Lave and Wenger, 1991).

Firstly, symbolic interactionism premise on individual constructs and reconstructs meaning through social interaction process (Charon, 2006; Mead, 2001). Bloomer and Hodkinson describe meaning as ‘subjectively maintained notions of the intrinsic or extrinsic worthwhileness of given learning opportunities’ (2000: 589). Individual orientation to learning is based on the subjective meaning that participants attribute to their learning.

Secondly, Bourdieu’s concept of habitus explains the relationship between the individual and his position in society (Bloomer and Hodkinson, 2000). Bourdieu argues that an individual’s habitus is shaped by various internalised influences throughout one’s life (Bourdieu, 1977; Reay, 2004b). There are numerous elements that influence individual habitus, including education, socioeconomic situation, family background, environment, ideology, religion, values, society, experience and the nature of work (Pöllmann, 2009; Reay, 2004a). Bourdieu describes habitus as:

  a system of dispositions to a certain practice, is an objective basis for regular modes of behaviour, and thus for the regularity of modes of practice, and if practices can be predicted this is because the effect of the habitus is that agents who are equipped with it will behave in a certain way in certain circumstances (1990: 77).

Accordingly, habitus is a flexible concept and has a possibility of modification when an individual experiences change in their societal position or life experience (Hilgers, 2009; Reay, 2004a). Nevertheless, habitus has been criticised for its determinism (Davey, 2009; Sullivan, 2002; Nash, 1999). In this regard many scholars assert that habitus may influence individual chances, but not determine one’s thought and action (Hilgers, 2009; Davey, 2009; Reay, 2004a; Wacquant, 1998). There is a possibility for an individual to reflect on their habitus and
recognise potential for change. In the concept of learning career habitus illuminates a
significant influences of individual position, for example social class, ethnicity and
gender on their orientation to learning (Bloomer and Hodkinson, 2000).

Lastly, situated learning theory describes that the individual is inclined to learn
between learning and the context in which the learning takes place. Bloomer and
Hodkinson explain that the concept of ‘context’ is not limited to a particular
geographic location but rather is framed as ‘action and learning exist in a mutually
constitutive relationship with context or situation’ (2000: 590). The link between
learning and context has a ‘temporal dimension’ as explained by Lave and Wenger
‘one way to think of learning is as the historical production, transformation, and
change of persons’ (1991: 51). Therefore an individual may learn the same thing
differently at different times, according to their situation at the time (Crossan et al.,
2003). Within the context of this study, adult learners who are practitioner enrolled
in short course programmes to improve their skills and apply the learning at their
own business.

2.3.1.1 Understanding adults’ participation in learning through Learning
Career

Many scholars have extended the concept of ‘learning career’ through empirical
research to understanding adult participation in lifelong learning programmes
(Gallacher et al., 2002; Crossan et al., 2003; Cieslik, 2006). In the context of the
adult learner, Crossan and colleagues observe that learning career is used ‘to shed
light on the complex interplay between the social and economic structures which
shape people’s lives, the educational institutions which determine the processes of
engagement with learning, and the learners themselves’ (2003 :58). These studies
show similarity in findings that an adult’s learning career is nonlinear and is heavily
influenced by their situation as well as institutional factors. This section briefly
outlined studies that employed learning career in the context of adult learners.

Gallacher, et al. (2002) examined the concept of learning career to understand
participation and nonparticipation of adults in FE. The study reports that FE
institutions are highly accessible and localised to attract local community and
contribute a significant change in identity and perception among adults at the
respective settings. Accordingly, the research study extends the concept of learning career to include how adult’s identity can be constructed and change over time. Findings from the study show that an adult’s learning career is influenced by personal factors and by social relations. The results also highlight the influence of institutional factors, for example the college environment and tutor support in enabling adult to commit to their role as learner. Thus, the study highlights that the complexities of personal, institutional and structural factors may affect an adult’s learning career.

In the same study as the former Crossan, et al. (2003) challenged the nonlinear approach of learning careers. The study elicits views of adults who participate and do not participate at four FE colleges through a life histories approach. Findings reveal that learning careers of adults are ‘contradictory and volatile’ and at the same time may go forward or reverse (Crossan et al., 2003: 65). Adults’ disposition to learning changes over time and is influenced by changes in their social identities. Subsequently the research asserts that learning identities for adults is contingent.

On the other hand, Cieslik (2006) developed learning career through the concept of reflexivity in understanding the influences of structure and agency in adults’ engagement in learning. The study explores patterns of participation among adults in basic skills programmes. Findings reveal that the adults’ orientation towards learning is influenced by their ‘internal conversation with particular social–structural constraints and enablement’ (Cieslik, 2006: 247). Thus, the study suggests the concept of reflexivity facilitates in understanding the interplay of social context and individual disposition.

Learning career illustrates individual transformation in learning through reflectivity of their situation. Bloomer and Hodkinson highlight that a critical point urges an adolescent to ‘appraise themselves and their life-worlds in ways they had not done before’ (2000: 593). The study reveals that transformation is conditioned e.g. by the individual’s habitus, gender and social class. On the other hand, Crossan, et al. (2003) emphasised that even though individual participation in learning could be linked to transformation in identity, it is often temporary. The temporal dimension of an adult’s learning career is linked to status passage which refers to expected and
unexpected events in life which shift their social identity, for instance bereavement, parenthood or loss of a job (Ng, 2010; Alheit, 2009; Crossan et al., 2003).

2.3.1.2 Adopting the concept of Learning Career in the current study

In this study participants were among adult learners who engaged in short course programmes organised by community colleges. There are three main elements involved in students’ engagement in learning which are self, learning context and socio-cultural environment. Figure 2.3 shows the relationship between three overlapping elements. The intersection of the three circles represents the concept of learning career.

Figure 2.3: An illustration of the learning career concept

An adult learner’s ‘self’ is explored through the concept of habitus. This concept helps to provide an understanding of learners’ system of disposition which was constructed throughout an individual’s life. Furthermore, it is inevitable that learners went through life transitions and interacted with their respective socio-cultural environment.

The interaction of self and socio-cultural environment elements is explained by symbolic interactionism as an approach to understanding the concept of self and society where learners make and remake meaning (Crotty, 1998). Studies show that the individual’s sociocultural factors enhance understanding of possibilities of
individual learning career development (Ng, 2010). Accordingly, throughout life, learners also encounter status passage or turning points that made them reflect on their situation and consider participation in learning. The process of reflection includes activation of past experience (habitus) in the new situation or social context. As suggested by Jarvis (2004) learning itself is constructed meaning-making by the disjuncture between the new knowledge and existing learner experience. Thus, habitus and symbolic interactionism illustrate the objective and subjective dimension in learning career that are relevant in this study.

The adult learners’ participation in learning at short course programmes at community colleges is examined through the theory of situated learning. These learners chose to engage in the learning programmes despite their different situations. The theory of situated learning helps to link the learner’s situation and learning process that takes place at the setting. These learners engaged in learning with a community on domain activity that they were interested in. Throughout the engagement in learning, the learners undergo a process of ‘legitimate peripheral participation’ (Wenger, 2009). In doing so they construct a new social identity as they get involved in the community of practices in short course programmes at community colleges. Therefore, the concept of learning career complement to the theory of situated learning that enables me to elucidate and understand the experience of adult learners as they are shaped by different influences. Besides, the community colleges’ characteristics may influence adult’s re-enrolment in short course programmes or deter their participation in learning. Collectively adults’ participation in learning is restricted to their position, their embodied disposition, and the environment in which they are positioned.

2.3.2 Constructing learning acquisition at the meso-level: Social Constructivist Learning Theory

In this study the researcher is interested in examining how adult learners who participated in short course programmes construct their learning. To understand and explain adult learners’ learning behaviour in knowledge construction, some scholars have employed social constructivist learning theory (Kasworm, 2010; Chang, 2018; Roumell, 2018; Cherrstrom et al., 2017). Under the influence of socio-cultural theory, learning is suggested to take place through active learner participation in the
process of knowledge construction (Vygotsky, 1978; Casbergue, 2013). In this theory knowledge is first developed between the individual and environment on an inter-psychological plane and after that, inside the learners’ mind on the intra-psychological plane (Vygotsky, 1978). Thus knowledge is constructed by the interconnection between language and thought through active participation, collaboration with others, and social interaction (Vygotsky, 1962; Casbergue, 2013). In constructivist learning approaches the role of an educator is seen as that of facilitator or scaffold in helping learners go through a ‘zone of proximal development’ to acquire the knowledge or skills (Vygotsky, 1978). The zone of proximal development refers to the gap between actual individual development and individual potential future development through guidance from experts (Vygotsky, 1978). An educator, as a guide, may elicit learners’ current knowledge and help them to construct their conceptual knowledge. Thus, the learning process or knowledge construction takes place within the social interaction.

The short course programme offers a platform for a social learning environment where learners could learn through social interaction with educators, peers and surroundings. Illeris asserts ‘learning is always embedded in a social and societal context that provide impulses and sets the frame for what can be learned and how’ (2007: 19). The social context of learning provides a space for a learner to learn a hidden curriculum from the social relationship as well as course content that is formally taught (Jarvis, 2003; Kegan, 2009). Learners learn through discussion, collaboration or argument as part of the learning process in a social learning environment (Chang, 2018; Merriam et al., 2007). For example, in a study on adult peers in a community for support and learning, Cherrstrom, et al. (2017) highlight that interaction with peers plays a major role in adult learners’ acquisition of knowledge. In another study on learning transfer among adult learners, Roumell (2018) suggests educators need to scaffold meaningful social interaction among adult learners for the development of transferable skills. Besides, adult learners learn a great deal from each other concerning identity and life transition. Another study by Chang (2018) reveals how people gain knowledge through observation, imitation and adaptation. In the study on how adult learners learn in the Zhabei community in China, Chang revealed that adults gradually internalised new knowledge through a period of observation of how their mentor worked. The research demonstrated how
learners simulate new knowledge by observing modelled behaviour and adapt to their situation. The studies also illustrate how learners become explorers of knowledge through active participation with people and their surroundings. Thus, social learning environment plays a significant role in knowledge construction among adults.

2.3.3 Developing an analytical lens for macro and meso level: The Integrated Lifelong Learning Participation Model (ILLPM)

Many scholars have developed models on adult participation in learning. The earlier models focus on individual perspective on their involvement in learning. However, recent adult participation in learning models highlight an interaction between structure, which refers to government as well as educational institutions and the individual. This section explores the development of models on adult participation in learning.

2.3.3.1 Models of adults’ participation in learning: focus on the individual

In the late 1970s and early 1980s many models and theories were developed to explore factors that influence adults’ participation in learning programmes. The models show some similarities in their focus on individual effort and less on broader structural conditions (Rubenson and Desjardins, 2009; Boeren et al., 2010). These models are The Congruence Model by Boshier (1973), The Expectancy Valence Model by Rubenson (1977), The Chain of Response Model (hereafter COR) by Cross (1981), and The Psychosocial Interaction Model by Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) (Boeren, 2016). Among these models, the COR has been widely used in the literature, particularly on the idea of adults’ learning barriers (Bamdas, 2014; Boeren, 2009; Magro, 2007; Hale and Wattenbarger, 1990). Employment of the model in many studies demonstrates its capacity to explain and further understand factors that influence adults’ participation in learning (Boeren, 2009; Magro, 2007). A study reveals that the COR model is practical in developing a deeper understanding on adults’ participation in learning even with the changes in the 21st century of widening participation and diversity in higher education (Bamdas, 2014). This section examines how the model operates.
Figure 2.4: The Chain of Response Model

As shown in figure 2.4, the COR illustrates a cycle of adults’ decision-making process of participation in learning. It starts from the internal factors of an individual to an external factor of the environment. There are seven elements in this model: (A) self-perception, (B) attitudes towards education, (C) value of goals and expectation that participation will meet these goals, (D) life transitions, (E) opportunities and barriers, (F) information, and (G) participation. Each of these elements is linked and influence one another.

At point A (self-perception) the adult evaluates their ability to succeed in a learning activity. At this point, the model suggests an individual’s level of confidence and self-esteem- point A interacts with point B (attitudes towards education). The point B shows an individual is influenced by their experience in education and support from others. Findings from several studies reveal that an individual with negative learning disposition tends to demonstrate a negative attitude towards learning (Boeren, 2011; Schuetze and Slowey, 2002; Kasworm, 2003). Both points A and B observe on internal factors of individuals. Next, at point C the individual reflects on the value of their goals and the expectation that participation in learning will meet the goals. This point suggests an exploration of whether the participation helped them to achieve the expected benefit.

Point D illustrates that individual’s life transition consists of inevitable changing events or circumstances in individual life. Some life transition suggests a positive force and identify as ‘the teachable moment’ or a turning point (Cross, 1981: 238).
Subsequently point E is opportunities and barriers. Cross (1981) proposes three types of barrier to participation: dispositional, situational and institutional. Firstly, dispositional barriers focus on an individual’s self-esteem and attitude towards learning. For example, feeling too old, having negative learning experience in life. Secondly, situational barriers refer to a person’s condition at the time. The situation involves economic conditions, geographical context, and lack of time due to family or workplace commitments (Smith, 2010; Cross, 1981). Lastly, institutional barriers explain structural education procedures that inhibit learning. For instance, limited access to information, inflexible course schedule and lack of learning support. These barriers may hinder individuals’ participation in learning.

Point E is a crucial element process as individual needs to balance opportunities and barriers with access to necessary information. In the process, point F (information) individuals were influenced by external factors, such as, accessible information on learning opportunities. Lastly, at point G, participation in learning is decided. The decision-making process reveals how individuals possess different degrees of willingness to accept responsibility to participate in a learning programme (Brockett and Hiemstra, 1991). After completing participation an individual may consider participating in another learning programme. Re-entry to other programmes possibly reflects on individual persistence in learning.

The strength of this model is that it shows a complex decision-making process as it has many elements and offers far from simplistic explanation (Boeren, 2009; Cieslik, 2006; Scanlan, 1986). The interaction between the elements helps researchers to glean understanding on factors that influence adults’ participation in learning. The complex decision-making process suggests an individual’s decision to commit to a learning programme and its implication for their lives. Nevertheless, Smith (2010) argues the model as it overemphasises the linearity process of decision-making. In addition, scholars also contend that the model focuses on the individual side of lifelong learning since the interaction between individual and environment only takes place at the latter stage of the model (Boeren, 2016; Ng, 2010; Rubenson and Desjardins, 2009; Baert and Rick, 2006). Consequently, recent models of adult participation in learning emphasise an interaction on both sides: individual and structure for an effective adults’ engagement in lifelong learning programmes.

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2.3.3.2 Models of participation in lifelong learning: Interaction between individual and structure

In the late 2000s many studies examined models of participation in learning and learning barriers (Baert and Rick, 2006; Rubenson and Desjardins, 2009; Boeren et al., 2010; Ng, 2010). These scholars assert the pivotal role of structure in affecting adults’ capability to participate in learning programmes. For this reason, new models of participation in learning were developed. For example, ‘A bounded agency model’ by Rubenson and Desjardins (2009), ‘Model of lifelong learning participation’ by Ng (2010), ‘Comprehensive lifelong learning Participation Model’ by Boeren (2010) and ‘Integrative lifelong learning Participation Model’ by Boeren (2016). As compared with the previous models, these models assert the interaction of adult learners, the educational institutions and the authorities or broader social context for effective participation in lifelong learning (Boeren et al., 2010). Thus these models suggest there are significant differences in lifelong learning policy and practice in different socio-political structures (Rubenson and Desjardins, 2009; Boeren and Holford, 2016). This section explores the models to understand the relationship and interaction of structure and individual in adult participation in learning.
Figure 2.5: Bounded-agency Model

Rubenson and Desjardins (2009) developed a bounded agency model in order to consider broader structural conditions, for instance national policy and its impact on individuals’ participation. As illustrated in figure 2.5, this model distinguishes structural and individual factors. The structural factors shaped the circumstances that are encountered by an individual and may limit their learning opportunities. Thus, the model suggests the structure bound on type of action that could be performed by the agency. The strength of this model is it recognises the interplay of the structural condition and an individual’s action. For this reason, the structural barrier may contribute directly and indirectly to a positive or negative individual learning disposition. At the same time an individual may reflect on how they perceive the structural barrier. Their study comparing Nordic and non-Nordic countries reveals that the way a welfare state regime constructs their structural condition affects individual capability to participate in learning as well as overcome structurally and individually based barriers. The findings suggested that Nordic welfare states were more effective in overcoming barriers to participation in learning through a structured labour market for a high skills strategy and fostered learning for social and personal development. Therefore, the model illustrates that individual participation in learning is bounded between an individual and the broader structural conditions.
Ng (2010) constructed a Model of Lifelong Learning Participation from a qualitative study on adults’ engagement in lifelong learning activities. The model suggests stages in individual participation in learning. Nevertheless, the author highlights that the sequence may not always neat in a real life, and individual may reverse to the previous stage without completing the whole cycle. Inside the big circle as illustrated in figure 2.6, the study reveals six structural influences that facilitate individuals’ decision to participate in learning: government, community, the economy, educational institution, workplace and family. The various spheres influence individuals to differing degrees at a different time. Therefore, the results assert the importance of contextual factors in understanding participation. For example, many participants in the study took advantage of the learning opportunities that were provided and subsidised by the government, employers or community organisations. Besides, the model suggests the outcome of the learners’ previous learning experience may influence their decision to enrol in learning activities in the future. This model demonstrates an understanding of participation at a wider level than only in the compound of an individual.
Boeren, et al. (2010) designed a Comprehensive Lifelong Learning Participation Model (CLLPM) as illustrated in figure 2.7. The model consists of two blocks that represent the demand (individual) and supply (educational institution) sides connected by an arrow. The model shows the interaction of two blocks of central elements: the individual and the educational institution in participation in adult education. The arrow denotes a reciprocal link between the individual and the educational institution with support from the authority in an individual decision and perception in participation in learning (Boeren et al., 2010). The reciprocal link is formed on the assumption of demand and supply. The demand side (individual) is influenced by socio-economic, socio-cultural, and psychological factors (motives, barriers, attitudes, confidence and intention) as well as ‘relevant others’ (family, employer, reference group and services). The supply side (the educational institution) is characterised by organisational factors, namely range of resources, quality system, support services and coverage for marginalised groups (Boeren et al., 2010). The educational institution is also affected by ‘relevant others’ (education policy, alternative programmes, competition and services) in its social context. Furthermore, the CLLPM acknowledges the nonlinear relationship between individual perceptions and decision towards educational institution. Adult learners’ disposition will form a perception of the structure and similarly, the educational institution will affect the adult learner’s decision to learn. Accordingly, this model
asserts individual participation in learning needs to be interpreted through interaction of the individual, educational institution and broader social context.

In 2016, Boeren improved the CLLPM and called it an Integrative Lifelong Learning Participation Model (hereafter ILLPM). As compared with a relationship between two major elements (individual and educational institution) in the CLLPM, the ILLPM shows interaction of three levels of stakeholders: the micro-level, which refers to an individual, meso-level which is learning providers and macro-level the countries. Based on figure 2.8, the model presents the three levels in the form of wheels. The ‘movement’ of the country’s ‘wheel’ may influence the direction of learning providers ‘wheel’ as well as the individual ‘wheel’. The individual level consists of individual behaviour and social characteristics. Within individual behaviour, a person’s participation in learning programmes are in relation to their needs to reach the expected benefit from the learning. The social characteristics refer to the sociological structures (age, gender, education, employment, social/cultural capital and others) which change during the individual lifespan. These two aspects influence each other and may construct an individual's dispositional and situational barrier to participation in learning. Consequently, the individual level explains how micro-sociological factors affect adults’ participation in learning.

Figure 2.8: Integrative Lifelong Learning Participation Model
The learning providers’ level is divided into two types of organisation, learning institutions and workplace as learning environments. The learning institutions are characterised by programmes that offer flexible learning routes, affordability, and accessibility of information. On the other hand, the workplace that has an expansive working environment and values participation in learning stimulates participation in learning. Accordingly, studies found that there is a significant relationship between learners’ engagement in learning activities and positive learning environment (Boeren, 2017; Jarvis, 2014; Ng, 2010). The model suggests a reciprocal relationship between individuals and learning providers where individuals have their goal to be fulfilled and learning providers offer courses and facilities. The macro-level influence how participation in lifelong learning activities is ‘stimulated and constrained’ in the social system. Countries differ on ways the government operated, for example, in policy measures, educational system, financial system, social protection and labour market. These aspects of the macro-level influence national participation rate in learning. On this model Boeren (2016) highlights individual participation in lifelong learning is a shared responsibility and shared risk between countries, learning providers and learners. In term of shared responsibility, if the plan does not materialise as expected, all parties must act. For example, the country and learning providers improve programmes or skills that are offered and at the same time learners must take responsibility by learning new skills.

2.3.4 Summary of section two of theoretical framework

This section has focused on three theoretical frameworks that are used to understand lifelong learning participation in learning at individual, educational institutional and government levels. Figure 2.9 illustrated the application of the theoretical frameworks to the current study. At the core of the model is the micro-level, the individual learner. This area is investigated through learning career theory which is represented by the double headed arrow, as it highlights the sliding-scale dynamic nature of this theory. Around the micro is the meso level. The Social Constructivist Learning Theory is employed to investigate the interaction of these two levels as well as how learners construct knowledge in the social learning environment. Lastly, the macro-level is examined using ILLPM as indicated by the double-headed arrow.
again emphasising how micro-level factors can shape macro-level conditions and vice versa.

![Diagram](image)

**Figure 2.9: The theoretical frameworks employed in the current study**

Each theoretical framework contributes to understanding factors in lifelong learning participation. Firstly, the ILLPM offers insight into the interaction between three levels that each level has a responsibility to be fulfilled to ensure successful lifelong learning participation. Whilst the strength of the ILLPM theory is to capture macro-level factors, its limitation is that it does not adequately explain the micro and meso levels. Secondly, the social constructivist learning theory is widely used by education scholars to understand how the learner constructs meanings through social interaction (Chang, 2018; Kasworm, 2010; Kasworm, 2005).

Lastly, the learning career is a coherent framework within which it builds on the social constructivist findings and provides a framework to observe micro-sociological perspectives of individuals. The learning career perspectives explain the interplay of personal disposition, socio-cultural environment and educational
institution. As this theory focuses mainly on micro factors the ILLPM theory complement this by providing the macro-level knowledge.

The value to combine these theoretical frameworks together is it recognises that there is a dynamic element in lifelong learning participation (this is represented by the arrows in figure 2.9) such that the learner through their own agency is equally as important in shaping the learning environment as the macro level actors. The next chapter discusses the research paradigm that underpins the study, which is consistent with the theoretical perspectives discussed.
Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

Previous chapters have outlined the rationale behind this study. Chapter one set the stage with the background of the study and research context. Chapter two discussed the literature on adult participation in learning and theoretical frameworks for this study. This chapter aims to elucidate the choice of research methodology. This chapter is divided into nine sections: the first section discusses the research paradigm that underpins the study; the second provides an explanation for the use of qualitative research; the third describes the biographical method; the fourth explains various study sites; the fifth outlines the data collection process, including the criteria for participants and the activities undertaken during fieldwork; the sixth looks at the procedures for data analysis; the seventh deals with ethical considerations; the eighth considers the researcher’s positionality and reflexivity within the study; and the last section highlights the integrity of data in quality of research.

3.2 Research paradigm: Ontological and epistemological positioning

Research paradigm guides a research process. Guba and Lincoln define the research paradigm as a ‘basic belief system or worldview that guides the investigation’ (1994: 105). In the same way, Patton posits ‘how you study the world determines what you learn about the world’ (1990: 67). The research paradigm helps a researcher to determine their role as well as choosing relevant research approaches to explore the phenomena (Rubin and Rubin, 2012). It is grounded in developing a concept, making a relationship between theory and evidence, and explaining the belief that informs the research (Cresswell and Poth, 2017; Corbin and Strauss, 2008; Crotty, 1998). Accordingly, Fay (1996) argues that highlighting a research paradigm strengthens and produces more rigorous social science research.

The research paradigm consists of ontology (the belief on what is reality), epistemology (the view on the relationship between a researcher and knowledge) and the methodology (the way to conduct a research) (Cresswell and Cresswell, 2017; Hammersley, 2008; Corbin and Strauss, 2008; Crotty, 1998). It is important to
highlight that there has been a long debate between two research paradigms in social science which are positivism and post-positivism or interpretivism. The differences are within the three elements mentioned: ontology, epistemology and methodology.

Ontologically, positivists advocate for realism; the existence of objective reality and facts are autonomous (Creswell, 2013; Turner and Roth, 2003; Crotty, 1998). This means that in positivism, there is only one single reality or reality is something that is posited (Crotty, 1998: 19). Epistemologically, positivist contends in objectivity where the researcher is separate from the study. Therefore, the focus of research is on the object that inherent characteristics which exist independently. These characteristics are reduced into the simplest elements so that it can comprehend and measured quantitatively which is called reduction (Cresswell and Cresswell, 2017; Curtis and Pettigrew, 2010; Bryman, 2008; Hammersley, 2008). In terms of methodology, positivists emphasis on the use of natural science to understand reality. The natural science is valued as the utmost or the only means of arriving of a genuine form of knowledge. This means knowledge is produced based on systematic scientific proof and explanation which requires theories that make sense of the data (Benton and Craib, 2001; Turner and Roth, 2003). Thus, positivists focus on the study on the object and a structured reality.

On the other hand, at the ontological level, interpretivism promotes relativism; there is a multiple reality that exists based on human experience (Ritchie et al., 2014; Guba and Lincoln, 1994). Interpretivism is often linked to Max Weber’s thought of Verstehen which means an ‘understanding’ for social science study. Weber postulates that the social event or changes in society happened because of the way people think and understanding of the world (Crotty, 1998). This paradigm advocates humanistic approach as it rely on human interpretation of the situation that usually formed through human interaction, their cultural context and their historical position (Benton and Craib, 2001; Crotty, 1998). Furthermore, human has their own views and perceptions based on their experience, thought, knowledge and expectation (Hammond and Wellington, 2013; Lincoln et al., 2011). For this reason, the truth is a complex concept in interpretivism (Curtis and Pettigrew, 2010). Thus, the interpretive paradigm places emphasis on the subjective interpretation and diverse perceptions of people.
At the epistemological level, interpretivism believes in subjectivity where researchers play an important role to obtain a complex understanding of the subject (Abma and Widdershoven, 2011). This builds a mutual relationship between the researcher and the subject of the study. The researcher will have a direct impact on the research with existing assumptions, biases and ideas that are driven by their own interests, beliefs, experiences and values which called as value-laden (Creswell, 2013; Lincoln et al., 2011). This illustrates an inductive process where data is generated by the subject, and the knowledge is constructed by the researcher (Merrill and West, 2009). Consequently, the findings will be more contextual and in-depth (Hammond and Wellington, 2013). The context of the interaction is vital to understanding how meaning is constructed and produced (Ritchie et al., 2014; Vrasidas, 2001). Lastly, at the methodological level, the researcher employed inductive logic within its context. The inductive logic is developed from the ground-up in which a researcher examines in detail the context of the study and provides some evidence for the truth of the conclusion (Cresswell, 2007).

This thesis is underpinned by an interpretivist research paradigm. Using the paradigm within this study allowed the researcher to construct an understanding of three levels of stakeholders (government, community colleges and adult learners) that involved in lifelong learning participation. This paradigm aids in the interpretation of the meanings that are constructed by the research participants when engaging in lifelong learning programmes. Having discussed the research paradigm, I now turn to further explanation on methodological considerations within the interpretivist paradigm.

3.2.1 Methodological considerations: qualitative research

Taking into account both the research aim and main research question, as well as the research paradigm, this study uses a qualitative research approach. This approach has the potential to provide a wealth of information on individuals’ perceptions and experiences of the topic under examination (Blaikie, 2009; Guba and Lincoln, 1994). Punch proposes that qualitative research ‘aims for in-depth and holistic understanding, in order to do justice to the complexity of social life’ (1998: 243). This approach prioritise a subjective understanding and meaning of individual behaviour (Ritchie et al., 2014; Denzin and Lincoln, 2011; Guba and Lincoln, 1994).
On the other hand, a quantitative study prioritises objectivity, such as using numbers to explain the occurrence of a phenomenon within a social reality; this data is then analysed and explained based on scientific law, such as cause and effect (Patton, 1990; Braun and Clarke, 2013).

This thesis adopts qualitative research which set firmly within an interpretive framework, where the thoughts and feelings of the participants are explored and their individual voices are valued. This approach provides an appropriate way of answering research questions in the current study (Patton, 1990). Additionally, the qualitative approach allows for flexibility, for instance, questions within interviews could be developed and modified in the field (Silverman, 2010). This allows the researcher to obtain clarification from the participants when interpreting their experiences within a specific context. This flexibility is in contrast to the nature of quantitative studies which limit the participants to answering questions that have been defined prior to data collection. Thus, the qualitative approach is able to adjust and align to the subject of the study, as well as offer more nuanced insight (Cresswell and Poth, 2017; Patton, 1990). For this reason, the number of participants in a qualitative study tends to be smaller than the sample size in quantitative research projects.

The qualitative study has been criticised for its smaller sample sizes and limited findings (Patton, 1990; Cresswell and Poth, 2017; Ritchie et al., 2014). Critics of this approach further argue that the findings of a qualitative study based on this approach are limited to the area or context of the study and cannot be generalised to other settings, which means it may be deemed limited in its usefulness. However, this qualitative and quantitative divide is a major debate between scholars and is outside the scope of this thesis. In relation to this thesis, the small sample size is consistent with both my research aims and questions, for example, to understand on a deeper level the experiences of adult learners in relation to lifelong learning programmes in Malaysia (Hammond and Wellington, 2013). Alternatively, critical scholars argue that qualitative studies can be replicated and transferred to other places beyond the specific context, as although the factors that create a life story may be different, ultimately the patterns that emerge from each participant can help us to understand more universal social themes (Yvnonna S. Lincoln et al., 2011). These social themes
can also help us understand and interpret the experiences of other participants. In order to understand the experiences of adult learners and how this has shaped their life stories in relation to engagement with lifelong learning programmes, I employed the biographical method.

3.3 Biographical Method

The biographical method is based on the interpretive paradigm; it emphasises seeking individual experiences from within the participant’s own perspective (Bryman, 2016; Merrill and West, 2009). Biographical method was first used in 1918 in a study investigating the life stories of immigrants to the United States entitled ‘The Polish Peasant’ by the Chicago School of Sociology (Merrill and West, 2009; Plummer, 2001). However, it also has roots in oral tradition and oral history (Merrill and West, 2009). The individual biography provides ‘a meeting point of history, social structures, and the individual agent’ (Merrill, 2007: 27). For this reason, the findings from the biographical method demonstrate a significant ability to explain social phenomena from an individual perspective (Apitzsch and Siouti, 2007). Merrill and West define the biographical method as ‘research which utilises individual stories or other personal documents to understand lives within a social, psychological and/or historical frame’ (2009: 10). In addition, Merrill and West (2009) suggest that feminist perspectives have influenced biographical methods, particularly in giving a voice to marginalised groups by allowing them to be heard.

German sociologist Peter Alheit coined the term ‘biographicity’ to suggest that ‘individuals can continually reinterpret their life in the contexts in which they experience it, and that they experience these contexts as “mouldable” and “shapeable”’ (Alheit, 1995 cited in Apitzsch and Siouti, 2007: 5). Based on this explanation, the biographical method provides insight into certain characteristics, traits and environments that make a mark on an individual’s life. In the same way, this method helps to enable an individual to provide an in-depth narrative story on how they create their life stories within the cultural and socio-economic context (Roberts, 2002; Fillis, 2006). Thus, a biographical study can illustrate interaction in multiple ways and the significant relationship between the objective (structure) and the subjective (agency) elements in life (Merrill, 1999).
The biographical method becomes an important form of qualitative study as it emphasises the subjectivity approach (Merrill and West, 2018). Within the subjectivity approach, the focus is put on the human subject: how the individual gives meaning to their life, as described in their own words (Cederberg, 2014; Merrill and West, 2009). As argued by Chamberlayne, Bornat and Wengraf (2000), the subjectivity approach reflects a move away from objectivity and generalisability in positivism to a subjective understanding of individual and social meaning for their social practices. Furthermore, Plummer (2001) coined the term ‘critical humanism’ in biographical method which brings in a humanistic approach in the multiplicity of individual accounts for social justice. Thus, the subjectivity approach in the biographical method could give a voice to the voiceless and allow the researcher to demonstrate individuals’ struggles (Merrill and West, 2018; Barabasch and Merrill, 2014; Spector-Mersel, 2010).

3.3.1 Symbolic Interactionism

Within the biographical method, the individual’s perspective draws on symbolic interactionism. This theory was introduced by a psychologist, George Herbert Mead (1863-1931) from the University of Chicago, Symbolic interactionism illustrates the relationship between an individual and their environment (Charon, 2006; Merrill and West, 2009). Symbolic interactionism focuses on the self-view which is the interaction between the individual and the societal context in which the phenomenon is taking place (Merrill and West, 2009). As Charon explains, symbolic interactionism allows the researcher to ‘focus on social interaction, human thinking, the definition of the situation, the present, and the active nature of the human being’ (2007: 30). Individuals construct and reconstruct meaning in their respective environment through social interaction. A student of George Herbert Mead, Herbert Blumer expanded this theory by posited three basic assumptions of human interaction. First, a person’s action depends on the meaning they give to something. Second, the meaning of something derives from social interaction with others. Third, the meaning of something might be modified through an interpretive process by social interaction with others (Charon, 2006; Crotty, 1998; Merrill and West, 2009). Thus, this position guides on how a person construct and reconstruct a meaning through the process of social interaction as they develop. The
biographical study is an interdisciplinary field of research since an individual’s socialisation illustrates complex social and cultural influences (Apitzsch and Siouti, 2007; Merrill and West, 2009).

3.3.2 Critique of the Biographical Method

However, the biographical study has been criticised for its reliance on people’s accounts. For instance, the individual account may give an individual’s perception of the social world and not the social world itself, and an individual’s story is always partial and selective to represent the aspects that they choose to share with others (Silverman, 2010). The critique indicates that the validity and reliability of the biographical method were questioned. Merrill and West assert that the notion of validity in the biographical study focuses on ‘quality of research relationship, and the extent to which this facilitates deeper forms of insight and wider meaning’ (2009: 164). Consequently, the biographical scholars acknowledged that ‘through the selective process of what participants choose to share and emphasise about their life experiences, they demonstrate resiliencies and agency in setting forth their own autobiographical accounts of their lives’ (Gouthro, 2014: 98). In addition, Hammersley (2008) highlights that a phenomenon is observed as constitutive; it is produced by many possible versions of reality rather than just existing within binaries of true or false.

The theoretical framework that is used in this study, learning career, is congruent with the biographical method. For instance, individuals’ biographical stories ‘highlight the dynamic of structure and agency, the self and society, and macro and micro by placing the individual within a historical, cultural and societal context’ (Merrill, 2012: 25). In the same way, the learning career emphasises the structural and cultural influences on individual participation in learning (Bloomer and Hodkinson, 2000). In the present study, the biographical method and learning career supplement each other in order to understand the factors that drive adult learners to participate and engage in learning programmes and identify changes that occur in individuals or groups over time.
3.3.3 Application in research studies

Many studies in adult education have employed the biographical method (Gouthro, 2014; Field, 2012; West et al., 2007; Crossan et al., 2003). These studies suggested that the analysis of individual biographies helped to explain the complex interactions between the various domains of public and private life. Correspondingly, Alheit asserts that ‘learning can only be understood concretely in relation to the biography of the learner’ (2009: 116). Therefore, the biographical method was appropriate to the current study as it enabled the adult learners to reflect on their ‘agentic orientation’ particularly in relation to participating in learning (Ecclestone, 2009). The stories may link to the learners’ past experiences, present life situation as well as future planning. Besides, their life stories reflected influences of cultural and socio-economic factors at the time and context when it takes place.

3.4 Study sites and negotiating access to participants

This study was conducted in Malaysia; two community colleges in Kenanga and Seroja were selected for the research study. The college in Kenanga was located in an urban setting and the college in Seroja in a rural setting. The two settings provided a contrast in demographics and socio-economic characteristics, which enabled me to gain a different perspective from adult learners through biographical interview.
Figure 3.1: Location of the towns in the map of Peninsular Malaysia

3.4.1 Kenanga City

Figure 3.2: Kenanga City

Kenanga City is located in the state of Selangor, which is 20 minutes’ drive from Kuala Lumpur, the capital of Malaysia. As of 2016, the state of Selangor has the largest population in the country at approximately 6.3 million (Department of
Statistics Malaysia, n.d.). In 2016, the state of Selangor also contributed the highest percentage of the country’s GDP at 22.7%. The state also has the lowest poverty rate and was categorised as fully urbanised by the Malaysian government in 2010 (Selangor Statement Government, n.d.). This data illustrates that the state of Selangor is an economic leader within the country of Malaysia. The specific city of Kenanga was chosen because it has a diverse range of jobs within multiple sectors. The majority of the population is employed in the service sector (business, education, and public administration) at 65%, while manufacturing employs 27% and other sectors 8%. In terms of educational facilities, the town has seven higher education institutions. Additionally, there are seventeen secondary schools and twenty primary schools in the town. Therefore, this variety of professional backgrounds and good educational opportunities led me to choose Kenanga City as one site for my study.

3.4.2 Urban Community College

![Community College at the urban setting](image)

**Figure 3.3: Community College at the urban setting**

The Urban Community College was established in March 2003 and was a result of initiatives brought about by policy, specifically the Eight Malaysia Plan. The premise of The Urban Community College is a converted shop lot located in the middle of the city, making it strategic and accessible to the public. Additionally, the location facilitates learner access to public facilities, for example, transport,
restaurants and supermarkets. It is important to highlight that the urban community college has demonstrated consistent performance in conducting short course programmes in the local community and was deemed by management as the ‘gold standard’ for the remaining community colleges in the whole of Malaysia (Hulu Langat Community College, 2017). For instance, The Urban Community College was ranked first and second at the national level for the number of enrolments in short course programmes in 2014 and 2015 respectively. Furthermore, the college has also established a one-stop information centre for the short course programme that enables the local community to drop by for advice and information on short course programmes.

3.4.3 Seroja Village

![Figure 3.4: Seroja village](image)

The village of Seroja is located in the state of Perak. In the north of the country, it takes five hours to drive from Kuala Lumpur to Seroja. Perak is the second largest state in Peninsular Malaysia and well-known for agricultural production. In 2017, the national statistics of states’ economic growth illustrated that Perak’s economic performance had increased by 1.3%; however, Selangor outnumbered Perak at 2.3%. In addition, in the same year, Perak’s poverty rate was at 0.7% compared to Selangor at 0.2% (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2017a). These data suggest a different socio-economic performance between the two states. The village Seroja was chosen because the setting is in sharp contrast to Kenanga city; Seroja is not as multi-ethnic as Kenanga, with 98% of the population being from a Malay ethnic background. The
main economic activity in the area is agriculture which includes palm oil, rubber, and fruit plantations. There are limited educational facilities with only seven schools: six primary schools and one secondary school. As for tertiary education, there are two vocational colleges: the community college and an agricultural college.

3.4.4 Rural Community College

![Community College at the rural setting](image)

**Figure 3.5: Community College at the rural setting**

The rural community college started to operate in April 2003 as part of the Eight Malaysia Plan and moved to its permanent location in September 2004 (Department of Community Colleges, 2015). The rural institution has an extensive land area and excellent learning facilities. However, the setting is quite deprived and not convenient to access using public transport. Nevertheless, the rural community college illustrated a high commitment to conducting short course programmes and was ranked first in 2014 and 2015 for a high number of enrolments on short course programmes among rural community colleges. Consequently, the establishment of the community colleges in the area has helped to contribute to the development of education and socio-economic activities for the local community. Based on the information about the settings presented, the next section discusses the data collection process.
3.5 Data collection process

I submitted an application to conduct the fieldwork in Malaysia to the Economic Planning Unit at the office of the Prime Minister Department. The application was approved in June 2016. After receiving the approval, I submitted a further application to the MOHE. There was a misunderstanding which meant that the Ministry returned my application to the Economic Planning Unit even though I had received approval from the respective unit. It took me quite some time to figure out the real problem, but I managed to receive an approval letter from the MOHE after two months and then made applications to the two community colleges selected for the study.

I prepared interview tools including an interview schedule, consent form and information sheet before starting the fieldwork (See Appendix B). I discussed the interview tools with my supervisors and had a mock interview to rehearse the questions. During this process, I learnt how to approach participants and how to introduce my study. I felt confident to start the interview having prepared some tools beforehand. The interview schedule helped me to give prompts and a flow to the questions as well as develop consistency in data gathering (Ritchie et al., 2014; Bauer and Gaskell, 2000). After the discussion, the interview schedule was refined, and additional probing questions were developed for the real fieldwork. Table 3-1 summarises the research process and timeline of the fieldwork.

Table 3-1: Stages in research process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Urban setting</th>
<th>Rural setting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Approval of fieldwork</td>
<td>Received approval to conduct fieldwork in Malaysia in June 2016 by Economic Planning Unit, Prime Minister Department of Malaysia. Approval from the Ministry of Higher Education in August 2016.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethical approval</td>
<td>July 2016</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting Department of Community College Education</td>
<td>Fourth week of August 2016</td>
<td>Second week of November 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting gate keepers and pilot study</td>
<td>First week of September 2016</td>
<td>Second week of September 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biographical interview with adult learners</td>
<td>Third and fourth week of September 2016</td>
<td>October 2016 and first week of November 2016</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Time Period</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Semi-structured interview with short course managers</td>
<td>First week of October 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-structured interview with policymaker</td>
<td>Fourth week of October 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transcribing</td>
<td>December 2016 to April 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member checking</td>
<td>April 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data analysis</td>
<td>January 2017 to June 2018</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### 3.5.1 Recruiting participants and developing sampling strategies

This study has three levels of participants, which correspond to the three levels of analysis: micro, meso and macro. The participants at the micro-levels are adult learners who are participating in short course programmes at community colleges. This level was the main focus of this study. Next, the meso-level participants are the staff of the community colleges who coordinate and implement short course programmes. Finally, the data for the macro-level includes official document in relation to the lifelong learning agenda in Malaysia and a policymaker who involve in the implementation of lifelong learning policy in Malaysia. Therefore, each level has a separate sampling classification based on the needs of the study.

##### 3.5.1.1 Micro-level

I recruited participants for the micro-level among adult learners based on the purposive sampling technique. Cohen, et al. (2011) asserts that purposive sampling includes selecting participants with certain qualities or experience that would be relevant to the study. This sampling technique enables a researcher to provide in-depth and rich information from the selected sample (Cresswell and Cresswell, 2017; Ritchie et al., 2014). Thus, I developed two sample criteria or qualities of adult learners that would answer the research questions. The first criterion of the adult learners was the age. Chao and Yap (2009) claims that it is more pragmatic to define adult learners based on age than on cognitive maturity. In the context of this study, the adult learner was selected on the basis of being aged 24 years and above. This age was chosen as they would possibly have completed school and tertiary education (if relevant) and have a hiatus in formal education of between three and eight years (based on the Malaysian education system). The second criterion was that they had
attended at least fifteen short course programmes at the community colleges in a year. One single short course took between six and twelve hours. Therefore, these adult learners had made an effort to participate in at least ninety hours of learning programmes in a year. The criteria were developed based on a study on ‘learning projects’ among adults by Allan Tough (1971). Tough (1971) defines a learning project as a period of time devoted to conducting the same activity. The duration of time may enable an individual to gain and retain clear kinds of knowledge or skills which further produce some changes in the person. Therefore, adult learners who regularly engage in short course programmes may provide sufficient information on their reason for participating in learning and further provide rich information on some significant changes resulting from engagement in learning activities.

