The Transfer Of Learning: Exploration Of Benefits And Perspectives In The State Of Kuwait

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to explore the various benefits and effectiveness of transfer of learning theory in different cultures and environments, particularly in Kuwait. Transfer of learning remains a crucial ingredient in human training and international management because it is a core concept in learning and is related both to the process and the outcome. However, the differences that one can observe in different countries, especially in Kuwait, which include culture, language, gender, and technological variations, affect this transfer of learning. Similarly, the exploration of the concept of transfer of learning also varies; the differences in interpretation and application of transfer of learning theories remain complex and tangible among educators, managers, trainers, and learners. This paper addresses the core issues of the observed differences in Kuwait and highlights the variations that are needed in this State to impart to educators, managers, and trainers a clear understanding of the needs of individual learners, employees, and trainees.

Keywords: transfer of learning; human training; international management; technological variations

INTRODUCTION

ransfer of learning is a complex process and is applied in a number of different contexts. Some argue that transfer of learning is a pervading concept that is fundamentally linked to the way we lead our daily lives. In today's global, fast-paced world, it has become essential for individuals to embrace lifelong learning and to be able to transfer what they have learned to a myriad of different situations. We cannot ignore the concept of transfer of learning in current times because of its benefits and effectiveness in different fields of education, training, and practice. Training individuals helps to bring forth their particular talents and abilities, which in turn results in the optimum outcome of their learning. In this context, we can equate the transfer of training with the transfer of learning.

Because of the related issues, the transfer of learning may impose positive and negative effects on the transfer, depending on the different working contexts and environments. For example, Leberman, McDonald, and Doyle have pointed out the differences between the positive and negative effects of transfer of learning. When learning in one context improves learning in another context, the result is regarded as a positive transfer of learning; however, if the learning inhibits or interferes with the learning or performance in a new context, then a negative transfer of learning occurs. This negative outcome is mainly due to the differences revolving around culture, gender, language, and other such dissimilarities and disparities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A review of the literature, which contributes to an understanding of the effectiveness of transfer-of-learning theory and the importance of this concept in different environments and cultures, provided the conceptual framework for this study. This paper helps to describe the goals and perceived outcomes of transfer-of-learning principles applied in different settings and situations. In this paper, the assessment of teachers' and instructors'

perceptions of knowledge, skills, and attitudes toward teacher-preparation programs in different cultures, including Kuwait; is depicted; and the differences and variations that are needed in Kuwaiti culture are also highlighted. I mention the key concepts, theories, and models of transfer of learning in the review in order to increase understanding of the effectiveness and value of transfer of learning in different social contexts.

What Is Transfer of Learning?

Transfer of learning is considered a key building block and foundation in the educational field with its different levels from elementary, to secondary, to vocational and industrial training, to higher education. Through this progression, we can also learn about the diverse settings and frameworks that help us to identify how the learning is applied in different situations. In this way, we can call this process *transfer of learning,* "the very meaning of learning itself" (Haskell, R. E., 2000). Cree and Macaulay (2001) have defined transfer of learning as the ultimate aim of teaching; however, achieving this goal is regarded as one of teaching's most formidable challenges.

The transfer of learning helps an individual to gain knowledge about the particular task and the skills that he or she might apply on the job to achieve success. It also becomes important for educators, learners, and employers who face difficulties in their workplace. The transfer of learning also helps adult learners in various professional and vocational contexts.

Definition

Transfer of learning has been defined as "putting into practice the skills, knowledge, and attitudes that were gained through learning intervention on [*sic*] either the classroom or on job training in a specific working environment" (Rambau, 2005, p. 18).

A basic purpose and aim of transfer of learning is to offer a comprehensive and versatile perspective on the different fields of education, psychology, management, and other fields, a perspective that develops and enhances the students' understanding in their respective fields. Therefore, we can regard transfer of learning as a "pervading concept that is intrinsically linked to the way we lead our lives every day" (Leberman, McDonald, & Doyle, 2006, p. 1).

