Cultural Influence on SDL among Malay Adult Learners

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Abstract

More adults are pursuing higher education and self-directed learning (SDL) is essential in adult learning (Hsu and Shiue, 2005). SDL inculcates the idea of independent, take control of one’s own learning determination and life-long learning (Guglielmino, 2006). Culture is important in learning (Lal 2003) and it influences the learners’ learning styles (Manikutty, Anuradha and Hansen, 2007). The Malays are considered as hierarchical, collective, relationship oriented and masculine in nature with a strong influence of Islam (Asma 2006). Study on the influence of cultural orientations on SDL has been minimal (Hudson & Ramamoorthy, 2009), particularly on the Malay adult learners. Ahmad Badli Esham and Faizah (2010) found that the Malay cultural values have a mixed influence on the SDL readiness of the Malay adult learners. Thus, the paper intends to look in more depth at the relationship between SDL readiness and the Malay cultural values. It seeks to identify the level of SDL readiness of the Malay adult learners. Secondly, the paper looks into the cultural dimensions of the Malays (Hofstede, 1980) and finally it describes the correlation between the Malay cultural dimensions and SDL. Two sets of questionnaires were distributed to one hundred adult learners taking bachelor’s degrees in distance learning mode. The first questionnaire, Self-directed Learning Readiness Survey (SDLRS) (Guglielmino, 1977), is used to measure the level of SDL readiness. The second set, Value Survey Module (VSM 94) (Hofstede, 1994), is to determine the cultural dimension scores of the group. The VSM 94 scores were then compared to the scores obtained by Hofstede (1980). Next, both SDLRS and VSM 94 scores were correlated to determine any significant relationships between SDL readiness and Malay cultural dimensions.

The study found that the Malay adult learners have an average level of SDL readiness. The cultural dimensions of the Malays are in contrast to the contemporary understanding of Malay cultural dimensions. The learners are masculine and more oriented to individualism, less collectivist and hierarchical in nature and have a high long term orientation. In addition, these traits are similar to the characteristics of a self-directed learner. However, statistically, cultural dimensions have very low correlation with SDL readiness. Culture does not seem to have a strong influence on SDL readiness despite the contrasting findings of the Malay cultural dimensions. Even though without any positive relationship between culture and SDL, the findings on cultural dimensions would be able help educators to plan, structure course designs and learning support systems that focuses on the cultural dimensions of the learners. In lieu of the future of education, developing SDL readiness among the Malay adult learners and enhancing the learner support system would help to enhance their learning experience.

Keywords: Self-directed learning, Culture, Malay, Adult learners
**Background of the Study**

Experience has an important role to play in adult learning as it is seen as an important resource for the learners. Many adult educators, (Knowles, 1981; Lindeman, 1961) have acknowledged the critical role it plays (cited in Merriam, 2001). Adult educators, however, point out that experience is highly influenced by sociocultural and historical factors. In addition, experience alone is not sufficient to ensure success in adult learning as other factors also have significant impact such as SDL (SDL) and learning how to learn (Brookfield, 1995). Brookfield explains that despite the vast amount of research done in the area of adult learning, we are still far from a complete understanding of adult learning. Other variables such as political and cultural differences, personality as well as ethnicity could provide the adult learners with richer amount of experiences which they could learn from (Brookfield, 1995).

Cross cultural research into SDL is a trend which started in the nineties. Brookfield (1995) has suggested from the beginning that adult educators should not undermine the complexity of adult learning by simplifying the elements of culture into just two separate categories of whites and non whites. Western cultural values differ from those of Eastern values. For example, Malaysian culture values the idea of a collective society and not individualism, which according to most Western adult educators is a critical component in SDL. Brookfield (1995) adds that the elements within certain cultures play a far more significant role in adult learning as compared to the age factor.

