Research Article

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A Phenomenological Study on Hospitality Lecturers' Experiences in Coping with Part-Time Study

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Abstract

This qualitative research study explored the experiences of Hospitality lecturers to cope with their part-time study including the challenges and benefit that they have gained. A semi-structured interview was conducted to five Hospitality lecturers who are currently continuing their part-time study at postgraduate level either taking master's degree or doctorate level. Purposive sampling technique was used to identify respondents who met the research criteria. Data collected were analyzed by using thematic analysis. As non-traditional students, they have greater possibility to not completing their study on time due to conflicting demands and roles. Other challenges faced by them include increasing in stress level, inability to manage time and lack time to socialize with their family and friends. Despite the challenges they faced, by continuing study, lecturers could improve their knowledge and skills as well as they have a better career progression including increment n their salary and to be promoted in higher position. This research findings could help to stimulate thought about the demands of part-time study and consideration of which support needed by them. Higher learning institutions should be aware on the need and demand of non-traditional students since there is a growing number of professionals especially lecturers continuing study as part of their continuous professional development (CPD).

Keywords:

Part-time studying, Full-time employment, Hospitality lecturers, Challenges, Coping strategies

1   Introduction

Today's professions are constantly being pressured by the ways of thinking, new application, techniques, and advancement of technologies to meet the changes in innovation and globalization which include the education sector. Management are encouraging their academic staffs to continue study as part of continuous professional development in their teaching career as learning should be a lifelong process. Even after someone has completed their degree study and entered the workforce, they should continuously learn as to improve knowledge and skills, focus on getting high salary, better position, or self-recognition, to move into academia and research, to specialize a career path or change track entirely, (Lee, 2017; Lee & Morris, 2016). Lifelong learning is useful and effective in introducing new techniques, broaden knowledge, idea and skills.

Most professionals especially lecturers tend to continue study as they already in track in teaching career, exposure to advance subjects or to create interest on subject, for personal development and career progression purposes. Those who are continuing their part-time study are considered as non-traditional students. Non-traditional students are more likely to have family obligation and work full time (Muller et.al, 2015). Part- time study provide opportunity for those who cannot allocate their time to study as a full-time student (Jolin, 2015). In this context, some universities have offered lifelong learning programs at postgraduate level through distance learning or Off Campus learning programs and e-learning which provide flexibility for the employee to attend for classes and learning materials will be provided via email or student portal (Schoffstall & Arendt, 2014). Through this learning program, classes will be conducted after working time or during weekend, which provide flexibility for part- time student to manage their time for study and work.

From organizational perspective, it can be viewed as a source of competitive advantage among their employees when there is a staff who keep up to date their knowledge and skills as part of career advancement (Skok, 2014). In fact, this situation helps in realizing government's intention to produce more qualified and skillful workers who can compete in the global marketplace and secure good jobs. Unfortunately, many employers and employees do not take advantage of educational opportunities that really help in company growth and develop their own career. To promote continuous learning among their employees, the organization may introduce some mechanisms to support and motive them to continue study such as paid study leave, provide flexibility in their working arrangement, providing incentives or fund for their study fees. This mechanism allows worker continuing their study while preserving their job and income.

The perception of studying while working will be different based on individual's perspectives. Studying while working can be beneficial especially in terms of financial and future career prospect. However, it also tiring and quite challenging because they must perform both tasks at the same time. As a result, employees will have the conflict of priorities to meet the work and study demand. Many things should be taken into consideration when the employees make decision to continue study. This is because when they are too busy with work commitments, it could distract their attention from

study which might turn employability to a negative effect on their academic performance. With regards to the issues mentioned above, this study was conducted to explore the experiences, challenges and benefits of continuing study whilst working among Hospitality lecturers to figure out either this situation will bring good or bad implications in their life. Professionals job who are looking for ways to advance their careers should explore the benefits that can be obtained through continuous learning.

This study was guided by the following research questions:

a) What is the challenges encounter by hospitality lecturers in integrating their study with work commitment?

b) What are the benefits of continuing study among the Hospitality lecturers?

