

## **Research and evaluation of the position of the adult learner in the learning process. Motivations and barriers to participation in lifelong learning and education**

**Tsonis Z. Konstantinos**

Teacher of Primary School  
tsonekostas80@yahoo.gr

### **Abstract**

This paper aims at providing to study and evaluate the adult learner in lifelong learning, as a whole. Also, it describes the importance and necessity of learning, throughout a person's life in order to improve himself in personal and professional level. We must not forget that education is a daily process that does not end with the completion of the formal education. Through our research, individual characteristics of the trainees are identified. For example, what they expect, their motivations, the possibilities provided, if it could cover in a constructive and creative way their free time but also what could prevent them by the learning process. By using a questionnaire, the data were obtained and based on them the results were extracted. Finally, the paper contains conclusions and suggestions for better lifelong learning for the adults.

**Keywords:** education, adults, lifelong, learning

### **Introduction**

Contemporary international literature and research has largely dealt with the clarification of the term Adult Education. Several definitions have at times attempted to describe the field of adult education and a discrepancy between them is observed. One of the reasons for this, points out Knowles (pp. 55-56), is that a definition is sought to cover the variety of educational cultures that prevail in each state. For this reason, it is observed that the definitions become more and more extensive and complicated, in the effort to cover all countries. For this reason, it is observed that the definitions become more and more extensive and complicated, in the effort to cover all countries. An extensive definition was given by the (formerly) National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, now National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) England and Wales in 1970 (in Rogers, 1999 p. 56): "Any kind of education for people who are old enough to hold a job, vote, enlist, or marry, and who have completed the cycle of continuing education that began in childhood. They may want to compensate for the limited schooling they have received, take exams, acquire basic technical or professional skills, or learn new operational processes well. They may turn to education because they want to know themselves and the world better and act on that knowledge, or they may participate in programs just for the pleasure they derive from developing their abilities and skills—either these are spiritual or aesthetic or physical or practical. They may not even participate in "organized programs". They may find what they want in books or 10 shows or be guided by mail by some supervisor they have never met. They can be educated quite informally, by participating in joint pursuits with people of similar interests." The term lifelong education has prevailed to refer to all types of education based on the typology of Coombs (1968; Coombs & Ahmed, 1974), i.e. formal, non-formal and informal, as stated by Karalis (2014, p. 2-3), but at the same time it refers to "a philosophical concept according to which education is considered as a long-term process that begins at birth and lasts throughout life" (CEDEFOP, 1996).

In recent years, there have been many researches that aim to study the general characteristics of learners who take part in the educational process. The investigation of these

characteristics is expected to identify specific educational needs which, to the extent that they are taken into account by the instructors, will be able to lead them to identify the conditions for ensuring the effectiveness of the educational activities. Adult students have characteristics that differentiate them from the school's "traditional students" (minors).

Adults have a wide range of elements that have little or no variety of knowledge and experience. According to Kokko (2004, p. 21), "new learners are not people who have just appeared on earth". Strengthening this position, we add that every person (at any age) until he reaches the point of choosing to be educated has traveled a certain path in his life and has gained a set of experiences, where these experiences have given him knowledge, in whatever form and if it was its evolutionary path.

Adult learners participate in learning programs with expectations about the learning process, with various and different attitudes and behaviors towards education. These positions are most commonly based on their initial experience from the school years when they were minors but also on the experiences they have gained since completing any level of education. Learners are complete personalities and have crystallized what they want. Precisely because they are in a continuous learning process (formal, non-formal or informal), they have now arrived at the effective ways of learning for themselves. Adults never stop evolving and developing. They never go through a sterile and static period in their lives. Even if they are on the spectrum between the developmental stage of youth and the decline of old age, they are still people who seek evolution. Their development is not limited to a biological level only (Karalis, 2005). The adults who participate in these programs come from a particularly complex background. That is, it refers to people who belong to a certain age level that includes various activities that overlap to a high degree with their effort for education. Therefore, their effort for education comes second as the "realities" of their daily life are many, but also different (family or social life, their work or unemployment).

