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This thesis was produced in 2003 as assigned coursework for the MSc in Occupational Psychology by Katie Fraser, and has not been peer reviewed. It formed part of my work with a genuine organisation. Further information on the context of the study, and full text of the thesis can be obtained by contacting me at the details on the link above.

E-Learning Locally: Assessing, understanding and measuring success in an adult learning centre.

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Abstract

This study investigated a centre-based e-learning course, run as a self-managed learning scheme for adult students. There were three aims to the study: to assess the success of Training Centre X, to understand what did and did not make it successful, and to establish measures and methodologies for evaluating e-learning.

Such understanding is important as the use of any technology cannot guarantee a high quality learning experience (Goldstein and Ford, 2000), and since many studies into elearning have had little rigour even training experts are uncertain of its superiority (Oliver et al, 2002; IPD, 1999).

A model was created using comprehensive taxonomies of outcomes and factors that might affect course success, including little-studied outcomes, eg. student retention. While the model was neither discarded nor confirmed completely, both methodological and practical implications for e-learning arose.

Although longitudinal data could not be gathered, this study showed it is both possible and desirable to perform comprehensive evaluations without longitudinal research. A range of methodologies also proved to provide a wider range of important data.

Courses were judged as successful across a wide range of outcome measures, showing that e-learning courses could be successful. However, important factors for ensuring this success also arose, with key factors including student expectations, course factors, and addition of social support and contact for learner satisfaction.