ESCOLA SUPERIOR DE SAÚDE DO ALCOITÃO
SANTA CASA da Misericórdia de Lisboa

USE OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES BY PHYSIOTHERAPIST AND PHYSIOTHERAPY STUDENTS IN PORTUGAL

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Introduction

The European Region of the World Confederation for Physical Therapy refers in its document European Benchmark Statement (ER-WCPT, 2003) that the Physiotherapist should have ICT competences, so that he/she is able to search for the required evidence to validate their interventions, as well as to process the data and records collected during the clinical practice. Therefore those skills should be developed during their basic training and aplied in professional context. The main objective of this work was to characterize how ICT is used in Physiotherapy practice and on teaching and learning in Portugal, aiming specifically to determine the available technological support as well the usage, in academic and professional context by both physiotherapists and students.

Methodology

We carried out a descriptive study, a survey of transversal and exploratory nature, using 2 questionnaires based on bibliographic review, submitted to a validation before a experts panel and a pre-test. The studied population comprised all the Portuguese institutions that offered the Physiotherapy Course and all the members of Portuguese Association of Physiotherapists (APF) in the year of 2004/2005. As a sample we selected all the students from the 1st and 2nd years of the Physiotherapy Course and all the APF members. The data collection took place between June 2004 and January 2005 and descriptive statistics were used (frequency, mean, standard deviation). After the data retrieval the number of respondents was the following: students from the 1st and 2nd years of the Physiotherapy Course - 982; Physiotherapists - 221.
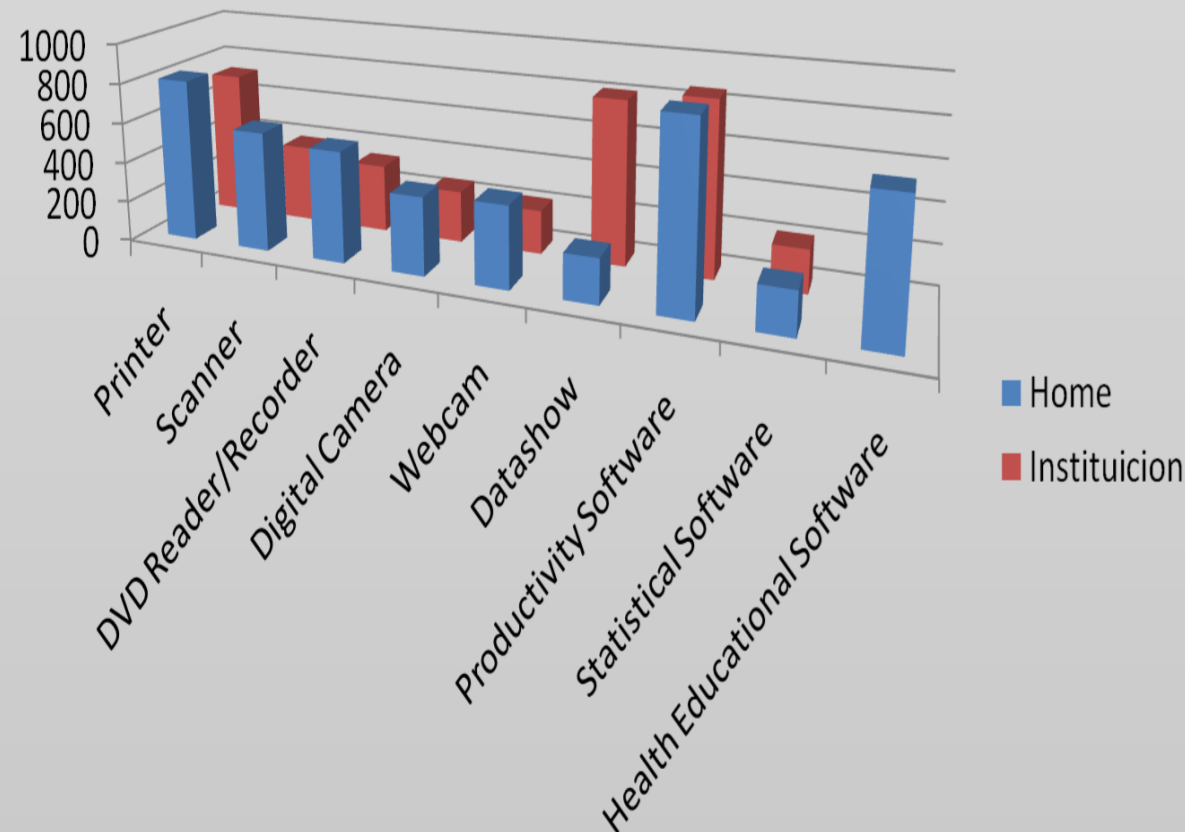
Accessibility to ICT

