ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to critically examine employees perception of the effectiveness of the use of e-learning in BR Academy in the United Kingdom; highlighting the factors/variables that influences its effectiveness. A mixed method of research design was used which involved quantitative method, using a statistical tool to analyze the responses of the participants in the study and a qualitative method using content analysis through verbatim quotes for a clearer understanding as to what the participants’ perspective on the effectiveness of e-learning in BR Academy was. The research adopted the use of questionnaires. The findings revealed that both the staff and students from BR Academy perceived e-learning to be effective, however staff felt that they did not have the right equipment to enhance the use of e-learning and e-learning did not save time and cost. The research was limited as the findings from the study could not be generalized as a result of it being a case study of a small organization.

KEY WORDS: E-learning, Employee Perception, Effectiveness, UK and BR Academy.

INTRODUCTION

E-learning has arisen as an attractive option to the delivery of modules in educational and secular organizations as it has the capacity to be of benefits to the teachers, the learners and the society as a whole. Also, it has become a ground-breaking development in many educational institutions (Foray 2004) leading to a paradigm shift in education, enhancing the easy, flexible, meaningful, experience in the overall learning process. Nevertheless, e-learning is argued not to be seen as an alternative to the traditional learning process, rather it should be a complement to the traditional face to face learning process (Raj 2011).

Learning has a way of transforming the way individuals, groups and the society understand things in vivid ways. However, this will not be possible if the developers of e-learning constantly ignore actions and procedures of e-learning effectiveness. Although, researchers have been able to come up with success models on information systems and technology, nevertheless, little research has been carried out in order to assess the effectiveness and the success rate of e-learning in organizational settings (Wang, Wang and Shee 2007).

There is a wide level of interest in e-learning, and the potentials it carries. The UK government has meaningfully introduced different initiatives on e-learning, invested in creating technological, and computer based network infrastructures in institutions - schools, colleges and universities, (Freitas et
This is done in order to enhance the effectiveness of the e-learning process. Learners are the primary participants of e-learning thus, research studies have been carried out in order to explore the factors that affect the effectiveness of the learning process of the online learners (Chou and Liu, 2005, Sun et al. 2008). However, there is a limited proof that there is an increase and improvement in skills and professional practice as a result of e-learning (Salter et al. 2014). Thus this research sought to explore the effectiveness of e-learning in organization from the aspect of pedagogy in an educational organization using BR Academy as a case study.

Background of the Organization
The organization, BR Academy, a charity organization works with young adults who are not in education, employment or training (NEET). BR Academy uses e-learning for both staff and students. It is used for staff in planning and administering training for smooth delivery of all their activities, and for students, the teachers use e-learning to deliver their modules.

Aim of the Study
The overall aim of this paper is to critically examine the perception of the effectiveness of the use of e-learning in BR Academy in the United Kingdom; highlighting the factors that influences its effectiveness. This will be achieved by reviewing past literatures on the effectiveness of e-learning, and comparing them with the results from the responses from questionnaire.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE
In recent years, e-learning has become the most valuable and important development in the field of learning and talent development (CIPD 2011). E-learning is basically viewed as a learning tool that complements the conventional face to face learning (Maule 1997) and enhances the learner’s ability to think critically and analytically (Raj 2011). E-learning that is focused on computer, internet and the intranet has brought education a surplus level of interactivity, interaction, responsibility and combined learning (Cristina, Emmanuela, and Adriana 2011). However, there has been a higher drop out level on e-learning than conventional face to face learning, as a result of boredom, which is associated with the constant absence of fellow students to interact with, leading to disinterest and disengagement in the course (Bamidis 2008).

The contents of e-learning could be delivered through the internet, intranet, audio tapes, video tapes, satellite and CD ROM). However, for e-learning to be effective using these media, there is a need for a high quality technology, functional electronic devices and quality in the internet (Piccoli, Ahmad and Ives, 2001)Nevertheless, issues like technological breakdown, limited internet connectivity, slow network transmission, outdated soft ware, and unmaintained e-learning facilitating devices could affect the effectiveness of the e-learning process (Sun et al.2008). Irrespective of these challenges that could affect the effectiveness of e-learning in an organisation, being proactive in taking necessary steps to avoid the issues that affect the effectiveness of the e-learning process, is very important.