**Statement of Problem**

The current research on SDL in Malaysia is more focussed on web based and online learning (Daing Zaidah, 2002; Daing Zaidah and Abu Daud Silong, 2002), institutional aspect (Shireen Haron, 2003), learner aspect (Norzaini Azman, 2007; Chiu Yong, Kian Sam and Kok Wah, 2007) whereas cross cultural research is more focussed on the area of management (Asma Abdullah, 1996; Junaidah Hashim, 2005; Fontaine and Richardson, 2002; 2005). SDL studies in Malaysia, to date, have not looked into the relationship between culture and SDL nor investigated the possible link between the two elements. Culture is an important factor in learning (Lal 2003) and it has the capacity to influence the learners’ learning styles (Manikutty, Anuradha and Hansen, 2007). Hiemstra (2001) has noted that research into SDL has reached a plateau after three decades, thus it is more pertinent, according to him, that the research on SDL be taken into the next level whereby the focus should be more on the impact of SDL on the learners. Studies on the influence of cultural orientations on SDL has been minimal (Hudson and Ramamoorthy, 2009), particularly on the Malay adult learners. Badli Esham and Faizah (2010) found that the Malay cultural values have a mixed influence on the SDL readiness of the Malay adult learners. Thus, the present study intends to investigate the relationship between culture and SDL.

**Purpose of the study**

The study intends to investigate the level of SDL readiness of the Malay adult learners. Secondly the study also intends to look at the Malay cultural values as proposed by Hofstede (1980). The study will also look at the relationship between SDL and Malay cultural values and determine if there is any significant relationship. It is hoped that this study will provide a better understanding of the Malay adult learners and provide relevant suggestions to improve them as adult learners.

**Conceptual Framework**

The present study is based on the notions of culture by Hofstede (1980, 2005), Asma Abdullah (1996), Anthony Reid (2001) MatZin and Mohd Shukri (2007) Zainal Kling (1995) and Shamsul A. B. (2001) and also on the level of SDL readiness, based on the works of Guglielmino (1977), and Hiemstra and Brockett (1991) This conceptual framework is visually represented below:
Research Objectives
The present study is guided by the following objectives:
1. Investigating the SDL readiness level of Malay Adult learners
   a. High SDL readiness
   b. Low SDL readiness
2. Investigating the differences in the Malay cultural values as proposed by Hofstede (1980)
3. Investigating the relationship between Malay cultural values and SDL readiness of Malay adult learners

Research Questions
Based on the objectives that the present study has set out to investigate, the following research questions have been derived:
1. What is the level of SDL readiness of the Malay adult learners?
2. Have the Malay cultural values as proposed by Hofstede (1980) changed over the years?
3. Is there a statistically significant relationship between Malay cultural values and SDL?

Significance of the Study
Hsu and Shiue (2005) state that more than ten million adults have enrolled into distance education courses and the number is escalating. It would be right to assume that there will be more people enrolling into distance education courses thus creating more demand for research in the areas of adult education. In addition, the need to understand the adult learners should be made culturally specific, as suggested by Brookfield (1995), as this might be significant in the development of adult education. Therefore the present study hopes to add to the existing body of literature on Malay Adult learners, Malay Culture and SDL.

Self-Directed Learning (SDL)
The idea of SDL, though only systematically studied in the 1970s and 1980s, has been around as old as the history itself (Merriam and Brockett, 1970 as cited in Robinson, 2003). Famous figures in ancient history such as Socrates and Plato are said to be self directed learners. Likewise, influential characters in the early American history, such as Benjamin Franklin, Henry David Thoreau and Thomas Edison
are people who learnt on their own to provide significant contributions to society (as cited in Robinson, 2003).

The last three decades has seen the propulsion of SDL as a major research area. The pioneer work was done by Tough (1979) in his book *The Adult Learning Projects*, which he discussed the reasons for adults to participate in learning and classified them into three categories: goal, activity and learning oriented (Robinson, 2003, Hiemstra, 1994). Similarly, during this period, the term “andragogy”-“the art and science of helping adults learn”-was popularized in North America by Malcolm Knowles (Hiemstra, 1994). Knowles continued to provide foundational understanding of SDL through his publication, *SDL (1975)*, which has become the guide to much subsequent research into SDL (Hiemstra, 1994).

SDL inculcates the idea of independence, taking control of one’s own learning determination and life-long learning (Guglielmino, 2006). Brockett (1995) defines SDL as the processes by which adults take control of their own learning, in particular how they locate learning resources, set their own learning goals and evaluate their own development. Hiemstra (1994) on the other hand, proposes several aspects that are relevant to SDL: Individuals are empowered to take responsibility for various decisions related to the learning process, self direction should be viewed as a continuum, SDL does not mean working in isolation and the teachers can play an active role in providing essential feedback on the learning process (Hiemstra, 1994). According to Garrison (1997), the desire to be in control of deciding what to learn and how to learn it, which is innately human characteristics is an inherent concept in SDL.

