

Interim results of the survey about how Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) are used in seniors' education in Europe. Conducted 2006/2007 by the project eLiLL- eLearning in Later Life of the eLearning Program of the Directorate General for Education and Culture of the European Commission.



<p style="text-align: center;">Zentrum für Allgemeine Wissenschaftliche Weiterbildung (ZAWiW), Ulm University 2006</p>

Introduction

ZAWiW of Ulm University, Germany, had sent the questionnaire to the mailing lists of the

- Association of the Universities of the Third Age in Germany, BAG WiWA, with membership of 59 universities of the third age
- Network Learning in Later Life with around 100 addresses of heads of institutions and other professionals from the area of seniors education in Europe
- Participants from ZAWiW's conferences on the subject of seniors' education that included educationalists and experts in seniors' education from Europe and overseas
- Participants of Grundtvig courses on the management of virtual courses organised by ZAWiW.

A message with an invitation to participate in the survey and providing the link to the questionnaire on the project homepage <http://www.aiuta.asso.fr/> was made personally by Stanley Miller, the President of the International Association of Universities of the Third Age, IAUTA, and in Italy, the Istituto Rezarra had forwarded the questionnaire to the association of the U3As FEDERUNI.

A mailing to the Universities of the Third Age was also made at the end of the year in Poland by a cooperating institution, the U3A at University of Lodz. More answers are expected, which will be included in the final results.

A mailing with an invitation to participate in the survey will be made to the Third Age Trust, the head office of the Universities of the Third Age in Great Britain at the beginning of 2007.

Up to now, 27 replies were received, of these 11 from Germany, 7 from Italy, 4 from Poland, 1 from Russia, 1 from UK, and 1 from Malta, 1 from Austria and 1 from Canada. Answers are still arriving.

Due to the small number of answers from each country, there was no evaluation per country made, national specifics are only noted when they appear to be of special significance.

Organisational data

1. 23 of the replies arrived from the U3As and 1 from a research institute and 3 from universities offering courses in general adult education. These organisations were exempted from questions 7,8, and 9 as the numbers given include young university students.

Only one of the replying institutions does not have Internet presence.

2. The persons replying were mainly the heads of the institution, 4 were researchers or administrators.

3. 17 of the organisations were situated in towns with 50.000-500.000 inhabitants, 7 in large cities over 500.000 inhabitants and 3 in towns with 10.000-50.000 inhabitants. No answering organisation was based in a rural area or a village.

Analysis of the answers

Note. In questions 13,14,15,22,26,27,28,29 with a scale from 1 less important to 5 very important, the answers were divided into 3 sections. 1+ 2 → unimportant, 3 → of middle importance, 4+5 → important.

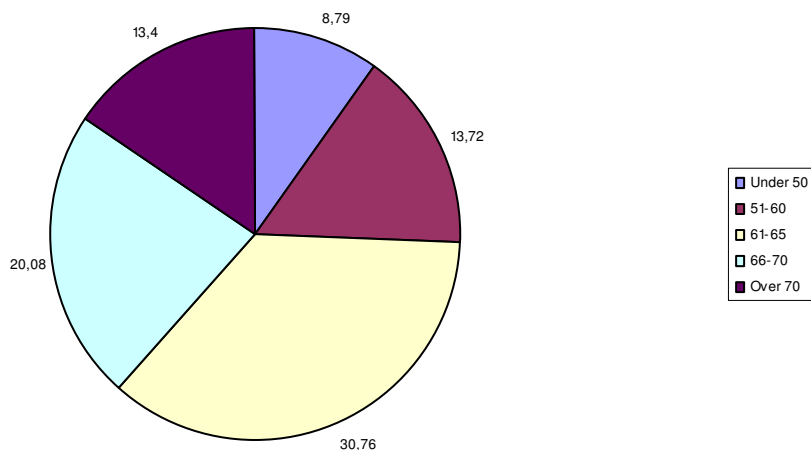
Target learner groups and participation

4. 22 of the answering organisations do not have any requirements concerning qualifications or level of education of the participants, 3 require secondary education, 4 higher education.

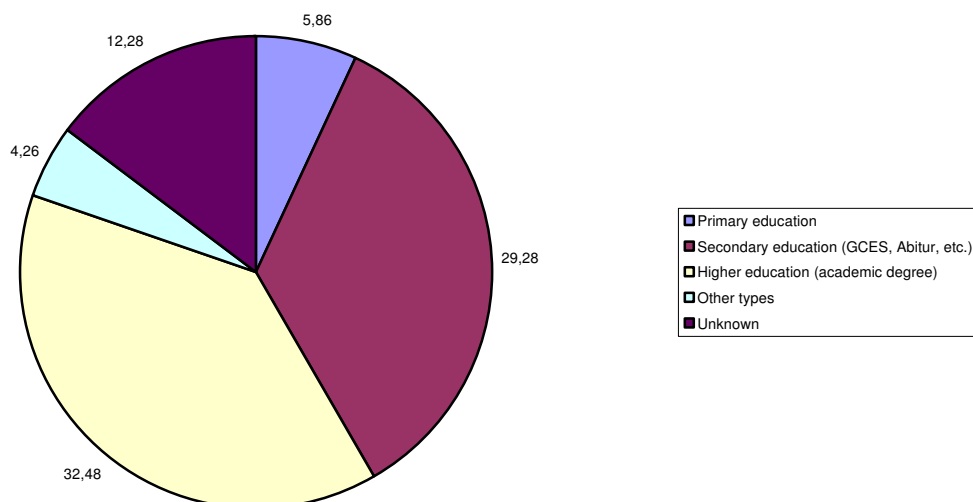
5. 8 answered YES to age requirements for admission, 19 answered NO.

6. The number of active participants in the education events varies greatly, spanning from 50 to 9000. While the providers specialising in seniors' education have from 50 to 3500 students, two organisations with membership of 6200 and 9000 include in this number also regular students taking part in vocational and other qualifying courses at the institution. Association of Universities of the Third Age in Italy- UPTER has 30.000 active participants.

7. In terms of the age of the participants in the educational programs, the largest groups fits the categories 61-65 (31%) and 66-70 (20%). The third largest group is 51-60 (14%). The age group over 70 years of age was represented with 13% and under 50 with 9%.



8. The education level of the participants was the highest at the academic level (32,48%), followed by secondary education (29%). Participants with lower than secondary education were rare (6%) but also present.



