The Role of Distance Learning Study for the Croatian Top Level Athletes

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Abstract. Altogether 352 categorized female athletes participated in the research; most of them were in the age of 18 to 21 years. With the purpose to determining interests and attitudes of top athletes in education system, a specially designed questionnaire was prepared for this study. Categorized athletes are excellent students and very successful in coordinating their sports and school obligations. Mostly they speak one or two foreign languages, they are familiar with today’s information and communication technologies, and they have interest to use this knowledge in their formal education. The athletes’ success serves an important social function in our society, and when it comes to their career it is in the national interest to support them in education with programmes that allow athletes to be more flexible in their studies. In contribution to that, an interest and need to make new education programmes for entrepreneurship has been determined. With the purpose to establish the new E-study for athletes we have made the proposal of the Operational activities model. This model have to be implemented in the process of creating new educational distance learning program that particularly suites to meet the needs of athletes and other special educational groups who cannot be involve in regular academic process.

Keywords. sports career, high education, distance learning.

1. Introduction

The Commission of Women in Sport, within the Croatian Olympic Committee, emphasized in its programme a need to carry out an analysis of interests and attitudes on education. The goals of the Project „Attitudes and interest of Croatian female top level athletes on education and equality” which was accepted by the Croatian Olympic Committee Council are; 1. To determine the interests of Croatian female athletes in education during and after a sports career, 2. A necessity to introduce a new educational subjects (mentor-teacher, information and communication technology in learning process, E-learning, programmes for management training in sport, etc.), 3. Determination of goals and activities to be follow in 2009, based on the results of the research analysis.

A series of analysis confirm that many young female athletes lose interest in sports training and competition during secondary school. The reason could be different: life of adolescent marks a big change, physical and emotional; the amount of practical training increases at the same time with the studies obligation; stress can get to be too much and frustrations are inevitable; and there is a lack of social life, need to spent time with friends.

A great deal of active Croatian female top-level athletes terminates their education after secondary school. According to accessible information there are a small number of female athletes at Croatian universities. The results of the analysis from 2003 showed that we dealing with several groups of reason: 1. They are not able to integrate their academic obligations with sports commitment, 2. Family reason and maternity, 3. Lack of motivation for higher education and 4. Without long-term planning the future seams uncertain. Today, at Croatian universities they can study one academic year longer than other university students and they can also arrange exams with their professors. [2]

The main aims of this paper is to present the more interest in education of the Croatian top level athletes and according to the analysis to define the activities which can secure the
conditions for the successful achievements in education as well as in sports career.[3]

2. Methods

Altogether 352 categorized female athletes participated in the study; most of them were in age of 18 to 21 years (altogether 103). A specially designed questionnaire was prepared for this study which contains 35 questions divided into chapters: 1. General information, 2. Education and sport, 3. Sport status, 4. Equality of male and female athletes and 5. New educational subject and activities. The results of analysis were consolidating in summary created in the Information centre of the Croatian Olympic Committee.

3. Education and a sports career

In the female athletes sample, altogether 64 of them are mostly second and third year university students (28) and mostly at the Faculty of Economy, Faculty of Kinesiology and Faculty of Law of the Zagreb University. For the purpose of this Conference, in this paper we have analyzed the answers from the questionnaire regarding athlete’s continuation of education, their interest on information and communication technology in learning and teaching process as well as the necessity to run up the new educational programme or study.

197 female athletes who attend high school responded to the question on continuing education. Most of them, 191 athletes (54,26%) are interested to continue their education and to attend college. Response analysis implies that the largest number of them are interested in enrolling in some college – 126 of them (35,80%), while 30 of them is interested in studying Kinesiology. Graph 1 Smaller number - only14 (3,98%) are interested in high coaching school or some other college or professional training for a coach. An interesting information is that female athletes are mostly interested in studying Economy and Marketing, which creates a possibility that the bodies in authority of education and sport make directives that could contribute to college success during active sport career, on the model of some European countries (mentor, distance learning, consensual agreements on the rights and privileges of athletes, etc.)

From the total sample, 124 of them emphasize the significance of information and communication technology in learning and teaching process at all levels of education. In consideration of that e-learning is a constituent and integral part of university education, in the future a step forward could be made concerning development and training of students – athletes for use of technologies and systematic implementation of e-learning and initiation of an international facility.

4. Career after sports career

Only a very small number of top athletes can support themselves with their athletic career. After ending their sport career, 134 female athletes wish to remain committed to sport, while 98 of them do not have a clear vision of themselves, but they want to be able to enter in another occupation after their athletic career has ended. This is not possible without vocational training or university studies accompanying the athletic career. With the purpose of determining interest for creating study for entrepreneurs in sport, a question was asked concerning the need and interest of female athletes. Response analysis sets out the necessity to build a training curriculum, from the total of 246 female athletes who responded to the question, 162 confirmed the necessity to build and implement such kind of study, and 93 athletes are interesting in attending in it.