2 Literature Review

2.1 The Need for Hospitality Lecturers to Continue Study

Hospitality educations are seeking for highly qualified lecturers to teach knowledge and skills required for the industry. The challenges of globalization and innovation has increased the awareness on importance of academic (Hindley & Wilson, 2018). Hospitality institutes should encourage more on professionals rather than industry (Oskam et al., 2018). Graduates or employees who are well educated, well trained, and skilled can secure their future job and becoming highly desirable source of talent in hospitality job market. There is a need for lecturers to pursue their study at highest level as part of their career development. The qualification of lecturers is one of the key indicators of quality teaching in higher education institutions (HEI) (Sokoli & Koren, 2017). The highest qualification is PhD. Most of lecturers with PhD holder are usually hired by higher learning institution because they are sufficiently knowledgeable in their area of expertise (Sokoli & Koren, 2017). In fact, they can teach different levels of student (Diploma, bachelor's degree, master's degree or PhD). Lecturers are required to equip themselves with the latest information and knowledge (Sigala & Baum, 2003), exposed to advanced level subjects, new teaching methods and best practices in their subjects area (Bolden, 2019), keep up with education, research development and constant policy changes (Eduflow, 2015; Sundiman & Mursidi, 2014; Garret et. al, 2017; Giroux, 2002). For the lecturers to remain up to date on the most current theories and practices, they need to maintain the highest level of education and continue updating their knowledge base (Sokoli & Koren, 2017). If not, there could be spreading of wrong information during teaching process (Sokoli & Koren, 2017).

Study whilst working is good for lecturers' personal growth as they have the opportunity to broaden their social and personal skills. Some skills such as time management, communication, teamwork, customer care and practical skills may be developed through learning process (Lee & Morris, 2016; Jewell, 2014). They should identify which skills and knowledge are needed to be applied in their job as well as their study. They can directly relate their working experiences to improve their academic knowledge and increased their confidence level (Lee & Morris, 2016; Jewell, 2014).

Other than that, those who are taking courses related to their working field can gain new knowledge and enhance their skills for a better future career prospect (Barron, Leask & Fyall, 2014; Schoffstall & Arendt, 2014). The lecturers who wish to continue their study have to choose part-time study mode because they already have full time work commitments such as conducting theoretical and practical classes and other administrative tasks.

2.2 Previous Study on The Issues Faced by Part-time Learner

Working students might face more challenges rather than full-time students as they need to balance between work and study commitments. Previous studies highlighted some issues and challenges faced by part-time learners as they are trying to integrate their study with other existing obligations such as institutional, structural, financial and cultural barriers in pursuing and succeeding in their study (Colvin, 2013; Giancola, Grawitch, & Borchert, 2009; Lakin, Mullane, & Robinson, 2007; Quimby & O'Brien, 2006; Thompson-Ebanks, 2017). Remenick (2019) highlighted that many higher education institutions do not apply the concept of flexibility in the way they structure their courses such as lectures, seminars, workshops, tutorials, and supervisions which make part-time learners unable to participate due to work commitments (Curtis & Shani, 2002). It is also difficult for them to gain employer permission or apply for study leave to take part in academic programs and activities (Kember, 1999). Luna and Medina (2007) indicate that students who live far away from the campus or university faced difficulties in meeting their lecturers or research supervisor. It seems that part-time students always receive last-minute information regarding their academic matters (Colvin, 2013; Dauer & Absher, 2015). They feel a sense of alienation, discrimination, and/or marginalization as their lecturers give more attention to full-time student rather than part-time students (Colvin, 2013; Witkowsky et al., 2016).

Other institutional challenges faced by part-time learner including excessive assignment and classes (Abiddin, 2011; Gyambrah, Sesay & Amponsah, 2017), clashes in lectures' timetable, credit overload as a result of short duration of their programme (Butcher, 2015; Persaud & Persaud, 2016). Many studies agreed that continuing study whilst working negatively affect students' mental health (Hovdhaugen, 2015; Creed, French & Hood, 2015; Darolia, 2014), suffer from stress, anxiety and depression that lead to poor academic achievement (Mounsey et al., 2013). It is impossible for them to achieve higher grades (Curtis & Shani, 2002). These demanding situations place them at high risk of not completing their studies (Walters, 2011 & Coopers; Nwosu et al., 2018). Vaughn et al. (2016) acknowledged that employment might pull students away from their academic activities. Too overloaded with work commitment could distract their focus on study and even allocate limited time to study (Manthei & Gilmore, 2005; Jogaratnam & Buchanan, 2004). For that reason, higher learning institution should provide element of flexibility in their curriculum structure to facilitate their learning process (Curtis, 2007) so they can acquire both academic success and enhance employability (Watts & Pickering, 2000).

A study from Lowe and Gayle (2007) have found that non-traditional female students have difficulties to cope with their study. They need to do household chores, taking care of their family and kids and busy with work commitment which make them feel extremely tired. This situation could drop their motivation level in pursuing their part-time study which causing them to not finish up their study. On the other hand, most of the previous researchers also agreed that part-time learners have less time to socialize with their friends and family as they allocated most of their time for work and study commitment (Visser, 2011). Non-traditional students need help especially in time management, study skills and training in academic writing (Schoffstall & Arendt, 2014). They faced a hard time to deal with challenging work, demanding families, and social responsibilities. Poor psychological well-being and mental state may affect the positive learning and task performance of the students (Roslan et al., 2017). In view of financial constraints, high study fees leading them to borrow from family or even credit card loan to fund their studies (Lange & Byrd, 1998; Butcher, 2015; Persaud & Persaud, 2016; Gyambrah et al., 2017).

