

ONLINE LEARNING IN THE COBISS.SI COMMUNITY

SPLETNO UČENJE V SKUPNOSTI COBISS.SI

Translation from Slovenian into English: Petra Bridges

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Abstract

As part of its mission in the Slovenian librarianship sphere, IZUM puts great emphasis on education and training. Today's way of life is very information- and technology-oriented, and e-learning with its online access to contents can additionally improve information literacy and also the quality of lifelong learning as a basic human right. Both IZUM and libraries provide their users with access to various information services. For the use of these services, IZUM has been offering free online courses for librarians, lecturers, researchers, students, high-school students, library users and employees of various institutions as part of its regular training programme. The paper discusses online learning at IZUM, the structure and content of online courses, the tools used for online learning and the advantages of this way of learning, and also presents an analysis of online courses held from the introduction of online learning at IZUM in 2005 to the end of 2015.

Keywords

lifelong learning, information literacy, e-training, e-education, online learning, information technologies, information systems and services, COBISS.SI, IZUM, libraries

Izvleček

IZUM v svojem poslanstvu v slovenskem knjižničnem prostoru pripisuje izobraževanju velik pomen. V današnjem informacijsko tehnološkem načinu življenja e-izobraževanje s svojimi spletnimi dostopi do vsebin še dodatno izboljšuje in izpopolnjuje informacijsko pismenost in s tem bistveno prispeva k dvigu kvalitete vseživljenjskega učenja kot temeljne človekove pravice. IZUM in knjižnice ponujajo svojim uporabnikom dostop do različnih informacijskih servisov. Zato IZUM za uporabo le-teh v okviru svojega programa izobraževanja že vrsto let izvaja tudi brezplačne spletne tečaje za knjižničarje, profesorje, raziskovalce, študente, dijake, uporabnike knjižnic in zaposlene v različnih institucijah. V članku so predstavljeni spletno učenje v IZUM-u, struktura in vsebina spletnih tečajev, uporabljeno orodje za spletno učenje, prednosti takšnega načina učenja in analiza izvedenih spletnih tečajev v obdobju od začetka vpeljave spletnega učenja v IZUM-u leta 2005 do konca leta 2015.

Ključne besede

vseživljenjsko učenje, informacijska pismenost, e-izobraževanje, spletno učenje, informacijska tehnologija, informacijski sistemi in servisi, COBISS.SI, IZUM, knjižnice

1. INTRODUCTION

With the development of the Internet and information and communication technologies (ICT), online learning makes information literacy easier to achieve and more adapted to individual needs and is already becoming an all-purpose mechanism for individual training. This particularly

applies to universities, research and academia. In these areas, libraries play a key role (Rahanu, et. al., 2015), as they provide access to various information resources and services. Librarians have very specific skills for accessing various information resources, creating search queries and developing search requests for searching academic papers, organising, sharing and evaluating search results, taking

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into account copyright and recognising and respecting the importance of citations, bibliometry, data protection, etc. This is why libraries should focus on information literacy by enabling, organising and carrying out online learning for their users. Only a few libraries decide to organise this form of training in Slovenia for various reasons.

At IZUM, training and learning is of great importance. Due to IZUM's role as an information service for Slovenian research, culture and education (COBISS.SI: Kooperativni online bibliografski sistem in servisi, 1997-2016; SICRIS, s. a.), we carry out very specific training activities, mostly for the use of COBISS software for librarians. We understand the impact of e-training on one's personal growth and student and researcher success as well as the success of other COBISS users and are also the provider, organiser and coordinator of access to foreign databases and services (based on consortia agreements). Because of this, in 2005, IZUM took over the important role in this with our online courses that we will continue to perform and update in the future. By doing so, we work towards information literacy and also act as a bibliographic service to a wider population in Slovenia. We have been organising and holding online courses for information services and COBISS/OPAC for several years. The online courses are free of charge and intended for all users.

