

The skills acquired through online education and their utility

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Abstract

Since the beginning of the covid-19 pandemic, interest in online courses for vocational training centres has increased. The involvement of employers through e-learning is growing because more and more people understand that for an involved workforce there is a need for continuing education. People who choose to develop their knowledge through an online course are confident in the medium and long term benefits they will have. In a time of controversy and opposition to any initiative, the only thing under our control is our development. The rapid advancement of technology made possible qualitative online learning, and the development of a growing online learning community. Courses such as public procurement expert, project manager, internal auditor, expert accessing European Structural and Cohesion Funds in 2020 and 2021 were among the top choices. A centre such as Extreme Training, Euro Best Team and Alma Vision has been able to take advantage of this favourable period to attract many students by successfully aligning their educational offer with the needs of students. In the opinion of the students, the skills acquired must be useful in the medium and long term.

1. Introduction

Undereducation has countless direct and indirect effects, so a person who has not had access to higher education throughout their life will earn less than a person with a university degree. And because of the small incomes, it will not be easy for them to provide quality education to their descendants. Increasing the efficiency of learning activities is a desideratum of modern society. Online courses stimulate innovative learning ability, adaptable to conditions of rapid social change and strengthen motivation in the learning process. Lately, the development of communication skills is provided in the university curriculum. Research conducted over the last seven years globally has shown that the use of information and communication technologies in education contributes greatly to improving outcomes.

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2. Literature Review

J. J. Rousseau's principles of education and progress left their mark in the second half of the eighteenth century, as did Jean Piaget in the twentieth century¹. Transforming any passion into a career is the goal of all centres because passion produces excellence. The first fully online course was offered in 1981, and the first online program was established by the Western Behavior Sciences Institute in 1982². The World-Wide Web (WWW) in 1991 was a milestone in the rapid expansion and growth of online teaching and learning³. Anderson T. believes that online learning can present challenges to educators because the tools and opportunities for discovering students' preconceptions and cultural perspectives are often limited by bandwidth constraints that limit the view of body language and paralinguistic clues⁴. In the opinion of Allen and Seaman, the economic crisis in 2008 had a great impact on online education⁵. Volery and Lord consider that the internet and traditional classroom teaching methods are not mutually exclusive but should be seen as an extra dimension in education that can facilitate the lecturer's task while benefiting the students as well⁶. Porcello and Hsi believe that multiple information sources, user communities, and online platforms might be coordinated to craft effective experiences in digital-rich learning environments.

3. The most popular courses chosen in the period 2020-2021

3.1. Public procurement expert - COR code 214946

In Romania, public procurement is regulated by Law no. 98/2016 on public procurement published in the Official Gazette (M.O. no. 390 / 23.05.2016). Installation of the climate of self-improvement competitiveness is desirable for every employer because they lead to success. Fast data processing is an essential feature for a public purchaser. An independent work style requires a high level of knowledge and well-defined character traits. Choosing and using the right strategies to solve problems is essential in the procurement process. A popular platform that provided this course was SmartExpert, which through a personalized approach of the training program ensured efficiency, emphasizing the benefits of the students⁷. Apendis, one of the most dynamic vocational training centres in Romania in this course special importance given to the practical application, such as aspects related to the procurement procedures, specifications, rules for participation in award procedures, publication of announcements, types of auctions and settlement of appeals. The price of the course at the mentioned centres is between 500 and 950 lei. 2020 and 2021 registered a general increase in the number of students by 19% at the Romanian training centres⁸ as we can see in figure no.1.

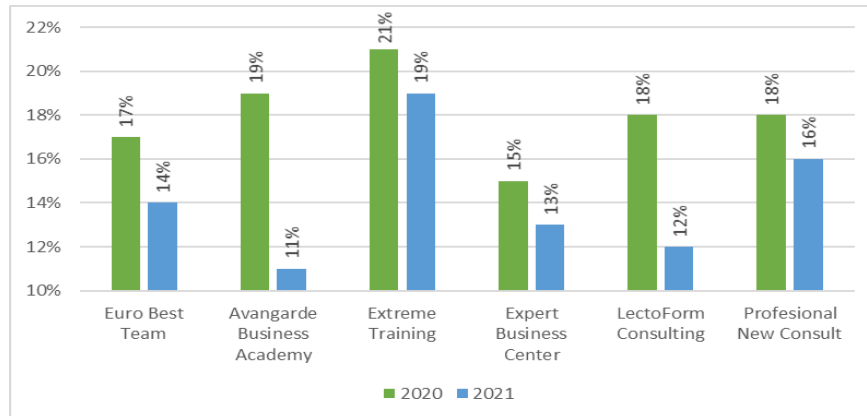


Figure 1. Increase in the number of students expressed as a percentage in six well-known training centres

