

Influence of Self-Directed Learning (SDL) on Lifelong Learning (LLL) of Primary School Teachers in Selangor

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Abstract

The rapidly evolving educational landscape necessitates that primary school teachers continually enhance their professional skills to meet the demands of modern teaching. This study explores the influence of Self-Directed Learning (SDL) on Lifelong Learning (LLL) among primary school teachers in Selangor, Malaysia. Utilizing a quantitative research design, data were collected from 400 teachers using validated questionnaires, including the Self-Rating Scale for SDL and the Lifelong Learning Competence Scale. The study examines the relationship between SDL and LLL, highlighting the critical role of school leadership in fostering a culture of continuous learning. The results indicate that teachers with high levels of SDL are more engaged in lifelong learning activities, which is essential for adapting to curricular changes and technological advancements. Furthermore, the study finds that supportive leadership practices significantly enhance SDL, which in turn positively influences LLL among teachers. Gender differences were also noted, with female teachers reporting slightly higher engagement in LLL compared to their male counterparts. The findings underscore the importance of promoting SDL through effective school leadership to enhance the professional development of teachers. This study provides valuable insights for policymakers and educational administrators to design strategies that support teachers' lifelong learning, ensuring that they remain competent and confident in their roles as educators.

Keywords: Self-Directed Learning, Lifelong Learning, School Leadership, Primary School Teachers, Professional Development.

Introduction

The rapidly evolving educational landscape demands that teachers continuously adapt to new teaching methods, technologies, and curricular changes to remain effective in the classroom. Lifelong learning (LLL) in the Malaysian context, has emerged as a crucial approach for

ensuring that teachers can meet these demands. In line with the Malaysian Education Development Plan 2013-2025, lifelong learning is emphasized as a key component in achieving a world-class education system (Malaysian Ministry of Education, 2013). This focus is particularly relevant for primary school teachers, who play a foundational role in shaping students' learning experiences. Self-Directed Learning (SDL) is a pivotal aspect of lifelong learning. SDL empowers teachers to take charge of their own professional development, enabling them to identify learning needs, set goals, find resources, and evaluate their progress (Garrison, 1997). For primary school teachers in Selangor, SDL offers a pathway to continuously improve their teaching practices and keep up with educational advancements. This study explores the influence of SDL on lifelong learning among these teachers, highlighting the role that SDL plays in fostering a culture of continuous improvement and adaptability.

In the context of Malaysian education, there has been significant attention paid to SDL as a means of enhancing teachers' professional growth (Knowles, 1975). In this research, SDL serves as a mediator in the relationship between leadership for learning and lifelong learning among primary school teachers in Selangor. The study underscores the importance of school leaders in providing the necessary support and encouragement for teachers to engage in SDL, which in turn influences their commitment to lifelong learning. The significance of lifelong learning in the teaching profession cannot be overstated. As educators, teachers are expected to be lifelong learners, continuously expanding their knowledge and skills to adapt to the changing educational environment (Uzunboylu & Hürsen, 2011). The Malaysian Ministry of Education (MoE) has recognized this need, integrating lifelong learning into its strategic plans to ensure that teachers remain competent and confident in their roles. The integration of SDL into teachers' professional development is seen as a critical step in achieving these objectives.

Furthermore, the advent of the Industrial Revolution 4.0, with its emphasis on automation, big data, and the Internet of Things (IoT), has further heightened the need for teachers to be adept at lifelong learning (Siemens, 2005). The ability to effectively utilize new technologies in teaching is now considered a fundamental skill, and teachers who engage in SDL are better positioned to incorporate these technologies into their classrooms. This not only enhances the learning experience for students but also ensures that teachers remain relevant in an increasingly digital world. In Selangor, primary school teachers face unique challenges in their pursuit of lifelong learning. It includes the varying levels of support from school leadership and the differing opportunities for professional development across schools (Sharifah Shahadania, 2024). Despite these challenges, the study found that teachers who actively engage in SDL are more likely to develop a positive attitude toward lifelong learning, which is crucial for their professional and personal growth.

In conclusion, the relationship between SDL and lifelong learning is integral to the professional development of primary school teachers in Selangor. As the educational landscape continues to evolve, the need for teachers to engage in lifelong learning becomes increasingly important. SDL provides a framework through which teachers can take control of their learning journeys, ensuring that they remain at the forefront of educational advancements. This article will delve deeper into the factors influencing SDL and its impact on lifelong learning, providing insights into how primary school teachers in Selangor can be supported in their professional development efforts.

