

Review of blended learning program for lifelong adult education in the South Aegean

**Tzimopoulos Nikos, ntzimop@sch.gr
Iosifidou Maria, miosifid@sch.gr
Iliadis Eyagelos, vanil@otenet.gr**

Abstract

In 2008 – 2009, there was an annual training program for a duration of 250 hours implemented in the Southern Aegean Sea from IDEKE (Institute of Adult Continuing Education (IDEKE) GGEE) and attended by residents of 14 islands. The seminar was held with the mixed system of remote meetings and meetings in person. The seminar was evaluated using questionnaires at the beginning and end of the seminar with closed and open questions. The results of this evaluation are mentioned in this article.

The model of lifelong learning and adult education

The model of lifelong learning and adult distance education combines techniques of distance education (where students are taught and learn the greater part of their studies without the physical presence of instructors, but of course guided and animated by their instructors) with traditional teaching techniques for adults. It is essentially a hybrid learning model (blended learning model).

The learning process is learner-centered and based on the principles of personalized learning rate, the advisory communication, synergy and interaction between learners and instructors but also among learners to carry out learning activities both in person and from a distance.

Formation and Function of a learning class

In the South Aegean islands there was a call for the creation of an educational program to be set up, in order for a learning class consisting of 30 adult citizens (18 and older) to be formed. Candidates for participation in the learning class could be any adult who met the program requirements.

The educational program, totaling 250 hours, was composed of training modules. For each training module, which lasted two months, there is one meeting forecasted in person each month, which is a meeting of students of the learning class with the instructor to monitor progress, resolve arbitrary queries and provide feedback for the program.

Formation and Function of a learning class

At the end of each training module, examinations are conducted within kee - KE.E.EN.AP. The learner deemed that he successfully completed the course when attending 80% of the total planned hours of each module. After successful graduation he/she receives a "Certificate of Lifelong Learning" for a program lasting for 250 hours.

System of distance learning K.E.EN.A.Π. LMS

The program is set up on the Moodle platform and located at the website <http://www.keeenap.gr/lms/>.

Study guide for the program of Information Technology

The program Information Technology - Communications , with a duration of 250 hours is intended to help learners acquire knowledge and skills in various subjects such as developing knowledge on information networks and PCs, advanced issues of MS Windows and MS Office (Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Access), familiarisation with interactive multimedia applications, familiarisation with personal web page creation and general issues of web Publishing and modern applications in management of leisure time, housekeeping and the working environment in the Information Society.

Meetings in person

The face to face meetings took place once a month. The program of the meeting included the first part where we answered questions and problems that had been encountered by trainees, while in the second part we designed the next educational issues. At the end of every two months the trainees were assessed for that particular module with an online exam through the platform, on subjects that were common to all parts of the country, and they all had to complete multiple choice questions etc at the same time . By the end of the test they could also check their grades.

Materialisation

The learning class was constituted with 30 adult citizens (18 and over) from the following islands: Syros, Tinos, Paros, Santorini, Sxoinoysa, Andros, Rhodes, Kos, Nisyros, Anafi, Symi, Naxos, Folegandros, Karpachos.

The program evaluated trainees through questionnaires which were given at the beginning and end of the program with open questions and closed-type ones, and the completion of 20 trainees. These answers will be presented below.

Expectations from the program

Most trainees, 16 out of 20, expect to gain new knowledge, to improve themselves, to enrich themselves, to strengthen themselves, to perform their "cleansing". They also refer to best prospects for finding work, get familiar with distance education, and familiarise themselves with a most proper management of leisure time.

Knowledge and experience in relation to the program's subject

Only two trainees believe that they know little to nothing when using computers, while 8 students say they are self-taught and often use software (word processor, spreadsheets, browsing the Internet), while the remaining 10 are doing seminars such as ECDL and HPC or from their workplace (eg ACC).

Opinions regarding distance learning

Of the 20 trainees, 14 trainees felt that distance education gives an opportunity to residents of the islands to be educated, with certainly being difficult to move in order to be taught, and adding to this the positive point that trainees can deal with the issues of training in time that they desire so they can handle simultaneously any other obligations (eg family).

The negative points include lack of books, one can give up easily, short deadlines in the execution of assignments, but mainly, what is referred from 7 trainees is the lack of immediacy in contact, lack of communication, dialogue and continuous exchange of views between teacher and student.

Communication with the trainer

Positive points		Negative points	
Good cooperation	8	None	12
Frequent phone contact	4		
Eager to help	7		
Politeness	6		
Encouraging in difficult times	3		
Problem solving fast	6		
Intimacy	10		
Personal communication	3		
Patient	1		
Well trained	2		

Communication with the trainer

Working with the trainer had mostly positive features and the only negative point was in relation to the cooperation, and that was distance for only a few of them.

