

Exposé for Master Thesis

*“Bridging Theory and Practice:
Evaluating Training Transfer in a Lifelong Learning Master’s Program “*

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1 Problem Statement:

Economic restructuring due to rapid technological advancements and globalization affects work conditions, job landscapes, and labor market dynamics, requiring adults to pursue lifelong learning training (Bills, 2005). Economic uncertainties and automation concerns have led individuals to recognize the need for ongoing education. On the other hand, with their flexible and customizable format, lifelong learning courses are becoming more accessible and provide learners with a competitive advantage and skill gap closure (Clarke & Edwards, 2000).

Lifelong learning courses are crucial in bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application in the workplace. However, understanding the effectiveness of these courses in promoting learning transfer is essential for educators and organizations. Programs for lifelong learning must address people from diverse professional backgrounds and educational prerequisites. This presents a challenge while designing curricula or deploying appropriate learning activities and methods (Kainz et al., 2022).

This thesis, therefore, aims to assess training transfer in a specific lifelong learning course using the LTSI survey. LTSI (Learning Transfer System Inventory) is a survey instrument designed to evaluate and measure the extent to which knowledge and skills acquired in a learning program are effectively transferred in real-world settings (Holton et al., 2000).

Furthermore, it will explore the extent of training transfer using a reflection activity, thus employing a triangulation methodology to enhance the reliability and validity of the outcomes.

2 Research Objectives and Research Questions:

This research aims to achieve several objectives. It will begin by assessing how much participants in the lifelong learning course feel they are applying what they have learned using an adapted version of the LTSI survey. A reflection activity will be carried out to explore how the course knowledge has been put into practice in their workplaces. A comprehensive understanding of training transfer outcomes will be obtained by examining the connection between LTSI survey responses and the outcomes of the reflection activity by which participants are offered an opportunity to demonstrate their learned skills. The triangulation approach of combining the survey and the reflection activity ensures that the LTSI survey's results are trustworthy and

reliable. Lastly, based on the findings, evidence-supported recommendations will be provided to improve the design and delivery of the lifelong learning course.

To address these research objectives effectively, the following research questions were formulated:

RQ1: How do the lifelong learning course participants perceive the extent of training transfer, as measured by the LTSI survey?

RQ2: How does participants' perception of training transfer, as indicated by the LTSI survey, correspond to the outcomes of the reflection activity assessing workplace application of the acquired knowledge?

RQ3: What strategies and recommendations can be formulated, based on the analysis of participants' perceptions of training transfer (as assessed by the LTSI survey) and the outcomes of the reflection activity, to enhance specific aspects of the lifelong learning course?

3 Theoretical Framework

In response to the research questions mentioned above, the theoretical framework integrates three conceptual lines: learning in lifelong learning study, learning transfer, and, from an empirical point of view, the methods to measure training.

The learning process for adults differs from that of children and adolescents due to their life experiences and motivation levels (Collins, 2004). To ensure the effectiveness of lifelong learning courses for adults, instruction must align with their learning preferences, emphasize real-life application, foster a climate of respect and comfort, and promote self-directed learning. However, adult learners face challenges such as lack of time, financial constraints, confidence issues, and competing responsibilities, which may hinder their learning motivation. Overcoming these barriers requires enhancing their reasons for participation and reducing obstacles (Lieb & Goodland, 2004). Future research should continue exploring the effective application of adult learning principles in different educational settings and understanding adult learners' specific needs and preferences to tailor instruction based on diverse learning styles (Collins, 2004). The use of these tailored environments is related to a learning transfer.

Learning transfer, defined as the ability to apply learned knowledge in novel situations (Gass & Selinker, 1983), is a fundamental aspect of education and training. It involves successfully applying acquired knowledge and skills in contexts different from those during the learning process. Several theories, such as Situated Learning Theory, Theory of Analogy Extraction, Theory of Low and High Road Transfer, and Theory of Identical Elements, offer diverse perspectives to understanding learning transfer.

However, challenges such as overgeneralization (Ronan, 2018) and negative transfer (Chen & Daehler, 1989) can impede effective learning transfer. Thus, there is a need to explore learning transfer in the context of technological advancements, especially in the internet age, to determine appropriate instructional support for learners with varying self-regulatory behaviors and prior knowledge (Hajjan, 2019).

Organizations use various methods to assess training transfer, and the choice of method depends on the level of evaluation. According to Olsen's (1996) study, Level 1 (Reaction) methods include participant feedback forms, satisfaction surveys, and interviews, while Level 2 (Learning) methods involve pre- and post-training tests, knowledge assessments, and skill demonstrations. Level 3 (Transfer) methods encompass on-the-job observations, supervisor evaluations, self-assessments by trainees, and follow-up surveys or interviews. In contrast, Level 4 (Results or Impact) methods consist of performance evaluations, productivity measures, cost-benefit analysis, and return on investment analysis. These methods align with Kirkpatrick's taxonomy of training evaluation as organizations progress toward higher levels of evaluation (Olsen, 1996).

Looking ahead, investigating how self-reported scales differ from objective or external sources in different contexts will inform the selection of preferred measurement parameters for training situations. Implementing repeated measurements of transfer efforts over time and conducting longitudinal studies will provide valuable insights into transfer maintenance and intra-individual variations in training transfer (Schoeb et al., 2021).

4 Research Method and Design

The current research project will involve the collection and analysis of data through the following methods:

Initially, the study will gather the necessary data to address the research questions, ensuring that all data collection is conducted with the full consent of the participants. An LTSI survey will be administered to the participants of this study to obtain their perceived training transfer. This study will collect quantitative data regarding factors such as motivation, self-efficacy, and the transfer climate. To validate and explore the results from the LTSI survey, the study will also devise a reflection activity. The study will engage the participants in a reflection activity, where they will share how they have practically applied the knowledge gained from the lifelong learning course in their workplaces. This activity is designed to offer insights into how they have put their new skills and concepts to use in real-world scenarios.

Following data collection, the study will proceed to analyze the collected data. The study will analyse the responses from the LTSI survey using suitable statistical methods, such as descriptive statistics and inferential analysis. This analysis will help us determine the level of perceived training transfer among participants. However, the analysis of the reflection activity will

take a qualitative approach. A rubric will be developed and employed to systematically evaluate the responses provided by participants.

The study will then compare the LTSI survey's quantitative results with the reflection activity's qualitative findings. This comparative analysis will provide insights into the alignment or discrepancies between participants' perceived transfer and the actual application of their learning. Additionally, the study will identify factors that emerge as significant influencers of learning transfer based on our combined quantitative and qualitative data analysis.

Based on the research findings, evidence-based recommendations to enhance training transfer within the lifelong learning course will be offered. The study will also propose potential modifications to course delivery methods to optimize learning outcomes and promote the practical application of newly acquired skills.

5 Time Plan

By 15 October 2023: Registration of the master's thesis.

By 5 November 2023: Analysis of data collected.

By 31 December 2023: Draft Objective, Theoretical Framework, and Research method.

By 15 January 2024: Draft the results and findings for the Research Questions.

By 15 February 2024: Draft the discussion and conclusion with recommendations.

By 15 March 2024: Write, correct, and submit the master's thesis.

6 References:

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