2. ONLINE LEARNING AT IZUM

The beginnings of online learning at IZUM go back to 2005, when two different online courses for the use of COBISS and other services were offered to our users for the first time: *COBISS/OPAC Online publicly accessible catalogues* (thereinafter: COBISS/OPAC) and *Use of full-text databases* (thereinafter: FTB). Through the second one, the users got acquainted with the contents and use of full-text services, such as ProQuest, OCLC FirstSearch ECO, EBSCOhost (EIFL Direct) and Science Direct. In January 2006, we also started carrying out the online course *Use of Web of Science service* (thereinafter: WoS) (databases with citation indexes). Throughout time, based on the changes in the services themselves, consortia agreements with providers, and also user needs, these online courses were transformed and upgraded; some were cancelled, new courses were designed. In September 2012, we started carrying out the new online course *Use of ProQuest databases* (thereinafter: ProQuest), while in January 2013, we offered another online course to our users: *Use of EBSCOhost service databases* (EIFL Direct) (thereinafter: EBSCO). The abovementioned new courses replaced the original FTB course, which was cancelled in January 2013. In January 2015, our users also got access to another course, *Use of Scopus* (thereinafter: Scopus). In the beginning of 2016, due to lack of finances we were forced to cancel the agreement for the access to the multi-disciplinary database ProQuest Central and,

consequently, also stopped carrying out the online course for the use of the ProQuest service.

The free online courses, organised and carried out by IZUM, are intended for and accessible to a wide range of users: librarians, lecturers, researchers, students, high-school students, employees of various institutions and everybody else who would like to learn how to use the COBISS/OPAC services and other foreign information services. The online courses are very practical; the course participants get to know the basic terminology, learn how to use the databases, are introduced to the search forms and learn how to form search queries and various other useful contents.

For the duration of the course, each course is available 24 hours/day (accessible anytime and from any location) so the course participants can tailor the learning process to their needs and divide their work into manageable portions so that they can complete the course any time throughout the duration of the course. The course instructor monitors and guides the learning, helps the course participants during the learning process and answers their questions. To receive a certificate on course attendance, the final test must be completed with a score of at least 50% of points.

2.1. Online learning tool

Initially, the online courses were created and carried out using the WebCT (*Web Course Tools*) commercial learning environment. Later we switched to the Moodle e-learning system in 2009. Moodle stands for *Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment*. The tool is a free-of-charge, open source learning environment and one of the most frequently used systems for e-learning management and support to other forms of work cooperation worldwide.

Moodle enables the organisers of e-training to build e-learning contents, monitor the course participants' activities, manage e-learning contents and evaluate carried out online courses, but also includes a wide range of additional e-learning tools (e.g. calendar, forums, etc.). It also provides various communication tools (forums, chat, messaging) that are available to the course participants for the exchange of information, discussion with other participants of the online learning process and getting to know each other and work together.

2.2. Online course structure and contents

Each online course is divided into individual sections or learning units in terms of content. The course structure is based on the concept of modularity, which means that the individual learning units of the course can be used independently and individually based on the course participant's individual needs, existing knowledge and requirements. Each online course is structured by chapters

and subchapters; in addition to text, many media and visual elements are added, such as pictures, recordings, diagrams and tables. Each course contains many practical exercises and examples, quizzes to check one's knowledge as you go along and for studying, links to other similar contents and additional explanations available online, etc. (Figures 1 and 2).



Figure 1: COBISS/OPAC online course in the Moodle web environment (Source: IZUM, 2013)



Figure 2: Example of COBISS/OPAC online course contents (Source: IZUM, 2013)

The advantages of our online courses are:

- modular concept and good overview of contents,
- easy-to-understand explanations with graphic displays,
- quizzes for studying and checking newly acquired knowledge as you go along,
- interesting examples, equipped with visual displays or videos,
- adaptability to individual needs; while the course takes place, it is available 24 hours/day,
- course book with entire content and exercises in pdf-format; each course participant can print it out or save it to their computer or another device,
- final exam,
- course instructor monitors and guides the learning process, helps course participants and answers all their questions,
- several communication options for communication

among course participants or with the course instructor,

- availability to all interested users,
- free-of-charge participation, etc.

