

# GREEK ADULT EDUCATION MOVING FORWARD IN THE KNOWLEDGE SOCIETY

**Maria Theodosopoulou**

General Secretariat for Lifelong Learning (G. S. LLL.), Institute for Continuing Adult Education, (I.D. EK. E.), Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs, Greece  
E-mail: mathe@gsae.edu.gr

**Konstantinos Siassiakos**

Supreme Council for Civil Personnel Selection, Greece  
E-mail: Siassiakos\_k@ideke.edu.gr

**Vassiliki Theodosopoulou**

Intercultural Communication, UK  
E-mail: v.papalois@btinternet.com

## Abstract

*Adult Education is a major contributing force to Lifelong Learning, as inclusive and flexible continuing education can help people adapt to the everchanging needs of labour markets and close the knowledge gap. Adult education can play a positive role to economic growth and social cohesion, by helping people become lifelong learners. In order to achieve this, adult education has to reach low skilled adults with literacy issues, upgrade competences of all adult population and offer a transparent system of recognition of competences and provide better educational programmes by ensuring the efficiency of trainers. These three challenges are examined both in the european as well as in the greek context.*

**Key words:** *lifelong learning, knowledge economy, literacy, competences, european qualifications framework, quality provision, training of trainers.*

## Introduction

Knowledge Economy with all the technological and scientific advances has created the need for a Knowledge Society. The effective and fast dissemination of knowledge to a large number of people is crucial for the transition to a knowledge based society. Inclusive education systems, access to knowledge, investment in education contribute not only to the economic growth but also to the social cohesion of a society. Education becomes a central pillar for strengthening the human capital of a society, for closing the knowledge gap between the poor and the rich, whether this division refers to individuals or countries.

The continuing education of adults is not a complementary side of education, but a central factor for the adaptation of workers to the demands of the modern economy and society. The concept of education covers more academic learning, while that of training has a socioeconomic connotation and covers employment-related learning as it exists in Greece in the context of labor force development. In this policy, the term lifelong learning covers both of these concepts, which are aspects of

a single phenomenon, the common denominators being adults and the key idea that learning takes place throughout life. Adult education is facing a major task: persuading adults not only to attend courses in order to refine or upgrade their skills, but, above all, to become lifelong learners, and even more, helping society to engage to lifelong learning.

In order to achieve this task, adult education has to respond effectively to three challenges: literacy, new competences, the dynamics of the adult population, the provision of adult education services. All three issues are interrelated, as they are all essential to lifelong learning and, more specifically, to renewing and upgrading knowledge and skills.

The objective of the present paper is to discuss the international trends regarding these three challenges, as well as how these challenges are embodied to the existing adult education policy framework in Greece. The upper goal of the present study is to pay special attention to the necessity of providing lifelong learning more than ever. This necessity does not concern the adult citizens only but the public authorities as well as the private sector.

The next section examines the case of illiteracy worldwide as well as in Greece. We explain how illiteracy is dealt by the public services. Then we attempt to compare the European Qualification Framework for lifelong learning with the respective national. According to the results of this comparison we discuss how the Adult Education should be formulated in Greece.

## **Literate Society**

The new conditions, which are created in the knowledge economy, among others, make it clear that definitions of terms get a new significance. For a long time, the acquisition of 3R's (reading, writing, arithmetic) was the focus of literacy campaigns. The technical skills definition regards reading and writing as "skills independent of the context in which they are acquired and the background of the person who acquires them" (UNESCO, 2005: 149). Building systems of public schooling has been an important factor for diminishing figures of illiteracy.

Since the 70's though, there is an ongoing debate to redefine literacy by setting levels of literacy, placing it in a wider social and cultural milieu and recognizing that skills are developed both in school, as well as out of school. So, literacy can not be seen as a "disease", but as a situation dependent on social context. As the acquisition and practice of literacy are influenced by cultural and social situations, prior learning and experiences have to be taken into consideration and the learning material has to reflect the person's social context. Another perspective is to see literacy as active learning process, in which the person learns by making sense of his own experience (Freire, 1995). Such a philosophy brings attention to the ignorance, apathy and underdevelopment which go hand in hand with illiteracy and promote critical awareness and transformation of social, economic and political situations (Freire, 1985).

More recent publications literacy "beyond its simple notion as the set of technical skills of reading, writing and calculating... to a plural notion encompassing the manifold meanings and dimensions of these undeniably vital competencies... recognizing that there are many practices of literacy embedded in different cultural processes, personal circumstances and collective structures" (UNESCO, 2004). The shift to literacy from an individual basis to the societal milieu puts on the spotlight the increasingly complex environments, where adults should attend and participate (UNESCO, 2007). The written, visual and communications resources are the environment in which the knowledge has to be accessed. Thus, more forms of literacy are raised, such as digital literacy, family literacy, health literacy and more significance is given to literate environments.