During the fieldwork, I requested data regarding active participants from the Data and Record Manager for short course programmes at both institutions. The data showed that the majority of the active participants from the urban and the rural community colleges were women. After receiving the data, I selected participants that met the two sampling criteria (24 years and above and attended at least 15 short course programmes). There were two strategies for participants’ recruitment. The first was during the classroom observation. I introduced myself and my study to the class. I then cross-checked the participants that attended the course with the record of active participants that I had. After the session, I approached the potential participants if they were interested in getting involved in the study. Many participants were recruited through this strategy. Secondly, I sent a text message to several participants on the record of active participants. When they replied and agreed to participate, I called them to arrange an interview. I tried best to recruit participants from a diverse range of age to capture differences in their learning motivation as well as learning experiences. There were three male learners that met the criteria. I invited them to involve in the study. However, they declined the invitation to participate, stating that they have a very limited time after the short course programme because of other prior commitments.

My study consisted of 24 adult learners, 12 from each institution. During the data analysis process, the data saturation was achieved on the 16 participants, 8 participants from each community college. As suggested by scholars, the number of
sample is based on the exploration of data saturation (Ritchie et al., 2014; Baker and Edwards, 2012; Guest et al., 2006). The saturation point is ‘a point of diminishing return where increasing the sample size no longer contributes to new evidence’ (Ritchie et al., 2003: 83). This number was sufficient to allow me to conduct an in-depth exploration of the adult learners’ experiences. The number of participants for an in-depth study are less to do with the representation of sample and more to do with an ‘opportunity to learn’ from the participants (Stake, 1995: 6). In addition, the sample size was also appropriate to the nature of biographical study that required a detailed analysis rather than producing a large quantity of data. Therefore, the following discussion will concentrate on data from these 16 participants.

3.5.1.2 Meso-level

I interviewed twenty-eight staff at the urban and rural community colleges (15 from the urban and 13 from the rural). The staff were selected based on their job position in implementing the short course programme. The job positions involved included Director, Head of Department, Short Course Coordinator, Data and Record Manager, Financial Manager and educators for the short course programmes. In addition, I interviewed three officers from the Department of Community College Education (the departmental organization that governs community colleges). They were also officers from the Lifelong Learning Unit, selected based on their position. They were responsible for coordinating short course programmes at community colleges nationwide. These interviewees provided adequate data to explore the research question on implementation of lifelong learning policy at the community colleges level.

3.5.1.3 Macro-level

In the context of the macro-level, the main data were gathered from official government documents that discuss the national lifelong learning agenda. The documents include Malaysia’s Development Plans and the Educational Plans. The documents that were selected represent the lifelong learning policy in Malaysia. In addition, I interviewed a policymaker who is responsible for monitoring lifelong learning policy and practice in Malaysia. The purpose of the interview with the policymaker was to get a general idea of the purpose and the intention of the national
lifelong learning agenda. The data collected from the policymaker helped to complement the data from documents.

3.5.2 Biographical Interview

The use of biographical interview helped in gleaning significant factors that influence adult participation in learning as the method of the interview emphasis on giving control to the participants to narrate their own stories (Merrill, 2004; Goodley, 2004). The emphasis on giving control to the individuals is a distinct factor of the biographical interview as opposed to other interview types (Roberts, 2002; Wengraf, 2001). Within the context of this study, biographical interviews were conducted with sixteen adult learners who were actively participating in short course programmes organised by the community colleges. This method enabled the adult learners to reflect on their present situation based on their previous experiences and envisage their future. The scope of the interview included their decision to participate in learning, learning experiences on the short course programme and their plan for the future.

3.5.2.1 Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted to ascertain any ambiguities about or difficulties with tools, setting and explaining my research (Bryman, 2008; van Teijlingen and Hundley, 1998). The pilot study was undertaken at the urban and rural community colleges with one adult learner at each institution. The adult learners that were selected had similar characteristics to the potential participants for the study (Stevens et al., 2016). The learners were recruited with help from the gatekeeper at each institution. Since the learners were familiar with the gatekeeper, they were willing to be involved in the pilot study. The pilot study helped me as a new researcher to gain exposure to conducting interviews. I learnt how to explain my study in a simple way. At the beginning, I found myself anxious to ensure that I followed the interview schedule strictly, but after the interview went on, I found that I could use probing questions when a key word was mentioned by the learners. The pilot interview taught me to ask the learners more specific questions regarding their stories. For instance, when I said, ‘Tell me about yourself.’ The learner asked me ‘About what?’ I then realised that I needed to ask more specific questions and give them some
direction. The participants’ responses from the pilot interview helped me to reflect on how I constructed the interview questions to yield information to answer the research question (Rubin and Rubin, 2012). Consequently, the following interviews were conducted more efficiently.

3.5.2.2 Interviewing Adult Learners

Scholars suggest one of the main aspects of the interview process that encourages interviewees to share their life stories is to establish a good rapport (Ritchie et al., 2014; Rubin and Rubin, 2012; Merrill and West, 2009). A good rapport enhances the willingness for participants to share their life experiences. I practised two strategies to develop a good rapport with the adult learners. Firstly, I observed as many short course programmes as I could so that the learners were familiar with my presence; indirectly, I established a relationship with the learners. There were times when some participants assumed that I was an assistant teacher for the short course programmes. However, it was quite hard to use this strategy at the rural institution, since the short course programmes were limited on weekend and I had limited time for the fieldwork. Secondly, I yielded as much information as I could from the gatekeepers (short course managers) about the active participants. Therefore, I had some idea about the participants’ stories as well as their particular interests.

Before each interview, I introduced myself and the study and provided the participants with an information sheet. After they understood their involvement in the study, I asked their permission to record the interview and requested them to sign an informed consent form. I assured the participants that the information would be kept confidential and that I would use pseudonyms for the analysis. After completing the procedures, I asked for contextual information about the participants’ background in an informal way (Ritchie et al., 2014). Through this process, I could anticipate how to plan further questions with the participant. I prepared an interview guide based on subtopics so that the interview would be flexible and follow the learners’ interests. Accordingly, I asked probing questions at the right moments. There were three subtopics: their learning trajectories and decision to engage in learning, learning experiences on the short course programmes and future plans following participation in the learning. Thus, the interviews did not strictly adhere to
the interview guide; instead, they were conducted in an informal way so that the learners could freely share their life stories.

Many of the interviews were conducted in the native language, Bahasa Melayu, at both settings and only one interview was in the English language. The interviews took place at several different locations including community colleges, restaurants, participants’ houses and participants’ workplaces. At the urban community college, many interviews were conducted at the institution, while, at the rural institution, many interviews took place at the participants’ houses. At the end of each interview, I presented the participants with a souvenir (keychain) and chocolate from England as a token of appreciation for their willingness to be involved in my study. Table 3-2 and 3-3 below outlines the demographic characteristics of the adult learners in the study.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Number of Children</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Educational Background</th>
<th>Work-related Status</th>
<th>No. of short courses completed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Zetty</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Malay</td>
<td>Certificate in Mechanical Design</td>
<td>Clerk in Palace of Justice</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Hanny</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Malay</td>
<td>Lower Certificate of Education (SRP)</td>
<td>Retiree</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Fatima</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Malay</td>
<td>Diploma in Information Technology</td>
<td>Housewife (Resigned from a school teacher)</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Eva</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>Certificate in Accounting and Computer</td>
<td>Retiree</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Malay</td>
<td>Malaysian Certificate of Education</td>
<td>Retiree</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Maya</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Malay</td>
<td>Master in Linguistic</td>
<td>University Tutor</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Ruby</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Malay</td>
<td>Master’s in business administration</td>
<td>Housewife (Resigned from a university lecturer)</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Sree</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>Malaysian Certificate of Education (Secondary school)</td>
<td>Housewife (Resigned due to redundancy)</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3-3: Demographic of the Participants from Rural Community College

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>No. of Children</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Educational Background</th>
<th>Work-related Status</th>
<th>No. of short courses completed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Yati</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Malay</td>
<td>Bachelor of Education (Home Science)</td>
<td>Secondary School Teacher</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Ira</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Malay</td>
<td>Malaysian Certificate of Education (Secondary school)</td>
<td>Housewife/Tailor</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Lina</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Malay</td>
<td>Malaysian Certificate of Education (Secondary school)</td>
<td>Entrepreneur</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Rose</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Malay</td>
<td>Master’s in education</td>
<td>Special Education Teacher</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Dayang</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Malay</td>
<td>Malaysian Certificate of Education (Secondary school)</td>
<td>Entrepreneur</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Farah</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Malay</td>
<td>Primary School</td>
<td>Housewife</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Ayesha</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Malay</td>
<td>Master’s in educational technology (part time)</td>
<td>Retired Secondary School Teacher</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Shalia</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Malay</td>
<td>Malaysian Certificate of Education (Secondary school)</td>
<td>Baking Shop Owner</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.5.3 Classroom Observation

The observation technique helped me to examine the adult learners’ behaviour in the classroom setting. It was chosen as it reveals how individual links to its natural setting to construct understanding of the environment (Lofland et al., 2006). I did observations for as many short course programmes as I could at both institutions since through the observation process, I built a rapport with the potential participants to be interviewed.

Before the fieldwork started, I enrolled in two short course programmes as a covert participant or non-participant observation. The purpose was to have the experience of being a part of the adult learners at the institution. This method enabled me to understand the meaning of participants’ responses or behaviour in the particular context. I found it was an interesting experience. For example, during the course we were divided into four groups; I found that many participants preferred to be in the group with others with whom they were familiar. In my case, all the members of my groups were first-time participants on the short course programme.

During the fieldwork, I conducted an overt or non-participant observation. The non-participant method involved the obvious presence of the researcher in the classroom (Ritchie et al., 2014). I was aware there were some issues with non-participant observation in the truthfulness of the people being observed as there is a high risk of encountering the ‘Hawthorne Effect’. The ‘Hawthorne effect’ is an assumption that people may behave differently when they know that they are being observed (Paradis and Sutkin, 2017; Workman, 2007). Based on reviewed literature, the ‘Hawthorne effect’ could be reduced through long-term research or having a control group (Paradis and Sutkin, 2017; Oswald et al., 2014). However, since I had limited time for data collection, I applied a suggestion by Oswald, et al. (2014) for the researcher to successfully immerse themselves in the social setting to enable participants to feel relaxed. Furthermore, I tried to reduce the ‘Hawthorne effect’ by walking around the classroom rather than standing in one particular area. Since the nature of the course was practical, most of the time the participants did not notice my presence as everyone was busy practising the skills and moving around the classroom to use the equipment.
The schedules of classroom observation were carried out based on the short course programmes organised by the community colleges. I focused on two types of programme, sewing and catering, since the active participants were mainly engaged in those courses. Before the course started, I collected the course handout and participant information from the short course managers in order to keep up with the learning process and classroom activities. During the observation, I focused on evaluating four important settings: the physical setting (the space or environment), the human setting (the way people organised and how they changed over time), the interactional setting (the form of interaction), and the programme setting (the resources provided and the teaching approach) (Patton, 1990). During this process, descriptive field notes were taken.

This observation process helped me to examine differences in the adult learners’ behaviour and interaction in learning, particularly between the new learners and the regular learners. This includes their interaction with the educator and other learners in order to acquire the knowledge and skills. In addition, since the observation took place at two community colleges, I was able to see how the classroom environments impacted the participants’ learning. For instance, on the sewing course, there was more cooperation between the learners at the rural institution due to limited space; they needed to take turns using the same space. On the other hand, the learners at the urban institution were competitive; everyone wanted to complete the task as soon as they could. Overall, findings from the observation helped me to gain an understanding of learners’ social interactions to acquire the skills.

3.5.4 Semi-structured interviews with Community College staff

I chose semi-structured interviews to explore the social and organisational context of the implementation of short courses programmes. This interview type is used to create a space in which the researcher and participants construct the knowledge together (Birks and Mills, 2011; Hand, 2003). An interview is therefore an interaction between researcher and interviewee to construct knowledge on a phenomenon (Mills et al., 2006). I preferred the semi-structured interview because it enabled me to have some flexibility during the interview process, even though I had the same set of questions. The flexibility enabled me to ask follow-up questions based on the responses from the interviewees and, at the same time, the interviewees
did not feel constrained in answering several lists of questions. Indirectly, the approach allowed interviewees to influence the direction of the interview which helped to uncover rich information and significant issues (Cresswell and Poth, 2017; Bryman, 2016; Rubin and Rubin, 2012). I prepared interview tools for the interview session as enclosed in Appendix C.

This method helped me to glean an understanding of lifelong learning policy implementation and interpretation at the Department of Community College Education (organisation that governed community colleges) and community colleges levels. The Department of Community College Education role as a middle person between the Ministry and the educational institution provided a big picture of the implementation of short course programmes. At the community colleges, I interviewed staff in different roles to collect data from multiple perspectives. The gatekeepers at both institutions, the short course managers, helped to arrange some of the interviews.

To illustrate the interview session, many of the interviews took place in a meeting room at the Department of Lifelong Learning and some at the interviewees’ office. The interviewees were cooperative and showed willingness to engage with my study. To put the participants at ease during the session, I started the interview session with a general question about the institution. Then, I began with a planned question, allowing flexibility in the way it was answered. Since the focus of the questions was on their responsibilities and the interview took place at their workplace, the interviewees could not only explain the information needed, but also provide further information or additional documents. Throughout, the interview process adhered to ethical standards, especially in terms of the consent and confidentiality of the participants.

Despite the advantages, there are some disadvantages of the semi-structured interview approach. It can produce a voluminous amount of data that can be challenging to analyse (Patton, 1990). Also, some scholars critique the notion of informants’ trustworthiness, as there may be differences between people’s words and actions (Deutscher, 1973; Atkinson et al., 2003). To mitigate the issue of trustworthiness, I compared the consistency of the information between different staff members. Table 3-4 to 3-6 list the interviewees from the community colleges.
**Table 3-4: List of Interviewees from the Department of Community College Education**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Years in the position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>HQ01</td>
<td>Director of Section of Academic Development</td>
<td>5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>HQ02</td>
<td>Deputy Director of Lifelong Learning Unit</td>
<td>2 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>HQ03</td>
<td>Former Deputy Director of Lifelong Learning Unit</td>
<td>10 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3-5: List of Interviewees from the Urban Community College**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Years in the position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>IHL_01</td>
<td>Head of Department of Lifelong Learning Unit</td>
<td>9 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>IHL_02</td>
<td>Short Course Manager</td>
<td>1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>IHL_03</td>
<td>Data and Record Manager</td>
<td>8 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>IHL_04</td>
<td>Promotional Manager</td>
<td>4 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>IHL_05</td>
<td>Tailoring Unit Leader</td>
<td>2 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>IHL_06</td>
<td>Staff / Educator</td>
<td>8 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>IHL_07</td>
<td>Technical Unit Leader</td>
<td>9 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>IHL_08</td>
<td>Financial manager</td>
<td>6 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>IHL_09</td>
<td>Technical Unit Leader</td>
<td>8 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>IHL_10</td>
<td>Staff / Educator</td>
<td>4 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>IHL_11</td>
<td>Cooking Unit Leader</td>
<td>2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>IHL_12</td>
<td>Generic Skills Unit Leader</td>
<td>2 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3-6: List of Interviewees from the Rural Community College

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Years in the position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>IPS01</td>
<td>Head of Department of Lifelong Learning Unit</td>
<td>2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>IPS02</td>
<td>Promotional Manager</td>
<td>4 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>IPS03</td>
<td>Short Course Manager</td>
<td>8 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>IPS04</td>
<td>Data and Record Manager</td>
<td>8 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>IPS05</td>
<td>Technical Unit Leader</td>
<td>7 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>IPS06</td>
<td>Technical Unit Leader</td>
<td>3 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>IPS07</td>
<td>Technical Unit Leader</td>
<td>4 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>IPS08</td>
<td>Staff / Educator</td>
<td>6 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>IPS09</td>
<td>Generic Skills Unit Leader</td>
<td>2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>IPS10</td>
<td>Staff / Educator</td>
<td>3 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>IPS11</td>
<td>Financial manager</td>
<td>7 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>IPS12</td>
<td>Tailoring Unit Leader</td>
<td>8 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>IPS13</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>2 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.5.5 Selecting appropriate documents for analysis

O’Leary describes document analysis as ‘collection, review, interrogation, and analysis of various forms of text as a primary source of research data’ (2014: 177) where document refers to the written materials that are collected from the fieldwork and not those generated by the researcher (O’Leary, 2014; Patton, 1990). Documentary sources were important data to represent the national lifelong learning policy in Malaysia. The use of the term ‘lifelong learning’ in Malaysia was first officially documented in the Eighth Malaysia Development Plan (2001-2005). Since then, the term has been continuously highlighted in the subsequent Malaysia
Development Plans. These Development Plans revealed the aim of the introduction of lifelong learning in Malaysia, which reflects my first research question.

In addition, the study includes the National Education Plan from 2007 until the most recent, the Malaysia Education Blueprint for Higher Education (2015-2025). The departments and agencies responsible for higher education were under the Ministry of Education until the MOHE was established separately in 2004 to give more attention to tertiary education. The role of lifelong learning was more prevalent under the MOHE. In 2007, the MOHE launched the National Higher Education Strategic Plan which advocated one single chapter on lifelong learning. Later education plans retained this legacy to have a single chapter dedicated to the lifelong learning agenda in the national education system. The pinnacle was the launch of the Blueprint on Enculturation of Lifelong Learning for Malaysia (2011-2020). In addition to the policy documents on lifelong learning, a policymaker who involved in developing lifelong learning strategies in the country was interviewed. The policymaker is from the Division of Research Planning and Policy Coordination, Ministry of Higher Education, Malaysia. Table 3-7 lists the documents.

**Table 3-7: A list of the National Development Plans and the Education Plans since the term ‘lifelong learning’ was first used.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Year of implementation</th>
<th>Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Third Outline Perspective Plan (OPP3)</td>
<td>2001-2010</td>
<td>Malaysia Development Plans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Eighth Malaysia Plan</td>
<td>2001-2005</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Ninth Malaysia Plan</td>
<td>2006-2010</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Tenth Malaysia Plan</td>
<td>2011-2015</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Eleventh Malaysia Plan</td>
<td>2016-2020</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.5.6 Summary of data collection

This section has discussed the data collection process for the study in two different settings: urban and rural. Furthermore, the study involved three layers of stakeholders: micro (the adult learners), meso (the educational institution) and macro (the government). Firstly, sixteen adult learners voluntarily participated in this study and they were given significant attention in order to yield a micro-sociological perspective that offers insight into their participation in learning activities. Two methods were applied: biographical interview and classroom observation. Secondly, investigation at the meso-level was conducted by using a semi-structured interview with twenty-eight staff at both community colleges and three interviewees from the Department of Community College Education. Lastly, at the macro-level, the study focused on examining the official government documents that presented the lifelong learning policy in Malaysia. A policymaker from MOHE was also interviewed to enrich the data. Figure 3.6 illustrates a summary of the data collection techniques and participants involved in the study. The next section explains data organisation and data analysis.
3.6 Organising the data: Transcription and translation

After I completed each interview, I transferred the audio file to the computer and labelled the file using a code. The computer was password protected. Then, I uploaded the audio file to the University’s OneDrive storage as a backup. OneDrive has security protection linked to my email account. At the same time, I updated the information about the interviews that were conducted, for instance, date, place and time of each interview, on one record. I followed the University of Warwick guidance on data security.

The audio files were transcribed into verbatim transcripts using the original language. This included pauses, laughter and other remarks. I developed a guideline for transcription to produce consistent transcripts (see Appendix D). The transcripts were cross-checked with the fieldwork notes and I added some additional notes on distinctive issues or unique participant reactions (where relevant). After that, I removed all identifiers from the file to ensure anonymity of the participants.

Figure 3.6: An illustration of data collection process
translated two anonymised transcripts into English. At first, I did a word-for-word translation, but the final text did not make any sense. For this reason, I decided instead to produce a meaning-based translation. For accuracy of meaning-based translation, I listened back to the audio to take into account the participant’s tone, context, and environment when the interview took place. I reflected upon my understanding of the meaning of the narratives. Later, I could translate it into a text that made grammatical sense. This process helped me to understand the context in which the narrative took place. As claimed by Esposito, ‘the translator’s goal is to develop transcripts that are accurate, clear, sound and as natural as possible’ (2001: 571). Later, I sent both the Malay and English versions to an English educator at the community college to ensure the accuracy of the translation.

During the process of translation, I realised that there is a cultural issue in terms of language. For example, I found a problem in distinguishing the meaning of ‘I’ and ‘we’ used by the participants. It is common for Malaysian to use ‘we’ as the first-person plural pronoun, instead of ‘I’ when referring to themselves. The term is contextual which means in some cases, the use of ‘we’ does refer to the plural pronoun. This situation could be attributed to a strong collective culture among Malaysians that establishes their identity based on the group to which they belong (Abdullah, 1996). Thus, I needed to pay extra attention when translating the pronoun ‘we’ in the transcripts.

3.6.1 Thematic Data Analysis

After transcription, I started to analyse the data by developing codes. Coding is a crucial step in developing a thematic analysis (Saldana, 2016; Rubin and Rubin, 2012). Saldana describes the purpose of code as being to ‘represent and capture a datum’s primary content and essence’ (2009:4). During this process, I regularly referred to the research questions and interview schedule. Scholars suggest several techniques on which to base coding development: research questions, published literature, repetitive words or responses raised by interviewees (Rubin and Rubin, 2012; Ryan and Bernard, 2003; Patton, 1990). I used a manual method to analyse the data and Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis (hereafter CAQDAS) to organise the data. The CAQDAS software that was used in this study is NVivo which is recommended for use by the University of Warwick.
There were seven steps in the analysis process for the study that I adapted from Ritchie et al. (2003). It is important to highlight that even though the steps outlined seem like a linear process, the real process went back and forth. First, I familiarised myself with the data by reading and re-reading the transcripts several times. This process helped me to get insight into the pattern of responses from the participants. The second step was to develop codes. I made a note of general ideas in the index of the transcript (see Appendix E). The more I engaged with the data, the better I was able to decide on important and unimportant data in relation to the study (Merrill and West, 2009). In addition, I employed ‘descriptive coding’ and ‘In Vivo coding’ techniques (Saldana, 2009). ‘Descriptive coding’ refers to a general topic that related to the data, while ‘In Vivo coding’ is literal coding which uses the terms used by the participants (Saldana, 2009). The ‘In Vivo coding’ is relevant to the current study on biographical method as it helps me to honour the participant’s voice.

In the third step, I rechecked the coding that was developed to ensure consistency. For this reason, I had a list of characteristics for each code (see Appendix F). The list helped me to be more certain and consistent in developing the codes. The fourth step was to divide the codes that were developed into categories. Saldana describes this process of categorisation of the codes as ‘from the full set of codes, which is then reorganised into a selected list of categories, and then condensed further into the study’s central themes or concepts’ (2009: 218). This categorisation process was examined several times to avoid repetition as well as to refine the themes for the study (Rubin and Rubin, 2012; Braun and Clarke, 2006; Bowen, 2005). In determining a theme, Braun and Clarke suggest that ‘a theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set’ (2006: 82).

After completing the manual coding process, the fifth step was to transfer the categories to CAQDAS to organise the data. I coded the participants’ quotes into the categories that were developed. Then, the sixth step was to analyse the categories by comparing the categories with participants’ demographic information (see Appendix H). There were two approaches applied to analyse the categories: case analysis and cross-case analysis. Patton explains that ‘case analysis refers to analyse case study for each person interviewed while cross-case analysis means analysing different
Otherwise known as a ‘perspective on central issues’ (1990: 376). Lastly, I developed stories based on the interrelated categories and interpreted the findings (Riessman, 2008; Corbin and Strauss, 2008). Figure 3.7 below summarises the data analysis process.

![Data Analysis Process Diagram]

**Figure 3.7: Steps for data analysis**

### 3.6.2 Document Analysis

As discussed earlier in section 3.5.5, eight Malaysian official government documents were used in this study. The aim of analysing these documents was to explore the major aims in lifelong learning policy in Malaysia. Document analysis is a form of qualitative research in which documents are interpreted by the researcher to give voice and meaning to an assessment topic (Bowen, 2009). It is important to highlight that I employed CAQDAS to facilitate the data analysis process of the documents.
As suggested by Ritchie and colleagues CAQDAS helped the ‘organisation, search and display of data in a more systematic and accessible way’ (2014: 289). Thus, CAQDAS helps the researcher to handle a large amount of data and to focus on interpreting its meaning (Ritchie et al., 2014; Seale, 2010).

Firstly, I imported all the Development Plans and Education Plans to CAQDAS. Then, I used a query text search using the term ‘lifelong learning’. I used a ‘broad context’ option so I would have a full paragraph of quotes that mentioned the term. I got 166 quotes and named the nodes as ‘lifelong learning’. After that, I read through the quotes in the ‘lifelong learning’ nodes and found that there was a consistency in the theme of ‘development’. Then, I ran a query text using a term ‘develop’ with stemmed words (which means the query will include related words, e.g. ‘development’) in the lifelong learning nodes and found 103 related quotes (See Appendix G). I saved the query result as a node and named it ‘Development’. I then read through the quotes in the ‘Development’ nodes and found three major development categories: economic, human capital and human. Subsequently, I interpreted the data that were categorised and developed the narratives of these themes (Bowen, 2009). Based on the aforementioned process, the CAQDAS helped me to sort and sift through the data and there was a clear role of the researcher in determining terms and categories that were developed. It is important to highlight that the document analysis process is not linear.

However, I was aware of some scholars’ critique of the use of CAQDAS. For instance, the researcher may interpret data out of the context of the original narratives (Weitzman, 2000; Rodik and Primorac, 2015). This issue was mitigated by using a broader context function and hyperlinks to the main documents which enabled me to always refer to and read the whole paragraph from the original documents (Rodik and Primorac, 2015; Ritchie et al., 2014). Nevertheless, scholars have agreed that the CAQDAS should not remove the significant role of the researcher in the data analysis process (Ritchie et al., 2014; Flick, 2009; Atkinson et al., 2003). For instance, Coffey and Atkinson assert ‘None of the computer programs will perform automatic data analysis. They all depend on researchers defining for themselves what analytic issues are to be explored, what ideas are important and
what modes of representation are most appropriate’ (1996: 187). Figure 3.8 below summaries the document analysis process.

Figure 3.8: Steps for document analysis

It was anticipated that findings from the data analysis would reveal the interaction between the three levels: micro, meso and macro. The whole data collection and data analysis followed the ethical procedure strictly to ensure participants’ rights and privacy were well protected.

3.7 Ethical considerations

The ethical issues were taken into consideration before the fieldwork started. As a researcher based at a British university, I had to follow a different procedure to a local researcher when conducting fieldwork in Malaysia. I had to apply for approval to undertake a study in Malaysia from a government body, the Economic Planning Unit under the Prime Minister Department. The organisation had outlined several rules and regulations to be followed by the international researcher. For instance, the study must not involve any sensitive issues that can cause prejudice, hatred, enmity or contempt in the national context. In addition, there is a document on the code of conduct which includes a prohibition on making press statements or discussing national policy matters with the media. After the approval was granted, another application was made to the MOHE. The approval documents are attached to this thesis (see Appendix I). Then, the next stage was to gain permission from the community colleges for the fieldwork. Furthermore, I had obtained approval for ethical consideration from the department, Centre of Lifelong Learning, during the upgrade process. The study does not have to be referred to the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) at the University of Warwick since it does not involve the participation of vulnerable categories of people.
Throughout the research process, the study strictly adhered to British Educational Research Association ethical guidelines (British Educational Research Association, 2011). Two essential procedures were followed: voluntary informed consent and privacy and confidentiality. Firstly, participants were provided with an information sheet and consent form before taking part in the study. The participants were informed about the potential ethical issues of the research and that they could withdraw from the study at any time. This step was taken to ensure that the participants were fully informed of the nature of the research that they engaged with (Rubin and Rubin, 2012). All participants provided me with a written approval of consent form. Secondly, the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants were maintained (Cresswell and Poth, 2017). All identifiers of the participants in the transcripts were removed to ensure anonymity. A pseudonym was used for the analysis and findings of the study. Furthermore, the normal courtesies were adhered to in conducting the interview session, for instance, keeping a promise, respecting the participant’s privacy, and being straightforward with the participant (Bryman, 2016; Rubin and Rubin, 2012; Patton, 1990).

I considered the power relation between myself as a researcher and the interviewees among senior officers and adult learners (Hennink et al., 2011). Throughout the interview process, both parties bring their own personal values and identities to the research process, for instance, literacy, masculinity and status. For this reason, I ensured that I respected the local cultural values by seeking guidance from the gatekeeper on appropriate dress and personal appearance to different individuals. My appearance, gender and attitude could have had profound influence on the information that the participants were willing to share. In the same way, Braun and Clarke (2013) have emphasised that there is a power relationship between interviewer and participant, especially when interviewing people with high social status. For example, there is a possibility that the interviewees will dominate the interview session (Rowlands et al., 2015). As a female student facing professional officers, I acknowledged the power differential in the process of interviewing participants among senior officers. In contrast, during interviews the adult learners I focus on the learner’s life stories which suggest that they have the authority on the issue discussed, therefore, there is less issue of the power imbalance during the data collection.
In addition, I was also aware that my positionality influenced the way research was conducted. For this reason, I tried to reduce its impact by reflecting upon my role throughout the research process.

3.8 Positionality and Reflexivity

Reflexivity is a continuous process of critical assessment by the researcher of their social background, knowledge, experiences and beliefs throughout the research process (Hennink et al., 2011). Birks and Mills define reflexivity as ‘an active process of systematically developing insight as a researcher to guide future action’ (2015: 52). Reflexivity suggests that there are implications of personal position, values, biases and decisions in constructing knowledge of the social world (Bryman, 2016; Koch and Harrington, 1998). Being a qualitative researcher, I am aware that my background, values, beliefs, and experiences could influence the research process (Floyd and Arthur, 2012). I am in both positions of insider and outsider in this study.

The research was conducted in Malaysia. I was an insider because I am Malaysian. Therefore, I am familiar with the socio-cultural context of the research setting, especially at the urban community college located at the state where I grew up, Seroja. In Seroja, I was able to speak the local language fluently, which help me to understand the participants’ perspective. However, I was an outsider at the urban community college where the study was conducted since I never worked at the institution. I was not familiar with the staff, setting and organisational culture.

In the rural community college, I was more of an insider. I worked at the rural community college for seven years before pursuing doctoral study. I was an organiser and also an educator for the short course programmes. I knew the power structure, the business process of the college and the staff who participated in the data collection process were my colleagues. Many scholars have indicated the advantages of being an insider researcher (Saidin and Yaacob, 2016; Floyd and Arthur, 2012; Mills et al., 2006). For instance, the insider researcher benefits from having a better understanding of the context being studied in term of the hierarchy of social interaction in the organisation (Mills et al., 2006; Floyd and Arthur, 2012). Hence, being an insider, I had the advantage of easily being accepted by the staff and participants in the study. I did not encounter challenges that an outsider or a non-
Malaysian researcher might experience in understanding the organisation structure and the business process of the institution. Also, I never had an administration position at the community college, so, I did not have power over the staff which possibly can negatively affect the data collection.

Nevertheless, I was aware of the drawbacks of being an insider researcher. For example, a risk to make a bias judgement on the phenomena, overlooked some routine activities and losing objectivity on the subject of study (Saidin and Yaacob, 2016; Unluer, 2012). Besides, some staff assumed that I knew what they know and that I knew their views and issues (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009; Hellawell, 2006). On encountering this situation, I asked further questions that required the participants to provide a detailed answer. Also, I am now a research student and not a staff, I needed to make a formal application to gain access to the institution. As a research student, I have a limited time for data collection as compared to a staff member and a researcher at the same time.

In relation to personal background, there was a generation gap on age with the older and younger participants. I did not have any issue with the older participants. This is due to Malaysian cultural values where there is a strong hierarchy of power; elders are respected (Abdullah, 1996). For this reason, older participants treated me as a young individual that wanted to learn from them. They were happy to share their life stories and disclose their learning experiences so that I could learn from them. I was also given life advice throughout the interview. However, when interviewing younger participants, initially, I felt that they were reluctant and ashamed to talk about their learning trajectory and learning experiences. Accordingly, I posited myself as an older person that could advise them. They then started to disclose their stories. I did not provide any advice for them; instead, I praised their efforts to engage with the lifelong learning activity. I found that this was helpful to put them at ease and build a better rapport. I took into consideration the process of reflection during the fieldwork to ensure the quality of the study was established.

3.9 Quality and integrity of research

I maintained the quality of research by using member checking, triangulation of methods and a research diary throughout the research process. The member-checking
approach was conducted by presenting some of the interview transcripts to the participants (Rolfe, 2006; Tobin and Begley, 2004). The participants were requested to check the transcript and confirm that the content represented what they really said. After receiving confirmation from the participants, I started to analyse the data. The participant validation helped to increase the accuracy of the information and establish credibility of the study (Rolfe, 2006). In addition, I preserved academic rigour by having my work peer reviewed by my supervisors. They reviewed the emerging themes by reading through some of the anonymised quotes and the interview questions.

The triangulation of methods is the use of multiple methods to study some aspects of human behaviour (Cohen et al., 2011; Crishna, 2006; Golafshani, 2003). In this study, I employed multiple methods, including observation and interviewing, which could lead to more valid and reliable data. After the short course observation, I followed up with an individual biographical method interview to get further explanation of the participants’ behaviour in their own words. This approach is the most important technique needed to establish credibility in research (Rolfe, 2006). I interviewed the participants twice, after the course observation and in a follow up session. During the follow up session I had a chance to review every single question in the interview. Therefore, I could explicitly ask them to recall and explain further if necessary, by referring to the full interview transcript together.

Furthermore, I used a research diary to reduce bias and maintain consistency of the study. Clarke (2009) suggests that a research diary provides transparency and clarifies thoughts and feelings which acknowledge factors that may influence the process of data collection and analysis of the study. The research diary was a space for me to note and reflect on a daily research process, which helped me to gain insight into my research experience (McCormack, 2014). I referred to suggestions by Burgess (1981) for the content of the research diary. Burgess (1981) proposes three main concerns to be documented in a research diary: substantive account refers to the events or activities by participants during the fieldwork; methodological account describes the role and involvement of a researcher; and analytic account includes insight and inquiries that developed over time within the research process. I used information in the research diary and
compared it to the data collected from participants (Burgess, 1981). By doing so, I gained further insight into the context of the data. The research diary also disclosed factors that I had taken into consideration when making decisions during the research process. This systematic method is consistent with the research paradigm of this study which emphasises the engagement of the researcher throughout the research process.

3.10 Conclusion

To conclude, this chapter has discussed the paradigm that underpins the research: interpretivism. Within this paradigm, the researcher played the important role of obtaining information from adult learners and interviewees from the community colleges through qualitative research. Utilising the biographical method, the study brought together the voices of sixteen adult learners from two different settings on factors that influence their participation in learning programmes. In addition, the research also gained the perspectives of the staff at the community colleges who are involved in organising short course programmes for adult learners. Accordingly, the discourse around lifelong learning policy in Malaysia was investigated through document analysis and supported by a semi-structured interview with a policymaker. This chapter has also explained how the data collection process was conducted in Malaysia while considering ethical issues. Furthermore, it has discussed how the data was organised and analysed. Throughout the research process, many strategies were adopted to ensure the consistency, rigour and quality of the study. Thus, the discussion in this chapter forms the basis of the findings presented in the next four chapters of the thesis.
Chapter 4: Malaysia’s Lifelong Learning Policy Landscape

4.1 Introduction

The focus of this chapter is introducing the macro-level on a wider governance discourse of lifelong learning in Malaysia. The purpose is to highlight to the reader the aims of lifelong learning and its prevalence in policy documentation in the country. The data for this chapter is drawn from government strategy documents such as the National Development Plans, Education Plans, and includes an interview with a policymaker. Specifically, there are six Development Plans that information are drawn from: The Third Outline Perspective Plan (2001-2010), the New Economic Model (2011-2020), the Eighth Malaysia Plan (2001-2005), the Ninth Malaysia Plan (2006-2010), the Tenth Malaysia Plan (2011-2015), and the Eleventh Malaysia Plan (2016-2020). Furthermore, The Educational Plan consists of three documents: The National Higher Education Strategic Plan: beyond 2020 (2007-2020), the Blueprint on Enculturation of Lifelong Learning for Malaysia (2011-2020), and the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015-2025 (Higher Education). The documents have been analysed using the document analysis method. In addition to this, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a policymaker from the Ministry of Higher Education to support the findings from the documents.

The chapter is organised into two main sections. The first section introduces lifelong learning in Malaysia. The second section provides a brief explanation of Malaysia’s Development Plans and further discusses the landscape of Malaysia’s lifelong learning policy. Data analysis identified, four major themes.

These themes can be delineated as lifelong learning for:

- the country’s economic development, particularly the transition from an industrial-based to knowledge-based economy.
- human capital development.
- enabling self-development.
- developing a learning culture in Malaysian society.
4.2 The beginnings: Introducing lifelong learning in Malaysia

In Malaysia, the term lifelong learning was first introduced in the Eighth Malaysia Plan (2001-2005) (Bax and Hassan, 2003). This was following a Malaysian Government official’s participation at the Education for All Forum which saw the creation of the Dakar Framework. The Dakar Framework outlines a shared commitment by countries to provide learning opportunities for every citizen (UNESCO, 2000). The adoption and subsequent usage of the term lifelong learning in national policy documents is a significant milestone for education development in Malaysia. Since then, the lifelong learning term has been continuously mentioned in the Development Plans and the Educational Plans.

4.3 The drive for economic growth: Malaysia’s Development Plans to achieve Vision 2020

As a country Malaysia has grand ambitions of being a developed country by the year 2020. Malaysia aims to achieve this through detailed development plans. The development plan is a framework that encompasses many aspects particularly in relation to economic and social progress at the regional and national level of a country. The economic development plan is defined by Tadaro and Smith as ‘a deliberate governmental attempt to co-ordinate economic decision making over the long run and to influence, direct and, in some cases, even control the level and growth of nation’s principle economic variables (income, consumption, employment, investment etc.) in order to achieve a pre-determined set of development objectives’ (2009: 532). In making sure that Malaysia will continue its growth, meet its development objectives and stay relevant in the global economy, the Malaysian government utilise three levels of national strategic development plans: long-term plan, mid-term plan, and short-term plan1.

Firstly, the long-term plan is produced every ten-years, and is known as the Outline Perspective Plan (OPP). This plan sets the overarching objectives for the country’s long-term Development Plan and it started in 1971. Secondly, the mid-term plan is a five-year plan, and is the main document for the government’s development programmes. The First Five-year Malaysia Plan was established in 1966, following

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1 This study doesn’t include the short-term plan as the outcomes of these are more transient.
the formation of Malaysia (which included the recognition of Sabah and Sarawak as states in 1963). This document includes guidance on funding allocation for the public sector and an outline of the role of the private sector in supporting the development of the country. All the national Development Plans were initiated by the Economic Planning Unit, which was established in 1961 by the Prime Minister’s Department. To the present day and for the foreseeable future, it remains the responsibility of the Economic Planning Unit to formulate, implement, evaluate and revise the country’s Development Plans. For instance, in the opening speech for the Eleventh Plan (2016-2020), the Prime Minister highlights:

The Eleventh Malaysia Plan is coordinated by the Economic Planning Unit, or EPU. For your information, this unit was established in 1961 and its main function is to prepare national development plans (The Government of Malaysia, 2015: 4).

As an organisation, the fundamental objective of the Economic Planning Unit is to spearhead the Malaysian economy in achieving Vision 2020. Vision 2020 has been outlined and nationally recognised by the government as a plan for achieving the status of a developed country by the year 2020. Accordingly, based on this vision and the role of the Unit, it is apparent that economic growth is a major driver of Malaysia’s Development Plans. For this reason, the performance indicators used by the Malaysian government, particularly in the education sector are strongly based on economic measures. This emphasis on economic measures impacts heavily on how the lifelong learning policy landscape in Malaysia is shaped.

4.3.1 Lifelong learning as a driver of economic development

The findings reveal that major goals of the lifelong learning policy, is characterised by a strong relationship with the economic development of the country. Bagnall describes this relationship between lifelong learning and economic determinism as ‘educational change is largely and ultimately driven, framed or determined by considerations of cost and benefit as measured through the economy’ (2000: 21). Within the context of this study, there are two illustrations of economic determinism that can be drawn from the findings. In this section the first instance of economic determinism is discussed. This is that lifelong learning policy facilitates the
country’s economic transition from an industrial based economy to a knowledge-based economy.

Fuelled by Malaysia’s aspirations to become a developed country in the year 2020 economic development has been a key priority of the Malaysian government. Vision 2020 was first articulated in the Sixth Malaysia Plan in 1991 and was emphasised in all the successive Development Plans. The status of a developed country is dominated by economic criteria: the country intends to reach per capita Gross National Product (GNP) between USD 15,000-20,000 by 2020 (National Economic Advisory Council, 2009). The Third Outline Perspective Plan (2001-2010) explicitly makes the connection between the knowledge economy and the aspirations of Vision 2020:

The knowledge-based economy will provide the platform to sustain a rapid rate of economic growth and enhance international competitiveness so as to achieve the objectives of Vision 2020 (The Government of Malaysia, 2001b: 119)

The same Outline Perspective Plan defines the knowledge-based economy as one ‘where the acquisition, utilization and dissemination of knowledge provide the basis for growth’ (The Government of Malaysia, 2001b: 24). A word frequency search using qualitative research software of the term “knowledge-based economy” and “knowledge economy” shows that references to the two terms were repeated in the following Development Plans. For instance, the Third Outline Perspective Plan (2001-2010) refers to the terms 113 times, but just 47 times in the Eighth Plan (2001-2005) and 34 times in the Ninth Plan (2006-2010). The number indicates the concentration of the term discussed in the documents.

The Eighth Plan (2001-2005) details the strategies of moving Malaysia into a knowledge-based economy in ‘increasing the supply of quality manpower, enhancing research and development (R and D) efforts and accelerating the development of growth sectors’ (The Government of Malaysia, 2001a: 3). The Plan expects that the knowledge-based economy will accelerate and add value to all economic products. The goal of moving into this type of economy is to strengthen
Malaysian economic competitiveness at the international level, and to reach the developed economy status.

The Ninth Plan (2006-2010) continues to intensify the knowledge-based economy with a concentration on Information, Communication and Technology (ICT) development. The Plan suggests that ‘efforts will be undertaken to further harness ICT as a new source of wealth creation and to sustain Malaysia’s position as a hub for a competitive global multimedia, shared services and outsourcing’ (The Government of Malaysia, 2006: 67). Business services in relation to ICT are anticipated to grow and multiply, for example, ICT services such as software and content development as well as Internet-based services and e-commerce solutions.

Therefore, the transition to the knowledge-based economy requires technological capacities and resources for education and training, particularly for people in work and those seeking new employment.

Reading through the Development Plans from the last fifteen years shows that the lifelong learning policy is linked with changing the country’s economy focus from industrial-based to knowledge-based. The lifelong learning policy plays an imperative role in the process of the country’s economic transition to the knowledge-based economy. For example, the Third Outline Perspective Plan (2001-2010) states:

The pervasiveness of information technology and increasing knowledge intensity of the economy will create new employment opportunities but will also result in skill redundancies and job displacements. It is critical that the labour force possesses the ability to adapt and adjust to the changing demands of technological advances in the knowledge-based economy. Lifelong learning will be promoted among Malaysians as it is critical for them to continuously acquire new knowledge to upgrade their skill base after leaving the formal education and training system (The Government of Malaysia, 2001b: 148).