2.3. Some indicators of online course use

In the entire time period (2005–2015) while the online courses were carried out, we recorded a large number of participants with a varied educational background. At the same time, participants also come from different age groups. Below you will find diagrams for different online courses that display the number of participants by months in the abovementioned time period, by number of acquired attendance certificates and activity and structure of participants as well as gender.

The *COBISS/OPAC* online course has been carried out without any interruptions from the launch of online courses; until the end of 2015, 932 participants took part, 533 successfully completed the course and acquired an attendance certificate (Figure 3). Most participants attended the *COBISS/OPAC* online course in spring, in March, followed by April in May. The least attendance was recorded in the summer months when the course is held only once a month. During the rest of the year, two courses per month are organised (Figure 4).

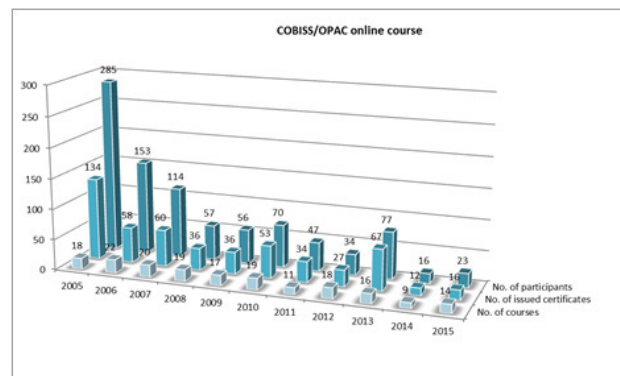


Figure 3: COBISS/OPAC online course between 2005 and 2015

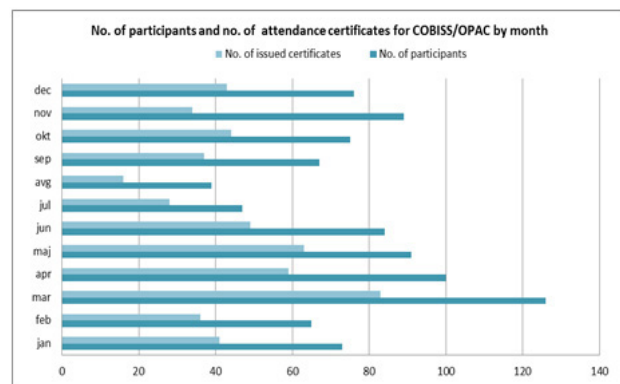


Figure 4: Number of COBISS/OPAC online course participants and issued attendance certificates by month between 2005 and 2015

With regards to participation structure by gender, the majority of online course participants are female, 75% on average (Figure 5). The largest percentage of female participants was recorded in 2013, when 90% of all online course participants were female, while in 2006 the percentage of female course participants was lowest with only 69% female participants.

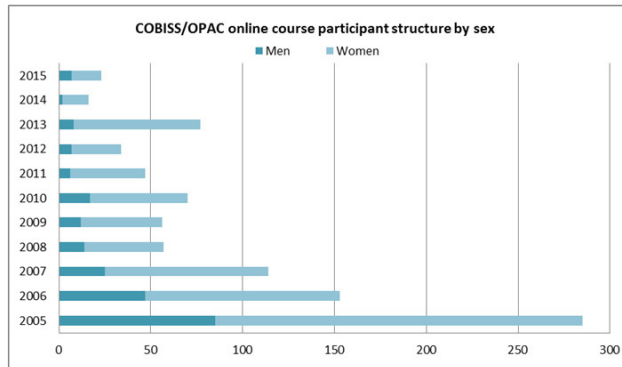


Figure 5: Structure of COBISS/OPAC online course participants by gender between 2005 and 2015

Between 2005 and the course cancellation in 2012, the *FTB* online course was attended by 564 participants. The ratio between the number of participants and the number of issued attendance certificates is 2:1 or a little less than 50% of issued attendance certificates, which is the lowest out of all online courses (Figure 6). The reason is that some course participants only visited the course but did not complete the final exam, which is the precondition for issuing the attendance certificate for online courses. The participants of the *FTB* online course attended the course most frequently in November, as many as 105 out of 564 in total, followed by February, April and September (Figure 7).