Still, countries adopt different definitions of literacy, some based on ability to read a letter or newspaper, others on the ability to read and write simple sentences, while others on educational attainment. Greece adopts such a definition and illiterate are considered those who have never been in school (organic illiterate) as well as those who have not finished the six years of primary education (functional illiterate). According to national adult literacy rates in the 1990's the percentage of literates reached 94, 9%, while in 2000-2004 was 91%, of which 94% represented males and 88, 3% females (UNESCO, 2006).

Literacy is one of the issues which is tackled by the greek adult education system and new conceptualizations of literacy are incorporated in relevant courses. Nevertheless, there is a definite

gap of surveys and research in this issue. There are not enough data on the level of literacy of adults according to these new conceptualizations. There is also an absence of needs analysis of the adults already participating in adult education courses, as well as an absence of data examining ways to promote literacy skills. In 2006 the percentage of Greeks participating in adult education is 1, 9%, while the European average level participation is 9, 6% (Eurostat, 2008). Thus, a big percentage of adults have not yet been reached or motivated to be lifelong learners, nor is there a survey analyzing the reasons of non participation and the needs of these hard to reach adults. Actions towards this direction have to be taken soon, as Greece has to further drop the percentages of people with low literacy level. Two benchmarks adopted by the European Council relevant to literacy indicate that by 2010 the percentage of people completing lower secondary education should be less than 10% and the percentage of 17% 15 years old with low achieving attainment in reading literacy should fall, at least, at 13,7% (The European Civil Society Platform on Lifelong Learning, 2004). The lack of concrete data does not help reveal the magnitude of the literacy challenge and, therefore, a solution to this problem is delayed.

In Greece adult education literacy courses are designed by the General Secretariat for Lifelong Learning (G.S.LLL.) and delivered through its Institute, the Institute for Continuing Adult Education (I.D.EK.E.). These courses are attended both by greek citizens as well as migrants. A significant effort toward this goal is the Second Chance Education. An innovative curriculum is developed for adults who have not finished the compulsory level of education. In 2008 Second Chance Schools became more decentralized as they operated not only in cities, but also in towns with a smaller population, but with increased needs of literacy. There is also a growing demand for ICT education, as in 2007 around 27.000 adults attended the HERON programme of G.S.LLL./I.D.EK.E. (Tsamadias et al, 2008). A shift is also noticed in the content of courses. The family education courses in "Parents' Schools" tackled issues of communication, child development and interaction of parents and teachers (Theodosopoulou, 2008). In 2008, though, more literacy elements are incorporated in courses, such as health literacy, where parents understand principles of healthy eating or proper use of medicines, and financial literacy, where parents learn to use efficiently family budget.

Serious efforts are being taken to address literacy issues in adults within the context of educational programmes in the greek adult education system. In every state there are "one stop" education centres, where an adult can have access to information about all the programmes offered by Adult Education Centres, Parents' Schools, IT, greek as a second language. Nevertheless, the role of adult education in creating literate environments is not yet clear. Adult education can encourage seamless learning among formal, non formal and informal learning situations. The establishment of networks among organizations, which provide educational services, remains a challenge for the greek adult education. Strengthening local communities, effectively using resources, such as technology and media and building links with libraries and museums could be steps for creating literate environments embedded in a community level.

## **Competent Society**

The idea of education embracing width and length of life, as expressed in the four pillars of lifelong learning: learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together, learning to be (Delors, 1996) is echoed the Lisbon strategy and the process towards its implementation (EC, 2001; EC, 2006a). LLL has a definitive role in the growth of human capital of Europe. The demands of knowledge society regarding language learning, entrepreneurship and social skills are increased (Siassiakos, Theodosopoulou, Tsamadias, 2008). It is also shown that there is a need for workplaces to evolve to learning organizations in order to adapt more easily to new demands (Framework of Actions, 2002). Basic learning competences "should support independent functioning and coping with practical problems or choices as a parent or worker or citizen, and are seen as critical gatekeeper to job entry and societal advancement in all countries" (Wagner, 2000, p. 132).

The European Competence Framework shows seven key competences for all individuals to develop (EC, 2006b). All of them are equally important and many of them overlap in some of the three categories, in which they are analysed: knowledge, skills and attitudes. The seven key competences are:

- a. Communication in the mother tongue
- b. Communication in foreign languages
- c. Mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology
- d. Digital competence
- e. Learning to learn
- f. Social and civic competences
- g. Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship
- h. Cultural awareness and expression.

