CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

5.0 Summary of the Study and Findings

This study investigated the adults’ perceptions on e-learning as a method for further study. Areas investigated included their awareness, general understandings, expectations and perceptions on e-learning. Adults’ motivations and obstacles to use this method of learning were also studied. At the same time, this study also aimed to find out the success factors for e-learning program implementation. Besides looking at learners’ perspective, information gathering from two institutions engaged in e-learning programs was also carried out to understand the providers’ perspective. With the clearer picture from both parties, the study can help to create mutual understandings and commitments between the providers and learners.

Five research questions were set up to investigate the main concerns of this study. The first research question sought to obtain general opinions of trainers’ in UNITAR and OUM regarding e-learning implementation. Interviews were conducted with instructors who were involved in e-learning program implementation. Their views and opinions were recorded based on programs offered, students’ enrolment and response, adult learners’ participation, problems faced and measurements undertaken.

The other four research questions were investigated using the survey method. A questionnaire was administered to respondents made up of adults from different demographic categories. The questionnaire was distributed through an online survey and distribution by hand. It was found out that the response for online survey was much lower than distribution by hand. Generally, adults preferred to participate in a survey with a hard copy on hand where they will be constantly reminded if they have not
completed the questionnaire. For an online survey, they were easily distracted either by the Internet connection or other interests. The data collected was analysed statistically using the SPSS software.

The data collected revealed that e-learning has received attention and concern among Malaysia adults. A majority of the respondents who participated in this survey had heard of this learning method. The e-learning method also gives positive perception to them. Generally, adults perceived e-learning as a learning method that can give them high flexibility in time management, can suit their different learning abilities and was important to have good information technology knowledge to involve in e-learning. They also considered e-learning as a cost effective method for learning. However, they did not perceive e-learning as an interactive medium to promote group interaction and strengthen communication with peers and instructors. The lack of ‘human’ factor in e-learning may have caused majority of them to doubt its ability to provide quality education. From the study, it is also learned that this learning method has been widely accepted by adults. Though many of them appealed to on-the-job-training learning method, they were willing to give it a try if there was an opportunity. Nevertheless, their willingness to try will be affected by the quality issue concerning e-learning as there was a significant relationship between these two aspects.

The traditional classroom method is a widely used method in schools, colleges and institutions of higher learning. Adults have gone through this method of learning at many stages of their life. To measure their expectation on e-learning programs and implementation, a comparison was done with the traditional classroom method. A majority of adults expected e-learning to be equally as good as traditional classroom method in terms of quality. They were also quite positive that e-learning method would be replacing the traditional classroom method in future. However, the replacement may
need more than five years to be realized. During this time, e-learning is expected to be continuously improving and be more widely recognized for its quality.

Respondents in this study were highly motivated by e-learning benefits in providing flexibility and savings on time and cost. Adults who have to work and commit to families responsibilities have tight constraints in time and money. They preferred a learning method that can let them learn at own pace and without wasting too much time in moving and travelling. As for the obstacles that could hinder adults to learn through e-learning was the lack of human interaction and indiscipline in self-learning. The 'alone' environment may not be motivating for learning in long run. Adults might felt bored to learn alone without the face-to-face communication with other learners.

Among all the important criteria tested for e-learning implementation, program content was identified as the most critical factor while the others also had some importance. The respondents were very concerned of how well the program is designed and suited to their needs. Technical considerations like website accessibility, security and support were also highlighted by the adults. As e-learning utilizes Internet technology to carry out its learning process, the considerations are important. The respondents in this study were mostly working adults who preferred minimum interruptions and distractions during their limited time spend in e-learning.

5.1 Implications of the Study and Suggestions

The findings from this study have a few implications for the policy makers and e-learning instructors from various universities. A majority of respondents did not think highly that e-learning provides high quality education. Results from the survey suggest that institutions should look into ways of improving quality perceptions on adult
learners. Whenever offering an e-learning program, quality aspects on the program, instructor, learning materials, quizzes, examination formats and learner supports should be emphasized. The institutions can position themselves as quality driven academy by getting some worldwide recognition for their e-learning programs. For example, they may strive toward ISO 9001 accreditation for their institution or set up Quality Management Centre to ensure all programs offered comply with standards at all times. For some professional courses, they can partner with international institutions or industry giants for additional certification of their e-learning degrees and diplomas. With these image revamping efforts, adults’ perception on e-learning quality can be improved.

Findings from the survey also showed that most of the respondents were concerned on the lack of human interactions elements in e-learning. Institutions and instructors may need to modify their delivery system by putting more human elements in it. Instructors can encourage more communication among the learning groups by moderating or facilitating a discussion or forum. Institutions should train the instructors with academic counselling skills and equip them with relevant educational materials and tools. Instructors have to take the initiative to interact with learners from different background and locations from time to time. With some personal coaching and progress monitoring from instructors, learners may not feel bored or de-motivated in a self-learning environment.