In Greece, as well as the entire European Union have been severely affected by unemployment, various policies have been put in place to address it. Especially, where the labor market requires highly skilled people, continuous vocational training is becoming a key tool for the professional development of the workforce in such a competitive environment. Based on the current conditions, the state takes action and aims through targeted adult education programs to upgrade skills and professional knowledge in order to cope with the unemployment to some extent and passivity of the workforce. Adult education was linked to economic and socio-cultural globalization, which in turn emphasized the "society of knowledge" in the sense of continuing vocational training and certification of professional qualifications with a view to enhance the geographical mobility of citizens and workers internationally (Prokou, 2004).

In European Union, adult education was significantly strengthened after the Treaty of Lisbon, also known as the "Reform Treaty", in 2007, as it was identified as the main institutional tool for national strategies of European Union member states to provide new vocational training opportunities, a rise to job market and improving the quality of life and personal development of adult learners (Gkavaris & Roussakis, 2008). In Greece, the participation of adults in educational programs remains low to date, as our country ranks in the last three places among the twenty-seven countries of the European Union (Karalis, 2013).

Our hypotheses are:

- There are more women than men in the Lifelong Learning programs.
- The participants have mostly completed high school
- Most of them are unemployed
- The participation is to obtain the certificate
- If it would be easier for them if the lessons were held from their home

## Methods

Over the past two decades, much research has been conducted on the motivations and barriers to adult participation in lifelong learning. In particular, an attempt is made to establish the reasons why adult learners participate in these programs, but also what prevents them from participating. Lifelong Learning is a process that needs continuous study because it concerns the acquisition of knowledge, attitudes, skills and experiences. Essentially, it is a helper in the effort made so that the trainee develops and improves in all aspects of his life.

In a study by NSS (National Statistical Service of Greece) in 2007, the main reasons for participating in educational activities were professional (78.4%), personal (16.7%) and a combination of the previous two (5, 0%). Then, in 2010, in a survey by the Ministry of Education, a decrease is found between professional (44%), personal (31%) and a combination of the two previous factors (25%). The most important reasons for participating were to make their work better (35%), to increase their general knowledge (35%), for personal pleasure (27%), for promotion/development (19%), to obtain a certificate ( 3%) and social relations (1%) (Karalis, 2013, p. 43). Also, Goulas, with 216 questionnaires in 2006, investigated the position of the adult and his degree of participation in the process of his education.

Based on the results, it emerged that "81% wish to participate in the planning and implementation process of the program with a specific point of view and 77.5% stated their desire for greater participation in the implementation of the program". Through the processing of the data, it appears that the trainees who were positive about the methods and procedures of Adult Education and promoting their participation, declared high satisfaction with the course of the program and the opposite. From these variables comes the conclusion that the degree of participation of adult trainees in their training process significantly affects their degree of satisfaction with it (Goulas, 2006, pp. 5-11).

According to the study by Antonopoulou S. (2009, pp. 58-79), Lifelong Learning is approached, qualitatively and quantitatively, and it is found that although in recent years there has been a reduction in programs, the participation of trainees in the learning process is particularly high. This is because they are looking for ways to use their free time creatively. We notice that in the study of Kavka E. and Konstantopoulou A. (2014) there are points of identification. In particular, the participants have as a dominant motivation for their participation the threat of unemployment. They join in order to improve their position, acquire more skills and receive more money.

Another research that also shows a convergence of results is that of Kouklatzidou M. (2017, pp. 30-49), which makes special reference to the fact that most of the trainees were women and indeed with a higher educational qualification.

Finally, the study was carried out by Eurostat from the year 2009 to the year 2011 and it is found that the students who used a computer in 2009 were 47% and this increased to 54% in 2011. But despite the fact that about half use of the computer seems to be below the European average which ranges from 69% in 2009 and reaches 73% in 2011.

The survey was conducted at the Vocational Center, the region of Livadia and took a place on October, 2022. The total number of participants was 50. The methodological tool employed was the questionnaire. The questionnaire was structured based on the literature review and was the main research tool consisting of closed-ended questions. It consisted of 4 thematic units. It includes 26 questions. The measurement scale consists of five steps. The questions were grouped into five categories. The first category includes demographics such as gender, location, education level and age group. The second category includes questions about the use and familiarity with computers. The third category includes questions about the educational material and the logistical infrastructure. The fourth includes the motivations and obstacles to the participation of the trainees and the fifth group for the content of the learning process.

