

**THE EFFECTS OF SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING
AND ORGANISATIONAL LEARNING
ENVIRONMENT ON JOB COMPETENCIES
AMONG THE EMPLOYEES OF
GOVERNMENT-LINKED
COMPANIES IN
KOTA KINABALU**

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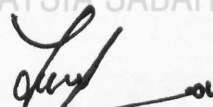


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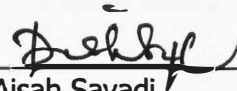
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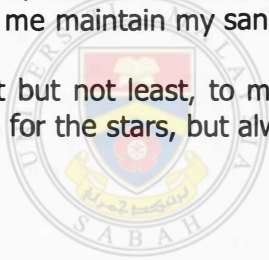
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ABSTRACT

THE EFFECTS OF SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING AND ORGANISATIONAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENT ON JOB COMPETENCIES AMONG THE EMPLOYEES OF GOVERNMENT-LINKED COMPANIES IN KOTA KINABALU

This research aims to examine the effects of Self-directed Learning and Organisational Learning Environment on Job Competencies among the employees of eight Government-Linked Companies in Kota Kinabalu. Demographic factors such as Age, Gender, Education Level and Working Experience were hypothesized to moderate the effects of Self-directed Learning and Organisational Learning Environment on Job Competencies. An empirical study was conducted to test the relationship between the three dimensions as expressed in the research framework, as well as the moderating effect of the demographic factors on the relationship. One hundred twenty seven (127) respondents from eight GLCs participated in the survey. The quantitative analysis showed that Self-directed Learning has a significant relationship with Job Competencies, while the hypothesis that Organisational Learning Environment has a significant relationship with Job Competencies was only partially supported. The findings also concluded that none of the demographic factors i.e. Age, Gender, Education Level and Working Experience have any moderating effects on the relationship between Self-directed Learning and Organisational Learning Environment with Job Competencies. The findings have significance to human capital management practice within the realm of organisational learning and on the development of employees' job competencies.

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ABSTRAK

Kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji kesan pembelajaran sendiri dan suasana pembelajaran organisasi terhadap kompetensi kerja di kalangan kakitangan lapan Syarikat Berkaitan Kerajaan di Kota Kinabalu. Faktor demografi seperti umur, jantina, tahap pendidikan dan pengalaman berkerja dijangka mempengaruhi hubungan antara pembelajaran sendiri dan suasana pembelajaran organisasi terhadap kompetensi kerja. Kajian empirik telah digunakan untuk menguji hubungan antara ketiga-tiga dimensi termasuk kesan pengaruh faktor demografi, yang terdapat dalam rangka kajian. Sejumlah seratus dua puluh tujuh (127) responden dari lapan Syarikat Berkaitan Kerajaan telah mengambil bahagian dalam kajian ini. Keputusan kajian melalui pendekatan kuantitatif menunjukkan bahawa pembelajaran sendiri mempunyai hubungan signifikan dengan kompetensi kerja, manakala hubungan yang signifikan di antara suasana pembelajaran organisasi terhadap kompetensi kerja hanyalah di sokong sebahagian. Kajian juga merumuskan bahawa faktor demografi iaitu umur, jantina, tahap pendidikan dan pengalaman berkerja tidak mempengaruhi hubungan antara kaedah pembelajaran sendiri dan suasana pembelajaran organisasi terhadap kompetensi kerja. Penemuan kajian mempunyai implikasi terhadap amalan pengurusan modal manusia yang merangkumi persekitaran pembelajaran organisasi dan seterusnya, ke atas pembangunan kompetensi kerja kakitangan sesebuah organisasi.



