

E-learning from the Perspective of Teachers at the University of Zagreb

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Summary

The purpose of this article is to investigate teachers' attitude about e-learning; it attempts to investigate the current teachers' opinions and awareness about e-learning, their activities pertaining to e-learning, as well as their motivation and initiative, or lack of them. The target group were the teaching staff of the faculties of the University of Zagreb who were sent a link to the online survey. By looking at the results of the University Computing Centre's annual survey, which was sent to University of Zagreb's faculty administration, it was assumed that teachers show motivation and interest in using e-learning, however, they lack support from their respective faculties, as well as technological prerequisites to implement e-learning in their teaching. Another assumption was that some faculties would have bigger and some smaller need for e-learning, depending on their field of study. To test these hypotheses, a survey was sent to each of the University's faculty with instructions to pass it along to members of their teaching staff. There were 315 participants in the survey, and data analysis confirmed on of the authors' hypotheses; it was concluded that the majority of participant teaching staff at the University, irrespective of their age, is motivated and interested in the idea of e-learning, but lack the incentive and support to engage with it.

Key words: e-learning, teacher motivation, external incentives, motivation, attitude, ambition, University of Zagreb, University Computing Centre, SRCE

Introduction

The existence and importance of e-learning is becoming harder to ignore as we witness the rapid improvement of ICT and the widespread presence of internet, and due to this, e-learning is becoming an increasing and inevitable trend in education. According to the University of Zagreb's Strategy on E-learning, it is not an alternative to standard education, but an integral part of it, an enhancement even [4]. The University Computing Centre (SRCE), conducts an annual survey on the subject of e-learning at the University of Zagreb [1]. This survey was an important orientational mark in this research and showed that the next logical step in exploring the phenomenon of e-learning is to investigate teachers' attitude towards it. From the survey it can be concluded that there are four key elements which are of utmost importance to e-learning: technological framework, attitude and support of the faculty administration, teachers' motivation, and active participation of the student body. Since the Centre's survey focused on the attitudes of faculty administrations, analyzing the technological framework was outside of our interest domain, and investigation of the opinions of the student body was already conducted at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, where most of the students expressed high interest in e-learning [3], the goal of this research was to explore attitudes and motivation of teachers, as well as some of their habits pertaining to implementation of e-resources and e-learning. The research didn't delve into the increase of teachers' responsibilities caused by e-learning; the focus was on their inclination to implement e-learning and their attitude towards their faculties' incentives for e-learning.

Hypothesis

The hypothesis of this research was drawn from the data collected by the Centre through their annual survey on e-learning at the University of Zagreb. One of the conclusions from that survey was that attitude of the faculty administration somewhat affects the attitude and motivation of teachers towards e-learning. This was also mentioned in notes that participants of the survey left: they gave a suggestion that it would be highly motivating if the University started to value participation in e-learning more. Therefore, the assumption of this hypothesis is that teachers lack incentive in implementation of e-learning into their courses. It was also assumed that teachers at technical and natural sciences faculties would be more prone to using e-learning than teachers in the social and humanistic field of study.

Method

The survey was created in Google Form [2] and was sent via e-mail to Vice Deans of Academic Affairs and representatives for e-learning from each faculty at the University of Zagreb. In some cases, it was also sent to each teacher personally. Structurally divided into four categories, the survey consists of twenty

questions. The first category helped the authors to create a demographic profile of the participant. The second group of questions investigates e-learning activities of teachers and their awareness of e-learning systems and incentives on the University level. The third group of questions focuses on their opinion about existing incentives for e-learning offered by their faculties. The fourth category pertains to the teachers' ambition, motivation and attitude towards using e-learning. The data was collected through the survey and organised in a spreadsheet, after which it was sorted and filtered. It was also interpreted by calculating and observing correlations between certain groups of data.

Results

The survey was filled by 315 participants, 56% of which were women. The oldest participant was 75, while the youngest was 23 years old. In Figure 1, the number of participants who use e-learning is analogous to the number of participants who don't use e-learning. This means that the tendency to use e-learning and participants' age are not interdependent.

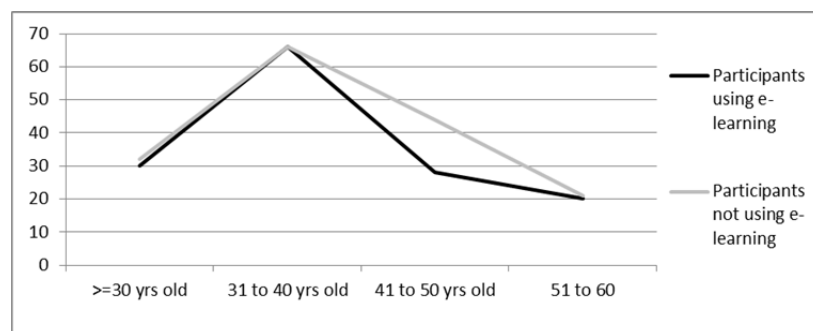


Figure 1. Correlation between age and tendency to use e-learning

The largest turnout was from the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, whose staff comprise 21% of the participants of the survey. The survey was filled mostly by assistants, to be exact; 30%. Most of the participants; 99%, use the computer during their preparation for class, while 88% of participants also use the computer in teaching. 84% of participants answered that they know what systems for e-learning and learning management systems are, however, only slightly more than half of the participants; 53%, answered that they don't use any kind of e-learning system in teaching. The majority of participants; 85%, would consider it useful to track student online course activity on e-learning systems. Participants who do use an e-learning system use Moodle the most – 45.1%. Most of the participants; 82%, answered that they are aware that the University Computing Centre annually invites participants to apply for the best e-learning course award. Furthermore, 74% of participants know that the University of Zagreb gives out awards in the same category. 77% of participants