**Some Relevant Research in SDL**

There are a few fundamental conceptual frameworks in the area of SDL. Brockett and Hiemstra Personal Responsibility Orientation (PRO) Model (1991) and Candy’s Self Direction in Learning Model (1991) are among the relevant ones.

The PRO model is designed to recognize the differences and similarities between the adult learners’ personality characteristics in self direction and SDL as an instructional method (as cited in Robinson, 2003). This model draws largely on the assumptions of humanistic philosophy and emphasizes on personal responsibility (Robinson, 2003, Booth, 2007).

Candy’s (1991) Self Direction in Learning Model involves three domains: competence, resources and rights. According to Candy (1991), ‘developing competencies for SDL is a lifelong endeavour’ and this formed the basis for the first domain (Robinson, 2003; Booth, 2007). The resources domain refers to how educators can provide adequate resources for learning to take place be it in terms of physical resources such as libraries, and materials, and social resources such as internships and job placements. The final domain deals with what is permitted and what the learners believe is permitted and the ability to be self directed is a limitation set by the confidence level of the learners (Robinson, 2003, Booth, 2007).

**Current Trend and Direction**

Brockett (2000) states that after thirty years of research into SDL, much have been explored and studied, yet there is still a need to take SDL into the next level. The current trend in adult education seems to have shifted from understanding the adult learners to looking at the socio-political context of adult education (Brockett, 2001). Next he suggested that research on SDL should focus on the naturalistic point of view, where the concern should focus on the limits of SDL and how it interfaces with power and conflict in various settings. Based on this suggestion, the present study intends to explore how SDL interfaces with cultural values in the local context.
Critics of SDL
Hiemstra (1994) has outlined three most fundamental critics of SDL over the past three decades. These critics mostly centred the issue of lack of theoretical base for SDL. The most prominent critic came from Brookfield (1991) who argued that the over emphasized attention given to SDL is unwise for its lack of theoretical underpinning. SDL has been considered as the most widely researched area in adult education (cited in Garrison, 1997). He also criticized that research into SDL has placed more emphasis on the middle class white subjects and finally, research into the area was most quantitative in nature. Brockett (2000) indicated that even though there were fairly substantial amount of research into SDL which were qualitative in nature, further inquiry into future directions of SDL should focus on qualitative research.

Another critic according to Hiemstra (1994) has been directed to Guglielmino’s (1977) SDLRS, the instrument to measure SDL. It has been criticized as difficult to use, have no proper validation and conceptually as well as methodologically flawed. Although this critic was refuted by Guglielmino, Long and McCune (1989), the instruments appears to have some limitations (Hiemstra, 1994).

The final critic was by Candy (1991) who argued that research into SDL has stalemated over the years for its lack of a strong theoretical base as well as continued confusions over the term’s meaning (Hiemstra, 1994).

Previous Research on SDL and Adult Learners in Malaysia
Norzaini Azman (2007) conducted a study on the SDL readiness of undergraduates in a local university and her research has revealed several significant findings. One of her findings indicated that SDL readiness appears to be positively associated with work experience and she postulated that this could be due to the fact that respondents have learned to become more self-directed as they accumulate work experience. However, her findings on the relationship between age and SDL readiness are in contrast to ideas forwarded by Knowles (1980) who stressed that as an individual matures and ages, his or her concept moves from dependent to being self-directed human being. Norzaini Azman’s (2007) findings suggest otherwise as no relationship existed between the SDLRS scores and the age of the respondents in her study.

Another study was conducted by Ibrahim and Silong (2002) on the barriers to SDL in a virtual environment. They found that there were several barriers that prevented the respondents from becoming active learners in the virtual environment: situational, institutional and dispositional. Their findings indicate that under the dispositional categories, age and inhibition are deterrent factors when it comes to SDL. The respondents in the study reported that it was difficult for them to compete with the younger generations and thus making the whole learning program difficult. Inhibition reflects more on the social status of the respondents as they have already reached a certain age and were only doing their first degree, some of them feel shy to describe to people on their current status as undergraduate.

