

Factors Influencing Learning in Malaysian Public Sector Training Centre

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Abstract

Enhancing learning is one of the desired outcomes of training program. Hence, this study is conducted to examine factors influencing learning to gain a better understanding on how to improve it. A total of 78 employees, who participated in a specific training program were surveyed on aspects of learning using questionnaire. Data analyses show that the only factor for learning is motivation to transfer. In contrast, stress, organizational citizenship behavior and work engagement do not have influence on learning. The findings highlight important areas and directions for further investigation of learning.

Keywords

Learning, Public Sector, Training Centre, Malaysia

1. Introduction

From an organizational training perspective, learning is defined as the extent to which trainees change their attitudes, improve their knowledge, and increase their skills as a result of attending training (Kirkpatrick, 1994). Learning is one of the desired outcomes that organizations want to achieve when they invest money in training. Therefore, learning has been regarded as one of the most important criteria in evaluating the success of a particular training program (Griffin, 2011). In other words, a particular training program is considered successful if there is an improvement of employees' knowledge, skills, and attitudes after attending the training.

Maximizing learning has become the challenge in organizing the training program. A meta-analysis study by Arthur Jr., Bennett, Edens and Bell (2003) concluded that the effectiveness of training in organization, in particular the learning aspect is only at the medium level. Similarly, a recent meta-analysis

study also indicated that the effectiveness of learning aspect is still at moderate level (Lacerenza, Reyes, Marlow, Joseph, & Salas, 2017). Thus, there is a need to explore the factors that able to influence learning aspects during the training.

Researchers in the field of training have argued that an employee characteristic is one of the important determinants of learning (Tannenbaum, Cannon-Bowers, Salas, & Matieu, 1993). Other researchers such as Tziner, Fisher, Senior and Weisberg (2007) also indicated that employee characteristics have influence on learning outcomes in the training. Even, the recent researchers such as Blume, Ford, Surface and Olenick (2019) also recognized the importance of employee characteristic on learning. Thus, this study assumes that an employee characteristic such as motivation to transfer, stress, organizational citizenship behavior and job engagement might influence employees' learning during a training program. It is essential to examine the effect of those factors (motivation to transfer, stress, organizational citizenship behavior and job engagement) on learning because there is still lack of empirical evidence on its effect on learning. The previous studies tend to focus on other employee characteristic aspect such as employees' metacognition (Bhat, 2024), self-efficacy and motivation to learn (Ibrahim, Mohd Zin, & Vengdasamy, 2020; Govaerts, Kyndt, & Dochy, 2018).

2. Literature Review and Development of Hypotheses

The link between employee characteristics and learning can be explained through a dynamic transfer model by Blume, Ford, Surface and Olenick (2019). The model highlights the impact and importance of employee characteristics on the learning, including in the situation of pre, during and post learning. Other researcher such as Tziner, Fisher, Senior and Weisberg (2007) also indicated that employee characteristics have influence on two training outcomes, which are learning performance and post-training performance. Based on these two underpinning theories, this study assumes an employee's characteristics such as motivation to transfer, stress, organizational citizenship behavior and job engagement able to influence learning as discussed in detail below.

2.1. Motivation to Transfer and Learning

Based on the literature review, the study that examines the relationship between motivation to transfer and learning are still limited. However, there is a need to explore this relationship because it has been postulated previously that motivation able to play the role as determinant for learning (Baldwin & Ford, 1988). In fact, a study by Baber (2020) among undergraduate students in both South Korea and India found that the student motivation is positively influencing students' perceived learning outcome. The similar finding has been recorded by de barba, Kennedy and Ainley (2016) in their study among students who persisted to the last 3 weeks of the Principles of Macroeconomics MOOC, offered by The University of Melbourne in partnership with Coursera. This study indicated that the strongest predictor of learning performance was participation, followed by

motivation. Thus, based on previous argument and findings, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 1: Motivation to transfer is positively related to learning

2.2. Stress and Learning

A study by [Abdullah, Ahmad Shah and Mohamad Idaris \(2020\)](#) showed that the higher the level of stress, the lower the learning performance. Similarly, [Varghese, Norman and Thavaraj \(2015\)](#) in their literature review study also concluded that high perceived stress results in low learning performance and vice versa. In addition, [Oduwaiye, Yahaya, Amadi and Tiamiyu \(2017\)](#) in their study among 300 respondents recognized that stress is a significant predictor for learning. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 2: Stress is negatively related to learning

2.3. Organizational Citizenship Behavior and Learning

A study by [Khalid, Jusoff, Othman, Ismail and Abdul Rahman \(2010\)](#) revealed that organizational citizenship behavior dimension of altruism and courtesy were significantly related to learning achievement. In other word, these findings indicate that, to enhance learning, the elements of organizational citizenship behavior such as altruism and courtesy are some of the important behaviors among employees. Similarly, a study by [Burns and DiPaola \(2013\)](#) also found a positive and significant relationship between organizational citizenship behavior and learning achievement. In fact, a study by [DiPaola and Hoy \(2005\)](#) discovered a strong correlation between organizational citizenship behavior and learning achievement. Based on the previous findings, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 3: Organizational citizenship behavior is positively related to learning

