Teaching introductory statistics to students in economics: a comparison between R and spreadsheet

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One of the main disadvantages in using R in introductory statistics courses is the need to explain the code to people who only handle software with a graphical user interface. In addition, the limited time available for teaching how to use any kind of software is a problem that leads to the regular use of spreadsheets as support software in our different subjects rather than more suitable statistics programs.

However, even on an elementary level, all statistical packages provide a much greater range of options and are better suited to the needs of our disciplines. Hence, we decided to give students a basic introduction to R and spreadsheets, and allow them to choose which of the two to use in practice.

The practical sessions begin with an introduction, consisting of half hour for R and another half hour for the spreadsheet. During this time we run through the essentials and provide templates with codes and manuals that the learner groups adapt to their needs.

In the case of R, we explain the basics: the Rstudio interface, how to work with scripts, and basic use of variables (objects), and then focus on statistical concepts and how to calculate with R.

The session poster gives examples of the strategy being followed and the results obtained and the students' perception of their experience.