Badli Esham and Faizah (2010) conducted a case study research on three Malay adult learners who are doing a bachelor’s degree via distance learning mode. The study looked at the relationship between culture and SDL among the Malay adult learners. The findings of the study indicate that culture has a mixed influence on the students’ SDL readiness. One of the respondents is affected by the cultural values of the Malays in managing her learning process. She mentioned that she is cautious and aware of the barrier between her and the lecturers who she considers to be older and wiser than her thus demands her respect. On the other hand, one respondent is not affected by the Malay cultural values in her studies. This particular respondent believes that she should be confined or restricted in her pursuit of education by cultural matters. The last respondent is partly affected by the cultural values. The findings are inconclusive as to whether cultural values influences SDL.
Culture

Knowles’s version of andragogy defines the individual learner as someone who is autonomous, free and growth oriented (as cited in Merriam, 2001). However, this view is criticised for leaving out the fact that individuals are shaped by their society and culture, which have their own history (Merriam, 2001; Rogers, 2002).

The culture of a society is ‘the glue that holds its members together through a common language, dressing, food, religion, beliefs aspirations and challenges. It is a set of learned behaviour patterns so ‘deeply ingrained’ that we act them out in ‘unconscious and involuntary manner’ (Asma Abdullah, 1996, as cited in Merriam and Mohamad, 2000). The concept of culture includes the aspects of historical, behavioural, mental and functional (Bodley, 1994). Culture according to Bodley (1994) has at least three components: what people think, do and produce, is an observable phenomenon and people’s unique possession. Hoult (1969) states that a common way of seeing culture is to see it as having four components: values, norm, institutions and artefacts that are passed on from generations to generations by learning alone (as cited in Bodley, 1994). Central to the understanding of culture is the concepts of shared beliefs, values, customs and meanings that distinguish one group of people from another (Hofstede, 1991). What can be drawn is that the concept of shared beliefs in the society is integral in understanding culture, albeit the conformity to such beliefs may not be unanimous.

Cultural values are emotion-laden, internalized assumptions, beliefs or standards that shape how we interpret our life experiences (Merriam and Mohamad, 2000). Since most research on aging have been conducted in the West (Fry, 1990), there is a tendency for Western cultural bias in characterizing the models of learning and development (Merriam and Mohamad 2000). The Western idea of aging and learning the notion of self reliance, personal achievement and autonomy are integral. In contrast, Merriam and Mohamad (2000) stated that in the Eastern context, collective and interdependent in the society are valued.

Malay Cultural Values

Although Malaysia is a multicultural society, each ethnic group retains its own identity. However, certain values seem to be shared by all ethnic groups in Malaysia. Asma Abdullah (1996) has identified these values and her findings have been the guidelines to many researchers (Abdullah, 1996, 2001, Merriam and Mohamad, 2000, Poon, 1998, Che Rose, Suppiah, Uli and Othman, 2007). Asma Abdullah (1996) identified five common cultural values among all the ethnic groups. The first is the notion of collectivism, whereby identity is determined by the group that one belongs to instead of individual characteristics. Next is the idea of hierarchy, where wealth and power are distributed unequally, which resulted in Malaysians placing greater emphasis and respect to the seniors, either by age or position. Third, Malaysians are relationship oriented where their lives are embedded in a complex web of ties to family, friends, country, village or social group. Fourth, is the notion of ‘face’ which translate into ‘maintaining a person’s dignity by not embarrassing or humiliating him in public’ and this has become the key to a harmonious society. Lastly, Malaysians are considered to be religious where happiness is derived from suppressing individual needs over the needs of others and discovering oneself through prayers and meditations (Abdullah, 1996, Merriam and Mohamad, 2000).

Malaysia’s ranking in Hofstede’s study would suggest the type of cultural values practiced by the locals. Findings in Table 1 on the next page show that Malaysia has a high score for Power Distance Index (PDI), which, according to Hofstede

‘is the extent to which the less powerful members of organizations and institutions (like the family) accept and expect that power is distributed unequally...It suggests that a society's level of inequality is endorsed by the followers as much as by the leaders’.

Retrieved from www.geert-hofstede.com
This is similar to hierarchical and collectivist society as suggested by Asma (2006) where the elderly, either by age or power are respected and there is a clear rank and file between the young and old. It indicates that respect is given to those who are elderly, in power or in certain social position. High PDI index also suggests that Malaysian society is a collective society where the needs of the group are placed above the needs of one’s own.

‘On the collectivist side, we find societies in which people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups, often extended families (with uncles, aunts and grandparents) which continue protecting them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty.’

Retrieved from www.geert-hofstede.com

Malaysia scores rather low in terms of its Individualism score (IDV: 24) in contrast to its PDI score of 104. IDV score is what Hofstede defines as

‘the degree to which individuals are integrated into groups. On the individualist side we find societies in which the ties between individuals are loose: everyone is expected to look after him/herself and his/her immediate family.’