Several factors affect the transfer of learning. "First, some initial acquisition of knowledge is necessary for transfer," and secondly the "context also plays a pivotal role in the transfer. If the knowledge learned is too tightly bound to the context in which it was learned, transfer to superficially different contexts will be reduced significantly" (Mestre, 2002, p. 11).

Benefits of Transfer of Learning

There are many benefits of and advantages to transfer of learning. It plays an important role in improving individuals' ability to discover and explore their new skills and talents as a result of their earlier performance on a series of related tasks. This potential also helps them to obtain and acquire new views on a topic as they gain insight into the different approaches to a particular task, and ultimately helps to support and strengthen their understanding of the topic:

For example, practicing to drive a variety of cars provides experience with different stimulus situations and makes new learning easier. Another example is that greater learning occurs not by rereading the same text, but by reading another text on the same subject matter. (Transfer of Learning, 2009, para. 12)

Transfer of learning also has helped many governmental agencies and private-sector companies, as well as schools and other associations, to explore different perspectives about learning. This transfer of learning has occurred through important interventions, the training and development programs that evaluate and further enhance the role of transfer of learning.

Transfer of learning helps the individual to perform his task with excellence and superiority as a result of the practice that he has had in a particular training session. In this way, the transfer of learning improves and enhances the training in any area or in any workshop. For example, according to Enos, Kehrhahn, and Bell (2003), many innovative perspectives have been offered on the interrelationship between informal learning and transfer of learning, the role of metacognition and self-regulation in informal learning, and the influence of informal learning in the development of managerial proficiency.

A general theory of transfer of learning that Haskell (2001) proposed suggests that 11 learning and instructional principles are required for significant and effective learning. The basic principles mentioned in the theory specify that transfer of learning undergirds the different characteristics of learning, thinking, problem solving, and memory. The No Child Left Behind Act also emphasizes the pervasive and central role that transfer of learning plays in our daily lives (Haskell, E. H., 2001). The effectiveness of the transfer of learning is evident from the different challenges and demands that both students and teachers face successfully within the context of different standards, benchmarks, and grade-level expectations.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

We can better understand the effectiveness and benefits of transfer of learning by looking into the different models that various theorists have proposed about the transfer of learning. For example, Holton (1996) is of the view that one reason for a failure to transfer training is the lack of a proper training design; lack of such a design provides no efficient way for the process of learning to consistently occur. This means, for example, that although cognitive learning might well occur, the participants enrolled in a training program might not get an opportunity to practice the training in a job context or may not be taught how to apply their knowledge on the job. In this way, the training itself can have a direct influence on the transfer, or lack of transfer, of that training. The two primary viewpoints that describe the conditions necessary for learning transfer are the identical elements theory and the principles theory (Yamnill & McLean, 2001).

Identical Elements Theory: Thorndike and Woodworth's Proposal

We can trace one view of learning transfer to the theory of identical elements that Thorndike and Woodworth (1901) proposed. This theory presumes that transfer will occur in situations in which identical elements exist in both the original and transfer situations. The degree and types of transfer that occur will be determined by the similarity of the two situations (Smith, 1991). Applying this theory to the engineering transfer-of-learning context, we can assume that if the task is identical in both the training and transfer settings in the workshops, trainees are simply practicing the final task during training and there should be high positive transfer.

Principles Theory: Haskell's Theoretical Framework for Achieving General Transfer

To resolve past and current failures of transfer of learning in the classroom, which he believed was due predominantly to a perceived insufficient theoretical base, E. H. Haskell (2001) enumerated 11 learning and instructional principles in his theoretical framework for achieving general transfer. These learning and instructional principles, which shall be discussed individually in future studies, are as follows:

1.   First Principle of Transfer: Primary Knowledge Base
2.   Second Principle of Transfer: Peripheral Knowledge
3.   Third Principle of Transfer: History of Transfer Area(s)
4.   Fourth Principle of Transfer: Motivation
5.   Fifth Principle of Transfer: Nature and Function of Transfer
6.   Sixth Principle of Transfer: Orientation to Think and Encode in Transfer Terms
7.   Seventh Principle of Transfer: Cultures of Transfer
8.   Eighth Principle of Transfer: The Theory Underlying the Transfer Area
9.   Ninth Principle of Transfer: Drill and Practice
10.   Tenth Principle of Transfer: Incubation Time
11.   Eleventh Principle of Transfer: Reading and Observing Exemplary Works of Transfer

These principles can help teachers make an effective plan to enhance students' learning behavior.