The transition to the new form of economy creates a gap in knowledge and skills from the present forms of employment to the future forms of employment. In order to reduce the gap and prepare the workforce for the challenges, lifelong learning is introduced to enable individuals to benefit from continuous learning and skills
improvement. In a text search across the Development Plans for the term “lifelong learning”, the term has been continuously highlighted. In the Third Outline Perspective Plan (2001-2010) and the Eighth Plan (2001-2005), it was referred to 6 times, whereas 15 times in the Ninth Plan (2006-2010), 5 times in the Tenth Plan, and 17 times in the Eleventh Plan.

The findings highlight the function of lifelong learning in building a solid foundation of human resource to keep abreast with the challenges of the knowledge-based economy. For example, the Third Outline Perspective Plan (2001-2010) states ‘the education and training system will be reoriented to be more effective in imparting skills as well as focus on areas required by the economy’ (The Government of Malaysia, 2001b: 25). In the same way, the Eighth Plan (2001-2005) introduced lifelong learning as one of the thrusts in the human resource policy, which suggests ‘promoting lifelong learning to enhance employability and productivity of the labour force’ (The Government of Malaysia, 2001a: 112). The above quotes illustrate a change in direction of the education system to match the requirement for the new economy. Likewise, the policymaker explains:

There are some sectors that we need to stress on to create economic growth; for example, aeronautics, electrical and engineering and petrochemical. These sectors could drive the country to achieve the national aim to become a developed country.

As the quote suggests, Malaysia must enhance knowledge and skills in several sectors, particularly in relation to science and technology to improve industrial production as well as economic development. For this reason, major investment and resource allocation are redirected to the education and training programmes in these sectors to meet the needs of the knowledge-based economy.

In addition, the findings suggest that lifelong learning facilitates the reduction of the digital divide among Malaysians in moving towards a knowledge-based economy. For instance, the Third Outline Perspective Plan (2001-2010) suggests ‘affordable accessibility to training courses and education programmes through the Internet or other ICT-related media will be provided so that Malaysians have the opportunity to acquire new competencies and qualifications for career advancement’ (The
Government of Malaysia, 2001b: 162). Through the lifelong learning policy, many training courses and education programmes on ICT skills are provided for people who are inside or outside the labour force. Besides, the Development Plans also emphasise providing better ICT facilities and access to lifelong learning opportunities for marginalised people in urban districts and people in rural areas. Thus, lifelong learning in Malaysia is seen as a process to develop an individual to gain the necessary knowledge and skills to aid the country’s economic transition.

4.3.1.1 Discussion

The findings of the current study are similar to the studies from other countries, which claim that lifelong learning policy is driven by economic determinism (Bell and Stevenson, 2006; Biesta, 2006; Jarvis et al., 2003; Bagnall, 2000). The studies suggest that the current investment in education is decided based on how it benefits the economics of individual, societal or country. In the same way, Biesta (2006) reviews the lifelong learning policies of ‘trans- or supra- national organisations’ reveals that there is a transformation in the direction of lifelong learning for the purpose of economic development. For instance, the current policy focuses on ‘learning to be productive and employable’, apparently such words placed an emphasis on a person’s economic productivity in the context of work. This is in contrast to the former key document of the lifelong learning agenda, the Faure Report (1972) titled ‘Learning to be: The World of Education Today and Tomorrow’ which has an emphasis on human development in the context of solidarity, democracy, and fulfilment of man (Faure et al., 1972). Biesta (2006) coins this trend the ‘learning economy’, which has a reductionist effect on learning opportunities that are offered to adults. As what is taught is only made available based on ‘a redefinition of what counts as legitimate or ‘useful’ learning and partly as a result of the reduction of funding for those forms of learning that are considered not to be of any economic value’ (Biesta, 2006: 169). This is a concern for Collini (2012) who scathingly posits that educational policies that are formed on the foundations of economic determinism devalue disciplines and subjects that are based in the arts and humanities which do not appear to have a direct benefit to economic growth. After examining the thesis data, the analysis shows that the dominant discourse of the

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2 Trans or supra-national organisations include UNESCO, OECD and EU.
lifelong learning agenda in Malaysia is in relation to economic transformation as the country moves to a knowledge-based economy.

In a similar way, Bell and Stevenson (2006) claim it is important to identify the dominant discourse in a social-political environment that drives the development of educational policy. These authors further assert many countries in Asia illustrate an explicit link between economic performance and educational achievement. They also reported how the entire Malaysian education system has been reviewed to fulfil the market demand for a human resource that is required by the knowledge-based economy. In the context of Malaysia, the major socio-political discourse is in relation to economic development to reach a status of the developed nation for Vision 2020. Furthermore, Biesta (2006) suggests the global discourse on lifelong learning policies by the international policies, namely, UNESCO, OECD, and the EU possibly influenced the Malaysia lifelong learning policy. He explains that globally, ‘such organisations have a strong ‘agenda-setting’ impact and provide crucial reference points and yardsticks for the formation of policy and practice at national levels’ (Biesta, 2006: 170). In the same way, Merrill (1997) highlights lifelong learning policy in Europe almost certainly influenced by ideological, political and cultural forces during the time it is promoted. Thus, the nature of lifelong learning policy cannot be isolated from socio-political factors (Bell and Stevenson, 2006; Merrill, 1997).

4.3.2 Education for human capital

The findings show the second illustration of economic determinism in lifelong learning policy which is a significant influence of human capital theory in the discourse of the policy. Bell and Stevenson define human capital as ‘the sum of education and skill that can be used to produce wealth’ (2006: 42). Based on the definition, it is suggested that an individual is recognised by the accumulative knowledge and skills that they acquire, which determine their level of income and, subsequently, their contribution to the economic growth of the country. The concept of human capital seems to help a country to form a strong cohesion and more efficient by developing a relationship between the national resources and the market needs (Mace, 1987). Consequently, the two-way relationship possibly lead to a better connection between human resources and the labour market demands (Bell and
Stevenson, 2006). There are five main findings in this theme: new challenges; the pillars in human capital development; concentration in skills enhancement; a ‘holistic’ human capital development; and an inclusivity in the national lifelong learning policy.

4.3.2.1 New challenges

The findings show that the Development Plans anticipate new challenges as the Malaysian economy moves from its current form to be a future knowledge-based country. For example, the Eleventh Plan (2016-2020) states ‘human capital development is a critical enabler for driving and sustaining Malaysia’s economic growth and supporting the transition of all economic sectors towards knowledge-intensive activities’ (The Government of Malaysia, 2016: 1-9). There is no specification of the kind of challenges anticipated but the Development Plans emphasise on equipping human capital with the necessary knowledge and skills to meet these challenges as ‘the quality of the nation’s human capital will be the most critical element in the achievement of the National Mission’ (The Government of Malaysia, 2006: 237). The process of equipping individuals with knowledge and skills is repeatedly projected as an “investment”, for example, the government plans to make ‘greater investment in human capital focusing [focus] on increasing the knowledge content of education and training will be made to ensure growth and resilience of the economy’ (The Government of Malaysia, 2001a: 111). In addition, ‘investment in human capital will be given greater emphasis during the Plan period to sustain economic resilience and growth’ (The Government of Malaysia, 2006: 249). Both quotes provide a strong emphasis on the importance of human capital investment in spearheading the nation’s growth. The investment is believed to have strong correlation to the country’s economic resilience and progression.

4.3.2.2 The pillars in human capital development

The findings highlight the role of lifelong learning as the third pillar of human capital development in the country. For example, the *Blueprint on Enculturation of Lifelong Learning for Malaysia (2011-2020)*, which represents the country’s strategies for the lifelong learning agenda states:
Like primary and secondary schooling and tertiary education, lifelong learning should be in the mainstream of our education system; thus becoming the “third pillar” to propel human capital development in this country (Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, 2011: xxiii).

Based on the acknowledgement of the new position as a pillar in the national human capital development, lifelong learning has become a significant strategy in shaping the country’s development. The Blueprint states ‘In our desire to achieve Vision 2020, it is imperative that lifelong learning be adopted as a New Agenda in achieving the nation’s human capital development’ (Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, 2011: 7). Figure 4.1 shows the pillars of the national human capital development.

![Figure 4.1: Pillars of the national human capital development](image)

(Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, 2011: 34)

The proposal to recognise the role of lifelong learning is in order to challenge the old stereotype in Malaysia; that education only values formal education, specifically for youngsters (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2015). The issue is also mentioned in some comments from the policymaker who admit the narrow understanding on the concept of learning in Malaysian society. The policymaker further suggests the
recognition of lifelong learning in human capital development as a commitment to change the dominant discourse. For example, the policymaker reports:

The Malaysian education system has been skewed to the formal education which in most cases is exam oriented. There is a lack of consideration for other types of learning such as non-formal and informal learning. The lifelong learning concept that has been introduced is hoped to educate the community to be aware of the benefit of these types of learning especially for professional development and coping with the technology advancement.

The policymaker further adds:

The journey of learning should remain, and this is the essence of lifelong learning. Every individual has a right and opportunity to continue their learning trajectory.

Based on the quotes, there is a challenge to overcome the old stereotype of learning and also to ensure lifelong learning is recognised and embraced by Malaysian. For this reason, lifelong learning in the context of Malaysia is defined as ‘learning engaged by everyone of age 15 and above except professional students’ (Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, 2011: 6). Therefore, lifelong learners refer to those who are neither in the school system nor in tertiary education. Furthermore, the Blueprint explains such a definition is proposed because of ‘the productive age of the Malaysian population which is from 15 to 64 and those above 64 who are still able to contribute towards the economic development of the country’ (Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, 2011: 6). Therefore, a high proportion of lifelong learners in the country are seen as an essential focus for human capital development to meet the needs of the national economic growth.

In the same way, the policymaker narrates:

It is estimated that almost 70% of the Malaysia population is at the age between 15 and 64. Most of the proportion is involved in the workforce. For this reason, they play important roles in contributing to the country’s economy.
Thus, the findings suggest that human capital theory has shaped the national education system through the acknowledgement of the school system, tertiary education and lifelong learning as the pillars of human capital development and the concentration for economic growth.

4.3.2.3 Concentration in lifelong learning efforts in skills’ enhancement

The findings also show a concentration in lifelong learning efforts in skills’ enhancement for human capital development. For example, the Ninth Plan (2006-2010) suggests ‘the implementation of lifelong learning programmes will be accelerated to encourage skills upgrading among all segments of the society. Education and training delivery systems will be expanded, particularly in vocational and technical fields’ (The Government of Malaysia, 2006: 237). The quote illustrates an explicit focus on lifelong learning agenda for technical and vocational skills. The Blueprint justifies the need for more skills training ‘to ensure [ensuring] that Malaysia develops the necessary human capital to meet the industry’s requirements and drive productivity improvements’ (Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, 2011: 32). In the same way, the Eleventh Plan (2016-2020) concentrates on industry-based human capital development with an inspiration to become an advanced nation. For instance, the Plan explains:

Investments in human capital are also vital to the improvement of personal wellbeing due to its many socio-economic benefits. […] the Government will improve the efficiency of the labour market to accelerate economic growth, enable industry-led TVET to meet industry demands, expand lifelong learning for continuous upskilling, and improve the quality of the education system for better student outcomes (The Government of Malaysia, 2016: 5-30).

Moreover, the Eleventh Plan (2016-2020) also reports that 60% of 1.5 million jobs that will be created by 2020 will require TVET skills. Therefore, there is a significant focus on TVET in the lifelong learning programmes, which is suggested as necessary to ensure the required workforce to support the demand of the labour market.
4.3.2.4 A ‘holistic’ human capital development

The Ninth Plan (2006-2010) proposes a holistic human capital development. The Plan describes a ‘holistic’ human capital development as one that encompasses ‘the acquisition of knowledge and skills or intellectual capital including science and technology (S and T) and entrepreneurial capabilities as well as the internalisation of positive and progressive attitudes, values and ethics through education, training and lifelong learning’ (The Government of Malaysia, 2006: 237). Thus, holistic human capital development in this context refers to individual growth that includes knowledge and skills and good characteristics as an individual. The finding suggests a limitation of human capital theory where some additional elements need to be included to make it ‘complete’. The human capital theory in itself could not reach a complete goal of development and the inadequacy needs to be supported by other elements.

4.3.2.5 Inclusivity in the national lifelong learning policy

The Blueprint aims to achieve inclusivity in human capital development by activating lifelong learning policy. The Blueprint states ‘lifelong learning opportunities must be made available to all (inclusiveness) to create knowledgeable, responsible and skilled individuals who can contribute to the nation’s economy’ (Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, 2011: 7). The Blueprint also highlights a concentration on several disadvantaged groups of learners, ‘to underserved and marginalised segments of society’ (ibid: 7) and ‘especially in rural and remote areas as well as marginalised urban centres’ (ibid: 31). However, there is some contradiction with the earlier statement in the Blueprint that suggests lifelong learning is for people aged between 15 and 64. The age range that are expected for people to be productive and will stay longer in the labour market. Therefore, the return on investment to this group is expected to be worthwhile for the economy. Thus, lifelong learning policy illustrates a contradiction in the statements in relation to inclusive lifelong learning opportunities.

4.3.2.6 Discussion

The recognition of Malaysia’s education system (school system, tertiary education and lifelong learning) as pillars in human capital development illustrates an essence
of economic value in the national education system. Analogically, Bell and Stevenson describe human capital, ‘if physical capital is the product of making changes to raw materials then human capital is created by changing people to give them some desired skills and/or knowledge’ (2006:42). It could be said that the ‘output’ of the individual learning has been dictated by the state. This situation led to an important issue of the democratic right of people (Biesta, 2006). Whilst there is a notion of free choice in the learning opportunities available, ultimately the choices are limited to the areas that contribute to the economic development of the country.

The finding mirrors those of the international studies (Coffield, 1999; Bagnall, 2000; Crowther, 2004; Biesta, 2006) that have, in particular, examined how the lifelong learning policy considers investment in human capital as a means for economic development. For instance, Biesta reports the key issue in the prominent document of lifelong learning in Europe is human capital, as it states that ‘the idea that lifelong learning is first and foremost about the development of human capital – an “investment in human resources” – so as to secure competitiveness and economic growth for Europe’ (2006: 172). For this reason, education has become a commodity where the value of education is assessed based on the calculation of economic return on investment (Bagnall, 2000; Bell and Stevenson, 2006; Biesta, 2006; Ball, 2018). Likewise, Bell and Stevenson claim ‘both the individual and the state as consumers, the individual seeking to maximize personal benefit and the state seeking to maximize economic growth and development’ (2006: 46). Thus, education has been regarded as the process to increase the value of human workforce.

Much as it is expected that education causes a significant growth in the economy, some studies suggest the opposite (Marginson, 2017; Monteils, 2004; Jenkins et al., 2003). Based on Jenkins and colleagues’ quantitative study on a longitudinal data set from the National Child Development Study (NCDS) in Great Britain of those born between 3rd and 9th March 1958, they found little evidence of positive wage effects from lifelong learning. In addition, Monteils (2004) conducts an empirical study of France in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to justify or invalidate the probable endogenous nature of economic growth induced by education. The analysis has failed to find any positive causality link between investment in education and economic growth. Likewise, Marginson argues that human capital theory ‘fails the
test of realism’ because of the weakness in the method used (2017: 1). Therefore, it proposes a limited explanation of the relationship between education and work compared to complex and fragmented reality. Thus, based on these studies, the sole human capital discourse in education is limited and could be contested.

Findings also suggest a concentration on human capital development towards skills enhancement and TVET to meet industry needs. As Peter Jarvis claims ‘The lifelong learning society has become part of the current economic and political discourse of global capitalism, which positions people as human resources to be developed through lifelong learning, or discarded and retrained if their job is redundant’ (Jarvis, 2000 quoted in Grace, 2004: 398). This finding is in line with previous research, which highlights a narrow purpose of lifelong learning and education agenda based on market demands (Coffield, 1999; Blair, 2000; Bagnall, 2000; Merrill, 2000). For example, Bagnall claims lifelong learning policy that is driven by the labour market ‘generates a reduction of education to training, whereby educational value is measured in the extent to which it contributes to the development of vocational and other skill routines and habits’ (2000: 22). When education is influenced by wider social changes, there are elements of risk, uncertainty and illusion (Jarvis et al., 2003). For this reason, Jarvis and associates further claim that education is seen as ‘much more fragmentary and relativistic idea of truth’ (2003: 22). Furthermore, scholars argue that the extent of the democratic right for the individual to choose what they learn is questionable (Bagnall, 2000; Crowther, 2004; Biesta, 2006; Bell and Stevenson, 2006). When a state gives full attention to certain courses, it means there are limited allocation and resources for other courses. At the same time, the individual may choose education or skills that they are aware of that may provide employment opportunities. Thus, the focus on TVET may limit individuals to have other options of courses to develop their full potential in a more holistic way.

This ‘token’ demonstration of democracy is evidenced in The Blueprint which makes reference to human capital development being constructed as democratic, inclusive and holistic. The document outlines the availability of lifelong learning opportunities for everyone, however, a closer analysis of the definition, reveals the limits. Learning opportunities are limited to people from the age between 15 and 64,
in short people who are productive and able to contribute to economic development. The reason possibly because of the older worker has a shorter ‘shelf life’ compared to the younger worker (Field, 2015a). In addition, scholars assert that the limitation of lifelong learning opportunities to a certain age range is contradictory to the principle of lifelong learning (Longworth, 2001; Aspin and Chapman, 2001; Grace, 2004). Therefore, the definition of lifelong learning seems to be dictated by consideration of an individual as human capital.

Nevertheless, the lifelong learning policy is inclusive whereby it provides everyone with an equal opportunity to learn (Kodelja, 2016). However, in terms of equality of outcome, the approach may create a division of workers. In a similar way, scholars (Coffield, 1999; Coffield, 2000; Biesta, 2006) suggest a lifelong learning policy based on equal opportunity or human capital could not be attributed to inclusivity since it builds a polarisation of the worker, and a huge gap between the high-skilled worker and low-skilled worker; thus, it may only reproduce inequalities in society. The analysis suggests that the Malaysia lifelong learning policy is not inclusive since it limits the learning opportunities to age range that is deemed ‘economically active’ and it has neither the notion of equality of opportunity nor the equality of outcome.

4.3.3 Education for self-development

In some capacity, the findings show a concern for self-development. Self-development has been an important facet since the early introduction of the term lifelong learning. The Faure report, which is a significant document in promoting lifelong learning, emphasises the need for continuous learning for self-development. For example, the Report states ‘we should no longer assiduously acquire knowledge once and for all, but learn how to build up a continually evolving body of knowledge all through life – ‘learn to be’’ (Faure et al., 1972: vi). The authors of the Faure Report assert the goal for every individual to achieve the complete fulfilment of man (Biesta, 2006; Biesta et al., 2011; Elfert, 2015). Thus, it is suggested that lifelong learning plays a crucial role to facilitate an individual for self-development to achieve their full potential in life. Within the context of this study, there is a mixed concern in relation to this issue; in some parts there is an emphasis for self-development, however, on the other part, there seems to be an underplay of its importance.
The findings illustrate lifelong learning policy that encourages self-development, which will contribute to develop individual potential and career in the long run. In the Blueprint, the role of lifelong learning for self-development is described as ‘human development relates to widening the range of choices that people have in order to lead the kind of life that they would value. Fundamental to increasing these choices is building human capabilities – the range of things that people can be or do in life.’ (Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, 2011: 5). The quote submits the self-development is seen as the ability for an individual to have essential knowledge and skills to enhance their quality of life. It follows that the Malaysian Education Blueprint (2015-2025) reports ‘the national education system will take students from “cradle to career”, help them achieve their potential, inculcate a love for lifelong learning, make them globally competitive, and prepare them for life’ (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2015: C-12). The quote suggests the national education system that could equip individuals for many goals of self-development. In the same vein, the policymaker highlights:

The focus for lifelong learning policy is for self-development. As an individual, we should not feel content or complacent with our current situation. We need to keep upgrading our skills or expand our knowledge in different areas.

Thus, the findings show a similar discourse in the Development Plans with the literature on the role of lifelong learning for self-development.

Furthermore, the Document Plans state a concern for a balanced educational policy between the self-development and economic growth. For instance, the National Higher Education Strategic Plan 2007-2020 and beyond asserts a balanced consideration between humanitarian and utilitarian reasons in developing or formulating educational policy (Ministry of Higher Education, 2007: 11). The Plan refers to the humanitarian aspect in education as a process to grow a balanced individual in physical, intellectual, social, emotional and spiritual terms, with good value. Alternatively, the utilitarian aspects of the Plan is described as being more inclined towards education to produce a technocrat, bureaucrat, scientist, economist and engineer for economic growth (Ministry of Higher Education, 2007). Subsequently, the same concern is also highlighted in the introduction of the
Malaysia Education Blueprint (2015-2025). Accordingly, the Plan proposes the individual aspiration can be achieved by a balanced foundation built on a dual approach between ethics and morality and knowledge and skills. There are three attributes for ethics and morality: ethics and spirituality, leadership skills, and national identity. In the same way, three attributes are suggested for knowledge and skills: language proficiency, thinking skills, and knowledge (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2015: E-6). The Plan proposes that these aspects will help individuals to achieve equilibrium in life. Thus, the findings suggest there is a consistent awareness for a balanced educational policy between the humanitarian and utilitarian aspects in the Development Plans.

However, the Development Plans seem to underplay the role of lifelong learning for self-development. For instance, the Blueprint explicitly states ‘While the focus of our definition is on the economic contribution of lifelong learning, we will not exclude the importance of the other roles of lifelong learning, particularly in the area of personal growth and development, inclusivity and sustainability’ (Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, 2011: 7). Based on the quote, the phrases ‘we will not exclude’ suggest an insignificant role of personal development compared to the skills development that possibly contributed to the economic growth. Thus, the quotes show that there is a priority order for the economic development whilst self-development is relegated to second order.

4.3.3.1 Discussion

Findings suggest some inconsistencies in the discourse of the national lifelong learning policy in relation to self-development. In some parts, the Development Plans emphasise the importance of self-development and a need for a balanced focus between humanitarianism and utilitarianism. In other parts, the Development Plans seem to underplay self-development as an important goal. The findings in this study are in line with the previous study which claims a shift from lifelong learning as a means for self-development and social progress to lifelong learning for economic development (Bagnall, 2000; Biesta, 2006; Biesta et al., 2011). The shift impacts on learning courses or programmes that are offered as to whether it is worthwhile for lifelong learning. For this reason, scholars suggest that the shift has reduced the opportunities for people to enrol in certain types of courses, which means they have
little influence on the content or purpose of their learning (Biesta et al., 2011; Jarvis, 2014). The situation may lead to lifelong learning that benefits others rather than the individual learner (Merrill, 2000). Thus, the persistent focus of lifelong learning to economic growth has limits for individual choices for self-development. The current study illustrates an inconsistency in the current national lifelong learning policy, even though the document mentions self-development, but it seems not the main goal.

Findings reveal there is continuous debate to find a balance between the humanitarian and utilitarian in educational policy. The result is consistent with studies on the concept of lifelong learning (Aspin and Chapman, 2001; Jarvis et al., 2003; Biesta, 2006). Aspin and Chapman (2001: 2) claim that lifelong learning represents three agendas, which they describe as ‘the triadic nature of lifelong learning’: for economic progress and development; for personal development and fulfilment; and for social inclusiveness and democratic understanding and activity. Similarly, recognising a study on the policy of lifelong learning by the international agencies, namely UNESCO, OECD and the EU, Biesta (2006) suggests lifelong learning as a ‘composite’ concept, which he describes as ‘the triangle of lifelong learning’ that consists of three functions: personal, economic, and democratic. The functions propose that lifelong learning contributes to the personal development of an individual for a meaningful life, establishes their financial well-being both personally and state-wide, and empowers the individual to exercise their right. Furthermore, Biesta (2006) explains that the economic function of learning is indirect with regard to the individual, since it needs a mediator to work and generate income; meanwhile, the personal and democratic functions of learning are more direct to the individual. However, in terms of measuring the benefit of learning, it is otherwise. Schuller et al. (2017) claim that there is growing evidence of indirect benefits of learning; for example, literacy provision. The indirect benefit is harder to capture compared to possibly direct or tangible outcomes of the economic benefit through an increase in income. Thus, it is important to reflect on the internal value of education rather than the external value of the education in terms of economy (Bell and Stevenson, 2006).
4.3.4 Education for a learning culture

The findings from the data illustrate an emphasis on promoting a learning culture in society. In the context of the current study, the culture refers to ‘a particular way of life, whether a people, a period or a group’ (Williams, 1983: 90). In a review of enculturation of educational thinking, Collins and Bielaczyc (1999) highlight that an individual’s relationship to learning is formed by the community and how central the learning is for them. In a similar way, Hodkinson and associates propose culture ‘as being constituted-that is, produced and reproduced-by human activity, often but not exclusively, collective activity’ (2007: 419). Thus, a learning culture is not a one-way process; instead it is a continuous process (Biesta et al., 2011). Within the context of the current study, there are two significant findings; the first is the focus to develop a learning culture in the society, and the second is the recognition of other forms of learning to encourage continuity of learning within an individual.

Firstly, the findings illustrate an emphasis on promoting lifelong learning as a culture or a way of life. For example, the Blueprint document states ‘enculturation of lifelong learning seeks to influence individuals to embrace lifelong learning as an integral part of their lives’ (Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, 2011: 7). Furthermore, the lifelong learning policy statement proposes ‘to create a knowledge society which embraces lifelong learning as a culture that contributes towards high-income productivity-led economy, inclusiveness and sustainability […]’ (Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, 2011: 38). The quotes demonstrate a lifelong learning policy that encourages people to embrace learning in a daily routine. Correspondingly, the Eleventh Plan (2016-2020) states ‘the Government will widen access to LLL [lifelong learning] and raise the quality of existing programmes, with the goal of making LLL [lifelong learning] a way of life for all Malaysians’ (The Government of Malaysia, 2016: 5-23). The Plan suggests strategies to influence Malaysians to embrace lifelong learning as a centre of their lives: improving training programmes to meet learning needs and improving regulatory and funding support. Similarly, the policymaker explained the rationale behind the theme of enculturation of lifelong learning in the Blueprint Plan. The policymaker emphasises:

The intention is we want to develop a culture of continuous learning in Malaysian society. We have some issues of lack of interest in learning
and poor reading habits...therefore, it is not easy to change something that has is entrenched in the society. Some stages have been outlined in the Blueprint about what we are expected to achieve gradually. We started with an awareness of learning opportunities that are offered by learning providers.

The policymaker further remarks on an example of a situation when an individual embraced the culture of learning:

Parents who are aware of learning opportunities and actively engaged in a learning programme could advise or guide their children who are not interested in formal education to enrol in a different type of learning. Currently, there are plenty of learning opportunities besides the formal education. Therefore, individuals who embrace lifelong learning as a way of life could help to develop a better community even in their small circle of family.

The policymaker addresses some challenges to change the poor learning interest that has been rooted in Malaysian society. For this reason, they explain that a deliberate plan has been outlined to tackle the issue. Thus, the findings highlight the national lifelong learning policy goal to develop a learning culture in the society.

Secondly, the findings highlight a major concern on recognition of non-formal and informal learning experiences for continuity of learning. For example, the Document Plans report on benchmarking the Korean approach of the Credit Bank System (CBS), which recognised diverse learning experiences that were gained by their citizens to accumulate and transfer credits to obtain Bachelor or Associate Degrees. Correspondingly, in the context of Malaysia, an initiative called Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) was established in 2011 under the Malaysian Qualification Agency (MQA) that had a similar function; to recognise non-formal, informal and formal learning experiences and to integrate educational programmes across institutions in Malaysia. The Eleventh Plan (2016-2020) states ‘the APEL enables knowledge and skills acquired through formal education and working experience to count towards the completion of their studies in IHEs [Institution of
Higher Educations]’ (The Government of Malaysia, 2016: 5-24). In the interview, the policymaker remarks:

Initially, there was only one type of APEL which was APEL (A). But there were high demands from people to have a credit transfer for academic certification. So, we launched APEL (C). APEL (A) is for access to the educational institution while APEL (C) is for credit award. The availability for credit transfer in the formal education facilitates individuals to reduce cost and time to complete the education programme.

The explanation illustrates that the APEL initiative received a good response from citizens and many pursue higher education to obtain a formal certification. In addition, the policymaker also shares on the clusters of learning programmes in the national lifelong learning approach:

We have divided different types of learning programme in lifelong learning into four clusters (see Table 4-1). The cluster also includes informal, non-formal and formal types of learning programmes. Any individual’s involvement in learning could be categorised into the cluster.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cluster 1</th>
<th>Cluster 2</th>
<th>Cluster 3</th>
<th>Cluster 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Part-time programme for the certificate, diploma, Bachelor’s degree, post-graduate and including e-learning.</td>
<td>Short-term technical programme that is not more than six months’ duration.</td>
<td>Up-skilling programme for personal development in any type of knowledge and skills.</td>
<td>Full-time programme for the certificate, diploma, Bachelor’s degree, and post-graduate for non-traditional learners.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The cluster is not stated in the Document Plans that were analysed but they are included in the improvement of lifelong learning practice implemented at the ministry level. The cluster illustrates recognition of informal learning at cluster three and non-formal learning at cluster two. Meanwhile the first and the fourth clusters refer to the formal education participated by non-traditional learners; the former is
for the part-time mode while the latter is for the full-time mode of learning. The cluster is suggested to facilitate the ministry in classifying the learning programmes as well as aid the learning providers. Thus, the results suggest some strategies that have been developed by the government to encourage continuity of learning.

4.3.4.1 Discussion

The findings suggest the national lifelong learning policy’s goal to inculcate learning culture for every individual. However, in some ways, creating a learning culture in a society possibly reduces the government’s responsibility for individual success for the individual themselves. Studies suggest an individualisation of learning has shifted lifelong learning from the individual’s right to individual’s responsibility (Biesta, 2006; Bagnall, 2000; Crowther, 2004). For example, Biesta states that ‘under the conditions of the learning economy, lifelong learning has become understood as an individual task rather than as a collective project and that this has transformed lifelong learning from a right to a duty’ (2006: 169). In addition, Coffield (1999) and Crowther (2004) suggest that the requirement for the individual to become flexible and engaged in lifelong learning activities in a dynamic economy that is a social control and is supported by the state. Consequently, it is an individual’s duty to change. As Crowther claims, ‘people become agents of their own self-surveillance by adjusting and adapting what they do’ (2004: 131). Therefore, in the long run, the learning culture may shift to the individualisation of learning.

The findings emphasise that the recognition of other forms of learning may encourage individuals to continue to learn through life. The result is in line with previous research that suggests the recognition of learning from experiences had been seen as an empowering individuals to climb the academic ladder or vocational pathways (Garnett, 2016; Garnett and Cavaye, 2015). In the study by Garnett and Cavaye (2015), the university used the information from the Recognition of Prior Learning programme to develop a programme that is customised to the needs of learners and the organisation. Instead of the common practice to recommend existing courses that are offered by the university, the learners enrol in a programme that has a high value to them and their organisation. For learners, the initiative increases the
sense of belonging and ownership of the programme. At the same time, it encourages the individual to see their experiences and careers from a learning perspective.

Furthermore, the initiative to acknowledge individual experiences is closely linked with enhancing social inclusion of people from different social backgrounds. An individual with no formal qualification could gain recognition in the academic world where it is not possible through the traditional pathway. On the other hand, a comparative report by Cleary et al. (2002) on APEL practices in five countries (England, Finland, France, Scotland and Spain) suggests that APEL could be double-edged phenomena, which provide a recognition of other types of learning; however, in other respects, it could deter the process of social inclusion because of its formality. In this case, the formality refers to the process of recognition that requires the active participation of the individual to complete the requirement. (Commission of the European Communities, 2000). Thus, the recognition of different forms of learning encouraged individuals to utilise their experiences, at the same time, the government needs to facilitate the procedure, so it is feasible for the public.

4.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, the chapter has drawn attention to the landscape of lifelong learning policy in Malaysia. The study reveals many aims of Malaysia’s lifelong learning policy, however, there is a major focus on economic determinism. The strong underpinning of economic determinism could be attributed to the country quests to reach a status of developed country by the year 2020. The transformation of the economy from industrial-based to knowledge-based requires a major restructuring in the education system, not only to prepare the workforce for the new labour market but also to fill the gap of knowledge and skills of the present workforce. For this reason, lifelong learning is suggested as a possible solution to overcome the period of economic transition. Table 4-2 summarises the interplay of the variables the data analysis has revealed for this chapter.
Table 4-2: Private and public focus of Malaysia’s lifelong learning policy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Economic</th>
<th>Humanistic</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Economic Development (1)</td>
<td>Learning Culture (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Human Capital (2)</td>
<td>Self-development (3)</td>
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The table is arranged based on the priorities that have been presented in the Malaysia lifelong learning policy. It is apparent in the discourse that economic development is a higher priority than the humanistic purpose. The public benefit is prioritised over the private benefit in the context of the economy since the country aims is to fulfil the requirement to be a developed country. In the context of humanity, self-development comes first based on the idea that a collective of people who are engaged in learning and keen to improve themselves contribute to the establishment of a learning culture in society.

Firstly, the national lifelong learning policy pays extra attention to the learning programmes that will benefit the public in terms of spurring economic development for the realisation of Vision 2020. For this reason, the education and training programmes have been redirected to the programmes that will drive the country’s economic growth and ability to compete globally, i.e., science and technology and TVET. However, the concentration on certain education and training programmes has had the effect of narrowing the diversity of knowledge and reduced the funding for other programmes.

The second concern of the policy is to encourage individuals to improve their knowledge and skills to be sustained in the labour market. The learning programme has been designed tailored to market requirements to ensure an adequate workforce. Therefore, individuals who participated in the learning programme possess a high value in the labour market. They are said to have high chances of employment with a promising income. Indirectly, they will contribute to the country’s economic growth. Nevertheless, the individual has a limited democratic right regarding choice of
learning programmes. The influence of human capital in the national education system and lifelong learning is seen as degrading the value of education.

Thirdly, self-development contributes to the private success of an individual rather than to society. The policy emphasises on promoting learning as awareness for an individual to have a better quality of life. At the same time, there is a continuous concern regarding the balance between humanitarian and utilitarian value. However, there is an inconsistency in the policy statement, and it seems to underplay the importance of self-development.

Lastly, the findings suggest the role of the lifelong learning agenda is to inculcate the love for learning in society and, for this reason, the results emphasise on creating learning awareness and recognising other types of the learning experience for an individual’s learning enhancement. On the other hand, the responsibility for individuals to learn may lessen the government’s responsibility to educate the people.

To reconcile the tension between the social and economic value of learning, there is a need for the political leaders to reach an agreement on ‘the basic values and broadly acceptable means’ so that the policy and practice are consistent in achieving inclusive social and economic development (Bell and Stevenson, 2006: 164). The agreement could lead to a greater consideration in developing resourceful individuals rather than only human resources for the workforce. Accordingly, participation in the lifelong learning programme needs a shared responsibility between the government and the individual to make it successful (Boeren, 2016).
Chapter 5 : The Implementation of Lifelong Learning Policy by the Community Colleges

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter reveals there are many aims of Malaysia lifelong learning policy; however the major aim is in relation to economic development as the country is heading to become a developed country in 2020. To materialise the aims, educational institutions play different part at their respective specialties and contexts. Among others, community colleges have been appointed as a hub of lifelong learning institution in the country. This chapter focuses on exploring the implementation of lifelong learning policy at the meso-level (community colleges). The data were gathered from interviews that have been conducted with three officers from the Department of Community Colleges, and twenty-eight staff members across both urban and rural community colleges.

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section describes the strategies that are developed by the Department of Community Colleges in coordinating the implementation of lifelong learning policy at the community colleges nationwide. The second section explores how the different geographical settings of the community colleges influence their approaches in organising lifelong learning programmes.

5.2 The community colleges as a hub of lifelong learning in Malaysia: The role of Headquarters

In 2007, the MOHE released the National High Education Strategic Plan 2020 and beyond for the ministry’s transformation agenda. The Plan has designed four stages of excellence in promoting lifelong learning in society, which are:

i. Phase 1 (2007-2010): Establishing a Base
iv. Phase 4 (beyond 2020): Glory and Sustainability
The Plan also addressed the role of the community college as the hub of lifelong learning in the country which was re-emphasised in the *Blueprint of Enculturation of Lifelong Learning for Malaysia (2011-2020)* as follows:

As the hub of lifelong learning, community colleges will offer programmes which are relevant to the needs of the local community, assist the poorest segments of society, the underprivileged, the disabled and senior citizens to enhance their communication and computer skills (Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, 2011: 60).

For this reason, the community colleges designated its vision ‘to champion Technical and Vocational Education and Training and become a hub for Lifelong Learning by 2025’ (Department of Community Colleges, 2015: 9). The community college focus on empowering the local communities to learn technical skills, particularly in the areas of TVET. Accordingly, this study is conducted during the implementation of lifelong learning programmes at the community colleges is at the stage of excellence.

The community college is governed by the Department of Community Colleges, which is stationed at the Federal Administrative Centre in Putrajaya. The function of this Department is somewhere similar to the Local Education Authority in the United Kingdom, which work as the middle tier between the government and networked of schools. The middle tier approach by the Department suggests centralised management of the community colleges, for this reason, the staff at the community colleges refer the Department as ‘Headquarters’. For the purpose of simplicity, this Department will be referred as Headquarters in this study. Figure 5.1 illustrates a hierarchy of lifelong learning policy implementation at the community college level in Malaysia.
At the policy level, MOHE has established a National Lifelong Learning Council that plays an important role to formulate and materialise the national lifelong learning policy. The Council coordinates and monitors lifelong learning providers towards their respective function based on the Blueprint that was documented. Then, at the community colleges level, the organisational structure starts with a Director-General, who led the Department of Community Colleges, followed by a Director of Section of Academic Development. Then, there is a specific body that coordinates the lifelong learning programmes which is the Lifelong Learning Unit. The unit which function as middle tier between the central government and the networked community colleges nationwide in terms of lifelong learning programmes. The Unit also involved in the early meetings for the formulation of the lifelong learning policy by the National Lifelong Learning Council. They also led in translating the lifelong
learning policy from theory into practical implementation by the ninety-four community colleges in the country. Next, the Headquarters developed a working committee that includes all Head of Department of Lifelong Learning Unit at community colleges nationwide. The working committee plans and develops strategies regarding the implementation of lifelong learning programmes at the community colleges. Lastly, the staff of the community colleges as the implementer who receive information and instruction to organise the lifelong learning programmes from their respective Head of Department.

The data for the first section is drawn from the interview with the Headquarters officers which include Director of Section of Academic Development, the former Deputy Director of the Lifelong Learning Unit, and the current Deputy Director of the Lifelong Learning Unit. For simplicity of the chapter, the term Headquarters in this section refers to the Department of the Community College Education.

5.2.1 Community Colleges as a community-based lifelong learning programmes

In 2013, community colleges trained 57% of participants in lifelong learning programmes out of learning participation organised by the Public Higher Learning Institutions in Malaysia (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2015: 3-2). This percentage shows the significant achievement of community colleges in creating learning awareness and promoting participation in learning within society. The data also indicates that that Malaysian society may prefer the nature of community-based learning as compared to participation in formal education. Accordingly, Gallacher et al., (2007) assert the development of community-based learning is considered to play an important role in widening access to learning. This is in line with the findings of this study where the interviewees refer to the community-based learning as enabling more people to learn based on their needs and interests. For example, the Deputy Director states:

> Community colleges provide a community-based learning which is called a short course programme. So, it could be any type of learning that is requested by the local community. The content could be from a leisure course to a more technical course.

Similarly, the former Deputy Director comments:
The concept of lifelong learning in community colleges is quite different from other institutions, for example, the university. At the university, if you pay, you can learn. However, at the community colleges, we offer an affordable community-based learning.

It is important to note that there is a difference in terms of the philosophy, concept, and value of learning between the universities and community colleges. In the quote above, the interviewee suggests that the community colleges provide a simple learning programme that fulfils the community’s learning needs. The type of learning that is offered is affordable with a minimal fee. As the Director remarks, ‘we are not a profit-oriented body. We go for knowledge. It does not mean that it is free, but a very minimal fee’. Besides the diverse content of learning, the community colleges also provide a flexible learning approach in which the short course programmes could be conducted at any place that is convenient to the potential learners. The Director explains:

We hold a principle: ‘anyone, anywhere, and anytime’. Our approach is to provide a flexible learning opportunity anywhere. We could conduct the short course programmes at the client’s office, the community centre, or even just in an open field. We try to make learning as easy as possible. Our clients are varied from professionals to marginalised people in the society.

In addition, the interviewees suggest they try to cater for different learning needs in the community. For instance, the Director highlights:

Lifelong learning is not about certification, it is about the thirst for knowledge. Everyone has different learning needs; some people want to learn for certification, some learn for the skills. Thus, as a learning provider, we offer several alternatives for these individuals. We try our best to reduce learning inhibitors.

The quotes above suggest that community colleges offer learning programmes that can be tailored to different learning needs in the community. For this reason, the community colleges offer a range of activities to widen participation in learning for all levels of the community. The findings of the current study concur with those of a
study by Field (2015) who suggests the importance of understanding different learning needs within society. For example, in his study on a multigenerational workforce, the older workers have different learning needs compared to the younger workers. They also have a different attitude to education based on their life experiences.

The interviewees mentioned a lifelong learning carnival at national level as one of the approaches to reach the public audience. The Director recalls:

Between 2012-2013, together with the Ministry of Higher Education, we organised the Malaysian Lifelong Learning Carnival (My3L) to raise awareness of lifelong learning on a larger scale for the public. There, we promote learning opportunities that are provided by many educational institutions, ministries and agencies in the country. The carnival took place at seven different locations around the country and had successfully increased participation in learning among the respective local communities.

The officers recalled the national carnival on lifelong learning as a successful strategy to raise learning awareness for the local community.

5.2.2 Challenges in coordinating lifelong learning programmes

All interviewees reported that a major challenge in coordinating lifelong learning programmes is the limited funding. They explained two strategies to overcome the issue: National Blue Ocean Strategy (hereafter NBOS), and trust account. Through these strategies, the community colleges managed to reach for potential clients and implement the lifelong learning activities effectively. NBOS in the context of this study refers to a government strategy to break down bureaucratic barriers between ministries, agencies, and the private sector in order to perform activities with minimum costs but a maximise output (Ramli et al., 2016). The Director explains:

We received a very limited budget since we started the short course programme. So, what we do is, we apply the NBOS. We reach out for clients from other ministries, agencies, Non-governmental Organisations (hereafter NGO), and industries among others. For
example, there is an NGO called *Yayasan Aman* which is dedicated to addressing people in B40\(^3\) group in the society. They have some budget allocation for training to the people. We have facilities and educators. So, we facilitate their needs and at the same time, we achieve our goal of offering learning opportunities to the communities.

The quote suggests that NBOS activity helps the community colleges to achieve their goal of providing learning activities at a low cost. The Director describes how NBOS has been a successful strategy since the community colleges have facilitated to a large proportion of participants in lifelong learning programmes in the country:

There are many collaborations that were established between the community colleges and other institutions. Many community colleges did a very good job in applying NBOS to reach out to clients. We search for clients seven days in a week.

The Deputy Director explains another example of NBOS activity which she managed to broker and facilitated networking between a ministry and the community colleges:

Recently, I went to the Ministry of Rural Development and I was informed that they will conduct a programme called *Desa Lestari*. This programme will take place in each state (district) in the country. It is an opportunity for the community colleges to be involved. So, I explained the role of community colleges as a hub for lifelong learning programmes in the country and the types of learning activities that we offered. The officer agreed to collaborate with the community colleges to implement the programme.

