
INFLUENCED ASSESSMENT IN THE IT TRAINING

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Abstract: This study is based on the PhD dissertation research of the author. The primary aim is to draw attention to a seemingly insignificant phenomenon that affects the effectiveness of the educational process. The article presents key results relating to the prevalence and specificities of assessment influencing among IT teachers in state-run vocational education and training (VET) institutions in Hungary. Influencing of assessment by teachers to determine students' learning outcomes occurs not on the basis of their learning performance, but for some external, e.g., administrative, purpose, deliberately distorting reality. The study is motivated by the assumption that the phenomenon exists, it is not an occasional phenomenon, and there are several reasons for it which have not yet been explored. It highlights the most common causes of assessment influence and their frequency, raising questions about the operation and regulation of the education system. The present research is based on a questionnaire and interview survey of teachers in IT vocational training in state-run secondary vocational schools. The results show that more than 60% of IT teachers attempted to influence assessments. At least four reasons for this behaviour can be identified.

Keywords: education, evaluation, assessment, influence

1. Introduction: theoretical framework

The essential and indispensable activities of the educational process are to determine educational outcomes and provide effective knowledge transfer (Gyökös and Szemerszki, 2014). To determine the efficiency and effectiveness of participants' activities, it is necessary to measure relevant performance outcomes.

Assessment is a comparison of the real state (the student's learning performance at a given moment) with the ideal state. This requires the definition of value. Value is the particular human (social) determination of the objects of the known world surrounding the individual and society, which places positive or negative significance on the material and spiritual creations. Values are based on choice, do not exist on their own, are interconnected and form a value system. Value is subjective: it can vary in space and time and always applies to a particular community or person. (Pusztai, 2002; Tóth, 2011; Forgas, 2011; Moore, Filippou and Perrett, 2011) Subjectivity is caused – among other things – by the evaluator's attitudes and prejudices, changes in the value order and self-fulfilling prophecy (Cserné Adermann, 2009). This was recognized by Henri Piéron (1881–1964), who in the 1920s, established the science of 'docimology' (pedagogical measurement and evaluation science; examination science). Assessment helps to determine the efficiency and effectiveness of participants' activities by measuring relevant performance outcomes.

The actors in the education system (students, parents, teachers, headteachers, etc.) interact and influence each other's work. Sometimes there are differences in their set of goals, which leads to conflicts. One way to resolve a conflict is to influence the other party, for example, to persuade the teachers to change their decisions. A major source of conflict is the determination of student grades. As a result of influence from other parties, a teacher may make a professionally unjustified grading decision, which reduces the accuracy of the assessment and reduces confidence in the teacher.

Reasons for influencing the determination of student grades may include:

- (a) Optimization of institutional outcomes: schools have to seek to achieve and demonstrate the best possible results to avoid punishment (or sanctions considered as punishment). This pressure can lead them to deliberately manipulate results so that their performance appears better in official statistics (Fitz-Gibbon, 1996; Fitz-Gibbon and Williamson, 1990).
- (b) Prejudice (Allport, 1999) and avoidance of appearance of prejudice: not all negative attitudes are automatically considered prejudices, so the issue of prejudice needs to be addressed with caution. One example is the situation of the Roma minority, where poor integration leads to conflicts in the education system.
- (c) Fulfilment of expectations: schools are controlled by the Ministry, which makes certain administrative demands, e.g., the proportion of unsuccessful students should not exceed 10%, or there should be a minimum number of students enrolled in classes.

Other reasons which have become apparent during preliminary research:

- (d) Addressing problems of students who cannot perform learning requirements: unsuccessful students also cause problems in education outcome figures (Hörich and Bácskai, 2018; Kertesi and Kézdi, 2009), which must be kept within the limits of manageability (Széll, 2015; Munkácsy and Juhász, 2011).
- (e) Halo effect (Lachman and Bass, 1985): the behaviour of the student may influence the teacher, which may affect the outcome of their evaluation.
- (f) Mark as punishment or reward: some teachers think that a high or low mark is a more effective mechanism for punishment or reward than other available tools. This has been confirmed by research interviews.

There are no religious conflicts in Hungarian society, therefore investigation of this factor does not provide relevant data.

