



Promoting Digital Literacy and Active Ageing for Senior Citizens: The GRANKIT Project – Grandparents and Grandchildren Keep In Touch

Athos Charalambides

Emphasys Centre: Centre for Education, ICT Training and Research (Cyprus)

Abstract

The world population is ageing causing changes in the society as whole. Ageing is a global phenomenon. Although it is usually associated with frustration, loneliness and isolation, ageing can also be an enjoyable experience if senior citizens are provided lifelong learning opportunities, live healthy and independently with security and continue to participate in the formal labour market and society, providing their experience and services to all.

This paper will present the GRANKIT project: Grandparents and Grandchildren Keep In Touch. The project addresses active ageing and intergenerational solidarity through developing an innovative ICT training course that enhances senior citizens' digital literacy skills and support the acquisition of the necessary competences to participate in the highly technological world, both for pleasure and for business.

This project explores the relationship developing between the first and the third generation of members of different European families through the provision of digital opportunities for lifelong learning. Senior Citizens – mainly grandparents have been professionally offered ICT training to acquire basic digital skills with the involvement of their grandchildren who will transfer their current knowledge on social networking and platform communication, so that their grandparents can communicate in the trendiest ways.

The project will design an innovative social communication platform in the form of an online 'help desk' to be supported by volunteers (grandparents-senior citizens) which will offer on-line chat forum, for private or group discussion. The GRAND's HELP DESK will provide opportunities for the promotion of digital literacy and communication.

1. Context

Senior citizens represent an important and ever growing part of our European population, economy and society. Irrespective of the current economic crisis, this poses manifold questions as to how member states can best ensure that these citizens are socially included, actively engaged and can fully enjoy all their rights.

Although many senior citizens enjoy good health, ageing often brings difficulties preventing older citizens from accessing goods and services and living independently. Ensuring accessibility for all is both a question of fundamental rights and crucial to making the most of the potential that senior citizens have in social and economic terms.

The Europe 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth acknowledges LLL and skills development as key elements in response to the current economic crisis, to demographic ageing and to the broader economic and social strategy of the EU. The economic crisis has highlighted the major role which adult learning can play in achieving the Europe 2020 targets, by enabling adults - in particular the low-skilled, senior citizens and older workers - to improve their ability to adapt to changes in the labor market, the family and the society.

Adult learning provides a means of up skilling or re-skilling those affected by unemployment and age, as well as makes an important contribution to social inclusion, active citizenship and personal development [1].

Yet, there is a growing consensus that adult learning is currently the weakest link in developing national lifelong-learning systems. Participation in adult learning has continued to fall, from 9,8 % of the 25-64 year-old population in 2005 to only 9,1 % in 2010, thus making the increased 'ET2020' target of 15 % by 2020 an even greater challenge [2].

In light of evidence provided by the Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC) on adult skills levels and deficits for MS, as well as the aims set by the EU Agenda for Adult Learning, it can be concluded that access to lifelong learning is not equally distributed across the adult population. In particular, low-skilled adults, including senior citizens can easily be caught in a 'low skills trap'.



In the last years great efforts have been made by the EU to encourage all Member States to raise the issue of 'being an active citizen' regardless of age or role in society. The EC and the UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) has worked on developing policies for active and healthy ageing. The Active Ageing Index (AAI) was developed in the context of the European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations 2012 (EY2012) by the European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research in Vienna (ECV) in close collaboration with, and advice from, the EC DG for Employment Social Affairs and Inclusion and the UN Economic Commission for Europe.

Its four priority goals to be reached by the end of the third cycle (2017) are: (a) encouraging longer working lives and maintaining work ability, (b) promoting participation, non-discrimination and social inclusion of older persons, (c) promoting and safeguarding dignity, health and independence in older age, and (d) maintaining and enhancing intergenerational solidarity" [3]

In the above context the GRANKIT project contributes to the efforts of M.S. to promote active ageing and intergenerational learning and raise the awareness of the society to address the challenges it brings through upgrading the digital literacy of senior citizens.