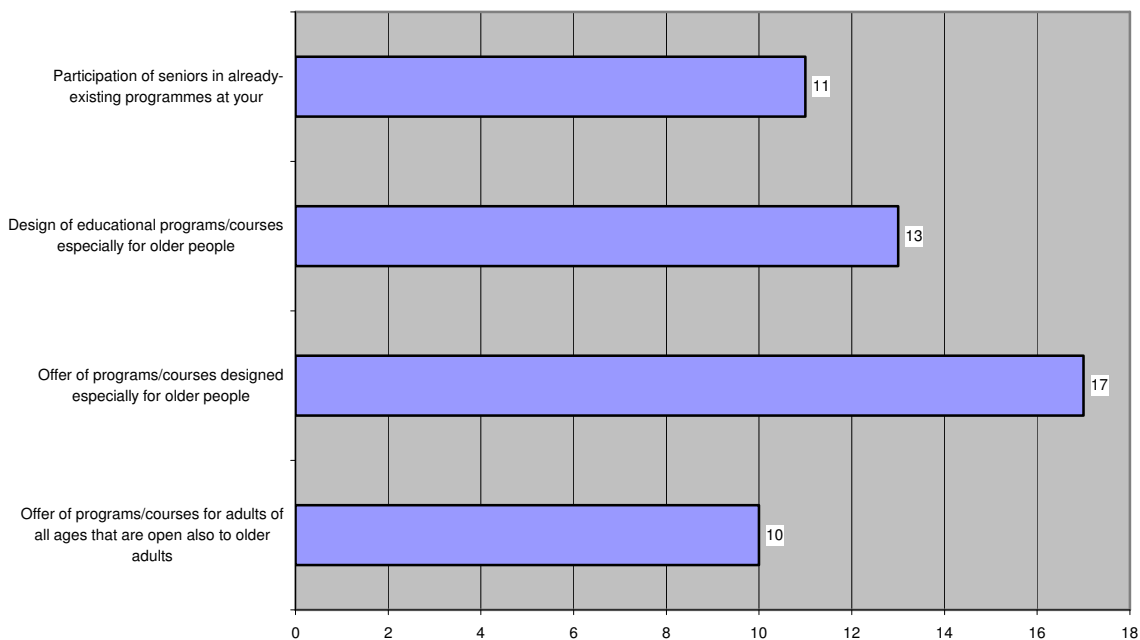
9. The percentage of women participating in the education events was with 60% much higher than that of men. In the 4 Polish U3As, the percentage of women was with average of 86% even higher than in the other countries.

Education programs: contents and forms

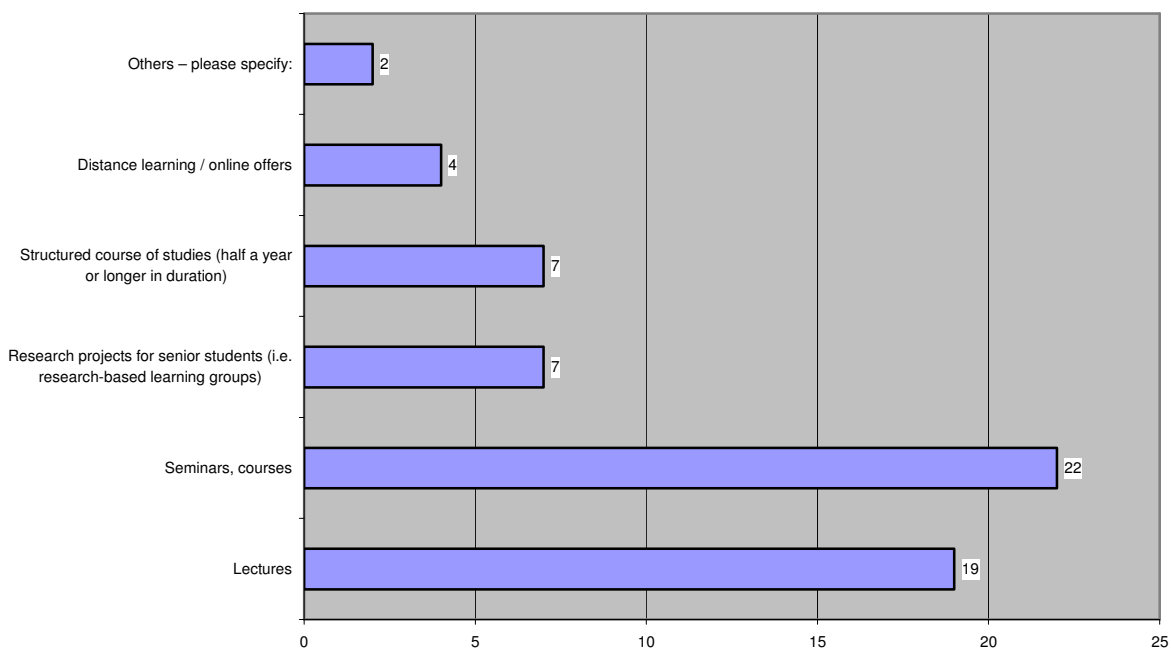
10. The majority of the answering organisations offer education programs designed especially for older people (17) and/or develop educational programs for older people (13).

Education programs offered for adults of all ages but open to older adults and participation in already existing programs of the institution such as guest study or lectures for younger students were also represented (10 and 11). Participation in

already existing programs of the institution such as guest study or lectures for younger students was most common in Germany and not selected by any of the 7 Italian organisations.

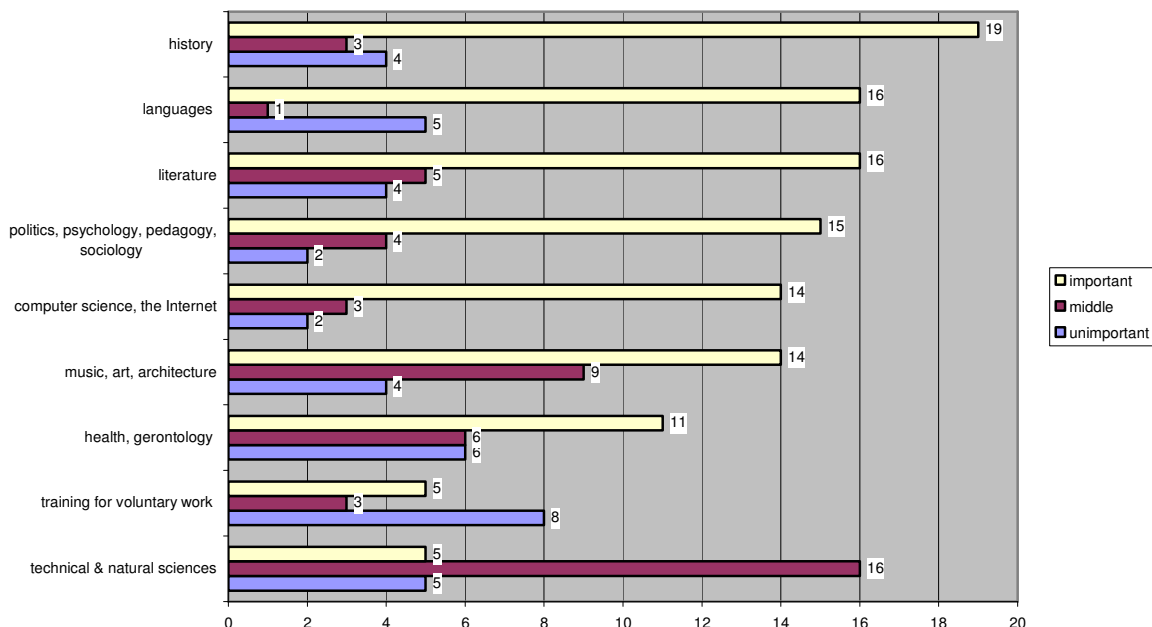


11. Seminars, courses (22) and lectures (19) are the leading forms of educational programs for seniors. Research-based learning groups (7) are offered by the majority of the German organisations but by none in Poland and Italy. Structured courses of studies with a duration of half-year or longer are offered by 7 organisations. Distance learning is offered only by 4 organisations.