Source: created by the author, based on information collected from the six centres

¹ Koops, W., (2012), Jean Jacques Rousseau, modern developmental psychology, and education. *European Journal of Developmental Psychology*, 9(sup1), 46-56

² Harasim, L. (2000). Shift happens: Online education as a new paradigm in learning. *The Internet and higher education*, 3(1-2), 41-61

³ Maloney-Krichmar, D., Abras, C. (2003). History of emergence of online communities. In K. Christensen & D. Levinson (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of community: From village to virtual world*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publication

⁴ Anderson, T., (2008). The theory and practice of online learning, in *The Online Learning Series*, Athabasca University Press, p.35

⁵ Allen, I. E., Seaman, J. (2013). *Changing course: Ten years of tracing online education in the United States*. San Francisco, CA: Babson Survey Research Group and Quahog Research Group LLC

⁶ Volery, T., Lord, D. (2000). Critical success factors in online education. *International journal of educational management*.

⁷ www.cursurismart.ro

⁸ www.apendis.ro

3.2. Project manager – COR code 242101

Excellence gives satisfaction, so the project planning activities need to occur with precision. A 63-hour training, of which 21 hours of theory and 42 hours of practice, is considered essential for acquiring the knowledge necessary for a project manager. During the course, the participants become familiar with the whole process of carrying out a project financed from European funds. The best-known training centres have a similar agenda. Very important parts are risk management, management of the project team, and project quality. Among the acquired knowledge, we can list the elaboration of the financing application, the familiarization with the evaluation process, the contracting procedure, the organization of the project team, the monitoring, the reporting, the reimbursement of the expenses and the closing of the project. On the first places in the participants, preferences are the Euro Best Team, Extreme Training and Alma Vision centres, and the price of the course is between 500 and 800 lei.

3.3. Internal auditor - COR code 241105

Knowledge and skills to perform the internal audit activity are acquired with the help of practical examples. With 30 hours of theoretical and 10 hours of practical training, this course combines in a modern way the essential knowledge that a successful auditor must possess. The course agenda at the studied centres focus on notions such as types of audits, stages of the audit process, the role of audit in the control process, risk identification and risk matrix, and elaboration of the annual audit plan. Effective implementation of the internal control methodology is a difficult task. But those who participated in the internal auditor course at the well-known training centres in Romania (Avangarde Business Academy, Top Quality Management, Expert Aktiv Group) through the reviews left on the official page express how satisfied they are with the course. figure no. 2 is an illustration of this.

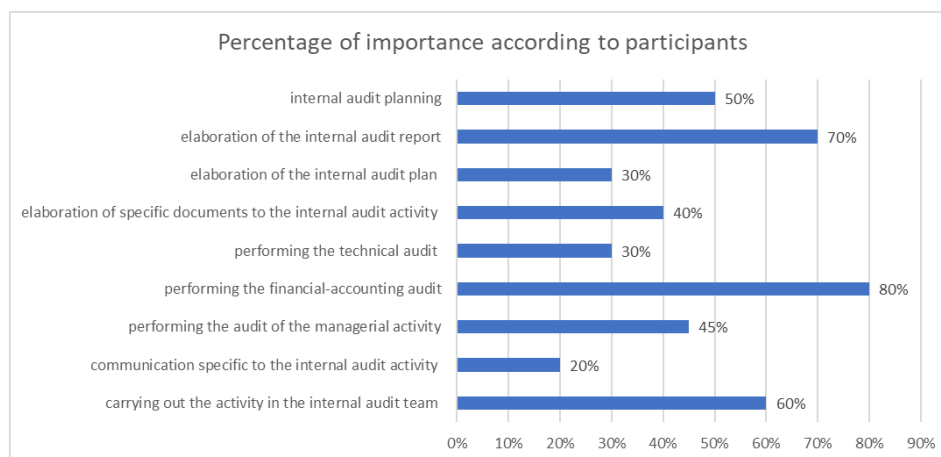


Figure 2. Importance of acquired professional skills according to participants expressed in per cent