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
DECLARATION	ii
CERTIFICATION	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	iv
ABSTRACT	v
ABSTRAK	vi
TABLE OF CONTENTS	vii
LIST OF TABLES	xi
LIST OF FIGURES	Xiii
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	xiv
 CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	
1.0 Overview	1
1.1 Background of the Present Study	2
1.2 Problem Statement	3
1.3 Objectives of the Study	4
1.4 Scope of the Study	5
1.5 Significance of the Study	6
1.6 Definitions of Key Variables	6
1.6.1 Job Competencies	6
1.6.2 Self-Directed Learning	7
1.6.3 Organisational Learning Environment	7
1.6.4 Demographic	8
a. Age	8
b. Gender	8
c. Education Level	8
d. Working Experience	8
1.7 Summary and Organisation of the Remaining Chapters	9

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0	Introduction	10
2.1	The Concept of Job Competencies	10
2.1.1	Previous Studies on Competencies	12
2.2	The Concepts of Organisational Learning and Organisational Learning Environment	15
2.2.1	Previous Studies on Organisational Learning Environment	17
2.3	Theoretical Models of Self-Directed Learning (SDL)	19
2.3.1	Previous Studies on Self-Directed Learning	21
2.4	Previous Studies on Self-directed Learning and Job Competencies	25
2.5	Previous Studies on Organisational Learning Environment and Job Competencies	26
2.6	Summary	27

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

3.0	Introduction	31
3.1	Research Framework	31
3.2	Definitions of Variables	31
3.3	Research Hypotheses	33
3.4	Nature of Study	34
3.5	Research Design	34
3.6	Research Methodology	35
3.6.1	Unit of Analysis	35
3.6.2	Sampling Design	35
3.6.3	Data Collection Method	36
3.6.4	Instrument Design	37
3.6.5	Measurements	38
3.6.6	Data Analysis Method	39
3.7	Summary	39

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH RESULT

4.0	Introduction	41
4.1	Respondents' Profile	41
4.2	Descriptive Statistics on Demographic Information	44
4.2.1	Gender	44
4.2.2	Age	44
4.2.3	Education Level	44
4.2.4	Working Experience	45
4.3	Goodness of Measure	45
4.3.1	Self-directed Learning	46
4.3.2	Organisational Learning Environment	48
4.3.3	Job Competencies	50
4.4	Revised Framework and Hypotheses	52
4.5	Reliability Test	56
4.6	Descriptive Analysis of Variables	57
4.7	Hypotheses Testing	58
4.7.1	Hypothesis 1	58
4.7.2	Hypothesis 2	59
4.7.3	Hypothesis 2a	59
	Hypothesis 2b	60
	Hypothesis 2c	60
	Hypothesis 2d	60
4.7.4	Hypothesis 3	61
4.7.5	Hypothesis 3a	61
	Hypothesis 3b	62
	Hypothesis 3c	62
	Hypothesis 3d	62
4.7.6	Hypothesis 4	63
	Hypothesis 4a	63
	Hypothesis 4b	64
4.7.7	Hypothesis 5	64

4.7.8	Hypothesis 6	65
	Hypothesis 6a	65
	Hypothesis 6b	66
	Hypothesis 6c	67
	Hypothesis 6d	68
4.7.9	Hypothesis 7	69
	Hypothesis 7a	69
	Hypothesis 7b	70
	Hypothesis 7c	71
	Hypothesis 7d	72
4.8	One-Way ANOVA Test	73
4.9	Summary of the Hypotheses Results	75

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

5.0	Introduction	78
5.1	Recapitulation of Study	78
5.2	Discussion of Study	79
5.2.1	Relationship between Self-directed Learning and Job Competencies	80
5.2.2	Relationship between Organisational Learning Environment and Job Competencies	81
5.2.3	Moderating effects of Demographic Factors	83
5.2.4	Relationship between Self-directed Learning and Organisational Learning Environment	84
5.3	Implications of the Findings	84
5.4	Limitation of Study	85
5.5	Suggestions for Future Research	86
5.6	Conclusion	87

REFERENCES	89
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APPENDIX A	93
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APPENDIX B	100
-------------------	-----

