CURRENT SITUATION IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ELECTRONIC LEARNING IN KOSOVO

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Abstract

We will present in this paper the educational aspect of the Telemedicine Center of Kosova (TCK) in the UCCK and in the Faculty of Electrical and Computer Engineering in the University of Prishtina. In order to explore the current state of electronic learning in Kosovo, we visited and conducted interviews with the managing staff of Kosovo Telemedicine Centre in UCCK and in the Faculty of Electrical and Computer Engineering in the University of Prishtina. The Telemedicine Center of Kosova started officially its function in December 2002. This center provides educational and clinical services. One of the important educational activities in TCK is the functioning of electronic library since the establishment of the center.

Keywords: distance learning, electronic learning in Kosovo, the Telemedicine Center of Kosovo, the Faculty of Electrical and Computer Engineering.

Introduction

Nowadays, modern society could be defined as a society with knowledge expansion and a learning society. This is linked to rapid development of science and technology and the application of these achievements, including education for the betterment of life and work of man and society. The culture of work and the scientific understanding of modern technology are increasingly becoming an integral part of modern education. However, lifelong learning has become a focal point of the modern society, including the education system of Kosovo. Distance learning represents an alternative form of education, and is mainly dedicated to people who want to acquire education and to progress in their professions, or change their vocation while in service, at a certain place and time depending on the individual needs. Electronic learning is a form of education where computer technology is the medium for instructions, in many cases without the participation of any other person. In different companies, electronic learning is referred to as a strategy to use the network of a company to develop training courses for employees. With "electronic learning (e-learning) we understand the use of electronic media, such as: internet, intranet and extranet, CD-ROM, DVD, audiotapes and videotapes, satellite TV and interactive TV (interactive, cell (mobile) phone, etc., to create, promote, maintain and facilitate formal, non-formal and informal learning in public or private sector, at any time and in any place"[30]. "In the USA, electronic learning is defined as a planned experience of teaching and learning, which uses a wide range of technology, mainly the internet and computer to take lessons from distance"[31]. Finally in most universities of developed countries, electronic learning is being used to define a specific way of attending a study course or program where students rarely or very little participate physically in classes in university premises because they study "online".

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[30] Gazeta "Mësuesi",Tiranë, Nr. 26, 5 korrik 2006, f. 6
[31] Ibid

The subject of research and its importance

The subject of this research is distance learning as a modality of lifelong education, respectively the implementation of electronic learning through videoconferences and web-sites. The importance of the research relates to the fact that the rapid social, technical, technological and scientific revolution in the field of electronics and information technology has inevitably imposed the need for the implementation of electronic learning in the process of lifelong learning. This has necessitated the application of up-to-date teaching strategies, where electronic learning takes a special place as an integral and indivisible part of lifelong education system.

Distance learning in the function of lifelong education

Distance learning includes the entire technology of learning and teaching without the direct contact of pupil-student and teacher. The rapid development of information technology has enabled quick dissemination and promotion of distance learning, including the use of computers for communication purposes, the internet, compact discs (CD-ROM), press, audio and video tapes, e-mail, videoconferences and teleconferences. "Instead of having a course attended directly by people in certain premises, teacher and students can communicate at a particular time chosen by them, and exchange information through electronic media, or technology, thus enabling communication at distance"[32]. Conversation courses at distance which require the presence on the spot of an attendee for any reasons include: tests, assessments or exams, are known as mixed courses.

Implementation of electronic learning in Kosovo

Before presenting the current state of electronic learning in Kosovo, we are going to present some general aspects related to videoconferences, as one of the modalities of electronic learning, because the empirical part of the document deals precisely with this modality. With videoconference we understand the ability to communicate at distance, where, in addition to voice, the transmission of image is also made possible. Videoconference provides a new opportunity to interested parties to communicate face to face, by bringing people together in real time from distant locations. This communication technology gives rise to new ideas and creates partnerships, thus facilitating the exchange of documented materials, debates and knowledge.Videoconference provides opportunities for innovative findings in any project, and gives a new dimension to interaction. With an aim of exploring the current state of electronic learning in Kosovo, we visited and conducted interviews with the managing staff of the Telemedicine Centre of Kosovo in UCCK (Figure 1), and in the Faculty of Electrical and Computer Engineering in the University of Prishtina.