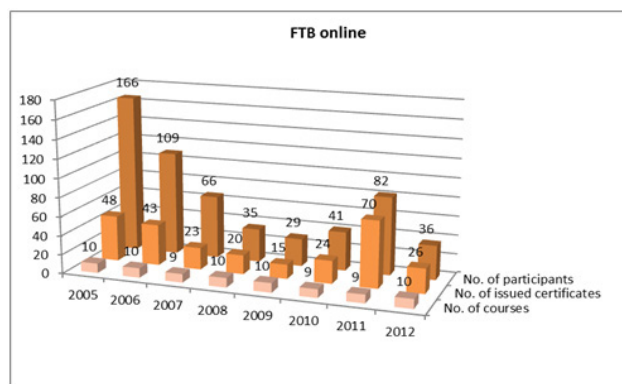


Figure 6: *FTB* online course between 2005 and 2012

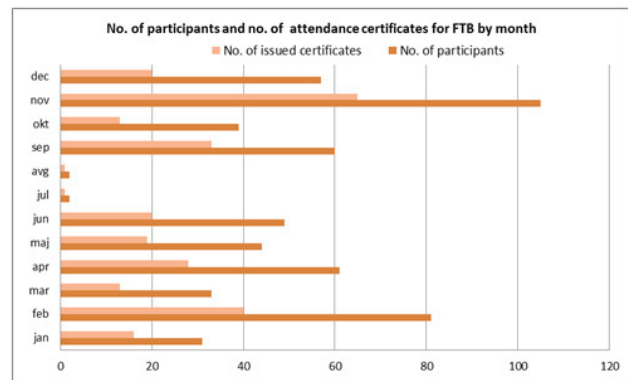


Figure 7: Number of *FTB* online course participants and issued attendance certificates by month between 2005 and 2012

Among all participants of the *FTB* online course there were 74% women and only 26% men. Throughout the years this structure did not change much, with the exception of 2011 when 88% of all course participants were women (Figure 8).

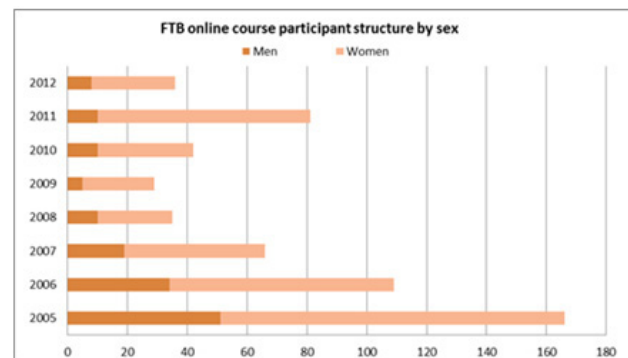


Figure 8: Structure of *FTB* online course participants by gender between 2005 and 2012

We started carrying out the *WoS* online course in 2006. In the first year, an average of 9 participants attended the course each time. This was followed by a decline in attendance until 2011 when it was on the up again. In 2012 there was another decline, followed by 2013 with the largest number of participants (Figure 9). Until the end of 2015, a total of 89 *WoS* online courses were carried out, with the largest attendance recorded in March, November and September (Figure 10); the course is not carried out in July and August.