![Graph 1; Results of Questionnaire; interest in HE (study programs)](image)

5. Distance education for top level athletes and other special group

In the frame of the Bologna Declaration, e-learning is the very important factor and tool for the quality of university education in Croatia. E-learning in Croatia has defined by the E-learning strategy documents for the period 2007-2010. According to the Strategy of University of Zagreb supports and actively encourages e-learning with the following objectives; 1.
enhance the quality of university education, 2. facilitate teachers and students to achieve new roles in the process of education, 3. increase the competitiveness of the University and its study programs and 4. enable students to use lifelong learning technologies. Also is important to stress the definition of e-learning in the Strategy: e-learning is a process of the education (learning and teaching process) conducted using the information and communication technology which improves the quality of the process itself and the quality of its result.

According to the Report of the E-office in the University of Zagreb, the actual state of the e-learning status on the University of Zagreb can be explain as beginning of good start in the process of developing of e-learning on the faculties. The University consists of the 33 faculties, and 29 faculties have answered on the E-office questionnaire; 26 faculties have create and send to office financial plan for implementation e-learning in 2008; 19 faculties have emphases the plan to establish the e-centre or group for the support e-learning in faculty and 11 faculties have mentioned in their plan other activities which are the part of the Strategy.

The research was carried out on the Faculty of Economics and Business in the University of Zagreb. One of the aim of the research was to determine what students (n=117) consider as advantages and disadvantages of e-learning. Advantages of e-learning according to student’s opinions are the following: learning from own home, everything in the same place, easy and quick access to information, and no fixed terms of learning. Possible disadvantages of e-learning according to students’ opinions are: no direct communication among students, no direct communication with teachers, no interaction...

According to the Bekele's model success in Internet – supported learning environments was function of a complicated interplay of human, technologies, course, pedagogic, and leadership factors. One of more of these factors would unfavourably affect success measures such as learning outcomes, student satisfaction, higher learning, faculty satisfaction, sustainability, scalability and rate of return.

All of these very important documents as well as the results of the different researches, analysis and data from the reports can help in the process of defining the e-study for top level athletes with the main purpose to use all advantages of e-learning which can help the athletes to be at the same time successful in academic and sports career.

6. Conceptual framework of the future study for the athletes

The conceptual framework of the future study for the athletes noted the most important guidelines to establish e-study for the athletes and other potential special educational groups (such as athletes with disability, people with special needs, sailors, etc.) Concerning the national strategy documents (National activity plan for children rights and interests 2006-2012, Plan of educational development system 2005-2010, National strategy of equal possibilities for people with special needs 2007-2015), Bekele's model of learning environments and interests of the Croatian top level female athletes for distance learning we have created the proposal of the Model which consist of the most important factors (Fig. 1). Moreover, according of the National Strategy of equal possibilities for people with special needs, learning ideally should be a personalised and adaptive process for all, which from the beginning till the end should consider the learner's specific needs. Students with disabilities suffer from lack of information and practices that meet their needs. In addition there are many difficulties in providing the appropriate infrastructure to them. The conceptual framework of the future study has to consist of the standards and user modelling for the students with special needs.

According to the Bekele's model factors and the activities which are prescribed in the E-strategy of the University Zagreb we have created the proposal of the most important factors (Fig. 1) and activities which could contribute in preparation process of establishing new E-study programme;

Organizational environments; plan activities for e-learning, regular the intellectual property rights of the faculty, establish of e-graduate study and later on e-postgraduate study, inter-university cooperation, cooperation with GO and NGO institution responsible for education and sport and synchronous environment.

Human resources; ICT competency, motivation, establish network of experts, inform about benefits of e-learning and ICT, workshops about technological and pedagogical aspects.

New e-study program; define the structure and organization, quality content and standards for e-learning materials, clear goals and
expectations, teaching methods as well as very important pedagogic strategy; interactive, prompt feedback, support from professors, motivation and learning experience.

Technology and leadership; support development and improve ICT infrastructure (according to standards from the NIMAS, adjustment of the LMS program, modification of the „Merlin“ system and the other necessities for the people with disabilities), to ensure functioning of the fund for the production of e-courses, support teaching staff, help desk, staff/students (athletes) training.

7. Conclusion

Results related to this study suggest that education becomes increasingly important to athletes as they progress through their sporting careers. Having a vision and possibilities to planning their long-term career is a reason that we recommended a new e-study program. Distance learning is excellent model which will allow to athletes a success in academic career as well as in sports career. According to the E-learning Strategy of the University of Zagreb, e-learning is an integral part of higher education process. There are advantages and disadvantages of distance learning, but for the top level athletes is very important that they have possibilities for distance learning during the period of practical training and competitions. Be able to learning from own home, at own convenience, self-paced learning, with everything in the same place and with easy access to all information’s is absolutely crucial so that athletes can pursued their academic obligations and still put themselves fully into their sport. [9] Moreover, to create the new e-study for the athletes and other special educational group should be influence on the following objectives; 1. Be an efficient tool in the realization of quality changes regarding to E-learning Strategy of the University of Zagreb as well as implementation of the Bologna Declaration principles, 2. Enable students-athletes and students with disabilities to use ICT, 3. To increase the positive competitiveness between the faculties and its new attractive educational programmes, 4. Ensure equal possibilities for all students in education process and 5. Accomplish the activities which are the part of the National Strategies.

9. References


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