2.4. Job Engagement and Learning

A meta-analysis of 69 independent studies revealed that there was a moderately strong and positive correlation between engagement and learning achievement ([Lei, Cui, & Zhou, 2018](#)). A similar finding has been determined by [Froiland and Worrell \(2016\)](#) in their study among students in an ethnically and racially diverse high school. In addition, other recent study also found that engagement is one of factors that contribute to learning achievement ([Fiorilli, De Stasio, Di Chiacchio, Pepe, & Salmela-Aro, 2017](#)). Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 4: Job engagement is positively related to learning.

3. Method

3.1. Sample

Purposive sampling technique has been used to select the sample for this study.

In specific, 78 public sector employees, who attended a management executive training program in the middle of January 2024 have participated in this study. All employees who participated in this management executive training program have involved in this study. Using the trainees of one specific type of training as the study sample has been applied by most of the empirical training research (Chen, Holton, & Bates, 2006). This is due, in part, to the fact that each training type has its own specific content and objectives, which may have difference influence on trainees (Laker & Powell, 2011).

This study utilizes survey research. According to Sekaran and Bougie (2010), using surveys or questionnaires is an efficient data collection strategy when the researcher knows exactly what is required and how to measure the variables of interest (p. 197). This approach also enables researchers to generalize the findings from a sample of responses to the sample population (Creswell, 1994). A total of 78 questionnaires were collected.

3.2. Measure

This study used previously published measures (see Appendix). All measures were assessed using a five-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = neutral; 4 = agree; 5 = strongly agree).

Perceived learning was measured using four items developed by Curry (1997). An example of the items is “As a result of the training, I substantially increased my knowledge on the topic”. The measure was validated in a study by Curry, Donnenwirth and Lawler (2010) with Cronbach alpha 0.83.

Motivation to transfer was measured using four items developed by Baharim (2008). An example of the items is “I will put into practice what I have learned from the training to the workplace”. The measure was validated in a study by Baharim (2008) with Cronbach’s alpha 0.94.

Organizational citizenship behavior was measured using three items developed by Podsakoff and MacKenzie’s (1994). An example of the items is ‘I attend and actively participate in organization meetings’. The measure was validated in a study by Paillé, Grima and Dufour (2015) with Cronbach’s alpha 0.71.

Work stress was measured using three items developed by Boreham, Povey and Tomaszewski (2016). An example of the items is ‘Problems associated with my job have kept me awake at night’. The measure was validated in a study by Boreham, Povey and Tomaszewski (2016) with Cronbach’s alpha 0.89.

Job engagement was measured using nine items developed by Schaufeli, Bakker and Salanova (2006). An example of the items is ‘I feel happy when I am working intensely’. The measure was validated in a study by Schaufeli, Bakker and Salanova (2006) with Cronbach’s alpha 0.85.

3.3. Data Analysis

The data of this study have been analyzed using SPSS software. In the beginning, the validity of the items for each variable has been examined through explora-

tory factor analysis (EFA). EFA is a statistical method used to uncover the underlying structure of a relatively large set of variables. EFA is also a technique within factor analysis whose overarching goal is to identify the underlying relationships between measured variables (Norris & Lecavalier, 2010). Then, the reliability of each variable has been assessed based on Cronbach's alpha value. Cronbach's alpha value determines the internal consistency or average correlation of items in a survey instrument to gauge its reliability. Finally, a multiple regression analysis was conducted to test the proposed hypotheses. The regression analysis can produce the result related to the relationship between the variables and the direction of the relationship, either positive or negative. Moreover, the regression analysis enables the significant level of each relationship between variables to be checked.

4. Analysis Results

As shown in **Table 1**, among the respondents, 76.9 percent ($n = 60$) were male, and 23.1 percent ($n = 18$) were female. In term of age, the majority, 60.3 percent ($n = 47$) of them are between 20 - 30 years old, 33.3 percent ($n = 26$) are between 31 - 40 years old, and only 6.4 percent ($n = 5$) of them are between 41 - 50 years old. In term of working experience, 82.1 percent ($n = 64$) of them have work in the public sector between 1 to 5 years, 9 percent ($n = 7$) of them have work in the public sector between 6 to 10 years, 7.7 percent ($n = 6$), have work in the public sector between 11 to 15 years, and only 1.3 percent ($n = 1$) have work in the public sector more than 15 years.

The results of the multiple regression analyses (**Table 2**) indicate that motivation to transfer is positively related to learning (coefficient = +0.830, t value = 9.011, $p < 0.001$). However, the other 3 hypotheses show insignificant results. In specific, the analysis result found that stress is not a significant predictor for learning (coefficient = -0.009, t value = 0.112, $p > 0.05$). Similarly, organizational citizenship behaviour (coefficient = -0.077, t value = 0.968, $p > 0.05$) and

Table 1. Respondents demography.

