Recruiting foundation and bridging learners in a digital age.

Is online information on tertiary education accessible for bridging learners?

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- **Purpose of research**
- **Literature review**
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- **Findings**
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Purpose of research

Bridging education

- **Agenda of widening access and participation in higher education**
- **Applications have reduced**
- **Increasingly younger students**
- **Familiarity in use of technology**
- **Enrolments entirely online**
- **Low literacy levels and often previously unsuccessful learners**

Literature Review

Stats NZ (2013)

- 1 in 5 NZ homes not connected to internet.

- Largest group accessing internet are currently employed and have tertiary qualifications.

Published research

- Limited studies which tended to be on website design and were marketing related (Astani and Eldhini, 2008; Hasan 2013).

- Studies were on undergraduate students not bridging learners.

Participants

- Newly enrolled Bridgepoint, Unitec students
- AT steps 2- 4 literacy
- 53 students
- Most aged 18- 25
- Health pathway

Survey

- During class time
- Computer or I-pad
- Given an NZ tertiary ITP
- Asked to find bridging or foundation courses for that ITP
- Complete a survey about the website
- Mean of 11 students evaluating each website and each student completed a mean of 3 evaluations

Vignette

- 11 AT step 2-3 students using i-pads
- Struggle to get past front pages and gave up
- Then more gave up after a only a few clicks
- Older students more engaged but frustrated
- Google search used
- Only 1 enjoyed task and most were frustrated

Websites

- 71% of students had used a website to find information on the course they were currently enrolled in
- 57% rated websites as very important for finding information
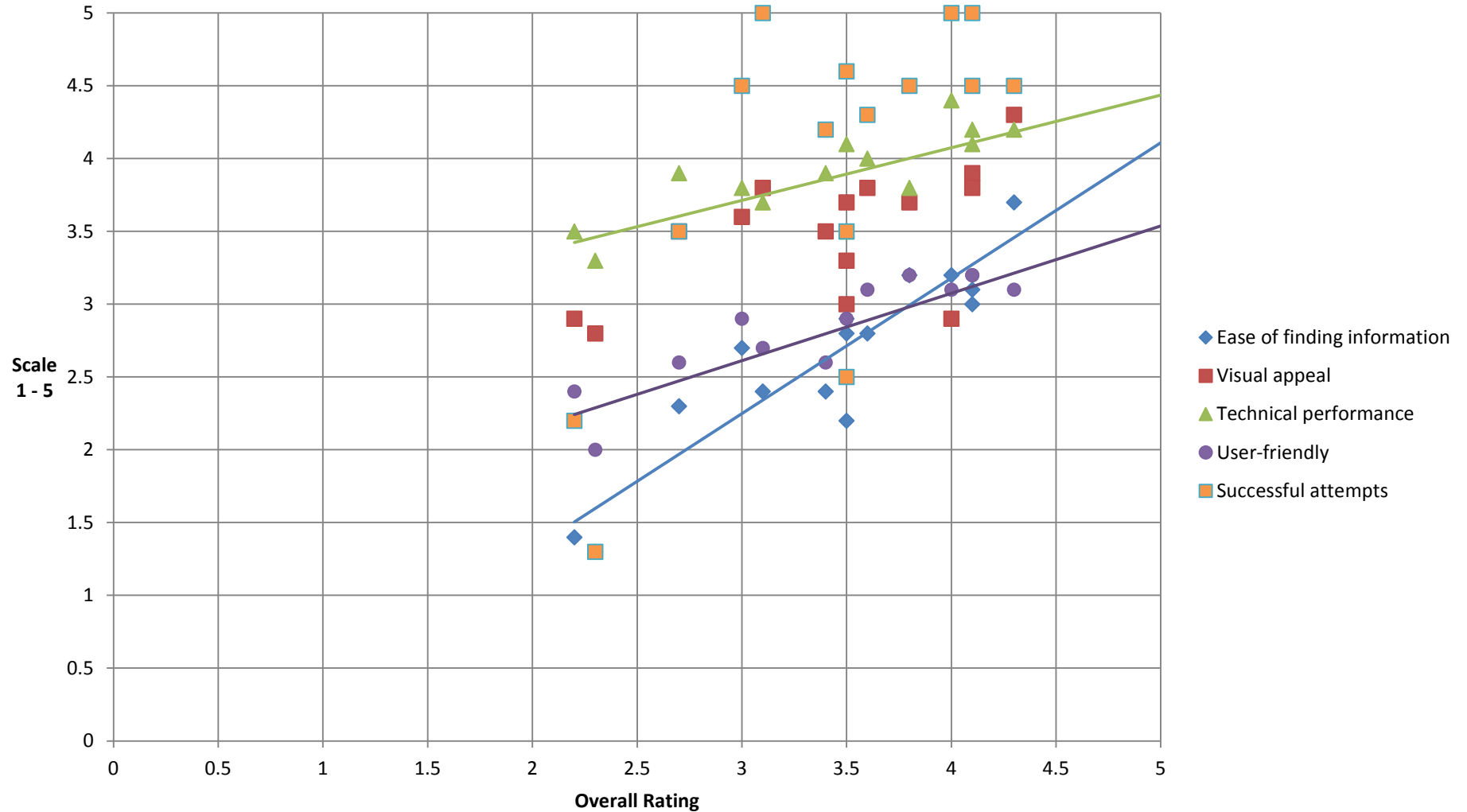- The rest rated websites as reasonably important

