

Abstract

Exploring the Role and Adoption of Technology-based Training and Employment Services

The dramatic evolution of computer and communications technology, coupled with an ever-increasing emphasis on cost-effectiveness, underscores the potential of technology-based learning (TBL), or e-learning, in the public workforce system. ETA launched a national initiative in 2008 to systematically explore the role and adoption of TBL within the public workforce system (see Training and Employment Guidance Letter Number 17-07 at: <http://wdr.doleta.gov/directives/attach/TEGL17-07.pdf>, which was issued to implement the TBL Initiative). While several demonstration grants funded under the TBL Initiative have examined the structure and outcomes of specific training programs, comparatively little is known about the emphasis on TBL at the state policy level or its systematic adoption and use at the local level by American Job Centers (AJC) and other providers of workforce services. In 2011, ETA commissioned Abt Associates, Inc. to develop and implement surveys to collect descriptive information about the use of TBL at the state and local levels of the public workforce system and provide a report on the findings from these surveys. The two surveys were administered during an eight-week period in spring 2013. A total of 47 state surveys (81 percent response rate for state workforce agency (SWA) administrators) and 399 local surveys (69 percent response rate for Local Workforce Development Boards (LWDB) Executive Directors) were completed by respondents, respectively. The final report provides a description of SWAs' efforts to promote and support TBL, as well as actual adoption and use of TBL at the local level in providing Workforce Investment Act (WIA) services. These include WIA Title I core, intensive, and training services, and WIA Title II educational services. Note: The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) became law on July 22, 2014, and WIOA supersedes WIA and amends the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act, the Wagner-Peyser Act, and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. While the analysis of the survey results suggest that state and local stakeholders have embraced the value and potential of TBL, there were issues such as infrastructure costs to the providers and the technological literacy of some workforce participants, that might defer or impede utilization of TBL. The researchers suggest that ETA continue to offer both the insight and support needed for state decision-makers and LWDBs to make informed decisions about where and when to invest in TBL. This research is the first to systematically describe the policy and environmental context that shapes TBL adoption and current patterns of actual use. In establishing baseline characteristics of TBL use and potential policy levers, this study can serve as a foundation for future research.

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