Some of the negative consequences of influenced evaluation include:

- (1) Students may develop a negative attitude towards the teacher, the subject, the school or learning in general;
- (2) Conflict between the teacher and the students becomes more frequent;
- (3) Overestimation may give students a false impression of their level of knowledge and competence;
- (4) Learned helplessness is formed in the student (Peterson, Maier and Seligman, 1993).

These negative consequences may lead to decline in the quality of education.

2. Research

2.1. Questions and aims

The present research explores the question of whether teachers' influencing assessment is a significant phenomenon in IT vocational training in state-run secondary vocational schools.

The aims are:

1. To confirm or refute the existence of the phenomenon (because there are no reference data);
2. To discover the types, causes and extent of subjective evaluation and grading of student performance;
3. To uncover the relationship between the factors behind influencing behaviour and territorial distribution, type of settlement and degree of disadvantage, characterized by correlation coefficients. The average income per capita per year in the municipality in which the respondent was employed during the reference period is a measure of the size of a disadvantage (source: KSH (Hungarian Central Statistical Office))

2.2. Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: at least 5% of teachers engage in the influence of assessment

Hypothesis 2: there is a connection between the extent of disadvantage of area where the school operates and the frequency of influenced assessment by IT teachers in the school.

Hypothesis 3: attempts to influence are more common in the group of teachers who teach children involved in mentoring programmes than in the group of other IT teachers.

The mentoring programme is the 'Útravaló' scholarship programme run by the Hungarian Government. It aims to reduce early school leaving, increase the educational attainment of disadvantaged students and provide access to quality education. As part of this, it provides benefits to properly or well-educated and supported students.

2.3. Research methodology

The research is inductive, empirical research with a descriptive strategy. The population was a sample of IT teachers in secondary education in Hungary (N = 1115). The periods under review were the 2016-17 and 2017-18 school years. The study used online survey and interview methods; use of the two methods increases the reliability of the results.

The online survey consisted of 42 questions. Groups of questions: frequency and form of attempts of influencing, reasons for influence, influencers. Question types: closed-ended and open-ended question. Questions of the semi-structured interview: survey question groups and influencing as the subject of conversations.

Data were analysed using quantitative and qualitative approaches. Results are corrected for distribution by area and type of settlement.

Table 1. Research statistics

	Online survey			Interview
	Sampe size	Sample rate	Experience (years)	Sampe size
Statistical sample	59	5.36%	17.06	6
Distribution				
Capital	4	6.78%	20.25	1
County town	22	37.29%	13.86	2
Small town	33	55.93%	13.86	3
Eastern Hungary	36	61.02%	16.74	3
Western Hungary	19	32.20%	14.11	2

3. Results

The figures below show the main results from the study. The left (lighter) columns represent all attempts to influence assessments, the right (darker) columns represent the successful attempts. The major influencing factors were as follows:

Conservation of the number of classes and groups

The number of teaching positions depends on the number of classes and groups. A high failure rate can worsen the school's image, which can lead to a reduction in the number of students in the school. The change in student numbers then means a change of the number of required teachers. Therefore, one of the most common reasons for influencing assessment is to preserve the teaching positions.

According to the data, this argument seems to hold, despite an insufficient number of teachers in IT training (Fig. 1). This factor is successful 80.6% of the time, making it particularly effective.