The learner also has a role to play in the e-learning process as the success of easy and flexible learning is highly dependent on the learner. The success of the e-learning process is argued to be achieved when there is a high level of learner control (Granger and Levine 2010). A high level of responsibility and self-discipline is very essential for the learner to cultivate in order to keep up with the unrestrained learning process that is typical of e-learning.

A study by Cantoni, Cellario and Porta (2004) argued that e-learning needs a huge level of self-discipline from the learner as there are so many distractions whilst learning via the internet and electronically. There are no restraints, no one ‘watching’ so the learner can decide to play games, or watch videos, or read novels, when he is supposed to be learning. On the contrary, with the traditional face to face learning, there is a limitation to the level of distraction as compared to when learning is taking place via the internet or electronically; as the teacher is present to control some distractions whilst the learning process is on. E-learning to a large extent gives the learners control over the different areas of the training environment (Scheiter and Gerjets 2007), thus giving them the opportunity to actively be part of their learning process (Salas and Cannon-Bowers 2001).
Furthermore, the learner’s attitude is a very important factor in the effectiveness of e-learning and the learning process as a whole. The learner’s attitude has a huge role to play in influencing the interest towards the learning process (Arbaugh 2002). Positive attitude towards e-learning increases the effectiveness of the learning process; on the other hand negative attitude decreases the level of effectiveness of e-learning and the learners’ satisfaction (Sun et al. 2008). However, for e-learning to be effective, the learners must be able to have sufficient skills in technology management, personal motivation, and prepare to learn in isolation (Dringus 2000). E-learning involves a lot of independent learning, thus learning in isolation is typical of e-learning.

E-learning could be a faster means of learning as the learner can avoid the materials that they know already (Cantoni, Cellario and Porta 2004) on the other hand, if there are challenges with the technology, in terms of slow internet speed, difficulties assessing relevant sites, the learning process may be hampered or delayed (Luambano 2004). However, the technological challenges discussed above, may pose a challenge for the success of direct and quick answers to any question from the learner (Luambano 2004). In contrast to this, the traditional face to face learning enables the learner get an immediate feedback from the tutor whilst learning takes place; there are no issues, of slow bandwidth or technological failures, thus making the learning process faster and more interactive.

Although the availability of chat rooms, instant messaging, emails helps ensure interactions between the e-learners and the e-tutors, (Monahan McArdle, and Bertolotto 2008). A study by Cantoni, Cellario and Porta (2004) argued that, there is some sort of consistency and uniformity in the content of the materials being delivered via e-learning. But this study also argued that as a result of numerous materials, and different points of views on the same subject matter being uploaded, the learner may be confused and not have an idea what stand exactly to take with regards the information he should take and that which he should discarded.

The internet with latest technology is changing the way education is being delivered and e-learning is becoming a viable substitute to the traditional ‘classroom’ teaching and learning However, the CIPD revealed that e-learning should not be seen as a substitute to other types of learning rather, it is more effective when it is combined with other forms of learning, thus complementing the other forms of learning (CIPD 2011: 6).

The effectiveness of e-learning is dependent on the support from different technologies, in terms of speed and connectivity; this enables online interaction. However, issues such as slow internet connection, little or no knowledge in using the computer or tools for the e-learning process to occur, could affect the effectiveness of the learning process. In addition, an organizational culture which also supports the delivery of e-learning is very paramount to the effectiveness of e-learning. When there is no culture of learning in the organization, then there will be little or no success with regards to e-learning (Rosenberg 2001). Furthermore, researchers have argued that the understanding of the culture of an organization and adjusting the e-learning approach and strategy to fit the environment is a key factor in the success of the e-learning process within the organization (Lea, 2003, Newton and Helis 2002, Rogers, 1995).