Positives		Negatives	
Whenever I had problems with the lessons, I could communicate with the trainer	4	Distance that played a crucial role in not have personal meetings with the trainees	3
Cooperation	6		
Helped a lot with the tests for each unit	2		
Had the requested patience and cooperation	2		
There was punctuality and willingness	3		
Many ways of communicating	3		
Fast response from the trainer	3		

Communication with the trainer

The support from the trainer and especially the encouragement belonged to the strong points of the seminar, as shown by the answers:

Notes	
Very communicative, I felt safe because I knew that he/she would help me anytime to resolve my queries	7
Was always there when needed	7
Communication through the platform and by e-mail	1
When needed him/her, he/she supported me and encouraged me not to give up	12
Gave me an extension for submitting my work when I needed it	4
Informed us on the day for the test and asked us on whether we were able to have the exam	1

Communication with the trainer

80% of trainees consider that it was not necessary to have face to face meetings, since remote communication and access to their platform completely covered them. And those who felt that it was good these meetings took place, reported as causes, mainly the communication between trainees.

Problems that they faced

Difficulties	
None	4
The system was sometimes slow	1
Our activities sometimes were placed in the wrong week , and they were difficult to understand and incomprehensive	2
I would want a more accessible design, a photo of every trainee, a cv and more colour.	1
I would prefer to be informed for various conferences in the units of our choice.	1
Many chapters were very exquisite and they gave me a lot of trouble (4th chapter)	2
Some activities were very time consuming	1
I would like to be able to have the exam also in the afternoon and night	1
I do not like many page exercises	1
Wrong activities in the wrong week	1
It would be good to have the schedules so we could experiment on the various activities	1
It was unnecessary to get down to the main center to have the exams when we could have done this form home	2

Seminar results

Did the attendance of the program help you in the following didactic subjects:

	Totally agree	Agree	Neither disagree, nor agree	Disagree	Totally disagree	I don't know
Introduction to PC use	15	3				
Windows	13	4	1			
Word	13	5				
Excel	12	5	1			
Power Point	14	3	1			
Access	13	5	2			
Internet use	13	3	1			
Web page construction	6	8	2	2		1

The positive and negative experiences that they had during the program

A positive experience		A negative experience	
Wonderful experience in order to learn a lot for computers and the software that is used	2	Material mix up in the beginning	2
Knowledge, use and knowledge in depth in computers	4	Difficulties around the unit discussing programming languages	2
I learned many new ways of communication	2	Sometimes I wanted to enter the page but it would not allow me	1
The education itself was something new to me after all these years that I have finished school	2	Often in the tab "grades" there was a message for failure and I worried that I had to stop the course	2
Every time I entered the class I felt like a student again	1	Once, my pc system got frozen and I was in danger of losing my data	1
It helped me a lot for using the internet	3		
I met people from places that I could not otherwise meet.	2		

The positive and negative points for distance learning

Positive views		Negative views	
You can read as much as you want, whenever you want, without moving	11	Your trainer and co-trainees are away	4
You win in terms of money and time	2	There is no real focusing in organisation	1
The lack of intimate communication is covered by the Forum and e-mail	1	For those that work, it is very difficult to get to tuition classes outside of home	1
Helps people that cannot move easily from where they live	5	There can't be any practice applying the theoretical knowledge gained	1
It bans the limitations of the traditional teaching	3	There is no clear information in order to get people to know more about this.	1
It covers educational needs that arise before but also after people have entered the job market	2	The certificate is not credited by anyone	1
It provides more educational opportunities to a wide range of adults	3	The inability to attend a "live" lesson	1
	3	In the case that there is a question on the taught material, you cannot solve it straight away	1

E-class

Almost all students felt that they belonged to an e - class and in a corresponding question they suggest some minor improvements for greater cohesion, where most mentioned group work.

Conclusion

At the seminar there were 30 residents of 14 islands in the southern Aegean registered. Of these people, five discontinued the first 2 weeks because they had several problems, but the 25 rest implemented the course successfully by performing all required activities, and exams.

Conclusion

As for the technical details and cohesion of class and suggestions for improvement of the program, are generally suggested; Electronics events / Chat, Group work , discussions on questions and problems where possible, more compatible educational material and similar in degree of difficulty in terms of material , and posting of audiovisual material.

Conclusion

The relationship developed with the instructor was from very good to excellent. Everyone declared satisfied and especially emphasized the cooperation and the intimacy of communication with him/her, and the support where there were difficulties .

Conclusion

As a positive view on the program, as expressed by many participants, was the acquisition of new knowledge and deepening knowledge of computers. As a positive view for distance learning is expressed that you can read whenever you want, as long as you want and wherever you want.

Conclusion

The implementation of this seminar is particularly welcomed by the residents of small and isolated islands, where the blended learning training is not only an essential and unique way of training of residents, in terms of content but also when it comes to the communication and encouragement from the instructor. They want to attend other seminars only with remote synchronous and asynchronous techniques, since they do not consider the face to face meetings necessary, but they want to be enriched with group activities for more communication with the other participants of e - class.