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Nowadays Information Technologies Within Adult Education

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Abstract

Research work in the necessity of further education and different technologies of its implementation is being carried out at the Latvia University of Agriculture. An enquiry was realized among practical teachers and part – time students of engineering and economics. The analysis of the research results shows that further education programs are necessary. Different technologies of education including part – time studies and e – studies are requisite. The possibilities for the potential students to use information technologies in the process of studies are very different. Nevertheless, the common tendency of educational demands is towards more extensive application of computer technologies. It states new requirements for the teachers, trainers and lecturers in preparation of the teaching aids considering the specificity of adult learning and the necessity to develop adequate technology.

Key words*: adult education, further education, long-life education.*

Resumen

Investigación de la necesidad de educación de adultos y permanente, y aplicación de diferentes tecnologías educativas se hicieron entre los grupos de profesores y estudiantes de ingeniería y economía. Este análisis muestra la necesidad de estos programas y también la aplicación de diferentes tecnologías educativas, incluido a través de Internet. Existen diferentes posibilidades de utilización de tecnología educativa para estudiantes potenciales, pero la tendencia común es para utilización más amplia de tecnologías computarizadas. Esto hace necesario, la implementación de nuevos estándares para los docentes y profesores en preparación de ayudas educativas especialmente para enseñanza de los adultos y necesidad de aplicación de tecnología adecuada.

Palabras Clave : Educación de adultos, educación permanente,

INTRODUCTION

Long- life education, continuous education, further education – these are terms characterizing the ways of independent learning after reaching a definite level of education determined by the legislation – elementary, secondary or higher education if the official nomination is followed by a professional career. Educational priority is acknowledged for ensurance of vital capacity of minorities, especially in geopolotically active regions. In the present socioeconomic situation of Latvia quality of education should not be underestimated.

Reorganization of economy, low economic security level and high level of unemployment 7,7 % (1) requires possibilities for re - qualification and improvement of qualification and in- service training as well as education possibilities according to the interests. The greatest number of unemployed is still among representatives of ordinary professions who are doing unqualified work in agriculture, forestry, production etc. – 24.5 thousand people or 26.7 % of the total number of unemployed. In turn, in the groups of higher qualification – among managers of different level – the number of unemployed is 2.6 thousand people comprising 2.8 % of the total number of unemployed (*Central Statistics Board*, 2002).

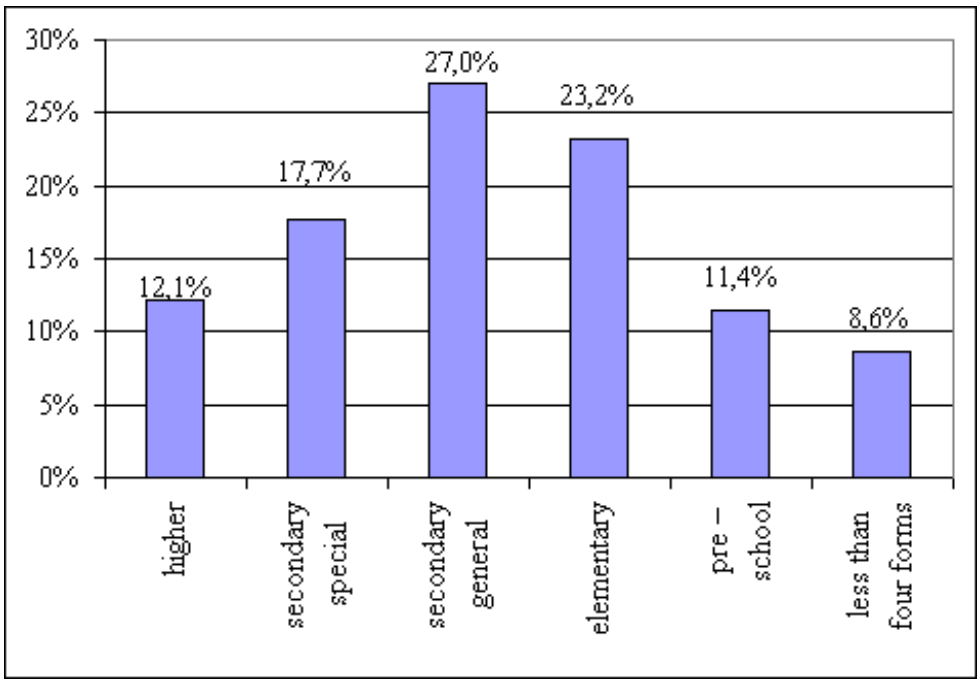
The mentioned aspects of demand for education are related to adult education. In this kind of education continuation and supplementation of education can be carried out in different forms of organization with the pace that is most suitable and the aim most appropriate to the definite situation – to deepen the contents and profoundness of the officially confirmed education. Programs covering a narrow specialized field of an educational level become more and more popular in Latvia. This is a way to re – qualify and acquire a new, usually related, qualification or to improve the existing one. Such programs open enormous possibilities for education related to interests.