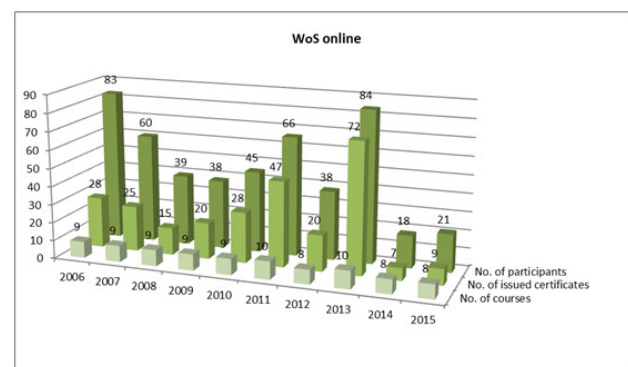


Figure 9: *WoS* online course between 2006 and 2015

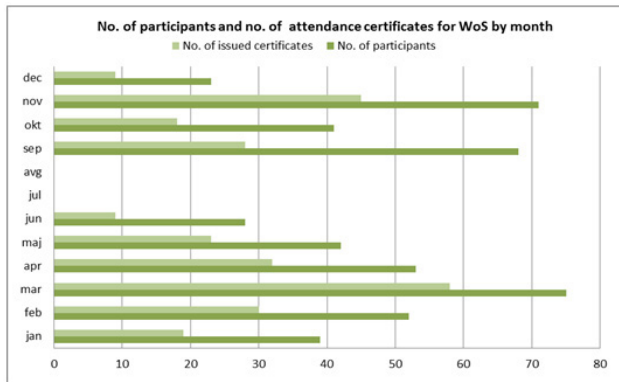


Figure 10: Number of WoS online course participants and issued attendance certificates by month between 2006 and 2015

With regards to the *WoS* online course participant structure by gender, 80% of participants of this course are women. The percentage of women was even higher in 2014, and in 2011, went up to 94% (Figure 11).

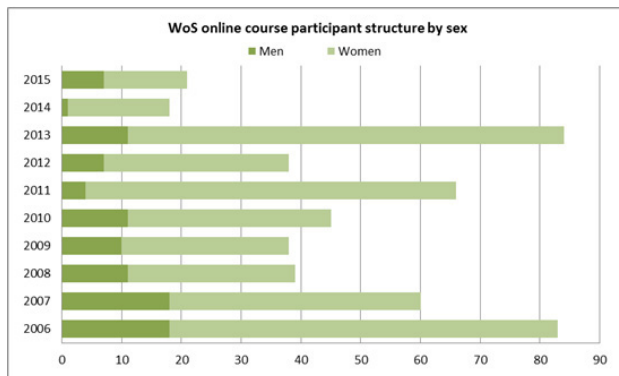


Figure 11: Structure of WoS online course participants by gender between 2006 and 2015

Until recently, the *EBSCO* online course was the newest one as we started to carry it out in 2013. Just like for all previously described online courses, in the first year of carrying out the *EBSCO* online course, the attendance was at its highest, which was followed by a decline and a new rise last year (Figure 12). In the three years of conducting the course, most participants attended it in March, April and May. The smallest attendance was recorded in February and at the end of the year, i.e. in November and December (Figure 13). During the summer, i.e. in July and August, the course is not carried out.

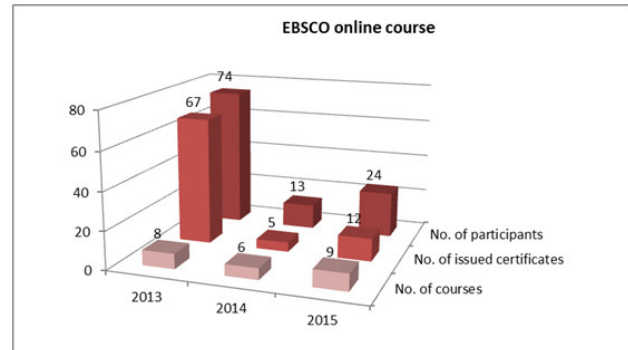


Figure 12: EBSCO online course between 2013 and 2015

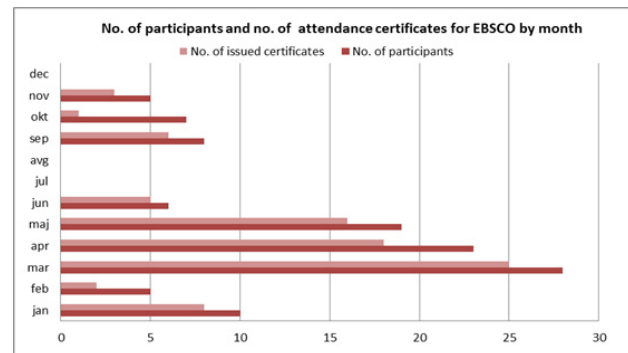


Figure 13: Number of EBSCO online course participants and issued attendance certificates by month between 2013 and 2015

With regards to the total number of *EBSCO* online course participants, 81% were women and only 19% men. It is interesting that the participant structure changes throughout the years and a total of 38% male participants of this course were observed last year (Figure 14).