Retrieved from www.geert-hofstede.com

As such, it can be said that Malaysia is not an individualistic society but a collective one. Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI) is also high in Malaysia and this would suggest that the Malaysian society does not favour anything that is uncertain.

Table 1: Cultural Dimensions score of Malaysia (Hofstede, 1980)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PDI</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IDV</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UAI</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on Hofstede’s study of Malaysia, it can be concluded that Malaysia is, predominantly a Muslim country, and share similar characteristics with other Muslim countries. Hofstede (1980) study found that Malaysia has a strong relationship between Power Distance Index (PDI) and the Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI). Malaysia’s PDI and UAI scores are high on the list of all 56 countries that were studied by Hofstede. The combination of these two high scores (UAI) and (PDI), according to Hofstede, will create societies that are highly rule-oriented with laws, rules, regulations, and controls in order to reduce the amount of uncertainty, while inequalities of power and wealth have been allowed to grow within the society. Furthermore he added that when these two dimensions are combined, it creates a situation where leaders have virtually ultimate power and authority, and the rules, laws and regulations developed by those in power, reinforce their own leadership and control.

Malaysia has a low score for Individual Index (IDV) which suggests that Malaysians are a collective society rather than an individual one. As such, the Collectivism index was high, suggesting the collective nature of the society. Similarly, Masculinity (MAS) was quite high, which indicates that
females are assertive and competitive but not as much as men and there are certain gaps between the both sexes. Malaysia is fast becoming a modernized nation with a lot of multinational and global interests, and this may influence the Malaysian society today (Merriam and Mohamad, 2000).

Research Design
The present study employs the quantitative approach. Two sets of questionnaires were distributed to one hundred adult learners taking bachelor’s degrees in distance learning mode. The first questionnaire, SDL Readiness Survey (SDLRS) (Guglielmino, 1977), was used to measure the level of SDL readiness. The second set, Value Survey Module (VSM 94) (Hofstede, 1994), was used to determine the cultural dimension scores of the group. Scores from the two sets of questionnaire were recorded. The scores gathered from the second set (VSM 94) were then compared to the scores obtained by Hofstede (1980). Next, both SDLRS and VSM 94 scores were correlated to determine any significant relationships between SDL readiness and Malay cultural dimensions.

Instrumentation
SDL Readiness Scale (SDLRS)
SDLRS measures the level of SDL of the respondents. This instrument, developed by Guglielmino (1977), is a 58-item five-point Likert-type questionnaire.

Value Survey Module (VSM 94)
VSM 94 measures the cultural dimensions of a country. Hofstede (1980) the developer of this instrument, conducted a survey on Malaysians and found that Malaysians are strongly influenced by cultural values such as respect for elders, religion and strong community ties. It is a 20 item five point Likert-type questionnaire.

Reliability
Both SDLRS and VSM 94 are highly reliable instruments which have been used by various researchers for the past two decades to study SDL and culture. The SDLRS for this study has a high Cronbach Alpha value of 0.91 which indicates its reliability.

Sampling
This study employed purposive sampling in selecting the respondents. Purposive sampling was used as the researchers “seeks out groups, settings and individuals where…the process being studied is most likely to occur” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000 cited in Silverman, 2005). Silverman (2005) suggested that in doing purposive sampling, parameters of the population studied must be carefully and critically thought of. As such, the respondents for this study were taken from the Universiti Teknologi Mara’s Malay undergraduate students for they meet the parameters set out by the study: namely Malay and adult learners. The questionnaires were given to one hundred respondents and the return rate was 71% for the SDLRS and 66% for VSM 94. The analysis was done based on these numbers.

Data Analysis
The SDLRS score was determined using the score guide provided by Guglielmino (1977). Each score range is labelled as Low, Average and High SDL readiness. Each of the Power Distance Index (PDI) Masculinity (MAS) Individualism (IDV) Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI) and Long Term
Orientation (LTO) dimensions was determined by calculating the scores using the formula set by Hofstede (1994). The data analysis was done on seventy one returned questionnaires using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

**Question 1: What is the level of SDL readiness of the Malay adult learners?**

Kolomgorov-Smirnov Normality test was performed on the data and it was found that the data distribution was normal. Significant level for the normality test was set at $p<0.05$. The mean score from data analysis was at 209 and most of the respondents in the study scored 218 which would suggest that the adult learners in this study are at the average level of SDL readiness (average score 202-226, Guglielmino, 1977). The minimum score was 140 and the maximum score was at 255. As shown in Table 2, the respondents of the study have a score range of 200-220 (78%) which indicates an average readiness level for SDL. In this study only 5% of the respondents have a score of 252 and above (252-290 highly self-directed, Guglielmino, 1978) while 18 % of the respondents are in the below average category.