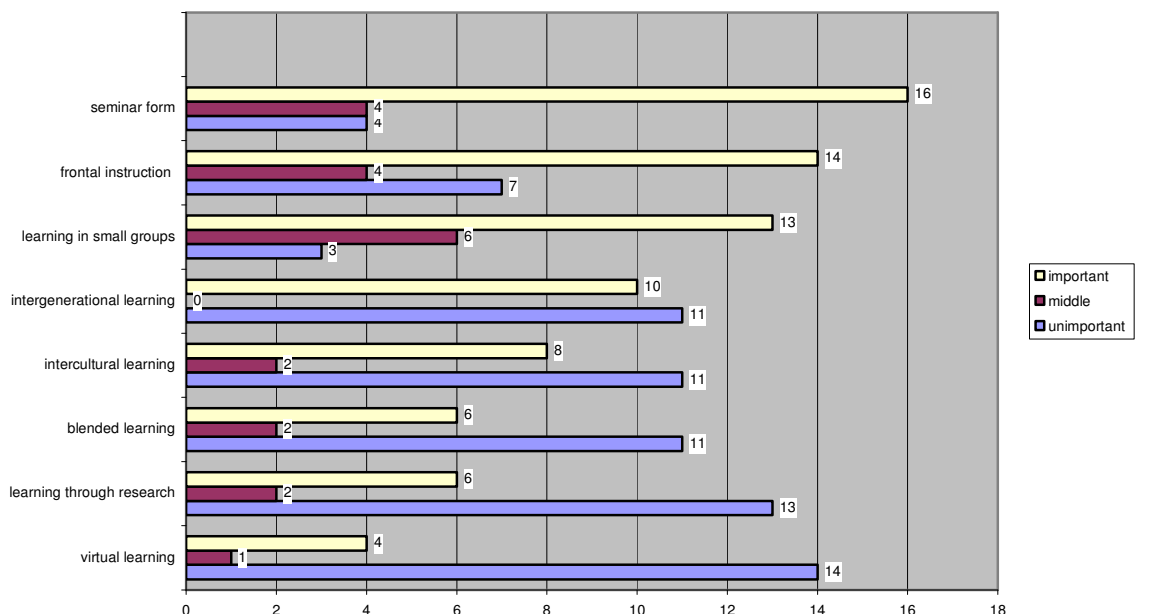


12. 17 of the answering institutions evaluate the courses offered, with self-evaluation (15) being the most widely used form of evaluation. External evaluation was done only by one organisation.

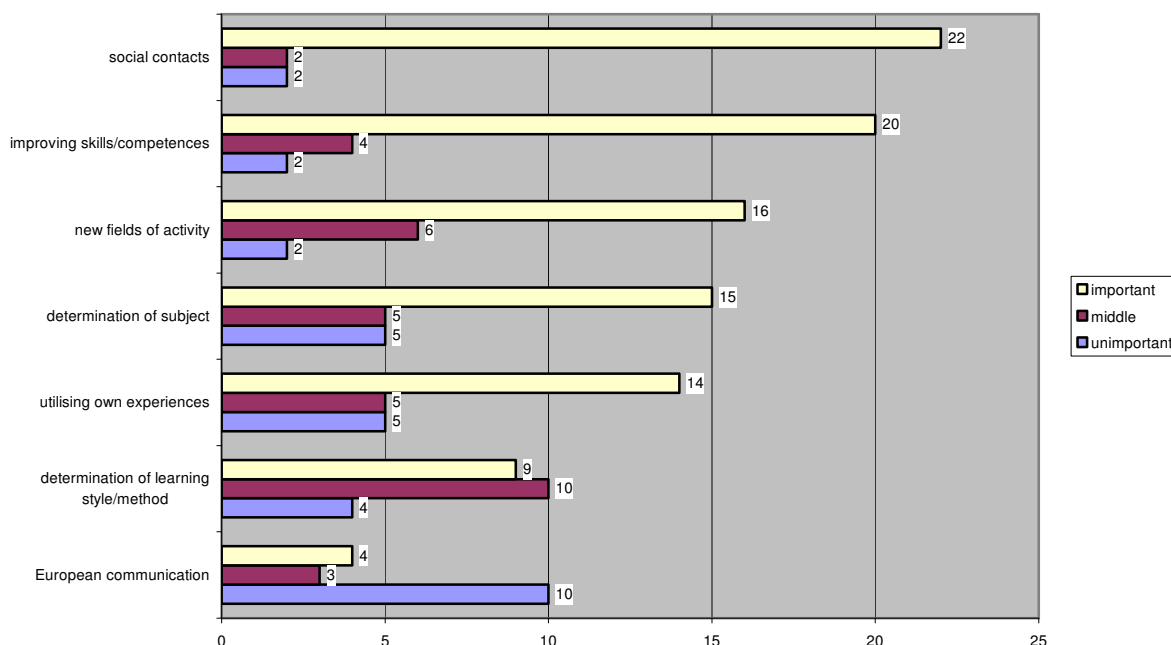
13. The subject focus is strongly in the area of humanities, with history, literature, languages leading, followed by politics, psychology, pedagogy and sociology. Computer science, music, art and architecture and health & gerontology play also an important role. Technical sciences and natural sciences came last, being considered only of middle importance by 16 of the answering. Training for voluntary work played the least important role amongst the subjects in Germany.



14. In the area of pedagogical principles, seminar form is the leading form of teaching, followed by frontal instruction and learning in small groups. Intergenerational learning and intercultural learning follow. Blended learning was selected as important pedagogical principle by 6 answering and 11 have held it for unimportant. Also learning through research is held by many (13) for unimportant. In all the listed pedagogical principles, virtual learning plays the least important role for the answering institutions with only 4 holding it for important and 14 for unimportant.



15. The answering organisations consider the most important experiences for the seniors to be social contacts and improvement of skills and competences. Opening of new fields of activity, the possibility to co-determine the subject and to use own experience/competences play also important role. The possibility of co-determination in the choice of the learning style/method came before European communication which was the last, with the highest score in the section “unimportant”.



16. Self-directed learning was considered to be beneficial for seniors by 19 of those answering and to be without benefits by 4.

The reasons for YES: Lifestyling, can participate; Life experiences are optimally utilised; Learning contents and learning times can be self-determined; They participate in first person; Comprehension of social problems; Needs a long development; Widening of the intellectual niveau and general integration; It depends on how much experiences they already have; Improvement of abilities and competences; Can open new activities; This kind of learning is especially beneficial for seniors, because they are directly and actively involved in the learning process; It stimulates.