Physiotherapists

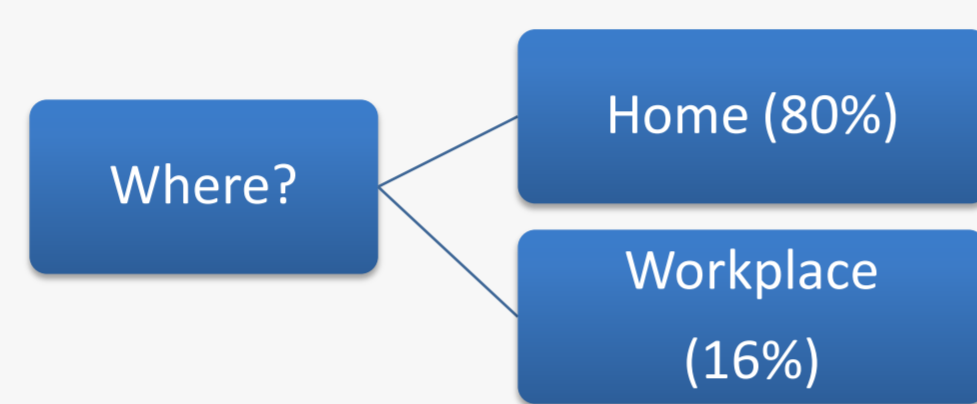**98%** have computer at home

87% have Internet access
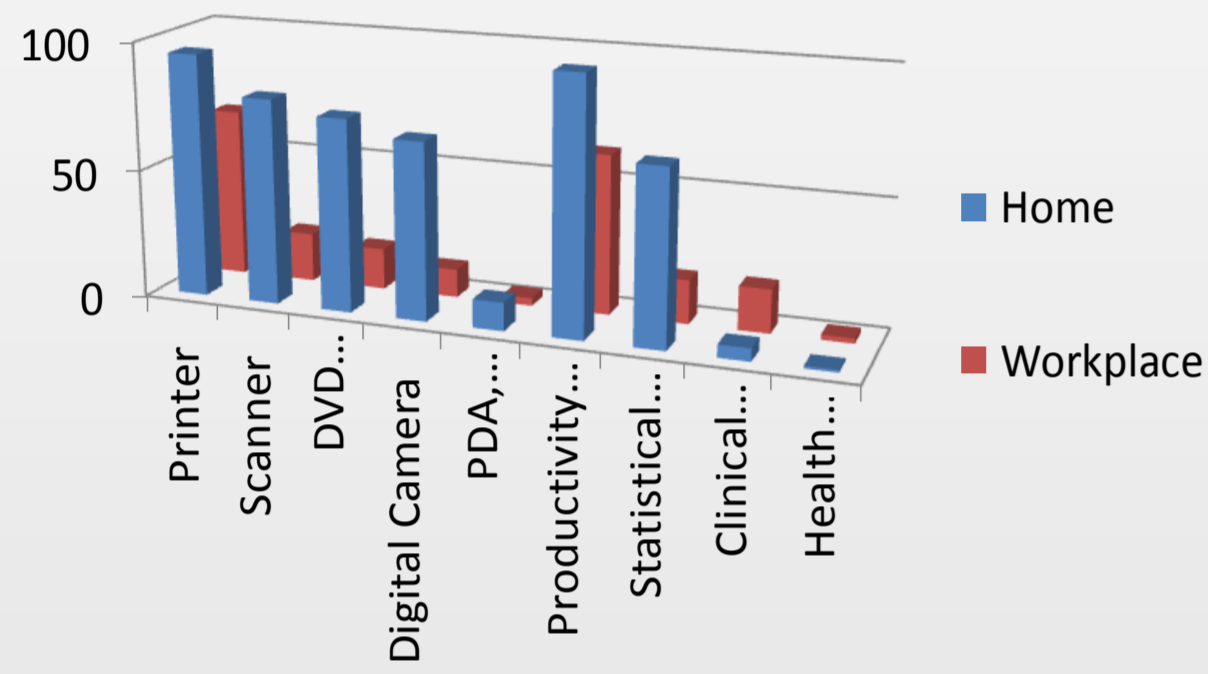
Students

93.5% have computer at home

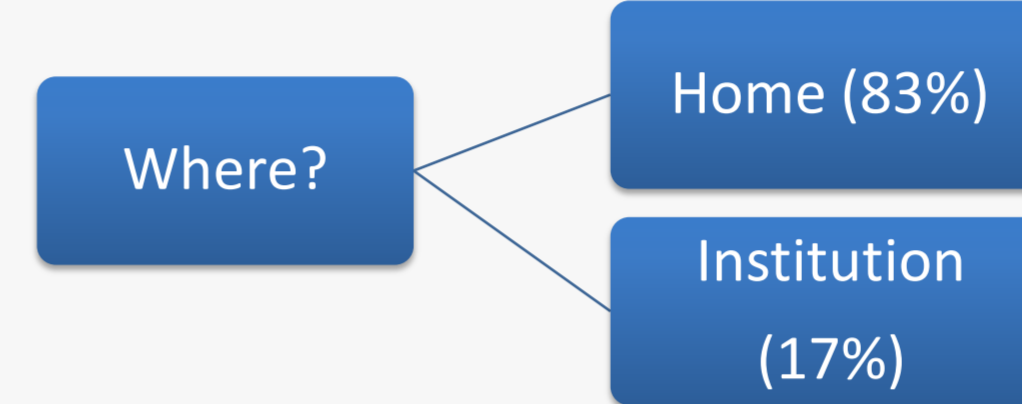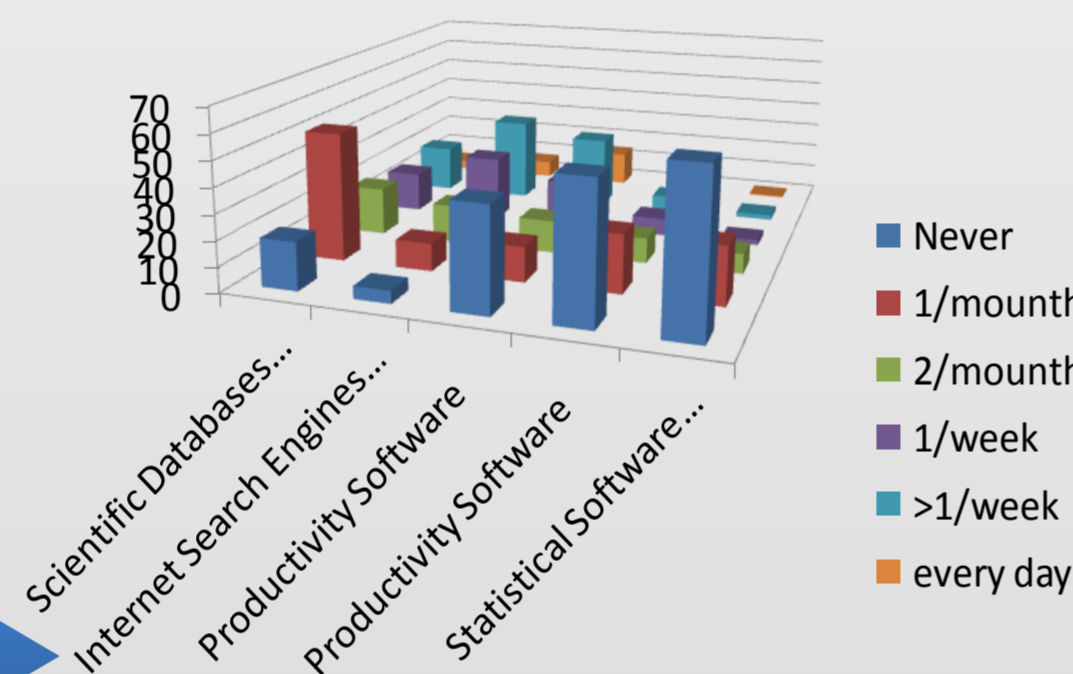**63.9%** have Internet access (**58%** High Speed Connection)

ICT Usage

Physiotherapists

Where? → Home (80%) / Workplace (16%)

Purpose? → Professional Context (90%) → More than 10 hours (32%) / 0 to 5 hours (28%)

Physiotherapy Students

Where? → Home (83%) / Institution (17%)