**Table 2: SDLRS Score of the Malay Adult Learners**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>140.0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>150.0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>160.0</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>170.0</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>180.0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>190.0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>200.0</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>210.0</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>220.0</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>230.0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>240.0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>250.0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>260.0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Question 2: Have the Malay cultural values changed over the years?**

It is important to note that the analysis of the present study was done on a specific group of Malays and this may not represent the whole population of the Malays in Malaysia. On top of that, Hofstede’s (1980) findings were based on the population of Malaysia, inclusive of all the other races. Hofstede’s (1980) findings of Malaysia were similar to his findings of other Muslim countries around the world. As such, since the majority of the population of Malaysia consists of Muslims who are Malays, the researchers feel that the findings can serve as an important data to indicate the cultural beliefs of the Malays. Asma Abdullah (2006) pointed out that Malaysians place high values on collectivism, relationship, religion, hierarchy, and are concerned about face. Generally, Asma’s (2006) and Hofstede’s (1980) findings are very similar.

As shown in Table 3 on the following page, the current research has found contrasting findings to what Hofstede and Asma have suggested. The only similarity is under the Masculine (MAS) dimension where the scores are almost similar (Hofstede 50, Badli Esham and Faizah, 45) as shown in Table 4 on the following page. This indicates that not much has changed over the years where women in countries having high MAS scores ‘are somewhat assertive and competitive, but not as much as the men’ (retrieved from www.geert-hofstede.com).

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However, the most visible difference comes from the PDI and IDV scores. The PDI and IDV scores in the study are the opposite of what Hofstede has found. The current study found that the PDI score is 24 (to Hofstede’s 104) and IDV score of 72 (to Hofstede’s 26). The UAI score also shows a vast difference, 68 (current) and 36 (Hofstede’s). Initial finding would suggest that the Malays are no longer a Collectivist society, but more to Individualism. This indicates that the Malays have adopted a Western cultural value of Individualism instead of the common Asian collectivist culture.

Another dimension which was not in the original Hofstede’s study (1980) is the Long Term Orientation (LTO). LTO scores indicate whether a society places great importance towards future rewards, perseverance and thrift (High LTO) or put greater emphasis on the past, tradition, social obligations and the preservation of face (Low LTO). In the current study, the high LTO scores (144) would suggest that the Malay adult learners in this study are more oriented towards future rewards, perseverant and thrift. Social obligations, traditions and face are not considered as important. This could explain the reason why these learners are furthering their education that is to achieve a better future and rewards.

**Table 3:** Cultural Dimensions score (Ahmad Badli Esham and Faizah, 2010)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cultural Dimension</th>
<th>Score (Current Study)</th>
<th>Score (Hofstede 1980)</th>
<th>Difference in Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PDI</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IDV</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAS</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UAI</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Question 3: Is there a statistically significant relationship between Malay cultural dimensions and SDL?**

Statistically, there is no significant relationship between the Malay cultural dimensions and level of SDL readiness. Table 5 on the following page indicates that none of the cultural dimensions has a significant correlation with SDL readiness. However, PDI seems to have a negative correlation with the level of SDL readiness (-0.0157). This would only suggest a weak relationship and does not provide any significant impact. There was also no significant relationship between the SDLRS scores and the cultural dimensions.
Table 5: Correlations between SDL and Cultural Dimensions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Correlations</th>
<th>PDI</th>
<th>IDV</th>
<th>MAS</th>
<th>UAI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Readiness (By Level of Readiness)</td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>-0.0157</td>
<td>0.1528</td>
<td>0.094631</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>0.90027</td>
<td>0.2208</td>
<td>0.449772</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Readiness (By SDLRS Score)</td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>0.0473</td>
<td>0.114</td>
<td>0.17075</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>0.7061</td>
<td>0.3619</td>
<td>0.170449</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussions

Research has indicated that SDL readiness is an important element in adult learning (Hsu and Shiue, 2005). The group of Malay adult learners in the study indicated that they have an average level of readiness and almost twenty percent are below the average readiness level. Only a small percentage (5%) is in the highly self-directed level of readiness. It is a good indication that more than half of the group studied displayed at least an average level of readiness. This would indicate that they have the characteristics that make a successful adult learner. As such, these learners need to improve their level of SDL readiness in order to be competitive in their learning.