Through this, the collection of quantitative data was possible. We have tried to investigate the needs of all social groups for participating in the learning process. For the analysis of the data, it used the software Excel 2007. I used the statistical index Pearson Correlation Coefficient Calculator for evaluating the affinity and association between two variables, the gender and the work situation. The test tool was used to compare the averages of the two sets of values. The first set is the work situation and the second one is the use of a computer at home.

The questionnaire was addressed to computer program participants. Its purpose was to investigate both the relative importance and prioritization of their motivations for participation, as well as the existence of deterrent/inhibitory factors for participation in similar programs that exist today.

In more detail:

- The motivations for participating in a Lifelong Learning program, found in the relevant international literature, are multiple: acquiring knowledge on subjects of interest to the citizen, subjects concerning everyday life, personal pleasure, or individual perfection. Also, important topics related to their personal work, securing their existing job, improving their career, finding a new job, obtaining additional qualifications or simply meeting new people.
- The dissuasive/inhibiting factors, which may act as a deterrent to following a Lifelong Learning program are also numerous: age, health reasons, remote area, lack of available time, family obligations, non-fulfillment of conditions, financial inability, lack of support from the employer (for programs alongside existing working hours). At the same time, at the survey are ascertained ways and reasons why adults decide to enter the learning process and become recipients of new knowledge, having been away from the educational process for years, were examined. In addition, the evaluation so far of both the trainer and the program carried out, the training technique followed as well as the possible participation in the next 12 months were mentioned.

Axes of research were the following thematic units:

- General views on learning and training-specific information of respondents.
- Learning method preferences
- Previous educational and training experience, e.g. participation, incentives and benefits.
- Intention to participate in the future including motivations, obstacles, and possible stimuli that they could act as a driving force for participation.

### Results

Initially in our research we report that the largest percentage of participants are women compared to men. Hence, women with a percentage 58% is more motivated to participate in a program. As it found the women are more motivated to participate in training programs. Therefore, the first hypothesis is confirmed.

**Table1. Gender**

| <b>Adult learners</b> | <b>Frequency</b> | <b>Percentage %</b> |
|-----------------------|------------------|---------------------|
| male                  | 21               | 42                  |
| female                | 29               | 58                  |
| <b>Total</b>          | <b>50</b>        | <b>100.0</b>        |

It is found that the largest percentage of trainees fall in the age groups of 25-44 and 45-64 years, with the age group of 45-64 being 6% higher. These groups are active workforce and a program could help them develop their knowledge.

**Table2. Target group for the age**

| <b>Adult learners</b> | <b>Frequency</b> | <b>Percentage %</b> |
|-----------------------|------------------|---------------------|
| 18-25                 | 7                | 14                  |
| 25-44                 | 20               | 40                  |
| 45-64                 | 23               | 46                  |
| 65 +                  | 0                | 0                   |
| <b>Total</b>          | <b>50</b>        | <b>100.0</b>        |

Also, it can be stated there is no participant at the age group over 65 years old. Thus, age does not play a part in the final decision to attend a program. On the contrary, there are those who try to gain new knowledge in order to strengthen their job position, or enhance their formal qualifications, as well as a way out of the routine of everyday life. Adult learners are people with experience and they want to learn to be ready to engage in an educational process, motivated by their personal inner needs.

It can also be seen that 46% of the participants have completed secondary education and there is none without having completed at least one level of formal education. Only 1/10 of them have completed primary school and 1/4 of the trainees have finished a higher education school. As we find the most of participants from 25 till 64 years old make the decision of self-improvement and an attempt to enhance their resume in the effort to deal with the highly demanding lifestyle. Therefore, the result we obtain coincides with the stated hypothesis.

