

UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA

**CHALLENGES FACING ADULT LEARNERS:
A CASE STUDY OF POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS**

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*Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet.
Only through experience of trial and suffering can the soul be
strengthened, ambition inspired, and success achieved.*

Helen Keller

Life as a postgraduate learner at the age of 32 was magical. It was a period of self-discovery where I regained my sense of self and confidence. I owe this to a large group of people. Whether they were aware of it or otherwise, I would like to convey my deepest appreciation for them.

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CANDIDATE'S DECLARATION

I declare that the work in this thesis was carried out in accordance with the regulations of Universiti Teknologi MARA. It is original and is the result of my own work, unless otherwise indicated or acknowledged as referenced work. This topic has not been submitted to any other academic institution or non-academic institution for any other degree or qualification.

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ABSTRACT

This case study investigates the challenges of adult learners as they seek a master's degree course. Adapting the conceptual framework of Cross (1981), Hillage & Aston, (2001) and Mackeracher, Suart & Potter (2006), three main challenges were discussed; physical and material / situational, structural and attitudinal. Two instruments; diaries and interviews were utilized to uncover the challenges of three adult learners. Twenty varieties of challenges emerged from the data collected. All three categories of challenges were found as well as academic challenges. Although not fully generalizable, this study presents some interesting and constructive information. The challenges are the lack of support, health, multiple-conflicting responsibilities, job commitments, the lack of time, financial constraint, guilt, distance to be travelled, being unmarried, the lack of concentration, the lack of confidence, the lack of motivation, the lack of appropriate provisions, inappropriate schedules, writing academic texts, understanding academic texts, assignment workload, problems with vocabulary and grammar, and unclear and unacceptable methods of evaluation. Coping strategies towards some of the physical and material / situational challenges were recommended. To overcome the challenges from the lack of time, bringing reading materials to read while out with loved ones and to double the use of activities at work for the use of the master's assignments were suggested. To overcome stress, taking unpaid leave was advised. To overcome financial constraint, delaying the purchase of expensive books and reducing entertainment allocation were offered. To overcome multiple-conflicting responsibilities, acknowledging the importance of the various responsibilities and accepting one's limitations were proposed. The implications of the study include the value of support and encouragement from those near at heart, the importance of time management, the need for endurance, the requirement for continued focus, the importance of obtaining consensus on class schedules and postgraduate adult learners do not necessarily possess essential academic skills. Suggestions for further research include a similar research which is conducted over a longer period of time, a study on the interactions between the different varieties of challenges and a comparative study to examine the differences between the challenges of local adult learners and those from foreign universities.

ABSTRAK

Tujuan kajian kes ini adalah untuk menyelidik cabaran yang dihadapi oleh pelajar dewasa yang sedang menjalankan pengajian ijazah sarjana. Terdapat tiga cabaran utama dibincangkan menurut kerangka kerja konsep oleh Cross (1981), Hillage & Aston (2001) dan Mackeracher, Suart dan Potter (2006) iaitu fizikal dan material / pensituasi, penstrukturan dan sikap. Terdapat dua kaedah iaitu diari dan temuduga yang digunakan untuk menyingkap cabaran yang dihadapi oleh tiga pelajar dewasa. Dua puluh jenis cabaran yang dihadapi oleh mereka dipaparkan melalui data yang terkumpul. Ketiga-tiga jenis cabaran tersebut dikenali pasti dan cabaran akademik juga menjadi salah satu daripada jenis cabaran. Sungguhpun penemuan ini tidak boleh diaplikasi secara keseluruhannya, ianya mempunyai maklumat-maklumat konstruktif yang sungguh menarik. Cabaran-cabaran itu ialah kurang sokongan, kesihatan, pelbagai konflik tanggungjawab, komitmen dalam tugas, kesuntukan masa, kesempitan wang, perasaan serba salah, jarak perjalanan, status perkahwinan, kurang tumpuan, kurang keyakinan diri, kurang motivasi, kurang kemudahan pembelajaran, jadual waktu kuliah yang tidak sesuai, penulisan teks akademik, kefahaman teks akademik, beban tugas kuliah, masalah perbendaharaan kata dan penggunaan bahasa Inggeris, dan kaedah penilaian yang tidak jelas dan tidak boleh diterima. Kajian kes ini juga telah menemui beberapa cadangan untuk mengatasi sebahagian daripada cabaran fizikal dan material / pensituasi. Untuk mengatasi cabaran kesuntukan masa, risalah perlu dibawa bersama untuk dibaca semasa beriadah dengan pasangan dan penggandaan kegunaan aktiviti di kerja untuk digunakan dalam persiapan tugas kuliah dicadangkan. Untuk mengatasi tekanan, permohonan cuti tanpa gaji telah disarankan. Untuk mengatasi cabaran kesempitan wang, pembelian buku mahal boleh ditangguhkan dan peruntukan perbelanjaan untuk hiburan perlu dikurangkan. Bagi mengatasi konflik pelbagai tanggungjawab, dicadangkan supaya kepentingan pelbagai tanggungjawab itu diterapkan dan had kemampuan diri diterima. Implikasi kajian ini merangkumi penghargaan sokongan dan dorongan dari orang terdekat, kepentingan pengendalian masa, kecekalan, fokus yang berterusan, kepentingan mendapat persetujuan jadual kuliah dan bahawa pelajar dewasa ijazah sarjana tidak semestinya mempunyai kemahiran akademik asas. Terdapat beberapa cadangan untuk penyelidikan selanjutnya. Antaranya adalah kajian kes sama yang dijalankan dalam jangka-masa yang lebih panjang, kajian interaksi diantara pelbagai jenis cabaran dan kajian perbandingan untuk mengkaji perbezaan antara cabaran yang dihadapi oleh pelajar dewasa dari universiti tempatan dan dari luar negara.