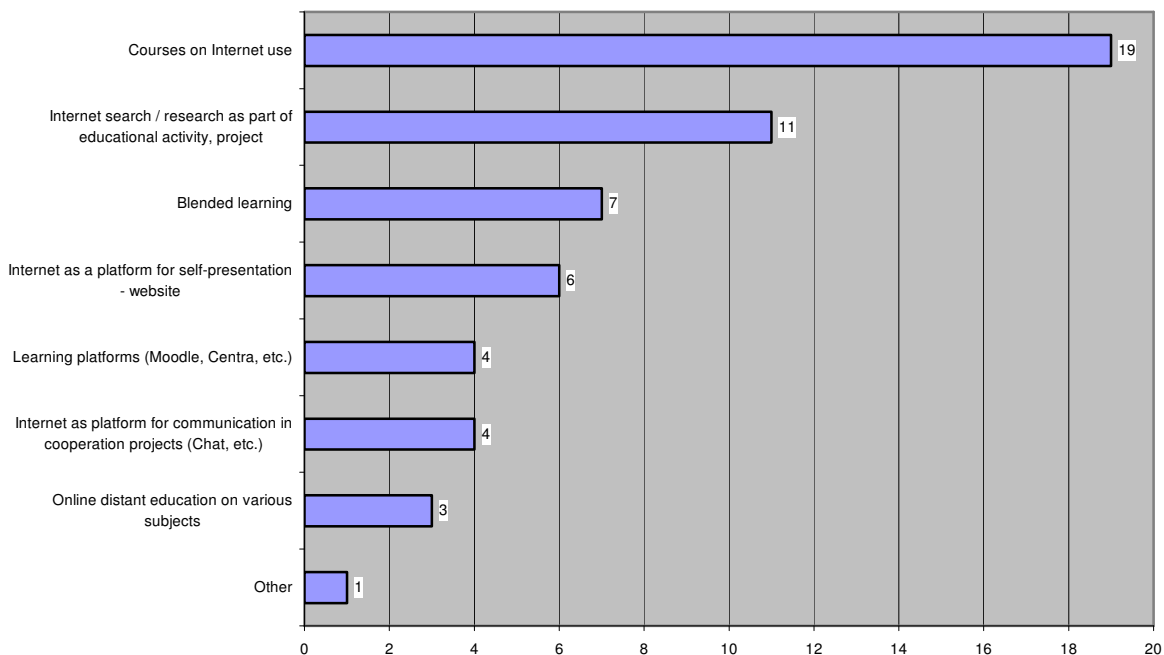
The reasons for NO: Requires a cultural homogeneity that the old ones do not have; Difficult to motivate themselves.

The ICT and especially the Internet in seniors' education

17. 20 of the answering organisations use the Internet in seniors' education, 5 do not. 2 did not answer.

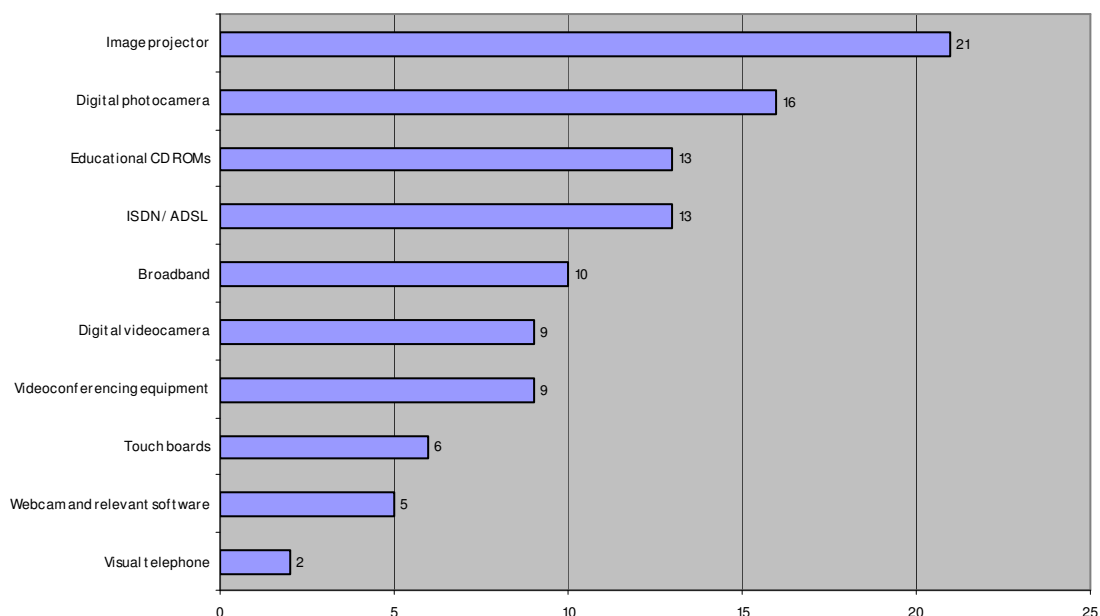
The areas of use were mainly courses on Internet use (19), Internet search / research as part of an educational activity (11) , blended learning is applied in 7 organisations, Internet used as a platform for self-presentation and the presentation

of the work results in 6. Internet as a platform for communication (chat, etc.) in 4 and the same number for learning platforms (Moodle, etc.). Online distant education was selected by 3.

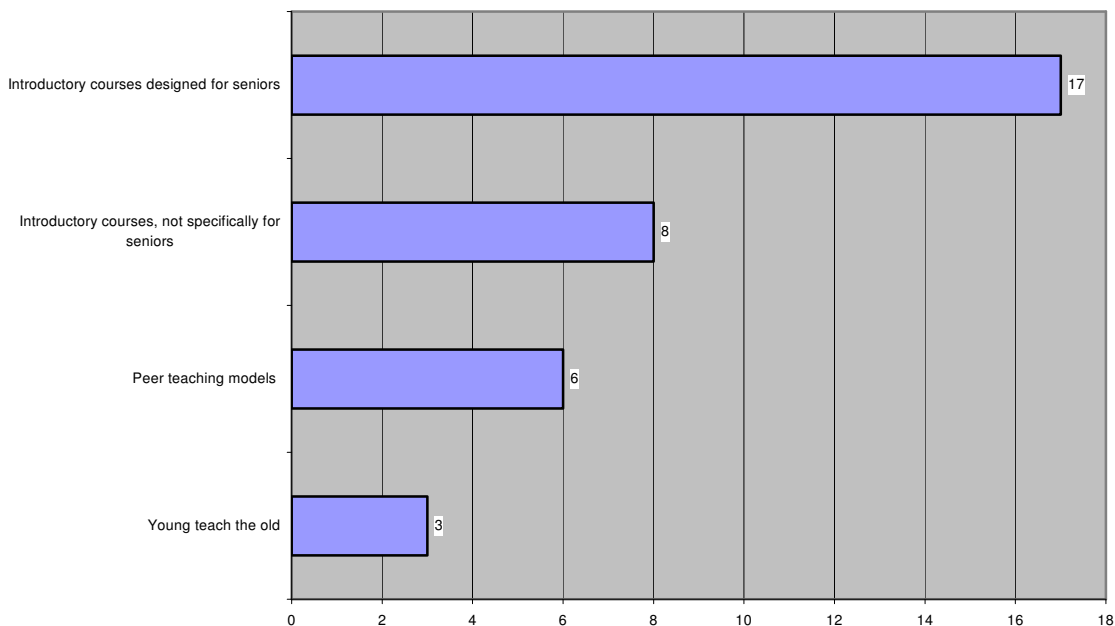


18. The PC facilities available were mainly a limited number of PCs for use in the courses (12). 9 have the possibility to use PC-pools of younger students enrolled in the institutions and 8 have PC pools established especially for senior learners.