Source: created by the author, based on information collected from the centres

3.4. GDPR: responsible for personal data protection – COR code 242231

Since life moved to the online environment, personal data protection has become more vital. General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) is the strictest privacy law that regulates how companies protect EU citizens' data and information. Help in better data management and increase credibility. A deep understanding of GDPR terminologies shapes data management skills. The centres provide 60 hours of theoretical and 120 hours of practical training. Well-known centres based on students' preference are Avangarde Business Academy, Picon Training Center, Absolute School, Expert Aktiv Group and Tuv Austria Romania, to enumerate just a few⁹. The price of the course in 2020 and 2021 varied between 490 lei and 1000 lei. Key moments in the course based on instructors' opinion are to understand core concepts and components of GDPR data protection; to understand the obligations, roles, and responsibilities of the Data Protection Officer (DPO); to learn various approaches and techniques for the effective protection of data; to know about methods and techniques to effectively implementing compliance framework to the protection of personal data¹⁰. In addition to the acquired knowledge, the possession of an internationally recognized certificate offers innumerable advantages, among which we can mention salary increase, promotion, more active participation in decision-making and projects. People who

⁹ www.picon.ro

¹⁰ www.gdprtrainings.com

sharpen their data protection and data management skills successfully obtained higher salaries than an average professional, more career opportunities and added more value to their resume. Since 2020 was a change in the delivery methods of the course, which is demonstrated in figure no.3.

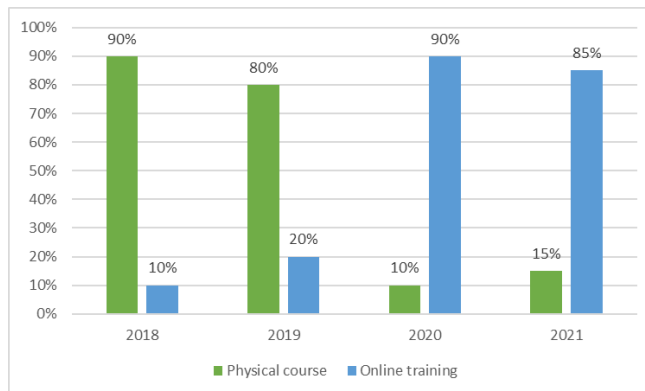


Figure 3. The evolution in delivery methods of the course from 2018 to 2022

Source: created by the author, based on information collected from the mentioned centres

3.5. Tax expert - COR code 241221

This training course is an intensive one with 20 hours of theoretical, and 20 hours of practical training. An extremely demanding course that in most of the studied centres has nine modules: the fiscal system; profit tax; income tax on micro-enterprises; income tax; social contributions; non-resident income tax; value-added tax; local taxes and fees; construction tax. The Extrem Training Center uses modern training methods based on immediate applicability. Among acquired professional skills it is worth to be mentioned tax returns compilation, fiscal processing of information, and the client's fiscal classification. We can see the road of training benefits illustrated in figure no.4.

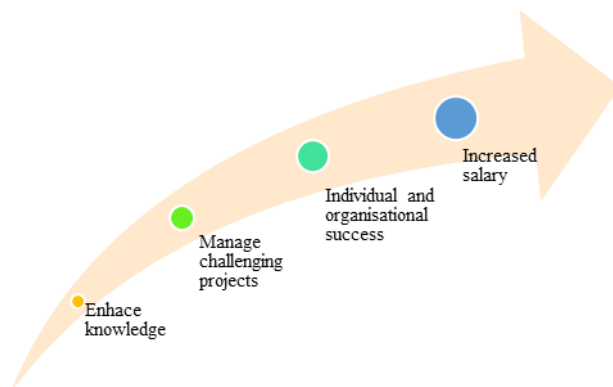


Figure 4. The road of training benefits

Source: created by the author, based on information collected from the mentioned centres

3.6. Expert accessing European Structural and Cohesion Funds – COR code 242213

A course that enjoys great popularity, because any small or large company tries to attract money from projects, and for this, they need well-trained specialists. Among the necessary knowledge and skills of a consultant who successfully accesses funds, we can mention the identification of the optimal financing program, the classification of eligible and ineligible expenses, to correctly calculate the non-reimbursable financial aid and own contribution, drawing up the procurement procedure in the project card. At most of the studied centres, the focuses are on the elaboration of some essential documents like the financing request, the financing contract, the additional act, the notification, the technical-financial report, the reimbursement request, the payment request, the monitoring report, the progress report, and the procurement procedure. The course provided by Euro Best Team presents, analyzes, and exemplifies all the phases of design and development of a European project, from the analysis of the opportunity to participate to the establishment and organization of writing activities, the process of evaluation, contracting, implementation, closure, and sustainability. Competences recognized at the

European level, mentioned in the descriptive supplement to the Certificate: 1. application of occupational health and safety regulations; 2. application of environmental protection rules; 3. maintaining effective working relationships; 4. preparation of the project; 5. documentation to carry out the project; 6. establishing partnerships; 7. elaboration of the project.

