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Adult Education of Immigrants in Greece

Thomai E. DIMITRIADOU
Anastasia A. PAMPOURI

Adult education is a broad and multifaceted field of science, which includes all activities through which people considered as adults by their society learn in a systematic and organized way, in order to acquire knowledge, skills, abilities and attitudes, aiming at effective resolution of individual and collective problems (Kapsalis & Papastamatis, 2002; Kokkos, 2002).

In recent years, the demand for adult education is constantly increasing globally and is expanding rapidly in all its dimensions. The reasons which led to the development of adult education in general and specifically of the continuing education are directly related to the needs gradually emerged in two main levels of any society: the economic-technological level and the socio-cultural level (Kokkos, 2002).

In socio-cultural level, where we focus our attention in this study, significant changes occur that result in the need for education. First, the sweeping movements of populations imply the need to adapt to new social structures. A second reason is the intensity of the phenomenon of social exclusion. Third, the crisis which, in the last years, is characterizing the traditional social structures and the everlasting stable values, result in that more and more people need to determine their own path in uncertain conditions and thus they are looking for educational competencies to cope with the circumstances.

Regardless of the educational level of immigrants, it's been emphasized that knowledge, understanding and use of the host language is of great importance for economic and social integration. On the contrary, the lack of knowledge of the host language is the main obstacle to integration. As it is rightly pointed out, language-communicative isolation leads to social marginalization and the suffering results that this entails. (Emke-Poulopoulou, 2007). It is true that more and more European countries require proficiency in the language of the host country in order to give permission of residence to immigrants.

The changes occurred in Eastern Europe led to the development of a massive emigration to Western Europe, together with the development of a fear of 'stranger' (Giddens, 2002). Ethnic minorities are considered by many as a serious threat threefold: a threat for their job, a threat for their security and a threat for their 'national culture'.

The experiences of all countries teach us that a key success factor for social integration of immigrants is education. Within this philosophy, educational programs aiming at learning the Greek language to immigrants came into operation in 2004 and were carried out through the Institute of Adult Continuing Education.

In Greece, the Institute of Adult Continuing Education is responsible for the implementation of lifelong learning programs. The Institute of Adult Continuing Education supports the following structures as well as autonomous educational programs after award of the General Secretariat of Lifelong Learning of the Greek Ministry of Education, Lifelong Learning and Religious Affairs.

Structures for Lifelong Learning:

- Second Chance Schools
- The Centers for Adult Education
- The Schools for Parents
- The Centers for Adult Education and Training by Distance Learning

Autonomous Educational Programs for Lifelong Learning:

- Design and Implementation of Distance Learning Programs for Trainers and Lifelong Learning Staff
- Adult Education in the Acquisition of Basic Skills in New Technologies: 'Heron-2'
- ***Education of immigrants in the Greek language, Greek history and Greek culture: 'ODYSSEAS' ('ULYSSES')***
- Design and implementation of distance education programs through the Centre for Lifelong Learning at a Distance of the General Secretariat for Lifelong Learning.

Education of immigrants in the Greek language, Greek history and Greek culture: 'ODYSSEAS' ('ULYSSES')

The implementation of the educational program "ODYSSEAS" - *Education of immigrants in the Greek language, Greek history and Greek culture* has been entrusted to the Institute of Adult Continuing Education (I.A.C.E.) under the General Secretariat for Lifelong Learning (G.S.L.L.L.) of the Ministry of Education, Lifelong Learning and Religious Affairs.

The project is part of the Operational Programme "Education and Lifelong Learning" of the Ministry of Education and is being funded by the European Union and the Greek government.

The project "ODYSSEAS" - *Education of immigrants in the Greek language, Greek history and Greek culture* is addressed to EU citizens and third country nationals, irrespective of their origin, who are at the age of 16 years old and over, without any discrimination, in accordance with the principle of equality and in the framework of ensuring equal opportunities for access and inclusion of everybody in lifelong learning. It should be noted that the right to participate in the program have all foreigners, provided that they are legal residents of the host country.