LIST OF TABLES

PAGE

Table 2.1	List of literatures reviewed	29
Table 3.1	The Population Company	36
Table 4.1	The Distribution of Respondents	42
Table 4.2	Response Rates	43
Table 4.3	Effective Response Rates	43
Table 4.4	Gender	44
Table 4.5	Age	44
Table 4.6	Education Level	45
Table 4.7	Working Experience	45
Table 4.8	Varimax Rotated Factor Loadings on Self-directed Learning	47
Table 4.9	Varimax Component Factor Loadings on Organisational Learning Environment	49
Table 4.10	Varimax Rotated Factor Loadings on Job Competencies	51
Table 4.11	Revised Hypotheses	54
Table 4.12	Reliability Coefficients of Variables	56
Table 4.13	Descriptive Statistics of the Variables	57
Table 4.14	Linear Regression: Self-directed Learning and Job Competencies	58
Table 4.15	Linear Regression: Self-directed Learning and Communication Skills	59
Table 4.16	Multiple Regression: Self-directed Learning dimensions and Communication Skills	60
Table 4.17	Linear Regression: Self-directed Learning and Cognitive Skills	61
Table 4.18	Multiple Regression: Self-directed Learning dimensions and Cognitive Skills	62
Table 4.19	Linear Regression: Organisational Learning Environment and Job Competencies	63
Table 4.20	Linear Regression: Organisational Learning Environment and Communication Skills	64
Table 4.21	Linear Regression: Organisational Learning Environment and Cognitive Skills	64
Table 4.22	Pearson Correlation	65
Table 4.23	Multiple Hierarchical Regression - Age as Moderator between Self-directed Learning and Job Competencies	66
Table 4.24	Multiple Hierarchical Regression – Gender as Moderator between Self-directed Learning and Job Competencies	67

Table 4.25	Multiple Hierarchical Regression – Education Level as Moderator between Self-directed Learning and Job Competencies	68
Table 4.26	Multiple Hierarchical Regression – Working Experience as Moderator between Self-directed Learning and Job Competencies	69
Table 4.27	Multiple Hierarchical Regression - Age as Moderator between Organisational Learning Environment and Job Competencies	70
Table 4.28	Multiple Hierarchical Regression – Gender as Moderator between Organisational Learning Environment and Job Competencies	71
Table 4.29	Multiple Hierarchical Regression – Education Level as Moderator between Organisational Learning Environment and Job Competencies	72
Table 4.30	Multiple Hierarchical Regression – Working Experience as Moderator between Organisational Learning Environment and Job Competencies	73
Table 4.31	One-way ANOVA Test	74
Table 4.32	Descriptive Statistics of Organisational Learning Environment	74
Table 4.33	Summary of Findings	75



LIST OF FIGURES

PAGE

Figure 3.1	Research Framework	33
Figure 4.1	Revised Research of Framework	53



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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CPE	Continuing Professional Education
CRCL	Career-Related Continuous Learning
DV	Dependent Variable
GLC	Government-Linked Company
HRM	Human Resource Management
IV	Independent Variable
JC	Job Competencies
KKIP	K.K.I.P. Sdn Bhd
OLE	Organisational Learning Environment
POIC	Palm Oil Industrial Cluster Sabah Sdn Bhd
ROI	Return on Investment
SDL	Self-directed Learning
SAWIT	Kumpulan Sawit Kinabalu Sdn Bhd
SCC	Sabah Credit Corporation
SDB	Sabah Development Bank
SLDB	Sabah Land Development Board
SSB	Saham Sabah Bhd
SUDC	Sabah Urban Development Corporation
SURIA	Suria Capital Holding Bhd

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Overview

Rapid technological development and competitive environment have forced businesses to compete for survival through continuous improvement and innovation. Organisations need to achieve knowledge and skill development to gain competitive edge in a rapidly changing industrial context and as such knowledge workers have become the most vital asset in the knowledge-based society, hence people need to build and acquire the necessary skills in order to remain competitive and relevant in the labour market.