Purpose? → Educational Context (99.1%) → 0 to 3 hours (42.6%) / 3 to 5 hours (36.7%)
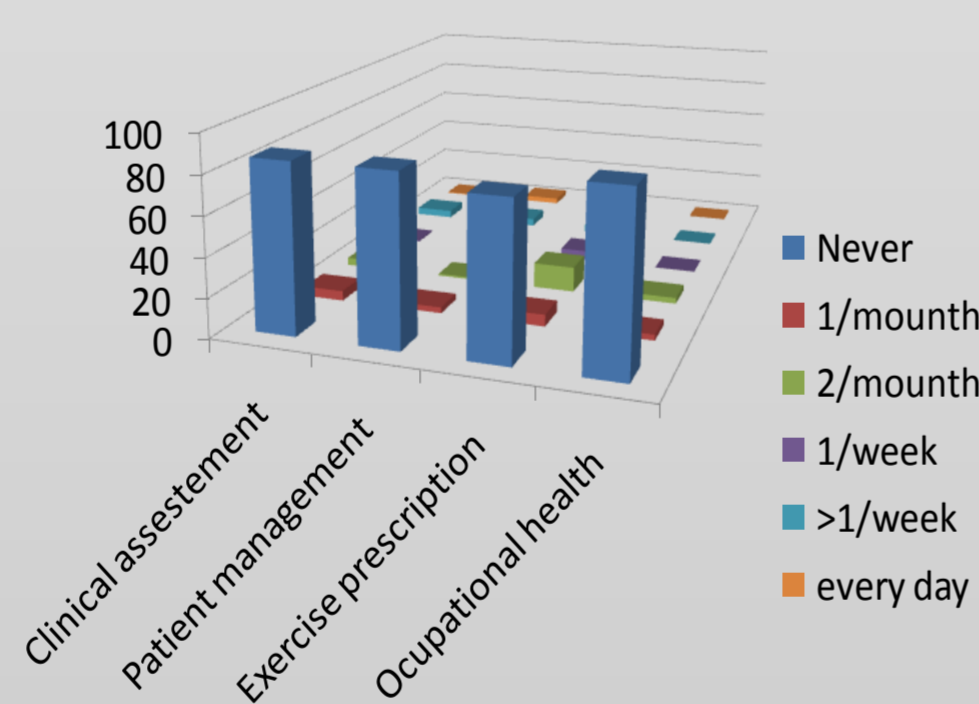