THE SENIORS@DIGIWORLD PROJECT: TOWARDS DIGITAL LITERACY OF SENIOR LEARNERS BY THE PROMOTION OF TABLETS

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Abstract

Training institutions and other organisations that work with senior citizens, together with friends and family, are the main contact that senior citizens have with technology. In the Seniors@DigitWorld we want to focus on the use of tablets to access services on the Internet and use some Apps to promote the seniors’ quality of life and digital inclusion. Organisations of different type (as adult schools, associations, libraries, NGO…) help on this mission on mainly informal learning of ICT. During the first phase of this project we wanted to know the needs and requirements of these organisations with the aim to increase their impact and quality. There were identified 4 main needs; capacities in human resources, updates of training material, equipment and motivation of seniors to learn ICT.

Keywords: organisations, trainers, senior learner, digital inclusion, andragogy, ICT, tablets, pedagogy, managers, elderly.

1 INTRODUCTION

The use of mobile devices to access the Internet is not as widespread among seniors than it is among other groups of population. According to data from Eurostat 41% of adults from 65 to 74 years old use the Internet [1]. While educational institutions offer courses to increase the digital literacy, other organisations –we call them multipliers– such as libraries, elderly houses, social care centres, telecentres, etc. which come into direct contact with senior citizens are the first (and sometimes the only one) access to get help about the use of tablets. This kind of organisations neither are related to training nor have experience on education, but still keep offering tuition and assistance.

Additionally, as the Population Division, DESA, from the United Nations estimates [2], “about 37 per cent of the European population is projected to be 60 or over in 2050”. This sector of the population is, in some cases, at risk of social exclusion and technologically marginalized despite the fact they are a basic participant of the “intelligence society”. In this sense, Education on the way will produce tools and resources that will help to:

- Educate, train and qualify the adults and young professionals of today that will be the elderly of tomorrow. The existence of a future society where the elderly are integrated, participants and active contributors of the society relies on the present preparation of their members.
- Prepare the instruments and technologically applied pedagogies that will contribute to an active and collaborative ageing of the elderly in present societies. This will occur not only by them achieving a mastery of new technologies in general but also by (through the customary use of new technologies) awakening their social awareness, collaborative integration, participation, learning to learn skills... which will keep them integrated in the knowledge society and away from the risk of exclusion and social marginalization.

In this context, the formal and non-formal learning provided by educational institutions allow that seniors learners increase their expertise on the use of ICT, but do they increase their experience? [3], is that enough to promote their digital inclusion. Here the use of informal methods during formal and non-formal teaching make possible to achieve great benefits on the senior education as the accomplishments of previous skills, attitudes and values [4] [5].

We propose the use of tablets as they can provide the capacity of connectivity and getting to sources of information thanks to internet without the complexity of the computer. Also, we focus on a wide
range of organisations (not-training institutions but institutions that deal with senior learners) to explore how the training (informally) is provided.

In this context, the Erasmus+ KA2 Strategic partnership project Seniors@DigiWorld (www.digitalseniors.eu) proposes to enable institutions which have direct contact with senior citizens, no matter either they have educational expertise or not, to provide learning opportunities via the use of mobile devices.

2 METHODOLOGY

This project intends to foster digital inclusion and contribute to the improvement of senior citizens’ daily lives by involving multipliers on training senior learners. To reach that aim, we wanted to validate the needs and capacities of organisations which are not directly related to training but offer some kind of educational service (assistance, tutoring, seminars, workshops, non-formal courses, etc.). To reach that understanding, we performed under the framework of partnership 41 interviews to organisation coordinators. We wanted to know to which extend non-formal training institutions organise, offer and deliver ICT courses to senior learners.