Fig.1.

We will present the state of electronic learning and services provided by these centers as follows: The Telemedicine Center of Kosovo has officially started functioning in December 2002. This center provides educational and

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[32] www.wikipedia.org, 20. 07. 2010 (distance education)

clinical services; however, our main focus is the education aspect. One of the important educational activities of TCK is the functioning of electronic library (figure 2) since the establishment of the center.
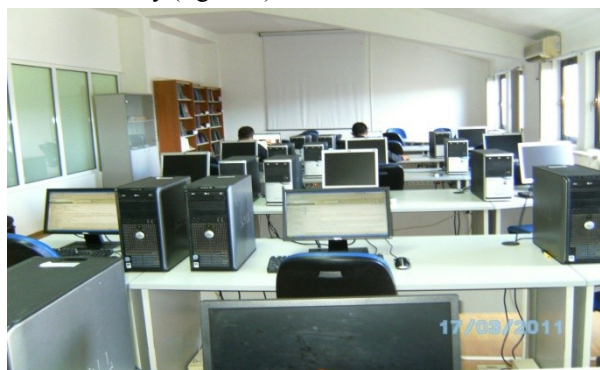

Fig 2. A view of the electronic library room

In the library, the medical staff currently has access to the package of medical journals HINARI. This package offers dozens of world known journals. Since April 2007 the access to electronic journals has also been done through the internet, so that students and medical staff can use these materials from their homes. TCK provides this service free of charge. Since April 2010, TCK has also ensured Access to UpToDate (www.telemedks.org) through "UpToDate International Grant Subscription program". UpToDate provides updated medical information evidence-based and peer-reviewed by more than 4,400 authors and editors who are experts in the respective fields.
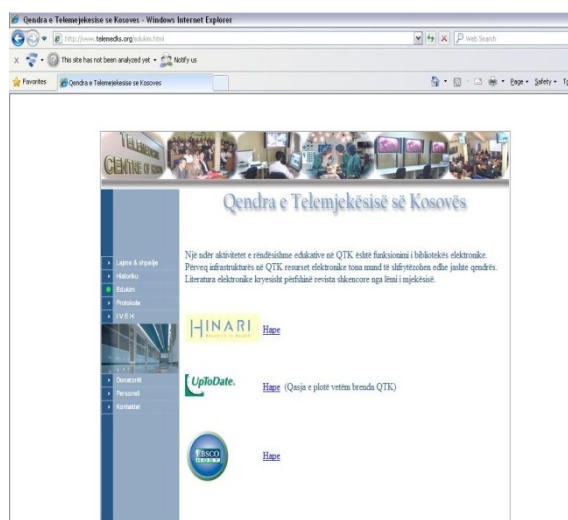

Fig 3. A view of the TCK web-page

UpToDate uses the latest information from more than 440 journals which are constantly supervised by experts of concerned fields. UpToDate covers more than 8,300 topics from 16 fields of medicine and encompasses more than 97,000 text pages, graphs, links to Medline abstracts, more than 385,000 references and a data base for medications. These resources can be used only within the Telemedicine Centre network, namely the electronic library. The telemedicine Centre of Kosovo also organizes videoconferences which can be attended by participants from other regions. The capacity of the room is 60 seats arranged in the form of a theatre.

Participants in the videoconference do not have to pay for their participation and are assigned depending on the needs for professional training which is determined by the permanent Education Board at the Ministry of Health. Depending on the purpose and needs for professional training of medical staff, participants are certified; and if this does not happen, then it becomes non-formal learning.

Fig 4. A view of the Kosovo Telemedicine room

In addition to electronic library and transmission of videoconferences, the Telemedicine Center of Kosovo provides clinical services, where a direct link is made from the operation rooms with the videoconference room. The purpose of this link is to allow participants from the videoconference room to follow surgical interventions, as well as, to ask questions about the progress of the operation, to which the surgeon in charge answers (based on the organization of the work). The person or the doctor who communicates with the participants in the conference room is equipped with a microphone, and a camera is set up to transmit footages to the videoconference room.