2. The GRANKIT project: Grandparents and Grandchildren Keep in Touch

2.1. Project Rational

Grandparents and Grandchildren Keep In Touch is a European project co-funded by the LLP under GRUNDTVIG Multilateral projects (2013-2015) (www.grankit.eu). The project consortium consists of five partners: the University of Nicosia (CY), the University of Hannover (DE), the Emphasys Centre (CY), the EuroEd Foundation (RO) and the National Centre for Scientific Research 'Demokritos' (GR).

The GRANKIT project focuses on two target groups: the grandparents and the grandchildren. Active ageing, digital literacy and intergenerational solidarity are promoted through the development and implementation of an innovative ICT training course that enhances senior citizens' digital literacy skills and supports the acquisition of the key digital competences considered essential to participate in the highly technological world.

GRANKIT explores the relationship developing between the first and the third generation of members of different families through the provision of digital opportunities for LLL. Senior Citizens – mainly grandparents are professionally offered ICT training to acquire basic digital skills with the involvement of their grandchildren who transfer their current knowledge on social networking (i.e. Facebook) and platform communication (i.e. e-mail, Skype), so that their grandparents can communicate with them in the current ways.

The participation of this group of adults who are more likely to be reluctant to be engaged in lifelong learning activities contributes to the elimination of the possible feelings of loneliness, isolation and inactiveness, while their voluntary involvement will enhance communication and participation in the lives of their grandchildren or other children.

In addition, the project aims to design and set up a social communication platform in the form of an online – chat forum namely the GRAND's HELP DESK that will be administered by volunteer grandparents-senior citizens and professionally supported by the partners. In this way all participants (grandparents and grandchildren) will be able to communicate, support each other, offer guidance and exchange experiences.

2.2. Methodology and main activities

The GRANKIT project reflects a research cycle procedure where the steps are interrelated and interlinked. The project is divided into five stages.

- The first stage: Current State Report on active ageing and lifelong learning Analysis of participants' needs
Through literature and policy research partners identified the current state of art in each country whereas through triangular methods of research the current digital skills of the target groups were analyzed in order to be used for the design of the ICT syllabus to be taught.
- The second stage: Development of ICT course for grandparents
During this stage the ICT Syllabi were first designed, pilot-tested and produced based on the four main components: Basic Computer Skills; Word processing; Internet, email; Social networking and communication tools (Facebook and Skype). Then the four step-by-step visual ICT Guides for the training were produced.



- The third stage: Implementation of ICT courses
This stage focused on the organization and delivery of the ICT training in the four EU countries with the participation of about 100 grandparents and grandchildren. Grandparents – senior citizens were professionally trained to acquire the basic digital skills in order to become digitally literate thus meeting the needs of their everyday life.
- The fourth stage: Setting up a network of communication
Grandchildren were involved, during the fourth stage in intergenerational learning activities assisting their grandparents with the use of social media tools and communication platforms i.e. setting up and using a Facebook and a Skype account. The sharing of knowledge and experiences between the two generations enabled constant communication with family, friends and relatives
- The fifth stage: The GRAND's HELP DESK – Innovative communication platform
During the final stage of the project, two main activities are organized: the design, upload and launching of the innovative communication platform titled "GRANDS HELP DESK" and the evaluation of the ICT training which in essence was the evaluation of the digital competences' of the participants and the recruitment of the volunteers to support the platform.

2.3. Products and results

As the project reaches its completion (Dec. 2015) various substantial results and products have been achieved, which can be further exploited and used for the promotion of the digital literacy of senior citizens, as well as other adults, young people, NEETs and unemployed people.

The ICT Syllabi for the four main components chosen to promote the acquisition of the basic digital skills required for the needs of business and social life, as well as the accompanied "ICT Step-By-Step Visual Training Guide" are of substantial quality and value.

