A Study of Career Development, Learning Motivation, and Learning Satisfaction of Adult Learners in Unconventional Scheduling Graduate Programs

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The study aimed at investigating the relationships among career development, learning motivation, and learning satisfaction of adult learners in master's programs at S University. Questionnaires were distributed with 211 valid returns (71%). The results indicated that some of the demographics are factors affecting both of the learners' learning motivations and satisfactions. Moreover, it is found that career development affect learning motivations and satisfactions, and it is a relationship found between learning motivations and learning satisfactions.

Keywords: adult learners, career development, career stage, learning motivation, learning satisfaction

Problem Statement

Due to the acceleration of scientific and technological progress and global economy that requires new skills and competencies, many working people are engaged in learning activities in order to survive and to be competitive. Despite the increased duration of primary, secondary and university education (14-18 years), the knowledge and skills acquired there are usually not sufficient for a professional career spanning three or four decades. Responding to the increased learning needs of adult learners, the educational policies regarding higher education in Taiwan have changed greatly. One of the most sweeping changes in educational reform took place in Taiwan when the government issued the "Twelve Education Reform Mandates" in 1998. There has been an increase of colleges and universities in four-year level ever since. According to Ministry of Education (2006), there were only 51 four-year colleges and universities in 1992 compared to currently 159 to date, the increase rate in 13 years is astonishing. This change brought about greater access to education at all levels, especially continuing education (BICER, 1998). Many graduate programs have been launched such as EMBA, PMBA (Professional MBA), and some graduate programs in other fields that are administered in unconventional class scheduling (evenings and weekends). Therefore, the number of adult learners at graduate levels increased dramatically in recent years. However, it raises questions to the researchers that why those adult students come back to school and what motivate them to be willing to take an extra role as a student while they are taking so many other roles and responsibilities? Does an individual's career stage play any significant part contributing to their returning to school? Furthermore, are they satisfied with the educational services provided by the school?

According to adult developmental theories by Super (1957), Havighurst (1972) and Schein(1978), there are stages of an individual career development. Each stage has different developmental tasks requiring specific knowledge and skills, which drives individuals to learn (Huang, 1989). The learned knowledge and skills, then, move the individuals from one stage to the next, which generates another set of learning activities. In other words, when a person perceives changes of the environment or needs to move up to another stage of his/her career, he or she would be uncomfortable about lacking of the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to adapt or move forward, the motivation to learning transpires (Tzai, 1996). Motivation is the key to accomplish learning goals (Kasworm & Marienau, 1997). When the motivation of learning occurs, as a result, engaging in learning activities becomes a person's next action. Long (1985) believes that the major goal of adults engaging in learning is to get desirable outcomes and learning satisfactions. Learning satisfaction generates more learning to occur which could be also used to determine whether the learning needs are fulfilled for individuals as well as an important indicator whether or not should an educational institute improve the educational services providing to the learners.

Based on the nature of adult education, learners come to the class and engage in learning activities voluntarily. When their learning needs are not fulfilled and satisfied, it would be very likely for them to withdraw from learning, and the situation could negatively bring down a school's competitiveness. Therefore, learner's satisfaction is one of the most important criteria for measuring the effectiveness of an institute (Astin, Korn, Green, 1987). Therefore, for

the purpose of improving schools' effectiveness in serving adult students in graduate programs, an investigation of the relationships among career development, learning motivation, and learning satisfaction of the students is needed.

Research Questions

1. What are the career stages, in terms of the five levels (exploratory, establishment, maintenance, decline, and second exploratory/career transition) of the graduate adult students currently in graduate programs at S University?
2. What motivates those adult students to come back to school?
3. Are the adult students satisfied with the educational services they have received from S University?
4. Do career stages of the adult students affect their learning motivations?
5. Do career stages of the adult students affect their learning satisfactions?
6. Do learning motivations of the adult students affect their learning satisfactions?

Literature Review

The theoretical framework of the study rests on Career Development, Learning Motivations, and Learning Satisfactions. The three constructs are described as follows.