Therefore, it is imperative for each country to develop its human capital through establishing a system of recognition of competences and qualifications, which will allow mobility of citizens. Such a system is essential to the transparency of qualifications, meaning “the degree to which the value of qualifications can be identified and compared on the market place, in education and training and in a wider social setting”(EC, 2006c: 3). The European Qualification Framework (EQF) acts as a link between different european qualifications systems and it is consisted of eight levels, each one of them defined by a set of descriptors indicating the learning outcomes (knowledge, skills, competence) (EC, 2008). Respectively “National Qualifications Framework means an instrument for the classification of qualifications according to a set of criteria for specified levels of learning achieved, which aims to integrate and coordinate national qualifications subsystems and improve the transparency, access, progression and quality of qualifications in relation to the labour market and civil society; (EC, 2008: 11).

After a considerable delay, recently, Greece took the initiative to work towards the development of National Qualification Framework (NQF). Analysis of the EQF, as well of other NQFs, particularly the ones which were developed during the past three year, and examination of the greek educational and training system, collection of data regarding accreditation systems are among the directions that the Working Group on the greek NQF is working at. An important feature of this effort is that the data which will be the basis for the NQF will be based on research on agencies, which deliver services in the initial and continuing vocational field. The results, which will come out of this research and the previous mentioned analysis, will be synthesized in concrete proposals for NQF, which will be put into public consultation.

This effort for the development of a NQF looks promising, but it is still at its beginning and more serious steps have to be taken in order to design and implement it. The formation of quality assurance agency and accredit awarding bodies, which will ensure the quality of the qualifications obtained and the relevance of the qualifications to the needs of higher education and market are essential for the reliability of the NQF system. The acceptance of NQF will heavily rely on the participation of social partners during its formation. Therefore, the consultation process needs to be inclusive of all the parties involved in education and training, so as to avoid the top-bottom establishment of a qualifications system.

### **Well Trained Training Society**

The quality of provision is one of the areas targeted by the Implementation of the Action Plan on Adult Education (EC, 2007). Adult learning professions present many differences across Europe as stated in the “Adult Learning Professions in Europe”. The research was undertaken by Research voor Beleid and PLATO (2008) for the European Commission. Among findings are the diverse training systems in Europe, the low status of the trainer, the long period between initial training of staff and the beginning of professional activity. One of the recommendations of this study is the delivery of pre-entry short courses and in-service training rather than more intense initial training and degree programmes.

In Greece, the National Accreditation Centre for Continuing Vocational Training (EKEPIS, 2006) had developed and applied a System of Certification of Adult Instructors certifying more than 6.000 instructors up to the end of 2007. It offered a course on adult education combining theory and practice and evaluating the participants through a microteaching. G.S.LLL./I.D.EK.E. has also been

providing short term training to its trainers. This training has focused primarily on the content and the educational material that was taught in its courses. In 2007 G.S.LLL./I.D.EK.E. offered a course, which focused exclusively on adult learning theory and practice and was attended by 2.000 trainers. In 2008 training of trainers is undertaken by the Centre of Lifelong Learning of Adult Trainers. This Centre, under the supervision aims to detect the needs of trainers, plan and develop educational and training activities at national and regional level. So, its activities will focus in three levels:

- a. provide Quality Initial and Continuing Education to trainers;
- b. develop a system of collaborative learning amongst trainers;
- c. improve through training the efficiency of administrative staff.

It will offer 13 courses on various issues of adult education theory and practice and will be attended by trainers of the Hellenic Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs, that is of trainers of G.S.LLL./I.D.EK.E., as well as by trainers of the Organisation of Initial Vocational Training (O.E.E.K.).

Interrelated with this program is the creation of a Register for Adult Education Trainers (G.G.G., 2008). According to their training and their experience, trainers are enlisted in subregisters and can attend courses of the previous mentioned Centre. Following the notion of flexible and distance learning, the courses will follow the blended learning methodology, allowing to a larger number of trainers to attend the courses.

However, these training initiatives are not adequate for the development of a quality provision system in Greece. Training programmes can be effective, when incorporated into a coherent and holistic system of standards and accountability (DfEE, 1998). Features of this system should also be internal and external assessment, reliable evaluation of qualifications, accreditation of training programmes and trainers. Nevertheless, there is a lack of a consistent evaluation framework. Eventually, trainers' competences obtained through training programmes or experience need to be seen into the context of the emerging greek NQF.