Transformative Learning Theory: A Different Focus

More recently, the focus has changed in education literature from that of learning for information ("what we know") to learning for transformation ("how we know"). An example of learning for transformation is emancipatory education, in which learning has the goal to transform the world toward social justice. In this context, much attention has been given to Mezirow's transformative theory, which emphasizes rational thought and reflection in the following10-step recursive process:

1.   Experiencing a disorienting dilemma;
2.   Experiencing fear, anger, guilt, or shame;
3.   Critically assessing assumptions about the world;
4.   Realizing that others have gone through what one is feeling;
5.   Revising one's old belief system and exploring new ones;
6.   Planning a course of action;
7.   Gaining the knowledge and skills for implementing new plans;
8.   Trying on the new role;
9.   Becoming competent and confident with the new change;
10.   Reintegrating into one's life based on a new perspective (Harris, Lowery Moore, & Farrow, 2008).

Effectiveness of Transfer-of-Learning Theories in Different Environments and Cultures

In different cultures, transfer of learning remains a salient and vital component of different learning processes that are the result of a proper learning system. The following sections offer brief summaries of the effectiveness of the application of transfer of learning theories in various cultures.

Effectiveness of Transfer of Learning Theories in South African Culture

For example, in South Africa, many interventions have been conducted that help us to explore the concept of transfer of learning in the workplace. These interventions have not only contributed to increased production but also have helped to strengthen the production capabilities within the workplace. This reflects the view that the transfer of learning ensures the individual's effectiveness in any institution, organization, or workplace (Rambau, 2005).

Effectiveness of Transfer of Learning Theories in Taiwan

In Taiwan, we can observe an exploration of the effectiveness of learning transfer through an analysis of group-learning experiences in the field of intelligent tutoring systems (ITS). A study that Y.-M. Huang, T.-C. Huang, Wang, and Hwang (2009) conducted shows that the group-learning experience reflects a sequenced pattern according to the different subjects' respective learning, or the contexts in which they learned. Different systems and programs were implemented that provided the learners with various opportunities to improve their transfer of learning and their ability to excel in different fields. This study also showed that online learners might achieve appropriate transfer of learning by following recommended learning sequences.

Effectiveness of Transfer of Learning Theories in the United States

By looking into the effectiveness of transfer of learning theories in United States, we can see that as a result of the diversity of many cultures within the States, transfer of learning processes play a critical role in a proper teacher-training program that focuses on serving the diverse needs of all students in the classroom. The mentors and educators who provide the proper and appropriate coaching directly to the students in the classroom meet a large number of the diverse students' needs by giving them helpful and supportive feedback and advising them appropriately. The effectiveness of the transfer of learning becomes evident following the students' learning experiences. These experiences include numerous prospects and opportunities for the participants. Students use their

actual "work" settings (which might include classrooms, clients' homes, for example) as learning laboratories in which to test out a variety of theories and approaches; this methodology fosters reflective thinking and change in practice (Thomas, 2007).