3.7. Project evaluator - COR code 241263

An extremely popular course with 20 hours of theoretical and 20 hours of practical training. Skills acquired after the course: preparation, organization, development and validation of the evaluation process of a project; identification and application of evaluation methods and tools; elaboration of the evaluation report; determining the administrative, technical and financial compliance of the funding application with the conditions imposed by the lender, the inclusion in the approved budget and the time allotted; identifying and highlighting possible risks, verifying the effectiveness of the proposed measures to manage them¹¹. The price of the course at the studied centres varies between 400 and 900 lei. It is also important to see how the students evaluate the importance of the acquired knowledge, as we can see in figure no. 5.

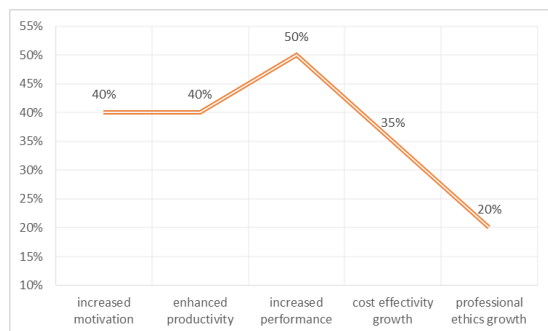


Figure 5. Growth after the course based on attendees' auto evaluation

Source: created by the author, based on information collected from the mentioned centres

4. Advantages of online learning

Online learning until 2020 has been a popular alternative to learning since 2020 has become a necessity and often was called the "new normal". Based on the predictions, the online education market will reach \$ 230 billion by 2025¹². In students' opinions, online learning promotes a better work-life balance. Because employers believe that online courses can boost soft and technical skills, multinational companies already have a budget allocated for this type of training. It is not neglectable that online courses do not require travel, thus relieving the student of the burden of travel taxes. Being a "digital nomad" is interesting and offers countless satisfactions but also challenges. For students who work part-time online courses was the perfect solution for a much more flexible schedule, because allowed them to work at the time when their brain is most engaged. The enhancement of technical literacy, development of self-motivation and self-discipline, stress reduction help people to become broad-minded practitioners.

¹¹ www.traininguri.ro

¹² www.usa.edu

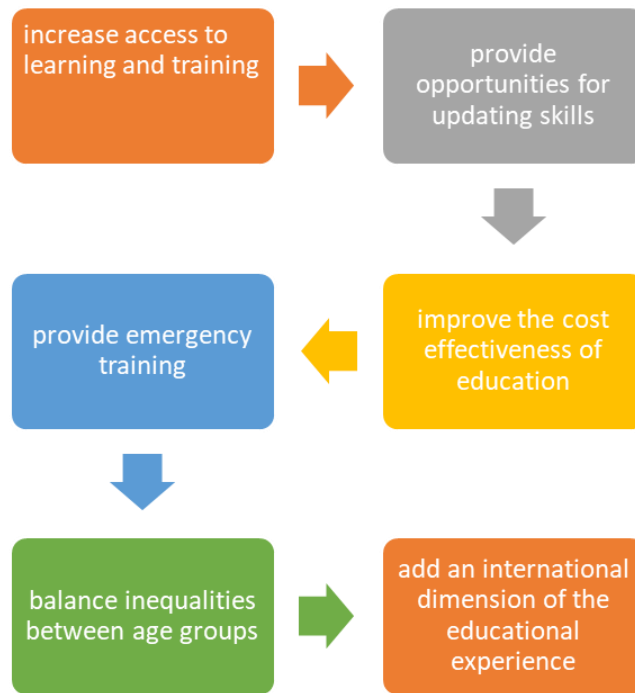


Figure 6. Advantages of online learning

Source: created by the author, based on information collected from the mentioned centres

5. Conclusions

The increasing number of enrolled people on online courses demonstrate that the internet is a reliable ally in acquiring qualitative knowledge, especially in uncertain times when is the duty of each of us to learn something useful. The students find online courses very flexible and cost-effective, using them to boost soft and technical skills too. Based on testimonies, online courses keep people connected with the rest of the world and trained at the same time, bringing a unique perspective to everybody's learning experience. Popular courses chosen in the period 2020-2021 was: public procurement expert; project manager; internal auditor; GDPR: responsible for personal data protection; tax expert; expert accessing European Structural and Cohesion Funds; project evaluator. In general, the price of the courses varies between 400 and 950 lei at the studied centres.

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