Support from supervisors, peers and the organization as a whole is argued to have a huge influence on performance and commitment to the job (Kim, Seo and Seo 2008). There is a psychological impact on the employee when supervisors and colleagues are supportive within the organization, as it is argued to enhance satisfaction and productivity. Similar research studies have attested that e-learning has been beneficial and stirred positive feelings amongst students and even trained employees in an organization (Hussin, Bunyarit, and Hussein, 2009; Vargas and Tian 2013). E-learning could be supported by making arrangements for all the necessities for the effective e-learning process. Furthermore, a more positive approach towards Information Technology, will be associated with more satisfaction and effectiveness from the learners point of view in the learning environment (Piccoli, Ahmad and Ives 2001) This is because e-learning is hinged on the use of computers in circulating materials on the platform, as the learners also participate using the computer systems (Sun et al. 2008)

**Key Issues For The Implementation Of Effective E-Learning Process.**
The effective implementation of e-learning is dependent on some factors and key issues, which have a way of either leading to the success or failure of the e-learning process. E-learning critical success factors are dependent on these vital issues: the human factor, information technology infrastructure, e-learning mind-set of both the learner and teacher, technical competence of both the learner and the student (Soong, Chan, Chuan, and Luo 2001). However, there are several other factors that can affect the implementation of effective e-learning. For the purpose of this study, the following was discussed:

**Costs:** The costs associated with e-learning is argued to be reduced, as it cuts down costs of travel, and other training costs that would have been borne if an alternative method was used (Markus 2011). However the infrastructure that is needed for the successful execution of the process could require high cost of upgrade (Weller 2004). This is because the acquisition of the e-learning equipment, the maintenance of the equipment will all cost money. Nevertheless, if there is a budget to make adequate plans for the e-learning process which may include, adequate computers, adequate bandwidth, and order technological related issues (Arabasz and Baker 2003) then the implementation of the e-learning process will be effective, on the contrary, if there is no budget for it, the effective e-learning process could be hindered.

**Staff development:** It is imperative for staff to have adequate training on the processes and different uses of ICT involved in e-learning (Afshari et al. 2009). If the staff are not aware on how to carry out the day to day activities with the use of computers and some order important soft ware, it will be challenging for them to use e-learning in delivering, thus hindering the effectiveness if the e-learning process. Hence, it is important for the organization, to conduct training sessions for the staff in order to enable them carry out their activities electronically.

**Student support:** E-learning has enabled students to build and develop confidence in themselves, thus increasing their self-worth, value and improving their learning experience (Tham and Werner 2005). This research considered e-learning as giving the learner the opportunity to explore, and make findings, which when achieved gives the learner confidence. The teacher’s attitudes towards, the students is a very key factor in the effectiveness of e-learning (Volery 2000), thus the support of the teacher in ensuring the students has an understanding of the subject matter is very important. An increase in the level of communication and interaction amongst the learners and the teachers, has a high possibility of an increase in the knowledge base of the learner, this is because learning is a social phenomenon, and it takes place in a social context (Liaw, Huang, and Chen 2007). Thus, support of the e-learners is very key in ensuring the effectiveness of the e-learning process and the desired output.

**Technical support:** E-learning could involve a handful of multimedia elements, like sound, video, computers, CD players amongst others. Learners will be more willing to make use of an e-learning tool that has little barriers, and easy usability (Amoroso and Cheny 1991). However, there are technical challenges and limitations learners may encounter (Bhardwaj, Singh and Kharayat 2011) which may include, low bandwidth, leading to dawdling transmission rates, lack of swift network (Ayanda et.al 2011). These could affect the effectiveness of the e-learning process when not maintained appropriately (Rosenberg 2001). Thus it is imperative for provisions to be made on how to solve these problems when they occur to ensure that the learners have no challenges with order for the learning process to be effective and satisfactory (Piccoli, Ahmad, and Ives 2001).

**Management support:** The learning culture is a very key aspect within an organization (Rosenberg 2001), and the management has a huge role to play in ensuring that there is a learning culture within the organization. The support of the management of the on e-learning could encourage other staff members follow suit, thus their interest will lead to the effectiveness of the entire e-learning process. It is also imperative for the management to know if the e-learning process is yielding desired results and increasing, the knowledge base of the learners or employees within the organisation. This can be achieved by putting in monitoring measures in order to track the performance of the staff or the learners concerned.
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The method of data analysis that was used in this study was the mixed method. Mixed method analysis involves analysing the data with at least one quantitative method which is channelled towards collecting numbers and one qualitative method which is aimed at collecting information through words with the aim of a deeper understanding of the research, thus combining both the qualitative and quantitative methods (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie and Turner 2007). The choice of a mixed method was to enable the researcher obtain sufficient and detailed information on the research, as one data source may not be adequate in order to have a detailed and exploratory finding (Leech and Onwuegbuzie 2009).

