COMPUTER SKILLS OF STUDENTS ATTENDING THE UNIVERSITY OF THE THIRD AGE

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Resumé

The paper deals with the computer skills of students attending the University of the Third Age in Nitra in the study programme – The History of Fine Arts and Creative Art Activities being offered under the auspices of the Department of Creative Arts and Art Education by the Faculty of Education at Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra. This paper brings together partial results of the research conducted by the author in the summer semester of the academic year 2012-2013 to determine individual student assumptions about the study programme innovation and a plan to introduce activities requiring ICT skills on the study participants' part.

Key words: university of the third age, computer skills

POČÍTAČOVÉ ZRUČNOSTI ŠTUDENTOV NAVŠTEVUJÚCICH UNIVERZITU TRETIEHO VEKU

Abstract

Príspevok sa zaoberá problematikou počítačových zručností študentov navštevujúcich Univerzitu tretieho veku na v Nitre v študijnom programe Dejiny výtvarného umenia a výtvarná tvorba, ktorá sa realizuje na Katedre výtvarnej tvorby a výchovy Pedagogickej fakulty Univerzity Konštantína Filozofa v Nitre. Prináša parciálne výsledky výskumu, ktorý realizovala autorka príspevku v letnom semestri akademického roka 2012/2013, aby zistila individuálne predpoklady študentov pre inováciu študijného programu s plánovaním zavedenia aktivít vyžadujúcich IKT zručnosti zo strany frekventantov štúdia.

Key words: univerzita tretieho veku, počítačové zručnosti

Introduction

Based on the "Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council" of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning (2006/962/EC) and the annex "Key Competences for Lifelong Learning – A European Reference Framework" setting out eight key competences, we, by way of the study programme – The History of Fine Arts and Creative Art Activities within the University of the Third Age at Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, guaranteed by the Department of Creative Arts and Art Education and the Faculty of Education of the aforementioned university, continuously seek to include the development of these competencies into educational activities. Within the challenge OPV-2012/2.1/03-SORO, the university decided to apply for an irretrievable financial contribution in favour of improving the quality of further education of the seniors at Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra. Given our interest in innovating educational activities in the aforementioned study programme in the context of the application of ICT technologies, we decided to carry out research focused on individual trainee assumptions in the field as well as their interest in this form of educational activities.

1. Theoretical background

The theoretical starting-point for us was the "Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council" of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning (2006/962/EC), which in the annex "Key Competences for Lifelong Learning - A European Reference Framework" sets out eight key competences. The most relevant for the study programme – The History of Fine Arts and Creative Art Activities is considered to be the development of digital, social and civic competences and, particularly, cultural awareness and expression.

2. Research focused on self-evaluation of students at the University of the Third Age in computer skills

2.1. Research objectives

The research objective was to find out which individual assumptions students of the University of the Third Age dispose of in ICT, i. e. which skills they have in computer usage according to their own assessments. Simultaneously, our intention was to investigate how our respondents acquired their ICT skills and whether they use a computer in their spare time or work area. We also wanted to identify the study participants' interest in the forms of educational activities, in which computer or digital technologies are applied.

2.2. Research hypotheses

We assumed that in our respondent group:

1. There would be more students who by self-assessment have beginner, good or excellent computer skills than those who do not master whatsoever work on the computer.

2. There would be more students who use a computer in their spare time or work area than those who do not use a computer.

3. There would be more students who welcome the possibility to use a computer within the lectures at the University of the Third Age (that is, each student is provided a computer during lectures to find information and to perform any other creative art activities under the supervision of the teacher), than those who, by contrast, do not want to take advantage of this opportunity.

2.3. Research plan and research sample

Our research sample consisted of 40 students enrolled in the study programme – The History of Fine Arts and Creative Art Activities taking place within the University of the Third Age in Nitra under the Department of Creative Arts and Art Education at the Faculty of Education of Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra in the academic year 2012-2013. Students of all current three years of the study programme were involved in the research: 14 students from the first year, 18 students from the second year, and 8 students from the third year. Of the total number of the respondents (40), 36 (90 %) were women and 4 (10 %) were men.

2.4.   Research methods

The data collection method we used was an anonymous questionnaire with closed questions with scaling options in each item as well as open questions with the possibility to develop responses. The questionnaire included 10 items on general information about the respondents in the context of their age, sex, residence district affiliation, level of educational attainment and employment status. Our main aim was, of course, to find out how our respondents – students at the University of the Third Age – evaluate their own computer skills, how they acquired these skills, how they use them and what their attitude is towards further education using ICT. The research was carried out during the summer semester of the academic year 2012-2013. The method of data processing was a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the responses from the questionnaire reflected in the table or verbal interpretation of responses as well as verification and evaluation of hypotheses.

