



Structural relationships among effective factors on e-learners' motivation for skill transfer



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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the structural relationships among the following factors: e-learners' internal value, learning usefulness, learning environment, satisfaction, learner achievement, and motivation for skill transfer. To answer the research questions, the researchers administered online surveys to 584 students enrolled in two courses, Conflict Management and Negotiation and Communication Skills, at S Cyber University. According to the results of structural equation modeling, the structural relationships among e-learners' internal value, learning usefulness, learning environment, learner satisfaction, learner achievement, and motivation for skill transfer were significant and showed positive influence. However, the relationships among learning usefulness, learning environment, learner satisfaction, and learner achievement and those of learning environment, learner satisfaction, and motivation for skill transfer were not significant. Overall, the findings suggest specific strategies to improve e-learners' learning outcomes.

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1. Introduction

Although cyber universities are recognized as educational organizations of the future, their educational outcomes have not yet been fully studied. Particularly, despite various discussions on the design aspects of educational systems and programs for producing positive educational outcomes, research is scarce on the transfer of cyber university educational outcomes to career fields (Lim, 2009). Recently, transfer of training was used for educational evaluation in the enterprise educational environment. In cyber universities, however, it is difficult for most cyber learners to directly implement their knowledge and skills to their job situation. It is difficult to evaluate learning outcomes because the purpose of cyber universities is to provide higher education to adults who have not previously had the opportunity to attend tertiary institutions, due to either personal or economic reasons (Lim, 2009).

Motivation to transfer learned skills has proven to be an important factor predicting learners' actual behavioral change (transfer) in numerous research studies (e.g., Baldwin & Ford, 1988; Burke & Hutchins, 2007). It was confirmed that the motivation to transfer occurred prior to the transfer of training (Axtell, Maitlis, & Yearta, 1997; Chiaburu & Lindsay, 2008). Additionally, Gegenfurtner, Veermans, Festner, and Gruber (2009) emphasized the importance of

research on the motivation of transfer by mentioning that major interests of human resource development (HRD) theory and practices include training failure, namely, low return on investment due to learners' low motivation to transfer. As it is confirmed that motivation to transfer is the main variable determining educational effects, in conjunction with learning motivation (Shin & Oh, 2004), measuring educational outcomes of cyber universities through motivation to transfer should provide meaningful insights.

The factors affecting transfer or motivation to learning transfer can be classified into three main types: learner characteristics, training design, and external environment. Baldwin and Ford (1988) proposed the transfer process model, in which they presumed that personal factors, training-related factors, and organizational factors affect transfer of learning both directly and indirectly. Noe (1986) argued that positive perception of the organizational environment affects transfer motivation by demonstrating the effects of learning motivation on educational training outcomes.

Additionally, Holton (1996) reported that learning, expected usefulness of the training, job attitude, learner satisfaction, and the transfer environment directly affect motivation to transfer by presenting the HRD evaluation research and measurement model. Moreover, Gegenfurtner et al. (2009) divided the factors affecting motivation to transfer as personal, training-related, or organizational. They also extended Baldwin and Ford's (1988) transfer process model by categorizing the factors as occurring before training, in the middle of training, or after training.

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However, Noe (1986) pointed out most studies that analyzed learning outcomes according to the learner's personal characteristics were mainly focused on the learner's intellectual ability, and research on learner motivation and environment factors remains insufficient. Campbell (1988) and Tannenbaum and Yukl (1992) proposed that the concept of training effects should be extended to the personal variables of trainees and the research should include trainees' self-efficacy and motivation.

Meanwhile, Warr and Bunce (1995) mentioned that learners' responses to the usefulness of their learning can be effective on three learning design principles (i.e., same element, stimulus variation, general principles). They also pointed out that measuring only learner enjoyment is problematic; the instructor and job-related usefulness of training contents should also be studied as important response measurement estimates (Alliger & Janak, 1989; Warr & Bunce, 1995). Until now, learner satisfaction has been frequently used to evaluate training results due to measuring convenience.

Moreover, as the effects of external environment on motivation to transfer were studied with a focus on the workplace environment (e.g., seniors, colleague support, organizational environment) in previous works (Fecteau, Dobbins, Russell, Ladd, & Kudisch, 1995; Huczynski & Lewis, 1980; Kirwan & Birchall, 2006; Seyler, Holton, Bates, Burnett, & Carvalho, 1998). It is thought that additional studies focused on the learning environment (e.g., instructor, colleague support, learning atmosphere) should be conducted to provide a more complete picture.