Effectiveness of Transfer of Learning Theories in Australia

In the development of and progress toward learning, students living in different countries are influenced by the various environments that depict the diversity of their journeys from their sometimes problematic past, into a transformative present, and eventually into a challenging future. After having completed their graduation, the students pass through all the required situation and circumstances, and ultimately enter a marketplace of opportunities and choices made possible by their achievements. Renshaw (2006) studied the effectiveness of the transfer of learning processes in one of the primary schools of Australia and found that, like the United States, the effectiveness of the transfer of learning is influenced by the school environments, which include the relational learning journeys wherein individuals develop new social identities and relationships with peers and teachers. Some of them move from a position of being anxious and unskilled outsiders to being insiders with a sense of community and belonging where they are at ease with themselves and others in the new time and place. This sense of the learning journey involves the establishment of social bonds with peers and teachers, including the acceptance of certain common practices as personal routines and habits of living, and of adopting and adapting to available identities within the community.

Effectiveness of Transfer of Learning in the United Kingdom and Canada

The effectiveness of transfer of learning for students is determined by the contribution of their school communities as well as their parents' participation. Duvall and Zint (2007) identified the effectiveness of the intergenerational knowledge transfer in different countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and Canada. They identified several factors that affected the intergenerational knowledge transfer among the students. One major factor that was reported included the parents' active participation in and focus on the students' activities and various issues. In addition, educational reformers also played a major role in enhancing the transfer of knowledge to the students through school-community relationships; these educators regarded the schools as catalysts for improving the community and its citizens, and encouraged community participation in local issues.

THE NEED FOR VARIATIONS IN TRANSFER-OF-LEARNING APPROACHES IN KUWAIT

It is important to understand the characteristics of each learner in order to evaluate the transfer-of-learning processes. It might help to include in this the understanding how individuals incorporate change into their personal and professional lives, a process that benefits from opportunities for reflection (Harris, Lowery-Moore, & Farrow, 2008). In a country such as Kuwait, we observe a need for variations in the transfer-of-learning approaches used because of the traditional educational system and learning processes that still exist in the country. We must address the differences in Kuwait that result from the culture, language, and gender issues, in order to find specific and valid solutions that can help the country to explore the concept of transfer of learning at a broader level.

Cultural Variations

Kuwait is an Arabic-speaking, Islamic constitutional emirate located on the Arabian (also Persian) Gulf in southwestern Asia. Kuwait gained its independence after 1961, when the British rule that continued there for decades finally ended. The discovery of oil in Kuwait raised the economy of Kuwait, and the country became one of the world's richest in gross national product per capita (Bazna & Reid, 2000). We can clearly see the various changes in the intellectual and cultural life in Kuwait that rapidly followed this process. One of the vital changes involved the replacement of the old tribal culture with the new Western culture. However, these new circumstances nurtured a strong basic conflict between tradition and modernity, a change in ethical and moral standards, and an imbalance between material achievements and spiritual values.

As a result of the Western influence from the beginning of the nineteenth century, after Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798, we can see many changes in the traditional Islam, which is heading toward the modern

Islam in its church-state dimension (Hardon, 2003). But still there are many differences and variations in this region compared to contemporary Western culture, and new programs and strategies should be implemented for better results and outputs. As Andrew (2005) proposes, the two contending educational systems today have created in the Muslim world a large gap between the Western-educated minority and the majority of the population, which on both the popular and intellectual level is rooted in traditional Islam. And there are numerous philosophical differences between America and Kuwait in many other areas. To some degree, there is a crisis in the Muslim educational system as it attempts to incorporate the ideas of modernity and post-modernity with its scientific influence upon education. To traditional Muslims, the ethical implication of the scientific mode of thought is a sensitive issue. Some traditionalists believe that science is guided by no moral values but by naked materialism and arrogance. Furthermore, knowledge divorced from faith not only is partial knowledge but also can even be described as a kind of new ignorance.

Language Differences

Language is one of the critical differences in education between the Western world and the Islamic world. Because of these language differences, Kuwait lags behind in many educational and technological fields that fail to transfer the learning among the learners. Andrew has pointed this out (2005). He proposes that a solution must be provided to the Kuwaiti students, who face a difficulty in learning the English language; this difficulty becomes a big hurdle in their learning process.