The cultural findings in the study indicate that the Malays in the study have changed their cultural dimensions. The Malays in the study are more individualistic and have long term orientation. This is on the opposite side of what most studies have indicated the Malays to be (Asma, 1996, Hofstede, 1980) - a collective society. Badli Esham (2005) in a study on learning styles found that a group of Malay undergraduates prefer individual learning styles to group learning. The reasons cited were difficult to communicate, meet and work together due to various reasons. They prefer to work on their own and if things go wrong, they only have themselves to blame. The current study indicates that most of the Malay adult learners are at the average level of readiness. Although Hiemstra (1994) states that SDL is not about working in isolation, the current findings could indicate that these learners are used to working on their own and prefer it that way. In addition, perhaps the work assigned by their professors is more towards individual assignment thus limiting their preference for group work.

The UAI score is also almost doubled to that of Hofstede’s (1980) and this would suggest that the Malays in the study do not prefer anything that is uncertain. Previously, in Hofstede’s (1980) study, the combination of high PDI and UAI scores would suggest that the country has societies that are highly influenced by laws, rules, regulations, and controls in order to reduce the amount of uncertainty, while inequalities of power and wealth have been allowed to grow within the society. Furthermore, he added that when these two Dimensions are combined, it creates a situation where leaders have virtually ultimate power and authority, and the rules, laws and regulations developed by those in power, reinforce their own leadership and control. However the current findings suggest a low PDI and High UAI. This would perhaps suggest the total contrast to what Hofstede has suggested. The Malay society today does not regard rules and regulations too highly, the amount of uncertainty in the society today is high and that the inequalities of power and wealth distribution have caused these Malays to be unsatisfied. This could suggest the high UAI scores. On top of that, the high LTO score would also complement the UAI score as high LTO would suggest that the Malays in the study are more oriented towards their future rewards and perceive tradition, maintaining face and beliefs as something backward. Therefore, they are working and furthering their study in order to attain future rewards. This in turn, would also complement the high IDV score that show the Malays in the study are highly individualistic. This could signal that the Malays in the study are resolute in achieving academic success that they ignore other distractions such as culture and traditions.

To say that the Malays have totally changed their culture would be a strong statement which this study alone could not justify. However, looking at the matter deeply, there seems to be an
underlying explanation as to why the Malays in the study have different cultural dimensions. This particular group of Malays are striving for success and do not want anything to hinder their progress. Thus, in order to achieve that, they need to be self-directed, motivated and positive minded. Cultural aspects such as face which include the notion of jaga hati (not to induce bad feeling onto others), budi pekerti (courtesy) and malu (shame) may be deterrent factors for them to achieve their goals. In addition, the education environment could be the reason why the Malays in the study have different cultural dimensions than those studied by Hofstede (1980) and Asma Abdullah (1996). Hofstede (1980) and Asma Abdullah (1996) looked at the Malays in the organizational context. This group of Malays could have different priorities and goals in pursuing their career. As such, their cultural dimensions were different than the present study.

However, the question that still remains is: Are the Malays really individualistic? It could be “Yes” due to the cultural concept of face which actually drives them to be individualistic. Concept of face entails among others to maintain not only the face of oneself but also the immediate family by not causing anything that will bring malu or shame. Therefore, the Malays in the group feel that they have to work hard in order to be successful in their study as failure would not only bring malu to them but the family as well. Another reason why the Malays in the study are more individualistic could be that they do not want to impose on their friends with questions or asking for help. This behaviour could stem from the notion of face because they do not want to menyusahkan orang lain (trouble others) as well as jaga hati (not to induce bad feeling) as these are not considered highly regarded traits.

The LTO score indicates that the Malays have low inclination towards tradition and cultural beliefs. They are oriented towards future rewards such as better jobs and personal gain. This would be a sign of individualism and independence. The Malays in the study are looking forward to their future as they do not want to be looked down by others for not having a better education, jobs or future. They are seeking better education because they want a better future. This, in turn, would mean better jobs, salary and in the end a better life, not only for them but also their families. This would reduce the negative view that may surround their families should they fail in their study. This attitude is more towards maintaining harmony in the society, traditionally a cultural trait of the Malays.

