

Adult Distance Education and Training Centre (ADETC)'s e-Learning Model

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Abstract

The Adult Distance Education and Training Centre (ADETC) of the General Secretariat for Adult Education (GSAE) has been established in order to reach more target groups of learners and to promote the principle of lifelong e-learning, especially in the periphery of Greece. Courses and Programs are designed having in mind the idea to give students the flexibility to study wherever they want, in their homes and workplaces. Teaching and learning are delivered with the use of Information and Communication Technologies after careful design and by focusing on the value they add to the learning process.

In this paper, ADETC's e-learning model is described, as well its first deployment.

Keywords: adult education, lifelong learning, e-learning, blended learning

1. Introduction

The Lisbon Council Summit in Lisbon (March 2000) set the goal for Europe to "become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion". The Commission Staff Working Paper "Memorandum on Lifelong Learning" [Commission of the European Communities, 2000] further explicates the Lisbon European Council conclusion that the transition to the knowledge-based economy and society must be accompanied by the principle of lifelong learning. Along with the change of the society, educational and training systems must undergo transformations too so that the lifelong learning "becomes the guiding principle for provision and participation across the full continuum of learning contexts".

The General Secretariat for Adult Education (GSAE) of the Hellenic Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs is the overall public authority that designs,

implements and applies the governmental policy and strategy for adult education in Greece. Having set the goal to overturn the unfavourable conditions in lifelong learning activities and to bring Greece closer to the Lisbon targets, has designed, developed and implemented the EU funded structure of **Adult Distance Education and Training Center (ADECT)**.

In the following section the need of the new structure of ADECT is further explained and justified. In the third section the model of the e-learning system adopted by ADETC is presented. In the fourth section the first deployment of the structure is presented, along with some statistical data regarding the participation of adult learners, as well as the first evaluation results. In the last section, further insight is given to its future, as well as the necessary steps to take in order to become a best practices in lifelong e-learning in Greece.

2. The Need

In order for Europe to strengthen its competitiveness and to improve employability and adaptability of the workforce it is crucial to have access to up-to-date information and skilled workforce. Furthermore, the social and political conditions require from the European citizen to cope with living in multicultural and diversified world. Implementing lifelong learning strategies helps to deal with targets such as to promote active citizenship and to promote employability. In this way, lifelong learning becomes an important aspect of the educational strategies that the Member States should implement.

The basic policy papers of the European Commission of the issue of lifelong learning bring forward a lot of issues, such as:

- Universal and continuing access to learning should be guaranteed for gaining and renewing the skills needed for sustained participation in the knowledge society [Commission, 2000].
- Basic skills for active participation in the knowledge society and economy are defined like digital literacy, foreign languages, social skills, entrepreneurial skills, learning to learn, etc [Commission, 2000; EC,].
- Decisive aspects of a successful implementation of lifelong learning are the centrality of the learner, the importance of equal opportunities, and the quality and relevance of learning opportunities [Commission, 2001].
- The expanding of the occupational mobility implies that the development of skills is more responsive to the needs of the labour market. The future needs for continuing education should be identified. In particular, the demand for ICT and e-business skills should be better monitored, and e-learning solutions should be used to maximize access to 'state of the art' knowledge [Commission, 2002].

- The provision of lifelong learning opportunities should be as close to learners and possible, in their own communities and supported through ICT-based facilities wherever possible [Commission, 2000].

The needs that defined the model of ADETC are the following:

- To give access to high quality e-learning services to all the citizens. Moreover, the educational material can be updated easily and universally for all.
- To tackle the problem of low participation in lifelong learning by addressing to the target group of the undereducated adults. Undereducated are those citizens who have not finished the upper secondary high school or those who have not continued to study at the higher education;
- To provide a complete e-learning setting based on the Internet dispersed in the whole of a country that is characterized by a difficult geographical topology and strong regional interests. Learning services go closer to the learner instead of the learner to go towards the learning establishment.
- To exploit innovative teaching and learning in order to create positive learning experiences;
- To reduce the need of transportation by giving access to 'learning anywhere, at any time'.
- To train citizens to acquire the new basic skills such as skills in ICT, entrepreneurship and learning-to-learn. That's why the first two courses that were implemented were:
 - o Studies in ICT
 - o Studies in Economy-Business-EntrepreneurshipThese two courses are those with the highest rates of demand in the Adult Education Centers.
- To raise the level of ICT use by providing high quality e-educational services producing thus multiple social profit;
- To give an incentive to people to come acquainted with the principle of lifelong learning and the necessity to practice it during the whole span of life.
- To bring Greece closer to the Lisbon target.

3. The Adult Education e-Learning Model

3.1 Teaching and Learning Model

The ADETC's e-Learning Model combines techniques of distance education with techniques of traditional adult education. It is basically a blended learning model, since there are three group learning meetings – seminars during each learning unit of each educational program. Face-to-face meetings and communication are considered essential to the learning process.