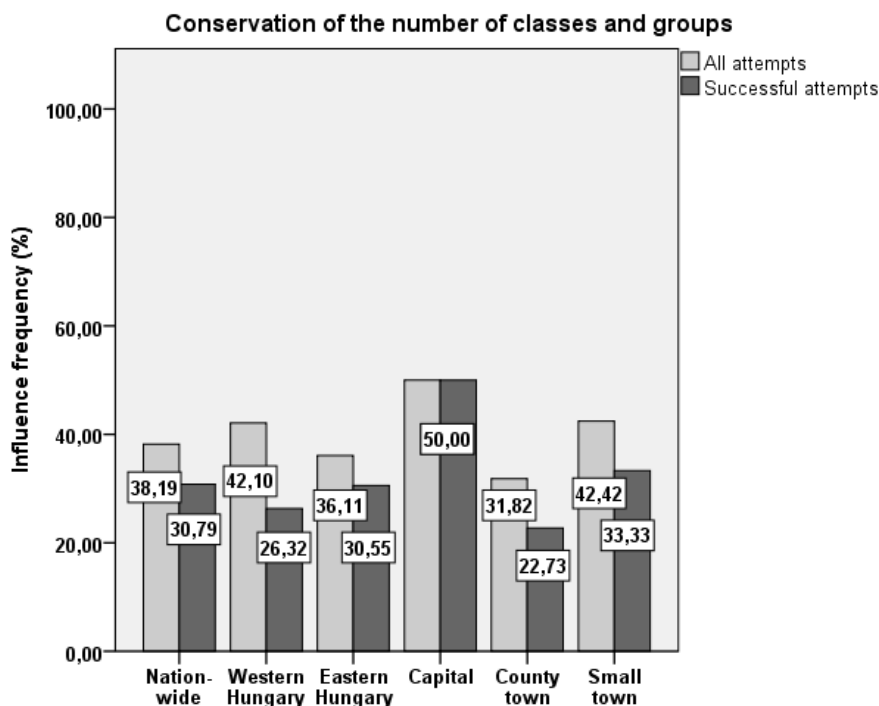


Figure 1. Frequencies – reason: conservation of the number of classes and groups

General overestimation

Learning outcomes of students are more modest each year, which is usually not mirrored by teachers' assessment methods and practices. This means that learning outcomes are constantly getting worse. To avoid this, some colleagues try to persuade teachers to adopt 'empathetic' estimation. Homogeneity is not complete, as the phenomenon is significantly more frequent in Western Hungary. Nationally, 40.43% of the population experienced this type of pressure exertion. This factor is successful 87.9% of the time, so it is also highly influential (Fig. 2).

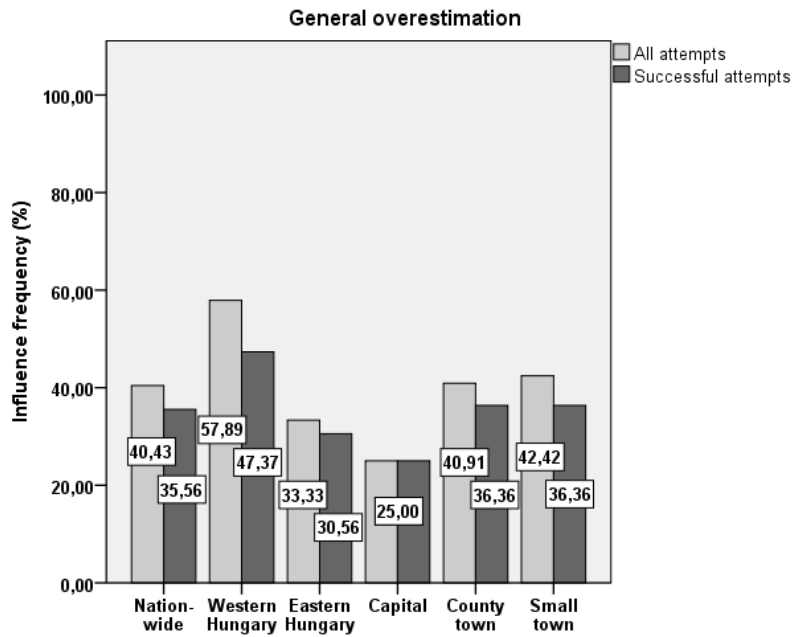


Figure 2. Frequencies – reason: general overestimation

Optimization of failure rate statistics

The optimization of failure rate statistics is a significant reason to influence assessments, particularly to avoid negative consequences. This occurs more frequently in smaller schools and is successful 94% of the time (Fig. 3).

