



HOW PEOPLE OF SERBIA REACT TO ONLINE EDUCATION

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Abstract:

As IT industry grows every day and expands its area of influence, more and more people are using benefits of online platforms that provide education (courses, dls, webinars, books, etc.). The research is taking focus on free of charge online educational contents and its usage among people in Serbia. In order to evaluate current situation, participants did questionnaire survey about benefits and flaws of online learning, common platforms, finalization of certain course, furthermore obstacles that stands between them and internet education. Among the participants were people of various educational backgrounds.

Key words:

Internet,
online education,
online platforms,
free online content.

INTRODUCTION

Technology is present in many aspects of our lives, even in the formal education. When it comes to informal learning, motivation for it can be curiosity; need to upgrade existing skills because nature of our job demands it; or will to learn and explore new areas in order to be competitive and able to work in various fields. Virtual learning environment (or web-based environment) can provide that kind of material, only challenge is to find proper content and be devoted.

“The growth of e-learning is directly related to the increasing access to information and communications technology, as well its decreasing cost.”¹ More and more people are using benefits of online platforms in order to simplify their subjects, make them more interesting and interactive, thus ensure better accomplishments through active learning. Nowadays this learning approach is well spread even among the toddlers. “Forward-looking institutions, recognizing the changing landscape of higher education and the potential of the Internet as a communication tool, originated the first online courses.”²

1 Som Naidu, “E-Learning, A Guidebook of Principles, Procedures and Practices”, CEMCA, 2006, http://dSPACE.col.org/bitstream/123456789/138/1/e-learning_guidebook.pdf, page 2, 05.04.2014.

2 Kaye Shelton, George Saltsman, “An Administrator’s Guide to Online Education”, IAP, 2005, page 2.

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

This work deals with question of informal educational contents that are available online and its appliances among people of Serbia. During the process of analyzing results, particular attention has been paid to advantages and disadvantages of online contents because this part appears to be the best reflection of people attitude.

The starting assumption is that people in Serbia use online contents, but up to certain amount. When it comes to the method of research, systematic non-experimental research was conducted (descriptive method). As a type of descriptive studies it was used questionnaire survey (survey in the narrow sense).

Expression “e-learning” refers to “Learning conducted via electronic media, typically on the Internet”³, which further implies that online education refers to all materials that can be found on internet and used in educational purposes. Goal of research was to establish to what amount people are willing to embrace benefits of internet, making their spent online time quality time, on the other hand to see which are the reasons of avoiding this type of learning, is it just question of being uninformed or is it a lack of confidence towards online sources.

3 Oxford Dictionaries: <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/e-learning>, 09.03.2014.



Population

The questionnaire survey consisted both closed and open-ended questions. It was distributed to a random sample of 400 people, with various educational backgrounds, educational levels, and employment status. Data were collected during February and March of 2013.

ONLINE EDUCATION

There are two types of online education. First where online platforms provide just information, user can just read, see or listen to the content, and second one which represents platforms where user can easily practice online, enter appropriate data. Either way platforms are usually user friendly, thus user can easily understand how to navigate through content. When it comes to interaction, there are different formats, such as “at your own pace; live online in real time; or some combination of the two”⁴. First one refers to situation where user learns on his own, and the second one is the situation where user communicates in real time with other people who are enrolled in that particular course.

Furthermore, there are platforms that provide wide range of courses, but also there are those who are committed to one particularly (e.g. such as language platforms). It is not rare that companies on their official website offer courses related to their business, as well as certification. That could be a plus when applying for a job. Also there are platforms that combine online educational material and job offers. User usually has some kind of profile that consist information on his experience, skill, courses taken so far, and based on that information companies do the recruiting process.

In order to be successful in creating online educational content, there are three elements that need to be determined “learning goals, learning activities, and feedback and evaluation”⁵. The challenge in e-Learning, as in any learning program, is to build lessons in a way that are compatible with human learning processes.⁶ This raises the question of adaptation of content to the reader, whether it is enough that the online material is prepared by an expert or perhaps there should involvement of person who is dealing with human behavior.