For implementation of further education programs for adults the following forms can be organizationally used: seminars, symposiums; courses, lectures; part – time study forms including distant learning and external learning.

The recent statistics show that the demand for education is growing in Latvia. It means that residents of Latvia are motivated for education and it is necessary to ensure the offer in most different educational programs and possibilities of their implementation according to this demand. In the poll information on the level of education of the residents is obtained and summarized. This question was asked to persons starting from the age of seven. See Table 1.

Table 1.

Education level of residents (%) (*Central Statistics Board*,2000).



If we compare the proportion of persons having higher education in cities and regions of Latvia the statistics show that in cities it is higher than average in Latvia but in regions it is lower (*Central Statistics Board,* 2000).

Another problem arises in this sphere due to the high level of unemployment in Latvia and the fact that the qualification people have has become unadequate during the course of time. This is the reason for the necessity of re – qualification and in-service training of adults. Also the amendments of legislation in requirements for conformity of the qualification of the workers and the working environment that occur very often determine the necessity to ensure the possibilities of supplementation of the professional education. We can mention the following examples: - normatives of qualification that allow to do the work or occupy the position; introduction of the clerk institution in Latvia; determination of the level necessary for the teachers etc.

In Latvia the average gross salaries excluding all kinds of irregular payments in 2001 were Ls162, for the employees in budget organizations Ls 158, for those working in education Ls 153 although the minimum living wage, consumer goods and service value in October 2001 was Ls 88.02 (*Central Statistics Board,* 2002).

). In such socioeconomic environment the employees have limited financial possibilities causing problems not only for regular traveling, (the educational establishment – place of living) but also for permanent (several days or a week) participation at full –time sessions at the educational establishments. Due to this reason distant or correspondence technologies are so promising in education. It is necessary to clarify what situation is in the educational technologies market.

Elements of separate stage distant learning technologies using traditional printed written learning – testing materials are repeatedly verified and improved. Therefore, today there is a special interest in application of electronic information possibilities in distant learning.

A question arises – are the ones who order and supply the information for studies ready for that? Is there sufficient technical and methodical provision?

METHODS

As the investigations in usage of computers and Internet published in the Internet portal “Delfi” show there are a little bit more than 20 % of people in Latvia who use a computer at least once a week, about 30 % are using it in the recent half of year. 29 % of active Internet users have higher education, 49 % - secondary education and 22 % have elementary education. According to the age structure most Internet users are in the age from 15 to 40 years. This investigation proves that students are active Internet users. It is also logically determined by the didactic requirements of higher educational establishments that should be oriented to modern informative technologies. Speaking about the possibilities of distant or correspondence learning part – time studies have got the priority. In order to get information on the situation at the Latvia University of Agriculture an investigation was carried out in December 2001 among students of engineering, economics and home economics specialties in provision with computers and readiness to work with them (77 respondents). There are comprehensive educational block of exact sciences, basis of what are mathematics and physics, in all of those study programs. Not infrequently there are some problems within basic studies of exact science. In this respect new methodologies and new technologies of education is urgent in this sphere. We have already some experience in Latvia University of Agriculture where electronically made study materials are available for the wide range students who express the interest to use the e- learning.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Analysing the data of the experiment that are summarized in Table 2 we stated that 25% of the students or their families own computers, 15 % of the students use computers that belong to their friends or acquaintances, 61 % of the students have computers available at their work places, for the third year students computers are available in their work places in 77 % of cases. Internet connection is available to 66% of the students (for the third year students 91 %), besides 27 % with the fixed (DSL) connection (for the third year students 59 %). In service companies 8 % of the students buy the Internet usage time, they are mainly the first year students.