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<th>Table 1. Questions part of the interview to stakeholders.</th>
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<td>Has your organization an opportunity to teach digital skills for seniors? What kinds of learning activities about technological skills are provided to seniors?</td>
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<td>How would you rate the current level of provided services for seniors in the digital skills area in your institution? How does it need to change or to improve?</td>
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<td>Are you prepared to offer trainings in the use of tablet computers to senior citizens?</td>
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<td>Do you have all the resources needed to train seniors to use technologies? What resources do you have and do you need?</td>
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<tr>
<td>How would you rate the capacities (motivation, time, resources) of your employees to guide senior citizens in the usage of tablet computer?</td>
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<tr>
<td>How we can be helpful to your organization in engaging and supporting seniors to use information technologies?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Stakeholders from the partnership countries (DE, ES, LT, and RO) were asked “Tab. 1” questions.

3 RESULTS

After the analysis of the interviews, four areas were identified for improvement;

- Human resources; there is a current need on training on digital skills and competences to work with different programmes. A more structured organisation and guidance. Lack of staff.
- Updates of training materials: reporting that present material is too complex, becomes deprecated too soon, and there is a huge variety of devices.
- Equipment; requiring more tablets
- Motivation of seniors to learn ICT; mainly because of lack of general information, and preconceived ideas.

Because of lack of equipment in most institutions, our proposal is to use the tablets that can be acquired from the project budget to show the seniors the benefits and the advantages of the tablets and the Internet. In this way, it is expected senior learners will increase their interests and motivation and buy new tablets (it was noted on the senior learners’ surveys that price was not the biggest problem), so institutions have not to buy new tablets, but senior learners can use theirs, and enjoy more putting their own apps and contacts.

To have up-to-date materials and trained staff on the tools and Internet services that can be accessed on the tablets the biggest issue reported. It has been pointed out the limited time and human resources. We propose:
• To train staff on training other staff, so they can act as multipliers. For example, training volunteers, other seniors or other staff. We can propose them skills on these topics, not becoming direct trainers of senior learners, but to engage others through a win-win situation, for example promoting to have senior learning groups (face-to-face or virtually).

• To train staff and provide materials only on the main ICT skills (as using the tools for searching and communicating), and once the senior learner become ICT-competent, to facilitate everybody can help each other, for example, by suggesting website that can be useful or interesting.

• Clearer tutorials and helping pages are key for a success (present pages have a lot of advertisements and are too complex). Those helping pages can be created with three different aims and target: for the trainers, to identify the needs, tricks for training, reaching the target and motivating; for the trainers, suggestions for the content to teach; and finally, for the senior learners; tutorials about how to use the tablet.

• To facilitate the content to be updated easily by any trainer, content should be not only accessible by everybody, but also create the sense of a “club” where any senior can make a question or report something confusing, and trainers can update any content.

Finally, it is important to create a product (course, materials) that are sustainable in time. We propose not to try to focus on producing a huge quantity of materials, but to facilitate its update and improvement over time.

4 CONCLUSIONS

It was identified 4 main needs that were not covered enough; capacities in human resources, updates of training material, equipment and motivation of seniors to learn ICT. Related to these needs and the scenarios that help to solve that requirements, we considered the following conclusions about the best way for organisations to help to provide educational activities to senior citizens to promote their digital inclusion. In case of lack of capacity from employees, the creation of tutorials for the most common tasks can be provided, at least it would increase the capacity of reusing materials (being then global) as well as avoiding existing online tutorials that have huge quantities of advertisement. Then a new issue raises, that is the variety of versions of tablets and the so dynamic websites, which make a tutorial to be soon deprecated.

The solution proposed relies on offering training to trainers but not only on senior learners’ context, didactic skills and methods for teaching to this target. It should also be focused on creating materials that are mainly dynamic and easy to update, therefore the first trainer to notice any error could then, update the materials and that would be immediate for the others. We propose a two-level network, the first level is a trainers’ network that facilitates sharing materials and practises (learning platform can organise several groups of knowledge) and a second level focused on senior learners which are directly linked to some topics (e.g. communication, getting information, etc.). That would promote the learners support from each other, discovering new things as well as creating emotional connections among them. This proposal is based on the managers interviews and the expertise of the Seniors@DigiWorld project.

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REFERENCES


