

ICT for seniors¹

Introduction

One of the greatest challenges for European society today is the dramatic increase of an ageing population and the fast technology that is separating the elderly from the younger generation. Due to these expeditious changes in technology, seniors feel more pressured to learn to cope with the changes. According to a 2008 survey, Finland ranked seventh among Europe's leading internet users.

Because of the increasing ageing community in Finland, every day more and more people end up living alone. Information technology is also on the increase. What lies ahead for the future of these seniors living alone with this new technology? Where can they get help? In recent years most services such as banks, health care, libraries, food supplies, and transport can all be accessed by internet. Social media can also make the life of seniors a lot easier.

The main objective is to support the daily welfare of seniors through Information Computer Technology. It is in the interest of the seniors themselves to be able to access these services by themselves without the aid of family members or the health care department and through ICT they can access these services that the municipality provides. Many seniors, because of hearing or other ailments may have difficulty communicating by telephone so ICT is a good alternative for emailing and booking appointments and therefore reducing the risk of miscommunication.

ICT can also be a great help in preventing early stage memory loss. Through ICT the brain is exercised and it gives seniors an opportunity to enrich their social life and the ability to continue learning with others. Managing their own computer can help to break the stereotype notion that seniors are too old to learn new technologies.

In the case of immigrant seniors, friends and family may live very long distances away adding to the loneliness and depression which most immigrant seniors feel. ICT is a low cost tool that can fill that void and enhance communication fulfilling the life of the senior.

Most immigrant seniors read online articles and news about current events in their own country in their own mother tongue. When they can use it internet is a source of information for everything, where they can find a variety of food recipes or through social media lives are enhanced by helping them to widen their social life to include old friends, acquaintances and relatives. They can print, watch videos and read maps through Internet.

Content

The University of Helsinki, Palmenia Center for Continuing Education began teaching ICT for seniors in 2008 with a total of 32 students. In 2012, in joint partnership with the Helsinki municipality social welfare department, we formed 3 small groups with a total of 29 seniors. There were 19 Africans (8 men and 11 women), 3 Asians and 7 Finns. The immigrants had 2hrs per week up to the present while the Finns had 3hrs per week for 2 months. During the process, we had at least 5 tutors who participated regularly. The immigrant groups continued until teaching started with the basic ICT program for beginners and an advanced ICT program tailored for seniors with computer experience of at least one year. All the participants were Europeans and after 3 months, almost 50 % volunteered to be tutors in the Helsinki municipality social welfare department and some went to volunteered for non-governmental organizations.

Since September last year, seniors meet in Helsinki social welfare for the elderly, Syytie Services centre in cooperation with the University of Helsinki. There are 8 senior men from Somalia, Bangladesh and Palestine. The class is held every Monday for 1.5hrs. We have noticed that there are many good practices during the group meetings.

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From September to November, the University of Helsinki, Palmenia Center for Continuing Education in cooperation with the Helsinki City Social Welfare for the Elderly, held ICT classes for seniors with a group of 13, a mixture of native Finns and immigrants from the Philippines with ages ranging from 65 to 89 years old. The class was once a week for two and half hours at a time.

Basic ICT for seniors

Introduce computer uses, different programs, accessories programs, add-ins and other computer devices such as a printer.

1. Skype for communication
2. Internet
3. Online maps (Google maps, Helsinki route map and Helsinki transport map)
4. Online banking
5. Online reservation (health care reservation, private doctor's appointment)
6. Creating email and email uses
7. Online purchasing (tickets)
8. Online matter (Finland health services, post office services)
9. Folders and files
10. Ergonomic

Recommendations

The multicultural group has helped the participants to appreciate and respect other cultures reducing any preconceived prejudices. It is often difficult for immigrants to get to know local people and this kind of course offers an occasion to meet native Finns and cooperate with them.

Men and women have been able to choose whether they would like to study together or separately. For women from e.g. Somalia, which has a Muslim culture, it has been much easier to be able to study in a group with only women. In a multicultural group, special needs (like religious needs: possibility to pray at a certain time) have also been taken into account. This has increased the motivation of some participants.

Also groups of small numbers has made learning much easier, since the teacher then has time for individual 'one on one' instruction. Teachers should respect and treat these students as individual people with unique backgrounds.

Meetings are broken down by teaching for 60 minutes with a coffee break of about 15 minutes during which the students, tutors and the teacher have had an opportunity to share their experiences concerning the course.

The duration of the meetings has been kept short and there has been a coffee break of about 45 minutes, during which the students, tutors and the teacher have had an opportunity to share their experiences concerning the course.

Serving snacks is one way of increasing motivation to participate in the class and the exchanging of experiences increases the self-confidence of participants.

Conclusion

There are great differences in culture, race, personality, life history, schooling, skills, functional capacity etc. among aged people, and a tailored education is extremely important because of the group's heterogeneity. So besides tailoring different kinds of education to offer this means also tailoring different pedagogical approaches/measures within certain educational courses.

Learning new skills usually takes aged people longer because the cognitive processes takes more time and movements are slower. A teacher must be aware that younger people are usually fast in many aspects: speech, movements, reactions, etc.

Teachers must always bear in mind that an aged student may have poor sight or hearing or has some other physical ailment affecting their capacity or concentration in the classroom.

The involvement of the volunteer senior tutors in the class helps the marginalization of students in the classroom. Their participation has helped not only the students, but has also had a good effect on the tutors themselves by giving them an opportunity to share their knowledge and experience with others.

This text is part of the book “Education and quality of life of senior citizens”. See the full book in <http://www.edusenior.eu>

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