Another aspect the institutions should look into is technology facilities. The survey showed that respondents had put a high priority of web page accessibility above most of the criteria tested. They were concern on whether the e-learning site can provide easy accessibility at all times. E-learning programs are highly depending on Internet technology for delivery. In the area of hardware, e-learning institution must
have reliable web server with good administration that can ensure 24 hours a day, 7
days a week type of operation ability. As the learners are posting their assignments and
sharing their thoughts through the learning sites, the learning area must be secured.
This is to avoid any outsider trespassing and viruses’ attack that may cause loses of
valuable intelligent properties and information. As for software, it is important that the
courseware or learning applications used are user-friendly with immediate support to
the learners. If possible, training sessions could be conducted at different locations
nearest to learners to educate them on any new courseware or applications.

The enrolment of e-learning programs is very low compared to traditional
classroom programs in Malaysia. Though the study shows adults optimistic view of e-
learning method, some efforts need to be carried to expose more adults to this learning
method. Institutions could consider giving previews or program testing to adults who
are interested in any of their e-learning program. Massive road shows on e-learning
modules could be conducted at different places in Malaysia throughout the year.
Currently, most of the road shows are at certain period especially when the SPM/STPM
school leavers are planning their education pathway. However, e-learning which is
suitable for adults can expect participation anytime in the year. By having some
education road shows which are targeted to the working adults, retirees or home makers,
institutions can have effective marketing strategy in attracting the right customers.
These groups of adults are more financially independent but with high constraint in
time. Therefore, some hands on experience on the e-learning courseware or learning
tools may attract them and encourage more enrolment.

A majority of the respondents involved in this survey were degree holders that
had much exposure to the Internet and they are very positive on the e-learning method.
As e-learning is a self-learning method that requires some basic information technology
knowledge and independent learning experience, this group of adults are quite suitable for this method. They were trained academically in universities before and are working in a society that lives around computers and Internet. Therefore, their acceptance level to e-learning was generally high. E-learning institutions should target this group of adults as their prospects and try to offer programs that interest them. The study shows that most of the adults involved in this survey were interested in postgraduate studies and information technology related programs. Times (1989) has identified one of the reason for adults to learn is the personal enrichment factor. Hence, this group of degree holder respondents are more likely to enrol in postgraduate studies to improve their academic qualifications. To capture these prospective adult learners, institutions should offer more Master degrees and Doctor of Philosophy degrees in various areas. With the right programs and all the other initiatives mentioned, e-learning method should be able to have higher enrolment compared to other forms of learning.

5.2 Recommendation for Future Research

On the basis of findings from this study, the following recommendations may be considered for further study.

E-learning has a very wide scope including web-based training, supported online learning in formal school, and informal knowledge gaining from the Internet. This study only looked at fully online learning programs offer by institution of higher learning in Malaysia. Further research on other forms of e-learning can be carried out to give a clearer overall picture concerning e-learning.

Secondly, e-learning is not only for adults. Young learners like teenagers and kids have many opportunities to learn interactively from the electronic medium. The
perceptions and understanding of young learners on e-learning can be investigated in the future to gather views from various angles.

The perception on quality has been identified as an important element that can affect adult participation on e-learning in this study. A follow-up study can be conducted to find out the determinants of quality. In-depth surveys or interviews with adults to know how they perceive quality for e-learning programs can help the institutions to improve in this aspect.

This study served as an exploratory research on e-learning in Malaysia, but it did not have detailed findings on a successful model on e-learning program which can be applied by the institutions. Therefore, it is recommended that more criteria for successful implementation be tested and be concluded in future.

Besides looking at perception, learners' satisfaction on e-learning programs can also be investigated. Many e-learning programs are running in local institutions now. A research to survey participants' satisfaction on e-learning program that they have enrolled can be carried out. Results from the perception study can be used to compare with the satisfaction level of participants. The research will show whether the positive perception for this exploratory study can be supported by satisfaction from participants.

5.3 Conclusion

This exploratory study on e-learning in Malaysia sought to find out the perceptions of adults to use it as a method for further studies. A survey was conducted targeting adults who have no experience in using e-learning technologies. Based on their general understanding and personal views, the chosen adults shared their perceptions and opinions on e-learning.
The study shows that majority of the adults’ wished to further their studies during free time. Though the learning method most appealing to them was the traditional classroom lecture and on-job-training, the adults had positive perceptions on several aspects of e-learning, especially on its ability to provide flexible learning process. Most of them were willing to try out this method when they are considering further study. They were also exposed to different sources for the availability of e-learning programs through mass media, the Internet, friends and family.

However, lack of human interaction and loneliness in self-learning were discouraging the adults’ participation. Quality was also one aspect that can affect adults’ decision to try e-learning. Adults who participated in this survey did not think e-learning was providing quality education. This may be due to limited recognition or publicity of e-learning programs offered by the institutions.

The study also identified several factors, such as program content, website accessibility, security and support as areas where e-learning providers have to put in more attention. These factors are used by prospective learner to evaluate the success of an e-learning program. With continuous improvement and evaluation based from the factors mentioned, the study showed the confidence of adults on e-learning’s ability to replace traditional classroom lecture in the future.

The implications discussed have significant pointers for policy makers and institutions. The recommendations based from findings and analyses are useful in promoting e-learning method to the adults. Hopefully, the institutions involved will make full use of this information. In conclusion, there are still many areas for e-learning to grow in order to capture bigger market share and receive more attention from learners of all ages. With proper planning and implementing, e-learning will be able to realise its potential as an effective learning method for lifelong learning.