**Table3. Education' s level**

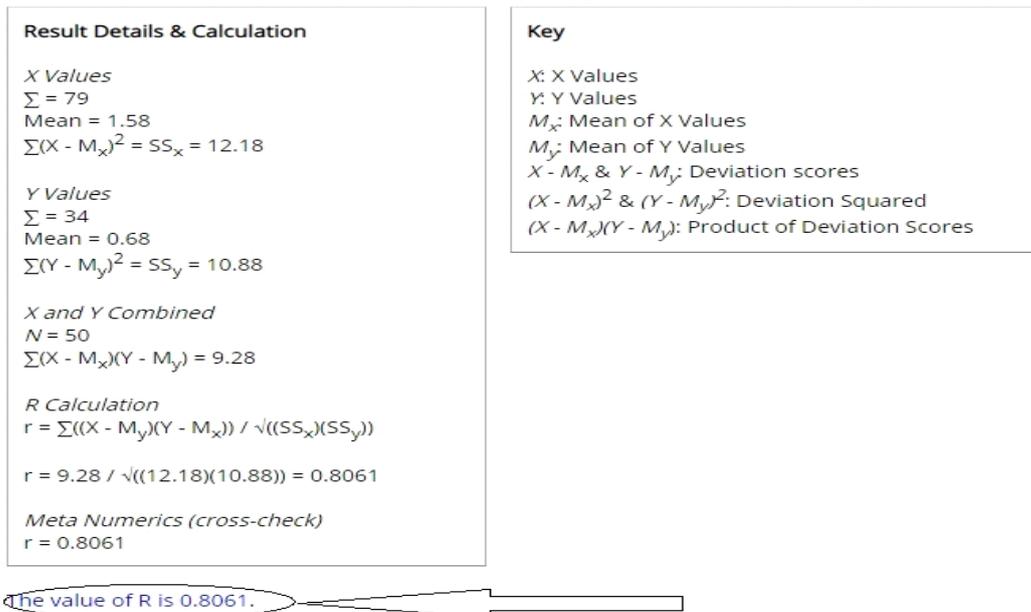
| <b>Adult learners</b> | <b>Frequency</b> | <b>Percentage %</b> |
|-----------------------|------------------|---------------------|
| High school           | 23               | 46                  |
| University            | 13               | 26                  |
| Technical school      | 7                | 14                  |
| Primary school        | 4                | 8                   |
| Secondary school      | 3                | 6                   |
| No school             | 0                | 0                   |
| <b>Total</b>          | <b>50</b>        | <b>100.0</b>        |

About, the employment state, the results show that 2/3 of the participants are under employment and 1/3 is unemployed. So, at this point our hypothesis is false, as we assumed that the majority of participants would be unemployed.

**Table4. Work Situation**

| <b>Adult learners</b> | <b>Frequency</b> | <b>Percentage %</b> |
|-----------------------|------------------|---------------------|
| employee              | 34               | 68                  |
| unemployed            | 16               | 32                  |
| <b>Total</b>          | <b>50</b>        | <b>100.0</b>        |

It used the statistical index Pearson Correlation Coefficient Calculator for evaluating the affinity and association between two variables, the gender and the work's situation.



**Figure 1. Pearson Correlation Coefficient Calculator**

In the Figure 1 above, since the value R (R = 0.8061) is close to number 1. There is a strong positive correlation between variables. So, we conclude that gender is quite related to the work situation.