3.   Research results

Our research results have some interesting findings. Given the limited scope of this paper, we analyze the results only partially, indirectly referring to some of the findings of the items that are not detailed herein. The results in tabular form are not herein stated due, as mentioned above, to the limited scope of this paper. We were interested in how our respondents would evaluate their ICT skills. We received the responses as follows: Option a) I am familiar with working on the computer at the beginner level was selected by 13 respondents, Option b) I have good skills in using the computer – 17 respondents, Option c) I have excellent skills in using the computer – 6 respondents, Option d) I do not master working on the computer at all, but would like to have some skills – 3 respondents, and Option e) I have no command of the computer work and it does not bother me was chosen by only 1 respondent. Our first hypothesis was confirmed. Up to 36 (90 %) of the total number of our respondents have, according to their self-assessment, either excellent, good or, at least, beginner computer skills, which we consider a very good precondition for study programme innovation in the context of the application of ICT in educational activities. Within the item focused on the use of ICT in respondents' free time or work area, we obtained the following results: Option a) the computer is an indispensable working tool for me (Word, Excel, Internet, etc.) was selected by 13 respondents, Option b) I use the computer to communicate with my family and acquaintances (via social networks, Facebook, Skype, e-mail, etc.) – 29 respondents, Option c) I use the computer in education and cultural activities (e. g. targeted information retrieval through Wikipedia, web lexicons, viewing works of art in virtual galleries, etc.) – 23 respondents, Option d) I use the computer to archive and edit photos – 15 respondents, Option e) I use the computer to obtain current important information (departures of bus lines, theatre or cinema programmes, news, weather, etc.) – 20 respondents, and Option f) I use the computer for shopping online – 9 respondents. Of the total number of respondents, 5 students did not mark an answer at all for the last item. Our second hypothesis was also confirmed, and the results surprised us. Given the age group of the respondents, we did not expect such a high frequency of responses for each item, and it is pleasing that up to 29 (72.5 %) respondents use the computer for communication and 23 (57.5 %) of respondents use it for education and cultural activities. It is another positive precondition in terms of study programme innovation in the context of the application of ICT in educational practice. In our third hypothesis, we assumed that in the group of our respondents there would be more students who welcome the possibility to use a computer within the lectures at the University of the Third Age (that is, each student is provided a computer during the lectures to find information and to perform any other creative art activities under the supervision of the

teacher), than those who, by contrast, do not want to take advantage of this opportunity. Our third hypothesis was also confirmed. The Option a) definitely was selected by 23 respondents, Option b) most probably – 6 respondents, Option c) yes – 4 respondents, Option d) no – 1 respondent, Option e) probably not – 5 respondents, and Option f) certainly not – 1 respondent. The Option f) certainly not was chosen by a respondent between the ages of 70 and 75 years with secondary economic education, who under the item of computer skills self-assessment, selected the Option e) I have no command of the computer work and it does not bother me. It is interesting to note that the respondents who within the analyzed item selected options d) no and e) probably not, have good or beginner computer skills and use their computer in their spare time or work area. Most responses to Option a) definitely were marked by respondents in the 2nd year. Out of 18 second-year students, 13 students marked this option. This year of study also has the highest percentage of university graduates. Of the 18 students, 14 (77.8 %) have a university education. In the 1st year, it is 57.1 % (8 out of 14 students) and in the 3rd year, it is 50 % (4 of 8 students). Based on the responses of our respondents in each of the items, we can conclude that a university education and different forms of lifelong learning are a motivating factor in connection with having an interest in the possibility of applying ICT in work as well as in personal life.

Conclusion

Our research was conducted due to a planned study programme innovation that uses ICT in educational activities, and this implies certain responsibilities on the study participants' part. From our findings, it is clearly shown that students currently studying in the investigated study programme have adequate computer skills and that the vast majority of them declared an interest in the possible application of ICT in educational activities. It is gratifying as in the field of fine arts education in the theoretical, practical and creative context, there is a variety of possibilities for using ICT.

Bibliography

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Lecturer review

The paper is devoted to the analysis of partial results of research in the field of computer skills the students at the University of the Third Age in the History of Fine Arts and Creative Art Activities study programme have. This paper reports interesting findings confirming the relevance and significance of ICT in senior age group education, currently termed as the "third age".

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