As Baruch (2009) noted, evidently both organisations and individuals seek to make an investment that would give the best return. Organisations look for the best people and for better ways to develop their managerial inventory. Towards this end, most organisations allocate a certain percentage of their annual budget for employees' training. The approach to training however varies from 1) the more traditional development methods based on instruction and systematic training intervention; 2) conducting ad-hoc training as and when the need arises, and 3) learning is voluntary where the employees are allowed to take responsibility for their own training and develop a self-directed mind-set. Given the financial implication, organisational decision makers such as human resource managers are interested in the potential return that results from various developmental activities, specifically if there is a relationship between continuous learning and enhanced competencies (Rowold and Kauffeld, 2009).

However organisations alone cannot assume the task of ensuring the learning of all their employees. It is neither feasible nor financially practical. Hence beyond providing basic and fundamental training, organisations should encourage employee development where the employees take the initiative to learn and

develop themselves. Pedler *et al.* (1997) as cited by James-Gordon and Bal (2003), had suggested that self-development would include self-directed and flexible learning approaches, where individuals were encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning and development. Antonacopoulou (2008) noted that two main principles of employee development, i.e. self-development and self-directed learning, emphasised that employee development must be driven by employees who recognised the need to develop themselves and who were willing to learn, and that the individual employees have the "power" to choose what to learn and how to develop themselves.

As jobs go through rapid transformation in a high-tech and knowledge-based society, the need to promote and nurture career-related continuous learning at the workplace would be crucial for employee career development. Hence the emphasis on the organisations' role to provide a more conducive learning environment that would promote workplace learning.

1.1 Background of The Present Study

Antonacopoulou (2008) noted that the emphasis on learning as a source of competitive advantage has renewed the importance of self-direction and personal responsibility in the development process. According to Smith *et al.* (2007), self-directedness of employees is worth pursuing by organisations that want to achieve knowledge and skill development in a competitive fast changing industrial context. Raabe *et al.* (2007) observed that much of the responsibility for managing careers is shifting from employers to adaptive and proactive employees. In contrast, earlier findings in McDonald *et al.* (2005) found that at least in the public sector, career was still planned and managed to a large extent by their organisations. Furthermore Ho (2008) observed that the culture of the organisation is dominantly characterised at present by a common belief that, learning within the organisation has to be basically employer-directed learning. This implies that most of employees' learning has to be decided within the organisation's training scheme in a strict compliance with the organisation's basic mission and objectives. Consequently most of the decisions related to employees learning have to be taken within the framework of the employer's training scheme. Another study done on apprentices in 12 organisations in Australia has shown that the evidence that the

development of self-directed learning is not well supported in the workplace appears disappointingly compelling (Smith *et al.*, 2007).

It was against this background that the present study examined the effects of self-directed learning activities and the influence of organisational learning environment in enhancing job competencies among the employees of eight (8) GLCs in Kota Kinabalu.

1.2 Problem Statement

Employees' skills and competences, whether acquired through formal education, training or experience, are essential for the organisation's activities and growth. And to support this requirement, organisations would allocate annual training budget for their employees, and would expect a return on investment in terms of increased competencies or productivity. However with more work responsibilities being placed upon employees, they now have less time to attend formal training (James-Gordon and Bal (2003). It is not uncommon that employees attend training and yet the knowledge is not shared or does not contribute to the organisation's performance. Besides research has also shown that organisations cannot adequately support all competencies and as such self-directedness in learning among employees has an important part to play in the competitiveness of enterprises (Smith *et al.*, 2007).

The researcher noted that, in her own organisation when the employees were accorded flexibility in choosing and deciding the courses or training they could pursue based on their own training needs, the observed perceived return in terms of the employees' knowledge acquisition and enhanced job competence were quite obvious. This was because the employees were able to decide when, where and how much learning they required and subsequently pursued. This observation was fairly significant on employees who were at the executive and managerial level. On the other hand, when the training was made mandatory across-the-board for example, an in-house program on sales and marketing, there were employees who were at the upper end of the knowledge spectrum who would feel that the training was not able to add value to their existing knowledge, and hence a waste of the organisation's time and money. The researcher further

noted that the employees' proactive inclination towards workplace learning has not always been fully supported at the workplace, for example the management was not quite receptive to the employees' suggestion to implement job rotation. This sometimes would lead to lack of motivation to work (as their jobs became too routine and monotonous), which in turn would affect the work performance. This study has attempted to demonstrate the value in encouraging employees to become more effective self-directed learners and for organisations to provide the right learning climate and methods to nurture this learning method. This study examined the effects of self-directed learning and organisational learning environment on the development of job competencies among the employees of eight (8) Government-Linked Companies (GLCs) in Kota Kinabalu.