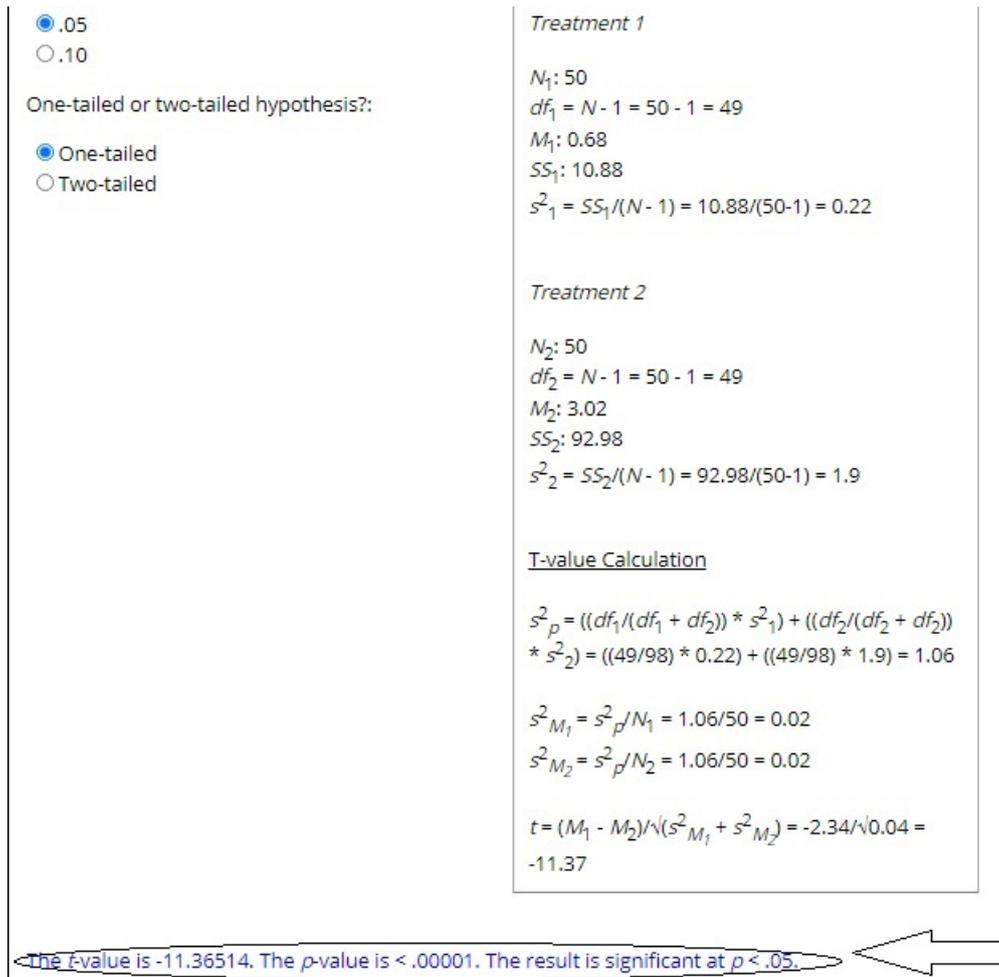
The next question is the familiarity level of the participants with the use of the computer. It is demonstrated that 68% are conversant with using a computer and 32% do not have at all or have very little familiarization. Only 10% are very familiar with a computer, which means that it is part of their daily lives, while 34% use it a lot. Only 8% have no familiarity with the computer. It means that in the 21st century, in the digital period, there are people who are digitally illiterate.

In the question about the use of a computer at home the results show that 2/3 of the participants responded positively, while 1/3 of them use a computer very little and not at all.

The t test tool was used to compare the averages of the two sets of values. The first set is the work situation and the second one is the use of a computer at home. The following method is Likert. The hypothesis being studied is the equality of the average values of the two independent groups, that is, whether employed and unemployed participants have the same use of the computer at home.

Zero hypothesis (H0):  $\mu_1 = \mu_2$  employees and unemployed use the computer at home, in the same way.

Alternative (H1):  $\mu_1 \neq \mu_2$  employees and unemployed do not use the computer at home, in the same way.



