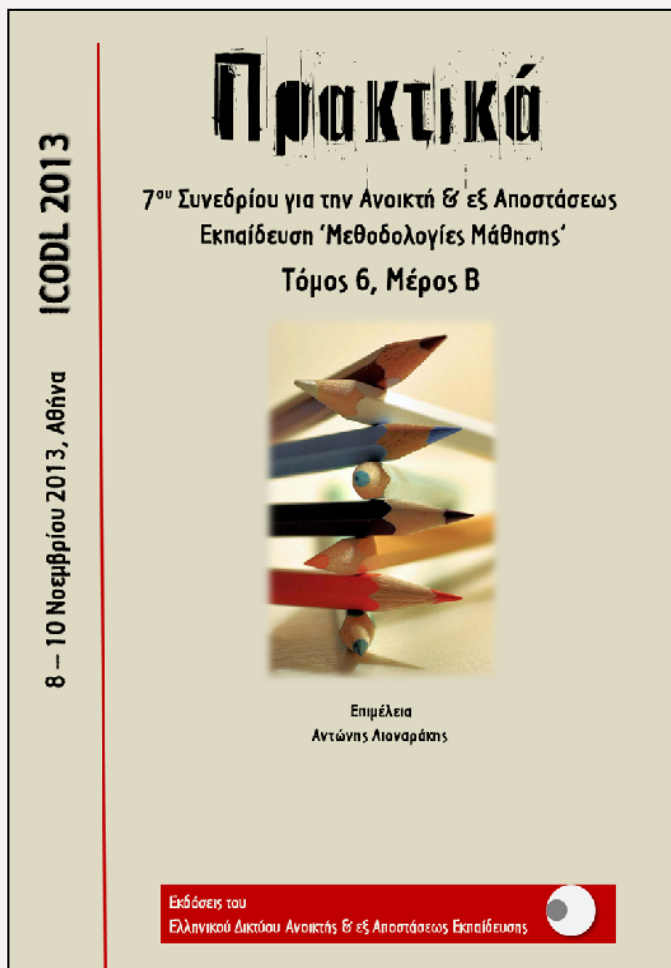


Διεθνές Συνέδριο για την Ανοικτή & εξ Αποστάσεως Εκπαίδευση

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Distance Learning in basic level education for adults at Radio ECCA

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Distance Learning in basic level education for adults at Radio ECCA

Η εξ αποστάσεως μάθηση στην πρωτοβάθμια και δευτεροβάθμια εκπαίδευση ενηλίκων στο Radio ECCA

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Abstract

This paper investigates the effectiveness of Distance Learning in the distance educational institution for adults, Radio ECCA, for the primary and secondary education programs. The research followed the principles of qualitative design (interviews) and was elaborated during the academic year 2011-2012. For the processing of the results, the method of content analysis was followed. The research questions that occupied the investigation were related to the requirements for attendance of the primary and secondary cycle programs, the organization of the studies, the content of the programs and the educational system of the institution. The results showed that the characteristics of the distance methodology applied in the primary and secondary education programs are in line with those of distance education, as well as with the principles of adult learning and that it leads to high educational efficiency.

Keywords: *distance learning, adult learning, primary and secondary education for adults*

Περίληψη

Στην εργασία αυτή διερευνάται η αποτελεσματικότητα της εξ αποστάσεως μάθησης στο εξ αποστάσεως εκπαιδευτικό ίδρυμα ενηλίκων Radio ECCA, στα προγράμματα του πρωτοβάθμιου και δευτεροβάθμιου κύκλου. Η έρευνα ακολούθησε τις αρχές ενός ποιοτικού σχεδιασμού, πραγματοποιήθηκε το ακαδημαϊκό έτος 2011-2012 και τα εργαλεία συλλογής των ερευνητικών δεδομένων ήταν η ημιδομημένη συνέντευξη. Για την επεξεργασία των αποτελεσμάτων ακολουθήθηκε η μέθοδος της ανάλυσης περιεχομένου. Τα ερευνητικά ερωτήματα που απασχόλησαν την έρευνα αφορούσαν τις προϋποθέσεις παρακολούθησης των προγραμμάτων του πρωτοβάθμιου και δευτεροβάθμιου κύκλου, την οργάνωση σπουδών, το περιεχόμενο των προγραμμάτων και το εκπαιδευτικό σύστημα που εφαρμόζει το ίδρυμα. Τα αποτελέσματα έδειξαν ότι τα χαρακτηριστικά της εξ αποστάσεως μεθοδολογίας που εφαρμόζονται στα προγράμματα της πρωτοβάθμιας και δευτεροβάθμιας εκπαίδευσης συνάδουν σε μεγάλο βαθμό με αυτά της εξ αποστάσεως εκπαίδευσης, καθώς και με τις αρχές της εκπαίδευσης ενηλίκων και οδηγούν σε υψηλή εκπαιδευτική αποτελεσματικότητα.