In addition, the former Deputy Director reports another NBOS activity through the Human Resource Development Fund. The Human Resource Development Fund is a

\(^3\)Malaysians are categorised into three different income groups: Top 20% (T20), Middle 40% (M40), and Bottom 40% (B40). The T20 group, is a household that earn at least RM13,148 (equivalent to £2420.76) while M40 and B40 groups earn at up to RM6,275 (equivalent to £1155.31) and RM3,000 (equivalent to £552.34) respectively. Source from: Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2017.
fund under the Malaysian Human Resource Ministry for training for Malaysian small and medium enterprises. He had successfully registered several community colleges as training providers for the Fund. He explains:

There are forty-two community colleges registered as training providers under the Human Resource Development Fund. For this initiative, any industries could come and participate in a training programme at the community colleges. They don’t have to pay the community colleges; instead, the fee will be paid by the Fund.

In addition to NBOS, the interviewees described a further strategy to overcome the limited funding to conduct the lifelong learning programmes which is a trust account. The trust account is defined as ‘an account to receive payment that involves the public fund for a specific reason based on section 9 in the Financial Procedure Act 1957’ (Jabatan Pendidikan Kolej Komuniti, 2015). The Deputy Director remarks:

We introduced a trust account to the community colleges to facilitate the implementation of the lifelong learning activities. The trust account allows the community colleges to raise public and private funds to conduct a training programme. So, they have financial autonomy to organise their expenditure and resources. At the same time, we will regularly monitor and audit the trust account.

Based on the accounts above, the interviewees show an active role at the central level in countering the challenge of limited funding to coordinate the lifelong learning programmes at the community colleges. The two main strategies they employed are NBOS and the trust account.

5.2.3 Managing and monitoring short course programmes

The findings from the interviews highlight two management approaches by the Headquarters: working in a team and establishing effective communication. These approaches contributed to the successful implementation of the short course programmes at the community colleges. The interviewees explain how they established true teamwork in serving the clients. The former Deputy Director shares:
Our strength is we work in a team. For example, there was a collaboration between the National Anti-Doping Agency and Community College A in one state (district) for large-scale short course programmes. As a leader in charge at the time, I called all the Heads of Department of each community college in the state (district) to be involved in the programme’s meeting. Other community college became a support system for the programme by providing resources, expertise or equipment. For instance, Community College A could borrow a bus from Community College B and a Public Address (PA) system from Community College C, among others. Therefore, we engaged everybody to work so that everyone could get the experience of working with national agency.

The narratives suggest the presence of a culture of working in a team among the community colleges. They share expertise, equipment and resources in order to conduct the events. In addition, the role of Headquarters as a middle tier has facilitated the community colleges to work effectively as a group.

Findings from the interviews also suggest that the Headquarters practise effective communication with the community colleges. The Deputy Director emphasises this:

At the beginning of the year, we will organise a meeting with the Head of Department of the Lifelong Learning Unit from every community college. At the same time, there are other alternative channels of communication. First, we have a group email, so we can repeat the same instruction. So, if they encounter some challenges at the community colleges, they could raise it on the email. Second, we have a telegram (a cloud-based instant messenger service) group. They will be reminded of some important information and sometimes we decided for immediate problem on the telegram.

Similarly, the Director explains:

We prepare several intervention mediums to minimise miscommunication. For example, through emails, formal letters or even an ad-hoc meeting if it is necessary.
In addition, the interviewees explain that the instructions for implementing the short course programmes is not particularly specific. The aim of this is to give space for flexibility for the community colleges to conduct the short course programmes that are relevant to their local context, and indeed to adapt the programmes in the local community. The Deputy Director describes:

If we suggest doing A, but the community college said that A needs to combine with B and C. So, we will accommodate and understand the needs at the ground level. We believe they know better their settings.

The above narratives also illustrate that the Headquarters modelled a democratic leadership approach which accepts views from the implementers. They value the tacit knowledge of the community colleges which refers to the past practical experience of the implementers (Dimmock, 2016). At the same time, the Headquarters play an important role in developing a sense of togetherness among the community colleges. The next section explains two mechanisms applied by the Headquarters in managing and monitoring the short course programme: e-psh, and KPI.

5.2.3.1 e-psh

To improve the effectiveness of the short courses and better serve the clients, the Headquarters developed a centralised information system to record the implementation of the short course programme at the national level, called e-psh. E-psh stores information about the short course programmes and participants’ profiles from the community colleges nationwide. The system gives the staff access to information that enables them to check on the number of applicants, prepare course certificates of attendance, and generate monthly or yearly reports (Kusni et al., 2014). The former Deputy Director reports:

The e-psh is an efficient database management system that stores short course participants’ profile from all the community colleges; for example, data on demographics such as age, level of income and education background of the participants. These data illustrate information on the range of participants in the short course
programmes. The information is useful for the department’s annual strategic planning.

In addition, the system enables the Headquarters to generate a monthly or yearly report of community colleges’ performance in their implementation of the short course programmes. The Deputy Director states:

At the Headquarters level, *e-ps* becomes a tool for us to monitor the monthly performance of each community colleges. If the record is empty, we will remind the institutions to key in short course programmes data into the *e-ps*. So that the record in the system will be updated.

The *e-ps* becomes one-stop information centre. It enables members of the local community to apply for short course programmes, staff to update short course information, and Headquarters to assess the performance of each community college in implementing the short course programmes. Thus, the system facilitates the management of the short course programme.

**5.2.3.2 Key Performance Indicator (KPI)**

The findings of this study illustrate that the Headquarters translate the lifelong learning policy into a tangible goal to be reached by the community colleges through a key performance indicator (hereafter KPI). The KPI in this study refers to number of participants in short course programmes that needs to be reached by each staff at the community colleges. The approach was introduced as a guideline for the community colleges in implementing the short course programmes. The former Deputy Director explains:

We developed a KPI for the short course programmes. It is the minimum requirement from the Headquarters placed on the community colleges. The KPI becomes a parameter to measure community colleges’ performance in implementing the short course programme. Initially we developed the KPIs based on the grade level of the Director of each of the community colleges. For example, a community college with a Director at grade level 52 needs to reach 3500 participants in the
short course programmes annually, while community colleges with a Director at grade level 44 needs to achieve 2000 participation's in the short course programmes.

However, after the mechanism was implemented, the Headquarters received many comments from the community colleges. He further reports:

We realised there was some weakness in the approach; it was too narrow. The grade level of the Director does not represent the capacity or resources of the institution. Some community colleges with the Director at grade level 52 only has fifteen staff while some colleges with a Director at grade level 44 have twenty-five staff. For this reason, we changed the approach to determine the KPI based on the individual staff at the community colleges. So, each staff member needs to reach at least ninety participants in a year.

The interviewees explain how the KPI was improved and customised based on the number of staff in the institution. It becomes a standard instruction to ensure that each community college implements the short course programmes. Furthermore, e-psih becomes a significant monitoring tool for the Headquarters to check and assess the KPI achievement of each college in running short course programmes. The Deputy Director remarks:

The KPI helps us to recognise which community colleges have problems or challenges in implementing short course programmes. If the community college did not achieve their KPI, we will seek their explanation. We try to understand their situation. Some community colleges have limited resources, some community colleges are newly operated, and some have changes of the organisation’s structure.

These interview accounts illustrate the role of the Headquarters in managing and monitoring the implementation of the short course programmes. At the same time, the interviewees illustrate a positive response to supporting the institutions that could not achieve the KPI, rather than penalising them. For the staff who achieve their KPI, the Headquarters provide a small reward, as the Deputy Director describes:
We acknowledged the staff effort in implementing the short course programmes. Every year, we will send a certificate of appreciation to each individual staff at the community colleges who has successfully reached their KPI.

Overall, the findings in this section show that the concept of lifelong learning by community colleges is a community-based learning that is flexible to facilitate different learning needs within the society. The Headquarters has a major challenge of limited funding to implement the lifelong learning programmes. However, to materialise the lifelong learning programmes, the Headquarters brokered networking for the community colleges through NBOS and introduced the trust account. Furthermore, there are two important mechanisms of implementation and accountability: the e-psh and the KPI. The e-psh is a centralised information system that was developed to facilitate record keeping of short course programmes by the community colleges. The KPI is a measure for the Headquarters to monitor community colleges performance in implementing the short course programmes.

5.3 The implementation of lifelong learning programmes at the different settings of community colleges

This section discusses how the selected community colleges implement the short course programmes within urban and rural contexts respectively. Both institutions were in the top ten list of short course programme performance for three consecutive years between 2013 and 2015. The achievement shows a high number of participants in the short course programmes at both institutions. The list suggests community colleges in the urban is most likely to reach high enrolment compared to the community colleges in the rural. Therefore, this study explores the strategies, approaches and challenges between the urban and the rural community colleges in the implementation of the short course programmes.
Figure 5.2 illustrates the administration at community college level. The top-level management includes the officers at Headquarters and the Director of the community college; together they determine the lifelong learning objectives and have overall control over the community colleges. The middle-level management involves the Head of Department of the Lifelong Learning Unit at the institutions and managers who have specific roles, for example short course manager, financial manager, promotional manager and data and record manager. They are the core figures in the community colleges to develop strategies and procedures in relation to the implementation of the short course programmes. The lower level management refers to the Leader of the Technical Unit who lead and deliver the short course programmes, as well as monitoring that every staff member achieves the required KPI. Lastly, the staff are the implementers of the short course programmes; in many cases, the middle level and lower level manager also become course implementers at the same time.

It is important to note that the staff at the community colleges are lecturers who are teaching the technical programmes offered in each institution. Every community college offers different full-time certificate technical programmes. Of the colleges participating in this study, both institutions offer four certificated technical programmes. The urban community college offers courses on Refrigeration and Air-conditioning Technology, Information Technology, Business Operations, and Electrical Installation while the rural community college provides courses on Light Vehicle Service, Event Handling, Information Technology, and Food Processing and
Quality Control. In addition, each institution has several staff who teach generic programmes, for example English Language, Entrepreneurship, and General Studies.

The findings reveal four themes that illustrate the implementation of the short course programme at the community college level: the setting of the community colleges, promotional strategies and participants’ engagement, awareness of lifelong learning policy, and wider benefits of learning.

5.3.1 The setting of the community colleges

Findings from the interviews suggest that the setting of each college play an important role in determining the strategy taken by the institution. The urban college is located in Selangor state which is recorded as having the highest population in the country. The premise of the community college is a converted shop lot within the city. In addition, there are many public facilities such as higher learning institutions, hospitals, government offices, and schools that are close to the institution. The promotional manager describes the setting:

   Our advantage is the community college is in a town and close to residential area. So, it is quite accessible by public transport for the local community. Besides, we have many different backgrounds of participants, for example, nurses, police officers, private sector workers, teachers and housewives among others.

However, the managers' report some challenges that they encountered in the early years of the establishment of the community college. The data and record manager recalls:

   In the beginning, many people assumed that this community college was a private institution, so, they avoided us. They mentioned the reason is that they expect the fee for the courses that offered will be expensive. However, after we promoted the short course programmes and clarified the misunderstanding, the community started to enrol in the courses.
The short course manager reports how they were flexible in developing course schedule:

Usually, we organise many short course programmes at least two times, one on weekdays and one on the weekend. So it will be fair for people who are working and housewives.

In contrast, the rural community college is in one area of the Perak state where most of the residents are working in agriculture. The college premises is a campus building and it is the first higher learning institution in the area. For this reason, the rural community colleges faced some challenges in introducing the institution to the local community. The head of the Lifelong Learning Unit recalls:

Most of residents around here are peasants either in paddy field or palm-oil plantations. Based on the participants’ profiles their average salary is around RM600 and above per month (£130.00 equivalent). There are also many housewives who are self-employed or as a part-time based worker at the plantations. For this reason, it was quite challenging to promote the community college in the early years. The local community was not familiar with the tertiary institution, so they were afraid to come to the community college. This institution is the first of its kind in this area.

The geographical setting possibly limits the local community to enrol in short course programmes. The staff from the rural community college reported their approach to organise short course programmes at the villages:

We have some challenges in term of logistics since the residential area is scattered and quite deprived. There is limited public transport service; therefore, the participants need to use personal transport. So, we facilitated the potential participants by conducting short course programmes at public places that close to their residential area. For example, at the local community hall, schools or mosque that is available at the place. We brought materials, equipment and ingredients that needed to the place. We received good participation from the local community.
Another staff member reports a logistical challenge:

Since the rural community college is situated far from the town, it is also challenging for us to find several ingredients needed for certain courses. Some ingredients were not available in this area. Thus, we need to plan everything earlier so that we could prepare the ingredients adequately.

The accounts of the interviewees illustrate that there is a significant difference of participants’ backgrounds between the urban and the rural area. The circumstances of the participants at the urban institution are mixed and complex. The interviewees from both institutions report some challenges to overcome the perception of the local community in the early years of establishment. The urban community college needs to justify how affordable the short course programmes for the local community to learn, while the rural community colleges needs to familiarise the local community with the educational institution. The context settings influence the community college approaches in implementing lifelong learning

5.3.2 Promotional strategies and participants engagement

Studies showed a lack of information around learning opportunities hindered adults’ participation in learning activities (Moore et al., 2013; Boeren, 2016). Thus, the promotional strategies are very important to promote the community colleges and the learning opportunities that are offered to the local community. Within the context of the current study, the community colleges report how they conduct several promotional strategies including traditional media, face-to-face, and social media. For example, the short course manager in the urban community colleges shares:

We moved to the current premise in 2009. From that year to 2012, we reached out to the community to raise awareness about our institution and promote the learning programmes that are offered. We distributed flyers, pamphlets and brochures to schools, agencies, community halls, marketplaces, shopping malls and residential areas. In addition, we also participated in exhibitions at any related events that were organised by the community.
The head of the Lifelong Learning Unit in the rural area further explains:

It was quite challenging to promote the community college in the early years, especially because the villages in this area are scattered and quite deprived. We did many promotional strategies. For example, we distributed pamphlets in the residential area, night markets, community halls and any local events. Then, we reached out to schools, agencies and the district office (local authority). At one point, we inserted pamphlets in newspapers at several shops to publicise our institution.

The rural community college also had an advertisement board in front of the college building. The promotional manager at the rural community college states:

Previously, we have a big advertising board in front of our college that states two slogans - ‘learning never ends’ and ‘everyone can afford to learn’ - to raise learning awareness to the local community and promote the short courses.

In addition, the promotional manager at the rural community college highlights the effectiveness of face-to-face promotion over other media:

I found that face to face promotion is more effective than internet based. When we directly meet the potential clients, we could ‘touch’ their heart and build a stronger relationship than only through promotional materials. Besides, we usually give them an opportunity for a taster session of short course programmes.

The promotional strategies have gradually shifted from traditional media to social media. For example, the financial manager for the short courses in the rural community colleges shares:

Earlier, there were limited people who use mobile phones. But now, it is far easier; people keep asking me to add their friends into the group, so, the contact lists in the group keep growing.

The promotional manager at the urban institution remarks:
We used several online methods, particularly the website e-psh, and social media. For the website, we update the short course schedule every quarter of the year. For social media, especially Facebook and WhatsApp, we frequently update it with the short course schedule, some pictures of the courses conducted, and useful information relating to the skills courses that are offered. Now, Facebook plays a significant role. Once we have shared something, others help to share and make it viral.

Equally, the interviewees from the rural institution shared their engagement on social media:

At the moment we have three WhatsApp groups for the short course programmes. It is the platform where we will promote our latest courses. It is fast and practical; we could easily get numbers of participants in a short amount of time. We not only have regular participants but also several waiting lists in the WhatsApp group who are interested in certain courses. I assumed the implementation of the short course programmes for the following years would be easier.

During the time of interview, both colleges have been recognised by the local communities for their role in providing short course programmes to the community. As a result, anyone who attended the courses or knew about the community college would help to promote the short course programmes. In addition, some former learners who had a positive experience in the learning programme shared their success stories, as highlighted by the promotional manager in the urban college:

We have been successfully building our image as a lifelong learning provider in the local community. Now, the clients who come look forward to participating in the short course programmes. Besides, they themselves become the promoters for the short course programmes.

In the same way, the short course manager at the rural college reports:

Some participants shared their successful status on Facebook of how they started to receive orders from a customer as a result of the skills
that they acquired here. So, indirectly they helped to promote our short course programmes.

As well as individual participation, the interviewees speak about group participation through collaborative activities. Collaboration is more apparent at the urban community college than in the rural community college due to the setting of the institution. For instance, the head of the Lifelong Learning Unit at the urban community college remarks:

We have collaboration with twenty-two different institutions, such as schools, agencies and NGOs. For example, we have a long-term collaboration with four special education schools. At the beginning of the year, they will provide us with a year’s schedule of skills courses. Sometimes the courses are conducted at the school, but there will be several times they will come and have their training here.

Furthermore, many interviewees from both colleges emphasise the importance of positive relationships with the course participants. They shared some of the approaches that they took to ensure the participants are comfortable and have a sense of belonging to the institution. The short course manager from the rural community college explains:

We take seriously participants’ feedback and complaints and try our best to build a good rapport. For example, there was once a situation in which the participants complained about an instructor of a sewing course. So, we apologised to them and are more careful in choosing the short course’s instructor.

In addition, the interviewees mention how they acknowledged the active participants through some reward and incentive. The short course manager at the urban college remarks:

We invited the short course participants to join the institution’s events; for example, we appointed some of the active participants to become judges for our full-time students’ annual skills competition. In addition, we also give them some souvenirs, and incentives in the form of free
entrance for any one of the short courses that they are interested in for a year.

The interviewees from the rural community college share how they initiated a meeting between the entrepreneurs among the short course participants with an invitation to an afternoon tea to develop strong networking among local entrepreneurs. The head of department at the rural college describes:

We keep updating some tips that either relate to vocational skills that we provide or some entrepreneurship-related sharing on the short course’s WhatsApp group and Facebook page regularly. Also, we organised a meeting among the participants who have started a business. There, they share their stories, challenges, and get feedback from each other.

These accounts suggest that the community colleges have consistent engagement with their local communities. The use of up to date communication media such as Facebook and WhatsApp have contributed significantly to the promotional strategies of the institutions. These communication media have also led to greater engagement of the participants through continuous sharing of knowledge and experiences.

5.3.3 Awareness of lifelong learning policy

Findings show that the heads of the Lifelong Learning Unit from both institutions are aware of the community colleges’ role in delivering the national lifelong learning policy. They recognise the role of community colleges is to inculcate a learning culture within the local community, and they report that, in each year, there are several meetings between the Headquarters and all the community colleges in the country. The head of the Lifelong Learning Unit at the urban college explains:

During the recent meeting, we were reminded about the new Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015-2025 which contains an aim to develop a nation of lifelong learner. There are many ministries and institutions involved in achieving the aim, which includes the community colleges. As an institution that is close to the local community, we play an important role in developing learning culture for all walks of life.
Similarly, the head of department from the rural college states:

The establishment of the community colleges is a part of the bigger national lifelong learning policy. In this country, our role is quite prominent because we serve the local community. Our aim is to expand individuals’ capabilities through developing many different skills. It is hoped the skills that they gain could help individuals to generate some income and possibly enhances their quality of life.

During the interviews, most of the managers and staff in both settings did not seem aware of the national lifelong learning policy. They kept repeating the specific role of community colleges and highlighting their task to reach the institution’s KPI. One of the staff members says:

I am not sure the content of the national lifelong learning policy. But I think our task in reaching the institution’s KPI is a part of achieving the lifelong learning policy. Even though we did not directly mention it as achieving the national policy.

The same situation is evident in the rural college as one staff describes:

I knew there was a new education blueprint that explains the lifelong learning policy, but I never read it. For me, I understand the role of the community college in empowering local community to learn, particularly in the area of technical and vocational skills.

Findings from the accounts above show there are differences in the level of awareness of lifelong learning policy, based on job position. The managerial position is aware of the national lifelong learning policy, while the non-managerial positions focus on their duties to reach their KPIs.

As discussed in the previous section on the role of Headquarters, the KPI on numbers of participants was introduced to each community college as a way to translate the lifelong learning policy into a tangible mission by the community colleges. The KPI indicates the community colleges’ performance and effort in implementing the lifelong learning programme.
5.3.3.1 KPI as achievement of lifelong learning policy

One of the key themes highlighted by the interviewees from both colleges is the goal to achieve the institutions’ KPIs. The KPIs become an indicator of the college’s commitment to implementing lifelong learning policy. Interestingly, the heads of the Lifelong Learning Units from both institutions reported their aim is to exceed the minimum required KPI, as expressed by the head of department from the urban college:

This year, there are two minimum KPI requirements for each community college. First, a need for every staff member to reach 90 participants in short course programmes. Second, a need to achieve RM 100,000 (£18,182 equivalent) for the trust account. However, at the institution level, we aim higher for everyone to reach 150 participants in the short course programmes.

The urban community college sets a higher aim for the institution as compared to the minimum of 90 participants that outlined by the Headquarters. Likewise, the head of department from the rural college suggests that they want to ensure a better number of participants compared to 2015:

This year we have two types of KPI for each staff member; 90 participants and to reach RM100,000 (£18,182 equivalent) for the institution’s trust account. If I counted the number of staff times the number of participants, we need to get 3870 participants. However, in 2015 we reached 6647 participants in the short course programmes. So, we plan to get a better number this year.

The findings suggest that the middle-level managers set a higher goal for their institutions than the required participants' number set by the Headquarters. They were ambitious to ensure the colleges' performance is better than the previous year. The following section explains the challenges that the community colleges encounter and how they led the lower level manager(s) and staff to reach the institutions’ goals.
5.3.3.2 Institutions’ strategies to achieve the KPI

The interviewees from both community colleges emphasise the importance of reaching the institution’s KPI. The KPI that has been set by the Headquarters is 90 participants for each staff member and RM100,000 (£18,182 equivalent) to be raised for the trust account each year. The achievement of the KPI is seen as the primary measure of the institutions’ and individual staff performance in implementing the short course programmes.

At the end of 2016, both colleges had successfully reached the required KPI. The urban college reached 7973 participants and RM122,930 (£22,350 equivalent) for the trust account, while the rural college reached 6742 participants and RM 121,619.40 (£22,112 equivalent) for the trust account. Both colleges managed to exceed the minimum requirement and fulfil their goal to achieve a better position than in the previous year. The achievement suggests the effectiveness of middle managers in leading, stimulating, and supporting the staff to work together in their unit and achieve the goal. This section highlights the strategies that have been carried out by the community colleges in order to achieve the KPI.

Findings from the interviews suggest there are several strategies that contributed to the desirable achievement of the KPI. Among the strategies are working in a team, improving the promotional strategy, and facilitating the procedures for conducting the short course programmes. Firstly, the interviewees shared their approach of working in a team based on their technical unit. The head of the Lifelong Learning Unit from the urban community college explains:

We delegate the task to reach the KPI to each technical unit. So, the leader of the unit will discuss with their team members the type of courses, the schedule, and a programme coordinator who will be in charge for each of the short course programmes. The leader is accountable to ensure every member in the team achieves their individual KPI. However, since there is a high demand for tailoring and cooking courses from the local community, we also have staff that are appointed to organise short course programmes in those areas.
In the same way, the head of the Lifelong Learning Unit from the rural community college suggests that they divide the KPI into a smaller and achievable goal for the unit:

The KPI is divided out to every skills unit. Since we have five different skills units, so each unit needs to achieve RM20, 000 (£3,636 equivalent) for the trust account in a year. The leader of the unit will organise a meeting to plan for their team. They could organise any type of courses, even across different skills.

One of the technical unit’s leader at the urban institution shared some challenges for him in managing his team members:

As a leader for a unit, I could not deny that there are several staff members that are less motivated to reach their KPI. So, what we will do is, we will develop a schedule for the short course and put them to be in charge for several short course programmes. Most of the time they will agree and cooperate to conduct the short course programmes. Thus, slowly, we will achieve the KPI for the unit.

Another staff at the urban community college describes how working in a team facilitated her task to reach the KPI:

I may not achieve the KPI on my own. Luckily in our team, there is a member who is good in marketing. So, I focus on teaching the short course programmes while she concentrates on searching for participants.

The accounts above reveal the significant role of the Lifelong Learning Units at the community colleges in providing a clear institutional goal and working in a team in achieving the KPI. The task seems manageable when each technical unit focuses on its small goal. At the same time, the team members play complementary and reciprocate roles to help one another to reach the goal, thus contributing towards the productivity of the institution.
Secondly, the interviewees from the urban institution shared how they improve their promotional strategy. For example, the short course manager reports:

Previously we produced a one-year schedule of the short course programmes and distributed it at the beginning of the year. However, we faced many problems with participants’ attendance. They forgot that they had registered on the course at the beginning of the year, because of the long gap. So, we changed it by producing a short course schedule once every three months. As far as we are concerned, there are less issues with attendance because the participants are alert to the short course programmes on which they have registered.

In addition, a technical unit leader describes their unit’s approach to bring variety to the short course programmes that are offered:

We will not offer the same short course programmes for the following three months. However, we will develop different courses by mixing and matching the products or creating a theme so that the participants will always have a chance to acquire new skills.

The findings suggest that the community colleges, particularly the urban institution, reflect on their work processes and improve them to increase their productivity. These findings concur with a study by Mohd Nawi and Abdul Razak (2014) who investigated the perception of college staff about the management of the Lifelong Learning Unit in an urban institution. This study concludes that many staff members agreed that the leadership at the Lifelong Learning Unit is excellent in planning, dynamic, and very supportive in facilitating the staff to conduct the short course programmes.

Lastly, the head of the Lifelong Learning Unit at the urban community college explains how they facilitate the procedure to conduct the short course programmes. They developed an innovation on short course documentation procedures, called as ‘dokuset’. Interestingly, this innovation is not only being implemented at the institution level, but also at the national level. The ‘dokuset’ is a template of brief proposal of the short course programme. It consists; information about the course,
cost budget, and a report after the short course programme has been implemented. The head of the department describes:

We managed to develop an innovation to facilitate the procedures to conduct the short course programme, which is called ‘dokuset’. The ‘dokuset’ has helped to facilitate the task of the staff before and after the implementation of the programme. They don’t have to make a detail proposal, instead just filling the template of the ‘dokuset’. The ‘dokuset’ only focus on important particular and utilise a page with many information. The innovation was awarded a gold medal in a national innovation competition. Then, in 2015, the Headquarters suggested other community colleges should use the ‘dokuset’ in implementing the short course programmes.

This narrative shows an innovative procedural strategy which has improved the implementation of the short course programmes. The Headquarters play an important role in sharing best practices, as shown in their recommendation that the ‘dokuset’ developed by the urban community college to be implemented nationwide. Thus, it has benefited other colleges and is an excellent achievement of the institution.

5.3.3.3 Challenges to reach the KPI

The interviewees report three major challenges in implementing the short course programme which are, the limited budget, participants’ attendance, and the concentration on technical skills. The first of these issues is that there is a reduction of budget allocation for running the short course programmes and this had impacted on providing expert educator to teach certain courses. For instances, the short course manager in the urban community college explains:

We offer any type of skills development that are requested by the local community. If there is no expertise in the institution, we will have to outsource the programme to an external instructor. However, most of the time there is limited budget for the payment to the external instructor. So, we could not offer the courses.

Another short course manager reports:
There was a scheduled short course programme on massage on a certain date. However, during the time, there was no budget to pay for the external instructor. So, we need to cancel the programme.

Limited budget has affected the opportunity for the local community to acquire certain skills. At the institution level, it contributes to the slower achievement of the KPI. Consequently, it may impact the reputation of the community colleges as the provider of lifelong learning activities.

The second challenge is the issue of participants’ attendance. This issue has been repeated by many interviewees, especially from the rural institution. For example, a staff member remarks:

 Usually we will limit a course to a maximum of thirty participants. So, if others are interested in joining the course, they could not but had to wait for another session which will take some time to be scheduled. However, there were several times that some participants cancelled their attendance at the last minute, when it is not possible for us to contact the interested individual for replacement. It is really a loss since the ingredients or the materials have been prepared based on the number of participants. That’s a shame.

For this reason, the colleges have devised a method to overcome or at least mitigate the problem. The short course manager at the rural institution explains:

 We make a strict restriction on the participants. Once they have confirmed their attendance, they need to look for replacement if they cannot attend the course.

The accounts suggest that poor attendance leads to a wastage of resources which have been invested in for the short course programmes. However, the precautionary measure stated above has been implemented to lessen the issue.

The third challenge is the lack of demand for generic skills courses such as language courses. The leaders of the generic skills units from both institutions report
difficulties in getting participants for the language short course programme, as highlighted by the generic programme leader at the urban community college:

We have some challenges to get participants for our short course in language programme in order to reach our KPI. I remember offering English language short course programme to a retired pilot who came to our college. However, he seemed not interested in the language course; instead he inquired information for the cooking course.

Similarly, the generic programme leader at the rural community college reports:

As a leader for generic skills programme, I found there is limited interest in the English course from the local community. Perhaps because of the skills, this is assumed to be less significant in their lives. So, what we did is we focused our language programmes toward school students and people who are working in private companies.

The study has showed that, much as the colleges aim to encourage people to participate in learning programmes, there is limited demand for generic skills courses. The quotes above suggest a lack of interest among the community in the language courses particularly and the less technical courses generally. It is therefore quite challenging for the generic skills staff to achieve their individual KPIs.

5.3.4 Wider benefits of learning

Findings from the study reveal a significant contribution of short course programmes to the local community. All the interviewees highlight the positive impact of the short course programmes on the local community. For example, the head of department at the rural community college shares:

This place is also my hometown and I grew up here. Based on my observations for several years working, in some ways, the community colleges have successfully changed the mind-set of the local community in this area. Previously it was quite rare to see adults enrolled in learning programmes and it was considered an embarrassing activity,
since learning is usually associated with the youngsters. But now, many adults start to enrol in learning, and it becomes normal.

Many interviewees expressed their satisfaction and feeling of pride regarding their contribution to the community through the short course programmes. For example, the short course manager from the urban institution says:

I feel it is rewarding to work with the local community. Some of them were eager to practice the skills that they acquired, to serve their family members or start a small business to generate some income. I remembered a participant who always brought her daughter to join the short course programmes in cooking. Sometimes later, she told me that her daughter registered in a Diploma in Culinary Arts. I felt so happy as her daughter pursue the skills to a higher qualification.

This feeling of satisfaction and achievement is also shared by the data and record manager from the urban community college, who reports:

There were many participants who started home-based businesses. They practice the skills and slowly started to receive orders. Gradually they generate more income and register their business. Their achievement fulfils the aim of the national lifelong learning policy to empower the local community to a better quality of life.

The findings demonstrate some transformation in social and economic well-being in the local communities. These results are in line with many studies which illustrate a significant change in individual learners and their families indirectly as one of the benefits of participation in lifelong learning programmes (Schuller et al., 2017; Merrill, 2015; Biesta and Tedder, 2007; Bennetts, 2003). In a report on the wider benefits of learning, Schuller et al., (2017) outlined three main aspects which are health, employment, and social and community. The health benefits are reducing the risk of serious illness and contributing to positive mental health, while the employment benefits include increasing earning, retaining jobs, and improving the level of job satisfaction. Lastly, in terms of social and community impact, there is an increase of trust and togetherness in the society and raising awareness of individual
rights. The current study focuses on the benefit of technical skills courses to the local community.

The findings of the current study also concur with those of a study by Kipli, Mohd Azrulnizam, and Khairul Ashraf (2014) which explores the role of community colleges in stimulating entrepreneurial traits in the local community. The findings illustrate that the community colleges have successfully contributed in instilling entrepreneurial traits in their participants through five phases of their training programmes (in the form of a series of short course programmes). These phases are: creating awareness of entrepreneurship; developing business plans; skills courses; up-skilling or increasing and building on skills; and finally, the value-adding phase. Thus, the results illustrate the implementation of the short course programmes are in line with the national lifelong learning policy to enculture learning in the community and improve their quality of life.

5.4 Discussion

The findings reveal a centralised management in the implementation on lifelong learning policy at the community colleges level. There are positive and negative implications of the centralised management. Among the positive implications is the spirit of working collectively among the community colleges. For instance, the community colleges easily to collaborate, sharing best practices and reduce the replications among the institutions. The negative implication is a risk the Headquarters viewing society in a homogenised way. For example, the concentration on number of enrolments in the KPI by the Headquarters to monitor the community colleges’ performance in conducting lifelong learning programmes. For this reason, community colleges in different context, geography, and social settings being judge in the same way. This situation may create a pressure for the institution with less advantage setting, for example, a community college in a rural area with low socio-economic background of the local community.

5.4.1 The role of middle tier: a collective approach

The middle tier is described as various organisations that operate between local institutions and central government to support their duties (Hinton, 2013). Within the context of the current study, the role of Headquarters as the middle tier in the
implementation of the lifelong learning policy at the community colleges study is profound. The Headquarters develops a nationwide lifelong learning plan and provides the relevant level of support for all the community colleges. For this reason, the supports that are offered by the Headquarters were customised based on the contexts of the community colleges. In addition, as pointed out by interviewees, the Headquarters share best practice to implement the short course programmes among the community colleges. This illustrates the encouragement of collaboration rather than competition between one community college and another. The results are in line with those of other studies which advocated the significant role of middle tier in coordinating the subordinates (Greany, 2015; Hinton, 2013; Chapman and Hadfield, 2010). For example, a study by Chapman and Hadfield (2010) explore the capacity of the middle tier to broker and facilitate school-based networks within a context of complex multiple agendas. The study suggests a heuristic where the middle tier approach contributes to a greater coherence and integration within a networked system. Another study on the implementation of national equality legislation in schools in the UK asserts the pivotal role of local authorities (middle tier) in supporting regulation (Hinton, 2013). However, since the position of the local authorities has been changed, the study reported that many schools have little or non-existent support for equalities issues. The paucity of support may lead to a serious equality issues at some schools. The current study promotes the important role of the middle tier in managing the community colleges to tailor the national lifelong learning policy to the local communities in Malaysia.

According to the interviewees, the centralised management by the Headquarters contributed to a collective working culture in the community colleges. This is evidenced by a spirit of cooperation in working culture at both levels. The Headquarters inculcate working in a team among the community colleges, and each unit at each institution is working together to achieve their unit’s goals. The sense of collectivism could also be attributed to the cultural value in Malaysia. Scholars suggest that collectivists established their identity as being part of the group where they belong and that they generally prefer group work (Abdullah, 1996; Bochner, 1994). Furthermore, Abdullah stated that collectivists ‘promote a sense of oneness with other people and consider the group as a basic unit of survival’ (1996:104). This suggests that the collectivist prefers to feel integrated with a group and
indirectly shows a humble manner wherein the effort that they have made is not for personal gain but for the benefit of the group (Hofstede et al., 2010; Abdullah, 1996). Accordingly, findings from the study illustrate the usage of first-person plural pronoun ‘we’ instead of single person pronoun ‘I’ by many of the interviewees from the Headquarters and the community colleges. The ‘we’ orientation which reflects a value of collectivism (Hofstede et al., 2010; Abdullah, 1996). This result is in line with previous research by Wagner (1995) in the US which revealed that the collectivist is more likely to engage in cooperative behaviour than the individualist. However, this study also suggests a negative consequence of collectivism. For example, an issue of social ‘loaﬁng’. The ﬁndings revealed there are several staff that contribute less than other members of the group.

5.4.2 The notion of homogeneity in KPI undermine the diversity of local context

The sense of homogeneity showed through the way Headquarters monitor community colleges’ performance in implementing lifelong learning programmes through KPI. The KPI in this study refers to the number of enrolments in the short course programmes. It is almost certain that the KPI limits the rich stories of learning development and the diversity in the respective local community. Each community has a different story in terms of its context and history that could be an asset for the community development (Connolly, 1996). However, the urgent need to reach a certain number of participations in learning may restrain the community colleges from evaluating the effectiveness of the programmes that have been conducted to the particular setting. The issue of reaching a high number of enrolments has been debated by many scholars, among whom Wrigley argues ‘What really matters: new targets to meet? Higher math grades perhaps? Or caring and creative learners, a future, a sense of justice, the welfare of the planet and its people?’ (2001: 1). Scholars refer the ranking, statistic and numeric overview of education sectors as ‘governance by numbers’; the concentration on statistic in governance and management in some ways has limited the social and human values (Simola et al., 2011; Boeren, 2016). Furthermore, the application of numbers in explaining the achievement of education performance is reductionist in many dimensions; for example, in terms of methodology, it reduces a complex reality to numerical factors, and in term of context, it fails to understand the broader context of each setting.
(Wrigley, 2008). The current study presents a limitation of governance approach in terms of evaluating the effectiveness of lifelong learning programmes to the local communities through number of enrolments from different setting and context.

5.5 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter is to understand the implementation of lifelong learning policy at the community colleges. The data are gathered from interviews with the officers at the Headquarters and the staff at two selected community colleges. The Headquarters encouraged a collective working spirit within the institutions to maximise their resources and improve productivity. The findings also demonstrate a difference between the managerial position and non-managerial position in understanding the lifelong learning policy at the community colleges. As explained in the findings, the Lifelong Learning Units from both institutions showed an ambitious leadership in aiming a higher goal for the colleges in terms of their KPIs than the number required by the Headquarters. For this reason, the institutions find ways to minimise potential conflict among staff by organising meetings, facilitating the procedures, and supporting in any problems that the staff encounter in implementing the short course programmes. Lastly, the chapter also illustrates some social and economic benefits that are experienced by the local communities after some period of involvement in the lifelong learning programmes. The benefits fulfil the aspiration of the national lifelong learning policy that aim for the communities to have a better quality of life.
Chapter 6: Biography, Transition and Learning: Developing Vocational Skills

6.1 Introduction

Chapters 6 and 7 explore the biographies and learning experiences of the micro-level (adult learners) to understand why they chose to engage in short-course programmes at their local community colleges. The biographies reveal an interplay between external structure and personal agency; the participants engaged in learning activities to overcome various life challenges. Data were drawn from face-to-face interviews with sixteen adult women aged 27–61 at two community colleges, with eight participants from each community college. Fourteen participants had Malay ethnicity; the remaining two had Indian ethnicity. All participated actively in learning with a minimum of fifteen enrolment in various short-course programmes in 2016.

Structurally, this chapter combines findings and discussion related to each group. Data were analysed using the Learning Career theoretical framework developed by Bloomer and Hodkinson (2000). This chapter demonstrates the importance of the concept of “agency” for understanding why adults participate in learning. In his study on learning through lives, Hodkinson (2008) proposes the following four scenarios involving the relationship between learning and agency: learning and agency to sustain existing conditions; learning and agency related to identity changes; learning and agency related to positional changes; and learning and restricted agency. Building on these findings, the present study discusses ways in which participants demonstrate a sense of agency and learning during various types of career changes.

The interviews revealed the impact of work-related identity on adult participation in learning. The participants were grouped into four work-related identity categories: unemployed, self-employed, employed full-time, and retired. These categories were used to group together individuals whose participation in learning activities was influenced by the same transitions, challenges, and barriers. The first group included unemployed participants who had resigned after a long period of employment and become full-time housewives. The second group consisted of self-employed
participants who were full-time housewives but also ran home-based businesses. Participants in the third group had full-time employment and worked for the federal government. In the fourth group, participants were retired from public or private employment. Although there were several overlapping themes, the present discussion focuses on the prevalent themes in each group. The abbreviation [U] indicates a community college in an urban setting; [R] indicates a community college in a rural setting.

6.2 Unemployed Participants

Three out of the sixteen participants defined themselves as unemployed. Ruby, Sree, and Fatima all attended an urban community college. These participants shared similar experiences during the transition from employment to unemployment. They all participated in short-course programmes to develop their vocational skills.

6.2.1 Ruby

Ruby [U] was 41 and the mother of two children. Ruby’s life trajectory illustrates upward social mobility through education. The educational qualification she acquired gave her an opportunity to obtain professional employment. In describing an earlier stage of life, she shared the following story:

I was brought up in a village. Despite my humble upbringing, I managed to obtain a degree in Economics and a Master of Business Administration from a local university. I taught at several educational institutions for seventeen years, but I could not continue, due to unavoidable circumstances. I was therefore forced to make one of the most difficult decisions in my life.

At the time of the interview, Ruby was in her tenth month of unemployment. Leaving her lecturing job was not her intended career plan. It all began when she encountered difficulties while carrying out doctoral research in Business Management. The unexpected problem hampered her progress and forced her to leave the programme. She chose to withdraw from her studies and resigned from her post as a lecturer. Her faith had helped her adapt to this career transition in a positive way. She planned to expand the family business that she and her husband managed
jointly. Their consultancy firm provided training in soft skills, such as public speaking, motivation, and career consultation. Ruby hoped to expand their offerings by adding sewing-skills training, reflecting her passion for sewing:

Upon resigning from a lecturing position that I had dearly loved for the previous 17 years, I did some research on how to establish a new career based on my passion for sewing. Why sewing? The first reason was that I was fond of it. I started to cut sewing materials when I was five years old. The second reason… I think… was family influence. I researched information that could elevate my sewing skills, with the mission of establishing a career related to sewing. Perhaps God will give me a chance to do what I love. [...] To achieve this, I need to have a certification that confirms my expertise in sewing.

Ruby's narrative makes clear that her decision to participate in sewing courses was triggered by unemployment and her childhood passion for sewing. She explained that her family had strong cultural capital in this field and a reputation for skilful sewing. Later, her plan to expand the consultancy by providing sewing courses gave Ruby an opportunity to improve her own sewing skills. To equip herself, she enrolled in a short-course programme in 2016. Ruby acknowledged the challenges and discomfort she faced in making the transition from a professional career to a manual job as a tailor. She also found it difficult to master this new field:

The challenge was to know what I needed to do… I knew that I wanted to develop a business related to providing sewing skills. Nevertheless, the pathway was not clear, and it was different from the academic pathway. I didn't know the procedure for becoming a certified tailor or the tools of the trade. It was a new field for me.

Ruby experienced an internal conflict between her previous position and present situation. To combat this, she became an independent learner and began to acquire information related to vocational skills. Despite holding a master’s degree, she acknowledged that her academic credentials did not make her better than her peers. She needed to start anew. She took control over her life and was able to move beyond academia to envisage a different future in tailoring. At the time of the
interview, she was preparing to obtain a Level 3 Certificate in Tailoring through an Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) platform.

6.2.2 Sree

Sree [U] is of Indian ethnicity; she is in her mid-40s and the mother of four children. She grew up on an estate and came from a disadvantaged socioeconomic background. Nevertheless, she completed secondary school at the local public school, and then began working in a factory as a production operator to help her family and earn a living. After marriage, she worked in a furniture company as a human resources manager. This job lasted for twenty years and provided a stable income. When the company went through a restructuring process, some workers were offered the option of a Voluntary Redundancy Scheme (VRS) to make way for new technology. Sree opted for the scheme. At the time of the interview, she was in her third year of unemployment.

Sree faced a difficult predicament after the VRS, as she no longer had a monthly income. She tried to do most things herself, making her family’s food and clothes. Sree’s new role as a full-time housewife changed her attitude towards sewing. In the past, her mother had suggested that she learn to sew; Sree was not interested because she could afford to buy whatever clothes she wanted. However, being unemployed meant that her priorities and focus changed to providing for her household. She became a regular participant in sewing courses and started to make school uniforms, everyday clothes, and traditional costumes for her family. Within five months, she took nineteen different short courses on sewing.

The desire to have own income prompted Sree to learn vocational skills. Her former career and identity made her value vocational skills in a different way. Without a job, she depended on her husband to provide her with necessities. As she explained:

When I was working, I just bought any clothes that I wanted because I had my own income. I always had extra money for myself to cover my own needs. However, things changed after the VRS. Since I was a housewife, I had to think more about family survival and less about myself. I reckoned that I needed to acquire a new set of skills that could
be used daily to help me reduce household expenditure. I therefore learned how to sew, as a cost-cutting measure.