answered that they were informed about e-learning by their faculty, however, most of the participants; 88%, never received any incentive from their faculty to use e-learning. In fact, 78% of participants claim that their faculties don't require of them to use an e-learning system. Figures 2 and 3 show that there are certain correlations within groups of participants who were informed by their faculties and participants who are required to use e-learning to groups of participants who answered that they use, or don't use e-learning. The figures suggest that more teachers use e-learning in the cases where they were informed about e-learning, and they also suggest that more teachers use e-learning in the cases where their faculty requires its implementation.

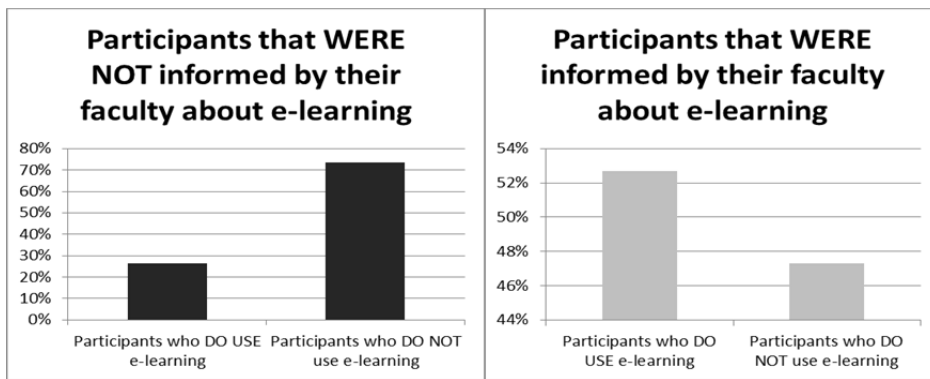


Figure 2. Correlation between participants' e-learning usage and their faculty's initiative to inform them about e-learning

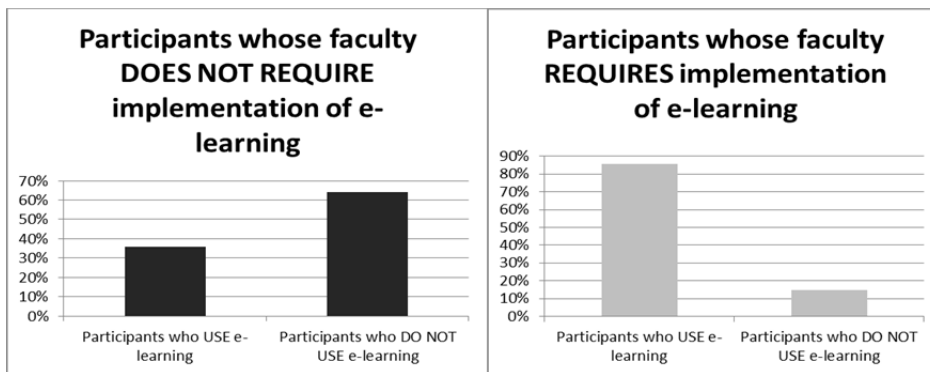


Figure 3. Correlation between participants' e-learning usage and their faculty's requirement regarding implementation of e-learning

Further; only 8% of the participants think that their faculty dedicates a lot of funds to the implementation of e-learning systems, while 32% think the amount of funds is small. 7% believe there are no funds allocated for implementation of e-learning at their faculty, and 7% don't know whether there are any funds allo-

cated towards e-learning. Most of the participant; 61%, don't think that e-learning should be added as one of the criteria for career advancement. To the question whether they were satisfied with the incentive for implementation of e-learning that they get from their faculty, 22% answered with not satisfied at all, 10% said they were completely satisfied, while 18% answered they didn't know about such incentives. Participants were also asked to grade their motivation to be educated about e-learning. Their answers can be seen in Figure 4.