Λέξεις-κλειδιά: *εξ αποστάσεως εκπαίδευση, εκπαίδευση ενηλίκων, πρωτοβάθμια και δευτεροβάθμια εκπαίδευση για ενήλικες*

1. Introduction

1.1 Radio ECCA

Radio ECCA is a private non-profitable foundation, which operates as a distance educational institution for adults. It was the first educational institution to provide distance education in Spain. The headquarters are in the Canary Islands, but the institution is active in the Iberian Peninsula and Africa. Radio ECCA has established partnerships with international educational organizations and it has conducted several training programs in Europe and Latin America.

Since 1965, Radio ECCA has offered distance education to adults who have not previously been able to attend the conventional educational system. Almost 100,000 people are being trained successfully every year. Courses are offered in formal and non-formal education, for adults with learning needs, which vary. There are courses offered that lead to accredited qualifications, from literacy and basic education up to the preparation level for the university. Courses regarding personal and social development are also provided, such as the rights and obligations of citizens, first aid training or leisure activities and courses regarding professional training which aim toward either gaining employment or improvement within the existing job.

The educational system of the institution consists of three main components: educational radio broadcasts or radio "classes", the specially designed printed material and weekly face-to-face meetings at the Tutorial Centers of Radio ECCA. The most important factor of the ECCA system's success is the synchronized existence of the above three elements, which in recent years has been supplemented and enriched by the use of new technologies of information and communication (ICT) in education.

1.2 Distance Learning

The definitions of "distance learning" vary depending on the questions and concerns raised by the researchers of the field (Lionarakis, 2005).

Keegan (2001), after having studied the field of "distance learning" and following some basic assumptions, such as that "distance learning" constitutes a distinct and coherent field of education and an educational system which is characterized by the distance between the teacher and the learner but also among the group of learners, proposes the following definition:

"The distance learning is a form of education characterized by: a) the distance between the teacher and the learner, on an almost permanent basis throughout the learning process, b) the impact of the training organization on both design and preparation of teaching material and the provision of support services to learners, c) the use of technical media -print, audio, visual material or computer- that link teacher and learner and carry the content of the curriculum, d) for duplex communication, so that learners can benefit from even direct dialogue, and e) the absence, in almost permanent basis, of the operation of the learning group throughout the learning process" (p. 74-75).

According to Holmberg (1995), distance learning provides educational opportunities to those who cannot or do not want to attend a classroom. It consists, in other words, of the training method, which covers the various forms and levels of education, without the constant and direct supervision of the teacher, away from classrooms and through which learners benefit from the organization, teaching and guidance of the educational institution (Holmberg, 1995). Regarding the characteristics of distance learning, Holmberg (1995) stresses that there is no global agreement and these vary depending on the organization of each educational institution.

Lionarakis (2005) argues that there is no globally-accepted definition for distance learning, because every definition is the result of the personal concerns and needs of

the researcher. What is critical, however, is the clear choice of important criteria, based on which distance learning is defined and according to Lionarakis (2005) and his colleagues, these criteria are: *"the student, the teacher, learning, teaching, communication, learning / educational material, place, time, the training provider and assessment"* (p. 26). Based on these criteria, Lionarakis (2005) defines distance learning as *"the education that teaches and enables the student how to learn on himself and how to work autonomously towards a heuristic self-learning course"* (p. 26).

Based on the above definitions and characteristics of distance learning, it turns out that it is about a learning methodology, which largely eliminates the learning barriers of the conventional educational system and allows anyone who wishes to study to do so (Matralis, 1999). Learning barriers are identified mainly as mandatory physical presence in classrooms and age limits. The particular characteristics of adults, such as increased professional and personal obligations, make distance learning an appropriate method, through which adults are allowed to choose the location, time and pace of learning.

1.3 Primary and secondary level distance learning for adults

Distance learning is a teaching and learning methodology which can be applied to any form and level of education. In the bibliography review, the majority of the data relates to university institutions that offer distance education. However, distance learning in the last decades has been applied with great success in the field of adult basic education.