The learning process is based on the principles of self-paced learning, consulting communication, co-operation and collaboration between learners and educators, as well as between learners for the realization of learning activities both face-to-face (during the meetings) and at a distance through the Learning Management System.

Learners have access to the study material in print and in digital format through the Learning Management System (LMS). They study the course material and perform learning activities (eg. assignments, exercises) either in group or alone. Communication between learners and tutors is conducted through the tools of synchronous and asynchronous collaboration provided by the LMS (Figure 1).

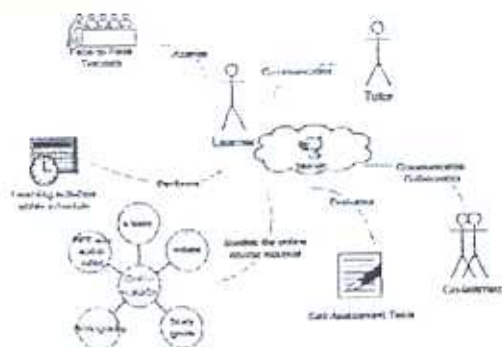


Figure 1. ADETC's Teaching and learning model

3.2 Study material

The study material is presented in such a way to have clear learning objectives, to motivate learners to apply and to study deeply the learning concepts, to offer to the learners the chance to interact with the subject under study and examples are given that help the learners accomplish the learning activities.

The study material consists of: a) A hypermedia electronic book that presents the subject of the course in a direct, interactive and attractive manner. b) Presentation slides with audio-video (Figure 1) for each one of the course units. c) Narrated educational videos that present selected units of the curriculum by using multimedia, in order to permit the adult learner to comprehend difficult concepts. d) A Study guide that includes advices and guidance of how the course material should be studied. e) Bibliography for the subject matter of the course for a more complete and productive learning experience.

3.3 Face-to-Face Tutorials

Each course contains three tutorials, one at the beginning, one at the middle and one at the end of the program. Each tutorial lasts 4 hours. The first meeting is very important aiming at the following general objectives:

- The learners and the educator come to know each other;
- Learners are informed in details for the ADETC's learning model.

3.4 Educational Structure

For each distance lifelong learning educational program (comprising of 5 courses of 50 hours) that lead to a "Lifelong Learning Certificate", the following roles are foreseen (Figure 2):

- Educational Program Coordinator
- Course Responsible
- Course Tutors, one for each of the 13 Regions of Greece

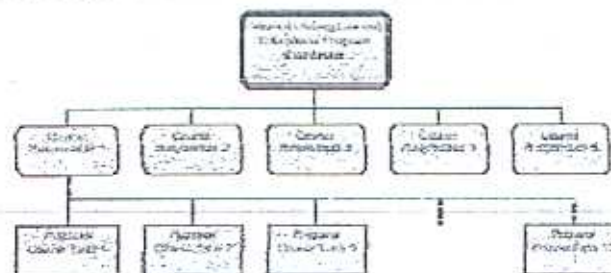


Figure 1. Distance Lifelong Learning Educational Program Roles

3.5 Regulations

Entry requirements: Any adult older than 18 years old can enroll with the only requirement to have certified knowledge of basic skills in ICT either by the GSAE or by other accepted accreditation agencies.

Registration: Applications to participate in the offered educational programs are made every March-May. If the applications are more than the offered places, an open and public draw is carried out, at a specified time and place.

Groups of learners: The members of each group reside in the same Region. The number of learners in a regional group is 20-30.

Modular system: Each program of 250 hours consists of 5 courses of 50 hours each. One course of 50 hours lasts 8 weeks. Studying has been calculated to be approximately 6 hours per week.

3.6 Assessment and Certification

The final mark of each course is calculated as following:

- The mark of the final exam through the Adaptive Self-Evaluation System will mount up to 40% of the final grade.

ii. The assessment mark from the individual or collaborative assignments (4-6 assignments per course) will mount up to 60% of the final grade.

For a learner to be eligible to participate in the final exams, it is necessary to have successfully completed 4-6 assignments and the average grade to be at least 60/100.

The final assessment mark for each learner of an educational program is based on the assessment marks on each of the corresponding courses. The "Lifelong Learning Certificate" is conferred when the learner has a pass mark at all courses that constitute a Distance Lifelong Learning Educational Program.

3.7. e-Learning System

The e-Learning Management Subsystem (LMS) (Figure 2) supports services and functions like the administration of registrations, the learners' assessment degrees, the presentation of the material to the learners, the communication between the learners and the educator, etc. The LMS that was selected for the delivery of e-learning services is Moodle, which was adapted to cover all needs of ADETC's teaching and learning model.