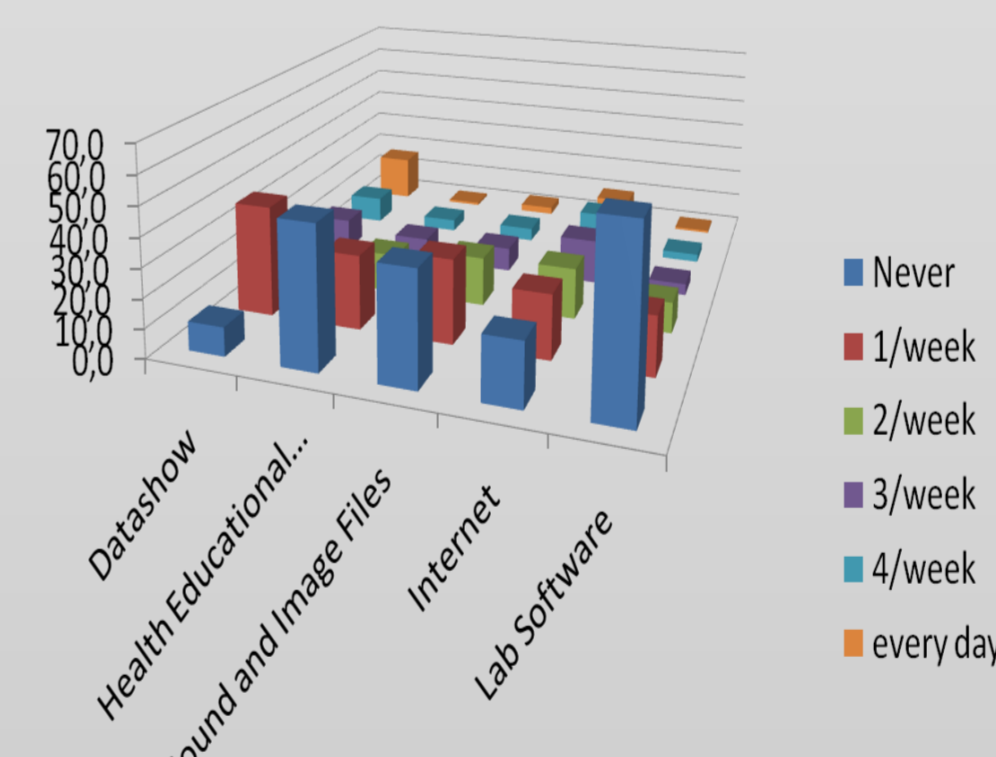
Professional work and tasks
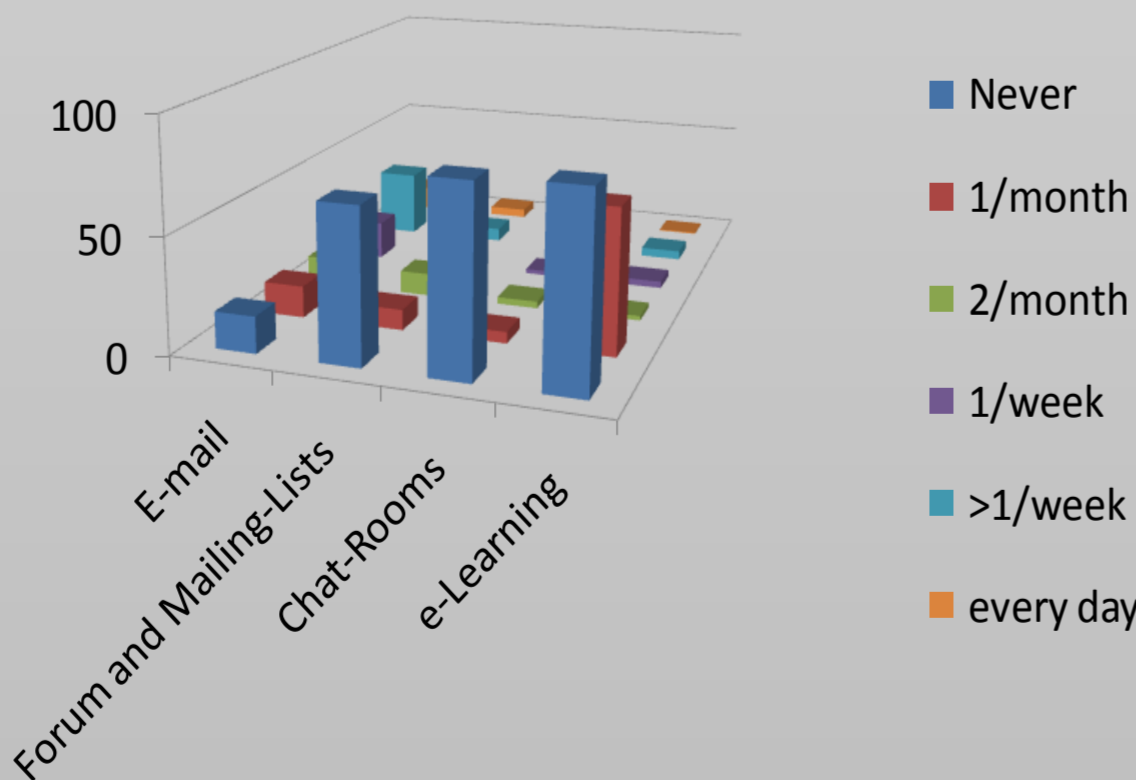