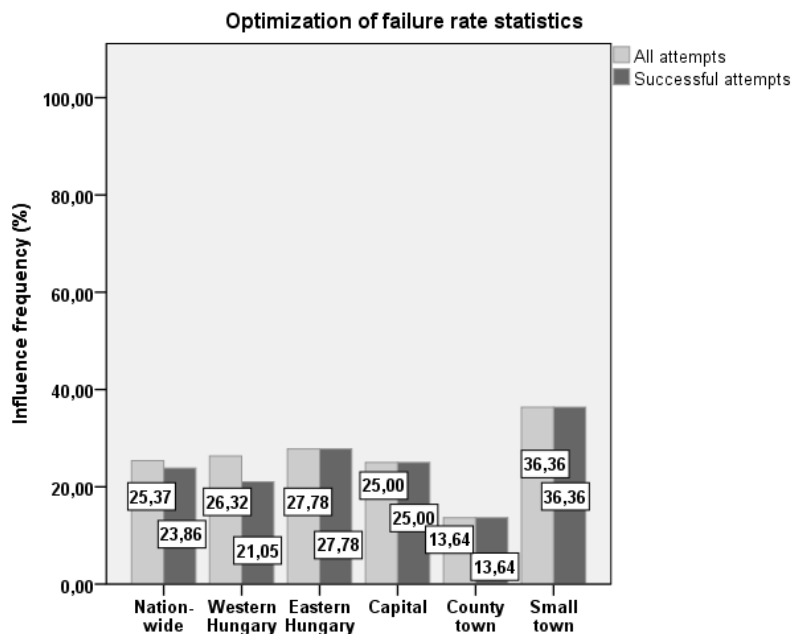


Figure 3. Frequencies – reason: optimization of failure statistics

Changing valuations in specific cases

This reason includes comments on improving exams as well as criticizing inconsistent assessment

practices. These cases are mostly not harmful, as they often help the teachers to develop their evaluation practice. This factor does not occur very often (Fig. 4) and is successful only 61% of the time.

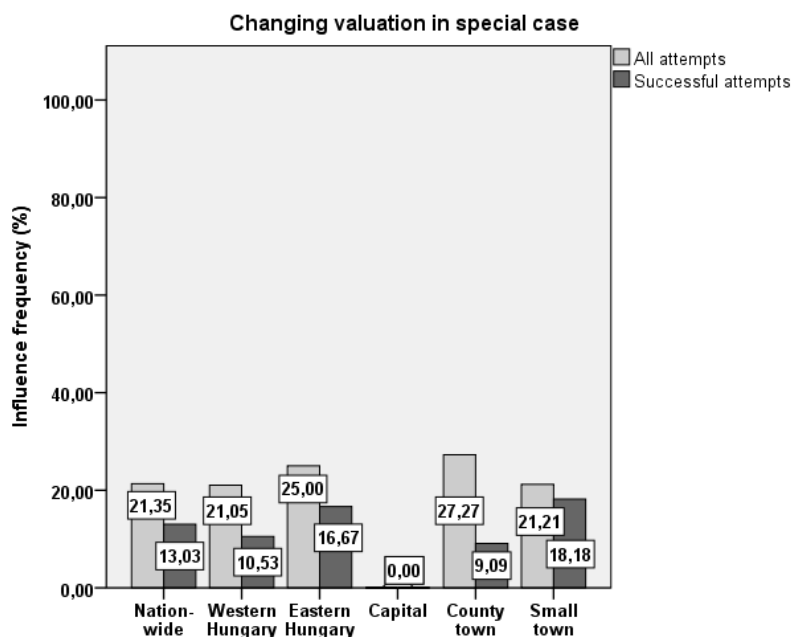


Figure 4. Frequencies – reason: changing valuation in specific case

Overestimation of mentoring program members

There is a special kind of ‘increasingly empathic’ assessment of students, which is the overestimation of the members of mentoring programmes. This is only a significant expectation in schools of small towns in Eastern Hungary (mostly in disadvantaged regions) (Fig. 5). The proportion of disadvantaged students is lower in IT training than in primary schools, so the number of cases is small, but the effectiveness is 100%.