Initially, Sree wanted to learn to sew simply to meet her own needs. However, after participating in several short-course programmes, she realised that there was an opportunity to generate income. She also felt the need to help her husband pay for family expenses. To become fully involved in the sewing business, she knew that she would have to enhance her skills:

I wanted basic sewing skills, including sewing a straight line using different materials. Some materials are thick, some are stretchable, and some are slippery. They must be handled in different ways. I therefore planned to attend a full-time sewing course taught a range of skills, from basic to advanced. It could be a systematic learning system or formal qualification, like a certificate or diploma. I had to consider the fee and class schedule, so that I could give it my full commitment.

The drive to earn additional income motivated Sree to apply herself to sewing. However, due to her situation, she had to consider the fees and find a course schedule that suited her family’s commitments.

6.2.3 Fatima

Fatima [U] was 38 and the mother of two sons. She grew up in a rural Malay village and received her formal education at the local school. Fatima managed to obtain a Diploma in Computer Science. After graduating, she worked as a temporary teacher for six months. It was hard for Fatima to find a permanent teaching job because the vacancies required candidates with a bachelor’s degree. Although she had teaching experience, she did not get a placement. Instead, Fatima managed to get a contract job as a history teacher in a private secondary school, where she worked for eight years. Although she enjoyed being a teacher, the school was far from her house.

It was March 2014. A non-job-related workload and the need to commute for two hours daily was causing me unnecessary stress. When my application to transfer to a closer school was rejected, I chose to quit. In
the beginning, I regretted my decision to quit. But I was not meant for the job…

After taking some time for reflection, Fatimah accepted her decision as a positive step. It was an opportunity for her to learn and acquire new skills in a vocational field. She admitted that, with her new cooking and sewing skills, she could take better care of her family. She was also able to save a lot of money by baking cakes and pastries and providing home-cooked meals for her family. Fatima became passionate about elevating her sewing and cooking skills to another level. She reflected upon how limited her living skills were. She regretted not having acquired such skills when she was young. As her husband was the only breadwinner, Fatima reported some difficulties in paying the course fees:

I depended on my husband to pay the course fees. On average, it cost me about MYR40.00 (£7.00 equivalent) for a four-day course. Obviously, it was cheaper than other places. However, since I attended many courses, it cost me a lot and my husband always complained about it.

Fatima and her husband experienced marital disputes because their limited finances made it difficult to prioritise things. After participating in some short-course programmes, she realised the potential of starting a business with her newly acquired skills:

In the future, I plan to have my own tailoring business, making school uniforms and women’s attire. The trigger for me was the fact that, when I was surrounded by families and friends who knew that I sewed my own clothes, they started to ask whether I would like to sew for them.

Fatima’s account reveals that she could see a market for school uniforms and women’s traditional costumes. She also mentioned that her peers played a significant role in motivating her to make use of her skills. She became aware that there was a demand for her tailoring services among potential customers.
6.2.4 Discussion: Learning and agency in relation to identity change

A key finding drawn from the participants’ narratives was that the drive to participate in learning activities was primarily a coping strategy, used to overcome unemployment. This group of participants demonstrated their ‘agentic’ qualities by accepting the shift in their work-related identities from being employed to becoming unemployed. Their narratives illustrate the structuration concept, where an individual action takes place within the interplay between structure and agency (Giddens and Sutton, 2013; Merrill, 2015). The participants had different reasons for being unemployed; some were structural and others cultural (i.e., normative expectations of gender roles). Structural reasons can be seen in the narratives of Ruby and Sree. Ruby was forced to leave her job after failing to obtain a doctoral degree, which had subsequently become a requirement for academic roles at institutes of higher education. By contrast, Sree was a victim of her organisation’s restructuring policy and was declared redundant. The combination of structural and cultural reasons is demonstrated by the case of Fatima, who resigned from her job after an application to transfer to a school closer to home was rejected. Commuting to her workplace drained her physically; she also had two sons to look after. She could not juggle the competing responsibilities of working and household chores. Such stories demonstrate that both structural and cultural factors impinged on the participants’ ability to remain in employment. This is in line with the concept of ‘learning career’ proposed by Bloomer and Hodkinson (2000), who argue that careers are erratic rather than linear, due to factors that shape an individual’s life course. These participants chose to acquire vocational skills to cope and adapt to their new identities as full-time housewives.

6.2.5 Triggering factors: The drive to participate in learning programmes

The findings of the current study appear to confirm previous studies, which have suggested that ‘triggering factors’ encouraged participants to reflect on their lives and participate in learning programmes (Biesta et al., 2011; Biesta and Tedder, 2007; Ecclestone, 2007; Merrill, 2004). For example, Biesta and colleagues suggest that adults participate in learning as ‘individuals respond to events in their lives, often to gain control over aspects of their lives’ (2011: 6). Other scholars have asserted that adults are likely to participate in learning as a way of managing change
in a current situation (West, 1996; Merriam and Heuer, 1996; P. Hodkinson et al., 2008). As Biesta, et al. (2011) have argued, an individual can respond in many different ways, depending on the context. Some adults choose to engage in formal education, while others prefer to enrol in non-formal learning programmes that may require less commitment or prove less academically daunting. Their interaction with an educational institution may help adult learners to perform and adapt to their new identities effectively (George, 1993). Within the context of the current study, Ruby, who resigned from her role as a lecturer to take control of her life, was able to move beyond an academic career path and envisage an entirely different future in tailoring. Similarly, Sree and Fatima developed a passion for sewing after becoming full-time housewives. They both reflected on their life stories and regretted taking for granted the sewing skills they learned when they were younger. They appreciated the opportunity to learn vocational skills and became enthusiastic and active participants in various short courses. Furthermore, Sree and Fatima began to appreciate the intrinsic value of learning to achieve a utilitarian purpose, as they realised the economic potential of a career in tailoring. This finding contrasts with Bloomer and Hodkinson (2000), who found that learners attach an intrinsic value to learning, even when they initially participated for purely utilitarian reasons. The present finding is in line with the social empowerment model, which asserts that money inspires change and helps individuals gain greater control over their lives (Zimmerman and Warschausky, 1998). Here, participants responded by gaining control of their current situations and adapting to their new identities through financial security.

6.3 Self-employed participants

Five of the eight participants from rural settings were self-employed. These participants engaged in self-employment to generate income from home, while, at the same time, performing their maternal roles and looking after children. One participant owned a shop that supplied bakery ingredients. All of them had legal companies that were registered with the local authority. This section describes their life stories.
6.3.1 Farah

Farah [R] was 56 and the single mother of four children. She grew up in a rural village and had a challenging upbringing. She had limited opportunities to gain a good formal education because the schools were far away; they lived on a farm deep in the forest. Despite the challenges she experienced, Farah was determined to get a good formal education. However, her parents asked her to stop going to school and to help with household chores. She had to take care of her siblings while her parents went out to work on their farm. Later, at the age of 17, she got married. With her family growing, she felt the need to help her husband provide materially for the family. She started sewing children’s school uniforms and everyday clothes:

I never had any proper sewing lessons before. It all started when I was forced to make my children’s clothes. After my neighbours noticed that I could sew, they asked me to take orders for them. After some time, I began to receive many orders and the business started expanding. Eventually, I became a seamstress… (laugh). Then the sewing became my source of income.

In 2011, after her children had grown up and her husband had passed away, Farah had more time to participate in learning activities. She expressed her admiration for the many learning institutions, which, according to her, offered better learning opportunities. Initially, she was hesitant to enrol in a short-course programme at the community college, as she describes below:

My friend invited me to join a short-course programme at the community college. But I said ‘I am shy about learning at this age. I am too old. College is only for youngsters. When I entered college and was selected to enrol in one of the courses, I felt so eager and excited. I’m not shy anymore.

The age factor gave her a sense of inferiority. Possibly, in her culture or society, learning was associated with children or youngsters. Farah had previously been rejected from sewing courses:
The incident happened when I was 46. I went to join a sewing course in an institution. I was excited to learn, but they said, ‘We are sorry, the course is only for people aged 45 and below’. At that time, I felt a bit hopeless...I was too old, and there was no room for me to learn.

The same situation was reported in studies by Gallacher et al., (2002) and Cleary et al. (2002), involving adults who returned to education in the United Kingdom and Europe. They found that older adults exhibited low self-confidence in traditional learning contexts. Farah’s account revealed that she had a desire to learn, but her age limited her opportunities. There was an age-based policy of discrimination.

Farah had good reasons for wanting to learn. Among others, she was experiencing a health issue that made it impossible to sit for very long. She started to ask around about ways to use her skills and resources. She signed up for courses that taught participants to produce processed food:

I used to take orders for sewing clothes, but now I had a health issue. So, I had to stop sewing. I needed to do something that allowed me to move around and not stay in one place for many hours. [...] I joined a food-processing course and planned to produce food products to generate income. After participating in a few food-processing courses, I now know how to make burger patties, fish cakes, nuggets, sausages, chilli sauce, noodles, and more.

Farah was determined to improve her household's socioeconomic status, despite her relatively advanced age. She actively participated in a few short-course programmes and learned to make various food products, which could later become a specialised skill.

6.3.2 Dayang

Dayang [R] was 59 and the single mother of four children; she left formal education in lower secondary school. As she explained:

I went to school only until the lower secondary. During that time, our family was in a difficult economic situation. There was no support for me
to continue my study. My father told me that there was no need for a girl to continue learning. So I stopped school and started working in several factories in the city.

Dayang’s narrative reveals that educated women were frowned on by society. As a result, she did not complete secondary school, opting instead to work in several factories. At the age of 20, she got married and moved to a rural area, the birthplace of her husband. She was employed in a series of low-skilled jobs, working as a farmer, an oil-palm seed collector, and a school security guard. After her husband passed away in 2002, Dayang started a home-based baking business.

In 2002, after my husband passed away, I learnt to make cakes and biscuits on my own. I started a small business from home. I sold them to government offices, schools, and restaurants. I used the proceeds from the sales to support my children. After some time, when my business grew, I felt that I needed to learn.

Dayang acknowledged that she obtained a great deal of information by participating in training and short-course programmes. She therefore took many different courses, learning to make different types of bread and cake decorations. She also studied financial management and online business, among other topics.

My participation in the short courses helped a lot in my business. Every course helped me in a different way. The sharing from the courses not only guided me in the production of products but also in organising my business. I do not know what would have happened to my business without attending such courses.

In addition, Dayang managed to reduce her business costs by producing her own ingredients (sausages, ketchup, noodles, etc.) as she had been taught to do in food-processing courses. Dayang provided a better service for her customers by making her own sausages for pizza toppings:

Recently I learned how to make sausages and I made them straight away. They were tastier, with more meat, than the ones sold in the market. Now, I use homemade sausages as pizza toppings.
Dayang described how she had benefited from attending short courses; the knowledge she acquired had helped her establish her business.

6.3.3 Ira

Ira [R] was 45 and the mother of seven children. She grew up in a rural part of Kedah, a state in northern Peninsular Malaysia. Her parents later moved to another state with an oil plantation under a Federal Land Development Authority relocation programme to eradicate poverty. She described her family as belonging to the lower socio-economic class. Ira received her primary and secondary education at a state religious school. She was offered the chance to study for a Diploma in Craft in a different state, but her mother was reluctant to let her go. Her parents believed that women should focus on domestic chores and look after their families. Once, she asked her mother’s permission to learn sewing. Her mother agreed, on condition that she did not leave the village. Unfortunately, there were no learning institutions or private sewing courses in the village, so Ira was forced to wait to pursue her dream.

After she got married, her husband did not have a permanent job; the couple found it challenging to make a decent living. As the family was growing, Ira needed more resources to provide for the children materially.

I asked myself, ‘How long do I have to be like this?’ As the Malay proverb says, ‘If the bark of the palm tree is not broken, how can we obtain the sago inside?’ I needed to do something to improve my life by going back to learn.

In her account, Ira used a metaphor or proverb to explain her struggles in life and the sacrifices she needed to make to improve her life. With the support of her husband, she began searching for information on tailoring courses.

My husband supported my intention. Initially, I asked a few friends whether I could learn from them, but they were not willing to teach me. I took it as a challenge to find a way out. When I listened to a promotion on the radio for a private curtain-making course, I was excited. However, the fee was MYR 670.00 (£110.00 equivalent). I could not afford it…. but I was determined to enrol. I sold some of my jewellery. I said to my
husband ‘I will pawn the jewellery for some money, and I will get it back. With God’s will’. I needed to work hard and sacrificed for things that I loved. I needed to prove that I could do it. At the time, my mum was nagging me ‘Hey Ira…what do think you’re doing? Will you able to get that jewellery back?’

The above account illustrates the challenges and barriers that Ira experienced in trying to learn. However, she had a strong agency to find a solution despite her friends’ refusal and her mother’s criticism. Fortunately, her husband was her great supporter. The course that Ira attended gave her a good foundation in sewing curtains, including fabric measurement and needlework. After a week of learning, she received an order for curtains. The payment she received from the order helped her reclaim her jewellery. This proved to her mother that she had the ability to succeed. After that, Ira continued learning other curtain patterns from the private tailor. She invested almost MYR4000.00 (£640.00 equivalent) in lessons with the private tailor. One day, she was surprised to hear from her friend about a similar course organised by a community college, with a much cheaper fee.

I was excited to enrol in the short-course programme. I enjoyed everything about the course, the staff, teachers, friends, and the environment. It is so good.

After participating in her first short-course programme in sewing, Ira declared that she liked the educator, her peers, and the environment. Participating in sewing courses helped her to enhance her sewing skills. Ira felt that the determination to change her life had kept her highly motivated to continue learning.

6.3.4 Lisa

Lisa [R] was in her early thirties and the mother of two children. She grew up in a rural area. After secondary school, she moved to a different state and worked in a restaurant. After five years of working, she got married. Later, she went back to her hometown with her husband. Lisa wanted to do something in life and embarked on a quest to discover and develop skills to earn money:
I joined many courses at the private shops in town for bread making, chocolate decorating, curtain sewing, and many more. The tuition fees were expensive. For example, I joined a five-day bread-making course which cost MYR 90.00 (£15.00 equivalent) per day, for a total of MYR 450.00 (£50.00 equivalent). However, the ingredients needed to make bread were expensive. It was not suitable to sell in the rural market where I lived.

At the time of the interview, Lisa had a stable career as a food caterer, producer of homemade local traditional confectionaries, and supplier of home-made ice cream. She loved to up-skill her abilities and learn to make different types of new products. She aimed to learn as much as she could:

Now, I am a regular participant in the short-course programmes. I have learned how to make traditional and modern desserts. Some people said that I had learned enough, but I just ignored them. If I do not receive any order on the weekend, I will find a class.

She was now in charge of her destiny and this motivated her.

There is no one to change our lives other than ourselves. I want to be independent economically …even from my husband. It does not mean that I want to overpower him; it is just for own satisfaction. At the same time, I need to prepare for any eventuality. If anything happens to my husband, I should have financial stability. I should be able to step up and play the role of the breadwinner instead of asking for help. In fact, nowadays…skills are precious. Some people are willing to pay a large amount of money to get our services.

Lisa’s account shows that she was determined to be financially independent and not to rely on others. At the same time, she highlighted the conflict between her agency and a culture in which women were not expected to compete with men. Her quest to become economically secure was often seen as socially deviant; wives were expected to be humble and obedient and to let their spouses play the role of breadwinner.
6.3.5 Shalia

Shalia [R] was 31 and married, with four children. After secondary school, she worked as a factory operator. After five years, she got married and moved to another town. At the time of the interview, she had just moved back to her hometown for a year to care for her parents and in-laws, who were in poor health. She and her husband had plans to open a shop selling bakery ingredients:

My parents were unwell and so were my in-laws. We thought of starting a business instead of just depending on his salary. We wanted to change our lives for the better. So, we decided to open a bakery supply shop, since it is hard to find baking ingredients in the village.

Shalia and her husband focused on fulfilling their plans. At the time of the interview, the bakery supply shop had been operating for six months. The shop was located in a strategic place in the village. Shalia was fortunate because she had an early exposure to baking skills. Her mother used to run a home-based bakery business. Eventually, the informal learning that she acquired grew into a passion for baking. She was grateful for the opportunity at the community college in her hometown, near her house:

I learned many things from the short course and not just about baking and food decoration. In a short course on business development, we went to visit the Companies Commission of Malaysia in the state capital. During the visit, we were taught the steps to apply for business licenses; we also learned about the Companies Act and statutory obligations, such as submitting annual returns to the agency. It was really helpful.

Shalia shared her excitement at having learned many things by participating in the short-course programmes. At the same time, she wanted a baking certification. With this qualification, she could become a trainer and expand the business more easily in future. She was also preparing a portfolio for the Level Two Malaysian Skills Certificate in baking. Shalia said that she was happy to have a supportive husband who encouraged her to develop her interest. She had a source of strength in her learning and career journey. The courses have helped her manage the business more
effectively. After the course, she became careful with expenses, documenting everything. She controlled the finances and direction of the business.

I needed training in business management, especially when it came to financial issues. Luckily, I had an opportunity to learn about it here at the community college. They taught me to develop an accounting report and asked me to record all transactions. Previously, I spent the profit on new stock. This made me lose track of the business profit. Now, I clearly record daily transactions and document each expense. The course helped me track my business performance.

At the end of the interview, Shalia said that she wanted to keep learning to expand her bakery ingredients business.

6.3.6 Discussion: Learning and agency for the betterment of life

The accounts of self-employed participants revealed that socio-economic background was not a key factor in individual participation in learning activities. These participants, regardless of their education or economic status, demonstrated their agency by taking the opportunity to acquire knowledge and skills for a better life. Their narratives showed that they were actively engaged in learning programmes run by local agencies, institutions, and village committees. For instance, Farah was involved in skill-development programmes run by the village committee and Dayang attended many training sessions conducted by the Agricultural Institute. They participated in learning programmes that were relevant and practical, given their situations. These findings were similar to those of Chang, et al. (2012) on the nature of adult engagement in learning in Taiwan. This survey (n=1323) revealed that women of low socioeconomic status were highly engaged in learning activities. It contradicted both qualitative and quantitative studies on adult education, which found that adults from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds with low levels of initial education were less likely than others to participate in learning programmes (Dincer et al., 2016; Ng, 2010; Boeren, et al., 2012; Desjardins et al., 2006; Gorard and Rees, 2002). These studies found that a negative learning disposition inhibits and creates a barrier for these adults, making it difficult for them to participate in learning. Dincer, et al. (2016) further explained that, regardless of gender, adults
were unlikely to participate in popular non-formal educational fields (e.g., business, language, humanities, craft skills, and computer studies). The current study findings are in stark contrast to the Matthew-effect phenomenon in adult education, which asserts that advantaged adults (from advantaged socio-economic backgrounds, with a positive learning disposition) are more likely to enrol in adult education programmes than disadvantaged adults (Boeren, 2009; Boeren, et al., 2012).

6.3.7 Gender roles: Social perceptions and expectations

The findings of the present study reveal that cultural factors made it difficult for the participants to obtain a formal education. The five participants from rural settings were born after Malaysia gained independence in 1957. Post-independence, the Government of Malaysia embarked on a vigorous and ambitious infrastructure-development programme, especially in the rural areas. During that time, there was an expansion of educational opportunities and a growing awareness of education in Malaysian society (Muhamad and Associates, 2004; Leong, 1997). Nevertheless, in 1957, national statistics showed that, among secondary-school students, males outnumbered females by a ratio of 2:1 (Noor and Mahudin, 2016). This ratio reflected the traditional cultural values and expectations of women’s roles within a patriarchal society (Hirschman, 2016; Ng and Chee, 1999). Traditionally, there appears to have been a division of labour between men and women. While men were expected to work and provide materially for their families, women were expected to be caregivers at home. The participants’ accounts of childhood demonstrate that educating women was seen as ‘wasteful’, because women would always end up doing menial domestic work: ‘however high a woman’s education is, her place is still in the kitchen’ (Abdullah et al., 2008: 452). This situation was illustrated by the stories of participants who had to stop compulsory formal education to look after their families and become housewives.

Gradually, many parents started to see the value of education for their daughters. This change can be seen in the narratives of participants who were born in 1970s and 1980s. They managed to complete secondary school. According to the National Educational Statistics, female enrolment in secondary school rose to 47.6% in the 1980s from 40.6% in the 1970s (Noor and Mahudin, 2016). Nevertheless, few girls received tertiary education. Universities and colleges only became formally
established in the 1950s; they were located in the capital city. Some participants were prevented from learning because their families did not allow them to travel. This was another cultural conflict for those participants whose families clung to strong cultural traditions. It is also a Malaysian cultural value to have a strong hierarchy of power, where elders are respected and normative expectations involve following orders (Abdullah, 1996). For example, children are expected to do what older people say, whether or not they agree. The findings of the current study show that cultural capital hindered the participants’ educational opportunities. In this, the results are consistent with UK studies of adults in higher education (Fuller, 2007; Withnall, 2006; Merrill, 2004). The UK studies found that parents with no or limited basic formal education had low expectations for their children at school. Although these studies took place in a different context, there are parallels with the cultural perception, among certain groups in society, that women must fill expected roles.

Further research by Biesta and associates have argued that individual position is always historical and geographical as ‘each person’s narrative is a story of its time’ (2011: 88). In this study, five out of eight rural participants from the same generation experienced similar structural and cultural challenges. There was a strong expectation that they would assume the traditional role of women, who were not encouraged to complete formal education or continue on to tertiary education. The findings also demonstrated that ‘learning lives are always structured lives’ (Biesta, et al., 2011: 88). However, after these participants married and had growing families, they encountered economic hardships. They looked for opportunities to learn vocational skills, such as catering or sewing, so that they could generate income from home while continuing to play the role of housewives. The findings of this study contribute to the existing literature by drawing an explicit picture of how societal structures, such as social class, ethnicity, and gender, influence education.

6.3.8 The importance of a supportive family

These findings show that the participants’ husbands were supportive of their wish to take short-course programmes. Some participants said that their husbands did the chores when they were attending courses. The courses not only increased the participants’ chances of earning; they were also seen as enhancing the roles these housewives played at home. The participants’ decision to engage specifically in
cooking and sewing reflected the prevailing societal norms within Malaysia; these were important skills that women were expected to use to ensure the wellbeing of their families. This may be why the participants’ families, and particularly their husbands, supported their wives in taking courses. This finding contrasts with previous study by Merrill (2004) which revealed that most learners with high socioeconomic status in relation to education experienced marital conflict and unsupportive partners. Other studies have shown that family responsibilities prevented women from participating fully in learning (McIntyre, 2012; Gouthro, 2007). In this study, none of the participating housewives reported marital problems related to their learning. One possible explanation for these contradictory findings involves the patriarchal sociocultural context in which these relationships took place. In Malaysia, even very educated women are expected to obey their husbands. Marriage is also revered (Noor and Mahudin, 2016; Abdullah et al., 2008); married women are respected and held in higher esteem than unmarried women. They are not expected to be disrespectful to their husbands.

6.3.9 Two-Income families and female economic independence

Learning has helped women gain some economic independence from their husbands. The present study reveals a shift in traditional gender roles, whereby women are no longer reliant on their husbands but are becoming independent. As Noor and Mahudin claim ‘the traditional demarcation of labour is no longer strictly adhered to and both men and women occupy work and family roles’ (2016: 717). This reflects a paradigm shift from one- to two-income families, in which both women and men are expected to be in the workforce to earn an income (Noor and Mahudin, 2016). Nevertheless, studies have shown that Malaysian women are still expected to do most domestic work, despite their involvement in economic activities (Hirschman, 2016; Noor and Mahudin, 2016). This is consistent with the findings of Hochschild and Machung (1989), who argue that women have to carry out the ‘second shift’; in other words, they are dispropotionately expected to take on household responsibilities in addition to paid work. Abdullah, et al. (2008) have asserted that the traditional home-and-family role of women has not changed, particularly among rural women.
6.4 Participants with Full-time Employment

Four of the sixteen participants were in full-time employment. Of these, three were educators. Maya [U] is a university tutor while Yati [R] and Rose [R] are teachers in secondary schools. Another participant, Zetty [U], is a clerk in a state court. This section describes their involvement in the learning-through-life course.

6.4.1 Maya

Maya [U] was 29 and a single young adult who worked as a tutor in a public university. Maya grew up in a small town in the northern part of the country. She described her childhood as troublesome and said that her mother was very patient in dealing with her naughty behaviour. This behavioural problem became worse when she was scolded during formal education. She disliked the approach of the teachers and disengaged further from school.

I didn't like going to school. The teachers made me stressed. There was one time when I came to school and was scolded by the teachers for my poor attendance record. For this reason, I hated going to school. However, my mother persuaded me to sit for the national examination. Thank God that I passed and got a good result.

After finishing secondary school, Maya was admitted to university in the capital, Kuala Lumpur, which is quite far from her hometown. She enrolled in the Diploma in Arts course. During her first year, she was seriously injured in a fall, while practicing for a performing art class:

I was badly injured after falling in training. For this reason, I needed to undergo a frequent physiotherapy treatment in hospital. This process was time consuming. At the same time, I felt miserable, disabled, and isolated. The situation made me miss my mother. So, I chose to defer my studies and moved back to my hometown. Since we lived separately (her mother was remarried), every day I went to the restaurant where my mother worked to help her.
Through volunteering at the restaurant where her mother worked, Maya learned to cook, serve customers, and manage a restaurant. She also managed to join a six-month sewing-skills course. After three years of the treatment, she felt the need to advance her studies:

I realised that it was time for me to continue my education. I knew that only education could change one’s life.

Luckily, she was admitted to the Bachelor’s Degree in Linguistics Literature at a public university. After completing her bachelor’s degree, she studied for a Master’s Degree in Linguistics at the same university. With these formal qualifications, she was hired by a local university as a tutor and a research assistant. This situation suggests that Maya’s academic credentials provided an opportunity for upward social mobility. However, Maya had learned a lot about business during her medical hiatus; this indirectly facilitated her career trajectory in some ways. She was appointed to teach two undergraduate modules: lifelong learning and entrepreneurship. The later required her to be knowledgeable about vocational skills and entrepreneurship. She decided to enrol at a community college to acquire these skills, which were crucially important in her new job.

I was shaking, trembling, and did not know what to say in my first class. I taught undergraduate students’ entrepreneurship just after having completed my degree. I started from zero. I therefore needed to learn before I could teach others.

This transition motivated her to enrol in short-course programmes.

What I learned here was related and relevant to my current need. I was able to ask experienced educators questions about business issues; they also had their own businesses – for instance, Cikgu Ani had a tailoring business and Cikgu Iza had a catering business. Both understood cost and profit in business.

She felt that her involvement in short-course programmes was beneficial in her new role. By attending these courses, she formed strong social capital and was able to learn about business-related issues from peers and teachers. She said that her
dedication and determination to be an active learner was because of her mother’s support:

My source of motivation was my mother. I had a very supportive mother. She allowed me to explore many things. My mother always reminded me that no matter how much we think we know a subject, there must be something that we still do not know. Learning never ends.

At the time of the interview, Maya was also working as a private tutor for students with learning difficulties (dyslexia). She described herself as a ‘challenge taker’. She not only taught in the university but also worked as a tuition teacher, tutoring students in primary, secondary and special-needs schools in the Malay language. Although Maya struggled with her early education experiences, she had the zeal to go as far as she could in formal education. At the time of the interview, she had ambitions to undertake doctoral studies in Linguistics after completing her master’s degree.

6.4.2 Rose

Rose [R] was 48 and the single mother of four sons. She is a special-education teacher at a local secondary school. She came from a difficult socio-economic background. Her perseverance in continuing her education changed her socioeconomic status. Rose started her career as a primary-school teacher after completing a diploma in education in 1990. Later, in 2006, Rose began a full-time Bachelor’s Degree in Special Education at the Teachers’ Specialist Training Institute; sadly, her husband passed away at that time:

My husband passed away when I was in my first year of the bachelor's degree. I was grieving, lonely, and empty. Sometimes, I asked myself: Why I am tested like this? What wrong did I do? Am I sinful? I thought about withdrawing, but my mother encouraged me to continue. I felt grateful that I followed her advice. GOD loves my husband and he is now resting in peace. I always believed that I could face these life trials. There will be a reward for my patience in the afterlife.
In the beginning it was quite hard for Rose to accept her husband’s death. She perceived it as a punishment from God. Slowly, with encouragement from her mother, she realised that there must be reasons for what had happened. Instead of continuous grief, Rose underwent a process of meaning-making. She restored her faith and found solace. After graduating in 2009, she was placed at a secondary school that had just started special-education classes. Although she was busy managing the new class, she never forgets her intention to continue her formal education. In 2013, she began a part-time Master’s in Education. However, she encountered other life trials after her mother passed away.

My mother passed away in 2013 when I was in my second year of the Master’s degree. She met with an accident...my mother had high spirit and was my pillar of strength (crying). Even though she was gone, I wanted to prove to her that I had successfully obtained a Master’s degree.

Rose overcame her grief by continuing her studies. Eventually, in 2014, she graduated with a Master's Degree in Special Education. Rose always kept herself busy to overcome negative thoughts. At the time of the interview, she played an active role in the special-education programme at the national level. However, she learned that few special-needs students progressed beyond secondary education.

I know that the learning disability of a disabled person depends on the severity of his or her condition. However, most of our students experience intellectual impairments or are slow learners. I would feel badly if they were incapable of developing any skills after completing school. I wish to see them gain some skills that can be used to sustain them, for example, tailoring.

After some deep thought, she realised that, with sewing skills, these children would be able to work on their own and earn enough to support themselves. Rose spoke about how she had to weigh various options, when considering the appropriate skills for these children.

Initially, I thought that cooking was more practical than sewing...but...it would be difficult for them (the disabled students) to keep clean and hygienic all the time. So, will people buy their food products? I thought
that sewing skills might be more practical for them. If they managed to produce good, neat work, people would send repeat orders. Besides, there is always a high demand for traditional Malay clothes. The minimal price for making such clothes is MYR 20.00 (£3.50 equivalent), which would be a reasonable return for their efforts. After a discussion with other teachers, we decided to teach them sewing skills. We developed a proposal and brought it to the District Education Officer. Luckily, the proposal was approved by the authority.

According to Rose, the Ministry of Education had made it compulsory for all vocational-skills teachers to have a Level 3 Certification in skills related to their area of study. However, the government had limited funding to provide training courses for teachers. Since the sewing skills programme needed to start soon, the teachers took the initiative to learn on their own. As Rose explained,

There will be a problem if the teachers responsible for teaching the skills lack the proper qualification. To overcome the problem, I discussed the issue with other teachers and we agreed to learn on our own. Luckily, I found out about the community college and became a regular participant. Now I have managed to make traditional Malay clothes.

Rose, in particular, took her responsibility as a teacher beyond the school context. She wanted her students to have some direction in their future careers. She particularly wanted to see her students excel at sewing.

6.4.3 Yati

Yati [R] was 45 and the mother of three sons at the time of the interview. She came from a low socio-economic background. Her narrative focused on her mother’s role in making sure that she got a proper education. According to Yati, her mother never had an opportunity to go to school, although her brothers (Yati’s uncles) were all educated and worked as teachers and civil servants in the government. In the absence of any formal education, Yati’s mother struggled through some challenging situations and found it very difficult to find employment. At that point, her mother was married to a small-scale farmer. Having watched all her brothers be educated, Yati’s mother was determined that all her children, regardless of gender, would get a
proper education and have a good chance of finding employment. However, her mother did not have enough money to pay for them all to be educated.

My mother wanted all of us to learn and get a good job. That spirit drives me to keep learning. Even though we were poor at the time, I looked for a solution. So I worked to get some money to pay the tuition fees.

According to Yati, she had to work hard to supplement her parent's efforts to educate all of their children. Yati had to defer her own studies to work and raise money for tuition fees and stipends. After raising enough tuition money, Yati resumed school and studied at a local university, where she obtained a diploma in Agricultural Sciences. She then went further, pursuing a degree in Living Skills. Upon graduation, she got a job as a teacher in a secondary school in a state in the northern part of the country. Yati managed to ascend the social ladder through her achievements in education. At the time of interview, she had been teaching Living Skills for twenty years.

After graduating with a Diploma in Agricultural Science, I pursued a Degree in Living Skills. It was in 1992; the Living Skills subject had just been launched in the national curriculum that year. So, it was quite ‘easy’ for me to get a job at the time. I have been teaching Living Skills for almost twenty years.

Yati had moved to a new school last year. In the new school, she was appointed to coordinate a newly introduced programme on Vocational Skills in Catering for the next academic year.

When I moved to this school, I was selected to coordinate a newly introduced catering skills course. I knew that I had limited skills in catering, since it was a bit different from my area of expertise, which involves electrical work, agriculture, and repairing home furniture.

Those who taught the new subject were required to have at least a Level 3 Certificate in Catering, based on the Malaysian Skills Certificate. Although the Ministry of Education was expected to provide a certification training course, it was delayed due
to lack of funds. Yati therefore decided to meet the new requirement by learning voluntarily.

I wanted to develop skills and have more exposure in the catering area. So that I could share the knowledge with my students. At the same time, I wanted to obtain the Level 3 Certificate for Catering based on Malaysian Skills Certificate.

She acknowledged that, as she learned, her passion for catering developed and increased.

6.4.4 Zetty

Zetty [U] was 29 and a single woman who worked as a clerk in a federal court. She came from a humble background. After secondary school, she was unsure what to study and followed her friend by enrolling in a Mechanical Design certificate programme at a local college. After graduating, she worked at several random places before obtaining a permanent job as a clerk.

I felt regret about my learning pathway. I didn't have any plan after I completed secondary education. So, I just followed a friend to enrol in a Mechanical Design course in a college. I managed to complete the course, but it was not relevant to either my current or former job. Previously, I worked as an operator in an electrical factory, then as a Starbucks barista. After I left Starbucks, I felt that I wanted to learn to sew, so I applied to a community college. I participated in six months of modular certificates in sewing. At the time, I had no intention of taking sewing seriously; I just wanted to fill my time. However, I realised that I had a passion for sewing.

Zetty’s decision to learn to sew during a period of unemployment gave her an insight into her passion. She admired the work of a well-known Malaysian fashion designer and hoped to have a chance to work with him. Subsequently, Zetty dreamt of having her own brand:
I planned to start taking orders for clothes. When I received a substantial order, I would quit my job. I don’t like to stay long in a workplace. I prefer to be self-employed and have freedom in my work […] I wanted to be a fashion designer with my own brand. I therefore wanted to have a degree in fashion; however, there is no part-time degree programme for sewing.

Zetty planned to obtain a certification in sewing. However, no institution provides sewing-skills training on a part-time basis. The alternative was to enrol in sewing courses offered on the weekend by the community college.

6.4.5 Discussion: Learning and agency in relation to positional change

Adult learners in employment attributed their participation in learning to positional changes. Positional changes act as a turning point, moving adult agency to consider change (Gallacher et al., 2002). These participants had the drive to acquire practical skills that could be passed on to students. These findings show that the participants had great determination and a sense of independence; they were creative in facing their life challenges. Their participation in learning also reflected the concept of employability. Studies have shown that students and university graduates need an entrepreneurial mindset to become self-employed (Rahim et al., 2015; Bin Yusoff et al., 2015). This view was highlighted in the Malaysian National Higher Education Action Plan of 2007–2010, which placed great emphasis on teaching and learning entrepreneurial skills to enhance the employability of the younger generation. Furthermore, this agenda was re-emphasised in the latest Educational Plan, the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015–2025, which focuses on instilling entrepreneurial skills among school students and university graduates. The educational plan aims to produce a younger generation of ‘job creators’, rather than ‘job seekers’ (Kamaruddin et al., 2017). Subsequently, holistic entrepreneurial-education programmes and the TVET were integrated into the national curriculum (Yoong et al., 2017). However, studies have found that most educators did not receive sufficient training in entrepreneurship or TVET to implement the programmes (Rahim et al., 2015; Bin Yusoff et al., 2015). As educators in educational institutions, the study participants were proactive; they took the initiative to train themselves instead of waiting for government-provided training programmes.
They equipped themselves with the vocational skills and knowledge of entrepreneurship their students needed. The findings of this study confirm a UK qualitative study (Fuller, 2007) of adults enrolled in higher education; uncertain social and economic conditions pushed them to develop their own capabilities in order to retain their jobs. Studying for formal qualifications helped with their career progression. In the present study, participants with full-time jobs voluntarily participated in short-course weekend programmes to advance their careers. They developed vocational skills to teach their students effectively and transmit skills to them.

6.4.6 The role of family influence

The findings of the present study suggest that parental involvement in the participants’ initial education influenced their participation in learning. Many participants reported that their parents emphasised the importance of education within the family, despite a disadvantaged background, whether low socio-economic status or an absence of formal education. As a result, these participants achieved upward social mobility through their achievements in formal education. A comparative study by Kupfer (2012) on educational upward mobility among working-class individuals in Austria and England has revealed the need for higher education as a constitutive factor. Kupfer (2012) explains the significant relationship between identity and higher education in upward social mobility through education. These findings concur with several studies that show a positive correlation between family influence and children’s participation in learning, even after they became adolescents and adults (Tsurkan, 2016; Repetti et al., 2011; Ng, 2010; Gorard et al., 1999). In a literature review, Tsurkan (2016) argues that the significant involvement of parents can fill gaps in the learning environment by building motivation or a sense of personal efficacy. However, the findings related to three participants in this group do not confirm those of Bloomer and Hodkinson (2000) or Dincer, et al. (2016), who found that the children of parents with little or no experience in tertiary education were likely to choose vocational skills. The present findings also diverge from Furlong and Cartmel’s (1997) claim that economic, social, and cultural status remains a powerful influence that determines individual life chances. The current
study shows that parents with no experience in tertiary education still manage to foster learning among their children.

6.5 Retired Participants

Starting from July 2012, the minimum retirement age in Malaysia across public and private employment was raised to 60 years (Malaysian Government, 2012). However, there is an alternative to optional retirement, based on the employee’s service contract or a collective agreement between the employer and employee. This means that some services offer early or late retirement. In the Malaysian Army, the retirement age is often after twenty-one years of service for enlisted ranks. Of the sixteen participants who were actively developing skills, four were retired. These participants had worked for various organisations and institutions before retiring. Ayesha [R] worked as a rural secondary-school teacher for 35 years; Eva [U] worked as an urban bank officer for forty years; they both retired at 60. However, Jane [U], a secretary at a public university, took optional retirement at the age of 58, after 30 years in service. Hanny [U] retired from the Malaysian Army at the age of 50. All received a monthly pension except for Eva, who worked for a private company with no pension scheme.

6.5.1 Ayesha

Ayesha [R] was 61 and married with no children. She came from a low socioeconomic background and lived in a tin-mining area. Ayesha represents social mobility from a working-class family to the middle class through education. She received a scholarship to further her secondary education at one of the best boarding schools in the country. She then pursued a Diploma in Educational Science at a local university and a part-time Bachelor’s Degree in Computer Mathematics at a southern university. She described herself as determined – always ready and willing to learn. Her zeal for learning was evident when she continued studying for a part-time Master’s degree in Educational Technology right after completing her degree. It was unusual for teachers of her generation to have post-graduate qualifications. Ayesha recounted how her father encouraged her to work hard to change her future destiny:

My father always told me to work hard to change my future. My dad had gone through economic challenges in life, especially during the World
War 2. So, he wanted us to have a good life. At home, he taught us about religious study. I remembered...I once tried to escape from studying to play with my friends. What my dad did was to invite all my friends to learn at our house. I then had no one to play with and no choice but to learn together. When I grew up... I reflected on how great my father was. Thus, whenever I had an opportunity to learn, I made the most of it.

At the time of the interview, she was in her first year of retirement. She felt the need to learn because she had developed a learning identity. She also enrolled in many courses organised by private and public institutions on cooking, baking, Quran recitation, health, gardening, and water-filter maintenance.

The learning process makes me happy and keeps me thinking continuously. If I keep thinking, I will become healthier and reduce the risk of dementia. On top of that, my motivation for learning is that I love to look for solutions to life challenges and to share the benefits with others.

Ayesha’s interest in learning to cook started after her mother’s death.

After my mother passed away, I became the father-mother figure in the family. My home became a gathering place for my siblings. Over time, my love of cooking grew. I was happy to serve them different menus. Then I started to share my passion with others by posting pictures of the courses I attended on Facebook. At some point, friends asked if I would take orders. So, I started to take orders and to sell the food I had learned to make.

Subsequently, after realising her potential and the market demand, she ventured into the food business. As she was computer literate, she was able to market her business online. Another essential point was that Ayesha aimed to develop a home-based cooking class based on every course she attended.

I did not focus on a single aspect of cooking, but on how to cook traditional cuisine, Western food, processed food, and much more. I tried my best to follow consumer demand. I have a strong interest in teaching.
For this reason, I planned to teach cooking courses.

Ayesha was excited by the opportunity to learn different things. She learned to cook many types of menu, from catering and a la carte menus to baked goods, cookies, and processed foods. She had a registered business and started selling some food products from home.

6.5.2 Eva

Eva [U] was 62 and a single lady of Indian descent. She worked for a local bank for forty years. At the time of the interview, she was in her second year of retirement. Eva came from a middle-class family and shared her parents’ admiration for learning:

For both parents, education was very important. My dad had this expression: ‘if you don’t eat a physical meal for a day that’s not a big loss, but if your brain is intellectually starved, then that’s a significant loss. You have no life after that. Knowledge acquired through formal education is the only thing that cannot be taken away from you. You could own any amount of money, but it can be stolen. Money cannot follow you in the next birth. Knowledge is the only thing that follows you’.

As this account reveals, Eva’s parents valued education. She worked hard at school and started working for a bank soon after completing secondary school. Over time, she gained a professional certificate in Business and Computers at the Institute of Banking in Kuala Lumpur to expand her knowledge and continue working for the bank. In addition, Eva was interested in the English language and took a part-time job as an English home-tuition teacher. As she had a longstanding interest in cooking, she wanted to do something related to cooking, rather than teaching.

I had a passion for teaching. I conducted English evening classes for children in my neighbourhood. I have been teaching part-time for almost 48 years now, and I’m too tired to teach anymore. I used to drive to go to work, but I’m too weak to do that. So, I wanted to have a small business selling food […] So, after retirement, I was looking around for a cooking
course. I wanted to do a course related to baking. But many private people who conduct cooking classes charge exorbitant rates. I was lucky to find the community college through my friends.

She shared how participating in cooking courses strengthened her relationship with family members and neighbours:

Every time I practised the food menu that I learnt in a short-course programme, I shared it with my family and neighbours. They were so excited to taste my new menu. I was proud when they loved the food. I told them I learnt it at the community college. Sometimes, when there is a family celebration or neighbourhood event, they ask me to cook.

According to Eva, the cooking courses enhanced her social relationships and inspired a plan to start a home-based food business. The skills she acquired, reinforced by good feedback from family and friends, gave her the confidence to set up a business.

6.5.3 Jane

Jane [U] was 58 and married, with two children. Her husband was retired from a government agency. At the time of the interview, she was in her first year of retirement. Jane came from a low-socioeconomic background. Although she completed secondary school, she described her academic achievement as ‘mediocre’. She did not have the chance to go to university. Later, her father encouraged her to take sewing and cooking classes organised by the village Community Development Centre. Jane had strong social capital because her father was the head of the village:

My father was the head of the village and acted as the supervisor at the Community Development Centre in the village. He asked me to join the vocational course and I followed the order. The more I learned, the more I became interested in sewing. At the same time, my mother was a seamstress; every day I observed my mother making clothes. Most members of my family were good at sewing. By chance, I inherited this skill from my family, so it was passed on.
Jane managed to develop sewing skills at an early age. She had both informal training through her mother and formal exposure to sewing. Although she took a permanent job as a secretary at a public university, she also worked part-time as a seamstress. Jane received many orders for clothes from family members, office mates, friends, and neighbours. As she lived in an urban area, sewing was a lucrative business. She credited her regular participation in sewing courses:

For me, when we venture into something, we need to do it wholeheartedly. I never stopped learning sewing after secondary school. When I was working, I kept developing my sewing skills by enrolling in an evening class in a Chinese tailoring shop. Sometimes I got involved in sewing classes organised by the local Community Development Centre. Even when I already had the skills, I still took courses. Because the more we engage in learning, the more the skills we gain.

