

Chapter 62

Ethical and Practical Issues Surrounding Access to ICT Education by Elderly Persons

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ABSTRACT

This chapter presents a summary of studies around the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and the elderly, with a particular focus on educational uses of ICT. Though the review is by no means comprehensive, it nevertheless addresses the main issues and provides a useful starting point for researchers interested in exploring this area in greater depth. These issues include barriers to ICT use for the elderly, motivation, the importance of ICT and education of the elderly, and the unique usability requirements of the elderly. Also explored are reasons why the elderly use ICT.

INTRODUCTION

This article is based on the authors' personal experience of teaching ICT to elderly persons, backed up by a literature review within the areas of ICT, education and older adults. The term "older adult" and "elderly" are used interchangeably throughout. We also refer to the "third age," a term used to describe a period in life "when people may no longer be in paid employment, but can remain healthy, fulfilled and continue to contribute to society" (Third Age Ireland, 2013). The article is divided into a number of areas that

relate to particular themes which came up through the study. These topics include challenges for the elderly with ICT, the divide between older and younger users with regard to ICT use and "Design for all" debate. We look at some of the ideas about older adults such as "The Silver Surfer" and the profile of older adults, stressing their unique needs and factors they may have with ICT use such as motivation. Participation and ethics of the "grey divide" are discussed and how this divide may be bridged. We looked at some of the factors around ICT classes for the elderly including teaching and loneliness. We have added

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some comments based on our experiences with the elderly. It is not a comprehensive study but it is hoped that it may serve as a good starting point for anyone interested in the area and for anyone interested in providing ICT classes for the elderly.

BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Challenges for the Elderly

The elderly may have gone through significant change in their lifetime. The last hundred years have seen huge cultural and social change on a global level. Many people in their sixties can remember a time when there was no television or electricity. Technology has been advancing at an increasingly accelerating rate. To keep up with this technology is difficult for young people but it provides greater challenges for older people.

Drucker (1995) wrote about the “knowledge society” and claimed that knowledge will be learned long after formal schooling. Perhaps there will be challenges for everyone to keep abreast of this knowledge and ways of acquiring it. There is currently more and more emphasis by all sections of society, business, schools, government services, and banks to automate their services. The elderly and everyone else are being asked to use more and more technology in everyday life. For example, retail banks are moving many of their traditional front-line work to on-line services. Even within physical banks, face-to-face teller services are increasingly being replaced by machines. This presents unique challenges for the elderly and for society in general. Some of the elderly may not want to use this technology; some may not know how to use it. Trentin (2004) analysed the purposes for which elderly persons used the Web, and found that they mostly accessed news, local authorities, government bodies, sporting or cultural associations, banks / financial sites, health sites or specific third age sites, and tourism and

library or museum sites. More recently, they are beginning to use “Skype” to contact younger relatives who are geographically removed from home. Agudo, Angeles Pascual, and Fombona, (2012) make the point that “the elderly use ICT as a form of education; that these generations of the elderly need and want to learn.”

The ability to change may also be a factor. Many of the elderly grew up in a very different social world. Communication was predominantly verbal. In an era before the arrival of e-mail and SMS, the written word perhaps had more power. Although older people can learn, the way they do so may be different from younger generations and their worldview may be considerably different from younger people. Many older people put great time and effort into writing letters, a lot more effort than many people today do in writing an e-mail.

The “Grey Divide”

Initially, we concentrated our literature searches upon the topic of the “digital divide,” a term used often in academic literature to describe the difference between those who have and those who have not in terms of Information Communications Technology. Mordini et al. (2009) report that in Europe, though 38% of citizens used the Internet regularly, only 8% of people over 65 were regular users. Quite a number of authors have pointed to the emerging issues associated with an increasingly aging population (Naumanen & Tukiainen, 2010; Czaja & Lee, 2007). Conversely, “digital inclusion” is a term used to describe the social inclusion of people through their access to ICT and ability to acquire ICT skills. Many authors comment on the importance of ensuring that the elderly are digitally included. As Gil and Amaro (2010, p. 2) put it “elderly people must be included in order to provide their inclusion because in the knowledge society, those who can use the new media are more advantaged than those who do not.”

Mordini et al. (2009) argue that the “grey divide” is an unethical situation and “an offence to

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