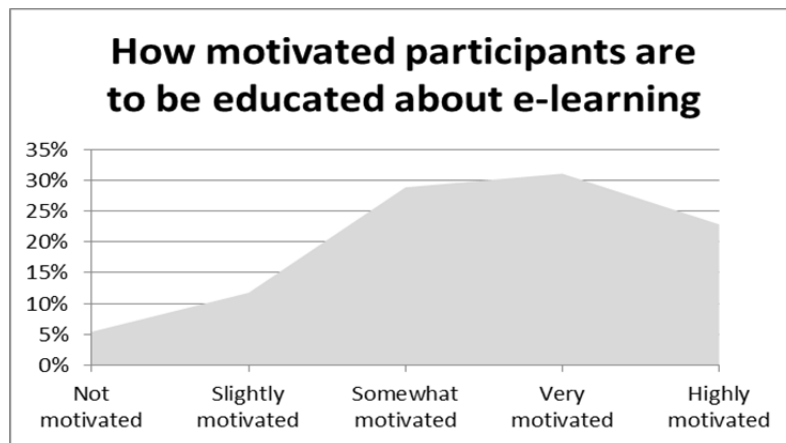


Figure 4. Participants' motivation to be educated about e-learning

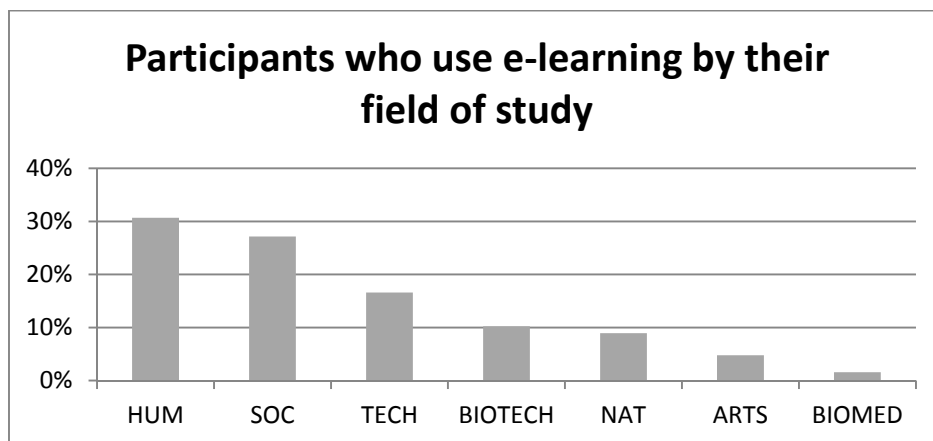


Figure 5. Correlation between participants' field of study and their e-learning usage

Furthermore, most of the participants; 61% of them, said they would be willing to set aside three hours a week during the course of several months to learn about e-education. Next, Figure 5 shows fields of studies of participants who

answered that they use e-learning. From the most to least represented, the field of studies are as follows: humanities (HUM), social sciences (SOC), technical sciences (TECH), biotechnical sciences (BIOTECH), natural sciences (NAT), arts (ARTS), and biomedicine (BIOMED). Data shown in the figure refutes the authors' hypothesis that teachers from technical and natural fields of study would be more prone to using e-learning than teachers in the social and humanistic fields of study, since it proves the opposite.

Furthermore, as shown in Figure 6, most of the participant teacher staff has a positive attitude about improving the quality of their courses by implementing e-learning.

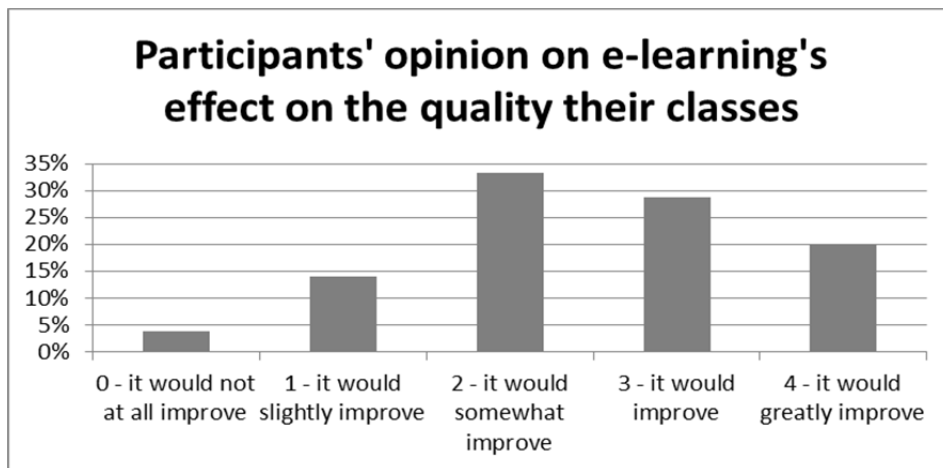


Figure 6. Participants' opinion on the effect of e-learning on the quality of classes

Conclusion

By analysing the data, it can be seen that there is no major difference in age between participants who answered that they use e-learning and participants who don't use e-learning. This suggests that age isn't a major factor in tendency to use e-learning. However, the hypothesis that teachers from technical and natural fields of study would be more prone to using e-learning was refuted. Most of the participants believe that e-learning leaves a positive effect on the quality of education. Greater number of participants also expressed that they would be motivated to further educate themselves on e-learning. The data also suggests that being informed by the faculty is a moderately influencing factor in e-learning usage. Other data shows that there is correlation between the faculty's policy on e-learning and teachers' e-learning activity in the sense that faculty policy seems to encourage teachers to use e-learning.

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