The academic difficulties associated with Kuwaiti students are mostly related to their lack of language proficiency and possibly the diglossia factor. The Greek linguist and demoticist Jean first coined the term *diglossie* (French). The Arabist William Marçais used the term in 1930 to describe the linguistic situation in Arabic-speaking countries (Knowledgerush, 2009).

According to Elinor (2005), Arabic native-speaking children are born into a unique linguistic context called diglossia (Ferguson, word, 14, 47–56, [1959]).. In this context, children grow up speaking a Spoken Arabic Vernacular (SAV), which is an exclusively spoken language, but later learn to read another linguistically related form, Modern Standard Arabic (MSA). (Abstract)

Therefore, it is important that more advanced courses in writing and reading in English should be made available to enhance the bilingualism in the country.

Gender Differences

The differences between the learning-transfer processes of the Arab countries and the West are mainly due to the cultural and gender differences. In any country, culture is considered an important and significant factor in shaping the norms and traditions of a society. Kuwaiti culture also affects the country, and one can observe many cultural differences in the country in terms of the role of gender. These differences produce a supplementary major obstacle in the transfer-of-learning processes when compared to Western countries. For example, Cicchelli and Baecher (1985), who investigated the concerns of 78 teachers (47 in a high school, 7 in a junior high school, and 24 in an elementary school) toward using microcomputers in the classroom, found that males scored considerably higher than females on consequence concerns, elementary female teachers indicated high awareness concerns, and elementary males scored significantly higher than females at the consequence stage. This research data showed that to some extent gender bias influences Kuwait culture.

Bander (2000) conducted a descriptive and relational study to identify concerns that teachers experienced when they were implementing the IT curriculum in Kuwait middle schools. Bander designed the study to investigate the relationships between teacher stages of concern and factors such as gender and experience, and to look for developmental stages of concern. The Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) (Carey, 1998) indicated significant mean differences between females and males on the management and refocusing stages, which also pointed toward gender discrimination in the learning process.

To transform the learning in a better and more appropriate way, it is important that gender differences be minimized to reduce bias and discrimination, and that equal opportunity be given to females in order to meet all students' educational needs and the desired outcomes for transfer-of-learning processes.

Technology Differences

Various differences also occur in computerized learning environments between Western countries and Arab countries such as Kuwait. In Kuwait University, despite the obvious advantage of computerized learning environments (CLEs), certain problems need to be resolved. Among these problems are the misuse of technology and the theoretical bases for the design of these CLEs. Concerning the theoretical bases, three schools of thought have been in wide use: behaviorism, cognitive psychology, and constructivism (Abdelraheem, 2003). However, many current approaches to CLEs in Kuwait adopt the traditional instructional design models in which learning is viewed as an information-delivery process coupled with the practice of procedures. To be more effective, CLEs also must carefully address suitable support for the learner.

Compared to Kuwait, modern instructional design models in Western countries such as the United States have been introduced that have become real technologies and that provide systematic and research-based advice, guidelines, and even prescriptions for the design and development of learning environments. Elen (2004) found that by accomplishing the mission of implementing an instructional design model, one can fulfill the requirement of scientific rigor in well-directed engineering research. In this model, however, the study of instructional design anchor points (IDAPs) plays a key role. Elen presents electronic learning environments as a recent version of an IDAP.

The issue of ethnic differences between Kuwait and Western countries is highlighted mainly when we look at a comparison of the barriers that affect or prevent e-learning in companies as an integral part of the training and learning processes of their workforces in Kuwait. The e-learning implementation models we find in Kuwait and in the practice of Western companies are also different in many research studies. For example, human resource managers as well as IT managers in charge of the e-learning of 11 of the largest companies in Kuwait carried out primary data collection through the use of semi-structured questionnaires (Ali & Magalhaes, 2008).