3 Methodology

The researcher used inductive approach that use research questions to narrow the scope of the study. Phenomenology research design was used to gain insight and lived experiences of lecturers who are continuing their study whilst working. The researcher needs to set aside their prejudice and prior assumptions so that they can focus primarily on the participant's immediate experience

3.1 Population and Sample Size

For sampling technique, the researcher used the non-probability sampling technique which is purposive sampling. The population of this study consists of hospitality lecturer who are continuing their study at postgraduate level (either taking master's degree or PhD level), engaged in full-time employment and having family obligation (kids, spouse or parents). The researcher chooses lecturers who are working in private Hospitality institutions in Johor as targeted population area for this study to find out what are the main motivation and obstacle for them to continue study since most of Hospitality institution that offering postgraduate program situated at the center area (Selangor and KL). This non-random technique does not require a set number of respondents. In this study, ten respondents who met the criteria of the study and until it reached data saturation.

3.2 Data Collection Method

This study used semi-structured interviews as the main instrument for data collection. In semi-structured interview, the researcher asked more open-ended questions and does not strictly formalized list of questions. Main questions are developed as a guideline during the interview sessions. The data were collected and recorded from respondents by using several approaches to ensure the accuracy in data-analysis process. The approaches used such as face-to-face interview session, using social

media like Facebook, Linked-in and email. Face-to-face interview sessions were recorded by using voice recorder that help during the process of transliterating and interpreting to avoid any mistakes. However, prior consent from the respondent were obtained for recording the interview session. The researcher could follow up with the respondents through email or phone interview to clarify on certain things that was unclear during the interview session.

4   Findings

Researcher analyzed and interpreted the interview data which was obtained from five (n=) participants. Six major themes derived from three research questions.

4.1 The Challenges Faced By Lecturers When Continuing Study Whilst Working

4.1.1   *Conflicting Commitments*

One of the challenges faced by lecturers was conflicting commitments since they need to cope with work and study commitments at the same time. Work and study tasks need to be submitted on the deadline given and this situation could make them experienced conflicting responsibilities since they need to figure out which tasks should be prioritized first.

> *"Sometimes it is stressful and I have to keep on telling myself which one should be prioritized. I have to ensure that I could make to the datelines for both work and research submission. It is tiring especially when you have to spend a lot of time in front of the computer."*

> *"Conflict responsibilities between work and study. Job task obstruct my focus for my study."*

> **"***Work-life-study balance. It quite challenging to balance all those 3 things in my life. Actually, there is none that obstruct my focus in study, it just how I manage my 24H. But I never ever think about quitting the study."*

As lecturers, they need to conduct theory and practical classes, and other administrative tasks. This could make them too overloaded with work commitments. When they are too overloaded with job, it could obstruct their focus on study. They have insufficient time to focus on their thesis write-up and lack of focus on study. At one time, one of the respondents feels like to quit from his study, however he manages to continue his study.

> **"***The work overload and tiredness stress me to focus to both study and working."*

"I face few challenges such as work commitment and limited time to write thesis paper. There is a time where I felt I should quit for study. However, until today I still manage to continue."

4.1.2   Difficulty to manage time

Time management can be a challenge when you are juggling with work and study. According to Cooper (2020), the problem faced by them is not a lack of time, but it is about how they manage their time. Managing time in your career and academic life is not an easy task.   Most of the time, they need to focus on their work and study commitment. Meanwhile, very little time remain for their personal life. Sometimes life can feel a little overwhelming of pressure with work commitment and at the same time need to do thesis or assignments. Between having a full-time job, schoolwork and maintaining a social life, it can seem like a daunting task to get everything done without feeling stressed. And many often have trouble maintaining a balanced schedule.

"*Probably the chaos like when you have a sudden meeting with your SV and you have to go there immediately and kind of abandoning your work for a while."*

"*Yes, your motivation will go down if you didn't manage your time wisely."*

"*Difficulties on time between work and classes."*

"*No. if you can manage your time well, there is none of it."*

"*Sometimes, I felt difficult, not enough time, tired. Easily can be in emotional, always thinking about the thesis. If don﹐t know how to manage the time, can causes mental issues."*

4.1.3   Stress

Studying whilst working is quite challenging. There is naturally going to be an added level of stress because studying part-time is considered additional responsibility and commitment as they already have existing commitments as a lecturer.