Often the term "distance school education" is used to convey the meaning of distance basic adult education at primary and secondary level.

According to Vassala (2005), distance school education is education at primary and secondary level, which is provided both to school age students, who, for whatever reason, cannot attend conventional school, and adults who had no access to school at the appropriate age.

Application of distance methodology in primary and secondary education is of particular interest in areas where distances between cities are large, such as Canada and Australia (Vassala, 2005), but also in developing countries like those in Africa, where there is no economic basis for the provision of basic education to their citizens (Georgiades & Kokkali 2009).

According to research carried out by Gungor and Prins (2011), the distance methodology was a significant factor in the completion of basic education of residents in Pennsylvania, and an opportunity for adults who cannot attend face-to-face teaching to participate in education and acquire the certificate of secondary level. Askov and his colleagues (2003, as ment. in Gungor & Prins, 2011) describe the distance method in basic adult education as so different from the traditional method that it looks like "rediscovering school" (p. 2).

Today, thousands of adults worldwide are trained with the methodology of distance learning, by attending integrated programs in primary and secondary education and acquire those skills that would allow them to manage the demands of the new era in the knowledge society (Vassala, 2005).

2. The purpose and the research questions

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of the distance learning in primary and secondary level at the adult educational institution Radio ECCA.

The questions of the research were:

- What is the content of the programs and the organization of the studies at primary and secondary level in Radio ECCA?
- What are the prerequisites to attend the courses in primary and secondary level?
- What is the educational system in primary and secondary level applied in Radio ECCA?

3. Research methodology

3.1 Design and conduct of the research

The research was conducted during the academic year 2011-2012 in the context of a dissertation in the field of Open and Distance Learning. It followed the principles and procedures of qualitative research and it intended to highlight the qualitative data that would contribute to the fulfillment of the purpose of the investigation and not to just record quantitative data and correlations.

The choice of the research method is a critical step in the research process. Cohen et al. (2008) argue that decisions on the type of research and techniques are tactical decisions that are taken after answering a series of questions about the purpose and objectives of the research, research questions, the sources of the data, etc.

In this research effort, the methods of bibliography review and interview were selected. The investigation of the research questions relied to a degree on bibliography, since it was a rich source of research data. More specifically, bibliography review attributed with data regarding the investigation of registration in the programs, conditions and limitations of attending the educational programs of Radio ECCA, the content and organization of the courses, etc. Information about Radio ECCA was mainly retrieved from the official website of the institution, specifically from addresses: www.radioecca.org and www.radioecca.net. In addition, data was sought in publications of Radio ECCA, print and electronic, such as "Studies Guide", "Report 2009-2010", "Radio ECCA and New Technologies", etc.

The interviews

The use of the interview as a data collection tool is the core of qualitative research and as a process exceeds the typical dialogue between the researcher and the subject of research (Paraskefopoulou-Kollias, 2008). According to Kvale (1996, as ref. at Cohen, et al., 2008), who attempts a broader social approach to the concept of the interview, it concerns the exchange of views between two or more persons, in order to produce knowledge.

The two interviews were held in January 2012 at the headquarters of Radio ECCA, in English. The two interviewees were selected according to their knowledge and experience in the content of questions and their knowledge of the English language. They were both aware of the purpose and objectives of the research and the content of the interview, they had studied the questionnaire and at the beginning of the interviews their consent was sought for the recording of the discussions. During the interviews, apart from the questions of the questionnaire, there were other questions posed, which either aimed at exploring new issues that arose, or to clarify and discuss the themes contained in the original questionnaire.

Although, the interviews were designed to be carried out as semi-structured interviews, due to the particularities, both interviews, according to the typology proposed by Patton (1980, as ref. at Cohen, et al., 2008), had the structure of the 'unofficial / informal interview with the format of discussion' (p.454).

The analysis of the research material followed the rules and principles of the method of qualitative content analysis (Paraskevopoulos, 1993 · Daskolia, 2005 · Cohen, et

al., 2008). According to Berelson (1971, as ref. at Daskolia, 2005), content analysis is a technique which aims at organizing and describing those contained in a written or oral communication with the detection, coding and categorization of key issues contained therein.

Usually, the processing of research data which is collected using the interview method follows a combination of qualitative and quantitative analysis, where the researcher focuses on identifying both the thematic categories and their encoding and the frequency of occurrence (Cohen, et. al., 2008). In this research work, due to the small sample size and the heterogeneity of the two interviews conducted, the treatment of research material was limited to qualitative content analysis, since a quantitative type of analysis would be meaningless.