Hashim (2008) noted that past studies have shown that workplace learning was important to business success. Virgona *et al.* (2003) stated that the workplace was the key site for the development of generic skills such as communication, problem-solving, teamwork, information technology and customer service skills. Despite this, Rowold *et al.* (2008) noted that empirical research was still rare, and subsequent study by Rowold and Kauffeld (2009) also noted that there was virtually no empirical research existed that examined the way employees' career-related continuous development activities affect outcome criteria such as work-related competencies. Subsequently the researcher has managed to identify only one empirical study conducted within the Malaysian organisational context, where the findings indicated that self-directed learning was one of the prevalent methods used by the respondents to acquire their competencies (Hashim, 2008). Recognising the dearth in empirical research on this topic, this study aimed to address the gap on the availability of literature on this topic.

1.3 Objectives Of The Study

The purpose of this study was to assess whether and to what extend self-directed learning and the organisation learning environment influence the job competencies among the employees of eight (8) GLCs in Kota Kinabalu.

To be specific, the objectives of the study were as follows:

1. To investigate the effects of self-directed learning on job competencies;
2. To investigate the influence of organisational learning environment on job competencies; and
3. To investigate the moderating influence of demographic factors i.e. age, gender, education level and working experience on the effects of self-directed learning and organisational learning environment on job competencies.

1.4 Scope Of The Study

This study has addressed these questions based on the employees' perceptions: Do employees embrace learning if it is not compulsory for their jobs? Do employees take their own initiatives to improve job competencies? Has the concept of self-directed learning being nurtured in their workplace?

Adopting the concepts of continuous career-related learning (Rowold and Kauffeld, 2009), the concepts of self-directed learning in the study are defined as follows:

- It is an individual-level phenomenon;
- It focuses on job or career-related experiences, hence contributes to career development and prepares for future changes in the respective career;
- It is self-initiated, discretionary and proactive; and
- It is a process sustained over time.

The scope of coverage was limited to selected executives and managers from eight (8) Government-Linked Companies in Kota Kinabalu, for whom continuing professional education was not compulsory. These occupations were selected because the researcher wanted to investigate whether employees would embrace learning even though it was not required by their occupations. The focus on this segment of employee population was based on the recognition, that they were more vulnerable within changing organisations, and that they were frequently considered to be more in control of their development than the general employee population. Questionnaires were issued to the respondents and quantitative method was used to test the research hypotheses.

1.5 Significance Of The Study

The present study has focused on the outcome of employees' self-directed learning activities and having a supportive organisational learning environment. The findings might be useful for organisational decision makers and researchers alike to know the effectiveness of self-directed learning on job competencies. According to Raabe *et al.* (2007), organisations may benefit from embracing a self-management approach in their career training, in which they support employees fostering their own careers and thereby becoming more satisfied with their careers. As Smith *et al.* (2007) pointed out, organisations would not be able to adequately support all competencies development, hence tapping into the employees' self-directed learning attributes might play an important part in competencies development. It might also be useful for organisations to recognise that having a systematic organisational structure and fostering an organisational culture which promotes active learning and information sharing are critical issues that should be the focus of all modern organisations (Wickramasinghe, 2007 as cited by Ho, 2008).

This study would contribute to the existing literature by exploring how organisational learning environment and self-directed learning attributes of employees together impact job competencies. This study built on previous researches; which found that self-directed learning was one of the ways Malaysian managers acquired their job competencies (Hashim, 2008) and another study which indicated that self-directed learning influenced organisational performance indirectly through organisational learning (Ho, 2008).