Jane had a positive attitude towards learning. She grabbed every learning opportunity that involved her passion for sewing. She kept joining more courses to improve her sewing skills.

Before retiring, I looked forward to participating in the community college shorter-course programme. Previously, I could only attend weekend courses. Now, I have more time to learn. However, now I don’t do much sewing because I had some health issues and I don’t want to stress myself. Instead, I focus on cooking courses; I am excited that I can prepare a variety of cuisines for my family.

Jane described her happiness at being able to prepare different types of menu when her children were home.

6.5.4 Hanny

Hanny [U] was 50 and married with two children. She grew up in a rural rubber-plantation village. She stopped formal education at lower secondary school:
I went to school until the lower secondary. I intended to keep learning, but...I had many siblings and needed to help support the family. So I chose to stop learning and went to Kuala Lumpur to look for a job.

She migrated to Kuala Lumpur and worked as a volunteer for a national youth organisation. She applied to skills-development courses at several educational institutions, but her applications were unsuccessful.

In 1988, I applied to several places for skills-development courses. I was never even called for an interview, let alone offered a place.

Hanny joined the Army Reserve and eventually became a soldier in the Malaysian Army, where she served for 25 years before retiring in 2017. During her military service, she was always looking for learning opportunities. She participated in sewing-skills courses run by the Army Wives Welfare Association, a community development centre, and a private tailor. Hanny learned to make her own clothes, curtains, bedcovers, and home decorations because she had such a positive attitude toward seeking knowledge.

At the time of the interview, she was in her final year of military service and planned to start a home-based bakery business once she retired. The Malaysian Army offers retiring members a transition training programme, to equip them with vocational skills for a future career. Although Hanny had applied for a bakery course, there were no free spaces. She was offered other options, not relevant to her needs. Frustrated, Hanny searched for alternative learning places and discovered the community college short-course programmes.

I went to the interview for a baking course in the Army transition training programme. However, I failed to get a placement in the baking programme. I was frustrated...I needed to do something to acquire baking skills. I therefore continued my learning here (at the community college).

Hanny had a definite learning goal: to launch a home-based bakery business as a new career. Therefore, she chose to acquire baking and catering skills by investing some money for tuition fees.
6.5.5 Discussion: Learning and agency related to communal orientation

The accounts of the retired participants illustrate their agency; they engaged in learning based on community considerations. The participants were between 50 and 62; they learned mainly to serve their families and communities. Their community orientation may reflect the Asian cultural value of collectivism (Yang, 2011; Merriam and Kim, 2008; Reagen, 2005; Merriam and Mohamad, 2000). One characteristic of a collectivist society is that individuals tend to be concerned about others and particularly their own groups: family, community, and country. The present findings confirm Merriam and Mohammad’s (2000) argument that cultural values influence learning among older adults in Malaysia. It reveals two communal considerations: learning is seen as a social activity, involving interactions with and contributions to the well-being of others. This finding contrasts with Withnall (2006), who conducted focus-group interviews among older adult learners at several learning providers across the United Kingdom. Some participants had an individualistic motivation and orientation; they learned for their own benefit. In this study, learning in older age was perceived as an opportunity to pursue individual interests, freed from the family responsibilities. The participants’ perception of gender roles could also be a factor. In Abdullah, et al. (2008) older Malaysian women felt that women’s place was in the home. Despite being educated, they felt responsible for their families. By contrast, younger women tended to look beyond domestic chores. They realised that they had the power and opportunity to contribute to society.

6.5.6 The role of learning identity

The life stories of participants from the retired group revealed a strong learning identity. Kolb and Kolb describe people with learning identities as those who ‘seek and engage life experiences with a learning attitude and believe in their ability to learn’ (2009: 5). In their narratives, the participants engaged with the process of constructing a learning identity, indicating that they were inspired to continue learning. These participants reported a continuous involvement in learning throughout their lives. Some opted for formal or professional qualifications, while others chose to enrol in informal learning at the workplace, community centre, or local agencies. These findings support Hodkinson and colleagues in suggesting that
‘retirement is a process and learning is an inevitable, integral part of that process’ (2008: 168). Learning is an important process that helps participants adapt to changes in position, disposition, and situation. This continued enthusiasm for learning contrasts with the findings of Biesta, et al. (2011), who found that some elderly participants expressed an unwillingness to adapt to their circumstances through learning. In the present study, retired participants adapted to retirement by staying connected socially; they nurtured a learning identity by taking courses.

6.6 Conclusion

This chapter has explored participants’ biographies and explained the factors that drove them to engage in short-course programmes. The narratives reveal a new understanding of the ways in which Malaysian women respond to a lack of vocational training. One theme that has emerged across the study is the importance of short-course programmes, regardless of a participant’s employment status. Participants with jobs and high-level academic qualifications (such as Masters’ degrees) took part. At the same time, unemployed participants who attended courses learned from their teachers and peers, especially those involved in business. The skills they acquired enhanced their lives and the lives of people around them. Some participants learned as a way of coping with their present situations (Jang and Merriam, 2004; Bloomer and Hodkinson, 2000; West, 1996). Teachers attended short courses mainly to up-skill themselves; they wanted to learn to teach tailoring or catering and to transfer skills to their students. Others, including housewives and retired participants, developed vocational skills to generate additional income and establish a social network. The courses provided a platform that allowed participating students to exchange ideas about using their skills to overcome everyday challenges.

The next chapter explores the participants learning experiences in short course programmes at the community colleges.
Chapter 7 : The learning experiences of adult learners: Learning engagement

7.1 Introduction

The previous chapter discussed the significance of adult learners’ sociological determinants, within a pattern of participation in short course programmes at the community colleges. The findings showed that most learners engaged in learning activities to adapt to life transitions and identity transformations.

This chapter explores the experiences of adult learners at the community college; it covers institutional characteristics, knowledge construction, and the teaching and learning process. The discussion in this chapter focuses on factors that contribute to or inhibit the participants’ positive learning experiences. Also, these factors may explain the participants’ learning engagement as they keep re-enrolled in other short-course programmes. It is important to note that the results discussed in this chapter came from active participants at both study sites. The participants gave overwhelmingly positive responses in their interviews. This positive feedback may reflect the cultural values discussed in Chapter 1 (section 1.4.3). As in Chapter 6, the abbreviation [U] indicates an urban participant, while [R] indicates a rural participant.

7.2 Examining the learning experiences of adult learners

There is no solid definition of ‘experience’, as the word can be interpreted in many ways. This study relies on the Boud and Miller definition of ‘experiences’ as ‘the totality of ways in which humans sense the world and make sense of what they perceive’ (1996: 8). Based on this definition, experiences can be seen as situations in which an individual has physical or non-physical practical contact with something or someone. A growing body of literature uses the term ‘learning experience’ to highlight a larger shift in educational pedagogy and technology that has influenced the design and delivery of education (Wenger, 2009; Chang et al., 2010; Ganzer and Zauderer, 2013). These studies attempt to illustrate educational changes and outcomes: how, when, and where learning can take place. Learners can enrol in
online courses, use educational software, or watch learning videos. While learning is sometimes valued primarily for the outcomes it enables, adult often value the process of learning for its own sake (Biesta et al., 2011). The experiences of adult learners offer a valuable resource for improving adult education; they should be examined without preconceptions (Reiff and Ballin, 2016; Fink, 2013; Crowther et al., 2010). Within the context of the current study, the learning experience refers to the participants’ involvement (experience) in the learning environment (event) that influences the acquisition of knowledge.

A review of the literature reveals three important factors that influence an individual’s learning experience: curriculum, teaching, and institution (Reiff and Ballin, 2016; Fink, 2013). Studies have indicated that a good curriculum is hands-on and stimulates active learning, while a bad curriculum is boring and non-productive. Teaching style is the most important factor in determining whether or not an adult will have a positive learning experience. Studies have revealed some attributes of effective and less effective instructors. Good instructors are respectful and knowledgeable, while less effective instructors may be arrogant or disrespectful. The ‘institution’ refers to institutional practices and procedures for enrolling adults in learning programmes. Boeren (2016) has argued that such institutions should provide flexible learning modes, relevant course content, adequate facilities, and intensive learning support. These four components are closely linked and influence each other. Teaching also plays a critical role in helping learners engage with learning. Even if the institution and/or curriculum are excellent, poor-quality teaching will have a negative impact on learners (Fink, 2013).

Building on these studies and fieldwork (Fink, 2013; Reiff and Ballin, 2016; Boeren et al., 2010), the present study identifies four factors that influence the learning experiences of adult participants: institutional characteristics, the learning environment, the variety of classroom activities, and teaching approaches. For each respective factor, there are sub-themes that support the findings. Table 7-1 provides a summary of these findings.
### Table 7-1: Factors and sub-themes that influence adults’ learning experiences

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#### 7.3 Understanding adult learners’ experiences in relation to institutional characteristics

The first factor that impacts the learning experience is the community college and its characteristics. The participants explained how they experienced the short-course community college programme process and procedures. The interviews reveal four themes: access to information, tuition affordability, a flexible course schedule, and stimulating course content.

#### 7.3.1 Access to information

In adult learning, the quality of information is paramount. Early scholars argued that a lack of information was a major barrier to implementing adult education, especially among disadvantaged and marginalised adults (Cross, 1981; Darkenwald and Merriam, 1982). More recent scholars have also noted that lack of awareness of learning opportunities can prevent adults from meeting their learning needs (Moore...
et al., 2013; Boeren, 2016). Learning providers must therefore personalise the means of communication to reach potential learners.

The findings of the current study show that community college location can determine the medium through which participants access information about short-course programmes. Half of the participants from the urban college indicated that they learned about the short-course programmes through online research. Participants involved in full-time employment in higher educational institutions highlighted websites as source of information about learning opportunities. Their roles enabled them to access computers at work.

Hanny [U]: Before I retired, I had more access to the Internet, especially at work. So I searched the web for institutions that offered short-term courses. Fortunately, I found out about the community college. I browsed every community college website in Selangor (a state) and attended courses that I was interested in.

Another participant shared her experience of learning about the course on social media:

Fatimah [U]: I really wanted to learn how to sew, and so I started looking for online information. Fortunately, I found a sewing group on Facebook. I asked to join the group and was accepted. I was thrilled. Meanwhile, a certain colleague of mine in the group talked about the community colleges offering short-course programmes in sewing […] That motivated me to do my own research, and it was true what she said – the college did offer short-course programmes.

The narratives above revealed that most urban participants were Internet savvy and used their skills to find information online. This finding is in line with global statistics on emerging countries; Malaysian Internet usage increased by 19% between 2013 and 2015 (Poushter, 2016). Another report showed that, in Malaysia in 2016, urban residents used the Internet almost twice as much as rural residents, at 67.2% and 32.8% respectively (Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission,
The same study also showed that 86.9% of Internet users were stimulated to search for information by the usefulness of the Internet (Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission, 2017). The availability of online information on short-course community college programmes enhances the value of Internet usage.

Another group of participants learned about the short courses during outreach programmes organised by community colleges in public places, including public agencies and shopping malls. These participants had good experiences in the outreach programmes, as they were given useful information.

Jane [U]: I am a member of a cooperative in my hometown (in a different state). I was fortunate that there was a collaboration between a community college C (not part of this study) and the cooperative, especially when it came to organising activities for club members. I used to tag along on a cooking course. There, we were told about the role of community colleges – they mentioned that collaboration was part of the community college outreach programme. So, when I went home, I searched online for the community college closest to my house and started to participate.

Ruby [U]: One day I went to a warehouse mall in Klang. I found a booth promoting short-course community college programmes. So I knew that community colleges provided vocational training for the local community.

The accounts above show that participants had a positive experience with the community college outreach programme. For a small proportion of participants, this was an effective strategy for promoting courses. Ng (2008) has argued that promotion strategies need variety. The present study revealed that local media promotions failed to reach most potential adult participants, particularly individuals with lower levels of education. Hake (2014) has argued that outreach programmes are a good strategy for targeting adults at risk of social exclusion. This study aims to materialise the theme ‘bring learning closer to home’ used by the European Commission (EC) to cultivate the lifelong learning agenda in Europe. That outreach
strategy manages to provide information about realistic options that help marginalised groups develop themselves. It is therefore important for educational institutions to have a wide range of promotion strategies.

Information sharing among previous students and people who know about the courses was also helpful, resulting in positive experiences for the participants. Two urban participants of Indian ethnicity mentioned that they had a good experience of obtaining word-of-mouth information from social networks:

   Eva [U]: Initially, I didn’t know that public institutions offered short-course programmes. Then a certain Malay friend of mine who knew about my passion for cooking told me that I could actually take part in a recognised cooking course, and that is how I enrolled in the course.

   Another participant was informed by someone she met in a shop:

   Sree [U]: I learned about the course when I went to buy some sewing tools. Someone I met in the shop told me about the community colleges. She invited me to join a sewing course. After that, I went to the community college office. I was excited about the number of sewing courses that they offered.

   Scholars such as Boeren (2016) have highlighted the importance of word-of-mouth (especially from successful learners) as an effective method of transmitting information to new and potential learners. The current findings resonate with Boeren’s (2016) assertions. Particularly in rural areas, participants highlighted their positive experiences of obtaining information from word-of-mouth sources. They also described the various ways in which information was passed on by word-of-mouth. Some participants learnt about the courses from community college members of staff, while others heard from friends who were already successful learners.

   Dayang [R]: I was informed by Rashidah (a staff member) about the skills-development programme offered by the community college when I
worked as a security guard at a primary school. During that time, she was sending her children to the school.

Rose [R]: My friend knew that I wanted to develop sewing skills, so she introduced me to the community college. She had taken part in a short-course programme there.

Interestingly, other participants learned about the short courses on social media, from their social networks:

Ayesha [R]: After I retired, I decided to join an Arabic language course. I shared my interest in cooking with a friend whom I met there. She invited me to join a WhatsApp group on cooking. Some of friends in the group told me about the community college. I asked how I could participate in a course. They invited me to another WhatsApp group of short-course programme participants, created by the college staff. That was how I found out about the short courses. I have seen that social networks are a good platform for disseminating information.

The accounts above illustrate the role of social capital in information sharing, particularly for participants in rural areas. Social capital refers to networks that enable people to cooperate to achieve a common goal (Putnam, 2000; Schuller, 2004; Field, 2015b). Findings from the current study concur with Field (2015b), which suggests that adults use social networks to support their learning transitions. The social networks provide important information and resources that helped people make educational changes. Although our findings were similar, the current study focused on short and temporary social networks, rather than long-term dynamic social capital. The present study builds on Subramaniam (2012) by exploring the community college short-course programme in Malaysia. It had found that most participants received information either by word-of-mouth or from the front-office information services. The current study also further explored the role of the Internet as a medium for transmitting information, particularly in urban settings. However, Subramaniam's (2012) study used mixed-methods, while the current study used biographical interviews to elicit information from short-course participants.
The findings revealed that urban and rural participants had different experiences when accessing information. The urban participants were more self-directed; they searched for information on the Internet themselves. By contrast, the rural participants received information through their social capital. Hence, educational institutions need to provide updated information about courses using several different strategies, while focusing on communication media that worked well within each setting.

7.3.2 Tuition affordability

One of the key themes from the participant narratives was that the women had a good experience because they could afford the course tuition fees. For instance, one participant, who had seven children explained how the affordable course fee encouraged her to improve her sewing skills:

Ira [R]: I had many children, so we had quite a lot of financial obligations. For me, MYR 30.00 (£5.50 equivalent) was like MYR 300.00 (£55.00 equivalent). Therefore, I am looking for courses that are affordable […] Before I enrol in any course, I will plan my savings for the course fee.

Some participants from both settings who had previous experience with private institutions said that community colleges provided the best affordable alternative:

Lina [R]: I applaud the community colleges for providing us with an affordable course! I can tell you the course was fab! An excellent alternative to private colleges! I joined several private learning courses.

Zetty [U]: So far, this is the cheapest course that I have ever found, and it is worth every penny. Most tailoring shops charge exorbitant fees.

Ruby, a university lecturer, made the following comment:
Ruby [U]: Even though I can afford to learn at a private institution, I prefer to come here. The quality of learning is of a professional standard with low fees. So why would I go to other institutions?

Clearly, the participants reported having had a positive experience in community college courses because they were worth the money. The participant accounts suggest that the reasonable course fees encouraged them to learn despite their socioeconomic backgrounds and levels of education.

7.3.3 Flexible course schedule

Many scholars have emphasised the need to understand the shift from traditional modes of education into lifelong learning (Schuetze and Slowey, 2002; Jarvis, 2003; Knowles et al., 2005; Field, 2015a). The fieldwork findings confirm that, where community colleges offer a range of programmes with flexible schedules, they encourage the local community to learn. In terms of scheduling, a short course can take between five and twenty hours, depending on the type of course. Some courses are held on weekdays and others on weekends. Most participants from both study sites said that they had a positive experience with the schedule; it was one of the factors that encouraged them to join the programme. For example, older adult participants preferred the short-term course schedule. Farah, for example, was offered a free full-time sewing course by another agency; however, she chose the short course sewing programme.

Farah [R]: As a first option, I was offered the opportunity to enrol in a full-time sewing course that ran for six months, from 8.00 am to 5.00 pm daily. In this instance, I felt I was too old for that. I was not able to commute every day for six months. For this reason, I registered for the second option, which was the weekend sewing classes offered by the CC. The whole course lasts eight hours. So this is manageable.

Eva described a similar experience:
Eva [U]: I am home-tuition tutor and my free time is quite limited. I could not find a better place than the community college, where the course schedule fits my time. I don’t expect the knowledge that I gain here to be as good as what I would get from a private learning provider.

Interestingly, participants who were urban mothers preferred short courses on weekdays:

Ruby [U]: Luckily, I found about community college with flexible time. I attended weekday courses, such as a sewing course making Baju Kurung (the traditional costume of Malay women) was conducted every Thursday for four consecutive weeks from 9.00 am to 2.00 pm. The course schedule was practical for me. On the weekend, I will be busy with family and business.

Another mother described how the organiser was flexible and understood her situation:

Sree [U]: I enrolled for weekday courses because I am busy with family on the weekend. However, there were several weekdays when I had no choice but to bring my daughter to class. Initially, I was worried, but I am grateful that they allowed me to do this. I made sure that my daughter behaved well during the class.

Mothers in rural settings reported that they preferred to attend weekend courses to accommodate their childcare responsibilities:

Lisa [R]: I attended weekend courses because, on weekdays, I am busy taking my children to school and picking them up. My husband takes care of the kids on the weekend.

Urban participants preferred weekday courses, while rural participants opted for weekend courses. Reflecting this pattern, scholars have argued that adults need flexible learning modes so that they can learn at their own pace and negotiate their
life commitments (Jarvis et al., 2003; Knowles et al., 2005; Boeren, Nicaise, et al., 2012; Boeren, 2016). The present findings concur with a systematic review by Taylor et al. (2005) on effective strategies for broadening participation among marginalised adults. A literature review revealed that educational institutions must provide a substantial degree of flexibility to accommodate the needs of learners. The present study provides evidence that flexible course schedules may encourage adults to participate in learning.

7.3.4 Stimulating course content

All of the participants highlighted positive learning experiences because the training was relevant to their needs. Researchers have argued that adult education courses should match the needs of potential adult learners (Boeren, 2016; Knowles et al., 2005; Merriam, 2001). As one of the most influential educational thinkers, John Dewey maintained that effective learning should be relevant and practical (Talebi, 2016). Urban and rural participants were drawn to different types of skills. According to the interviews and documents collected from the institution, six out the eight urban participants setting preferred sewing courses. They gave several reasons for wanting to learn to sew. The first reason was that it was expensive to have clothes made by someone else.

Fatima [U]: For me, the community colleges provide courses that meet the needs of the local community. They are not just for business, but also for social living. I was excited because the skills that I gained have helped me save some money, especially when it comes to sewing outfits. I am now able to sew on my own.

As their second reason, the participants cited constant changes of fashion:

Jane [U]: One of the things I liked about the community college was that they were active in organising short courses and many courses were attractive for me […] you know, there is always a new fashion and most of these ladies who are working, they always want to look good […] So I needed to be updated with the new fashions to sustain my skills.
The third reason they mentioned was that the institution was creative in organising courses. For example, a new course schedule was released that enabled the participants to learn various skills in more depth.

Ruby [U]: Recently, the community college changed the course schedule creatively. Previously, we learnt to sew whole garments, such as Baju Melayu, Baju Kurung, shirts, and skirts. This year, some courses were developed that focused on details – for example, a course on different types of collars, pockets, and zippers. It was interesting because it helped me be more creative in designing clothes.

By contrast, rural participants were more likely to participate in cooking courses. They mentioned the geographical location of their villages, which were too far from town to access food services. This was their main reason for needing to learn new recipes and venturing into the home-based food business.

Shalia [R]: It was quite hard to find new menus at local restaurants. Besides, these types of food were quite expensive, if there were any at the market. So the skills that I acquired from the short course helped me save money by making my own food.

The second advantage was that participants acquired practical business skills and knowledge. As one self-employed participant explained:

Lisa [R]: It is so amazing how my business has been booming since I was trained at the community college. I will give an example, I learnt how to make kuih talam (a Malaysian dessert) at a private institution in the capital city, which I could only sell for MYR 25.00 to MYR 30.00 (£4.00 to £5.50 equivalent). However, after I enrolled in the short course at the community college, the same food could be sold for MYR 18.00 (£3.00 equivalent). More local people can now afford to buy my products than when I was selling them for MYR 25.00, a price beyond the reach of many here […]
Given the local community's limited access to food services, there is an increasing demand for home-based businesses and small-to-medium-sized enterprise. For these participants, the courses offered were practical and business oriented.

Dayang [R]: You see [...] this area was far from the town [...] but people like to try a new menu. I was lucky that the structure and delivery of courses corresponded to what could be obtained in the market. My customers were willing to pay the prices, as long they could taste the food.

The narratives revealed that participants who ventured into food products discovered good business opportunities. In addition, cultural celebrations and local festivals increased the rising market demand. This trend is evident in a study conducted by Jebna and Baharudin (2013) on Small Medium Enterprise business performance in Malaysia. The study identifies seasonal demand, with higher sales during celebrations and festivals.

According to the narratives, the courses stimulated learners to engage in learning activities. Learners from both settings were pragmatic about choosing skills that were relevant and practical within their own contexts. Their choices were pragmatic, in the sense that they were concerned with the consequences of action and the quality of meaning in relation to their learning inclinations (Elkjaer, 2009). This confirms the findings of a study conducted by Ng (2010) in Singapore, which revealed that learners engage in learning at institutions that empower them. Thus, it is important for learning providers to offer relevant courses, based on the location of the institution.

7.4 Learning environments that facilitate learning acquisition and participation

The second factor that contributes to the learning experiences of adult participants is the learning environment. According to the fieldwork, there are two significant subthemes in the learning environment: the physical classroom environment and the multicultural setup among participants.
7.4.1 The physical classroom environment

The classroom environment is a critical element that affects learning. Studies suggest that a positive learning environment helps students feel a sense of belonging, encourages them, and encourages better performance (Hartje, 2016; Young, 2014; Turano, 2005). To provide a positive physical classroom, the present study explores learners’ perception of their needs. This approach reflects Maslow’s (1954) hierarchy of needs; it is imperative to ensure than people’s physiological needs are met if they are to function at the highest possible level and fulfil their full potential. Based on the interviews and researcher observations, two themes emerged: the need for adequate space and appropriate tools and equipment.

7.4.1.1 Adequate space

Most participants reported that the number of class participants influenced learning effectiveness. The issue of inadequate space took centre stage when the number of participants exceeded the available space. The community college had two types of enrolment: for registered participants and walk-in participants. It was therefore quite tricky for the short-course coordinator to estimate the number of walk-in participants. This issue affected both settings:

Ruby [U]: Sometimes there were fewer participants in a class but sometimes there were many participants, especially when it involved fashion trends. For example, I attended a sewing course on making shawls. To my surprise, there were many people who came! I think it was more than 40. All four rooms were fully occupied. We needed to share the sewing machine, especially those using the same colour of materials, as we had to use the same colour thread. So, it took quite some time before it was my turn to use the sewing machine.

The same uneasiness was echoed by another participant, who suggested an ideal number of participants for an effective class:
Fatimah [U]: There was a time when the number of participants reached 45 people in a course. So, it was quite cramped. I almost wanted to withdraw since there was not enough space or equipment. In my opinion, 20 participants should be the maximum number for a class.

This finding is in line with an article by Bucholz and Sheffler (2009), which suggests that it is critical for an educational institution to provide enough space for learners to move easily around the classroom. The same issue was raised by some participants at the rural institution:

Ira [R]: The classroom space for the sewing course was quite small. There was limited space to handle the material and move around the class. For me, 15 people would be a good number to learn in a session.

Another rural participant detailed the need for a proper space to conduct learning activities:

Rose [R]: Most of the time we make a pattern and cut the material on the floor. It is fine for me at the moment. But I think it is not practical for others, who suffer from health issues, or for some elderly people who suffer from knee problems.

An excessive number of students in a class interrupts learner, forcing them to wait to use shared equipment.

7.4.1.2 The appropriate equipment

The second issue involving the physical classroom environment was the presence of appropriate tools and equipment. Participants noted the need for proper tools and equipment to facilitate the learning process:

Sree [U]: I found that it was easy for me to get all the equipment needed because items were labelled properly. Sometimes when I forget to bring some of my sewing tools, I don’t have to worry because I can get them in class.
Another learner explained how she managed to learn using a new sewing apparatus:

Ruby [U]: There were many industrial sewing machines that could be used for different types of materials. I also learnt how to use the machine and I bought the same industrial sewing machines to use in my business.

However, there were times when some of the sewing machines broke, due to heavy usage:

Rose [R]: There were several times when we needed to share sewing machines because some were not functioning properly. For this reason, I usually bring my own sewing machine to class.

The above accounts show that the accessibility and availability of appropriate tools and equipment facilitates the learning process. Equipment problems create obstacles that reduce learning effectiveness. It is therefore essential for institutions to ensure that all of their equipment is in good condition and well-maintained. Researchers have suggested that educational institutions should consider a universal design that is practical for classroom activities and supports all learners (Bucholz and Sheffler, 2009; Young, 2014). Similar 21st-century innovative learning environments have been promoted by the OECD. Educational institutions are advised to invest in and develop educational facilities that are user-centred, with attractive and stimulating elements (Green and Donovan, 2006). In conclusion, understanding what learners need in the physical classroom environment could improve the learning engagement of adults.

7.4.2 Promoting multiculturalism among participants

This study produced mixed findings, as cross-cultural interactions created both positive and negative learning experiences. Malaysia is a plural society: multi-ethnic, multilingual, and multicultural (King, 1990; Fenton, 2003). The present study found that social interactions built a social cohesion among the learners, even if they were culturally divergent. This may reflect the participants’ proximity – they spent a lot of
time together and supported each other. There were two Indian participants in this study. They said that meeting people of different ethnicities made them feel content:

Sree [U]: It has been a while since I made new friends. I was busy working from 9.00 am to 8.00 p.m. I didn’t have any Malay friends. But now, I have many new friends, especially among Malays. I felt that I understood Malay culture better. For example, the baju kurung needs to be loose because women are encouraged to wear these garments for Islamic practices.

The multicultural learning environment enhanced the overall learning experience. As Sree [U] pointed out, she not only learned to make the Malay traditional costume, she also learned more about Malay culture. Another Indian participant commented:

Eva [U]: You see, what makes me happy and positive is the environment in the community college itself. The teacher is very nice and very open. She is warm, although I am the only Indian among all the other Malay colleagues. They don’t look at me differently and they see me as the same because we are all Malaysian.

According to the narratives, the participants felt welcomed, had positive learning experiences, and learned from people belong to other ethnic groups in the community college setting. Some Malay participants learned from the Indian participants. This happened most often during discussions on general topics, daily practices, and religion. For example, Jane [U] shared the following anecdote:

Jane [U]: I learned from Eva that Indians in Malaysia use similar naming practices as the Malay, although the Chinese don’t. We don’t use surnames; instead, we use first names, with the father’s name at the back. Malays add ‘Binti’ and Indians add ‘d/o’ between the individual name and the father’s name; both mean ‘daughter of”. So, for Malays, it will be Fatima binti Ahmad and for Indians, it will be Eva d/o Muniandy. Eva also told me that these practices are unique among Indians in Malaysia. In India, the place where she was born, the first letter of the father’s name
is placed in front of the individual’s name. So, it will be M. Eva. This is interesting to know!

The discussion changed Fatima’s understanding of the diverse naming practices of Indian communities (Abdullah, 2010). Thus, cultural differences triggered the participants’ interest in learning about many aspects of diversity. In this conducive environment, participants from many races should be encouraged to attend community college short courses.

7.4.2.1 Issues of cultural blindness

Despite the positive role that community colleges play in social integration, there were instances of cultural blindness. One example took place during a cooking course. The community college has a provision that allows people who are not registered to attend courses. On this occasion, the organiser of the pizza course assumed that all of the participants would be able to eat beef. However, Eva did not register in advance for the course; she walked in on the day. During the class, she was surprised that the teacher used beef as one of the ingredients in a pizza topping:

Eva [U]: I attended a course on making pizza but I did not register earlier. I was surprised because we learned to make a pizza topping using beef and chicken. I am a Hindu. In my faith, the cow is honoured. We believed that cows must be respected because they serve humans in many ways. I felt disgusted when they cooked the beef. But I did not blame the teacher, I should have informed her earlier.

Eva admitted that she should have anticipated the situation and allowed the organiser to accommodate her practice by registering beforehand. In a study of cultural differences, Means et al. (2015) have argued that food and drink have a social function: building and delineating members of a multicultural team. Their study reveals that food and drink play an important role as a manifestation of culture, offering social integration and acknowledging the power of cultural differences. Those who provide adult education must pay attention to the various cultural sensitivities that exist in the country. This is especially important when it comes to
food and drink, as these are visible and salient. Interactions are needed so that differences can be explored and negotiated. Even though this is an isolated case, it is very important to practice caution when dealing with other people’s cultures, as adults tend to be quite sensitive.

7.5 **Variety of classroom activities: The individual construction of knowledge**

The third factor that influenced adult learning experiences was the variety of classroom activities. This section discusses how adult learners learn best and the way they interact, despite being from different backgrounds. It is important to highlight the fact that the two study sites preferred different short-course programmes. The urban participants valued sewing skills, while the rural participants focused on acquiring cooking skills.

Findings across the urban-rural settings highlighted fact that variety made the learning activities meaningful, creating positive experiences for the learners. The classroom activities included: 1) learning by doing; 2) learning through observation; and 3) learning through interaction. The various modes of social interaction provided a balanced environment in which both learners and teachers felt engaged. Learners also explained how they learned and developed skills by taking the same course repeatedly – learning through repetition. The following sections provide comprehensive insights into these learning activities.

7.5.1 **Learning by doing**

Researcher observations and the interview sessions revealed that one central learning activity for the adult learners was learning by doing. Most participants cited learning by doing or hands-on learning as the main reason for their positive learning experience. This approach gives learners a primary experience in which they generate and develop a product themselves (Jarvis et al., 2003; Kolb, 2015). In the community college, there is an emphasis on practical learning; learners undertake activities on their own, with minimal guidance from teachers. Furthermore, the low-risk classroom environment encourages participants to participate and become involved in hands-on learning experiences.
Some participants who had no prior experience said they could only engage in hands-on learning with guidance from the teacher. For example, Rose [R] spoke about her ability to follow the learning process, despite having limited cultural capital in that area:

Rose [R]: Even though I was not familiar with sewing skills, I did not feel left out of the class. I could engage in making the garment. I was happy to be able to have the practical experiences of sewing a complete garment.

Most participants who were new to the skills reported that they struggled to learn. However, the opportunity to work at their own pace was a positive learning experience:

Sree [U]: I could practice the sewing process step by step. I was happy to know that even though I was a bit slow in class, I could always ask the teacher for help.

Zetty [U]: Everyone in the class seemed to be working so fast. Looking at that situation, I felt anxious. But when I noticed that I could do everything at my own pace, I was very happy.

Participants who had some prior experience practising the skills felt that learning by doing encouraged them to enhance their skills. Ira challenged herself to alter her garment from the standard design to a new design that she thought would be more fashionable. She enjoyed being creative in class because the teacher was there to guide her:

Ira [R]: I always wanted to alter the standard pattern given in class by introducing some idea of my own. For example, there was a short course on making Abaya. The teacher taught the students how to use a flat collar, but I wanted to make a shawl collar. So, the teacher showed me how to alter the pattern on tracing paper to create a shawl collar. I was delighted.
The above narratives are consistent with a field note made by the researcher on 1 September 2016 at the urban community college, in a short-course programme on making shirts:

The learners started taking out their dressmakers’ rulers, measuring tape, and paper patterns. They were helping each other take measurements, especially friends sitting next to each other. It was clear that some participants, who had attended other courses earlier, were familiar with the learning process and the place. They brought a complete set of sewing tools and looked confident doing the activity. At the same time, they were faster at finishing the pattern of the shirt. Some of them was already cutting the fabric using a drafted pattern. By contrast, most of the first timers sat in the same spot for the whole session and struggled to calculate the measurements. Several first-time learners observed their friends working and started to communicate with each other. During this time, the teacher was walking around the class, checking the measurements and interacting with students. She was helping out and repeatedly explaining techniques to the students.

This vignette illustrates the difference between new and regular students. The new learners were anxious to perform the learning activities, while the regular learners were confident and made fast progress. Thus, differences in cultural capital stimulated interactions and encouraged the learners to share information.

Many participants emphasized the fact that learning by doing created better learning experiences. They described the significant difference between learning by doing, online learning, and classroom demonstrations:

Dayang [R]: I enjoyed a first-hand experience by practising the technique myself. In the class, I was able to touch the ‘right’ texture of bread dough, which give me some idea of the texture to aim for when practicing at home later.
Lina [R]: I was excited to learn by practising the technique. It was easier for me to remember and recall the steps when I practiced it at home later. I once attended a demonstration-based baking class. The teacher made cakes in front of the class and we watched from far away and/or in an overhead mirror. I could not get much from that type of learning.

The above narratives point out that sensory faculties are underused when the learners can only observe and listen to a demonstration given by the teacher. It is clear from their accounts that these participants preferred learning by doing to using online sources, as a way of developing vocational skills.

### 7.5.2 Learning by observation

Many participants emphasised that learning through observation did facilitate learning acquisition. According to Bandura and Jeffrey (1973) learning through observation involves the input and output of social cognitive learning. In a later study, Jeffery (1976) suggested that observational learning is best acquired when learners observe an action and use it as feedback to refine their own performances. This is in line with the definition of observational learning as ‘learning a new response or refining a previous one as a result of observing the behaviour of a model’ (Diane et al., 1986: 457). In this study, ‘observation’ refers to an activity in which learners closely watch the teacher’s demonstration and/or how other learners perform the activity.

In the interviews, participants reported that learning through observation gave them an avenue to closely observe the teacher’s action, making it easier to assimilate:

Sree [U]: I loved observing the live demonstration by the teacher. I could see clearly how the teacher took body measurements and recorded them.

Dayang [R]: I observed the way they knotted the dough to make a red bean bun. It gave me a deeper understanding of the proper way to make the right design or even to alter the design. It built my confidence in practicing the activity.
The participants explained that observation made them feel more confident about performing the activity. The cognitive process enabled participants to rehearse the activity successfully (Bandura and Jeffrey, 1973). In addition, some participants described how the teacher’s explanation while performing the activity made them aware of things to focus on and avoid during the process:

Eva [U]: I closely observed the teacher when she demonstrated how to make pizza dough. The detailed demonstration, together with a proper explanation from the teacher, made me aware of dos and don’ts.

One participant explained the alternative method she used when learning through observation. Fatima, a teacher with some cultural capital through her knowledge of technical resources, recorded the teacher’s demonstration using a video camera:

Fatima [U]: I learned that we only retain 20% of what we hear and 30% of what we see. In order to get the most out of the learning experience, I record a video of teacher’s demonstration. Then I will watch the video several times, particularly those parts that are difficult to understand. I found that this was a helpful practice that helped me master the skills.

This narrative illustrates the learner’s agency; she used technology to help her acquire the skills. She reflected on and revised the learning by playing the video repeatedly, focusing on specific sections that she was struggling with. Through this practice, she became familiar with the steps and succeeded in acquiring the skills.

Other participants learned by observing their peers. The narratives of sewing-course participants were very clear about this.

Ira [R]: In the classroom, I learned by observing how others practiced the skills. The more I observed, the better I was able to understand the techniques. The learning environment inspired me to engage in healthy competition with other students […] either to finish the task sooner […] or to try to do something different with the products.
The above narrative shows how peer observation not only facilitated learning acquisition but also promoted healthy competition. The participant described the way in which a positive spirit of competition enabled her to perform at her best. Others explained that they were interested in studying their friends’ finished products:

Fatima [U]: I saw some friends who were tailors, who altered and innovated the standard design. For example, recently there was a course on sewing scarves. They combined several different fabrics and made them into a few layers. So, the design looked nice, vibrant, and attractive. I got some good ideas from their products.

The same experience was echoed by other participants:

Ruby [U]: Recently, I attended a course on sewing gowns for girls. We needed to bring our own fabric and I just brought a plain fabric. I noticed that some of my colleagues had brought floral patterns and mixed them with plain fabrics. That turned out very well. I was pleased with the learning process, which allowed me to develop my creativity.

In conclusion, the participants confirmed that learning through observation created a positive learning experience and helped them enhance their skills. They managed to perform the activity successfully by observing the practical activities carried out by teachers and other learners. It is clear that learning through observation enables adult learners to construct knowledge and develop their skills.

### 7.5.3 Learning through interaction

In addition to learning by doing and learning through observation, the learners benefited from learning through interaction. In this study, social interaction took place when learners participated actively and collaborated with others in classroom activities (Vygotsky, 1962; Casbergue, 2013). Within the context of the current study, participants described two types of interactions: student-teacher interactions and student-student interactions.
7.5.3.1 Student-teacher interactions

The classroom setting offered learners an opportunity to have synchronous communication with teachers. This two-way communication allowed the adult learners to express themselves and ask questions confidently (Schuller et al., 2002). These student-teacher interactions generated two findings. First, the participants practising skills (those aiming to become professional bakers or tailors) could choose to discuss an issue or problem that they encountered when practising the skills at home.

Jane [U]: Normally, I come to class with many questions in my head. By interacting with the teacher, I can clarify my doubts, ask questions, and get feedback immediately.

Second, the learners benefitted from having their mistakes pointed out by the teacher. They were able to retain the learning better by learning from each mistake.

Jane [U]: The teacher noticed that I had make some mistakes. She then explained the correct way of doing it. I was able to work on her feedback and reflect on my mistakes.

Dayang [R]: At first, I thought that my baking technique was fine and wondered why my finished product was not perfect. Then, by interacting with the teacher, I realised that I had made simple mistakes during the baking process. After I corrected my mistakes, voilà […] it’s perfect! I still remember the solution that the teacher suggested.

In both situations, the adult learners reported positive learning experiences from student-teacher interactions. Luxford and Smart (2009) have argued that asking questions enables an individual to verbalise her thoughts; there is a vital link between producing a question and reflecting on previous knowledge. These class interactions helped the learners clarify their understanding of particular issues by receiving direct feedback on their questions and mistakes. Furthermore, within the classroom setting, learners received personalised teaching, based on their ability to
perform the activities (Cercone, 2008). This finding is similar to Jaggars (2014), who found that students preferred face-to-face courses because they provided a stronger relationship between the student and the instructor. It can thus be said that the adult learners benefited from social interactions with teachers.

7.5.3.2 Student-student interactions

All of the participants from both study settings emphasised the role of peer interaction as a significant factor that stimulated them to learn. Boud, et al. (2001) have argued that peers offer each other information and experiences that facilitate learning and make it less challenging and more enjoyable. The present study reveals that interactions among peers’ centre on two elements: course content and life situations. Firstly, the learners interact with other learners in relation to the course content:

Zetty [U]: When I was not sure about some steps, I asked my friends. I found it easier to understand what they told me because they used simple terms. Sometimes they shared their experiences of things going wrong and reminded me to pay close attention.

Other participants described receiving feedback and practical advice as they struggled with sewing:

Ruby [U]: I usually get useful tricks and tips when I practice sewing skills with friends. Some of them have been sewing for a longer time and they know some tricks. Those tricks are not written anywhere […] they were gained through experience! I’ve practised them and they work!

These findings confirm Roseth, et al. (2011), who have shown that peer learning often succeeds because the participants share a similar mode of discourse and may have struggled with the same situation. It is therefore easier to share experiences and create a strong bond between them. This makes learning enjoyable and more achievable. The findings are also supported by Taylor (2017), who has identified three essential relational aspects of peer learning: non-hierarchical status, mutual
goals, and voluntary participation. These qualities were demonstrated by the learners’ peer interactions in the current study. Learning with peers provides a space for learners to engage intellectually, emotionally, and socially through constructive interactions (Boud et al., 2001).

Interestingly, one participant reported that she learned by explaining the lessons to peers:

Fatima [U]: I loved to explain the learning to others. For example, I explained the steps involved in making a shirt pattern to my colleague. Doing this jogged my own memory of the steps and helped my colleague to have a better understanding. I became extra cautious whenever I was teaching others.

Fatima’s narrative shows how effective learning through talk can be. She demonstrated the ability to reflect on the quality of her explanations and emphasised that the process of talking to others made her own learning experiences more positive. Learning through talk involves a cognitive process that improves recall and enhances understanding of the subject (Luxford and Smart, 2009). The process generates deep learning, which embeds the knowledge further into the learner’s memory (Hay, 2007). The present findings show that interactions among peers are significant for adults who usually find it challenging to grasp knowledge or skills.

Secondly, the learners shared stories about their own lives and reported that peers provided social support during life transitions and identity transformations. Particularly in the unemployed and self-employed groups, participants said that peers helped them transform their identities, helping them become business women. Despite differences in academic credentials, friends helped each other by sharing their life experiences. For example, Ruby, who has a Master’s degree, told the following story:

Ruby [U]: I understand that we came from different backgrounds. Some of my friends in the class had limited formal education […] for example, they only attended primary school. However, they had been
running businesses for years. They gave me valuable information and encouragement, as I will be launching my business soon.

The participants gained encouragement and support from each other, as well as advice from others who shared the same interests. Indirectly, they developed groups of colleagues who shared a concern for something they were doing: a community of practice (Wenger, 2009).

It is important to highlight that ten out of the sixteen participants continued to learn from each other, even after class. The learners used a WhatsApp group developed by community college staff. They showed great initiative and responsibility in managing their personal skills development.

Zetty [U]: I always asked friends via the WhatsApp group whenever I had a problem with sewing, especially when it came to fitting a shoulder. Some of them even made the extra effort of calling me to explain. This went beyond classroom interactions.

The community college provides a conducive learning environment (both in the classroom and via WhatsApp) where students were free to ask for or offer help, when needed. For this reason, peer-to-peer learning developed over time, beyond the classroom. Other studies have shown that individuals in a reciprocal peer relationship are better able to cope with their circumstances and develop self-belief (King, 1990; Seebohm et al., 2013; Cheruvalath, 2017). The present study reveals that adult learners are delighted by the role played by peers in supporting their life situation.