19. Image projector and digital photo camera are the most frequently available technical equipment. 16 organisations use educational CD-ROMs. 16 have ISDN and and/or broadband connection. Videoconferencing is available to 9. Webcam, touchboards and visual telephone are not commonly used.

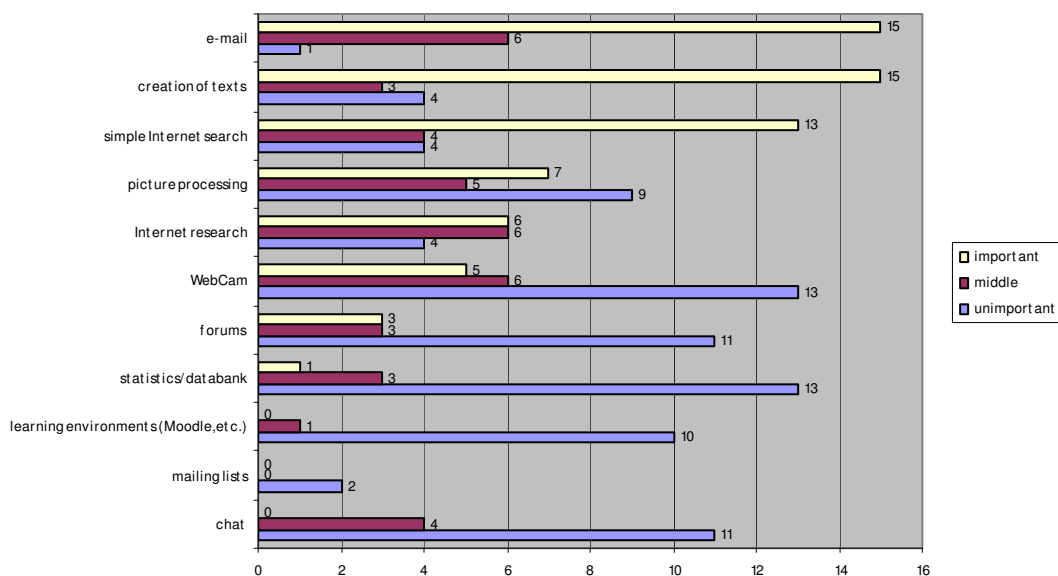


20. Introductory courses with didactic approaches designed for seniors are the most frequent form used to familiarise seniors with the Internet, however, some organisations offer introductory courses not specifically for seniors. Peer teaching (old-teach-old) models were selected only by 6 German organisations. Intergenerational models (young teach the old) by 3 in different countries.

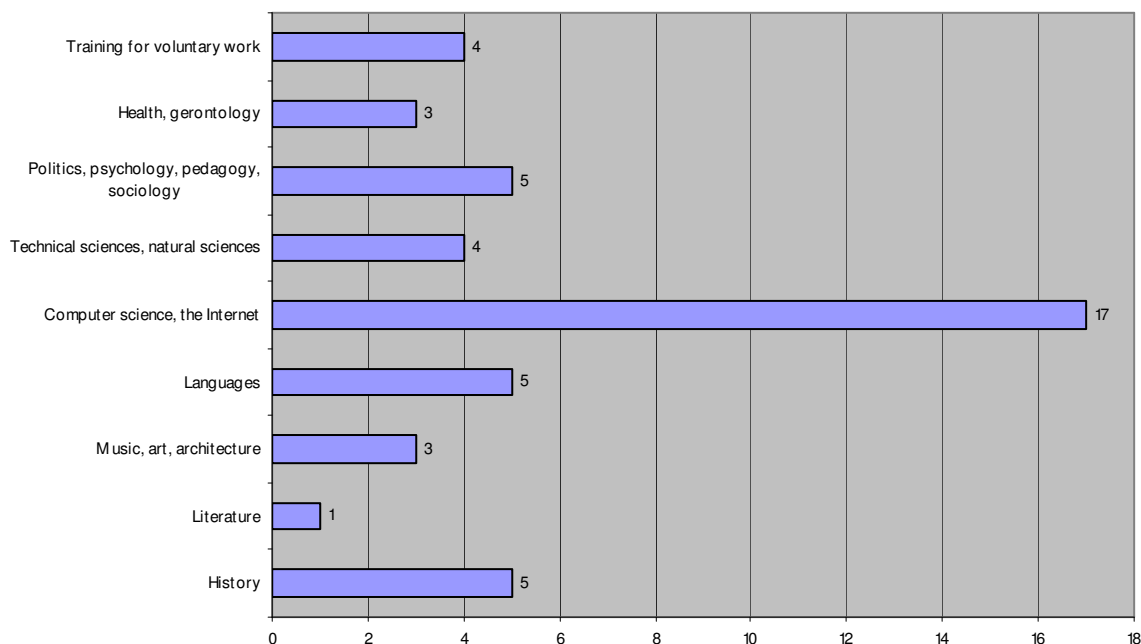


21. 11 organisations use support materials, especially brochures, not designed especially for seniors. 7 organisations use support materials developed especially for seniors, brochures followed by CDs. 7 provide self-help infrastructure to deal with problems. 1 organisation provides hotline service for help.

22. The senior students use the new communication and information technologies especially for email communication, followed by the creation of texts, simple Internet search and picture processing. Internet research is also represented. The communication tools such as WebCam, forums, chat, mailing lists are not popular or used much in the learning activities. Also learning environments and also statistical data processing do not seem to play any role.