1.6 Definitions Of Key Variables

1.6.1 Job Competencies

Competencies consist of knowledge, skills and other behavioural dispositions that are required to achieve the desired standards of job performance [Lawler (1994) as cited by Rowold and Kauffeld (2009)]. According to Barth *et al.* (2007), competencies may be characterised as dispositions to self-organisation, comprising different psycho-social components, existing in a context-overlapping manner, and realising themselves within specific context. They may be acquired gradually in

different stages, and they are reflected in successful actions. Another research done on graduate employment has identified generic competencies, as skills, abilities and attributes, which included interpersonal skills, leadership skills, teamwork, oral and written skills, and cognitive skills such as numerical skills, innovative skills, problem-solving skills, research skills and computer skills (Quek, 2005).

1.6.2 Self-Directed Learning

The most popular definition of self-directed learning (SDL) is that of Knowles as cited by Ho (2008), "as a process in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes."

SDL is not an instructional method, but rather an approach to learning. The core notion of SDL is responsibility and accountability for learning. SDL is planned and intentional; it begins when the learner identifies a need for knowledge or a skill and then creates a plan to learn that skill (or competency). This learning plan can include both formal and informal learning methods. The important characteristic is that the learner is in control of his or her learning path and decides which resources will be most effective in helping them to construct or acquire what knowledge they need, when they need it.

1.6.3 Organisational Learning Environment

Organisational learning environment (OLE) refers to conditions in workplaces which foster capability development both by offering specific opportunities to develop and utilise skills and knowledge, and by encouraging and facilitating on-going learning. Workplace may afford opportunities ranging from structured or guided learning like mentoring, coaching, and questioning through learning derived from everyday participation at work (Bryson et al., 2006).

1.6.4 Demographic

Demographic consists of age, gender, education level and working experience.

1.6.4a Age

Age is the length of time that a person or thing has existed and at a particular stage in someone's life (Concise Oxford English Dictionary, 2002).

1.6.4b Gender

Gender refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for men and women (World Health Organization).

1.6.4c Education level

An English philosopher of education regards being "educated" as a state which individuals achieve, while education is a set of process that lead to this state (Peters, 1972 as cited by Garavan, 1997). He also added that education, like many other phenomena, is too complex to define and suggested a set of criteria for consideration as the basis of education. Garavan (1997) also noted that others such as Jarvis (1995) added the following criteria:

- a) Education must involve a learning process;
- b) The learning process must not be a single event;
- c) The process should be planned rather than haphazard;
- d) Education is essentially a humanistic process; and
- e) Learning has to involve understanding.

1.6.4d Working experience

The working experience for all employees would be the number of years the employees have been employed.

1.7 Summary And Organisation Of The Remaining Chapters

This study is organized into five chapters:

Chapter 1 - Introduction - provides an Overview of the study, Background of the Present Study, Problem Statement, Objectives of the Study, Scope and Significance of the Study, Definitions of Key Variables and Summary and Organisation of the remaining Chapters.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review - reviewed studies previously done by other researchers and their findings on the Dependent and Independent Variables. In addition, this chapter also discussed the concept of job competencies, organisational learning, organisational learning environment and the conceptual models of self-directed learning.

Chapter 3 - Research Framework and Methodology – would discussed the Research Framework, Definitions of the Dependent, Independent and Moderating Variables, Hypotheses, the Nature of Study, the Research Methodology including Research Design, Units of Analysis, Sampling Design, Instrument Design, Data Collection Method, Measurements, Data Analysis Method and Summary.

Chapter 4 - Research Result - would detail the research findings, including the Respondents' Profile, Descriptive Statistics on Demographic Information, the Goodness of Measure, Revised Framework and Hypotheses, Reliability Test, Descriptive Analysis of Variables, Hypotheses Testing and Summary of the Hypotheses Results.

Chapter 5 - Discussion and Conclusion - would be based on the findings of this study. A brief introduction, followed by a Recapitulation of Study, Discussion of the Study, Implications of the Findings, Limitation of Study, Suggestion for Future Research and a final Conclusion.