European Funding Requirements in the eLearning Programme
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Introduction
In recent years, with the gradual consolidation of ICT implementation and expansion in Education, research on aspects of eLearning ranging from policy development, quality assessment, effective utilization and implementation strategies to key pedagogical implications has grown and diversified. The present study is situated in the context of a growing body of research literature on comparative perspectives regarding the problems and successes of eLearning policies and strategies undertaken in various national and cross-national settings, with a particular focus on the European Union.

The eLearning Programme
The eLearning Programme has its basis in two initiatives. The Programme, which was operational between 2004 and 2006, was the European Commission’s dedicated policy program to promote and accelerate the integration of ICT primarily in education, and, by extension, in the public and private sectors via educational partnerships. It acted as the continuation of the eLearning Action Plan, which was operational between 2001 and 2003. Both the Action Plan and the Programme, which were funded from the EU budget, were the operational components of the eLearning Initiative, the political declaration that sought to drive the objectives mentioned above.

Research Question
Are there differences among Italy, Germany, France, Spain and UK on how they rated the complexity of the requirements for European funding via the eLearning Programme?

Method
The participants in the study (N = 80) were contacted through the email addresses publicly available on the European Commission ELP website, and an online questionnaire was distributed to the designated lead coordinators of projects under the eLearning Programme, in 2009.

Results
All countries tended to rate the funding requirements unfavorable, ranging from 1.75 to 2.86. The overall mean rating was 2.49 (see Table 1 and Figure 1). All assumptions appear to be met in order to conduct the ANOVA. The omnibus F test reveals a significant difference among the five countries in terms of funding requirements (F(4,75) = 5.786, p < .001). Therefore, a post hoc analysis is required, indicating which countries differ from one another. Significant differences were observed between UK and France (p = .003), and UK and Italy (p < .001). For both comparisons, the UK rated the process more complex than either Italy or France.

Discussion
In this exploratory study, five countries were analyzed in terms of European funding requirements and complexity to obtain funding via the eLearning Programme. The coordinators expressed their apparent dissatisfaction through a low rating of the requirements in question (the mean value was lower than 3), especially in the case of the UK, which stood out with the lowest rating (M = 1.75).

First, the process of obtaining funds in the UK is not as complex as the one in the EU. The UK system relies on private revenue, slightly less complex, but more efficient, especially in comparison to the EU system. The documentation required by the EU is much more complicated in comparison to UK procedures.

Second, perhaps the UK coordinators who worked on projects for the first time were not experienced in terms of application requirements, having difficulties to understand how the process works. Individual comments documented in the same question outline that some of the UK coordinators considered this procedure as being “overly bureaucratic”, requiring assistance.

Further study is required to find the concrete answers to the question “Why did the UK coordinators rate funding requirements so much lower?”

References

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