**Figure 2.T-Test Calculator for 2 Independent Means**

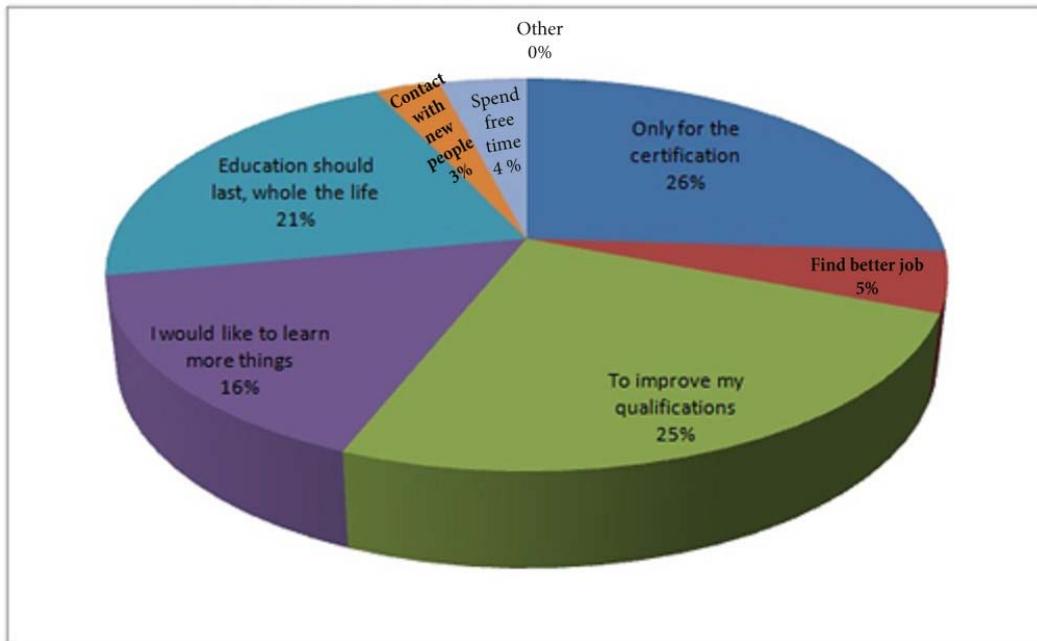
The power of the zero hypothesis is less than 0.05 ( $p < 0.05$ ), so we accept the alternative hypothesis, that is, employees and unemployed do not use the same the computer at home.

Various motivations result from this research as a reason for urging the participants to attend a learning program. These incentives are related to both the general perceptions and attitudes towards continuing education (e.g. “education should last throughout our lives”), as well as meeting specific needs and personal goals (e.g. “to enhance my formal qualifications”).

The reasons expressed a high frequency as important motivations for participation are the acquisition of a certificate, attaining further formal qualifications, the belief that education should last for all their life, the intention to obtain new knowledge and finding a better job. Less participants preferred motivations appear to be the utilization of free time and the escape from personal or family problems.

Specifically, 1/4 of the participants mentioned as a reason the computer knowledge certificate and to improve their qualifications. 1/5 of them said that education should last, lifetime and about 1/6 to learn more things. The numbers of trainees attending a program to find a better job, to use their free time and to contact new people are very small. Reasons such as getting away from everyday problems or some other reason received zero percentages. Hence, it is realized that the demanding society forces human beings to acquire knowledge and qualifications in a constant manner (Figure 3). And here, the hypothesis is

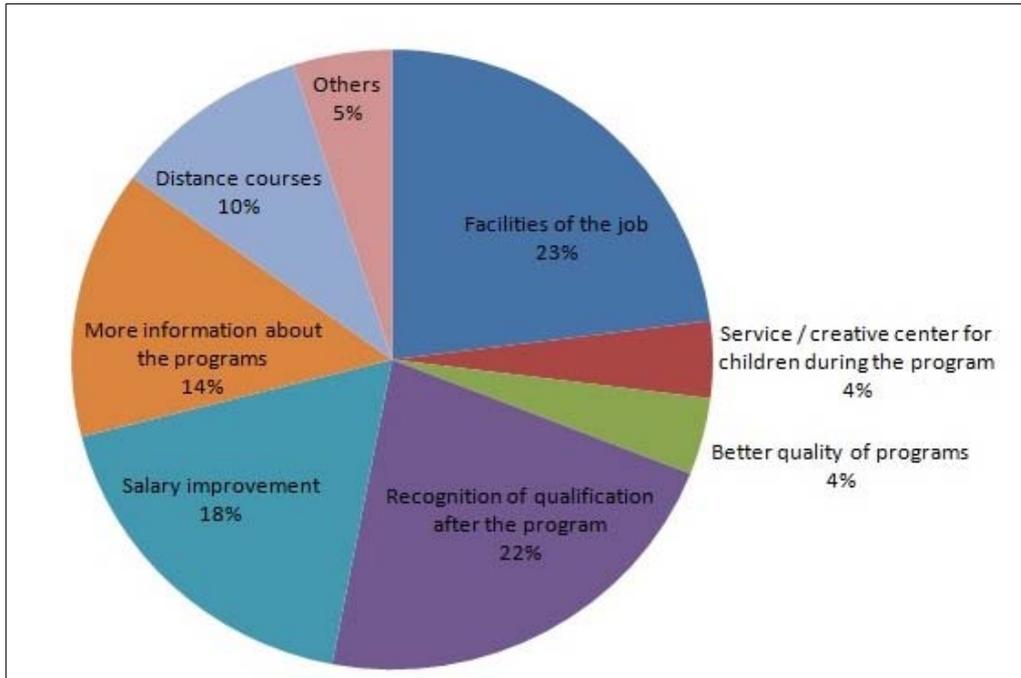
presented accurately and at the same time shows the same percentages as the acquisition of knowledge.