7.5.4 Learning through repetition

Interestingly, many participants (twelve out of the sixteen) across both settings enrolled in the same course several times to strengthen their understanding of specific skills. Hergenhahn and Olson (1993) emphasised that repetition helps learners to master skills. The needs for repetition also reflect the nature of vocational fields, which cover a wide range of skills and techniques. The participants gave four
reasons for enrolling several times in the same course. The first reason was the opportunity to learn from different teachers:

Yati [R]: I learned to produce the same product with different teachers. Teacher A said this; Teacher B said that. I followed the steps in the class carefully. So I acquired several different techniques. Later, I was able to integrate the techniques and develop my own technique that worked well for me.

The second reason was that repetition helped the learners become familiar with particular techniques. Participants said a single session was not enough to master a technique:

Ira [R]: I went to same courses repeatedly so that I could master the skills. The analogy is like a class with thirty students. The teacher is very good, and the teaching approach is easy to understand. However, do all those thirty pupils really acquire the same knowledge? No, right? It depends on their intellectual quality, their competence, and the efforts they make to learn. In my own case, I was not satisfied with my level of understanding after the first box-pleat curtain course I attended. I was not confident enough to make them on my own. So I enrolled in the same course a few times.

Ira pointed out that the learner herself determines the level of knowledge she acquires. For this reason, she took charge of her learning. With effort, she managed to develop the skills she needed to make box-pleated curtains competently.

The third reason given by the participants reflected their confidence in performing the skills and achieving the ‘right’ measurements:

Zetty [U]: The trickiest part of sewing a garment is the shoulder fitting. I attended the baju kurung course several times. Every time I went to class, I kept improving on the shoulder pattern. Now, I have the right measurements and a pattern that perfectly fits my shoulder.
Lastly, some participants explained that attending the same courses several times helped to keep them abreast of changes in the design field:

Jane [U]: I wanted to improve my sewing skills. The more we learn, the better we become and the longer we will retain the skills. The learning helps me balance the ebbs and flows of my skills.

These findings show that adult learners were willing to participate in the same course several times, despite having already mastered the skills. The findings confirm a study by Gallacher et al. (2002) on the extent to which redundant enrolment in some courses can benefit individuals. The study also reveals that some participants enrolled in the same course for several times because they realised how much they enjoyed the course and felt that the learning had helped them in their lives.

To summarise this section, the learning experiences of adult learners in the present study were profoundly based on social interactions within various classroom activities. The knowledge and skills they acquired were socially constructed, based on hands-on learning (learning by doing), observing, discussing, and questioning information with teachers and peers. The learners derived a positive learning experience by combining these learning activities.

7.6 The role of the teacher: Approaches to teaching

The fourth factor that influenced the learning experiences of study participants was the teacher’s approach. Previous studies have suggested that the teacher provides the key element in an individual learning experience (Fink, 2013; Reiff and Ballin, 2016). Equally important, various adult-education studies have discussed the different types of adult learners and the teaching styles that suit them best (Merriam, 2001; Jarvis, 2003; Merrill, 2004; Knowles et al., 2005). Among early scholars in adult education, Knowles (1980) noted that teaching roles differed between the school system and the adult education system. His book, The Modern Practice of Adult Education: Andragogy versus Pedagogy, introduced the term ‘andragogy’ to adult education. Within the andragogical model, the role of the teacher is to be a facilitator of learning (Knowles, 1980; Knowles et al., 2005). Other adult-education
scholars have argued that the teacher or resource person takes on a ‘helping role’ to promote adult engagement in learning (Tough, 1971; Darkenwald and Merriam, 1982; Jarvis, 2003; Gouthro, 2017). The teacher’s most significant role is to stimulate learners to link learning content to their own needs, interests, and experiences (Boeren, 2016). They encourage learners to become creative in facing the continuous change and advances of the world around them (Rogers, 1992; Knowles et al., 2005).

All of the participants highlighted the role of teachers in creating a classroom environment that generated either positive or negative learning experiences. This finding was confirmed by participants from different education backgrounds. For example, a participant with a master’s degree made the following statement:

Maya [U]: My learning experiences have been influenced by the teachers. With some teachers, I managed to acquire the skills easily, but with others, I needed to look for other learning sources to clarify my understanding.

A participant who did not complete secondary school made a similar comment:

Dayang [R]: The teachers were the ones who shaped my learning experiences. They were the first and foremost element. I could learn easily from a teacher who had a positive attitude.

These narratives confirm that teachers are responsible for creating a conducive learning environment, which later impacts the learner’s perspective on learning and acquiring skills. If the teacher is warm and happy, learners are more likely to be happy; the converse is also true (Reiff and Ballin, 2016). Participants discussed teaching approaches that enhanced or inhibited their learning experiences.

7.6.1 Teaching characteristics that enhance learning

The adult learners identified several teacher characteristics that facilitated the learning process. First, rural participants emphasised the quality of teachers – in
particular, whether they were patient and dedicated in helping them understand the learning.

Rose [R]: I was worried because I did not have any prior sewing knowledge. I felt so grateful to have Cikgu Hidayah, who taught me the sewing steps from scratch. She was patient with me. She taught me the process step by step. She knew how to teach a beginner. I was able to understand the subject easily.

The participants’ narratives revealed that their teachers’ attitudes inspire students to work hard when learning a new skill. The teacher provided a personalised approach, based on the learner’s level of understanding. Learners therefore felt comfortable and willing to keep learning.

Secondly, urban participants highlighted the teacher’s skills as the main factor in positive learning experiences. They reported that experienced teachers were able to deliver the learning effectively:

Ruby [U]: I learned from formal classes, but the teachers learned from their experiences. They knew how to make the clothes that fit perfectly and were comfortable to wear. So, it is good to learn and get help from an expert.

The learners sought knowledge that they could apply to real-life situations, especially when dealing with mistakes and customers. The teacher acted as a bridge, connecting theory and practice.

Thirdly, the participants reported that teachers who motivated them to learn (and to learn from their mistakes) created a positive learning experience.

Sree [U]: There were many mistakes in my sewing [...] the stitches were not neat or even. So I couldn’t even make an armhole. Then I asked the teacher [...] and she asked me to explain what I’d done. It was easy for her to point out the mistake I was making and to show me
how to correct it. So I knew which steps were causing problems. She then said that I would do better with the next armhole and I felt motivated.

The above narrations explain how teachers motivate students by solving their problems. One teacher suggested a short-term goal for the learner to achieve. The teacher’s motivational comments ignited the student’s intrinsic drive and made her more confident about learning.

Lastly, the participants described the teacher’s character – whether she was democratic in her teaching practice. Within the context of this study, participants had the opportunity to contribute to the learning process. Some experienced learners shared useful information, which enhanced the learning process or improved the curriculum, benefiting the community college:

Shalia [R]: Recently I enrolled in a cooking course to learn to make tarts. The teacher asked learners to grease the tart pan. Personally, I knew that tarts could be difficult to remove from the tart pan. So I shared my experiences. The teacher then told the other learners to follow my advice. I felt honoured and happy.

The learners suggested four teaching approaches that facilitated learning acquisition: being patient, expert, motivating, and democratic. The narratives explained how teachers effectively facilitated and stimulated the learning process. These findings confirm a previous study by Kember, et al. (2001), which interviewed educators at a Hong Kong university on their perception of good teaching. They found that some adult educators saw teaching as learning facilitation. They also found two approaches: teaching as a way of meeting students’ learning needs and teaching that helped students become independent learners. Although these findings are congruent, Kember. et al.’s (2001) study focuses on educators in higher education, in contrast to the current study, which researches a community-based short-course programme. The present study therefore makes a new contribution to the body of knowledge on adult learners engaged in different forms of learning.
7.6.2 Teaching characteristics that inhibit learning

Some urban participants also discussed two teaching approaches that inhibited their learning process. The first teaching approach was a teacher who were defensive. In one case, a teacher spent time belittling other teachers.

Ruby [U]: There was this day when I didn’t like what happened in the class. We had this teacher who, instead of teaching, spent almost half an hour criticising the use of self-drafted patterns in sewing. Generally, using self-drafted patterns is a basic technique for sewing garments, costumes, and many other items. However, from the teacher’s perspective, this was not a good practice and a waste of time. Many students became irritated by the criticism.

Some students felt that the teacher described above had a condescending attitude. Some students stayed in the class, but others boycotted it. This shows that students respond differently to teachers perceived as having a negative attitude. One participant who opted to stay in the class made the following comment:

Fatima [U]: I talked to myself ‘Oh dear teacher […] please don’t waste my time with this nonsense’. However, I decided to stay in the class. Somehow, it’s in our culture to respect the teacher, even if he is annoying. So, I just stayed and tried to remain positive.

The second teaching approach that limited participants’ ability to learn was theory-based teaching. The participants revealed that some teachers were not competent enough or did not have enough practical experience to conduct a hands-on course.

Eva [U]: I attended a class in which the teacher was incompetent. She gave us notes and asked us to read them and try to do the work on our own. It should not be like that. This is a hands-on class. She needed to demonstrate the techniques step-by-step. I was a bit disappointed!
As discussed in the previous section, it is not natural in Malaysian society to criticise an authority figure. There is a concept of ‘face’, which refers to the importance of individual dignity and the need to maintain harmonious relationships (Abdullah, 1996). Within this culture, it is unacceptable to criticise someone publicly and cause the individual and his or her family to ‘lose face’. These findings were derived from a study conducted privately; the individual involved has remained anonymous. It is also important to highlight that the adult learners showed their agency and expressed dissatisfaction with the teaching practices. While the participants highlighted this stance, the present study analysed on their narratives, not the performance of teachers. The findings showed that teachers played a significant role in creating a positive or negative learning experience.

7.7 Conclusion

To conclude, this chapter has discussed learning experiences that influenced participants engaged in short-course programmes at the community college. The experiences of adult learners were influenced by four factors: the institution, the learning environment, various classroom activities, and teaching approaches. The first factor includes institutional characteristics, such as access to information, tuition affordability, a flexible course schedule, and stimulating course content. The participants had positive learning experiences in relation to all four characteristics. In addition, they frequently re-enrolled in short-course programmes, both new and previously taken. These findings suggest that the community college successfully accommodated the learning needs of their communities.

The second factor centres on the adult participants’ perception of the learning environment. There was some concern about the maximum number of learners in a class for effective learning. The multicultural learning environment enabled the learners to evolve in their understanding of people from different ethnic groups and cultures.

The third factor was the variety of classroom activities – the process of knowledge construction within the classroom setting. The findings are congruent with social constructivist learning theory, as advocated by Vygotsky (1978), which argues that
knowledge is constructed through active participation by learners in the learning process. The educators provide a scaffold that guides learners to develop their own skills through a ‘zone of proximal development’. At the same time, within the social learning environment, learners interact with teachers and peers from different backgrounds. The participants reported three types of learning activities that facilitated the learning process: learning by doing, learning through observation, and learning through interaction. Learning by doing refers to hands-on activities, such as sewing or cooking. Participants can be categorised into two groups: those who are familiar with the skills and those who are new to the skills. The former group mentioned the availability of safe spaces where they could develop their creativity and further explore the skills. The later stressed the ability to work at their own pace and get direct help from teachers and friends. Learning through observation offered a space for adult learners to clearly observe the teachers’ demonstrations and immediately practice the techniques with confidence. Learning through interaction involved two types of interaction: student-teacher interaction and student-student interaction. Within student-teacher interactions, participants highlighted two significant benefits: resolving doubts and receiving feedback. Student-student interactions enabled them to exchange information related to the course content and their own lives. They acknowledged the important role of peer support in stimulating learning engagement. The participants also discussed the benefits of learning through repetition by enrolling several times in the same course. These benefits included the ability to acquire several different techniques for producing a product, increased confidence, achieving a perfectly fitting pattern, and sustaining their skills.

Lastly, the learners reported that different teaching approaches produced positive or negative learning experiences. The teacher’s approach could either facilitate or inhibit the learning process. The findings of the present study suggest that teaching styles have a significant impact on learners’ future engagement with learning. Thus, this study provides essential information for community colleges and policymakers working to improve provisions for adult learning.
Chapter 8 : Reflecting Back and Looking Forward

8.1. Introduction

This thesis makes a significant contribution to the academic literature in the area of lifelong learning by focusing on the socio-cultural perspective of Malaysian adult learners. A review of the literature shows a limited qualitative study into lifelong learning in the context of Malaysian community colleges which focused on in-depth biographical narratives of learners. The significance of this study stems from its focus on the grassroots experiences of learners and the interplay of these experiences in the wider social, political and economic context. Thus, the originality of this thesis lies in how it uses biographical methods to make sense of the complexity and diversity of participant perspectives. Additionally, this is the first study to do so in both an urban and rural setting. Furthermore, the study looks at the role that the three interdependent levels - macro, meso and micro - play in shaping the lifelong learning agenda in Malaysia. This research has provided detailed biographic findings on how these interdependent relationships are shaped. It has also discussed the implications that this has had on both learner participation and the implementation of lifelong learning programmes.

This thesis examined the discourse of lifelong learning participation in Malaysia at the macro-level (government), the challenges faced during the implementation of lifelong learning programmes at the meso-level (community college), and the biographies and experiences of those engaged in lifelong learning programmes at the micro-level (individual). Although studies have been conducted in the area of lifelong learning in Malaysia prior to this one in the literature review (Mohamad et al., 2014; Kok, 2014; Mohamad et al., 2004), there is no research had been conducted combining these three levels into one study. Chapters 4 to 7 provides an analysis and discussion of the research findings in relation to the aforementioned levels.

This conclusion chapter recaps the key findings of the study and addresses the research questions guiding it. During a discussion of the key findings, this chapter
also presents a heuristic model, which integrates the key findings with the theoretical framework that was discussed earlier. This model highlights the importance of the interaction between each of the three levels and is used to suggest recommendations to the policy and practice surrounding lifelong learning in Malaysia. The recommendations section outlines strategies to improve lifelong learning across several domains, including: the government, policymakers, educational institutions and learners themselves. The chapter also discusses the contribution that this research makes, together with its limitations and opportunities for further research. Lastly, the final section of this chapter offers up the researcher’s personal reflection.

8.2 Summary of the key findings

In the following sections, the key findings of the study are explained with reference to the research questions.

8.2.1 Research Question 1: What is the aim of Malaysia’s lifelong learning policy?

As discussed in Chapter 4, the study found that there are many aims in Malaysia’s lifelong learning policy, however, concentration was given for the state’s economic development. The focus on economic development is seen as an expression of Malaysia’s aspiration to become a developed country by the year 2020. In order to be able to compete globally, Malaysia has actively transformed from an industrial to a knowledge-based economy, which requires a highly skilled workforce able to apply and innovate knowledge in order to produce wealth. For this reason, economic resources have been directed at enhancing research and development and have been focused at education and training courses that are expected to contribute to the development of this kind of knowledge-oriented economy. Lifelong learning programmes thus play a vital role in providing education and training, and address shortfalls in the knowledge and skills of the present workforce, as well as those seeking employment.

The findings also revealed that the Malaysian educational system (which comprises its schools, tertiary education institutions and lifelong learning centres) has been designated as a pillar of national human capital development. This illustrates the importance that economic value has in the educational system and implies that the
value of education is measured in terms of an economic return on investment. This is evident by lifelong learning programmes needing to have practical and vocational dimensions and make a measurable contribution to the labour market. For instance, electrical, computer and business programmes. For this reason, courses that are considered to be a low priority for economic growth have been excluded, for example, religion, art and history. Thus, lifelong learning is perhaps viewed as a way to increase the value of the human labour force than as a means through which to develop a person’s wider knowledge.

Furthermore, the discourse of lifelong learning seems to undervalue humanistic self-development. For instance, definitions of national lifelong learning are centred on the individual, who is of an economically productive age and who is expected to contribute to the economic growth of society. The concentration on economically active participants is seen as contradicting the principles of lifelong learning, which ought to prioritise learning for all. Ultimately, the definition of lifelong learning that prevails nationally illustrates the influence of human capital theory where the individual is considered as commodity to produce wealth (Bell and Stevenson, 2006).

Nevertheless, the research findings highlighted a concern at governmental level that learning should be a way of life in Malaysian society. For this reason, the quality of learning programmes has been increased. Individuals are encouraged to enrol in learning programmes in order to adapt and refine their skills and knowledge in the context of technological advancement in the new economy. However, studies of lifelong learning policy suggest that the emphasis on individual responsibility for learning has meant that rather than a choice, learning is now increasingly a duty (Bagnall, 2000; Crowther, 2004; Biesta, 2006). This type of discourse may be problematic, as it may reduce the responsibility that the government has to reduce inequality amongst the population, and instead places liability solely on the individual; for instance, if someone is not economically successful, it is because they have not taken up the learning opportunities provided.
8.2.2 Research Question 2: How do Community Colleges implement lifelong learning policy?

Chapter 5 highlighted how, in Malaysia, community colleges are governed by a departmental public body known by community college staff as ‘Headquarters’ (much like the Local Education Authority here in the UK). In organisational speak, the Headquarters in this study is known as a centralised management system. The Headquarters acts as the middle-tier governing body to community colleges nationwide. From it emanates a network of community colleges dispersed across the country. As a middle-tier governing body, it receives instructions from the MOHE, the author of the country’s national lifelong policy. This governing body then translates the policy into manageable operational goals. One example of these goals are the short course programmes that are delivered to individuals in the community. To ensure this translation is done consistently and efficiently, each community college has a dedicated department for the management of lifelong learning matters. This department is known officially as the ‘Department of Lifelong Learning’. This department has a dual purpose: one strategic and one operational.

The department oversees the day to day operations, such as planning and organising the short course programmes for the local community and, more strategically, as a liaison between Headquarters and local college staff. Thus, these two organisational levels, Headquarters and the Department of Lifelong Learning, both contribute to the successful implementation of short course programmes. However, the task of the Department is made more difficult by the fact that policy is often directed at generalising and homogenising the population. Section 8.2.2.1 below discusses the implications of this kind of centralised management. Section 8.2.2.2 discusses and critiques centralised policy making; in so doing it focuses on its homogenising effects and how it has broader implications on participation in learning programmes by the local community.

8.2.2.1 Headquarters: The implications of a centralised management system on the implementation of lifelong learning policy

The data showed that the centralised management system had a number of implications on how lifelong learning programmes were shaped and implemented. A
key implication is the establishment of a collectivist organisational culture, which Headquarters was able to inculcate by fostering organisational cooperation between the 94 community colleges under its authority. The community colleges were easily able to share expertise, equipment and resources amongst each other, which meant they could maximise in-house resources and increase the productivity of the programmes. The Headquarters were able to foster this kind cooperation by carrying out meetings attended by representatives from each college. Headquarters was pivotal in facilitating joined-up thinking, developing a sense of togetherness, identifying opportunities for collective working and minimising replication. However, the results showed that these benefits spread beyond the Headquarters; this culture trickled down to the community college level too.

Building on the idea of collectivist cultures, a further implication of centralised management is that colleges were able to share best practice. The data revealed, for instance, that if the Headquarters identified best practice in a particular community college, it would share that practice with others. This kind of behaviour helped other institutions to improve their work processes.

From a purely organisational perspective, this study also showed that the Headquarters served a very important management function. Notably, it provided the infrastructure required to coordinate between 94 community colleges who, between them, had over 250,000 students a year in attendance. To ensure the successful operation and delivery of their short course programme a Key Performance Indicator (KPI) was introduced. The KPI required each teaching staff member to recruit 90 participants onto short course programmes every year. This was introduced so that Headquarters could identify the colleges that were lagging behind.

In addition, the Headquarters established a centralised information system for short course programmes at the national level. This was known as e-psl. Through e-psl, the Headquarters could monitor community colleges’ performance in when conducting short course programmes. The Headquarters follow up with those community colleges that show poor performance and arrange visits to understand why they may be struggling. They then provide constructive support to the institutions, rather than penalising them. This fosters a positive working relationship between the community colleges and Headquarters. The advantages are that the
management at the institution can talk openly about the challenges and difficulties they face and don’t feel compelled to hide their struggles. Therefore, any challenges can then be overcome. However, this can cause additional issues, as some institutions will not be motivated to resolve problems, as there are no meaningful consequences if they continue to exhibit poor performance. Having said that, Headquarters does encourage community colleges to perform well by providing a reward for staff in the form of certificate of appreciation.

Additionally, the Headquarters enables effective communication, using both face to face and electronic communications (namely email and social media). This effective communication helps to decrease the opportunity to miscommunication. This is evident in the consistency with which information flows from the Head of Department of Lifelong Learning to both urban and rural community colleges. Such effective communication provides the room necessary for community college to clarify any issues that they encounter.

8.2.2.2 From Homogeneity to Diversity: The challenges faced at different community colleges

As stated above, an important measure of performance that has been imposed is that each member of teaching staff must recruit at least 90 participants a year to organise short course programmes. The data showed that some community colleges in more rural settings struggled to meet this target. Objectively speaking, this is a straightforward indicator and an effective way to monitor how well a college is doing. However, there is a danger here of policymakers viewing society in a homogenised way and ignoring the diversity and differences that may exist, and the challenges that such diversity may bring. Notions of community and society are necessarily complex, given the variance in social and geographical contexts and individual characteristics of those involved. For instance, differences between rural and urban settings; how gender is viewed in each of these settings; and students’ previous education and employment.

Table 8-1 below has been constructed using the findings presented in chapter 5. The table is used to highlight differences between outcomes in urban and rural settings and the diversity in learner experience. The implication of such differences is that
national level policy may not sit well in community colleges in different geographical locations. For example, the table highlights how, in the urban context, there is a wide number of education institutions, whether private and public. Urban institutions tended to be built in areas with good transport links and which are easily accessible by public transport. However, in rural settings, small villages are scattered across a wide catchment area. They are not connected by public transport links, and participants would have to rely entirely on private transport. These issues have a direct impact on the numbers that are recruited onto short course programmes.

**Table 8-1: Identifying Diversity: the implementation of lifelong learning policy and programmes in different geographical settings**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspects</th>
<th>Urban Context</th>
<th>Rural Context</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Residents from different geographic areas</td>
<td>The local community in urban areas were from multi-ethnic backgrounds, lived close together, and had experience of working in the service and manufacturing sector.</td>
<td>Most residents at the rural community colleges were from a single ethnic background and worked in agricultural areas. Also, in rural areas participants were more scattered across different villages and had to travel further.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Availability of courses</td>
<td>In the urban settings, participants had a choice of which college they would like to attend. The college, which was one of many, was located near various other private and public educational institutions offering similar programmes. Although participants were likely to live nearby, they were also able to utilise good public transport networks.</td>
<td>In a rural context there was only one college in the small-town and also around the wider area. People in the surrounding villages would have to travel using their own transport, as public transport was inadequate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing and recruitment</td>
<td>In the urban settings, participants accessed information about the courses through online platforms. There was little direct interaction unless it was through ‘open college’ days. Computer literacy was a key factor for recruitment of urban participants.</td>
<td>Within the rural settings, participants preferred face-to-face meetings, as these gave them the opportunity to understand how the course would be beneficial. Recruitment via word of mouth was essential to the success of engaging participants. Meetings with college representatives took place at community-oriented areas, such as the village hall and schools.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Course selection and availability

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course selection and availability</th>
<th>The most popular course was sewing skills, as learning this trade would create an opportunity to be self-employed and economically independent.</th>
<th>In contrast, the rural settings had a high demand for catering courses. As there were not many diverse food establishments in the villages. For this reason, rural participants saw an opportunity for business as there was market demand for different types of food that were not available in the village.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Delivery of courses</td>
<td>In the urban settings, participants were happy to attend classes at the college. This was mainly because colleges were nearby and easily accessible by many different forms of transport.</td>
<td>In rural settings, community colleges engaged with outreach work, designed to help rural participants access the courses. Courses were run in community halls, religious buildings and local schools.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 8.2.3 Research Question 3: What are the biographies of participants in lifelong learning programmes?

A key facet in this study’s examination of the complexity faced by learners participating in lifelong learning programmes is an understanding of their biographies, the focus of research question number three.

Female adult learners dominated the data of active learners from both community colleges. There were several male adult learners, but they were not interested in involving in the study. Therefore, the data were skewed to the perspective of female adult learners’ participation in short course programmes. Findings showed that each participant had their own unique experiences of participating in such programmes. However, although each biography is individual, close analysis of the data began shows that wider patterns and themes exist. Several can be identified from the narrative. For instance, the participants spoke about self-development, wider cultural changes that challenged gender norms and the impact on newfound ways of contributing economically and in their communities. Interestingly, each pattern and theme emerged in response to a triggering factor.
8.2.3.1. The Ripple Effect: The role of triggering factors

Chapter 6 showed how triggering factors change the lives of participants. We saw that learners mentioned factors that led to their enrolment in short course programmes. This is in line with findings from other studies on lifelong learning participation (Boeren, et al., 2012; Biesta and Tedder, 2007; Ng, 2010; Crossan et al., 2003). Biesta and colleagues suggest that adults participate in learning as ‘individuals respond to event in their lives, often to gain control over aspects of their lives’ (2011: 6). The triggering circumstances differ from one individual to another, and the impact of their disruption can vary. However, a wider analysis of all the participants’ biographies revealed that the triggering factor created a ripple effect. For example, the data shows that a triggering factor that caused an individual’s circumstances to change spurred them to overcome the challenges they were faced with by enrolling in community college. For the participants, whatever work or life issues they were facing had led them to the programmes, as they were a seen as a means to overcome these new challenges.

The findings revealed that participants’ work-related identities were an important triggering factor. For this reason, the participants in this study were grouped into four categories of work-related identity: unemployed, self-employed, full-time employment, and retired. The purpose of doing so is to understand the motives of those with similar characteristics and the barriers that they each faced when engaging with short course programmes.

An additional theme that emerged from analysis of the biographies related to how participants spoke about overcoming triggering factors and where they felt the course had taken them and will continue to take them in the future. The themes that emerged were: self-development; professional development; challenging gender norms; and the contribution to the economy and community they would be able to make. Each will be discussed in turn.

This has been summarised and illustrated in figure 8.1 below, which simplified the causal effect that triggering factors have on wider learner outcomes.
Figure 8.1: A summary of how the triggering factors have a causal effect on wider learner outcomes.

a. Self-development

Unemployed participants sought to enrol in learning primarily as a coping strategy in response to becoming unemployed. All participants in this group are from urban community colleges. These participants reported different reasons for being unemployed, although most related to things beyond their control, for example redundancy and bureaucracy.

These participants took control of their lives by choosing to acquire vocational skills in sewing. In doing so, they had shifted from academic and management work to an entirely different area. The skill is useful, given their current position as full-time housewives. It would allow them to make clothes for them and their children, an important cost-saving exercise that respects their loss of income. In addition, the participants reported that their understanding of vocational skills was different to that which they had when they were employed. They became keen learners in various short course programmes. Subsequently, they started to develop ambitions to establish home-based businesses after realising the income potential that their newfound sewing skills had.

b. Professional-development

Those participants who were in employment reported that their motivation to learn was related to continued professional development. Participants in this group were found in both urban and rural community colleges. Three out of four participants in this group were educators who, in their jobs, taught vocational skills and entrepreneurialism to their students. The Malaysian government, in response to the unemployment in the country, encouraged students to adopt an entrepreneurial
mindset and encouraged them to create rather than seek jobs. Therefore, these participants (who were typically educators in university and schools) took the initiative to enrol in short course programmes so that they would be able to acquire the vocational skills needed to impart the necessary skills to their students.

c. Gender

Self-employed participants were motivated to learn by the promise of an increased standard of living, but the propensity with which they were able to engage was determined by entrenched gender norms. These participants were from the rural community college and participants had established businesses that were mostly related to the food industry, most typically catering companies, bakeries and food producers. Their involvement in learning is directed at growing their businesses and acquiring new or different skills. Such an education would allow them to diversify their product offering and improve quality.

These participants said that cultural factors, most notably gender role expectations, limited their ability to receive a formal education. Their family did not encourage them to learn, since there was a strong cultural expectation that women would be housewives. This had been instilled in learners from when they were young. Learning is seen as unnecessary for women, since they were expected to do nothing more than domestic housework. Therefore, some participants did not complete their formal education, and none enrolled in tertiary education. However, after marriage, these participants reported that they received positive support from their husbands and families (two of them are single-mothers) to enrol in learning programmes. For instance, their husband helped look after the children whilst they were attending classes.

These findings suggest that there was therefore a shift in gender-role expectations. This was driven by the normalisation of the idea of a dual-income household in contemporary rural settings.

d. Contribution to the Community

The retired participants were motivated to learn by a desire to serve the community. These participants were found in both urban and rural community colleges and were
retired from a range of different employment backgrounds; for instance, some used to be teachers, clerks, army officers and banks employees. These participants chose to develop vocational skills to aid a second career after retirement as a means to serve their family and their wider community. The motive reflects their perception that they were responsible for looking after their families in a holistic way and for building relationships. They were therefore driven by more than financial motivation. Consequently, they reported that the skills that they acquired in catering and baking had strengthened their relationship with family, friends and neighbours.

8.2.3.2 Changing attitudes to women being educated

Historically, Malaysian firmly holds to the patriarchal cultural value. This cultural value has made it challenging for women to participate in learning since they were attributed to the stereotype of gender role. Women are expected to become housewives and doing domestic chores. However, after the country became independent in 1957, the status of women gradually changed. The Federal Constitution outlines the right of education for all Malaysian despite different background and gender. Thus, the constitution has enabled women to get equal access to education and training.

Consequently, the proportion of female that does not enrol in formal education decreased from 55 per cent in 1970 to 27 per cent in 1991 (Noor and Mahudin, 2016; Ministry of Women and Family Development, 2003). Furthermore, the number of women being educated has increased significantly after 1995. The number of female students’ enrolment in tertiary education exceeded the number of male students at 51.3% (Ministry of Women and Family Development, 2003). It could be said that the national policy on the right to education for every citizen has changed the status of women in Malaysian society.

Findings from the study revealed that women from urban and rural settings have benefitted from learning through the expansion of educational opportunities. The educational opportunities were offered by various educational institutions, government agencies and NGOs. The provision of educational opportunities covered ranges of courses, including tertiary education, technical and vocational programmes and home economic courses. The increasing number of women participations in a
different type of learning reflects the accessibility of education to the local community. Also, this situation could be attributed to the shift from one to two-income families in society. Both men and women are expected to earn an income in a family. This is evidenced through the participants’ narrative about their husbands who support their enrolment in learning by taking care of children and doing domestic daily chores. The widening access to learning opportunities and the shift in cultural value have contributed to the changed of women attitude to learning.

8.2.4 Research Question 4: How do learners’ experience lifelong learning programmes?

This question focuses more on learners’ experience and engagement with the bureaucratic aspects of community colleges. Findings reveal four factors that influence adult’s engagement in learning at the community colleges: access to the institution, learning environment, variety of classroom activities and teaching approaches. This was the focal point of the data in chapter 7. However, as the thesis began to take shape, patterns began to emerge from analysis elsewhere. What emerged was a reciprocal relationship between the discussions in chapters 5 and 7. Chapter 7, which discussed learners’ experience of the more bureaucratic aspects of community college, was related to the discussion in chapter 5, which discussed these bureaucratic aspects from the perspective of the community colleges themselves. Figure 8.2., below, illustrates in a simple way how this reciprocal relationship plays out.
Figure 8.2: The reciprocal relationship between community college and learner

The figure aims to highlight that the concerns of the learner and the community college mirror one another. The potential learner is interested in enrolling into the institution, however the data highlighted that they had certain questions before doing so. Equally, the college is interested in recruitment participants for learning programmes, and to ensure the potential participant is interested must ask similar questions of itself.

The themes in this regard that emerged can be categorised according to whether they are focused on access, value, or impact.

8.2.4.1 Access: Information availability, course flexibility and affordability

The first factor concerning the institution’s attributes includes: access to information and enrolment in learning programmes; flexible course schedules; and stimulating course content. Participants in the study reported that they had positive experiences when it came to becoming informed about short course programmes. They were able to use college websites, social media accounts, outreach programmes or word of mouth to answer the questions that they had. The information about learning opportunities provided by the community college influenced participants’ decision to learn.
The findings illustrated that participants from urban community colleges were at an advantage because of their relatively higher levels of computer literacy. Thus, most of them were able to search for information about short courses online. On the other hand, many participants from the rural community colleges were informed about short course programmes through word of mouth. Staff at the community colleges ensured that several promotional strategies was organised, in a way that respected the way students accessed information.

Participants reported a preference for flexible course schedules, especially for many short courses, which were conducted during the weekend, which allowed them to deal with other responsibilities alongside their learning.

Participants from both types of community college said that the short course programme was financially accessible and that the tuition fee was within their economic means. The tuition fees charged by community colleges are lower than those of private institutions, since they are subsidised by the Malaysian government.

8.2.4.2 Value: Learning process and teachers

The second factor refers to the face to face teaching and learning approaches used. The participants valued engagement in learning activities. They reported a positive face to face learning experience in a variety of classroom activities, for instance, when learning by doing, learning through observation, and learning through interaction. They highlighted the fact that learning by doing enabled them to have first-hand experience when practising the skills, first at college and later at home. They also said that learning through observing the teacher's demonstration increased their confidence when performing tasks themselves. Besides, participants expressed excitement when interacting with teachers and peers in the classroom. This interaction with teachers helped them to clarify any doubt and get direct feedback on their mistakes. Accordingly, the participants acknowledged the role of peers in stimulating learning engagement and as a form of social support as they developed emotional and intellectually whilst a college. The findings were in line with the learning approach adopted by community colleges, which emphasises practical or first-hand experience.
It is important to highlight that participants emphasised the role of teachers in shaping their learning experiences. Teachers who are experts and who had practical experience with the skills they were teaching were better able to teach those skills. On the contrary, teachers who had limited practical experience found it more difficult and students rated the learning experience less positively. Similarly, interviewees from community colleges reported that they worked hard to find and retain educators that were qualified in the area they were teaching, but noted that, sometimes, they faced difficulties because of limited funding for short course programmes.

8.2.4.3 Impact : Social and economic transformation in the local community

The third factor focuses on the impact of participation in short course programmes on the local community. Many participants reported that they were encouraged to start a home-based business and became more productive in their business activities. Gradually, the participants found economic stability which, for some, meant being economically independent from their husband. Similarly, the community colleges offered business management courses to support the new entrepreneurs as they developed their own home-based businesses. For instance, they offered courses on product packaging and labelling, accounting and online marketing. Besides this, rural community colleges built a social network for local entrepreneurs in the area so that they could exchange ideas and support each other.

Furthermore, participants in the study shared how the skills that they acquired had strengthened their relationships with their family, friends and neighbours. They also highlighted that their social network expanded, and they started to become involved in other learning activities through friends that they met at community college. Likewise, interviewees from the community colleges reported that the short course programmes had changed the mindset of the local community regarding adult participation in learning. Some participants also recalled how they managed to foster an interest in acquiring vocational skills in their children.

Thus, their social and economic transformation indirectly contributed to an improved quality of life across the community.
8.2.5 Research Question 5: What recommendations can inform lifelong learning policy and practice?

The key findings from research question 5 will be integrated into the Research Recommendations (discussed in section 8.5). In this section, findings from the data are used to support discussions on actions required in the future.

8.3. Weaving the data: An integration of theoretical framework with key findings via a heuristic model

Using the key findings discussed in this section, a model of interdependent relationships between learners (at the micro-level), community colleges (at the meso-level) and the government (at the macro-level) is developed to illustrate the interaction of emergent themes uncovered in the course of this study. The findings in the study highlighted the interdependence between three key levels. The interplay between these three levels are important to understand, as they affect whether Malaysia is to be successful in its lifelong learning agenda.

What follows is a discussion of how the key findings and theoretical underpinnings of this study can be illustrated using a heuristic model. The figure 8.3 below presents such a model. The sections that follow will be dedicated to explaining how these theoretical considerations have been integrated.
8.3.1 Constructing the model: Situating the findings and the theoretical underpinnings

Figure 8.3: A heuristic model showing the interdependence of the macro, meso and micro layers that influence lifelong learning participation
Learners are located in the blue section at the core of the model. Around the learners are learning barriers and learning experiences. These layers are coloured using different shades of blue. Whilst they are directly related to the individual, they are separated in the model because barriers and experiences are encountered and navigated in different ways by different learners. The theoretical concept used to make sense of this segment of the model is that of the learning career as discussed in Chapter 2 (section 2.6.1) (Bloomer and Hodkinson, 2000).

The middle layer, shaded in green, represents the community college. This locates the learner within the context of the organisation and highlights how being in a rural or urban setting has a reciprocal relationship on learner and organisation. The theory used to underpin the findings in this segment is The Integrative Lifelong Learning Participation Model as delineated in Chapter 2 (section 2.6.3) (Boeren, 2016).

The outer layer, shaded in pink, represents the government. This illustrates how both learners and community colleges are located within a government-level political context. This aims to illustrate the influence of the grand narrative constructed that prioritises lifelong learning as a driver of economic growth and a way of life that envelops both organisation and learner. ILLPM is also used to underpin this layer.

The yellow arrows represent a dynamic and interdependent relationship between the three layers. The arrow that moves outwards-in represent the relationship between structural factors and their role in facilitating learning opportunities, whereas the arrow moving inward-out represents the relationship between a learner’s agency and its role in facilitating learning possibilities. The interaction of these two arrows, I argue, represents the point at which successful engagement in a lifelong learning setting exists.

8.3.2 The micro-level: The role of individual agency and the Learning Career framework

The theoretical underpinning used to conceptualise this segment of the model is that of the learning career (Bloomer and Hodkinson, 2000). Bloomer and Hodkinson describe learning career as a framework of ‘learning and dispositions to learning are seen in terms of their relationships with other material and cultural phenomena, including the meanings which learners attribute to those phenomena’ (2001: 591).
Thus, this section focuses on interpreting the findings uncovered during investigation of participants’ biographies and their participation in learning using the learning career as a framework of analysis. This framework has been used in many studies to account for differences in participants’ involvement in learning and how their life course, depicted through their narratives, influences their decision to learn (Biesta et al., 2011; Ng, 2008; Crossan et al., 2003; Glallacher et al., 2002).

The primary findings from these was that the learning journey over a person’s life course was erratic, rather than linear (Ng, 2008; Crossan et al., 2003; Merrill, 2004). For example, the current study has shown that the ‘erratic’ situation was brought about by a triggering factor, which impacted the social, economic and cultural factors in an individual’s life (Chapter 6). This ‘triggering factor’ then becomes an event or incident that acted as a turning point that drove adults to participate in learning activities (Gallacher et al., 2002 and Merrill, 1999).

For instance, in chapter 6 we saw the story of Ruby. Ruby was forced to resign from her academic career because she didn't receive her PhD. This was a ‘triggering factor’ which led her to learn vocational skills and embark upon a completely new career path as a self-employed seamstress. Stories like this show the interplay of an individual’s agency and ‘triggering factors’, and the role that they play in adult participation in learning. This was also true in the biographies of other participants. The findings are similar to those in Hodkinson et al., (2008a), which focused on adult career decision-making and reveals that older people adapted to health challenges by engaging in lifelong learning programs.

Within the context of learning through life, Hodkinson, et al. (2008b) build on the ideas of Strauss (1962) by contrasting two modes of living: routines and turning points. Routine is defined as a period of life when nothing dramatic happens, whereas a turning point is when something dramatic happens. Hodkinson, et al. (2008) develop on this theory to illustrate the significance of triggering factors on a person’s sense of continuity and the change that takes place in their life course. The findings from the current study revealed that when participants spoke about identity, this was mainly in relation to, and associated with, their work-related identity. Findings highlighted how changes in work status caused a turning point that had influenced their social identity and, consequently, impacted on the participants’
learning career. The present study therefore examined the participants’ learning career within the context of continuity and change patterns.

The triggering factors seen in the unemployed and retired participants were significant changes in their life, such as being made unemployed or retiring. These changes drove them to learn vocational skills in order to cope with their new identity. Many participants then set up a home-based business using the skills that they acquired. Consequently, this helped them to develop an identity as an entrepreneur. Even though some of the participants came in with strong academic qualifications, they started anew using their vocational skills. This illustrates that learning careers can go forward, and they can go into reverse (Crossan et al., 2003: 65). Thus, these changes in their life had strengthened their learning identity had shifted from a tentative learner to a committed one (Crossan et al., 2003). For instance, once they received the short course schedule, they marked the dates of each class in their diaries and looked forward for a new schedule.

On the other hand, those who were employed or self-employed sought continuity in their learning. Those who were employed among educators were actively involved in short courses of their own and relied on vocational skills to teach educational subjects at schools and universities. Therefore, they needed to acquire knowledge and skills in these areas so that they could impart knowledge and skills onto their students. Similarly, the self-employed participants enrolled in short courses to enhance their vocational skills and, at the same time, to keep up to date with changes to the fashion or food industries. Although learning served as a means through which they could continue their professional development, there were nevertheless changes that had motivated them to learn in the first place. As suggested by Hodkinson and colleagues 'even in periods of routine living some changes take place' (2008: 12). However, the factors that influence adult participation in learning are not typically acknowledged by policymakers and educators (Hodkinson et al., 2008).

8.3.3 The meso-level: Encouraging participation and the ILLPM

In chapter 2 (section 2.6.3), the ILLPM framework was discussed. Boeren (2016) states that no matter how motivated the student, if there is no opportunity to engage in a learning programme, the learner will not participate. This is evidenced by the
data from this study, which highlighted that if a learner wants to learn how to sew a particular type of garment, but the college offers courses that focus on other types of garment, they will not participate. The study also highlighted that flexibility of course schedules, accessibility of information, affordability of tuition fees and potential for income generation all affect participation in lifelong learning programmes.

Boeren (2016) argues that, at the meso-level, a reciprocal relationship between learner (demand) and community college (supply) is important if participation is to be increased. Furthermore, the study found that higher level policy decisions tended to homogenise rural and urban participants. However, by ensuring a reciprocal relationship, Boeren (2016) argues, institutions can focus on the unique barriers and mechanisms of support needed in a particular context to overcome the challenges created by the homogenous application of policies.

8.3.4 The macro-level: Complex relationships and the ILLPM

Overall the model seeks to illustrate the importance of the relationship between the three layers of government, community colleges and adult learners. Each layer is both embedded in and related to others. Boeren’s ILLPM framework highlights how the outer layer of the model, for example, the macro level (government), can impact strongly on how lifelong learning participation is ‘stimulated and constrained’ by various mechanisms, including government policy (2016: 148). The findings of this study highlighted how economic growth and commitment by the government in making lifelong learning a way of life, served to stimulate the funding necessary to ensure that universal access to lifelong learning in Malaysia. Specifically, the Blueprint on Enculturation of Lifelong Learning for Malaysia (2011-2020) was instrumental in the formation of a lifelong learning participation agenda. However, government initiatives can also constrain outcomes, as there can be a mismatch between policy aspirations and the mobilisation of resources required to implement lifelong learning programmes.

Using Boeren’s (2016) discussion on the importance of shared responsibility and shared risk between the three levels suggests how complex the relationships can become. It is not enough for the government to speak of grand aspirations, it must
also have a duty of care to ensure that the community college (meso-level) are provided with adequate resources for strategic implementation of the agenda. Furthermore, it is also important for the community college to then responsibly deliver the government's objectives by understanding the barriers and needs of potential learners.

This responsibility then extends to the learners who enrol onto courses. However, as Biesta et al. (2011) argue, this relationship must be balanced by the sharing of risk. This is mainly because dominant narratives can end up blaming the individual for not participating and taking advantage of opportunities.