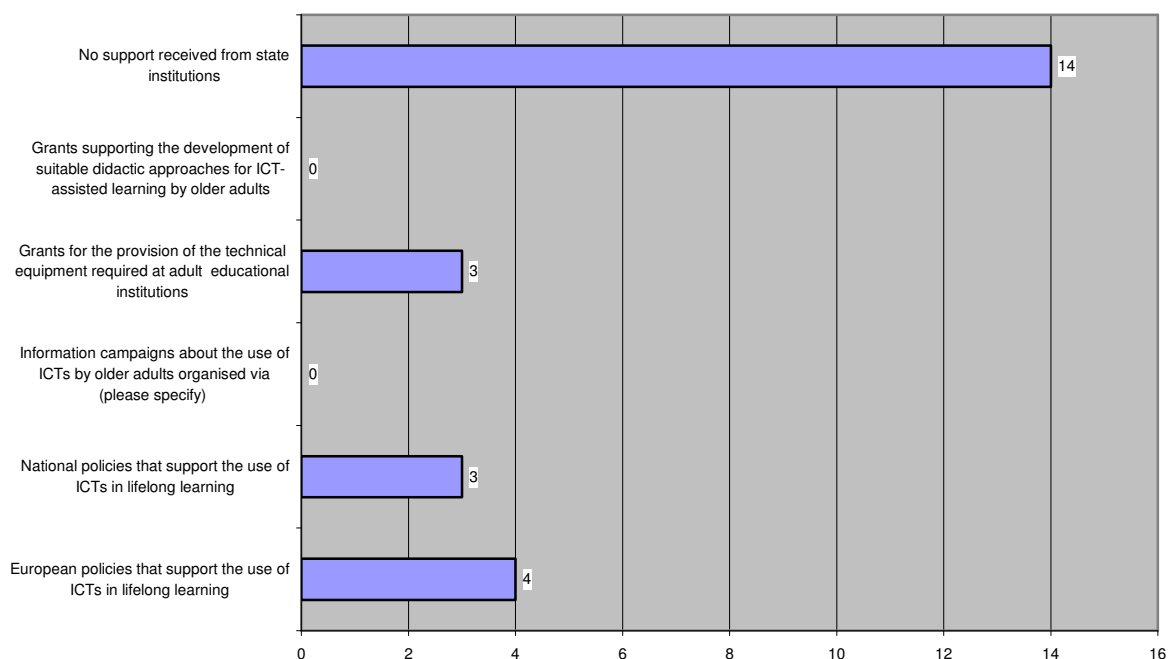


23. In teaching, the Internet is mainly used in computer science and in teaching Internet use. Other subjects selected by a small number of answering organisations were history, languages, politics, psychology, pedagogy, sociology. 7 of the answering organisations use the Internet in teaching 2 or more subjects, 9 of the answering organisations limit their offers to computing and the use of the Internet.

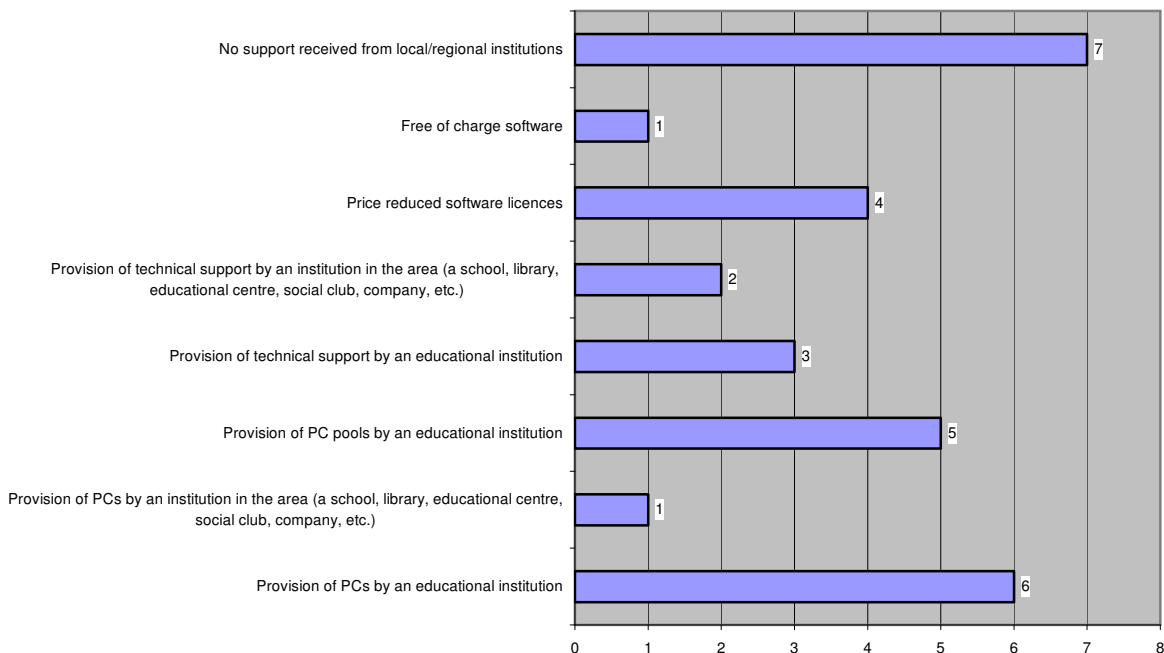


Effectiveness/sustainability of educational activities in seniors' education with the use of the ICTs

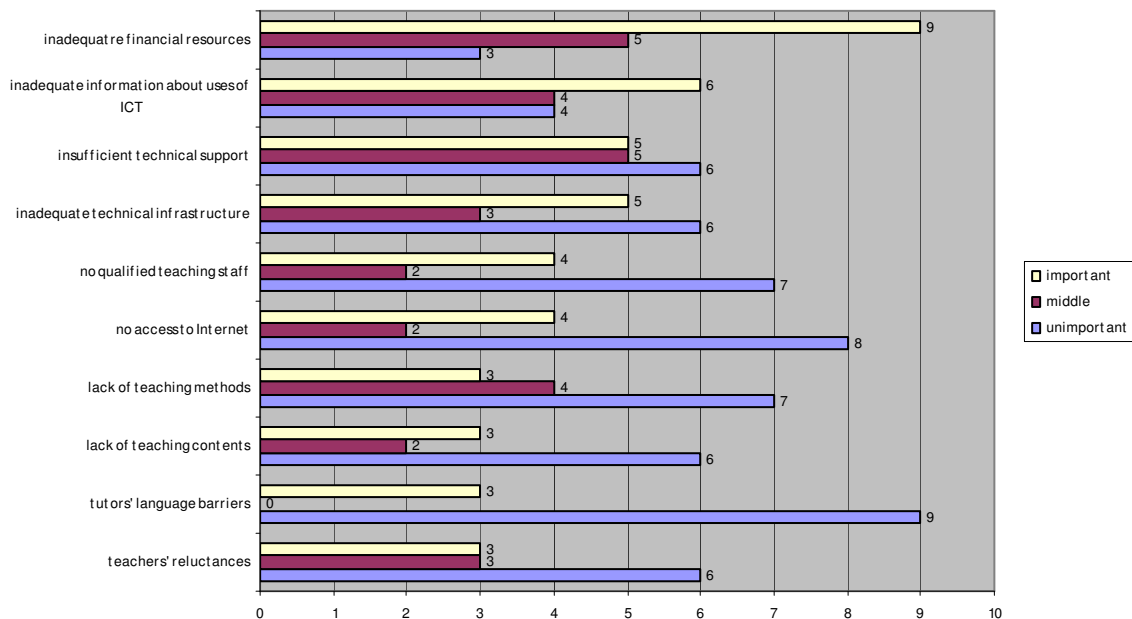
24. 14 of the participating organisations do not receive any support from state organisations, 3 get grants for the provision of the technical equipment, 4 state that they are supported by European policies that support the ICT in lifelong learning and 3 by national policies that support the ICT in lifelong learning. None mention the support through information campaigns or grants supporting the development of suitable didactic approaches for ICT-assisted learning by older adults.