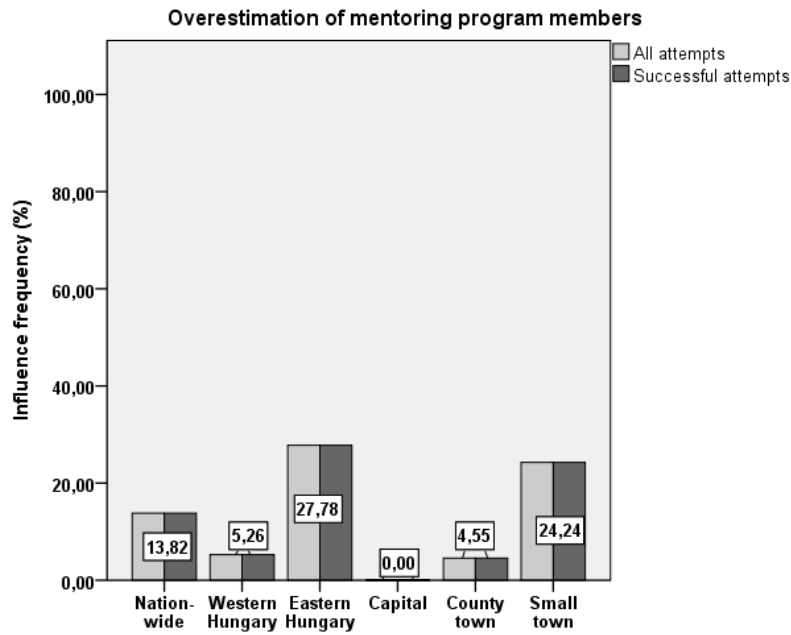


Figure 5. Frequencies – reason: overestimation of mentoring program members

Obstructing termination of the student’s enrolment

This is a special case. Some students may appear to meet expectations during the first part of IT training but do not pass the exam at the end. The teacher is faced with a dilemma: if the student is allowed to progress, they will likely meet with greater failure, which will lead to conflict; but if the student is deemed to have failed the course and their enrolment is terminated, this will also lead to conflict. As the results show, 7.8% of IT teachers were in this situation and all of them stood their ground on their decision (Fig. 6).

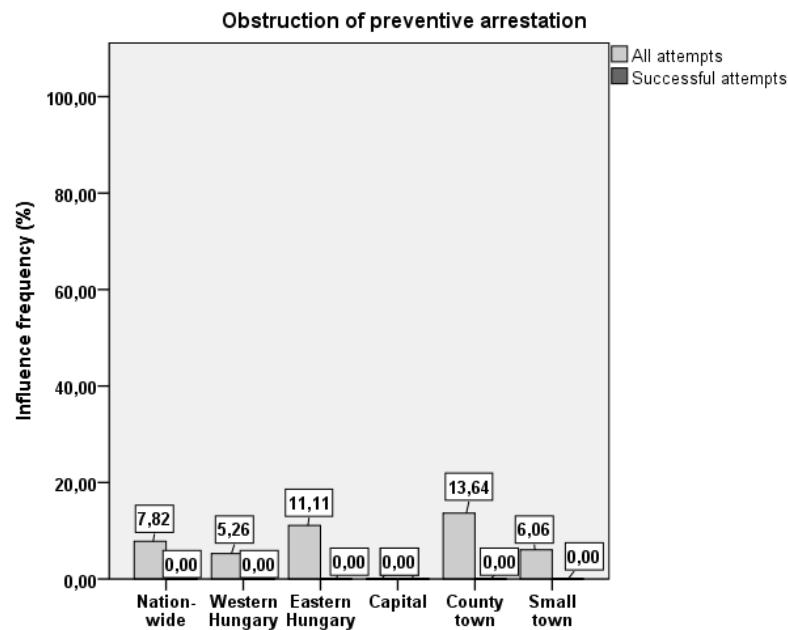


Figure 6. Frequencies – reason: obstruction of preventive arrestation

Fig. 7 shows the proportion of affected teachers. 66.10% of respondents (64.69% of the population) indicated that they had attempted to influence their grading for at least one reason. The result is significantly higher than the 5% in the hypothesis, so influencing is a genuine phenomenon. The data show that it occurs independently of the location of the school within the country and independently of settlement size.