The research results showed that the key implementation barriers in Kuwait are

1.   Lack of management support;
2.   Language barriers;
3.   IT problems; and
4.   Workload and lack of time.

Of these barriers, two are common to Western countries (technology problems and lack of time). The remaining two (lack of management support and language barriers) are specific to Kuwait. Regarding the comparison between the two implementation models, the key finding was that organizations in Kuwait did not follow the usual e-learning development cycle (plan–design–integrate–improve) (Ali & Magalhaes, 2008).

This research showed that organizations in Kuwait largely ignore the planning, designing, and improving stages, with the emphasis resting almost completely on integrating the e-learning tools and processes within the rest of the organization. The problem of e-learning implementation in Kuwait is not so much one of knowing what the barriers are, but one of knowing what the appropriate management processes should be for companies to achieve business success. Therefore, a proper development plan for e-learning in Kuwait should be created to fit the current business environment there.

VIEWPOINT

Through this paper, we have considered the effectiveness and benefits of transfer of learning in different contexts and situations. It is also important to consider whether the transfer of learning validates or undermines the training and practices in different environments. This is represented through the different perspectives about the

concept in different cultures, focusing especially on Kuwaiti culture and highlighting the differences and variations that are needed in Kuwait in order to promote better learning from experience.

Different countries determine different ways to enhance the effectiveness of knowledge transfer among their students. Countries such as the United Kingdom, Canada, the United States, and Australia chiefly rely on the active participation of the school communities, as well as the contribution of parents, who play an important role in the intergenerational knowledge and its transfer. Similarly, in countries such as South Africa and Taiwan, the effectiveness of transfer of learning depends on the demonstrated production capabilities in the workplace as well as the various programs and systems that are used to evaluate the skills and abilities of the students and prepare them for their professional experiences. So to provide effective transfer of learning and a positive framework for that transfer, it is important to evaluate and assess several factors that are associated with learning transfer: the socio-cultural environment of the workplace and the learning context, as well as a proper and appropriate program design.

There is an urgent need for a multicultural education movement in order to implement the interventions and programs related to the transfer of learning. Wright and Tolan (2009) define multicultural education or global education as a modern educational movement working to increase our understanding of one another. In the United States, multicultural education is a way of helping students perceive the cultural diversity within the country as well as the diversity of cultures and societies around the world. Commonly stated goals are that students will develop a sense of pride in their own cultural heritage, and develop an appreciation for the ideals and values of others' cultures and an understanding of the common humanity all persons share. For better consequences and results, Kuwaiti educators need to develop an awareness of their interdependency in terms of sharing the world's resources and to increase students' skills in cross-cultural communication and cooperation.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, transfer of learning is a unique phenomenon that plays an important part in students' learning process. In different environments and cultures, there are features and characteristics of socialization that refer to a particular design and pattern of learned behaviors that are shared and transmitted in a society and by a particular group of people. These behaviors connote a way of life in that particular society that enables the members in that society to survive and behave properly in that culture. The majority of human beings are socialized according to the normative behavior that is established in the culture in which they are living. Many anthropologists define culture as a way of believing, evaluating, and behaving (Andrew, 2005). So from the perspectives of different cultures, we see that the concept of transfer of learning differs in each country according to its culture, norms, and traditions.

The importance of the transfer of learning is reflected in every country's primary educational practice, whether the country is Western or non-Western because the transfer of learning helps to increase individuals' job proficiency, personal employability, and well-being. Because Kuwait is heavily influenced by traditional customs and values, there is a need to implement programs that explore the effectiveness of the concept of transfer of learning at a broader level and modify the country's educational and training approaches as needed, based on the results of those explorations, to achieve the goal of better performance of trainees in the workplace.

One of the major factors that we can observe in the various countries that promote the effectiveness in the transfer of learning within their programs is the participation of the parents and the schools in promoting the particular educational capabilities of students that will help those students perform better in their professional lives. In any academic setting, a proper mentorship-learner arrangement, wherein a faculty member supervises a student in exchange for work on a project in his area, becomes invaluable for the students. Such an arrangement offers a structured method and system in which students learn based on the concepts of transfer of knowledge and previous learning.

AUTHOR INFORMATION

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