RESEARCH RESULTS

The majority (67%) of participants were in the age range of 18-25 years old. More specifically, 19% were in the range of 26-30; 9% in the range of 31-40; 3% in the range of 41-50; and 2% in the range of 51-60 years old.

- 4 Kristen Sosulski, Ted Bongioanni, “The Savvy Student’s Guide to Online Learning”

It is interesting to say that from 400 participants 72% of them are actively using online education, while 28% do not at all. Participants who claimed that do not use online education were asked to provide reasons of avoiding it. Therefore among those 28% common reasons are: no internet access; they prefer hard copy books; lack of trust; no feedback; no need for further education; lack of time; obstacles while finding some material; ignorance about this type of learning; inability to find online platforms, etc. Based on this responses it is clear that there are some people who would use additional educational materials but they are just not so familiar with virtual environment, or they have technical difficulties.

When concerning the finalization of started online course⁷, 68% of participants claimed that they do complete their started course. The remaining 32% most commonly stated that they do not finish started material due to the length of the course. Chart below shows the most often studied areas.

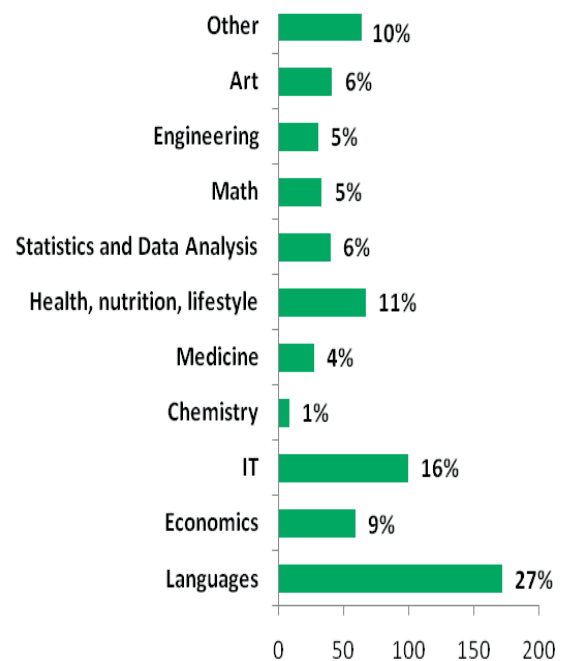


Fig. 1. The most common areas among online users.

For those (10%) who did not find desirable area in the list, it was given an opportunity to provide additional feedback through open-ended question. They mentioned Human science, HR, PR, Leadership, Sport, Law, Political science, Marketing, Management, Modeling, Psychology and Physics.

When considering advantages of online contents, accent is on free of charge online contents; platforms are user friendly; availability 24/7; speed of approaching; personalized tempo of learning; diversity among areas of study; possibility of home learning; there is no age restriction, no commitment; possibility of reviewing the content, etc. According to this “web-based education means that time and place are no longer barriers”⁸. Although majority

7 Or any other form of online content.

8 Thomas D. Lynch, Cynthia E. Lynch, “Web-Based Education”, [1013](http://innovation.cc/scholarly-style/lynchs-education.pdf, page 11., 05.04.2014.</p>
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of respondents prefers free of charge learning, there are some who do not mind paying fees. They pointed out, as advantage of online education, that those fees are much lower comparing to paying for the course to particular school.

Considering disadvantages of online education participants mentioned: that too much time spent in front of computer is harming their health; there is no people interaction; too much information; no certification; no feedback; unclarity of content; length of course; no group work; minimum experience sharing, etc. Among the answers some mentioned language barriers, it appears to be hard to find courses on Serbian.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of this research show that people in Serbia are familiar with online education and it benefits, thus the starting assumption is confirmed. However, there are some issues that need to be overcome, some depending on users themselves and some beyond their reach. People who are willing to learn they will found the way to do it, but those with the lack of the motivation and distrust towards online contents need to be introduced to this kind of learning. The introduction can be made through some workshops or simulations. Online learning can be very useful, it just demands devotion and exploring in order to find suitable contents.

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