8.3.5 The relationship between micro level and macro level

The findings of this study confirmed the interdependence relationship between the micro and macro level. At the micro-level, adults participate in a learning programme as a result of triggering factors that they encountered in life such as loss of employment. The ability of adults to exercise their agency depends on the availability of many factors, for example, learning opportunities and life commitment. This is congruent with the concept of agency and structure. According to the concept of agency, adults show an effort to enrol in learning activities to cope with the triggering factors or to alter their societal position (Merrill, 2015; Merrill and West, 2009; Ecclestone, 2009). Adults’ enrolment in lifelong learning programme enabled them to reach a set of expected benefits. In the context of this study, participants were interested in enhancing their skills, particularly in the vocational area and business, for example, sewing and cooking courses. On the other hand, the concept of structure plays an essential role in producing or reproducing behaviour by adults (Biesta et al., 2011; Crossan et al., 2003; Grenfell and James, 1998; Bourdieu, 1977). The availability of learning opportunities, for example, by the community colleges, provides a space for the participants to enrol and re-enrol in many different short course programmes to improve their vocational skills.

This study discovered that the Malaysian Government came up with a policy on lifelong learning to encourage Malaysians to continuously engaged in learning. Among the strategies was by providing a range of learning opportunities from many learning providers. It can be stated that to a larger extent, individuals’ factors to
participate in learning plays an essential role in determining the government strategies in providing lifelong learning programmes. Thus, the findings suggest that there was a reciprocal relationship between the micro-level and the macro-level in ensuring successful participation in learning.

The research findings were derived from a complex interaction between the government aspiration and the adult learners’ situation. They showed that each contributed to the development of lifelong learning participation, particularly in the Malaysian context.

8.4 Contribution to the knowledge and theory

This thesis makes a significant contribution to the academic literature in the area of lifelong learning by focusing on the socio-cultural perspective of Malaysian adult learners. A review of the literature highlighted that there was limited qualitative study into lifelong learning in the context of Malaysian community colleges which focused on in-depth biographical narratives of learners. The significance of this study stems from its focus on the grassroots experiences of learners and the interplay of these experiences in the wider social, political and economic context. Thus, the originality of this thesis lies in how it uses biographical methods to make sense of the complexity and diversity of participant perspectives. Additionally, this is the first study to do so in both an urban and rural setting. Furthermore, the study looks at the role that the three interdependent levels - macro, meso and micro - play in shaping the lifelong learning agenda in Malaysia. This research has provided detailed biographic findings on how these interdependent relationships are shaped. It has also discussed the implications that this has had on both learner participation and the implementation of lifelong learning programmes.

On a theoretical level, an original contribution stems from the use of two key theories that, although used in England and other European countries, have not been applied to the Malaysian context. These theories were Learning Career and the ILLPM. Interpreting the data using these theories reinforces existing knowledge into participation in learning among adults. This is because the study confirmed the findings of these theoretical frameworks. For instance, from the perspective of learners, we saw that triggering factors played a significant role in driving
participation in lifelong learning programmes. Additionally, on a meso-level, the role of reciprocity between the community college and learners established the ILLPM.

This thesis, therefore, extended both theories by applying them into the Malaysian context. What’s more, the study used ILLPM in a qualitative context to highlight the way the three layers were embedded, as well as the dynamic relationship between these layers as they influenced participation in lifelong learning. This kind of theoretical synthesis helps to provide a more comprehensive picture of participation in learning.

Based on these contributions, several recommendations for lifelong learning policy and practice can be outlined.

8.5 Research Recommendations

To improve policy and practice surrounding lifelong learning in Malaysia, the following recommendations are suggested. They are categorised in terms of the three organisational levels we have been discussing thus far.

8.5.1 Recommendations for the Malaysian government

1. Provide adequate funding to lifelong learning providers

The findings showed that community colleges receive limited funding from the central government to implement lifelong learning programmes. The statistics on the composition of participants at Higher Learning Institutions showed that 57% of those engaged in higher learning are enrolled in short course programmes in community colleges. This suggests that community colleges have successfully performed as lifelong learning providers and cultivated a culture within the local community. At the same time, this also illustrates that there is a preference for courses that are delivered in more informal educational settings. For this reason, the government is encouraged to provide adequate funding for community colleges to strengthen their role as hubs of lifelong learning.
2. **Encourage parental involvement in their children's education**

The findings suggest those with parents with a good value of education were supported in their pursuit of higher education and achieved success, even if they were from lower socio-economic backgrounds. This is in line with other studies, which showed that individual participation in learning at a later age was impacted by the extent to which their family was involved in their learning at a young age (Tsurkan, 2016; Repetti et al., 2011). As Tsurkan (2016) explains, parental involvement is a significant enabling factor in children’s learning, particularly when the teaching and learning process is, on its own, insufficient in fostering effective learning.

There is a Malaysian proverb that says, “learning begins at home”. It emphasises the role parents play as role models for their children. For example, parents can support the children’s learning by: monitoring them and becoming involved in their learning; showing positive moral-conduct; and fostering the child's potential development (Don, 2007). In doing so, the parents impress the importance of learning on the children.

However, demands faced by contemporary families have impacted this transmission of values. As more families become dual income in order to respond to economic struggles, parents increasingly send their children to child care and spend limited time with them on a day-to-day basis. This limits the transmission of cultural values. Thus, it is important for the government to strengthen the role that family plays in a child’s learning.

There are several approaches suggested in the literature that could help in this endeavour:

i. The educational institution could develop programmes that support families as they guide their children’s education;

ii. The government could foster a vision for better child development by cultivating a collaborative effort between parents, educational staff and communities so that they share responsibility for children’s education and social development.

iii. The government could promote a genuine lifelong learning culture by providing more spaces and facilities for intergenerational learning in
order to promote greater understanding of traditional values and to foster respect across generations.

3. **Encourage learning programmes at the workplace and public places**

The findings from the study showed that some participants stay engaged in learning activities that were conducted outside of the community college setting, whether in their workplaces, community centres, trade union buildings and public institutions. These learning opportunities had helped participants to develop their learning identities. Therefore, it is essential for the government to encourage the delivery of learning programmes outside of community colleges. This is in line with participants prioritisation of informal education environments and flexible courses.

**8.5.2 Recommendations for policymakers**

1. **Emphasise the social value of learning**

   The notion of ‘social value’ needs to be better integrated into the discourse surrounding lifelong learning policy. As discussed in Chapter Four (section 4.3.1), Malaysia’s lifelong learning policy, at the time of writing, places significant emphasis on ‘economic value’ for the creation of economic growth. This focus has meant that the significance of holistic self-development has been undervalued. However, as Crowther argued, lifelong learning ‘should be about learning for living as distinct from merely learning for a living’ (2004: 134). Literature suggests the need for a continuing emphasis on appropriate social value for positive individual progress and social justice (Field et al., 2011).

2. **Improve the national lifelong learning definition**

   This study calls for an improvement to the current definition of lifelong learning adopted in Malaysia. Lifelong learning is defined there as, ‘learning engaged by everyone of age 15 and above except professional students’ (Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, 2011: 6). As discussed in Chapter Four (section 4.3.2.2), the present definition of lifelong learning has been
influenced by the value of human capital theory. Thus, lifelong learning opportunities are concentrated on people who are economically active, i.e. people who are expected to contribute to economic development. In that context, there is a need to embrace a wider definition of lifelong learning, one that focuses on social and economic development. The Malaysian approach to lifelong learning policy can be contrasted with the concept of lifelong learning asserted by Aspin and Chapman, for whom ‘lifelong learning is a public good, for the benefit and welfare of everyone in society, not just the preserve of a few’ (2001: 2). For instance, people with disabilities and elder citizen also have a right to learn, despite their inability to fully ‘give back’ to the country in the form of economic productivity. This is important, as studies show that older people’s participation in learning activities have benefits for social outcomes, including their sense of citizenship, health and mental well-being (Schuller et al., 2017; Field and Lynch, 2015).

3. Upgrade the information delivery system

The findings in the study revealed that non-managerial staff were not aware of lifelong learning policy. Instead they focus on achieving institutional KPIs. A lack of awareness surrounding the policy could mean that the goals of educational institutions and the government become misaligned. Thus, there is a need for a better information delivery system in relation to lifelong learning policy. For instance, the policy could be presented in a different medium, one that is more accessible, such as a pamphlet, poster, or an app. Such an approach, it is hoped, would better align the organisational goals of both institutions.

8.5.3 Recommendations for lifelong learning providers

1. Promote the wider benefits of learning in the local area

The study showed that the benefits of learning are not limited to economic value and income generation. The interviewees reported that a transformation takes place in the mindset of the local community regarding rural community
colleges once adults start to engage in learning on a regular basis. This is evident in the increased enrolments in the short course programmes offered by such institutions. Consequently, many studies revealed that participation in learning could contribute to wider social benefits. For example, Schuller, et al. (2017) found that participation in learning contributes to the three main social domains: health, employment, and society and community.

Therefore, instead of concentrating on skills development, it may be better to promote the social benefits of lifelong learning. One way to do this is by conducting a study on the wider benefit that learning brings beyond simply economic productivity.

2. Improve the assessment for lifelong learning programmes

The findings in this study show that there is limited assessment of the effectiveness of short course programmes. Many studies that have been conducted in Malaysia used quantitative methods, thus, it is important to acknowledge that each local community has its own rich and unique story through qualitative study. Therefore, the assessment should seek to illustrate the social transformation that takes place after the establishment of a community college in the area.

In addition, the study suggests that community colleges can better use the data from the e-psh database. They can use it to better understand participation in short course programmes at the national level. For example, the analysis could compare type of courses and participants’ profiles. The analysis could further contrast community colleges in urban and the rural areas. The findings could lead to the creation of a more personalised short-course strategy for use in different settings. Besides this, the data could be used to compare national data with that in the districts in order to better understand how to widen participation in short course programmes in their area.

3. Establish a bridging course in Higher Learning Institutions (HLIs)

A number of strategies could be put in place to remove inhibitors to learning. These would mainly focus on widening participation. For example, one
approach could be to broaden access to HLIs for non-traditional learners by providing bridging courses. Bridging course is an intensive course to enable potential learners to enrol in the educational institution as well as to build their confidence to meet the institution’s requirement. Bridging courses have been implemented in many countries; for example, several universities in England offer foundation programme in Higher Education, which provide learning opportunities, with flexible entry requirement that are based on an individual’s work and life experiences. These courses provide a chance for individuals who have a negative view of learning to enter Higher Education. Studies show that societies which emphasise academic performance foster negative learning attitudes in individuals, for whom failure is equated with ineptitude or a lack of capability (Ng, 2013; Evans, 2003). A bridging course is a way for these learners to gain confidence and to foster lifelong learning.

4. Use an expert educator to deliver learning programmes

The results of the study underline the importance of teachers’ role in shaping adult learners’ learning experiences. Some teachers’ approaches facilitated the learners to acquire new skills, but the approach of some teachers inhibits their participation. For this reason, there is a need for continuous training and support for adult educators to establish their expertise and at the same time teach them about their responsibility to the broader institutional context.

8.5.4 Recommendation for learners

The findings from the study revealed that, by getting involved in learning opportunities, learners were better able to cope with changes in work-related identity. This is in line with findings presented in Duay and Bryan (2006) on elderly adults' perceptions of successful ageing, which revealed that participants were proactive in dealing with changes within their control and, at the same time, positively accepting of changes that were outside their control. The participants reflected on the fact that they had developed positive coping strategies and had taken charge of their lives. Thus, as individuals, we need to keep exercising our agency as we move through life.
Even though the study has outlined several recommendations to improve lifelong learning policy and practice, there are several limitations that need to be discussed.

8.6 Limitations of the study

The findings presented here are limited in that the study focusses on a small number of adult learners who are attending community colleges in both rural and urban settings at a fixed point in time. The findings cannot be generalised to other community colleges in the country, or other educational institutions, since the contexts are different. However, the findings were rich and in-depth and offered an appropriate sample upon which to apply the methodological and theoretical framework. The findings also provide an insight into the biographies of adults actively engaged in short course programmes. Despite that, the experience of these adult learners’ may be similar to those of other adult learners in different types of learning institutions, or in other places, for example, other Asian countries and regions.

In addition, the researcher did not intend to focus on women's participation. However, as it turned out, most active participants in short course programmes were women. Therefore, the findings of the study are limited to women’s experience of participation in lifelong learning programmes. It would be worthwhile to investigate the under-representation of men in community-based education (or indeed other areas of education too).

These limitations open up avenues for further research.

8.7 Further research

Studies have shown that dispositional barriers play a significant role in preventing adults from participating in lifelong learning programmes (Boeren, 2009; Desjardins et al., 2006; Gallacher et al., 2008). Thus, further research could interview non-participants, principally in order to understand their views and attitudes towards participation in learning activities. Exploring non-participants’ views and attitudes towards learning could help the government to understand the barriers or inhibitors to learning.
As discussed in Chapter 5, the use of a trust account was introduced in community colleges to overcome issues associated with funding for short course programmes. Because of the trust account, tuition fee for short course programmes has increased. This is because participants needed to pay the wages of the educators. This may alter the demographic make up of participants engaged in short course programmes. Further research could thus seek to compare the demographics of participants who attended the courses between 2016 and 2018. The findings may reveal the impact that the trust account strategy has on participation in short course programmes.

8.8 Autobiographical reflections: From positivist to interpretivist

I have learnt many invaluable experiences in conducting this research. The most profound learning experience for me was developing into an interpretivist, despite my positivist background. My first degree was in Information Technology and I taught programming for almost eight years before I started my doctoral studies. I used to think that science was the best way to explain things, because it provides convincing results using numbers and structured methodologies. I also believed that homogenising populations was not a significant issue and that, as a result, a research study should be generalisable to all relevant phenomena. However, my experience with critical theory has taught me that society is complex and ‘messy’.

I had thought of using quantitative techniques for my research, but after discussing such a choice with my supervisors and attending the ESCRC-DTC course, I learnt that qualitative study provides deeper and richer explanation about the world. Qualitative approaches were better able to capture society’s complexity and messiness. Thus, this approach is appropriate to my study, given that the focus was on understanding the meaning behind learners’ engagement in learning activities as well as the interaction between different stakeholders in lifelong learning participation in Malaysia.

Becoming more interdisciplinary has been quite the journey. In the beginning of the research process, I enjoyed the data collection process, since I had the opportunity to explore individuals’ learning biographies and how they ended up engaged in short course programmes at the local community colleges. The participants were open to
sharing their learning trajectories and life stories. This was certainly an exciting element of the research process, as each story was rich with individual experiences.

However, with this came additional challenges. I remembered when I was told by my supervisors that “qualitative study is messy…”. I did not truly understand what they meant until after transcribing the interviews. I realised that, when a participant answered my questions, their answers were scattered throughout the transcript. For example, a participant would add information about question A when they were giving the answer to question D. So, I needed to listen to the interviews and read the transcript numerous times so that I could gather all the related information and put them into one group. These processes were challenging and messy, but they were also valuable, as I could visualise and engage with the participants’ stories. Every’ story was complex, different and personalised; this made me appreciate the diversity of life.

Nevertheless, I became anxious, doubtful and uncertain, since every finding was being filtered through my own interpretation as a new researcher. My interpretation is limited to and influenced by my knowledge, values, beliefs and personal experiences. Besides, the findings could be interpreted in a number of ways. For this reason, I was taught by my supervisors to compare and contrast my findings with the literature. The process helped me to build confidence in my findings, as I was increasingly able to support and justify my findings.

On reflection, it has taken me time to adjust to interpretivist and sociological study. I feel I have adjusted well.

I am proud that, despite teething problems, I have come to the end of the doctoral process. The research has encouraged me to view lifelong learning as reflexive, both in relation to myself and in a wider context. Thus, this study is not just a lifelong journey for my research participants, but a turning point and commitment to my own lifelong learning journey.
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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Malaysia Education Pathway
APPENDIX B: Interview tools for adult learner

i. Consent form for interviews

CONSENT FORM FOR INTERVIEWS

Student No : 1466228
Title : Understanding adult learners participation in lifelong learning programme
Researcher : Nurulkinah binti Md Salleh

Kindly tick in the box (/)

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet of the above research study. I have had the opportunity to ask questions.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the research at any time, without giving reason.

3. I agree to participate in the study and the classroom learning-video recording.

4. I agree to the interview being audio-recorded.

5. I agree that my data will be stored, after it has been anonymised, and may be used for future research

________________________________________  ______________________  ______________________
Participant's name

________________________________________  ______________________  ______________________
Researcher's name
ii. Consent form for interviews in Bahasa Malaysia

**SURAT PERSETUJUAN PESERTA**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.Pelajar</th>
<th>1466228</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tajuk Kajian</td>
<td>Memahami Penyertaan Pelajar Dewasa dalam Program Pembelajaran Sepanjang Hayat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nama Pengkaji</td>
<td>Nursakinah binti Md Salieh</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sila tandakan (/) pada kotak di bawah.

1. Saya mengesahkan saya telah membaca dan memahami helaian maklumat berkaitan kajian ini. Saya telah diberi peluang untuk meneliti maklumat kajian, bertanya soalan dan mendapat jawapan yang memuaskan.

2. Saya faham penyertaan saya adalah secara sukacita dan saya bebas menarik diri pada bila-bila masa tanpa menjejaskan hak saya.

3. Saya bersetuju untuk mengambil bahagian dalam kajian ini dan terlibat dalam rakaman video pembelajaran.

4. Saya bersetuju untuk ditemubual dan dirakam perbuatan.

5. Saya mengizinkan semua data dan maklumat yang didapat digunakan oleh penyelidik untuk kajian ini dan kajian akan datang.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nama Peserta</th>
<th>Tariik</th>
<th>Tandatangan</th>
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<th>Nama Pengkaji</th>
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</table>
INFROMATION SHEET

Research Title: Understanding adult learners' participation in lifelong learning programmes

Introduction

I am Nursakinah binti Md Salleh, a PhD student from Centre for Lifelong Learning, University of Warwick. I am interested to explore adults’ participation and engagement in short course programmes by Community College. I invited you to participate in this research. I hope the information in this sheet will help you to make a decision to participate in this study. I sincerely respect your decision.

What is the aim of this research?

This research aims to examine adult participation and engagement in the short course programmes by the community colleges. I am interested to understand adults’ involvement in learning activities at the later age. In addition, this research will compare between two different settings, the community college that is located in the urban area and the community college that is located in the rural area. Furthermore, this study intent to contribute to the development of lifelong learning policy and practice in the country.

How is my involvement in the study?

Your involvement is voluntary. If you agreed to participate, you need to sign a consent form. Then, you will be interviewed between 30 to 60 minutes on your life story and engagement in short course programmes. The interview will be recorded with your permission. You can withdraw at any time of the study.

What is the risk of my participation?

There is only a low risk of participation.

What is the benefit of my participation?

This research helped you to reflect on your learning trajectory and possibly raised your awareness to build a learning culture within yourself and small circle of family.

Expenses and fee

You are not request to make any payment.

What happen after my involvement?

The interview audio will be transcribed and analysed to examine pattern of response from the participants. I will send you the interview transcript upon request.
Will my information will be confidential?

Yes, all the personal information will be anonymised and coded. I am adhere to the research ethical procedures by the educational institutions and the university.

How the result of the study will be disseminated?

The findings will be used at the educational institution level, presented in conferences and published in journals. It is hoped that the findings will benefit the adult education provider and the government to improve the quality of adult education in the country.

Where to refer for any issues?

Director of Delivery Assurance
Registrar’s Office, University House
University of Warwick
Coventry CV4 8UW
Complaints@Warwick.ac.uk
+44 (0)24 7657 4774

~Thank you very much~
INTERVIEW GUIDES FOR ADULT LEARNERS

### Opening

1. Creating good rapport
   i. Thanks to the participants for his/her willingness to share information.
2. Purpose
   i. Describe the nature of the study and the purpose of the interview.
3. Motivation
   i. Inform on how useful the information.
4. Confidentiality
   i. Declare anonymity of the informants.
   ii. Get approval from the participants to record the interview.
5. Time Line
   i. Inform the duration of the interview session.

### Body

1. General demographic information
   i. Personal and family background
   ii. What were your experiences of school?
   iii. What is nature of the job?
       (Ask more specific on the job)

2. What was your motivation to attend the non-formal way of learning?
   i. What inspired you to join the course?
   ii. Where did you hear about this short course?
   iii. How do you find the advantages of non-formal education?
   iv. Do you have any specific goal that you are hoping to achieve?

3. What is your prior knowledge of the skill?
   i. Do you have any experiences with the skill?
   ii. (How long have you been you practice the skills?)
   iii. (How do you learn the skill previously?)
   iv. (How this prior knowledge help you in learning?)

4. How was the learner experiences of the short courses programme?
   i. How do you enjoy the course? Which part do you like most?
   ii. What have you learn?
   iii. How do you interact with other learners?
   iv. How this learning contribute to you current condition (based on participant answer; economy, self-satisfaction)?
   v. Is there any barrier or difficulties in learning?
5. How effective is teaching in facilitating learning?
   i. How do you find the teaching process?
   ii. How the teacher response to learners inquiry?
   iii. How you find the interaction between teacher and students?
   iv. How do you learn?

6. What are advice, guidance and support do the learners’ received?
   i. How the support of learning that you received?
   ii. How the guidance help you in learning?
   iii. What is your recommendation to enhance your learning?

7. How does non-formal learning impact on your life?
   i. How did you practice your learning?
   ii. (What are some challenges that you face to practice your learning?)
   iii. (How do you see them as challenges?)
   iv. (Is your daily life changes in some ways?)
   v. How you satisfied with the course?

8. How does your engagement in learning?
   i. Do you have a plan to join other courses?
   ii. Why do you want participate to the other courses?
   iii. (How have these interactions affected your self-development?)
   iv. Are family/friends supportive in relation to your learning?

*questions in bracket () were asked if it is necessary.

Closing

A. Summarize
   a. Summarize the interview session.
   b. Ask for any additional information.

B. Action to be taken
   a. Approval for meeting again for the second stage of interview.
   b. Permission to keep in contact if there questions arise.
   c. Ask if the participant want to keep a copy of the interview transcript.

C. Maintain Rapport
   a. Thanks the participants.
   b. Appreciate their time.
vii. Verification Form

BORANG PENGESAHAN DATA

No.Pelajar : 1466228
Tajuk Kajian : Memahami Penyertaan Pelajar Dewasa dalam Program Pembelajaran Scapanjang Hayat
Nama Pengkaji : Nursakinah binti Md Salleh

Sila tandakan (✓) pada kotak di bawah.

1. Saya mengesahkan saya telah diberi pencerahan tentang maklumat saya dalam kajian yang dijalankan.

2. Saya telah diberi peluang untuk meneliti maklumat kajian, bertanya soalan dan mendapat jawapan yang memuaskan.

3. Saya faham penyertaan saya adalah secara sukarela dan saya bebas menarik diri pada bila-bila masa tanpa menjejaskan hak saya.

_________________________  ______________________  ________________
Nama Peserta             Tarikh                    Tandatangan

_________________________  ______________________  ________________
Nama Pengkaji             Tarikh                    Tandatangan
APPENDIX C: Interview tools for community colleges staff

i. Consent form for interviews

CONSENT FORM FOR INTERVIEWS

Student No : 1466228
Title : Understanding adult learners participation in lifelong learning programme
Researcher : Rumakinah binti Md Salleh

Kindly tick in the box (/)

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet of the above research study. I have had the opportunity to ask questions. 

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the research at any time, without giving reason.

3. I agree to the interview being audio-recorded.

4. I agree that my data will be stored, after it has been anonymised, and may be used for future research

Participant’s name Date Sign

Researcher’s name Date Sign

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ii. Consent form for interviews in Bahasa Malaysia

SURAT PERSETUJUAN PESERTA

No.Pelajar : 1466228

Tajuk Kajian : Memahami Penyertaan Pelajar Dewasa dalam Program
Pembelajaran Sepanjang Hayat

Nama Pengkaji : Nursakirah binti Md Sallih

Sila tandakan (/) pada kotak di bawah.

1. Saya mengesahkan saya telah membaca dan memahami helaian maklumat berkaitan kajian ini. Saya telah diberi peluang untuk menciti maklumat kajian, bertanya soalan dan mendapat jawapan yang memuaskan.

2. Saya faham penyertaan saya adalah secara sukarnya dan saya bebas menarik diri pada bila-bila masa tanpa menjejakkan hak saya.

3. Saya bersetuju untuk ditemubual dan dirakam perbualan.

4. Saya mengzinkan semua data dan maklumat yang didapati digunakan oleh penyelidik untuk kajian ini dan kajian akan datang.

_________________________          ____________________________          ____________________________
Nama Peserta                          Tarikh                             Tandatangan

_________________________          ____________________________          ____________________________
Nama Pengkaji                        Tarikh                             Tandatangan

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### Soalan Temubual

1. Mohon Yg.Brs Dr ceritakan latar belakang penglibatan Dr dalam perancangan program Pembelajaran Sepanjang Hayat di Malaysia (PSH)?

2. Apakah ura tuju pembangunan modal insan Negara? Apakah matlamat atau sasaran pembelajaran sepanjang hayat Negara?

3. *Blueprint Enculturation of lifelong learning for Malaysia 2011-2020* menyatakan keperluan sebuah formula polisi PSH di Malaysia, bagaimana usul perkara ini dibincangkan dan status semasa pembangunan polisi PSH ini?

4. Terdapat isu di kalangan ahli akademik yang mempertikaikan fokus pembangunan modal insan kini yang berteraskan vokasional dan peningkatan ekonomi berbanding membina atau memperkaya potensi individu sebelum ini. Apakah pandangan Dr?

5. Bagaimana Dr melihat akses kepada pembelajaran melalui pendidikan non-formal membantu pembangunan diri komuniti di Malaysia? (kursus-kursus pendek) pandangan Dr terhadap fungsi dan peranan Kolej Komuniti? Statistik menunjukkan penyertaan komuniti yang tinggi dalam kursus pendek, apakah perancangan untuk memperkemaskini program ini?

6. Bagaimana sistem pendidikan Negara menggalakkan penyertaan komuniti dalam PSH? Apakah ‘menggantikan peluang yang terlepas’ atau ‘menambahkan’ kemahiran-kemahiran yang diperlukan?

7. Malaysian Education Blueprint (HE) 2015-2025 menyatakan pengiktirafan bidang vokasional seiring aliran akademik. Pada pemerhatian Dr, bagaimanakah penerimaan masyarakat Malaysia terhadap bidang vokasional kini? Halatju bidang vokasional-akses kepada Universiti Awam?

8. *Bagaimana kerjasama KPT dengan Jabatam Pembangunan Komahiran, KSM? Keperluan kepada persijilan SKM tahap 1 dan 2 di kalangan guru untuk pendidikan vokasional KSSM (pendidikan vokasional dan teknologi).*

9. Apakah harapan/sasaran Dr kepada program PSH melalui kursus pendek di Kolej Komuniti ini?
iv. Interview Guide for officers at the Department of Community Colleges Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soalan Temubual</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Mohon Tuan ceritakan aspirasi program Pembelajaran Sepanjang Hayat (PSH) di</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kolej Komuniti?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Bagaimanakah Tuan melihat peranan Kolej Komuniti dalam menyediakan PSH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kepada komuniti berbanding Universiti Awam atau agensi lain? Apakah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kelebihan/kekurangan program yang ditawarkan? Bagaimana supply side memenuhi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>demand side?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Sebagai badan pelaksana, bagaimanakah strategi dirancang bagi meggerakkan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pelan pendidikan (khususnya berkaitan bangsa yang menghayati PSH) dilakukan?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Berdasarkan pengalaman Tuan, bagaimanakah arahan disampaikan daripada peringat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pusat kepada institusi pelaksana untuk pelaksanaan pelan pendidikan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(pembudayaan PSH) ini? Bagaimana implementasi polisi oleh institusi?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Apakah cabaran penyampaian arahan atau maklumat kepada institusi pelaksana?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Masalah dana, bagaimanakah tuan melihat isu ini akan mempengaruhi penyertaan PSH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dalam kalangan komuniti?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Apakah sistem pendidikan Negara (di peringkat makro) membantu menggalakkan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>penyertaan komuniti dalam PSH? Micro-meso-macro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Apakah perancangan ke hadapan untuk program PSH di Kolej Komuniti ini?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTERVIEW GUIDES FOR THE STAFF AT THE LIFELONG LEARNING UNIT,
COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Opening

Creating good rapport
- Thanks to the participants for his/her willingness to share information.

Purpose
- Describe the nature of the study and the purpose of interview.

Motivation
- Inform how useful the information will be.

Confidentiality
- Declare anonymity of the informants.
- Get approval from the participants to record the interview.

Time Line
- Inform the duration of the interview session

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Body</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1.</strong> Could you describe your involvement in the lifelong learning programme?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2.</strong> What are the aspirations of the Malaysian lifelong learning policy?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3.</strong> How do you informed about the lifelong learning policy?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4.</strong> What is the response of staff regarding the policy?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5.</strong> Have there been any issues?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>6.</strong> Whose interest are served by them?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>7.</strong> How is the command from the Headquarters?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>8.</strong> Could you tell me about the short course programme at the community college?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>9.</strong> What group of people that are active in the short course programme? (work status or socio-economic status or group of age)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>10.</strong> How a short course programme develop or organize?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>11.</strong> What are the challenges in conducting the short course programmes?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>12.</strong> How is your approach to reach the KPI?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>13.</strong> How is the promotional strategies?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>14.</strong> What is support/incentive/reward that is provided by the learner?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>15.</strong> What are the resources or support that needed to improve the implementation of lifelong learning programme?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Closing

- a. Summarize
  - Summarize the interview.
  - Ask for any additional information.

- b. Action to be taken
  - Permission to keep in contact if there questions arise.
  - Ask if the participant want to keep a copy of the interview transcript.

- c. Maintain Rapport
  - Thanks the participants.
  - Appreciate their time.
APPENDIX D: Guideline for transcription

This guideline is prepared by the researcher to develop a consistent format for interview transcripts.

Producing the Transcript

1. Sentence structure
   a. Put little or no punctuation in orthographic transcript. Check the audio if you want to get the sense of intonation-if need to use punctuation. (Braun and Clarke, 2013: 163).

2. Thinking time / A short pause (…)

3. Thinking time / A long pause (……)

4. Thinking time outloud. (aaa). E.g: I am aaa a teacher.

5. Non-verbal Communication (cry/laugh/pause) need to be consistent. E.g: (cry)

6. Inaudible-put the time of the tape. E.g: (inaudible-30.30)

7. Quotation mark; (“”)
   a. They said something to others.
   b. When they indicate that they were thinking something (internal dialogue).
   c. Reports what someone else said (or thought).
   d. Single quotation mark: If the person being quoted quotes someone themselves.

8. Words that are emphasized-make it underline. E.g: I really love baking.

9. Confidentiality; Either put a blank (____) or not real name or (the local hospital). If the person talks to their friend or family, put as He talked to (his sister) or not real name.

10. Agreeing to a statement (mmm)

11. Neutral to a statement (hmm)

12. Finding words (emm)

13. Miscellaneous;
   a. When a person trails off on a word @ change their thought @ non-essential information to the sentence, use a long dash. E.g: I went to—there was nobody. (to should be followed by verb, then the person changes his mind perhaps).
   b. Any error [sic]
   c. Number; less than nine, write the number.
   d. Abbreviation-only if the person uses it. Not to simplify the conversation yourself.
   e. Overlapping speech – ((in overlap))
   f. Uncertain-Use (?)
   g. Names of Media – title of book etc, put it in italic.

Template table for transcription

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discourse Unit (DU)</th>
<th>Researcher (R) / Interviewee (I)</th>
<th>Transcription</th>
<th>Remark</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>R</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>I</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>R</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>I</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX E: Examples of coding process

**THEME: Educational Institution**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Text segments from the transcripts in Malay language</th>
<th>Text segments from the transcripts translated in English language/ Open coding process</th>
<th>Selective coding/ generated themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Maya</td>
<td>jadi antara salah satunya adalah life long learning nilah yang kena ajarlah. keusahawanan pun sama. jadi bila saya cari-cari dalam internet mana tempat yang terbaik, untuk saya Masuk, untuk saya belajar, saya tengok antara Kolej komuniti paling dekat sinilah, Hulu Langat lah. ()</td>
<td>I found the internet to be a great source of information, we were just a click away from information (laughs). What I used to do were spending a considerable amount of time on the internet searching for vocational skills and entrepreneurship. In no time, I found information about the community colleges. This college was the nearest to my place.</td>
<td>Information: community college website</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>Before I retired, I look on the website for courses that offered, I focus on the weekend since I was working at the time.</td>
<td>Before I retired, I had more access to internet especially at work. So I searched the website for institutions that offered short-term courses. Fortunately, I found out about the community college. I browsed every website of the community colleges in Selangor (a state) and attended courses that I’m interested in.</td>
<td>Information: community college website</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Fatima</td>
<td>Asalnya kan saya tengok facebook. Saya kata ooo ok tiba-tiba terjumpa geng jahit tu. Eh, kata kolej komuniti. So, kolej komuniti dia kata kena daftar… Itu saya cuba buat. Dapat masuk daftar. Sebelum tu kawan-kawan ada cakap, jom aaa jom kita pergi kolej komuniti. Tapi dia nak pergi tempat jauh sana. Dekat Kapar.</td>
<td>I really wanted to learn how to sew, then I started looking for online information. Fortunately, I found on Facebook, there was a sewing group and I requested to join the group and it was accepted, I was thrilled (smiles). Meantime, a certain colleague of mine spoke about the community colleges offering short course programmes in</td>
<td>Information: social media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>297</td>
<td>Suami saya pon kata daripada jauh baik tak payah pergi, dia kata. Membazir minyak lagi berapa dah dia kata. Rupanya ada disini. Sebelumpernah tengok ni. Tapi tak tak tak tak, orang kata tak tak tak dapat nak banyakkan.. Apa yang ada program disini, tak tahu kan? Ha... Ingatkan aaa kerja kolej kat sini, kolej kat sini kolej komuniti ingatkan student-stiuent yang macam muda ni. Rupanya tak. Rupanya ada.. apa ni program untuk aaa aaa apa dia panggil... <em>Short, short-Course.</em></td>
<td>sewing [...] I tell you, you should have seen how happy I was when she mentioned that! That motivated me to do my own research, and true to what she said, the community colleges did offer short course programmes [...] (laughs) the rest is history.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Sree</td>
<td>Daripada kawan. Aaa dia pernah join dekat sini. Tapi orang Melayu lah.. Saya jumpa dia, dia dekat kedai-kedai la, kedai dekat depan beli barang jahitan. Ahaaa best mart... Dia yang ajak dia kata ada kkhl ada belajar jahitan semua kan Emm so i terus datanglah i dekat sini ofis saya tengok dia orang punya schedule banyak juga diorang ajar macam-macam lagi.. seluarlah apa-apa kan..</td>
<td>I knew about the course when I went to buy some sewing tools. <em>There was a Malay friend that I met in the shop who told me about the community colleges.</em> She invited me to join the sewing courses. After that, I went to the community college’s office. I was excited about the number of sewing courses that they offered. Information: word of mouth</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Farah</td>
<td>Maklumat ni... Aaa dapat daripada kawan-kawan. ada kakitangan dalam ni macam diaorang aaa...saudara Dia bagi tahu... Itu lah.</td>
<td>So what happened was that I really wanted to know more about the short courses, <em>I happened to have a relative who worked at a local community college so she is the one who gave me information about the short courses.</em> Information: word of mouth</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Ayesha</td>
<td>Melalui kawan-kawanlah. Bila saya ada kawan-kawan, jadi, bila saya dah masuk dalam satu group, dia akan wujudkan kumpulan group After I retired, I decided to join an Arabic language course. I shared my interest in cooking with a friend that I met there. She invited me to join a</td>
<td>Information: social media</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Rose</td>
<td>Tapi tak semua~ apa ni penyebaran tu tak semestinya sampai kat orang yang betul-betul perlu. Ha, tak sampai semua sebab macam saya pon dapat tahu pasal kolej komuniti buat macam jahitan ke apa kan sebab tanya kat kawan.</td>
<td>WhatsApp group on cooking. Then some of the friends in the group told me about the community college. Then I asked them how to participate in the course. They invited me to another WhatsApp group of short course programme created by the college’s staff. That was how I knew about the short courses. And I also witnessed how the social network has been a good platform to disseminate information.</td>
<td>Information: word of mouth</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Manual coding categorisation

In Class

1. Case study
   - Suka tugas / dada
   - Send video self
2. Steps in learning
   - But pola real
   - Notes
3. Bring school
   - Attitude
4. Many things happen
5. Learn
6. Meet friend
7. Share exper thought

Face to face
- Direct classroom
- Online learn
- Youtube
1. Not direct
2. Can't catch up
3. Know mistake
4. Project sales
5. Ppr
6. Boot smdl

Observe class
- Ready to approach
- Feel
1. Practice class
   - Follow closely
2. Reflection business

Experiences in learning
- Be specific
- On-time skills
- Business management

Emotion
- Happy
- Scared

Flash back
- Learning message
- Law of attraction
- Motivation
- Encourage each other
- Catalyst

No awake
- Knowledge
- Need work
- Know apa isi
- Translate
APPENDIX F: An example of list of characteristics for a theme on Learning experiences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Category of themes</th>
<th>Sub-themes</th>
<th>Descriptions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Educational institution</td>
<td>Information</td>
<td>Source of information: how they got to know about the programme? Promotional strategies - website - social media - social network - outreach programmes - word of mouth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Accessibility</td>
<td>Factor that facilitate enrolment in learning - Reasonable tuition fee - Lower risk of failure - Less commitment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Flexible course schedule</td>
<td>- Weekend - Weekdays (participants in-employment → urban)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Stimulating course content</td>
<td>State of not knowing/need that relate to the course that offered - Relevant of the short course - Practical for business - Updated fashion/menu and active</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Learning environment</td>
<td>Learners perception</td>
<td>Physical classroom Multicultural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Classroom activities</td>
<td>Learning by doing</td>
<td>- First-hand experience - Know the ‘right’ texture - Develop pattern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Learning by observation</td>
<td>- Learn the ‘right’ technique - Increase confident to practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Learning through interaction</td>
<td>Teachers - Like to ask questions - Improve from mistakes Meet friends - sharing life situation - Get motivation/encourage each other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Repetition</td>
<td>Reason for repetition: - - Learn different techniques from different teachers - Familiarise with the steps - Get the ‘perfect’ pattern/measurement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Teachers’ approach</td>
<td>How they perceive the role of teachers?</td>
<td>Facilitate learning - patient - motivating - expert Inhibit learning - theoretical based - not democratic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX G: CAQDAS

Query text search for the term “lifelong learning”: 166 quotes

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<th>Covera</th>
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<tr>
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Query text search for the term “develop”: 103 quotes

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<tr>
<td>OutlinePerspectivePlan3</td>
<td>Files</td>
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### APPENDIX H: Cross tabulation table generated from NVivo

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants' demographics</th>
<th>B: Experience</th>
<th>C: Classroom setting</th>
<th>E: Learning Outcome</th>
<th>F: Teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1: Participants</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4: Participants: Age = 21-30</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5: Participants: Age = 31-40</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6: Participants: Age = 41-50</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7: Participants: Age = 51-60</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8: Participants: Age = 61+</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15: Participants: Education = Primary School</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16: Participants: Education = Lower Secondary School</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17: Participants: Education = Secondary School</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18: Participants: Education = Certificate</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19: Participants: Education = Diploma</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20: Participants: Education = Degree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21: Participants: Education = Master</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24: Participants: Marital Status = Single</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25: Participants: Marital Status = Married</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26: Participants: Marital Status = Single Mother</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28: Participants: No. of Child = Not Applicable</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29: Participants: No. of Child = 1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30: Participants: No. of Child = 2</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31: Participants: No. of Child = 3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32: Participants: No. of Child = 4</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33: Participants: No. of Child = 5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34: Participants: No. of Child = 6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35: Participants: No. of Child = 7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38: Participants: Type of Course = Sewing</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39: Participants: Type of Course = Cooking</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40: Participants: Type of Course = Sewing and Cooking</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43: Participants: Employment Status = Unemployed</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44: Participants: Employment Status = Self-employed</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45: Participants: Employment Status = Inemployment</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46: Participants: Employment Status = Retired</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49: Participants: Colleges = KKHL (urban)</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50: Participants: Colleges = KKPS (rural)</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX I: Research approval

Approval from the Economic Planning Unit, Prime Minister’s Department, Malaysia

APPLICATION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN MALAYSIA

With reference to your application, I am pleased to inform that your application to conduct research in Malaysia has been approved by the Research Promotion and Co-ordination Committee, Economic Planning Unit, Prime Minister’s Department. The details of the approval are as follows:

Researcher’s name : NURSAKINAH BINTI MD SALLEH
Passport No./I.C No : 830720-14-5842
Nationality : MALAYSIA
Title of Research : “THE MOTIVATION AND OUTCOMES OF STUDYING NON-FORMAL LEARNING FOR ADULT LEARNER IN COMMUNITY COLLEGES”

2. Please take note that the study should avoid sensitive issues pertaining to local values and norms as well as political elements. At all time, please adhere to the conditions stated by the code of conduct for researchers as attached.

“Merancang Ke Arah Kecemerlangan”
3. The issuance of the research pass is also subject to your agreement on the following:
   a) to ensure submission of a brief summary of your research findings on completion of your research; and
   b) to submit three (3) copies of your final dissertation/publication.

4. Thank you for your interest in conducting research in Malaysia and wish you all the best in your future research endeavor.

Yours sincerely,

[Signature]

(AZRAL IZWAN BIN MAZLAN)
for Director General
Economic Planning Unit
Prime Minister’s Department

Email: [Redacted]
Tel: [Redacted]
Fax: [Redacted]

ATTENTION

This letter is only to inform you the status of your application and cannot be used as a research pass.

c.c.

Ketua Setiausaha
Kementerian Pendidikan Tinggi
Bahagian Perancangan, Penyelidikan dan Penyelarasan Dasar
Aras 13, No.2, Menara 2, Jalan P5/6
Presint 5, 62200 Putrajaya
(u.p. Encik Rosnadi bin Majid)
Approval from the Department of Community Colleges Education

Ruj. Kami : KPT/JPKK/BPA/650-6/6 Jld. 2 | (5)
Tarikh : 5 Ogos 2016

Nursakina bintiMd Salie
No. 18, Jalan 1/7F,
43650 Bandar Baru Bangi,
Selangor

Tuan,

PERMOHONAN MELAKUKAN KAJIAN AKADEMIK DI KOLEJ KOMUNITI BAGI TUJUAN PENYELIDIKAN DI PERINGKAT DOKTOR FALSAFAH BERTAJUK THE MOTIVATION AND OUTCOMES OF STUDYING NON-FORMAL LEARNING FOR ADULT LEARNER IN COMMUNITY COLLEGES.

Dengan segala hormatnya saya merujuk kepada surat tuan bertarikh 26 Mei 2016 berkaitan perkara di atas.

2. Sukacita dimaklumkan bahawa permohonan tuan diluluskan. Walau bagaimanapun hasil kajian yang telah siap hendaklah dihantar ke Unit Penyelidikan dan Inovasi, Bahagian Akademik dan Pendidikan Berterusan, Jabatan Pendidikan Kolej Komuniti untuk simpanan.

3. Pihak tuan boleh berhubung terus dengan Kolej Komuniti berkaitan untuk melancarkan urusan.

Sekian, terima kasih.

"BERKHIDMAT UNTUK NEGARA"

Saya yang menurut perintah

(HJ. WAN IZZI RASHIDI BIN WAN MOHD. RAZALI)
Pengarah
Bahagian Akademik dan Pendidikan Berterusan
Jabatan Pendidikan Kolej Komuniti
Kementerian Pendidikan Tinggi

Sk: Semua Pengarah Kolej Komuniti

PENERAJU KOMUNITI BERILMU & BERKEMAHIRAN