The strained economic situation causes financial problems – there is a constant lack of money and time – many people are working in several jobs and overtime. How do these factors influence application of computer technologies in studies?

The financial situation allows only for about a half of the students to use Internet connection only up to two hours per week. In the third year this limitation applies to a less number of students – about one third (27 %). About one fourth of the students (23%) have financially unlimited availability to use computers, in the third year – a half of the students (50 %). In turn, the tense time regime allows only for a little bit more than a half of the students (53%) to use the informative possibilities of computers up to seven hours per week, for one fifth, mainly the first year students, up to 14 hours per week.

Table 2.

Summary in % on personal provision of the part – time students of the Latvia University of Agriculture with computers and their readiness to work with them

	1st year	3rd year	Total

			average
PART I			
1. The most easily available computer is:			
my own	24	27	25
Owned by friends/acquaintances	15	-	10
in my work place	55	77	61
in a service company	9	5	8
2. Internet connection available	56	91	66
incl. fixed (home DSL)	15	59	27
PART II			
3. The financial situation allows for usage of the Internet connection			
up to two hours per week	62	27	52
unlimited	13	50	23
4. The tense time regime allows for usage of the computer informative possibilities			
up to seven hours per week	51	59	53
up to 14 hours per week	18	10	16
PART III			
5. For usage of computers (e – mail, Internet, chat etc.)			
I have no difficulties	16	18	17
basic skills	25	59	35
no necessary skills	20	14	18
6. Typing skills; can type			
with ten fingers	44	18	36
incl. without following the hands	4	4	4
two fingers	55	86	64

incl. fast	29	59	38

The summary does not include all columns and not all of the respondents have given an answer to every question, therefore the total sum is not always 100 %.(Dislere, 2002).

How well are students trained and what are their skills for usage of computer technologies? 35 % of the students are competent in usage of computers, incl. one fourth (25 %) of the first year and about two thirds (59 %) of the third year students. At the same time one fifth, mainly the first year students acknowledge that they do not have the basic computer skills and about the same number of the students have no technical problems in the work with computers. One third of the students can type with ten fingers, besides 6 % of them without following the hands. The remaining two thirds of the students use only two fingers, 29 % of the first year students and 59 % of the third year students say that they can type quickly. About 40 % of the students think that they are psychologically ready for the work with computers but 13 % of the students have psychological barrier for this work. It means that also the individual readiness of the students cannot hinder to use the materials for studies by means of electronic information.

The following distribution of the students according to the possibilities of technical and financial provision not only allows for but also demands for inclusion of computer technologies, including distant or correspondence learning, in the process of studies.

We can draw a conclusion that a real demand exists for electronic materials for studies and the students, at least part – time students of the Latvia University of Agriculture, are ready for active application of computer technologies including distant learning possibilities in studies.

It makes the search for appropriate didactic solutions topical and requires initiative of the teachers.

As 70 % of the students of the Latvia University of Agriculture come from the countryside, 18 % from cities and only 12 % from Riga where there one third of the whole population of Latvia live we can relate the mentioned conclusions to the general situation of the countryside of Latvia. A large part of economically active rural residents is sufficiently provided with and prepared for application of modern information technologies, including for studies, and the task of the teachers of the Latvia University of Agriculture is to ensure methodically the implementation of such possibilities.

CONCLUSIONS

1. In the conditions of fast changes of the economic and social situation in Latvia, what is typical eastern country; constant improvement of professional and educational qualification is necessary.

2. Research work in Latvia University of Agriculture shows that a large part of rural residents, what are part- time students and what are economically active part of society, are trained for application of modern information technologies not only for professional training but also for self- education and they are good motivated and technically (66%) and financially (53%) assured.

3. Investigation in Latvia University of Agriculture has justified the expanding educational work with e-learning within rural population of Latvia overtaking the average level of knowledge of using computers in our country. Authors permit that those conclusions relate to all Baltic countries with large reliability.

4. The teachers and lecturers of the Latvia University of Agriculture should be more active and should prepare materials for distant learning technologies to extend the availability of improving the qualification of adults in the countryside of Latvia.

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