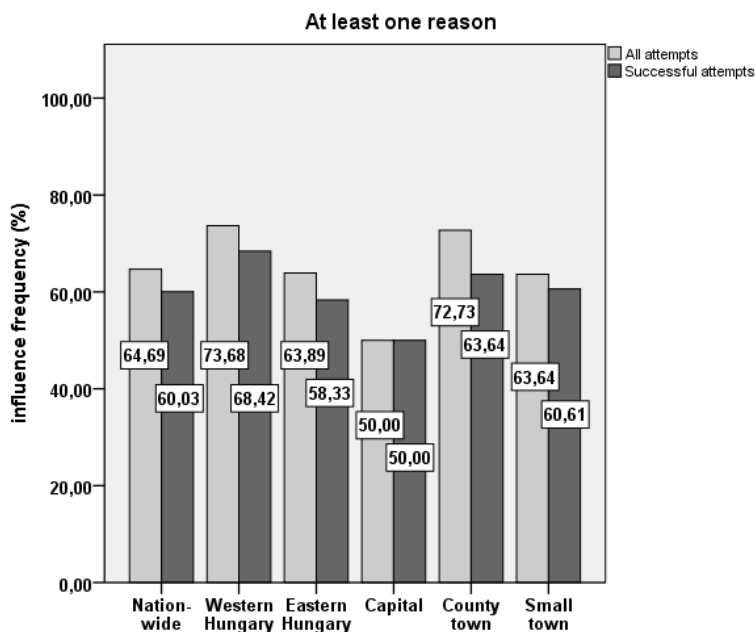


Figure 7. Frequency of influence

Effectiveness of influence

In total, 60.03% of the population attempted to influence assessment, with a 92.8% success rate. The values fluctuate slightly around the national average (Table 2.).

Table 2. Effectiveness of influence

Territorial distribution and types of settlements	Effectiveness of influence
Capital	100.00%
County town	87.50%
Small town	95.24%
Eastern Hungary	91.30%
Western Hungary	92.86%
Nation-wide	92.79%

Division of numbers of influencing factors

The vast majority (82.1%) of respondents attempted grade influence for several reasons and 28.2% for four or more reasons, both of which are considered significant. Looking only at those who respond positively, most (53.80%) reported two or three reasons. A small proportion (12.8%) reported five or more reasons (Fig. 8).

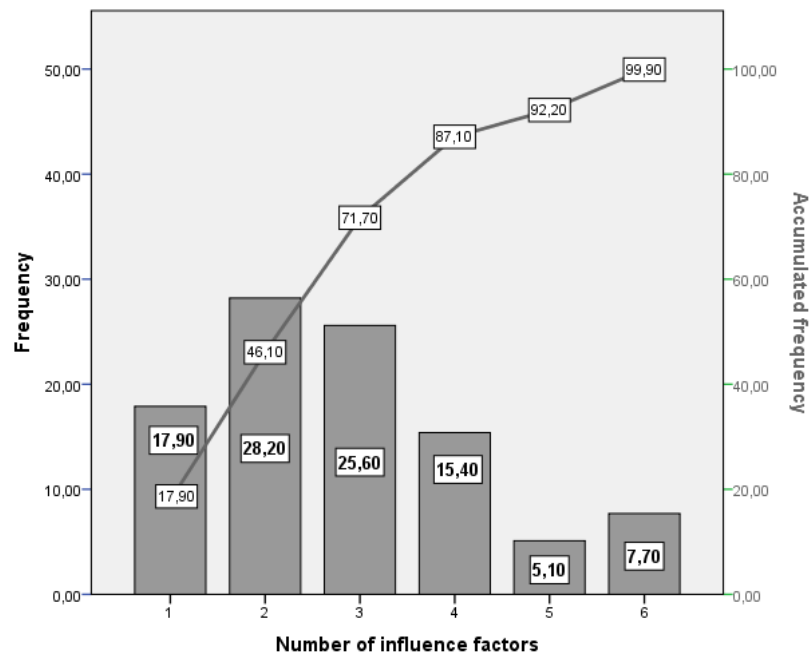


Figure 8. Division of numbers of influence factors

Correlations

Territorial distribution, type of settlement and degree of disadvantage of the settlement location did not show correlation with any of the observed factors. The correlation coefficients were less than $r = 0.20$ except for 'overestimation of mentoring programme members', where the correlation value with the spatial location was $r = 0.21$.

4. Summary

The results show that influence of teachers in the area of student assessment is an existing and significant phenomenon so the results confirmed the first hypothesis. 64.69% of the IT teachers attempted to influence grading during the study period, 60.03% were successful attempts, so the average of 'efficiency' of the influence is 92.79%.

Significant factors for influencing grading were empathetic evaluation (40.43%), retaining class and group numbers (38.19%), optimization of statistics (25.37%) and changing assessment methods (21.35%). Other reasons with lower significance were overestimation of Roma students (15.19%) and overestimation of mentored (disadvantaged) students (13.82%).

The results did not confirm the third hypothesis: attempts to influence are not more common in the group of teachers who teach children involved in mentoring programmes than in the group of other IT teachers.

The results show that there is no significant relationship between the factors behind influencing behaviour and the environmental factors: the factors show little fluctuation. Based on the correlation values, it can be generally stated that this phenomenon is present throughout IT training and it is not a local speciality. Further research is needed to explore the details and background.

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