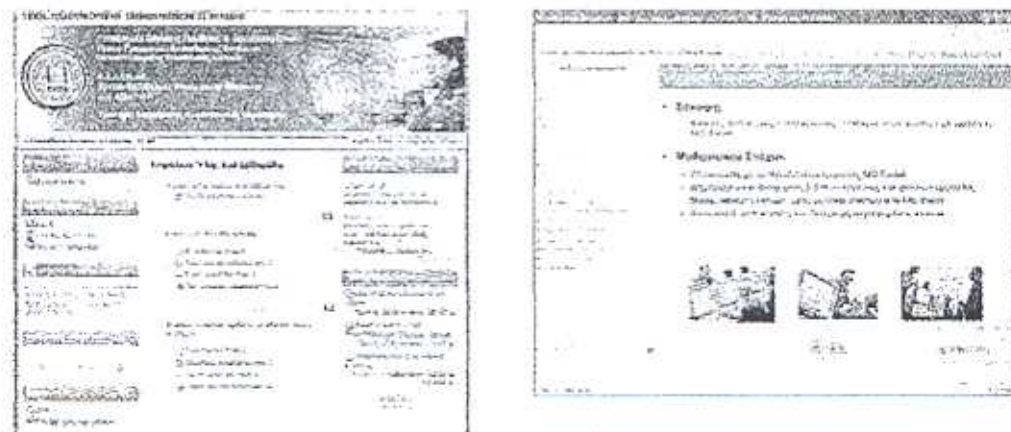


Figure 2. LMS Interface- Presentation slides with audio-video

5. First Deployment

During the first pilot phase, ADETC is deploying two Distance Lifelong Learning Educational Programs for upper secondary graduates:

- Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)
- Economy-Business-Entrepreneurship (EBE)

5.1 Participation

The numbers regarding the first deployment of the programs of ADETC are contained in Table 1. Some remarks are the following:

1. The overall percentage of the applicants accepted to attend the programs is 48,85%.
2. There is a preference towards the program in ICT.
3. The higher participation interest can be found in the Regions with the two biggest urban areas of Greece.
4. Groups were formed only in 9 Regions. Further inquiry should be made in order to explain the low participation interest in the 4 Regions.
5. The programs addressed to the lower secondary graduates were not implemented due to low participation. Further measures should be taken to attract this target group to lifelong learning.

Table 1. Participation numbers regarding the first deployment

	Regions	FBE			ICT		
		Applic.	Accept.	Percentage	Applic.	Accept.	Percentage
1	E.Mae.&Thrace	24	24	100,00%	38	30	78,95%
2	Attica	109	30	27,52%	111	30	27,03%
3	North Aegean	6	0	0,00%	12	0	0,00%
4	West Greece	22	19	86,36%	43	30	69,77%
5	W.Macedonia	34	30	88,24%	67	30	44,78%
6	Epiros	55	30	54,55%	48	27	56,25%
7	Thessalia	33	26	78,79%	36	30	83,33%
8	Ionia Islands	5	0	0,00%	9	0	0,00%
9	C.Macedonia	78	30	38,46%	114	30	26,32%
10	Crete	26	21	80,77%	40	30	75,00%
11	South Aegean	13	0	0,00%	9	0	0,00%
12	Peloponnesus	44	30	68,18%	40	32	80,00%
13	Stereia Ellada	8	0	0,00%	19	0	0,00%
	Total	456	240	52,63%	586	269	45,90%

5.2 Evaluation data

Some evaluation results about the program in ICT are the following:

1. **Demographic data:** The majority of the learners are women (55.1%). 42% of learners are of age 31-40, 29,4% are up to 30 years old, and 34,7% are older than 40 years old. 62.3% of them have internet access at home and 15.2% at work.
2. The two more important reasons why the attended the course are "to improve their current employment state" (29%) and "to improve their everyday life" (21%).
3. The overall course evaluation is positive. The learning objectives were clear (79%), their own expectations were met (68,8%), tutors were adequately prepared

- (84,1%), collaboration with the tutor was good (89,8%). The course covered the needs of the 74,6% of learners and 88,4% thought that the course was useful.
4. **Study material:** The majority of learners thought that the study guide, the e-book and the self-assessment tests were important to achieving learning objectives. The study material was useful (78,3%), understandable (73,9%), nicely presented (73,2%),
 5. 81,2% of the learners stated that they prefer the e-learning model.

6. Suggestions – Future issues

However, in order for ADETC to continue to cover the society's needs for which it was created in the first place, it is necessary to take further measures and steps in order to enhance, support and evolve it. Such measures could be:

1. Further evolve ADETC to a model using **synchronous tele-conferencing**, providing this service at the Regional Adult Education Centers, reducing thus transportation even more and making the model of ADETC even more flexible and approachable.
2. Give even more **incentives to citizens** to participate to the offered educational programs by linking the "Lifelong Learning Certificate" to formal education, eg to Second Chance Schools, or to the Hellenic Open University (HOU). A memorandum of cooperation has already been signed between the GSAE and HOU.
3. **More programs** should be created, trying to address the real needs of citizens.
4. **High quality e-learning material** should be developed and updated according to the progress in the specific scientific and vocational domains.

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