



Structure and evaluation of the programme: ‘Design and Implementation of Distance Learning Courses for Lifelong Learning Educators and Administrative Executives’, of the Institute for Continuing Adult Education (IDEKE)

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Abstract

IDEKE is an executive agency of the General Secretariat for Lifelong Learning of the Hellenic Ministry of Education, Lifelong Learning and Religious Affairs, and it is responsible for the management and implementation of various lifelong learning programmes. The aim of the programme ‘Design and Implementation of Distance Learning Courses for Lifelong Learning Educators and Administrative Executives’ is the design and implementation of training courses for 8000 educators of IDEKE on several subjects: training of adult educators, training administrative executives on the field of lifelong learning, training of counselling professionals, training of adult educators and administrative executives on coping with vulnerable social groups, training of teachers in Second Chance Schools and training of adult educators and administrative executives in e-learning. The main purpose of the programme is the continuous upgrading of knowledge, attitudes and skills of lifelong learning educators and administrative executives and the implementation of these training courses across the country. These training courses are realised partly (60%) through an online educational platform and partly (40%) through face-to-face group meetings. The combination of different modes of delivery and models of teaching makes this e-learning model a blended one. The multimedia educational tools of the programme have been designed and produced by adult education experts based on the principles of distance learning and adult education. Moreover, the programme is evaluated both internally by means of questionnaires completed by the learners at the end of the course as well as externally by an independent agency. The internal evaluation of the programme began in the summer of 2010, showing great results and One-way Anova was used to test statistical significance in rate of satisfaction and overall impression between learners of different level of qualifications.

Introduction

The role and the attitude of the adult educator, in combination with their knowledge, skills and competences, constitute the main factors for the effectiveness of any lifelong learning programme [1]. The adult educator acts as a catalyst for the educational procedure aiming at enhancing the learner's autonomy and independence. Educators are involved in all phases of the training process, from the planning to the evaluation [2]. Adult educators, also, provide chances and strengthen rules which:

- a. support free, complete and equal attendance
- b. promote interaction and team building
- c. create “protected educational environments” for the learners, in which the essential “conditions of social democracy” are encouraged [3].

The effective response to the role of adult educators requires specific knowledge, competences and attitudes but also personal and social skills [4].

The aim is that adult educators and administrative executives should be regarded as professionals in a distinctive field. It is important for them to regard themselves as structural members in the life long learning process [5].



E-learning being an innovative educational methodology constitutes a precious tool for the support of the adult educator. It also contributes to the updating knowledge and skills on the field of adult education [6], [7].

The case of greece

Until today, only two public organizations have implemented training programmes for adult educators: The National Accreditation Centre for Continuing Vocational Training (EKEPIS) and the General Secretariat for Lifelong Learning (GSLLL).

The EKEPIS training programme for Continuing Vocational Training Educators was launched in 2006 and had a duration of 300 hours. The main criterion for participant's accreditation was a microteaching presentation. Up to 2008, 8.312 adult educators successfully completed this particular programme [9]. The Institute for Continuing Adult Education (IDEKE) is an executive agency supervised by the General Secretariat for Lifelong Learning of the Hellenic Ministry of Education, Lifelong Learning and Religious Affairs, and it is responsible for the management and implementation of various lifelong learning programmes. In 2008, the "Educating Adults Educators" programme provided accreditation for 1.836 educators and executives who attended it.

Programme description

The programme 'Design and Implementation of Distance Learning Courses for Adult Educators and Administrative Executives' aims at the design and implementation of training courses for 8.000 educators and executives' of IDEKE, on the following subjects:

- training of trainers
- training of adult educators
- training administrative officers in the field of lifelong learning
- training of counselling professionals
- training of adult educators and administrative officers on coping with vulnerable social groups
- training of teachers in Second Chance Schools
- training of adult educators and administrative officers in e-learning

The main purpose of the programme is the continuous upgrading of knowledge, attitudes and skills of adult educators and IDEKE' administrative officers and the implementation of training courses across the country (2009 – up to this date).

Programme methodology

Training courses for all thematic fields have been delivered through an online Learning Management System (LMS) and face-to-face group meetings. The combination of different modes of delivery and models of teaching makes this e-learning model a blended one. LMS is the main software tool to support the e learning system. Moodle (Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment) as a LMS is used to produce Internet-based courses. It has been designed to support modern pedagogies based on social constructionist theory, and includes activity modules [8]. The programme has been designed on the basis of the following fundamental principles:

- The courses are designed to be flexible
- Face to face training meetings take place during the weekend
- Participants learn in consistent groups. This includes: a. face to face meeting, b. on-line participation by learners, c. following up by educators
- On-line training depends on the course duration (75% for the 100-hour course and 60% for the 25-hour course)
- Textbooks, multimedia educational material and suggested readings are all provided by the learning management system
- Group sessions take place on a regular planned basis at dates to suit the learners and the educators



- Learning activities take place during group sessions while e-learning activities are similar to face to face meetings supported by virtual group sessions
- Feedback, reflection and personal development are performed on a group basis. There is an ongoing on-line and via e-mail support by educators
- Group sessions are interactive and, where appropriate, focus on the current work of the learners
- Real life and good practice are used in the learning process
- A learner handbook designed by adult education experts is provided to support the learning process.
- The learners' evaluation, takes place through individual and team work

Former research

Earlier studies have highlighted the need to educate trainers in the fields of adult and distance education and stressed that training programmes should accommodate their working conditions, with maximum flexibility [10], [11]. Evaluation of course participants at the end of the orientation module to gauge their time expectations and needs showed that respondents participated to improve their skills and develop professionally [12]. Recent studies showed a correlation between the educational level of the trainees and their satisfaction with the courses [13].