The ICT Guides follow the standards as set by the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) Foundation for the acquisition of the ECDL Certificate which is a professional qualification and has been validated by the European Qualification Framework (EQF). In addition, the ICT Visual Training Guides comply with the recommendations of the EC in relation to the key competences required for lifelong learning, and in particular the "Digital Competences" [4]. Digital competence is a transversal key competence which, as such, enables us to acquire other key competences (e.g. language, mathematics, learning to learn, cultural awareness). It is related to many of the 21st Century skills which should be acquired by all citizens, to ensure their active participation in society and the economy.

The innovative social communication platform in the form of an online chat-forum and 'help desk' is the final product of the GRANKIT project. The GRAND's HELP DESK (which will be launched in October 2015) provides unique opportunities for the participants to develop the key digital competences acquired, achieve the connectivity between, thus achieving the European added value and sustainability of the results. The fact that the platform will be managed by senior-citizens (grandparents) digitally literate, after the completion of the ICT training, on a voluntary basis in order to offer guidance and support to their grandchildren on issues of mutual interest and concern gives an added value to this innovative idea.

The HELP DESK can be accessed through the official project's website (www.grankit.eu) but during this pilot testing access is restricted to the GRANKIT participants. The platform offers on-line chat, private and group discussions, multilingual interface, specialized features for the needs of senior citizens such as option for enlarging fonts, changing colour etc., and option of uploading various items (photos, articles, songs etc.). The functions provided for on-line group debate between the participants on a specific issue chosen by the senior-citizens will enhance the digital literacy of participants and promote the use of language learning.

The GRAND's HELP DESK to be designed has the potential to strengthen the links between the participants and initiate new routes in on-line support and assistance for grandchildren – students in need. The platform has also the prospect to continue to be used after the completion of the project and be further exploited.

2.4. Conclusion: impact

Although the GRANKIT project will be completed at the end of December 2015, the current evidence suggests that it will be among the successful EU projects, not only in relation to the production of



deliverables, but in relation to the impact that it has on this vulnerable group of adults, and the long lasting prospects that could be developed (i.e. acquisition of digital skills to be used for life).

The participants have seen their involvement in the LLL activities provided by the project as a great opportunity for becoming digitally literate and socially active. The role of the EU in funding this project has been acknowledged during the Transnational Skype Meetings [5] organised between the participants and during their evaluation of the project in the testimonials: “We understand and appreciate the fact EU spends a lot of millions for unemployed and young people in order to give them hope and strength to live in dignity. But, the third generation is not neglected by the EU! The GRANKIT project gave us the opportunity to fight our misery and loneliness” [5].

The GRANKIT project has been seen by the target group as “a present, a miracle and a gift for life”, as it has given senior citizens hope, prospect, self-respect, new meaning and purpose for life. Their involvement introduced them to the unknown for many years world of technology: email, internet, social media and networking and enabled them to understand the new way of communication that their grandchildren are using and share with them this excitement.

The acquisition of the basic digital skills enabled the senior citizens to communicate with their grandchildren who are living and studying far away, read the newspaper online, watch films, listen to music pay their utility bills saving money and time. Above all, the social part of the ICT training has played a key role in senior citizens’ satisfaction. Feelings of isolation, inactiveness and loneliness have been reported to be reduced, whereas the family relationships have benefited greatly by the ability of the grandparents to communicate using social media and communication platforms.

The GRANKIT project provided senior citizens LLL opportunities for active ageing, and intergenerational solidarity. The promotion of the digital literacy will support their ageing and offer them social inclusion, independence and motivation. The INTERNET CAFÉ FOR SENIOR CITIZENS to be set up will ensure the sustainability of the project’s results and the exploitation of the products.

References

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- [6] Local Conference Flyer (<http://emphasyscentre.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/GRANKIT-Conference-Emphasys-Flyer-Out-page-001.jpg>)