The two interviews were coded according to the distinctive letter I and serial number: I1 (first interview) and I2 (second interview).

4. Results and conversation

4.1 The content of the educational programs and the organization of the primary and secondary courses

According to the research data collected using the bibliography review and interviews, the content of the programs offered in Radio ECCA at primary and secondary level is in accordance with the formal circulars of Ministry of Education and the courses offered are like those offered in public schools, leading to official state certificates.

"... With regard to formal education (primary and secondary), there are circulars of the Ministry of Education, which we ought to follow, starting from the very basic education, literacy and up to the level before the university." (I1).

In addition, the research results showed that the organization of the courses in primary and secondary level has the following characteristics:

- Enrolment at any time within the academic year, with a deadline of March 30, due to organizational and secretarial matters.
- Students are able to take exams for the courses they have chosen three times in a school year.
- Students choose the number of modules and courses they deem that they can undertake.
- They also have the option to choose amongst some courses. In general, however, due to the circulars that should be followed, the courses are specific.
- Upon successful completion of the course, students acquire some credits, which if added up to a specific number, they lead to the graduation certificate.
- Previous learning experiences are recognized by the institution, either based on titles provided by the student or based on the results of tests that take place and consequently students are classified in the appropriate level.

Therefore, in accordance with the above, the content of the programs of primary and secondary education is specific, determined by the official circulars of the Ministry of Education and completion of studies leads to the state graduation certificate. While the content of the courses at the primary and secondary level does not change, because of the equivalence of qualifications that should be consistent with that of conventional education, the courses are adapted to the specific needs of the students.

In Radio ECCA, the team responsible for the planning and development of programs in basic education organizes the courses, taking into account the characteristics of adult education and distance learning methodology. In these programs, the objects / units that must be completed in order to obtain the graduation certificate are

subdivided into smaller sections. As a result, students have the opportunity to choose the number of courses and thus, determine the pace and time duration of their studies (Lionarakis & Lykourgiotis, 1999), depending on the adult obligations and their personal learning styles (Rogers, 1999). Furthermore, recognition of prior cognitive experience, transfer of credits and the choice of courses enable students to formulate to a degree their educational framework, unlike to the conventional system where the respective programs have rigid structure and a specific timetable.

4.2 The requirements for the attendance of the courses at the primary and secondary level

According to the information retrieved from the official website of the institution and the "Studies Guide 2010-2011," the requirements and criteria for attending the educational programs at the primary and secondary cycle are:

- People who are over 18 years old.
- For the secondary level courses, the certificate of the primary level is required.

The first requirement is **the age**. Radio ECCA is an educational institution for adults and therefore, the criterion of adulthood is critical for attending the programs.

"... There are no restrictions or limitations. Attendance is completely open. Anyone can study. The only prerequisite is to be over 18 years old." (I2).

There are, however, some exceptional cases for young people who have completed their 16th year, for instance, athletes with increased commitments which do not allow them to follow the conventional education system.

The second requirement to consider is **previous knowledge** for the classification to the respective level in the programs of primary and secondary education. These are mainly certificates or degrees of the previous level of the one someone chooses to attend. If, however, the student has attended courses or modules in conventional system in the past or other legally recognized educational institutions, Radio ECCA recognizes it and ranks the candidate at the appropriate level. Thus, previous experience is recognized and valued accordingly and this is very important in adult education (Kokkos, 2008):

"If we talk about formal education, then if the student provided a certificate that proves he/she has passed some courses or modules, we try to evaluate it and advise him/her what to do next. Sometimes when there is no certificate, the student is asked to give a test in order to determine the level of knowledge. So, if you have studied in the past some objects and this can be proved, then we recognize it and we continue with the rest. This is something that is done only in adult education because we should be able to facilitate the adults." (I1)

Another requirement to consider in the context of this research question is **the tuition fees**.