Career Development

Donald Super (1957) and other theorists of career development recognize the changes that people go through as they mature. Career patterns are determined by socioeconomic factors, mental and physical abilities, personal characteristics and the opportunities to which persons are exposed. People seek career satisfaction through work roles in which they can express themselves and implement and develop their self-concepts. Career maturity, a main concept in Super's theory, is manifested in the successful accomplishment of age and stage developmental tasks across the life span.

Self-concept is an underlying factor in Super's model: "...vocational self-concept develops through physical and mental growth, observations of work, identification with working adults, general environment, and general experiences....As experiences become broader in relation to awareness of world of work, the more sophisticated vocational self-concept is formed"(Zunker, 1994, p.30). At the time like this, people look forward to higher stage in their career.

Super's contribution was the formalization of stages and developmental tasks over the life span:

Table 1. *Career Stages (Super, 1957)*

STAGE	AGE	CHARACTERISTICS
Growth	Birth to 14 or 15	Form self-concept, develop capacity, attitudes, interests, and needs, and form a general understanding of the world of work.
Exploratory	15-24	"Try out" through classes, work experience, hobbies. Collect relevant information. Tentative choice and related skill development.
Establishment	25-44	Entry skill building and stabilization through work experience.
Maintenance	45-64	Continual adjustment process to improve position.
Decline	65+	Reduced output, prepare for retirement.

Career Transition

Due to the fast changing environment and economy, the career transition during a person's career development has received great deal of attention in recent decades (McDaniels & Gysbers, 1992). According to Sarason (1977), there are two forms of career transition: horizontal and vertical. Horizontal career transition means a person change his or her job from one field to another while vertical career transition is move up or down in the same one. A person might have multiple vertical career transitions within his or her career life. No matter how much change from one career to another, it involves changes in interpersonal interactions, perceptions and feelings of self, and the level of adaptability (Osipow, 1983). As a result, career transition leads a person to new learning and exploration.

There are more people reassessing their current careers. This could be due to the perception of a person towards his or her job lacking of future development or not matching with their personal goals (Vernon, 1994). As soon as their mindsets changed, they are very likely to change their careers. For those people who were satisfied with their previous careers might also consider change their career choices due to the effects of people and events surround

them (Lin, 2004).

Learning Motivations

Motivation by definition is the degree of the choices people make and the degree of effort they will exert (Keller, 1983). Clark (1998) developed a CANE (Commitment and Necessary Effort) model that identified two processes of motivation: commitment and necessary effort. Wlodkowski (1993) suggests six major components that affect adult learners' motivation in the time continuum. These motivational models were used in other research studies to identify the gap in learner motivation and how to design motivating instruction.

What adults were learning was "largely practical and skill oriented rather than academic" (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999 p. 47). Adults learn for their jobs, for enjoyment, and for social interaction. Social, economic, and cultural contexts greatly influence who they adult learners are, and what they learn. Hundreds of local, state, and national studies have asked adults their reasons for engaging in educational pursuits. The most common answer is job-related motives. Analysis of interview data conducted by Houle (1961) showed three learning motivations held by adults which Boshier (1971) expanded upon in his creation of the Education Participation Scale which states that adults participate for:

1. Social Relations – participation in order to make new friends or meet members of the opposite sex.
2. External Expectations – complying with the wishes or directives of someone else with authority.
3. Social Welfare – involvement due to a desire to serve others or their community
4. Professional Advancement – such as job enhancement
5. Escape/Stimulation – learners involved as a way of alleviating boredom or escaping home or work routine
6. Cognitive Interest – are engaged for the sake of learning itself.

Learning Satisfactions

Different from traditional students, adult students return to school by their own choice with purposes. Therefore, learning satisfaction is extremely important in adult education, which generates adults engage in more learning behaviors in the future (Fu & Chu, 2003). According to Houle (1961), learning satisfaction occurs when learning activities meet students' goals and needs. Knowles (1975) and Tough (1982) both stated that learning satisfaction occurs when the students are fulfilled and motivated to engage in further learning activities.