Fig 5. A view of the operation room

Fig 6. A view of the transmission of surgical intervention in the videoconference room

Multimedia Conference Room at the Faculty of Electrical and Computer Engineering in the University of Pristina was opened in May 2008, and was established in the frame of ECUP Project – development of electronic subject contents in the UP. The project was implemented by FECE in cooperation with WUS Austria with joint investments. The primary service of this videoconference room is to provide distance learning, as well as, meetings and various conferences from distance. The Multimedia Conference Room in FECE provides space for public use and aims to create new forms of communication, debates and exchange of knowledge at local, regional and international level.

The capacity of the room is 40 seats, and the room is arranged as shown in the images below.

Fig 7. A view of the organization of the Multimedia Room in FECE

Our research related to distance learning included web-sites, concretely the www.emesimi.org, a web portal which has enabled hosting and organization of online subjects since 2005. Classes are organized in two ways: in a synchronous way through the videoconference (especially in the UEJL and in the LnU), and asynchronous way (through posting materials and assignments in the internet, where each student has his own account to connect online). Audio lectures and slides are recorded in an asynchronous way, which students can listen to when they have time and possibility. Equipment for simultaneous videoconference has been provided by Vaxjo University and SEEU. Each student is provided with individual account for connection. Lessons can be arranged according to topics or by weeks. Subject contents mainly relate to computer science. Subjects offered through this platform are: XML based Multimedia Technologies, Intelligent Multimedia Systems, Distributed Systems, Mobile and Wireless Computing, Advanced Data Structures and Algorithms etc. Thus, only subjects of the computer science curriculum. Cooperation is maintained with the following universities: Vaxjo University (Sweden), Linnaeus University (Sweden), South East European University (Macedonia), Pristina University and European Vision University (Kosovo). Lectures are conducted mainly in English language, but there are also subjects in Albanian language. The system is relatively easy to use. Thus, with a two hour training each teacher will be able to create and host a subject online. Students can take all the materials they need to learn from the portal, and they can use different forums for discussion and chatting. They submit their completed assignments in the portal and receive from the portal their grades and comments regarding the assignments done. Before each lecture, the students are provided with slides and other materials for reading, and after the lecture, students post their questions and comments regarding a given lecture in respective forums. Later, in these forums, students receive answers to their questions from teachers. The system allows the two approaches. In the system of e-learning there is a module "conditional activity" which enables to condition certain activities, i.e. without completing the previous activity, one cannot continue further. The implementation of this option depends largely on the syllabus of the subject. Assignments can be organized as quizzes with alternatives (a, b, c, d) or by submitting a respective project. If an assignment offers the possibility of alternative answers, then incorrect answers result in negative scores, and this is done in order not to stimulate guessing during the classes. When students submit their assignments/projects then they receive comments from their teachers. Evaluation is done based on the syllabus and separate activities, for example: in a certain subject students take their test online and students have to be in front of computers at a particular time, and each of them receives individualized questions. The system allows automatic registration of marks for each activity, and consequently counts the final score.

Conclusion

Distance learning with its multiple dimensions of organization is becoming more and more present in the process of educating the population. It is also increasingly affecting professional development of individuals in their working places, thus highlighting the lifelong learning as a necessity in the life of individuals. Electronic learning is much more than the transformation of the existing material in a multimedia material for distribution through the internet or the intranet /extranet/. This requires a certain degree of basic computer skills, since the majority of electronic learning courses implies the use computer, both, by students and by teachers.It requires a lot of effort and serious work, and this is not an easy task. It requires from a teacher to possess a wide range of skills in the field of information and communication technology (ICT) and teaching methodologies, apart from the professional knowledge of the topics he/she teaches (is competent for) through electronic learning courses.Although distance learning supports and facilitates lifelong learning in Kosovo, it still has a limited use. Universities in Kosovo and different colleges do not provide sets of titles or academic levels and special online certification programs.

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