Quantitative research provides a numerical element and dimension to analysing the research phenomenon (Sun 2009). On the other hand, qualitative research enables the contextualisation of the research phenomenon (Yin 2006). Furthermore, the researcher argued that if there was no opportunity for the respondents to express their views about the study, then a detailed finding will not be achieved. Similarly, the combination of both methods, the quantitative and the qualitative method gave a broader and in-depth understanding of the research other than a single approach, as there was information from both a number perspective and a word perspective. The questionnaire consisted of questions that were answered in the Likert scale method, and a few open ended questions. This enabled the researcher get a better understanding of the results from the questionnaire.

This study adopted the convenience sampling which is a type of non-probability sampling technique. Convenience sampling involves getting samples that are both easy to access and willing to participate in the research (Teddlie and Yu 2007). The population of the study was made up of twenty eight (28) participants in total, nineteen (19) students and nine (9) staff.

In analysing the data using quantitative method, the SPSS, statistical analysis tool was adopted. The percentages of the responses of the participants were revealed, the mean of the responses were also revealed in the study. Furthermore, to have a deeper insight into the effectiveness of e-learning in organisation, using the case study of the research, a qualitative content analysis was conducted. The qualitative analysis that was adopted was the use of verbatim quotes, which involved quoting what the respondents had written in the questionnaire.

Validity is a vital quality that a test should possess (Mc Queen and Kunssen 2002). In the case of this study, the questionnaires covered issues with regards the way the staff and students perceived the effectiveness of e-learning and narrowing it to the academy. Thus, it is argued that there are no concerns with regards the validity of the instrument in the completion of the study. A reliability test was conducted using the Cronbach test and the result revealed that the research instrument (questionnaire) is reliable. However, the questionnaire will only be reliable when used for a similar organisation as BR Academy; and the research is similar to that of e-learning.

Discussion of Results and Findings

A total of 32 questionnaires were administered and only 28 usable questionnaires were returned giving a response rate of 87.5%. The rate is satisfactory as it has exceeded the minimum 10% response rate as argued by Neuman (2006). The participants consisted of 19 students (5 Males and 14 female students) and 9 staff members (5 males and 4 females).

A descriptive analysis was done which looked the percentages and the mean scores of the results, this was followed by a Mann-Whitney test to examine if there was a significant difference between the staff and students perception of the effectiveness of e-learning within BR Academy, the results indicated that there is no significant difference in the perception of students (30.85) and staff (28.43) with regards the effectiveness of e-learning within BR Academy UK. The open ended questions were analysed using content analysis – verbatim quotes to provide further clarification of the findings from the survey.
Perception of the effectiveness of the use of e-learning in BR Academy UK

A review of the questionnaire sent out highlighted that 78% of staff and 90% of students agree that they enjoy using e-learning, as e-learning made their work faster and easier. Results from the interview from a respondent said the reason they enjoyed using e-learning was that they were able to use different methods of learning e.g. the use of You-tube videos makes him understand better, this backs up the findings of the questionnaires. These results are further supported by the literature as Cantoni, Cellario and Porta (2004) suggested that E-learning could be a faster means of learning as the learner can avoid the materials that they know already.

The results from the questionnaire also indicated that 89% of students and 64% of staff said e-learning gives them the opportunity to work flexibly. This is an interesting result because the fewer staff feel e-learning gives them the opportunity to work flexibly. This is contradictory to some of the literature on e-learning which highlights that a key benefit of e-learning is flexibility (Scheiter and Gerjets 2007). 95% of students and 55% of staff agreed that e-learning helps them save time and resources. Markus (2011), highlighted that the costs associated with e-learning would be reduced, as it cuts down costs of travel, and other training costs that would have been borne if an alternative method was used.

89% of students and 44% of staff feel that the equipment needed for e-learning are available to them. The literature suggests that there are technical challenges and limitations learners may encounter (Bhardwaj, Singh and Kharayat 2011) which may include, low bandwidth, leading to dawdling transmission rates, lack of equipments and infrastructure, lack of swift network (Ayanda et.al 2011). These could affect the effectiveness of the e-learning process when not maintained appropriately (Rosenberg 2001). Issues like technological breakdown, limited internet connectivity, slow network transmission, outdated software, and unmaintained e-learning facilitating devices could affect the effectiveness of the e-learning process (Sun et al.2008). Thus it is imperative for provisions to be made on how to solve these problems when they occur (Piccoli, Ahmad, and Ives 2001).