The concept of Melayu Baru or ‘New Malays’, which was coined in the 1990’s (Muhammad, 1996 as cited in Chong, 2005) may have a bearing on the cultural directions of the Malays in the study. The New Malays refers to a generation of Malays who are highly educated, professionals and financially secured as a result of the country’s economic development (Chong, 2005). The term also refer to those who are corporate players, government elites as well as the entrepreneurs and the executive group (middle class) (Shamsul, A.B., 1999)

‘...when we talk about creating a New Malay, we are not casting aspirations on the old Malay. Rather, the vision stems from the firm conviction that what is good today ought to be made even better tomorrow. Applied to the Malays, this maxim needs to be carried one step further: what is already good ought to be made even better....As the end product of this endeavour, the New Malay will be sought after by other people or countries for advice and guidance and looked upon to lead in politics, the economy, sports and so on. The New Malay knows clearly who he is (identity),where he is going (vision) wherever he may be (level and role); is highly adaptable; is a leader who brings about changes in the technology or thinking of his people and who places his religion of Islam as the foundation of all aspects.’ (Muhammad, 1996, p. 1 as cited in Chong 2005)

These New Malays are involved in politics, business as well as state affairs. These New Malays are not entirely tied down by their traditional cultural beliefs. They have adopted a different approach to business, education and politics. This could be a strong motivational factor that drives the Malays in the study to perform well for they want to be part of the Melayu Baru or the New Malays.

There is also another possibility that could explain the reason why the Malays are beginning to adopt the individualist approach. It could be that in pursuit of educational excellence, they have discarded the traditional values of hierarchical, shyness or face values because experience has thought
them to be brave in class yet tactful in their interaction. Another factor could be the age factor as the lecturers could be someone who is their contemporary or perhaps younger. As adult learners they understand the concept of learning and behaving in class. They understand that they cannot allow shyness and passivity to take over them if they want to succeed. This could explain why majority of the Malays in the study are within the average level of readiness. This is in contrast to younger students who may still be afraid of the teachers.

Have the cultural values of the Malays changed? It appears that superficially, the findings in this study would indicate that the Malays have changed their cultural values and adopt the Western values. However, upon deeper analysis, it seems that the apparent change in the cultural values is caused by the desire to maintain the traditional values of a collectivist society. The Malays in the study are still collectivist in nature.'

**Recommendations**

The researchers would like to recommend a few suggestions that may help enhance the teaching and learning experience of the Malay adult learners. First, learning institutions that have a majority of Malay adult learners should focus on developing their level of self-directed readiness. This could be achieved by having programs and course designs that would help them to develop their SDL level of readiness. Courses should integrate SDL in their syllabus design and allow adult learners flexibility in choosing and selecting the courses that they would like to take. Flexibility should also be given in deciding the academic path that they want to pursue in order to complete their study. Nevertheless, as suggested by Hiemstra (1994) lecturers and teachers should help these learners in deciding but not making the decisions for them. The Malay learners, as indicated in this study, are ready to assume the responsibilities of managing their own study. They should be allowed to decide on their academic choices but with careful considerations and guidelines from the faculties.

Secondly, we would like to recommend that learner support system be enhanced in order to facilitate the development of the Malay adult learners. The learner support system that we are referring to involves the availability of resources for the learners to tap. This should include extensive academic resources that not only include libraries and consultation hours but also integrated online learning support that includes digital content. This would help the Malay adult learners to become more self-directed and develop their ability to manage their own learning. However, the faculties and universities have to play their role in providing up-to-date digital content so as not to digress the development of the adult learners.

Finally, we would like to suggest a reward system that would enhance the level of motivation among the Malay adult learners. Since the Malay adult learners in the study have a high LTO, which indicates preference for future rewards and gifts, it would be best to adopt a reward system that would help to ensure that these learners would be consistently motivated to pursue their education.

**Summary**

The study found that the Malay adult learners have an average level of SDL readiness. On top of that, the study also discovered that the Malay cultural values have not changed over the years and finally, there is no correlation between cultural dimensions and SDL readiness and scores. It is hoped that the findings from this study could be relevant to the study of the Malay adult learners in future. A deeper qualitative analysis on the Malay adult learners should be undertaken in order to get a deeper and closer look on them as adult learners, their cultural values and how these two intertwine in their pursuit of education.
References


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