There are many factors contributing to learning satisfactions of adult learners such as: the instructor, the contents, learning materials, teaching styles and techniques of the instructor, learning climate, and curriculum (Urdan, 1979). Chen (1983) states that instructor's characteristics and teaching styles, social interactions, work-related skills learning, and personal development are factors affecting learning satisfactions. Ma (1989) believes that the learner's personal factors such as: social background, psychological characteristics, learning motives; instructor's factors such as: personality, teaching styles, teaching methods, learning contents, and attitudes toward students; and school factors such as: school environment, administrative services, and policies are factors influencing students' learning satisfactions.

Methodology

Research Design

Quantitative research design was applied in the present study for determining how career stage development and learning motivation affected learning satisfaction of adult students in graduate programs at S University. Questionnaire was developed as an instrument for gathering necessary data. SPSS Windows 10.0 was utilized for analyzing gathered data.

Population and Sampling

The population of the study was adult learners in unconventional graduate programs at S University. There were 311 adult learners enrolled in the programs. Questionnaires were distributed to all of the adult students with 211 valid returns (71.06%). The descriptive analysis showed that a typical participant is 31-40 year-old married male adult student who does not have children and works in a non-management position for 10 – 15 years.

Research Framework

The present study was based on the theories mentioned in the literature review, which are career stage development, learning motivations, and learning satisfactions. The graphic as follow indicates the hypotheses of the study and the variables of each dimension:
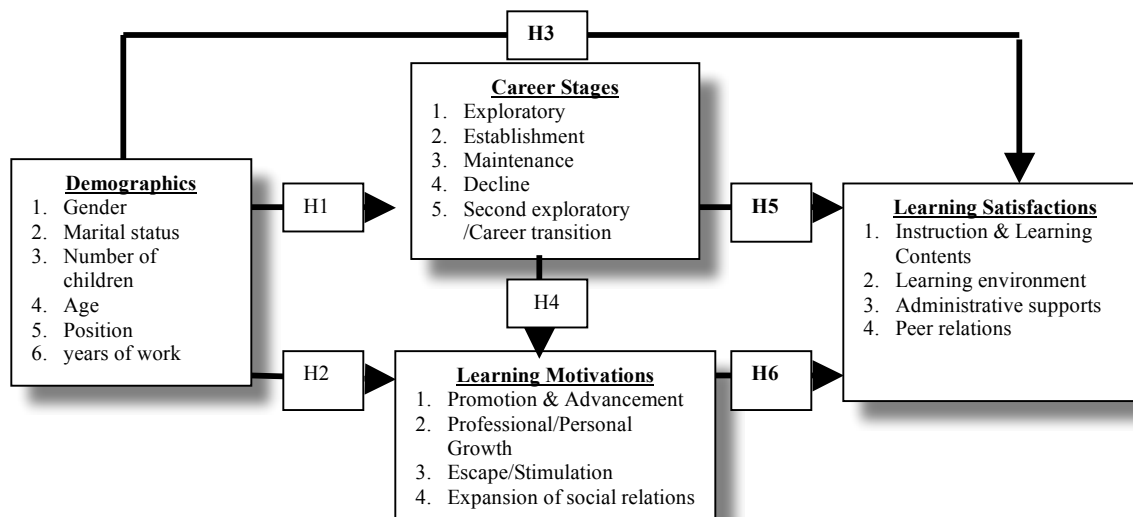
Figure 1. Research Framework

Research Instrument

The questionnaire was developed through a thorough literature review and review of questionnaires tested in previous studies, which consists demographic variables (gender, marital status, age, number of children, position, tenure) and three dimensions with different sets of questions including "Career Development/Stage", "Learning Motivations", and "Learning Satisfactions". The Likert-type scale was chosen for dimensions of "Learning Motivations" and "Learning Satisfactions" in the present study because it yielded a better mean correlation coefficient (Tittle & Hill, 1967). A six-point Likert-type scale was adopted to avoid central tendency of the responses. ("6" denoted as strongly agree, while "1" denoted as strongly disagree). Reliability test was employed with overall Cronbach's alpha .93, and .89 in Learning Motivations, .93 in Learning Satisfactions respectively.