68% of students and 55% of staff agreed that e-learning meets their learning needs. Further examination of the opened ended questions revealed that some staff felt that they had not had any training so it has not met their learning needs. While others felt that it had helped with specific qualifications to enhance their skills on the job. These are mixed responses and highlights key issues for the use of e-learning within organisations. It is imperative for staff to have adequate training on the processes and different uses of ICT involved in e-learning (Afshari et al. 2009). If the staff are not aware on how to carry out the day to day activities with the use of computers and other electronic software, it will be challenging for them to use e-learning in delivering (teaching), thus hindering the effectiveness if the e-learning process.

Examining the mean scores of the survey questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLES</th>
<th>CALCULATED MEAN (STUDENT)</th>
<th>CALCULATED MEAN (STAFF)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Opportunity to work flexibly</td>
<td>4.05</td>
<td>3.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Enables time and resources to be saved</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>3.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 E-learning equipment available</td>
<td>3.79</td>
<td>2.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Better understanding via e-learning</td>
<td>3.89</td>
<td>3.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 No disruption during e-learning</td>
<td>3.32</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The key disparity looking at the results from the mean scores from the survey question 3 – where a negative mean score of 2.89 was calculated for the response of availability of e-learning equipment for staff. This raises the issue of the use of e-learning facilities amongst staff and students. Issues like technological breakdown, limited internet connectivity, slow network transmission, outdated software, and unmaintained e-learning facilitating devices could affect the effectiveness of the e-learning process.
(Sun et al. 2008). Thus it is imperative for provisions to be made on how to solve these problems when they occur (Piccoli, Ahmad, and Ives 2001).

The effectiveness of e-learning will be questioned if there is no support from teachers (Holley 2000), and support from the organization is also very key in influencing commitment to the organisation (Kim, Seo and Seo 2008) Consequently, this research considered e-learning to be effective when there is a blend of support from both the management to the staff (in the case of this research; the teachers) and the staff in turn to the students.

Summary of Findings

- The mann-whitney test indicated no significant difference between the student’s perception and staff perception of the effectiveness of e-learning.
- Staff and students enjoy using e-learning within BR Academy
- Staff and students agreed e-learning gives them the opportunity to work flexibly (though more students support the flexibility of the use of e-learning provides).
- 95% students agreed that it enables time and resources to be saved but only 55% of staff felt this was an advantage of e-learning but this may be due to the fact that staff had fewer equipments to enable e-learning as compared to the students.
- Students agreed that the equipments are available within the academy to enhance the use of e-learning, this is in sharp contrast to staff responses. Staff felt that they did not have the right equipment to enhance the use of e-learning.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to examine the perceived effectiveness of e-learning in BR Academy UK. The research highlighted that there was no significant difference between the perception of students and the perception of staff with regards the effectiveness of e-learning; however, there was a difference with regards to the perception of staff and student on e-learning saving time and resources. This was a result of the staff still undertaking other activities whilst participating in the e-learning process. In addition, salient points were highlighted for the effectiveness of e-learning which included cost, support and development. Findings also highlighted that although e-learning involves learning which is computer based and could be carried out independently; nevertheless, it is imperative for there to be a synergy between teachers and learners. The effective implementation of e-learning is dependent on key factors and issues, which could lead to the success or failure of the e-learning process. E-learning critical success factors are dependent on these vital issues: the human factor, information technology infrastructure, e-learning mind-set of both the learner and teacher, technical competence of both the learner and the student (Soong, Chan, Chuan, and Luo 2001).

RECOMMENDATIONS

- BR Academy should ensure adequate provisions of equipments for both staff and students to enhance the e-learning process within the organization.
- BR Academy should prioritize their budgets in order to attend to most pressing needs of the organization with regards providing equipment for the smooth flow of the e-learning process within the organization.
- BR Academy should ensure necessary training sessions for the staff to enhance the use of e-learning within their relevant job roles.

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