Problem Statement

In the evolving educational landscape, primary school teachers are increasingly required to engage in continuous professional development to meet the demands of modern curricula and pedagogical practices. However, despite the emphasis on Lifelong Learning (LLL) in national education policies like the Malaysia Education Development Plan 2013-2025, there is a gap in understanding how school leadership practices influence teachers' ability to engage in Self-Directed Learning (SDL), which is crucial for sustaining LLL (Malaysian Ministry of Education, 2013). Specifically, the role of Leadership for Learning (LfL) in fostering SDL among teachers has not been sufficiently explored in the Malaysian context, particularly at the primary education level (Garrison, 1997; Hallinger, 2011). This lack of understanding may hinder the effective implementation of LLL initiatives, potentially affecting the quality of education and teachers' professional growth. Therefore, this study seeks to address this gap by examining the mediating effect of SDL in the relationship between LfL and LLL among primary school teachers in Selangor, with the aim of providing insights that can inform leadership practices and policy development to better support teachers in their lifelong learning journey.

Literature Review

The concept of lifelong learning (LLL) has been a focal point in educational discourse, particularly in the context of 21st-century education. Lifelong learning refers to the continuous, self-motivated pursuit of knowledge for personal or professional reasons. It enhances social inclusion, active citizenship, and personal development, as well as competitiveness and employability. In the Malaysian context, the Ministry of Education has underscored the importance of lifelong learning through various strategic initiatives, including the Malaysian Education Development Plan 2013-2025 (Malaysian Ministry of Education, 2013). This plan emphasizes the need for teachers to continuously improve their knowledge and skills to maintain high standards in education.

Self-Directed Learning (SDL) is a critical component of lifelong learning. SDL is a process in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, to diagnose their learning needs, formulate learning goals, identify resources for learning, select and implement learning strategies, and evaluate learning outcomes (Williamson, 2007). The literature on SDL suggests that it is a key determinant of successful lifelong learning, particularly in professions that require continuous skill development, such as teaching.

Garrison (1997), conceptualized SDL as a process that involves motivation, self-monitoring, and self-management. His model emphasizes the importance of a learner's control over their learning process, which is facilitated by their ability to set goals and take responsibility for achieving them. In the context of teaching, SDL enables educators to remain current in their field, adapt to new teaching methods, and integrate new technologies into their classrooms.

The role of school leadership in fostering SDL among teachers has been widely studied. Leadership for learning, a concept that integrates elements of transformational, instructional, and distributive leadership, is seen as essential in creating an environment that supports SDL.

Leaders who prioritize learning, encourage collaboration, and provide opportunities for professional development are more likely to cultivate a culture of SDL among their staff. Murphy et al (2007), highlighted that effective school leadership involves not only managing the school's administrative functions but also actively promoting a learning-oriented environment.

In Malaysia, the integration of SDL into the professional development of teachers has gained increasing attention. Studies such as those by Sharifah Shahadania (2024) have explored the mediating role of SDL in the relationship between leadership for learning and lifelong learning among primary school teachers in Selangor. This research findings indicate that SDL is a significant predictor of teachers' engagement in lifelong learning activities. The study also emphasizes that supportive leadership practices are crucial in enabling teachers to engage in SDL, which in turn enhances their commitment to lifelong learning.

The challenges faced by teachers in adopting SDL are also well-documented. Factors such as workload, lack of time, and insufficient support from school leadership can hinder teachers' ability to engage in self-directed learning. Furthermore, the rapidly changing educational landscape, characterized by technological advancements and curriculum reforms, requires teachers to continuously update their skills and knowledge. Without adequate support and resources, teachers may struggle to keep pace with these changes.

The literature also highlights the impact of SDL on teachers' professional development. By engaging in SDL, teachers can develop the skills necessary to navigate the complexities of modern education (Siemens, 2005). This includes the ability to integrate new technologies into their teaching practices, adapt to curriculum changes, and meet the diverse needs of students. SDL empowers teachers to take ownership of their professional growth, leading to improved teaching practices and better educational outcomes for students.

In conclusion, the literature underscores the importance of SDL in fostering lifelong learning among teachers. The relationship between SDL and lifelong learning is critical in the professional development of teachers, particularly in the context of primary education in Selangor. Supportive leadership practices play a pivotal role in enabling teachers to engage in SDL, which in turn enhances their commitment to lifelong learning. As the educational landscape continues to evolve, the integration of SDL into teachers' professional development remains essential for ensuring that they can meet the challenges of modern education.