Therefore, the current study aims to investigate the effects of internal value as a personal characteristic of learners. It includes internal value as a motivational variable, learning usefulness as learning content variable, and learning environment as an external environmental variable possibly affecting learner achievement, learner satisfaction, and motivation to transfer. We adopt an integrative model and confirm the structural relationships among the variables. Moreover, we identify the effects employment status on learning by investigating the differences in structural relationships among the variables according to learners' employment status.

Cyber universities typically have high proportions of learners who are employed than do traditional universities. Although many previous studies have investigated the effects of having a job on university students' academic achievement, the results are contradictory. That is to say, some researchers reported that simultaneously holding a job and studying at a university is potentially be harmful to one's learning (Astin, 1993; Lammers, Onwuegbizie, & Slate, 2001). Other researchers expressed positive opinions (Dallam & Hoyt, 1981; Lucas & Lammont, 1998). Furthermore, some proposed that it is not employment status but the difference in distribution of the learner's time (Dundes & Marx, 2006/2007; Gleason, 1993; Orszag, Orszag, & Whitemore, 2001).

The purpose of this study is to examine the effects of internal value, learning usefulness, and learning environment on learner satisfaction, learner achievement, and motivation to transfer of learning to their workplace. Additionally, we will investigate the structural relationships among e-learners' internal value, learning usefulness, learning environment, achievement and motivation for transfer depending on their employment status. The independent variables are internal value, learning usefulness, and learning environment. The dependent variable is the motivation to transfer of learning. The moderating variables are achievement and satisfaction. The specific research questions are as follows:

- (1) Do e-learners' internal value, learning usefulness, and learning environment affect learner satisfaction?
- (2) Do e-learners' internal value, learning usefulness, learning environment, and learner satisfaction affect learner achievement?

- (3) Do e-learners' internal value, learning usefulness, learning environment, learner satisfaction, and learner achievement affect the motivation for skill transfer?

2. Theoretical background

Internal value is a concept related to learner motivation in Eccles's (1983) expectancy-value model. Numerous studies argue that learners with high internal value have the learning goal of mastery, are oriented toward learning and challenge, and think their project is interesting and important (Ames & Archer, 1988; Eccles, 1983; Meece, Blumenfeld, & Hoyle, 1988). *Learning usefulness* has been defined as encompassing three concepts: *interest in training*, *perceived usefulness*, and *perceived difficulties*, by Warr and Bunce (1995). In particular, usefulness reflects the potential for the application of training content to a job (Shin & Oh, 2004).

Learning environment, in this study, is considered to be made up of *instructors' support*, *colleagues' support*, and *learning atmosphere*. *Instructors' support* refers to information given to learners by their instructors about the curriculum and learning achievement (Butler & Winne, 1995). *Colleagues' support* refers to when colleagues help learners in their learning process and help them apply what they have learned (Holton, 1996). *Learning outcomes* in this study are *satisfaction*, *achievement*, and *transfer motivation*. *Satisfaction* refers to the emotional response toward educational training and the emotional attitude emerging from the perception of a particular educational program. It measures how satisfied learners are with the whole learning experience and includes assessment of areas such as how helpful the program was, whether they would recommend it to others, and how satisfied they were in general (Lim, 2009). Evaluation criteria for *achievement* in training criteria relate to traditional exam results (Kraiger, Ford, & Salas, 1993). Iverson, Colky, and Cyboran (2005) say that it is important to measure knowledge change after training by controlling prior knowledge. Exam problems extracted based on content analysis of curriculum resources confirm the importance of expert instructors to ensure content validity. Finally, transfer motivation, which is considered the most important variable in training program development, is defined as the trainee's desire to apply the knowledge and skills that they have learned from the training program. It is related to Kirkpatrick's third level of evaluation—"transfer measurement."

Studies regarding internal value and satisfaction report that the higher the internal value, the higher the satisfaction (Vansteenkiste et al., 2007). Vansteenkiste et al. (2007) confirmed that an internal as opposed to an external task value orientation shows fewer negative results (higher satisfaction, higher activities in task) and more positive results (low tiresomeness, long-term satisfaction after successful goal achievement, low intention to leave job), in research using self-determination theory.

Several studies have presented research regarding learning usefulness and satisfaction centered in a school environment. In research investigating the effects of learner- and instructor-related variables Hong (2002) reported that group discussion can make learner-instructor interaction more positive and that learners who perceive learning resources positively are satisfied with a web-based learning process.

Roszkowski and Soven (2010) performed research on the relationships among three types of responses, targeting university freshmen. Responses were divided into *amount learned*, *information usefulness*, and *satisfaction with training program*. Their results showed that amount learned and information usefulness appeared to predict training satisfaction higher.

The research on relationships between learning environment and satisfaction shows that learning environment can positively

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