"*Sometimes it is stressful and I have to keep on telling myself which one should be prioritized. I have to ensure that I could make to the datelines for both work and research submission. It is tiring especially when you have to spend a lot of time in front of the computer. However, I feel like I could use*

my knowledge, and apply them when I work which is kind of cool. "

"*Feel challenging and stresses a little bit.***"**

4.1.4   Do not have time to socialize

One of the respondents expressed his feelings that he spend less time to socialize with their family and friends as he was too busy with work and study commitments. They spend most of the time for work and study. Moreover, at one time, this situation will negatively affect their social life.

> *"Lack of time to socialize with my friend and family because just focus on work and study."*

4.2 The Benefits of Continuing Study Among Lecturers

4.2.1   Improve knowledge and skills

Studying part-time whilst working can be a very rewarding experience as you can facilitate your career progression, develop interests, enhance your skills and knowledge which can be applied with day-to-day job. Below are the excerpts obtained from the interview.

> **"***Yes, because my research study is in the same field which is hospitality so I can gain more knowledge at the same time.***"**

> **"***As academician, yes. There are positive impacts such as, I can gain more knowledge to share with my students and get more understand on certain things.***"**

> **"***Can upgrade my education level parallel with my working experienced.***"**

4.2.2   Better Career Development

By continuing study, it is a good way for the lecturers to develop new skills or knowledge in their area of expertise. This will help you to find a clear and better career goal towards a higher level of achievement. As mentioned by Jolin (2015) in her study, continuing study to higher level can boost career and earnings. Lecturers are required to continue study to become more qualified lecturer to teach different levels of students.

"Definitely, but probably not where I'm working now. Like I said, I'm aiming for the public universities."

"My career development will step to the higher level after I complete my study."

"When I get my master's degree, yes, that piece of paper will affect on my career path and development."

4.2.3 Boost Salary and get promoted to higher position

Continuing study to higher level often leads to a raise in salary or a higher starting salary at a new position. Whether you will be offered a raise or promotion in your current job or will qualify for a new job that has a better salary, continuing study will have a major benefit for your income.

"Yes, for current company not really, but for industry yes for salary career pathway."*

"Yes, it impacts me on position and salary enhancement."*

4.2.4 Become more organized and systematic

Being organized and systematic is a good practice since you need to cope with work and study commitments. Lecturers need to arrange and stick with the timetable that they prepared for work and study.

"Yes, definitely. I have no choice but to be more organized (though not so much). And I have to keep up with both timetable and schedules which is good because I could arrange my rest/break time before I start on another task. "*

"Yes. Help me to become more arrangeable and systematic. "*

5 Conclusion

Trying to balance work, home and social demands with study requirements can be quite challenging for lecturers. This current study explored the experiences of Hospitality lecturers in pursuing their part-time study whilst working full-time. The challenged faced by them including they do not have time to socialize, increased their stress level and faced difficulties in managing time which could affected their focus on study. On the

positive sides, lecturers becoming more organized and systematic person, improve their knowledge and skills, better career growth and get promoted to higher position and salary increment. Based on the findings and discussion, the current study highlights some implications and recommendations for future research. There should be more qualitative and quantitative research conducted for this study due to limitation of information and journals related to this topic. It is crucial for the improvement in teaching and learning process for non-traditional students since there is a growing number of lecturers who are continuing their study at postgraduate level as part of their career progression.

Broader research and in-depth study on the findings of this study will lead to further knowledge by understanding the impacts from different perspective, locations and situations. Sample size in this study was small which not given an enough reflection of the lecturers' experiences as part-time students on how they cope with their study alongside other obligations. Furthermore, Higher Education Institutions should enhance their curriculum structure and programme by introducing some alternatives to facilitate these potential students. Even in courses also need to offer long-distance learning, computer conferencing and teleconferencing to promote better interaction with the students, in order to avoid them to be isolated from study environment. Numerous modes of learning are available including recorded lectures and YouTube videos uploaded by lecturers and other e-learning platforms such as Zoom, Voov meeting, Skype, Google Meet, Facebook live could be used in order to get interaction with students. All seminars and conferences also are conducted virtually. With all of these opportunities, they are supposed to not facing any issues in learning process. There is a role for academics and higher institution administration to improve student support systems for non-traditional students.

Researchers, institutions, and organizations should look at these findings as valuable resources in seeking the perfect ways to promote continuous learning process. The institutions should concentrate more upon the non-traditional students' issues and challenges. The needs of non-traditional students are different from full-time students. Full-time students can fully concentrate on their study. Meanwhile, part-time students have other existing obligations to be performed together with their study commitments. The institutions should have a better understanding about the difficulties faced by non-traditional students and assist them to cope with those difficulties.

6   About the Authors

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