In the section of Career Development, unlike instruments in the previous literature the variable "Second exploratory/Career transition" was added in the section since there are increased numbers of people who are facing stagnation or difficulties in their career, job dissatisfaction, life change, or retired from previous job and thinking about other career opportunities. The section adapted the form of multiple choices, the participants therefore to make only one choice after considering their current situation.

Findings

According to the descriptive statistical analysis, it is found that 30 participants (13.5%) are in the stage of exploratory, 94 participants (42.5%) are in the stage of establishment, 64 participants (29%) are in the stage of maintenance, only one participant is in the stage of decline, and 22 participants are in the stage of second exploratory/career transition.

Factor Analyses

Based on Rencher's (1995) principles, principal component factor analyses were performed to extract the scaled item variables into factors. The varimax rotation technique was applied when needed to enhance the representations of factor loadings and to ensure that factors in each section were not correlated. Item loadings in each factor that were less than .50 were omitted. There are four factors extracted in learning motivations: "Escape/Stimulation", "Promotion and Advancement", "Professional/Personal Growth", and "Expansion of Social Relations". In learning satisfactions, four factors are extracted: "Instruction and Contents", "Administrative Supports", "Learning Environment", and "Peer Relations".

H1: The demographics of the participants do not make any difference on career development.

Chi-squaretest was employed to determine if any demographic variables affecting participant's career development (Table 2). It is found that all the variables except gender do make difference on participant's career development. Therefore, the hypothesis is rejected.

Table 2. *Chi-square Test for Demographic Variables and Career Developmental Stages*

Variables	X^2	df	p-value
Marital status	43.77***	12	.00
Number of child	42.57***	12	.00
Age	85.13***	12	.00
Position	2.09**	8	.01
Yrs of work	103.94***	12	.00

**p <.01; ***p<.00

H2: The demographics of the participants do not make any difference on learning motivations.
H3: The demographics of the participants do not make any difference on learning satisfactions.
t-test and ANOVA were employed for determining the relationship between demographic variables and learning motivations and the relationship between demographic variables and learning satisfactions (Table 3). The Table 3 shows only those significant ones.

It is found that the demographic variables (marital status, number of children, age, position, and years of work) of the participants affect learning motivations while only number of children and gender do not affect participants' learning satisfactions. Therefore, hypothesis 3 and hypothesis 3 are rejected.

Table 3. *ANOVA tests for Demographics to Learning Motivations and Learning Satisfactions*

Motivations	F-value	Scheffe	Demographics	Satisfaction s	F-value	Scheffe
Pro./Personal growth	4.80**		Marital status	Instruct/contents		.
Promotion/advance	2.80**	2>1	1. Married	Admin. service	4.06**	1>2
Escape/Stimulation	3.73**	NS	2. Unmarried	Learning environ.		
Expand Social Relations			3. Divorce	Peer relations		
Pro./Personal growth			No of Child	Instruct/contents		.
Promotion/advance	4.62**	1>3	1. None	Admin. Service		
Escape/Stimulation	3.26**	1>3	2. one	Learning environ		
Expand Social Relations			3. two	Peer relations		
			4. three			
Pro./Personal growth			Age	Instruct/contents		.
Promotion/advance	3.63**	1>3	1. under 30	Admin. service	4.57**	3>1
Escape/Stimulation	2.89**	NS	2. 31-40	Learning environ.		
Expand Social Relations			3. 41-50	Peer relations		
			4. 51-60			
Pro./Personal growth			Position	Instruct/contents		.
Promotion/advance	4.41**	1>2	1. Non-mange.	Admin. service	7.08***	2>1;2>3
Escape/Stimulation			2. Management	Learning environ.	6.81**	2>1;2>3
Expand Social Relations			3. Boss	Peer relations	5.13**	2>3
Pro./Personal growth			Yrs of work	Instruct/contents		.
Promotion/advance	5.53**	1>4;2>4	1. under 3 yrs	Admin. service	4.07**	3>1;4>1
Escape/Stimulation	3.11**		2. 3-10 yrs	Learning environ.		
Expand Social Relations			3. 10-20 yrs	Peer relations		
			4. 21 & above			