Percent Success at finding information
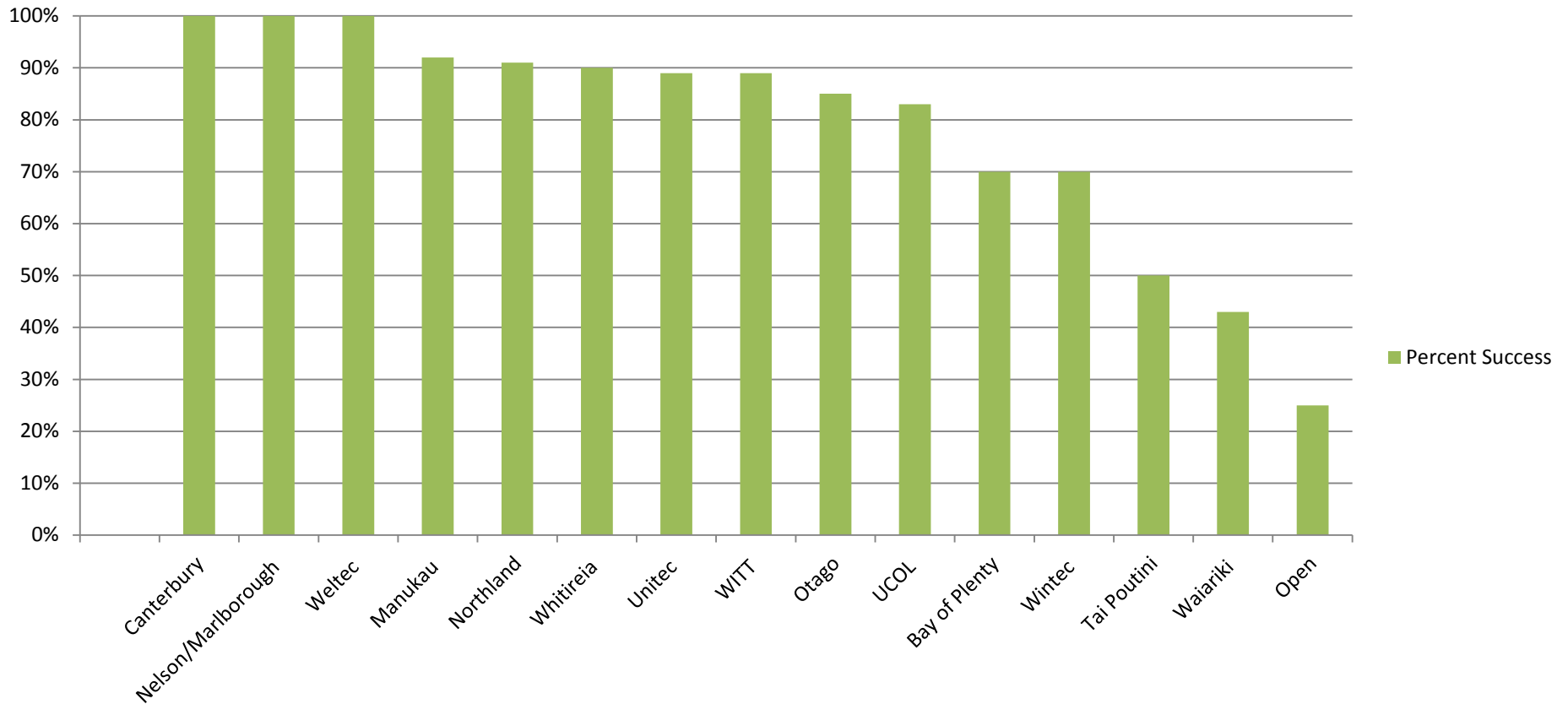
- 9 different terms used for bridging/ foundation education!
- Only 1 ITP had direct access off the front page (Wintec)

Relationship between overall rating and aspects of website

Other observations

- At least 9 different terms for bridging programmes
- Finding the cost and start dates was reasonably easy for most websites
- Particularly difficult to find a name of contact person, not personalised
- Location of courses on websites, sometimes grouped, sometimes spread
- Sometimes difficult for researchers to find information

Students observations

- Would not bother using this web site
- Not very clear don't know where to go
- Wish they could make it easier
- No information about a pre-degree course or anything suggesting foundation education
- There is a named person to contact . This is very good
- Easy to find with info all on one page
- Clicking around it just made me frustrated
- Too much info not able to find what I'm looking for
- I'm not sure if vocational studies is equivalent to foundation studies

Conclusions

- Bridging course information difficult to find on many ITP's websites
- Not having a generic name for bridging education maybe confusing
- Easy to find a contact phone or email but difficult to find a contact person or photo
- Students recognise the importance of website information but find ITP websites frustrating and difficult to access
- Students appear to value a website's ease of use and technical performance rather than visual appeal
- Small study more research is needed
- Findings didn't differ from studies carried out with degree level students/all rated ease of finding relevant information highly

References

Astani, M. and Eldhini, M.A. (2008) An Empirical Study of University Websites Issues in Information System, Vo. IX, No. 2, p 460-465.

Hasan, L. (2012) Investigating the Relative Importance of Design Criteria in the Evaluation of the Usability of Educational Websites from the Viewpoint of Students Proceedings of the World Congress on Engineering. Vol 11, July 4-6, 2012. London. U.K.

Statistics New Zealand (2013) New Zealand Household Use of Information and Communication Technology 2013