Demography	Frequency	Percentage
Gender:		
- Male	60	76.9
- Female	18	23.1
Age:		
- 20 - 30 years old	47	60.3
- 31 - 40 years old	26	33.3
- 41 - 50 years old	5	6.4
Working experience:		
- 1 - 5 years	64	82.1
- 6 - 10 years	7	9
- 11 - 15 years	6	7.7
- More than 15 years	1	1.3

Table 2. The result of multiple regression.

Dependant Variable	Learning	
	(t value)	(β)
Motivation to transfer	0.830	9.011***
Stress	-0.009	0.112
Organizational citizenship behavior	-0.077	0.968
Job engagement	-0.029	0.294

Note: β = Standardized Coefficients Beta Value; *** = $p < 0.001$.

job engagement (coefficient = -0.029 , t value = 0.294 , $p > 0.05$) also show insignificant effect on learning. A discussion of the findings is presented in the following section.

5. Discussion

There is still a lack of studies have analyzed simultaneously the role of motivation to transfer, stress, organizational citizenship behavior and job engagement on learning. Thus, this study is conducted addressed these gaps by examining the relationships in the context of public sector organization in Malaysia.

From an empirical analysis, only motivation to transfer shows a positive and significant effect on learning. This result suggests that if employees be motivated to apply the learned knowledge and skill to the workplace, this type of motivation can help them to achieve a positive learning outcome. This finding is important outcome that still lack of empirical evidence in training literature. This finding helps to clarify and support previous research indicating that a positive learning outcome can be achieved if the employees show a positive motivation (Baber, 2020; de Barba et al., 2016).

Based on the finding of this study, the management of organization, particularly the public sector in Malaysia is encouraged to enhance the motivation to transfer among employees when organizing training program. The recent study by Sharif, Braimah and Dogbey (2023) indicates that the employees' motivation to transfer will increase if there are two important elements in organization, which are supervisor support and peer support. Provide opportunities to use the outcomes and rewards also have been verified as important mechanism that can be implemented by organization to enhance motivation to transfer among employees (Sahoo & Mishra, 2022). In addition, organization can create a positive culture to facilitate motivation to transfer. According to Gautam and Basnet (2021), the organizational culture that emphasize on job challenge, communication, innovation and social cohesion can increase employees' motivation to transfer when attending a particular training program.

6. Conclusion

This study has provided empirical evidence about the role of motivation to

transfer to achieve a positive learning outcome in the workplace. The result supports the importance of motivation in producing a positive learning outcome among employees, particularly the public sector employees in Malaysia. Based on this finding, the management of organizations needs to ensure the employees have intention to apply the knowledge and skill learned in training to the workplace. Such motivation is essential, which is able to have an impact on learning during the training program.

The sample in this study consists of employees in the public sector in Malaysia. Future research could examine the similar study among different types of organization (e.g., the private sector) to validate the findings of this study. In addition, this study is limited to a single context, which is Malaysia. Future research is encouraged to validate this study in another context. It is because every country is unique in terms of environmental characteristics and culture. Moreover, this study only includes for individual factors (motivation to transfer, stress, organizational citizenship behavior, job engagement) as predictor for learning. Future study is encouraged to examine other potential factors that could influence learning outcomes such as organizational culture and leadership support. Future study also is encouraged to explore potential moderators and mediators that could influence the relationship between motivation to transfer and learning outcomes since the relationship has been established in this study.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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Appendix (List of Items for Questionnaire)

Perceived learning

- 1) As a result of the training, I substantially increased my knowledge on the topic.
- 2) As a result of the training, I have developed new skills.
- 3) The training has affected some of my attitudes concerning this topic area.
- 4) As a result of the training, I have better conceptualization of what I already do on the job.

Motivation to transfer

- 1) I will put into practice what I have learned from the training to the office.
- 2) I will make sure that what I have learned from the training will be put into practice for job benefit.
- 3) I will work as hard as possible to put into practice what I have learned for job benefit.
- 4) I will do a plan to put into practice what I have learned after I get back to the office.

Organizational citizenship behavior

- 1) I attend functions that are not required but help the organization's image.
- 2) I attend information sessions that are encouraged but not required to attend.
- 3) I attend and actively participate in organization meetings.

Stress

- 1) Problems associated with my job tend to directly affect my health
- 2) The demands of my job leave me feeling stressed
- 3) Problems associated with my job have kept me awake at night

Job engagement

- 1) At my work, I feel bursting with energy
- 2) At my job, I feel strong and vigorous
- 3) I am enthusiastic about my job
- 4) My job inspires me
- 5) When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work
- 6) I feel happy when I am working intensely
- 7) I am proud of the work that I do
- 8) I am immersed in my work
- 9) I get carried away when I am working