The project relates to the organization and operation of a program for learning the Greek as a Second Language, together with elements of the Greek history and Greek culture, so that all trainees acquire language skills and practical social and (inter) cultural skills needed for the achievement of linguistic and cultural understanding, which are essential elements for effective social integration of the immigrants themselves and their families as well.

More specific objectives for the trainees are:

- To develop skills needed to meet the communication situations of everyday life.
- To be familiar with the history and culture of the country.
- To develop the language skills to such an extent so that those who wish to, be able to join the formal schools (Second Chance Schools) or attend lifelong learning programs, so that they acquire the essential and new basic skills, necessary for their personal and professional development.
- For the third-country nationals, to obtain the Certificate of Attainment in the Greek Language -Level A2-, awarded by the G.S.L.L.L, which is a prerequisite for obtaining the status of long-term residence in Greece.

The completion of the planned course gives trainees the opportunity to participate in the Certification Examination Attainment -Level A2- by the G.S.L.L.L, which is considered as

a prerequisite for the acquisition by third-country nationals of the status for a long-term residence, according to the Greek Legislation for the Certification System.

The training program is divided into two levels: A1 and A2, lasting 125 and 175 hours respectively. More specifically:

A1 level: Introductory courses in Greek language, history and culture and the lifestyle of the Greek society. Students acquire the language skills and practical social skills, in order to better meet the communication situations of everyday life and become acquainted with the social environment, history and culture of the country.

A2 level: Greek language lessons, elements of Greek history and Greek culture. At this level there are two (2) modules: Greek Language Courses, lasting 150 hours, and elements of Greek history and Greek culture, lasting 25 hours.

Candidates are ranked at A1 and A2 Levels, after having been assessed for their acquisition level of the Greek language, by using an appropriate "*language skills investigating tool*", in order to provide meaningful learning and to maximize the trainees' successful participation in the Certification Process in the Greek language of A2 level. After completion of A1 level, trainees are assessed with a similar "*tool of progress*" to ensure the acquisition of skills and abilities corresponding to the particular level of proficiency.

At all levels of learning and if there is successful completion of a level, the trainee is granted a *Certificate of Lifelong Education*. The courses are **free of charge** to fully ensure equal opportunities for integration of target groups in education generally and equal opportunities for participation of third-country nationals in obtaining the Certificate of Attainment Level A2 in particular. In addition, each trainee is expected to receive educational and auxiliary material - printed and electronic - to enhance trainees' skills and abilities.

Each class of learning consists of 15 to 20 trainees. Classes may operate in the morning or in the afternoon, depending on the wishes of learners, and when the necessary number of trainees is completed. The courses last for three (3) hours and are held two (2) to three (3) days each week.

The courses are offered in all provinces of the country. Educational and supplementary material - printed and electronic - is distributed to each trainee, to enhance their skills and abilities.

Each trainee is required to attend systematically the training program in which he/she has been enrolled. The limit of absences is set at 20% of total hours. If the trainee exceeds the absence limit, he/she is being removed from this class and is obliged, if wishes to, to join the class and start from the beginning that particular level.

In conclusion, we would like to mention that the experience of all countries teach us that the basic parameter to accomplish social integration of immigrants is education. Within this philosophy, 865 classes were organised all over Greece and 15.873 trainees were educated, between the summer of 2004 and the summer of 2008 (Educational Material of the Institute of Adult Continuing Education, 2010).

What we should not forget, according to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations (10.12.1948), which was validated from Greece: "*Everyone has the right to education. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Professional education shall be made generally available. Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality*" (Article 26, par. 1, 2).

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Websites:

www.ideke.edu.gr

www.gsae.edu.gr

Name of the author: Thomai E. DIMITRIADOU

Title: Msc Continuing Education

Address: 2, Venizelou str, 59200 Naoussa / GREECE

Tel: 00 30 2332023651

E-mail: thomi.dimitriadou@gmail.com

Name of the author: Anastasia A. PAMPOURI

Title: Msc Continuing Education

Profession: Assisting Teaching Staff in University of Macedonia,
Department of Educational and Social Policy

Address: 156, Egnatia str., P.O. Box 1591/ GREECE

Tel: 00 30 2310 891386

E-mail: apamp@uom.gr