**p<.01; ***p<.00

H4: Participant's career developmental stages do not make any difference on their learning motivations.
H5: Participant's career developmental stages do not make any difference on their learning satisfactions.
ANOVA tests were employed to determine the relationship between career development and learning motivations and the relationship between career development and learning satisfactions (Table 4).

It is found that career development of the participants do affect their learning motivations and learning satisfactions. Therefore, the hypothesis 4 and 5 are rejected.

Table 4. *ANOVA tests for Career Developmental Stages to Learning Motivations and Learning Satisfactions*

Motivations	F-value	Scheffe	Career stage	Satisfactions	F-value	Scheffe
Pro./Personal growth			l. Exploratory	Instruct/contents		.
Promotion/Advance	4.36**	2>4	2.Establishment	Admin. supports		
Escape/Stimulation			3.Maintenance	Learning env.		
ExpandSocial Relations			4.Decline	Peer relations	2.44*	NS
			5. Sec. Ex./Transition			

*p<.05; **p<.01

H6: There is no relationship between learning motivations and learning satisfactions of the participants.

Pearson's Correlation tests were employed to determine the relationship between learning motivations and learning satisfactions (Table 5).

It is found that overall; there is a significant relationship between the two dimensions even though it is not extremely strong. Therefore, hypothesis 6 is rejected. As shown in Table 5, for those who come to school for "escape/stimulation" care a little bit more about overall satisfactions than their counterparts (r=360). Adult learners come back to school for job promotion and career advancement, on the contrary, they care least about the learning environment (r=.171) nor overall satisfaction (r=.252). What they probably care is whether or not they could get the degree and get promoted.

Table 5: *Pearson's Correlations on Learning Motivations and Learning Satisfactions*

(r)	Learning satisfactions				
	Inst/Content	Adm./Supp	Environment	Peer Relations	Overall
Learning motivations *Pro/Personal growth*	.35**	.13*	.18**	.31**	.34**
Promotion/Advance	.21**	.17*	.17*	.21**	.25**
Escape/Stimulation	.28**	.24**	.32**	.23**	.36**
Expand Social Relations	.27**	.19*	.19**	.37**	.33**
Overall	.36**	.26**	.31**	.35**	.43**

*p<.05; **p<.01

Discussions and Conclusions

The findings of the present study suggested that most of the participants are in the establishment stage of career development. This is much to do with their ages that the majority of them fall between 31 to 40 years old. People in this age range might have worked for certain years in the middle level management or somewhat important positions and look for further career advancement. Furthermore, according to Super (1957), people in Establishment stage tend to learn how to get ahead and have a need to produce significant results. Therefore, they are more likely to come back to school either for getting a higher degree for promotion or upgrading their knowledge and skills in their fields for better competitiveness.

Among all the learning motivations, "professional and personal growth" received the highest mean score while the second highest is "job promotion" followed by "expanding social relations". This reflects the educational needs of working adults in the fast changing economy, technology, and society in recent years; therefore, lifelong learning is a must for working adults. By coming back to school, professionals not only gain new knowledge and skills in order to be more competitive at work but also meet many other professionals for expanding their professional and personal network.

The participants are most satisfied with "peer relations". This is probably because most of them have a full-time job. With such limited time other than performing responsibilities as an employee, parent, and other roles, they help one another on study, share information and learning resources, and learn together. This again supports the notion that cooperative learning is important to adult learners. Cooperative learning is a natural for the adult education classroom (Thistlethwaite, 1994).