Research Methodology

This study employed a quantitative research design to investigate the influence of Self-Directed Learning (SDL) on Lifelong Learning (LLL) among primary school teachers in Selangor. The quantitative approach was chosen due to its effectiveness in systematically collecting and analyzing numerical data to identify patterns and relationships between variables (Creswell, 2018).

Participants: The study involved a sample of 400 primary school teachers from 662 national schools in Selangor. The participants were selected using stratified random sampling to ensure that the sample was representative of the population, considering various

demographic factors such as gender, teaching experience, and the geographical distribution of schools.

Instruments: Three validated questionnaires were used as the primary instruments for data collection. The Leadership for Learning questionnaire by Murphy et al (2007), was used to assess the leadership practices that support learning in schools. The Self-Rating Scale for Self-Directed Learning by Williamson (2007), was employed to measure the level of SDL among teachers. Finally, the Lifelong Learning Competence Scale by Uzunboylu and Hürsen (2011), was utilized to evaluate teachers' engagement in lifelong learning activities.

Data Collection: The data were collected through a survey method, where the questionnaires were distributed to the selected teachers. The participants were given sufficient time to complete the surveys, and all responses were collected and recorded for analysis.

Data Analysis: The collected data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, and frequencies, were used to summarize the data and describe the characteristics of the sample. Inferential statistics, including regression analysis and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) using SPSS and AMOS software (Byrne, 2016), were conducted to examine the relationships between leadership for learning, SDL, and LLL among the teachers.

Ethical Considerations: Ethical approval was obtained prior to the study, and participants' anonymity and confidentiality were strictly maintained throughout the research process.

This methodology provided a robust framework for understanding the role of SDL in enhancing lifelong learning among primary school teachers in Selangor, with insights into the critical factors influencing these outcomes.

Data Analysis

The results of this study provide important insights into the relationship between Self-Directed Learning (SDL) and Lifelong Learning (LLL) among primary school teachers in Selangor. The analysis focused on the levels of SDL, the extent of engagement in LLL, and the influence of school leadership on these factors.

Level of Self-Directed Learning: The findings revealed that the majority of primary school teachers in Selangor exhibit a high level of SDL. Descriptive statistics showed that the mean score for SDL was 4.2 on a 5-point scale, indicating that teachers are generally proactive in managing their own professional development, setting learning goals, and seeking resources to enhance their teaching practices.

Engagement in Lifelong Learning: The study also found that teachers in Selangor are actively engaged in LLL activities. The mean score for LLL was 4.1 on a 5-point scale, reflecting a strong commitment to continuous professional growth. Teachers reported participating in various professional development programs, attending workshops, and using online resources to stay updated with the latest educational trends and technologies.

Influence of Leadership for Learning on SDL and LLL: Regression analysis showed a significant positive relationship between school leadership practices and both SDL and LLL. Specifically, leadership for learning was found to have a direct effect on SDL ($\beta = 0.45$, $p < 0.01$) and an indirect effect on LLL mediated through SDL ($\beta = 0.35$, $p < 0.01$). This suggests that supportive leadership practices, such as encouraging collaboration and providing professional development opportunities, play a crucial role in fostering SDL, which in turn enhances teachers' engagement in LLL.

Differences Based on Demographics: The study also explored differences in SDL and LLL based on demographic factors such as gender and teaching experience. The results indicated a significant difference in LLL engagement based on gender, with female teachers reporting slightly higher levels of LLL (Mean = 4.2) compared to male teachers (Mean = 4.0). However, no significant differences were found in SDL based on teaching experience.

Table 1

Summary of Results

Variable	Mean Score	Significant Findings
Self-Directed Learning (SDL)	4.2	High level of SDL among teachers
Lifelong Learning (LLL)	4.1	High engagement in LLL activities
Leadership's effect on SDL	$\beta = 0.45$	Significant positive relationship ($p < 0.01$)
Leadership's indirect effect on LLL	$\beta = 0.35$	Mediated by SDL ($p < 0.01$)
Gender differences in LLL	Female = 4.2	Females report higher LLL engagement than males

These results underscore the importance of fostering SDL through supportive leadership practices to enhance teachers' lifelong learning and professional development.