The results of programme evaluation of EKEPIS indicated that 58.8% of trainees was very satisfied by the programme regarding their educational needs and 66,5% acquired useful skills and competences regarding the role of adult educator. The study concluded that the know-how level of educators increased significantly, mainly in the planning and the evaluation of educational work, the use of educational techniques and the handling of team dynamics [9]. The former course evaluation in 2008 of IDEKE, indicated that 83% of trainees had a very good to excellent impression and regarded the total programme as outstanding.

Methodology of research

Aim the study

The purpose of this study is to systematically evaluate the Programme by rating:

- the usefulness of the learner's handbook
- the contribution and usefulness of the educational multimedia material
- the trainer's collaboration, communication, cognitive competence and preparation during the course
- the quality of the LMS
- logistics processes in all phases of the programme

Hypothesis: rate of satisfaction and overall impression will differ between trainees of different levels of qualifications.

Participants

A questionnaire was distributed to 3273 adult educators and administrative executives who participated to the programme. During this study, educators and executives were working in several programmes of IDEKE. Two thousand six hundred forty two (n=2642) questionnaires were completed; the response rate was 80% from thirteen regions of Greece. The average age is 35 years that represents the 85.1% of the sample; males represents 33.1% and females 66.9% of the sample. Although 53.6% of the sample has a university degree, 42.2% a master's degree and 4.2 % of the sample has a PhD. Additionally, 85% of the sample was public servants, teachers, self employed, private employees and 77.3% were adult trainers in IDEKE. A statistical analysis was performed using SPSS 17.0.



Results

The fifteen items were developed for each level of evaluation criteria. A five-point (1-5) rating scale was used in all questions. Table 1 indicates that training participants were positive to all aspects of the Programme. All means are significantly more favourable than the middle point on the scales. It is noteworthy that 80.9% of participants awarded the highest satisfaction rate.

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation for the fifteen items of the programme evaluation

Items for evaluation	Mean	S.D.
The learner's handbook is useful	4.2	1.10
Evaluate the contribution and usefulness of the educational material to acquire or improve knowledge and skills in Adult Education	3.9	.98
Evaluate the multimedia material	3.8	.91
Evaluate the relevance of the activities of the educational material to the programmes of I.D.EK.E	3.8	.88
Evaluate the contribution of the activities of the educational material to innovative knowledge	3.8	.90
The educational material of the course was supportive regarding the preparation for assessment activities	4.7	.53
Rate the way that you have been evaluated for this course in relation to the quality (content, structure and form) of the educational material	4.3	.68
Evaluate your trainer regarding your collaboration and communication throughout the course	4.6	.74
Evaluate the cognitive competence and preparation of your trainer	4.4	.85
The face-to-face meetings of the course were useful and effective	4.0	1.04
Evaluate the quality of the LMS	4.5	.57
Evaluate the technical support of the LMS	4.5	.71
Evaluate the logistics of the programme by the team in charge of IDEKE and the regional officers	4.4	.82
Your overall impression of the Programme	4.0	.86
Satisfaction rate	4.3	.89

Table 2 presents the mean values, standard deviations and F value for the one- way ANOVA tests to check the presence of significant differences in the analyzed variables between trainees of different levels of studies. The results indicated that there were statistically significant differences between the subject groups in their overall impression and rate of satisfaction of artisans, High school graduates, those who have a diploma of higher technical education or a university degree or a master's degree and finally those who have a PhD. The results of the Scheffe post-hoc tests indicated that the mean of the analyzed variables between of trainees who have a higher technical education diploma or a university degree was higher than the mean of those with a Master's degree ($p < 0.05$).

Table 2 ANOVA, Mean and Standard Deviation between groups

	overall impression		rate of satisfaction	
	Mean	S. D.	Mean	S. D.
Artisans (n=5)	5.0	.00	5.0	.00
High school graduates (n=12)	4.3	.65	4.8	.39
Higher technical education graduates (n=293)	4.2	.73	4.3	.82
University graduates (n=1098)	4.1	.82	4.3	.86
Master's degree holders(n=1109)	3.9	.91	4.2	.93
PhD holders (n=111)	3.9	.99	4.1	1.06
	F(5,2622)=10.74, $p < 0.001$		F(5,26220)=4.84, $p < 0.001$	



Discussion

Concluding, the profile of IDEKE's trainers of trainers has been indicated as the most significant research aspect regarding the cognitive sufficiency, communication skills and coordination during face-to-face meetings. Participants in the evaluation study estimated that the educational multimedia material, the assessment activities and the learner's handbook were very innovative, interactive, useful and focused on Adult Education. The quality and technical support of the Moodle LMS was rated highly confirming the theoretical research [10].

Particularly, participants who held a Master's degree appeared to be less satisfied and impressed by the learning procedure and demanding as trainees. It was confirmed, on the basis of the research findings, that the educational level of learners is a factor that affects their expectations regarding their professional improvement. These findings are in parallel with other research findings [13].

Furthermore, concerning the educators' basic motive for the follow-up is the improvement of their cognitive skills in adult education, the possibility to continue their occupation in non-formal education and their accreditation as adult educators.

A system of continuing education and evaluation of adult educators will be established. The Hellenic Ministry of Education is planning to regulate the educational frame and the specifications of adult educator training. The fact is that, by 2013, trainers will have to hold an educational sufficiency certificate to be accepted for teaching in public, non-formal educational programmes.

Therefore, the IDEKE programme should be prepared for the accreditation of a higher number of educators and should also renew the learning context in order to respond to the increased demands. Moreover, its evaluation must be based on a concrete evaluation model like CIPP (Context-Input-Process-Product) [14].

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