Educational work and tasks
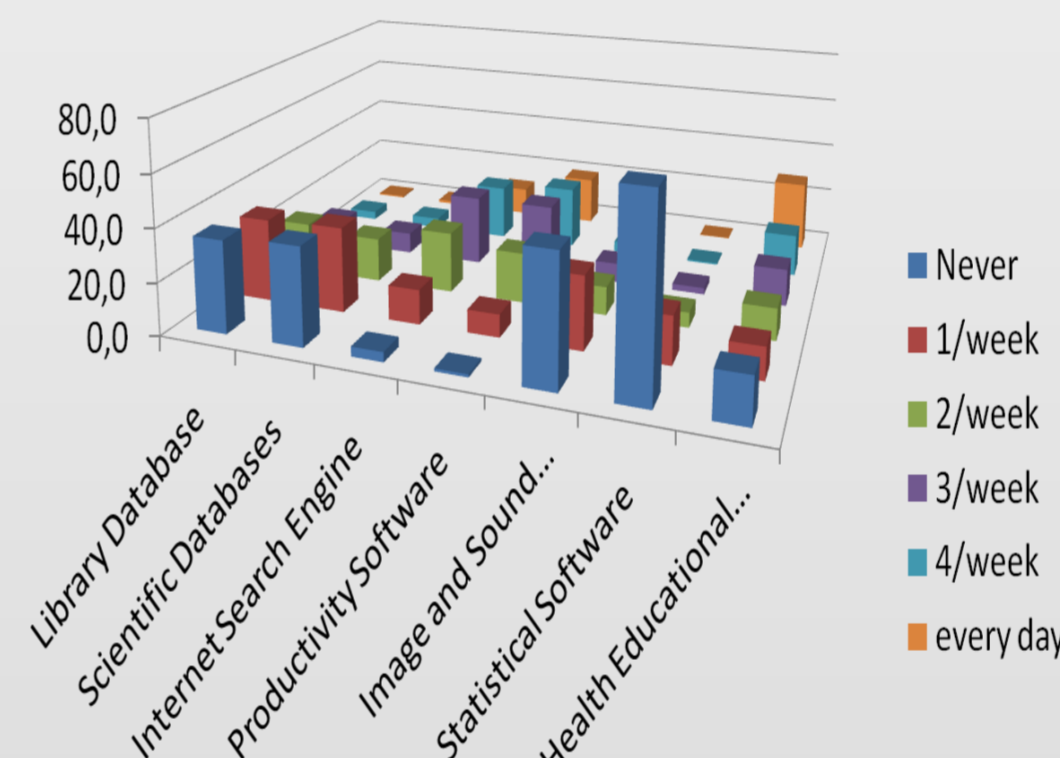
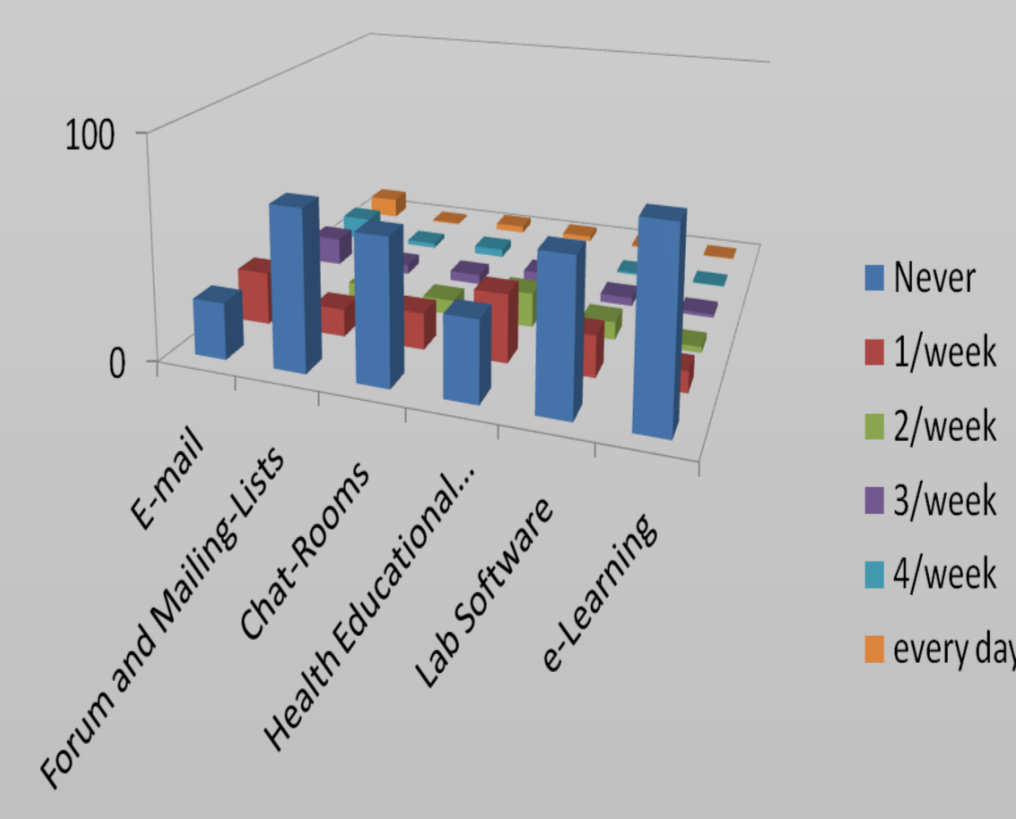**Software used in Professional practice**