**Figure 3. The reasons expressed as important motivations for participation**

As in the case of incentives study, the survey lists a number of barriers to participation in business-related programs. Undoubtedly, the cost of participation appears to be the dominant obstacle. In addition to the cost, other reasons hindering the participation in a program are the lack of awareness, the lack of time due to professional or other obligations, as well as other reasons related to the organization of programs such as inconvenient days and hours of implementation, the quality of seminars, the venue and their long duration. Specifically, 1/5 of the participants state that an obstacle to their participation is the cost of the program or the lack of awareness. About 1/10 indicate the lack of time due to other activities, that the seminars are take place at a specific time that prevents them to attend, the lack of time due to work or taking care of children or other persons. There are very low percentages of trainees who report a health problem as an obstacle, the long duration of the seminars, the belief that their position will not improve, that they have learned a lot so far or that they are too old to learn. No one mentioned poor structure of the program or that they are like school courses. It seems that the economic crisis overwhelming in Greece has affected the education's adult. Therefore, potential students are not given the opportunity to take part in this type of courses because of the cost.

Furthermore, this research dealt with the facilitation of the trainees to attend a seminar. Most of them answer that they would like to provide services/facilities of the job, the salary's improvement and more seminar information. For the participants are less important the distance learning, child care services (in case they have) and better quality for holding a seminar. More specifically, 23% ask facilities of the job, 22% for recognition of formal qualifications acquired by the program and 18% for improvement of salary. 14% would like more information about the programs and 10% would like distance learning. More than fewer participants would like find job (5%), creative center for their children during the program (4%) or the quality of the program (4%) (Figure 4). Here, our initial hypothesis is false as we find from the research that the majority are interested in facilitation by their work and recognition of formal qualifications, rather than distance learning.



**Figure 4. What was the reason you chose to participate in this seminar**

Finally, at the question of whether they know what Lifelong Learning is, the largest percentage seems to have knowledge. Specifically, 4/5 of the participants seem to know, unlike 1/5 that they do not. This finding shows that making the decision to participate in lifelong learning programs is mostly conscious.

**Table 5. Do you know what lifelong learning is ?**

| Adult learners | Frequency | Percentage % |
|----------------|-----------|--------------|
| Yes            | 40        | 80           |
| No             | 10        | 20           |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>50</b> | <b>100.0</b> |

**Conclusions**

Through the presented study, it is concluded that lifelong learning aims to meet the learning needs of learners. In this way, it is noticed that the programs are attended more by women with a percentage of 58% compared to men with 42%. It is also realized that the participants belong to the age group of 35–44 and 45–64, with a total percentage of 86%. Moreover, it reports that the motivations concern mainly the acquisition of a computer knowledge certificate, the increase of qualifications and the belief that education should last a lifetime. Thus, it is realized that the demanding society forces human beings to acquire knowledge and supplies in a constant pace.

On the other hand, there are still difficulties and obstacles in the final decision to attend a program. The most important is the cost of participation (20%) but also the lack of time (32%). The fact that information is not accessible to all those who potentially would be interested. It is also apparent that the economic crisis in Greece has a severe impact on the education of adults. The future students are not able to participate in this type of course mainly because of the cost. The responsible parties and authorities should form proper strategies and policies for informing the public and the public in turn should seek information.

Last but not least, it is concluded the trainees are making their choice to participate in the learning process consciously.

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