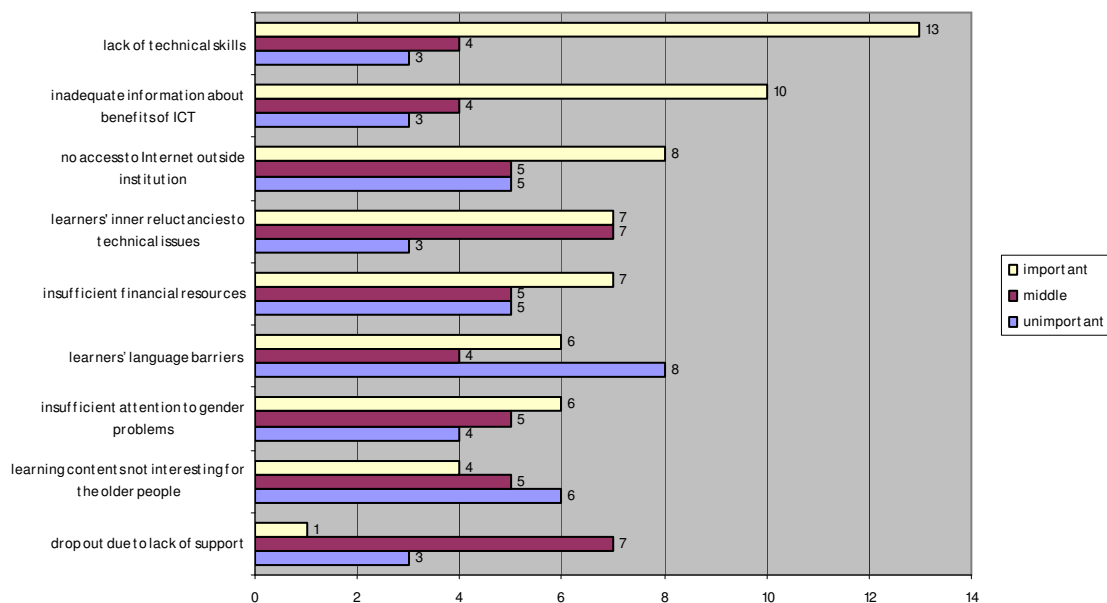
25. 7 organisations do not receive any support from local/regional institution. 6 receive help through the provision of PCs by an educational institution, 5 through provision of a PC pool by an educational organisation, 4 through price-reduced software licences, 3 through provision of technical support by an educational institution. Provision of PCs by an institution in the area (library, a school, educational centre, social club, company) is selected by 1 and free of charge software by 1. Technical support from an institution in the area (library, a school, educational centre, social club, company) is selected by 2.



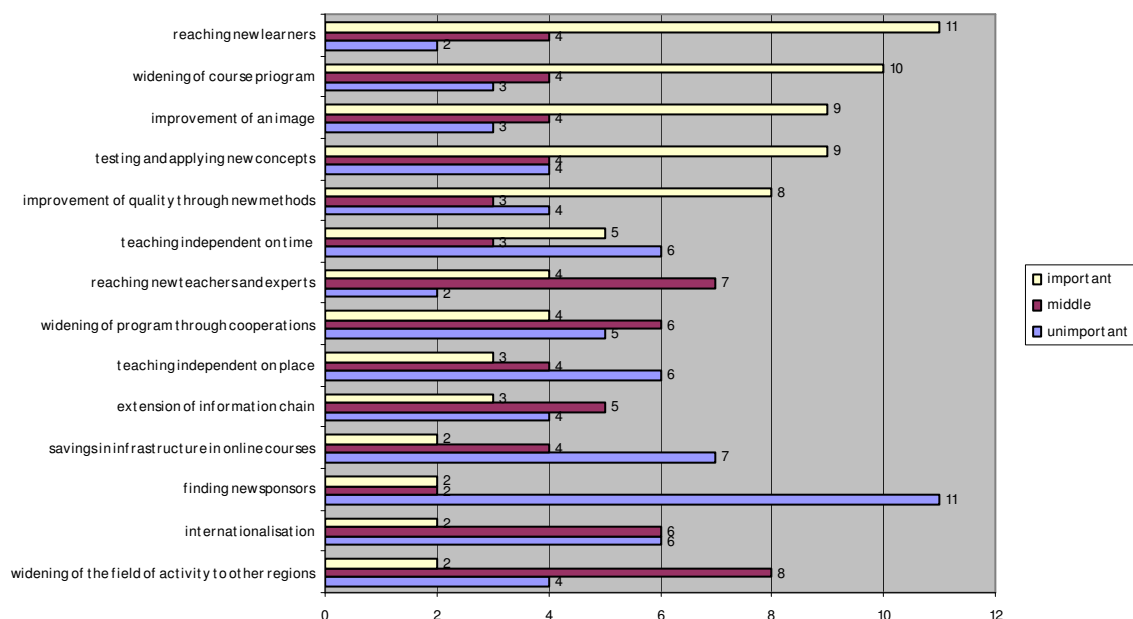
26. The main problems with using the ICT in the educational programs of the institution were selected to be inadequate financial resources and inadequate information about the uses of the ICT. Insufficient technical support and inadequate technical infrastructure play also important role. Shortage of qualified teaching staff and access to the Internet was also an issue. The non-availability of appropriate teaching contents, teaching methods, moderators'/tutors' language barriers, teachers' inner reluctances are also present, but do not seem to play important part.



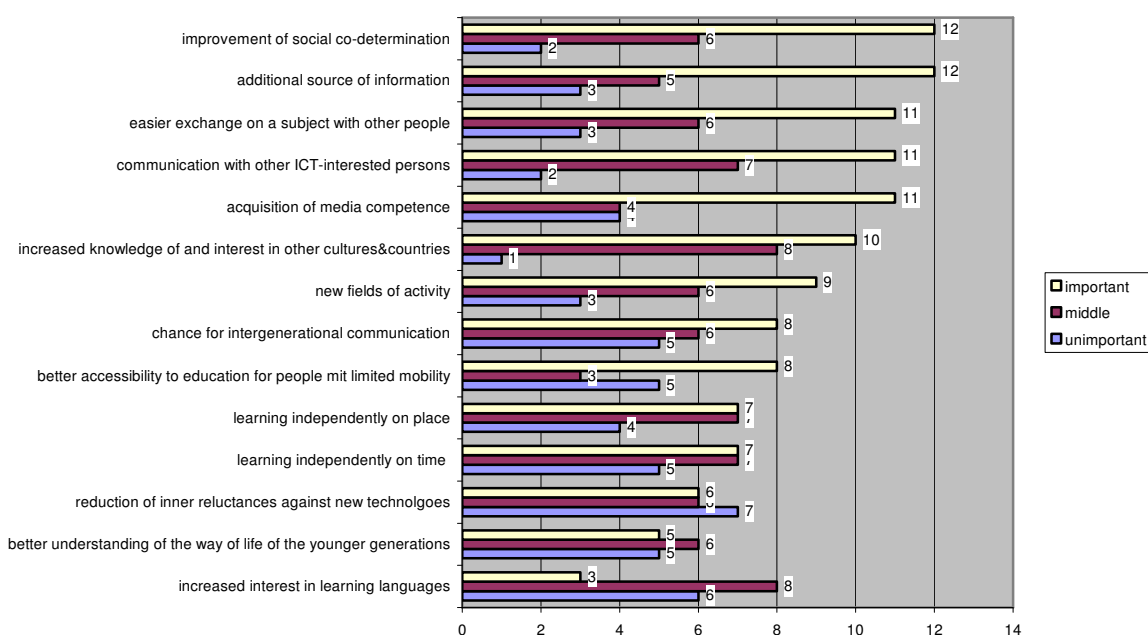
27. Problems with ICT-supported learning activities for the older learners are seen to be in order of importance: the lack of technical skills, inadequate information about the benefits of the ICT, no access to the Internet outside of the institution and learners' inner reluctances to technical issues. This is followed by insufficient financial resources on behalf of the learner and learners' language barriers. Of importance was also insufficient attention to gender differences in learning technical skills and learning contents not being interesting for older people. Inadequate supervision or support does not seem to play a part.