In the classroom

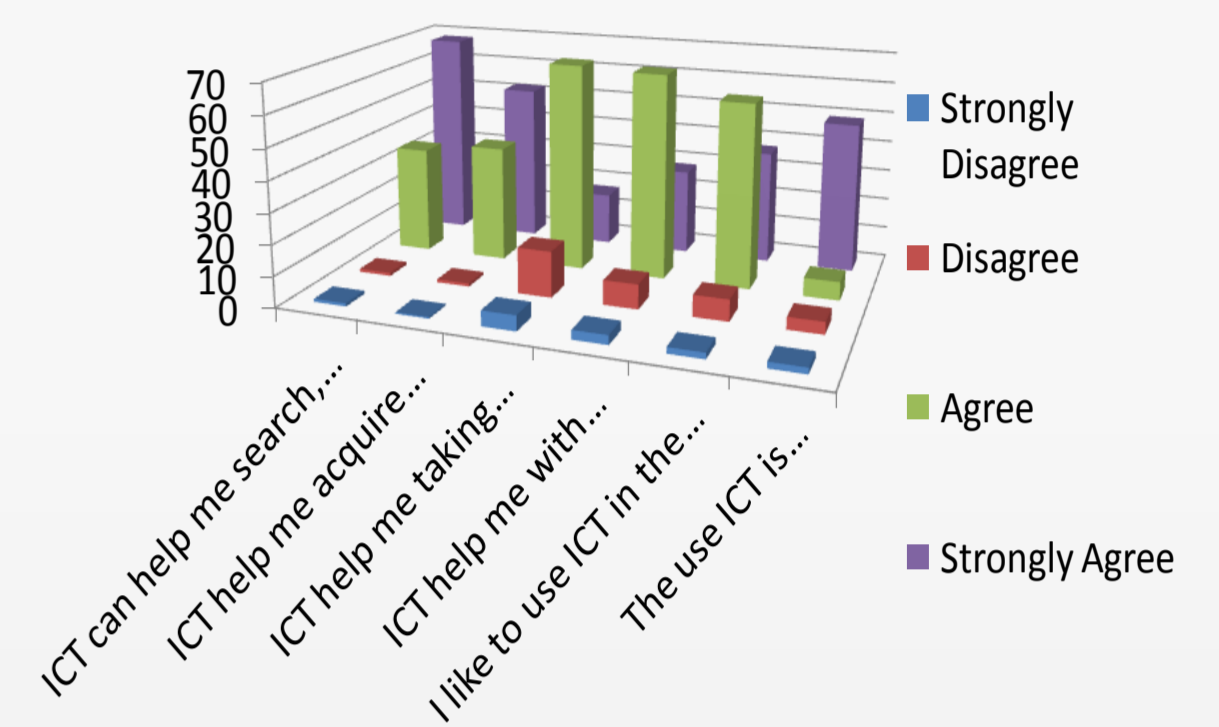**Directly with Patients and Pears**
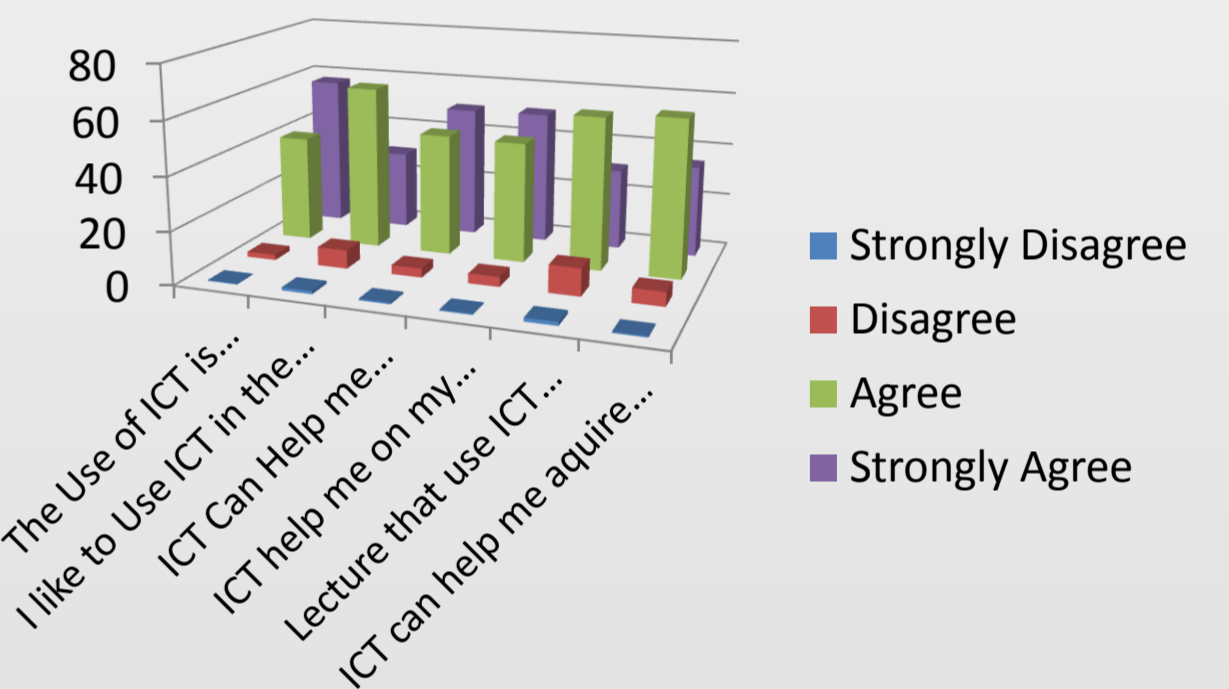