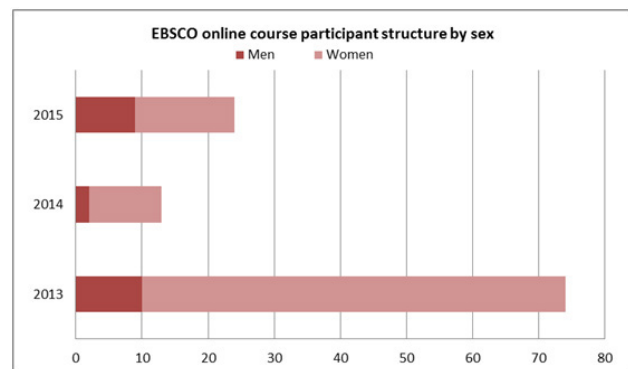


Figure 14: Structure of EBSCO online course participants by gender between 2013 and 2015

We began to carry out the *ProQuest* online course in September 2012. The number of participants per course remains more or less the same every year. A larger number of participants was recorded in 2013 when the most *ProQuest* online courses were carried out. In 2013, a little over 8 participants per course were recorded (Figure 15). In the time period when the *ProQuest* course was carried out, the month with the highest attendance was May, followed by March and December (Figure 16). This online course is not organised in July and August.

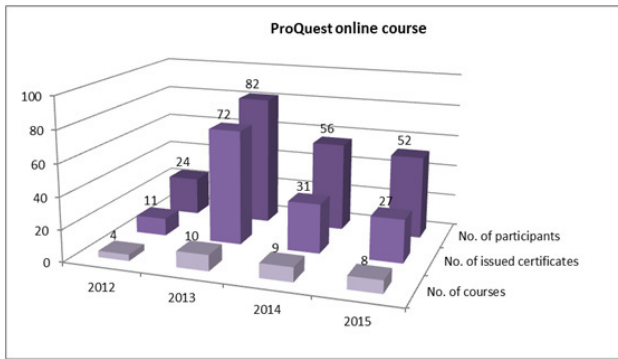


Figure 15: ProQuest online course between 2012 and 2015

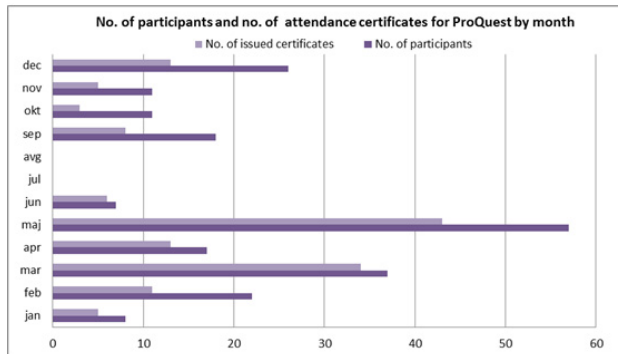


Figure 16: Number of ProQuest online course participants and issued attendance certificates by month between 2012 and 2015

By gender, the participant structure does not differ from the average of other online courses. The highest percentage of male participants attended the course in 2012 (29%), followed by 2014 (25%) and 2015 (27%), whereas the highest female attendance was recorded in 2013 with 85% (Figure 17).