Conclusion

The findings of this study underscore the critical role of Self-Directed Learning (SDL) in enhancing Lifelong Learning (LLL) among primary school teachers in Selangor. In the rapidly evolving educational landscape, the ability of teachers to continually develop their professional skills and knowledge is crucial for maintaining high standards of education. This study not only reaffirms the importance of SDL in fostering a culture of continuous improvement but also highlights the significant impact of supportive leadership practices in schools on both SDL and LLL.

This research makes significant theoretical and contextual contributions to the existing body of knowledge on educational leadership and professional development. Theoretically, it extends the understanding of the mediating role of SDL in the relationship between Leadership for Learning (Lfl) and LLL, providing empirical evidence that SDL acts as a critical conduit through which leadership practices influence teachers' engagement in lifelong learning. This finding enriches the discourse on adult learning theories by positioning SDL as not merely an individual attribute but as a process that can be significantly shaped by external factors, such as leadership practices within educational institutions.

Contextually, this study contributes to the Malaysian education system by highlighting specific leadership practices that can effectively promote SDL and, consequently, LLL among teachers. In the context of Malaysia's ongoing educational reforms, which emphasize the importance of teacher professional development, this research provides actionable insights for school leaders and policymakers. By identifying the mechanisms through which leadership can foster a culture of continuous learning, this study offers a practical framework that can be applied to improve teacher development programs across primary schools in Selangor and potentially in other regions. This research not only addresses the gap in understanding the interplay between leadership and teacher learning in Malaysia but also offers a model that could be adapted to similar educational contexts globally, thereby contributing to the broader efforts to enhance educational outcomes through effective leadership.

Key Insights and Implications

Firstly, the high levels of SDL observed among teachers in this study indicate that many educators are already taking proactive steps to manage their own professional development. This is a positive finding, as SDL empowers teachers to tailor their learning experiences to their specific needs, thereby enhancing their ability to effectively implement new teaching strategies and technologies in the classroom. The strong engagement in LLL activities further suggests that teachers in Selangor are committed to ongoing professional growth, which is essential for adapting to curricular changes and technological advancements.

The significant positive relationship between leadership for learning and SDL found in this study points to the vital role that school leaders play in promoting a culture of continuous learning. Leaders who prioritize learning, provide opportunities for professional development, and encourage collaboration among staff create an environment where SDL can thrive. This, in turn, enhances teachers' engagement in LLL, leading to improved teaching practices and better educational outcomes for students.

Moreover, the study's findings regarding gender differences in LLL engagement suggest that female teachers may be more inclined toward continuous learning compared to their male counterparts. This could be due to various factors, including differences in motivation, access to resources, or the types of professional development opportunities available. Understanding these differences can help inform the design of more targeted professional development programs that cater to the specific needs of different groups of teachers.

Practical Implications

For policymakers and educational administrators, the study's findings provide valuable insights into how to enhance the professional development of teachers. Encouraging SDL through supportive leadership practices should be a key focus in school improvement efforts. This could include providing more professional development opportunities, fostering a collaborative school culture, and offering resources that support self-directed learning. Additionally, recognizing and addressing the specific needs of different demographic groups, such as gender-based differences in LLL engagement, can help ensure that all teachers have equal opportunities to develop their skills and knowledge.

Furthermore, the study suggests that more emphasis should be placed on integrating SDL into the professional development frameworks used in schools. This could involve training school leaders on how to cultivate SDL among their staff, as well as developing resources and tools that teachers can use to guide their own learning. By embedding SDL into the fabric of school culture, educators can be better equipped to navigate the challenges of modern education and continue to grow throughout their careers.

Recommendations for Future Research

While this study provides important insights into the relationship between SDL and LLL among primary school teachers in Selangor, there are several areas where further research is needed. Future studies could explore the specific factors that influence teachers' engagement in SDL, such as personal motivation, access to resources, and the role of external support systems. Additionally, research could examine the long-term impact of SDL on teaching practices and student outcomes, providing a more comprehensive understanding of how SDL contributes to educational improvement.

Finally, it would be valuable to investigate how these findings might apply in different educational contexts, such as secondary schools or schools in other regions of Malaysia. By broadening the scope of research, educators and policymakers can gain a more nuanced understanding of how to best support teachers in their lifelong learning journeys.

Final Thoughts:

In conclusion, this study highlights the importance of SDL in fostering lifelong learning among primary school teachers in Selangor. By promoting SDL through effective leadership practices, schools can create a culture of continuous learning that not only enhances the professional development of teachers but also contributes to the overall quality of education. As the educational landscape continues to evolve, ensuring that teachers are equipped with the skills and knowledge needed to succeed in the classroom will remain a critical priority.

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