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The most frequent difficulties encountered by senior citizens while using information and communication technology

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Abstract

Many senior citizens are keeping in touch with modern times and put modern technologies to good use. They attempt to adapt to this era and don't avoid computers or smart devices. Such senior citizens often also educate themselves further in ICT, but are not immune to troubles that come hand in hand with ICT, or even psychological issues that stem from learning new skills in high age. Many even reconsider, asking themselves if all the effort is worth the outcome. Courses they attend might not be the best suited for them and can be very different from one another. Taught operating systems, teacher's individual attitude, accessibility of the course itself and learning environment have huge impact on both senior's attitude and quality of gained skills. This article aims to describe areas and issues senior citizens feel are most limiting in their access to quality education in ICT, and how they are tackled. The results come from a qualitative research among a selected sample of senior citizens that took part in our ICT courses.

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1. Introduction

Nowadays many senior citizens can be looked upon as modern individuals on account of their efforts to keep pace with this current era which is characterized so much by its incessant use of a variety of technical equipment, most notably computers and smart devices. These seniors are indeed involved in further education and specifically in the area of information and communication technology. And even though we often come across remarkably bright older individuals, even they cannot steer clear of some of the setbacks associated with not only the use of

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information and communication technology but also with the psychological demands of learning - what for them - is something entirely alien and new. One of the primary and fundamental barriers that senior citizens must take the first step to overcoming is the fact that for many of them their own age may influence any sense in further education. However, there are other numerous factors that can affect their relationship to education in the field of information and communication technology (ICT), and also toward familiarizing themselves with a technology completely new and unfamiliar to them.

Generally we can say that the older the person is the more likely it will be for him or her that the controlling, and especially the understanding, of ICT will be complicated. Other factors that may affect the ability to learn how to operate a computer and navigate in ICT can be attained from the person's education level or economic situation, or by the fact of what kind of life the senior citizen leads. Finally, it is also necessary to take into account the problems that senior citizens often face with the very technical aspects of the device that they are trying to use. A recurring problem seems to be the fact that they don't sufficiently understand the individual steps and principles of the use of ICT.

When we mention the most important problems that the senior attending further education in the fields of ICT meets, we must not forget the past and a other very important facts. Seniors often attend courses in ICT where they learn to work with computers in a certain way and benefit from specific programs and the operating system. However once they are at home they may find themselves unable to operate the computer as well as on the course. This can be partly because they have no one there to turn to for experienced teacher supervision. Furthermore it may be a different operating system environment at home with which the senior man or woman is not totally familiar. Often the senior citizen on the course does not find full satisfaction in the tempo and the discussed areas of knowledge and often needs to be taken back to the beginning and consequently making little advance towards additional knowledge and experience.

This article aims to describe the field of research relating to information and communication technologies in which senior citizens were most closely oriented. One of the goals is to find out what problems the senior citizens most often faced and how we may address those same problems and compensate for them. As a methodology for the research method I have chosen dialogue, case studies and interviews. The objectives, milestones and progress of the research methodology will be described in the pages which follow.

2. A description of the research and the methodology used

The research was centered on several carefully chosen senior citizens of different gender and age who had previously participated in our other research in order to get answers to some key questions of the research dealing with the focus on further education of seniors in ICT. From the previous research it was found that senior citizens are interested in further education in the field of ICT. In this research, we have created new curriculum of ICT courses according to their requirements (Vacek & Rybenská, 2014). Senior citizens who were in this current research were selected according to several pre-defined criteria:

- Age (60 years and older (ages classification according to WHO),
- An interest in further self-education in the field of ICT,
- Active and passive lifestyle (senior retired or working),
- Senior with no or minimal knowledge of ICT,
- Senior with their own PC or laptop, or an easy access to the device (any OS),
- Seniors who have in their vicinity someone experienced in the field of ICT who can advise them (for example, children, and grandchildren).

In terms of gender there were two men aged 76 and 67 and three women aged 78, 60 and 67. The sample thus consisted of 5 respondents. The senior citizens interviews were conducted according to predetermined questions, which are listed below. The fundamental research method used here is a case study which is the classical method of qualitative research. It occurs in all areas of human sciences, especially in social sciences. Its application is useful both for building the theoretical background of the disciplines and for practical applications beyond the research line (Olecká, 2010).

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