The unmarried participants are more likely to look for promotion and professional advancement than those who are married. This is quite understandable since they have less family responsibilities than their counterparts. Unmarried learners also have higher perceptions toward "escape/stimulation" than married ones. This supports Falaki's (1983) finding that unmarried adult learners taking part in learning activities for avoiding dull and fixed life. The finding also supports Long's (1983) study that marital status is one of the factors affecting an adult's desire to get job promotion. Those who have no children have higher perceptions toward "promotion/.advancement" and "escape/stimulation" than those who have children and would be more likely to come back to school. The same with Sing (1994), the more children the participants have, the more concerns there are that prevent them to come back to school.

Age is also a factor affecting adult learners' learning motivations. The younger participants tend to have higher learning motivations on "promotion/advancement" and "escape/stimulations". The participants who have less years of work and are in non-management positions tend to have higher motivation for "promotion/advancement" than their counterparts. As Phipps (1986) stated that adult learners in lower level positions tend to take part in

learning activities that could help upgrading their knowledge and skills or getting a higher degree in order to get promoted or get a raise.

Married and older learners are more satisfied with "administrative supports" than younger and unmarried ones. That is, the younger the participants are, the least satisfied they are toward administrative services. Participants in management positions tend to have higher satisfactions on "learning environment", "administrative supports" and "peer relations" than other groups. It is also found that participants with less than 3 years of work experience have the least learning satisfaction than their counterparts. Therefore, we can conclude that the number of years work experience is positively affecting learners' learning satisfactions. In other words, the more years of work experience the participants have, the more satisfied they are with educational services.

The results showed that career development affects learning motivations and learning satisfactions. In learning motivations, participants in the stage "establishment" tend to have higher tendency on "promotion/advancement" than others. For learning satisfactions, career development affects "peer relations", that is, participants in "second exploratory/transition" and "establishment" stages have favorable satisfaction levels than others. This is probably because people in these two stages have further desires on their career, so having better peer relations could be of help with their intents.

The findings also showed that learning motivations have positive relationship with learning satisfactions, which is, the higher the learning motivations participants have, the higher the learning satisfactions they perceive.

Suggestions

It is found that "administrative supports" received the lowest mean score among all the learning satisfaction factors. Knowles (1984) used to state, "It is perhaps a sad commentary that, of all our social institutions, colleges and universities have been among the slowest to respond to adult learners" (p. 284). According to the literature, institutional/procedural barriers are one of the most significant factors preventing adult learners to come back to school (Pinkston, 1987). Therefore, for increasing adult learners' satisfaction level and to attract more adult learners, the school should design administrative procedures that are simple, easy, convenient, and student-centered for adult learners.

As indicated in the results of the study that most participants are in the career stage of establishment with a purpose of professional and personal growth for coming back to school. For facilitating adult learners to learn more effectively related to their fields, therefore, it is suggested that the school should consider in designing more classes involving individual and group projects such as special projects related to their fields in which they can choose any topic they are interested in or related to their professions. More discussions in the class could be helpful for stimulating students to exchange practical knowledge and information helpful to their career. In such way, it could also increase their satisfactions on "instructional methods and learning contents" and "peer relations".

Contributions to HRD

There are many studies investigating career development and learning motivations or learning motivations and learning satisfactions. However, the study of the three dimensions (career development, learning motivations, and learning satisfactions) were not found, therefore, the present study contributes to HRD literature from a broader perspective. The finding indicating the stage of establishment is the dominated stage of graduate adult students who are seeking career advancement and peer relations is another contribution to HRD field.

The present study focused on the effects of career development on learning motivations and satisfactions. Further research could be focused on other dimensions of the adult learners such as life style, work and leisure, and family factors and how they affect their learning. The population of the study was adult graduate students in S University. Further researchers could do studies on other institutes or more schools to see if there are patterns found.
Limitations

The population of the study was adult learners in graduate programs at S University; therefore, generalization is limited. In career development section, the study investigate only the participants' current situations, therefore what would happen in the future is not controllable.

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