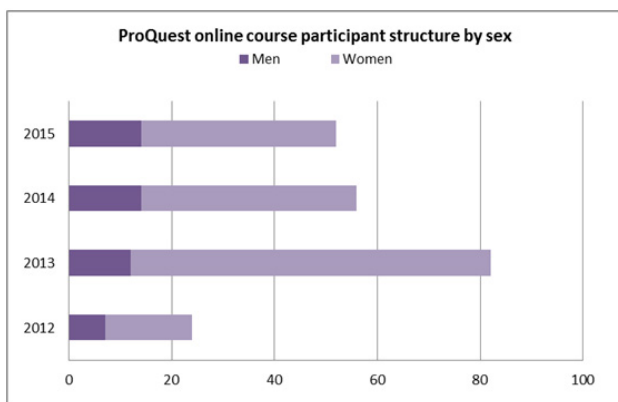
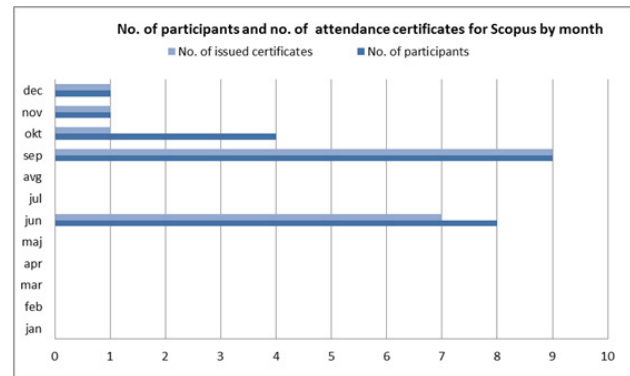
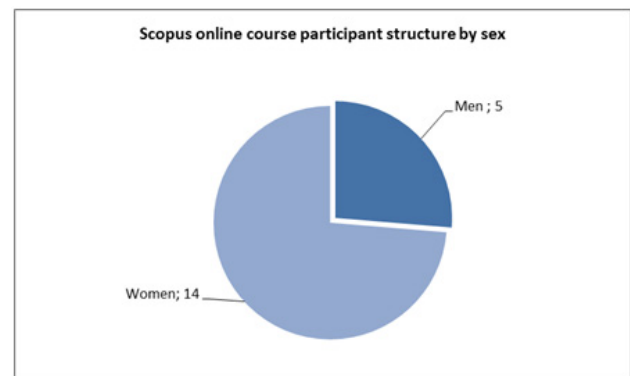


Figure 17: Structure of ProQuest online course participants by gender between 2012 and 2015

The *Scopus* online course was launched in June 2015. The most course participants attended in the first available dates, which was followed by a decline in attendance (Figure 18). In 2015, 74% of the *Scopus* online course participants were women and only 26% men (Figure 19).

Figure 18: Number of *Scopus* online course participants and issued attendance certificates by month in 2015Figure 19: *Scopus* online course participant structure by gender in 2015

Between 2005 and 2015, 408 online courses were held with a total of 2336 participants. 1913 participants were active and 1317 attendance certificates were issued per online course. The *COBISS/OPAC* online course was held the most times and had the largest attendance.

The details about the number of courses held, number of participants, number of active participants and number of issued attendance certificates are shown in Figure 20. With regards to the number of participants per course, the *FTB* and *ProQuest* courses are in the lead with an average attendance of 7 participants for each course held. This is followed by the *WoS* and *COBISS/OPAC* courses with an average of just over 5 participants per course held, and *EBSCO* and *Scopus* with an average of 4.7 participants per course. The most attendance certificates on average are issued for the *ProQuest* online course with 4.6 per course, followed by *Scopus* and *EBSCO* with 3.8 and 3.7 participants respectively, and *COBISS/OPAC* and *WoS* with an average of 3 participants per course.

Out of all online course participants, 82% were active and 56% received an attendance certificate.

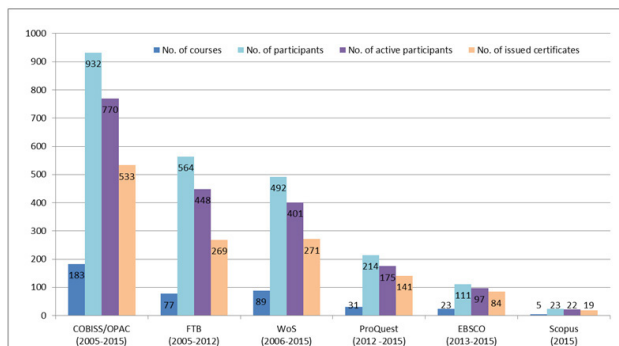


Figure 20: Online course attendance by years

With regard to gender, the participant structure is similar in the individual online course. All online courses were attended by 76% of women and 24% of men (Figure 21).