Directly with Teachers and Pears
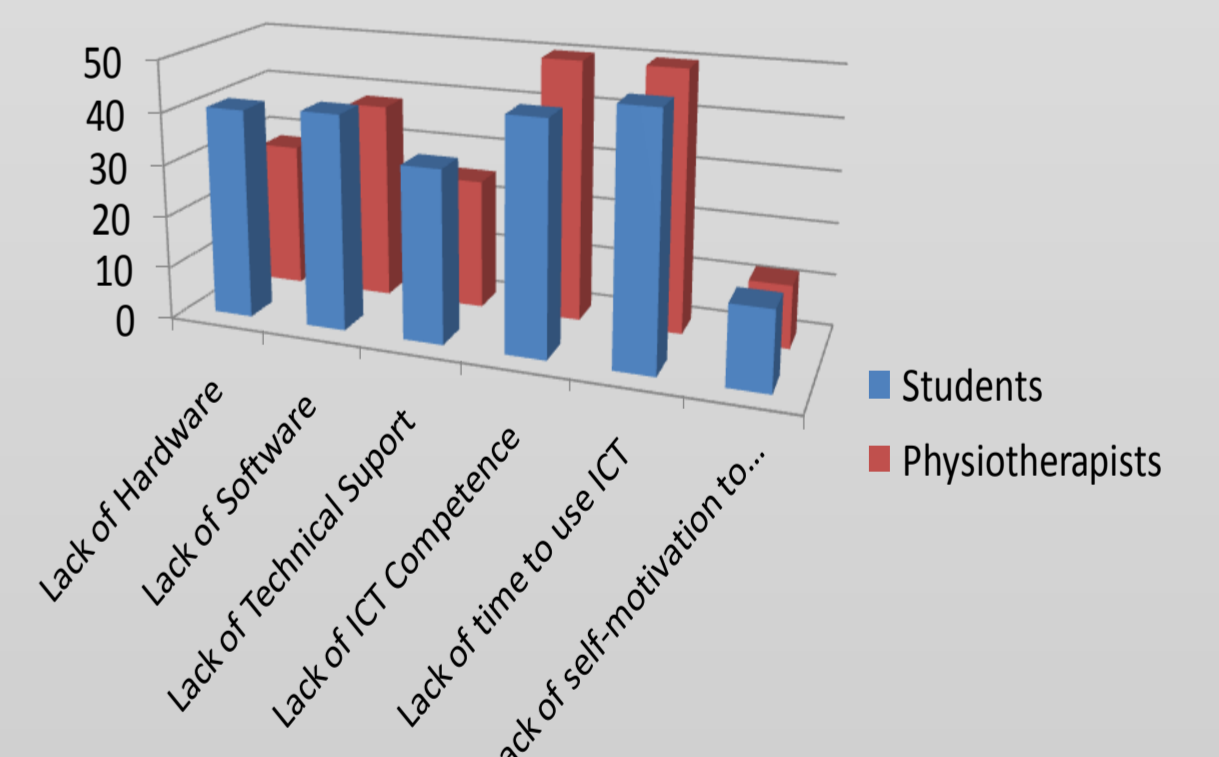

Attitudes and Beliefs

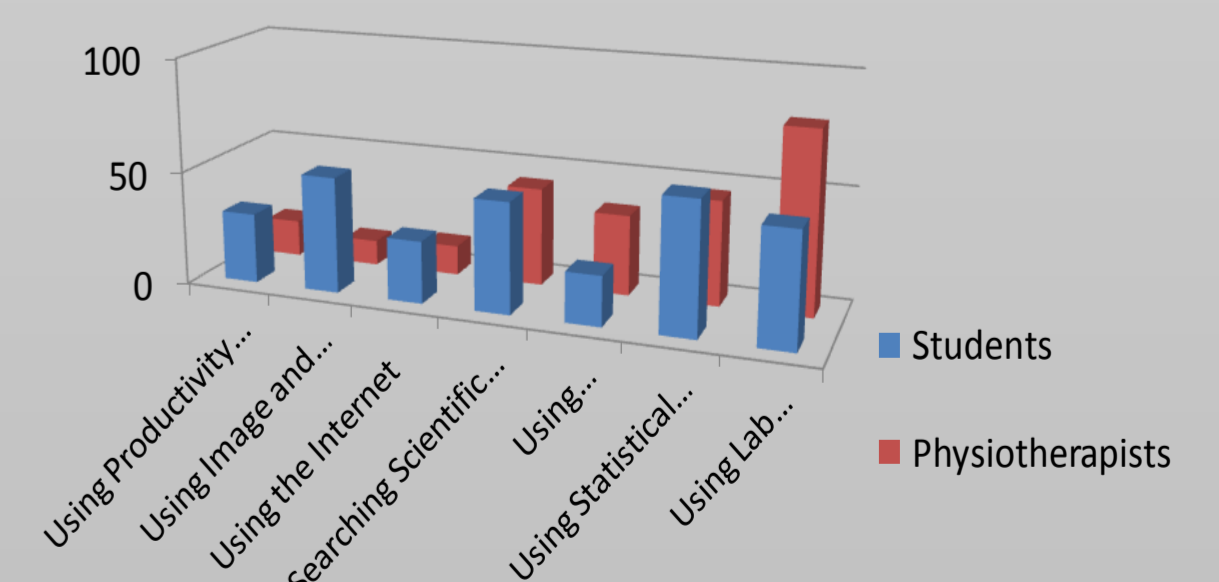**Physiotherapist attitudes and beliefs about ICT**

Students attitudes and beliefs about ICT

Perceived barriers for the implementation of ICT (Students and Physiotherapists)

Perceived training needs (Students and Physiotherapists)

Conclusion

The results of this study seem to point towards a recent and progressive ICT integration in the Physiotherapy practice and education. In the professional context the analysis of the results of this study demonstrated that although the good accessibility to the ICT by physiotherapists in their home, at work environment is scarce, this explain why there is a high use of ICT in outside the workplace for clinical purpose. The main obstacles identified to the use of ICT are accessibility in clinical settings, lack of time and specific knowledge to use them, having as major training needs the use of clinical assessment software and exercise software for producing patient information and handouts. In the case of the students although good access in the institution and at home, ICT are scarcely used in the classroom and educational activities. Students repot also lack specific training in this area. These results contrast with the generic competences that should be acquired in a Physiotherapy Course as referred in the ER-WCPT (2003). Therefore it is essential that professionals and students realize the importance of ICT in their practice and educational process, and by that motivating themselves for the pursuit of competences in this field. It is also necessary that the institutions set forward strategies that consider the ongoing training of physiotherapists and students and promote the usage of ICT in the workplace and professional basis, with tools that facilitate the management of the process of physiotherapy. And Final, establish partnerships that will ease information exchange about ICT integration experiences and the development of software centered in Physiotherapy education and practice.

Reference:
ER-WCPT (2003) European Benchmark Statement. European Region of the World Confederation for Physical Therapy.

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