## Conclusions

Adult education has not yet responded effectively to the objective of making adults –trainees and trainers- lifelong learners. Efforts to assess the needs, design relevant courses and appropriate evaluation tools are still on the way. Although these issues are high on the european agenda, the limited research data are slowly shedding light on the various facets of these challenges and the ways to move forward. Particularly, in Greece the delayed response to these challenges underscores the necessity to promote innovations in the adult education systems based upon concrete research data. The challenge for the greek adult education system is not only to offer high quality educational programmes, but also to create nuclei of lifelong and lifewide learning at a community level. Literate environments, competence building and quality provision are integral parts of a reliable adult education system in a learning society. Developing each one of these parts is not enough. Creating synergy between these parts is necessary for adult education to move forward. And within this move the role of adult education as a link among educational organizations and an activating mechanism for continuing learning has to be reexamined.

## References

- Delors, J. (1996). *Learning: The Treasure Within*. Paris: UNESCO.
- DfEE. (1998). *The Learning Age*. London: The Stationery Office Limited.
- EC. (2008). *The European Qualifications Framework (EQF) for Lifelong Learning*. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.
- EC. (2007). *Action Plan on Adult Learning. It is always a good time to learn*. Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of Regions, 558 final. Brussels: European Commission.
- EC. (2006a). *Communication from the Commission. Adult Learning: It is never too late to learn*, 614 final. Brussels: European Commission.

- EC. (2006b). *Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning*. Official Journal of the European Union L394/10. Brussels: European Commission.
- EC. (2006c). *Implementing the Community Lisbon Programme. Proposal for a Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the Establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning*. COM (2006) 479 final. Brussels: European Commission.
- EC. (2001). *Communication from the Commission. Making a European Area of Lifelong Learning a Reality*, 678 final. Brussels: European Commission.
- EKEPIS. (2006). *Programme of Training Trainers*. Educational Material (DVD). Athens: EKEPIS.
- EUROSTAT. (2008). *Five Education Benchmarks for Europe. Trends 2000-2006*. Brussels. European Commission.
- Freire, P. (1995). *Pedagogy of Hope: Reliving Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. N.Y: Continuum
- Freire, P. (1985). *The Politics of Education*. Begin & Garvey, South Hadley.
- Greek Government Gazette (G.G.G.). (2008). *Law 2075/2008 Lifelong Education and Training, 467/2075 (Vol. III)*. Athens: National Printing Office.
- Jacobson, E., Degener, E., Purcell-Gates, V. (2003). *Creating Authentic Materials and Activities for the Adult Literacy Classroom. A Handbook for Practitioners*. NCSALL.
- Research voor Beleid and Plato, Univeriteit Leiden. (2008). *ALPINE Adult Learning Professions in Europe. A study of the current situation, trends and issues*. Project number: B3276. Zoetermeer, final report.
- Siassiakos, K., Theodosopoulou, M. & Tsamadias, C. (2008). *Adult Education in the Lifelong Learning Era: The Case of G.S.A.E., Proceedings of the 5th WSEAS/IASME International Conference on Engineering Education*, 413-416.
- The European Civil Society Platform on Lifelong Learning. (2004). *Skills for Life as the Key to Lifelong Learning. Towards Achieving the Lisbon Strategy. Conference Report*.
- Theodosopoulou, M. (2008). *The Parents' Schools in Greece*. In M. Elfert (Ed.) *Family Literacy. A Global Approach to Lifelong Learning*, (pp. 48-49). Hamburg: UIL.
- Tsamadias, C., Kyriazis, D., Theodosopoulou, M., Karageorgou, E., Siassiakos, K., Trantakidi, M. (2008). *The Development and State of the Art of Adult Learning and Education (ALE). National Report Greece*. Athens: G.S.A.E.
- UNESCO (2007). *Literacy Initiative for Empowerment 2006-2015. Vision and Strategy Paper (3<sup>rd</sup> Ed.)* Hamburg: UIL.
- UNESCO (2005). *Literacy for Life*. Paris: UNESCO.
- Wagner, D.A. (2000). *Literacy and Adult Education. Executive Summary. Adult Education and Development*, 55, 129-141.

*Advised by Stefanos Metis,  
General Secretariat for Lifelong Learning, Greece*

<b>Maria Theodosopoulou</b>	Dr., General Secretariat for Lifelong Learning (G. S. LLL.), Institute for Continuing Adult Education (I.D. EK. E.), Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs, 417 Acharnon str., 11143, Athens, Greece. Phone: +30 6944 473020. E-mail: mathe@gsae.edu.gr
<b>Konstantinos Siassiakos</b>	Dr., Supreme Council for Civil Personnel Selection, 6 Pouliou str., 115 10, Athens, Greece. E-mail: Siassiakos_k@ideke.edu.gr
<b>Vassiliki Theodosopoulou</b>	Dr., Post Ph.D. in Intercultural Communication, UK. E-mail: v.papalois@btinternet.com