28. The main benefits of using the ICT in the programs of the institution were seen to be reaching new learners, widening of the educational offers of the institution, improvement of an image, testing and applying new concepts, improvement of the quality of the offered programs through applying new methods, teaching independent on time and reaching new teachers and experts. This was followed by benefits through co-operations with other institutions, teaching independent on place, extension of the information chain, extending the field of activity to other regions, internationalisation. Financial savings on infrastructure through online offers and finding new sponsors were thought to be the least important.



29. The benefits of ICT supported activities for the older learner were seen to be mainly the improvement of social co-determination, additional source of information, easier exchange with other people interested in the subject and communication with other ICT interested persons, acquisition of media competence, increased knowledge of and interest in other cultures and countries and opening of new fields of activity. Intergenerational communication and better accessibility for people with limited mobility followed. Reduction of inner reluctances against the new technologies, improved understanding of the way of life of the younger generations and increased interest in languages are the last on the scale of importance.



30. 13 of the replying organisations have proposed good practice activities.

Summary

Twenty of the 27 answering organisations use ICT in seniors education, all except 1 have a website and contact per email, the most have access to the Internet and PCs. The largest learner target group is 61 to 70 years of age and is well educated. The share of women in the educational programs is significantly higher.

The majority of the answering organisations offer education programs designed especially for older people or develop such programs themselves. Traditional forms of education such as lectures, seminars and short courses are the common education type with seminar form and frontal instruction as the dominant pedagogical principles. However, also self-determined learning was considered by the most answering organisations as beneficial to seniors and learning through research is considered to be important, if not dominant, pedagogical principle especially in German institutions. Virtual learning plays a very small role in the organisations participating in the survey with distant online learning offered only by 4 organisations. Blended learning is offered by 7.

Social contacts, improvement of skills and competences and new fields of activity were seen as being the most important experiences for seniors, followed by possibilities of co-determining the choice of the learning subjects and utilisation of experiences/competences. Communication on a European level was seen as being important only by 1 answering.

The subject focus is mainly in the area of humanities with history, literature, languages being strong leaders. However, also computer sciences and the Internet play a significant part in the subject choice.

The focus of use of the ICT in senior's education is on courses in computer science and on the subject of Internet and Internet search as a part of the education activity. The use of the Internet as a tool for communication (chat, etc.) in distance education and distant education itself is limited to only a few organisations. Also the use of learning platforms is not common.

The use of the new technologies by seniors concentrates on the following activities: use of email, creation of texts, Internet search and Internet based research, picture processing. WebCam with Netmeeting or similar, and communication tools such as forums, chat, mailing lists seem to play insignificant part. Also use of learning environments is uncommon.

A large number (17) of the organisation have introductory courses for the use of the Internet designed specifically for seniors, several (8) offer introductory courses that are not specifically for seniors. Only 6 of the organisations, all of these in Germany, use peer teaching models. 11 of the answering organisations use support materials (brochures, etc.) which are not necessarily for seniors, 7 use especially developed materials. 7 provide infrastructure for self-help.

Only 7 of the answering organisations use the Internet in teaching 2 or more subjects other than computer sciences or Internet applications.

As the major obstacle to using the ICT for the providers of seniors' education were named: the lack of financial resources, inadequate information about the uses of the ICT and inadequate technical support and technical infrastructure. 14 of the answering organisations do not receive any support from the state. The support from local/regional institutions seems to take place through the provision of PC pools by an educational institution, software licences, technical support. This form of support is however limited to only few of the answering organisations.

The major barriers for ICT-supported learning activities for the older learner are in order of importance: the lack of technical skills, inadequate information about the benefits of the ICT and no access to the Internet outside of the institution. Also important seem to be learners' inner reluctances to technical issues, insufficient financial resources on behalf of the learners, language barriers, insufficient attention to gender differences in learning technical skills and learning contents that are not interesting for older learners.

The main benefits of using the ICT in the programs of the institution were those with effect directly in the institutions such as reaching new learners, widening of the educational offers of the institution, improvement of an image, testing and applying new concepts and improvement of the quality of the offered programs through applying new methods. The benefits of the ICT for cooperation outside of the institution were recognised, but play a secondary role.

The benefits of ICT supported activities for the older learner, concentrate mainly on improved social integration, additional source of information, communication with people of same interest, acquisition of media competence, increased knowledge and interest in other countries and cultures, new fields of activity. The accessibility of educational programs to people with limited mobility and chance for improved inter-generational communication and understanding are also important, but play a secondary role.

Conclusion

The majority of the answering organisations utilise the new media and especially the Internet in the programs of the institution. Traditional forms of teaching are dominant in many of the institutions, but also self-determined forms of education are applied in some, often parallel to the more traditional forms. Many of the benefits of the use of the new media for seniors as well as for the organisations are well recognised. The focus of the courses that utilise the Internet is predominantly technical, concentrating on computing and the introduction to the basic uses of the Internet. Noted in this connection should be that the majority of the organisations use in their teaching support materials not developed especially for seniors and that peer teaching models are only rare in the courses familiarising the seniors with the Internet.

In spite of the strong tendency to subjects from the area of humanities, only a few of the organisations use the new media in teaching these subjects. Blended learning, which includes also social face-to-face socialising aspects important to seniors, is offered only by 7 of the organisations and virtual learning only by 4. Besides email, the communicative possibilities of the new media are not widely used. Aspects of uses of the ICT such as increased accessibility of education for people with limited mobility, the integrative role of intergenerational communication and the cooperative possibilities beyond the walls of the organisations seem to play only a marginal role. The main barriers for the institutions seem to be limited financial funds, insufficient information about the benefits of the ICT and inadequate technical infrastructure and support, and for learners the lack of technical skills, inadequate information about the benefits of the ICT, no access to the Internet outside of the institution and the learners' inner reluctances to technical issues.

To improve the situation, the following actions should be taken:

- ▶ *Information actions directed at the general public, the heads of educational organisations and older learners themselves, about the various possibilities of the use of the Internet in education and its benefits for increase of knowledge, mobility, cooperation, intergenerational communication and social integration*
- ▶ *Development of training courses for the educationalists and facilitators to provide know-how about the needs and requirements of the target learner group and the development of appropriate teaching methods, such as peer teaching models*
- ▶ *Development of teaching and support materials especially for seniors*
- ▶ *Development of models for cooperation with local and regional institutions (schools, libraries, educational centres, companies, etc.) to improve access to the Internet*
- ▶ *Development of self-help models for support structures (peer groups, young-teach-the-old)*
- ▶ *Dissemination of model practice examples*