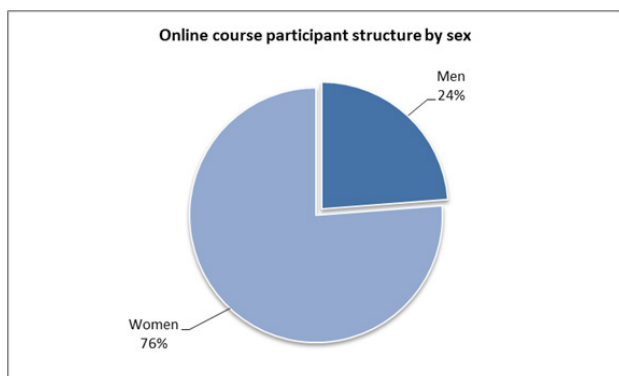


Figure 21: Participant structure by gender between 2005 and 2015

The educational background of the online course participants is very different; participants with a university degree prevail, followed by participants with a high school diploma and participants with a professional higher education degree. We can deduce that this result reflects the greater interest and applicability for online courses for the use of foreign databases and services in students, researchers, university staff, etc. who require these skills for their work and further education.

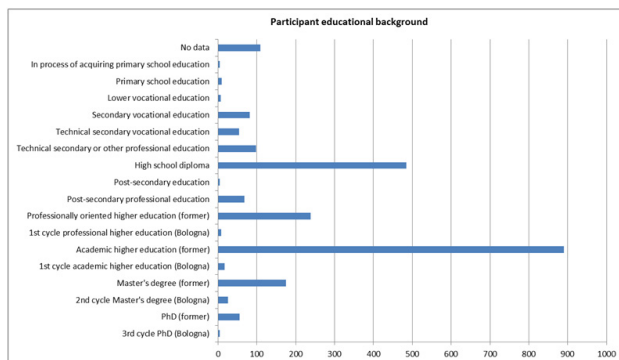


Figure 22: Educational background of online course participants between 2005 and 2015

Most online course participants are employed (42%) or students (22%), while a large percentage of participants (26%) did not provide this information (Figure 23).

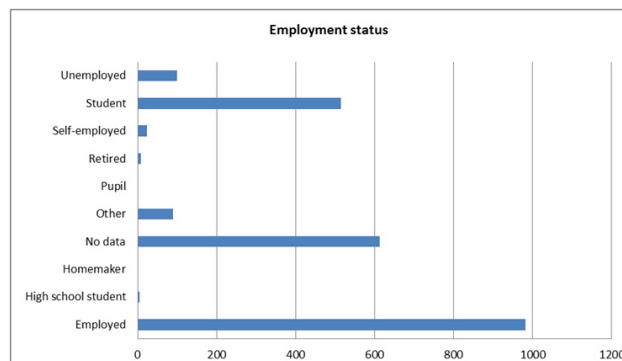


Figure 23: Course participant employment status

3. CONCLUSION

The modern learning society requires individuals that will permanently learn, improve and train in all areas of life. Only by doing so will they be able to stay up-to-date with quickly evolving technologies and achieve information literacy at a degree, required for successful and high quality performance in education, work organisations or everyday private life. IZUM as a bibliographic and information service for Slovenian science, culture and education offers online training for a wide population as part of their offer of training programmes, in addition to COBISS software courses. Within an 11-year time period, 408 online courses were carried out with over 2300 participants from different age groups and with different educational backgrounds. It is interesting to observe that three quarters of all participants were women. Out of everyone who signed up for our online courses, 82% actively participated; attendance certificates were issued to over half of the participants (56%). Through the online courses that we create and organise we strive to reach the goals of lifelong and multidimensional learning, to promote and improve information literacy of a wide range of individuals, and, at the same time, actively take part in the promotion of lifelong learning. For the fifth time in a row, IZUM actively participates in the Slovenian project *Teden vseživljenjskega učenja* (Lifelong Learning Week) – TVU 2016 with its range of online course.

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