The attendance of the educational programs in Radio ECCA requires the financial participation of the students, which is, however, at very low levels. The payment of the tuitions is made for each class or number of courses chosen by the student, upon registration. For the primary and secondary level programs, tuitions are:

Primary education (2 levels): Total tuitions at €188

Secondary education (2 levels): Total tuitions at €638 (58 courses / 11€ per course)

Although the financial participation is a requirement for the registration in the programs, in cases where some students are unable to meet their financial obligations, this is not a barrier for their studies. Radio ECCA, usually provides grants to those students who are unable to pay their tuition fees:

«... The budget also is not a prerequisite to attend the programs. If someone does not have enough money, then we take all steps to ensure subsidies for them. "(I2) "... It's hard for us to say to someone who wants to study but has no money, he cannot." (I2) "... If there are any profits from the Foundation's activity, then these are available to students who do not have the financial ability to attend the classes." (I1)

For the interpretation of the term "adulthood", in this work, we selected the approach proposed by Rogers (1999), who believes that adult is the one who meets the characteristics which are posed by each society or culture. Radio ECCA operates mainly in Spain, where the age of being adult is determined as 18 years and in line with its distinctive title, it is "an institution providing distance education to adults." Therefore, the requirement of adulthood, which occurs in all programs, is not a barrier to access to education, but a basic feature of the field of adult education (Kokkos, 2008; Rogers, 1999).

Previous knowledge as a prerequisite for enrollment in specific courses may restrict access (Tait, 1988), although according to Race (1999), in the open education it is important for learners to know what they can do before commencing such programs. Rowntree (1992) cites the example of a program without preconditioned knowledge, where there are students with different previous learning experience in the field. Then, it would be appropriate to focus on those students who fall short of adequate knowledge to attend the program. In this case, however, the program is likely to be less effective for those students who have advanced knowledge. Thus, the requirement of previous knowledge in the direction of the proper functioning of an educational program is not necessarily an impediment to access, but several times it "protects" students, who do not possess adequate knowledge to attend a particular program, from future hardships.

In the case of Radio ECCA, as previously mentioned, the presentation of diplomas or certificates of knowledge on integration of students at the various levels of formal education is a prerequisite, but not exclusive. If students do not possess formal qualifications of previous knowledge, they have the opportunity to sit a test in order to be classified to the respective level. Thus, previous experience is recognized and this may reduce the period of study and also the overall financial contribution. Furthermore, recognition of prior knowledge and experience in an adult program, such as those offered by Radio ECCA, is an important factor in learning in adult education (Kokkos, 2008).

4.3 ECCA System

The third research question is the biggest in scope and content and it aims, with the results of the research, to highlight the degree to which the educational system Radio ECCA applied to programs in primary and secondary education is in line with the principles and characteristics of distance learning. The ECCA system consists of three components, printed material, radio classes and face-to-face meetings, which each occur in all programs of the institution and work integrally with each other, especially the printed material and radio classes.

a) Printed material

The printed material is specifically designed to serve the educational objectives of each program and contains all the necessary information in order for the student to be able to both attend the radio classes and study the material.

The main feature of printed learning materials is the gaps that exist and which the student is asked to complete, as he attends the radio class and acquires the necessary knowledge. In that way, the material, to some extent, replaces the blackboard.

«... The printed material is designed with gaps, which the student is asked to complete. These gaps are related to the most important elements of the course, the keywords, all an adult needs to memorize ... "(II)." ... We try not to give them more than what they can manage in half an hour, it is important to achieve interaction [...] Our first thought, then, is that we must prepare a class of 30' and we design the material so that this can be achieved. "(II).

The main material is complemented with notes and texts that relate to its content, including responses to the exercises, practical exercises for the students to practice on their own and also additional information of the module. At the end of the material there are self-assessment exercises which are completed by the students after the radio class is ended. In some cases the material is complemented with audiovisual material such as CD-ROMs, videos, floppy disks, etc.

"... For subjects such as history or literature, which are large, we suggest to our students some auxiliary material... There are books that are recommended in adult learning and when we consider it useful, we suggest the books to our students as supplemented material. "(II).

The educational function of the printed material lies in enabling communication between the learner and the teacher on one hand and keeping the learner's attention focused on the other, attempting to replace the blackboard in a classroom (Cepeda, 1983).

The shapes and the images included in the learning material make it interesting and attractive, while the gaps, which are required to be completed by the student during the radio class, aim at two things. First, to highlight the important points of the material and secondly to maintain the undivided attention of the learner and help them reach the acquisition of knowledge.

"... We have to adapt the material to the reality of adult, while respecting the circulars of the Ministry of Education. This is not so easy to do and we have to make a resume and focus on the most important issues "(II).

b) Radio class

The radio "class" or radio "lesson" is not related to any lecture or teaching from the microphone. During the "class" a detailed explanation of the content of the material of the course is provided by the teachers. In order for the student to attend the radio class, they must have in front of them the printed material, which complements the "teaching" process. Teachers also have in front of them the respective printed material of the day in order to give the necessary information to the student to attend the "class".

In Radio ECCA, radio classes in conjunction with the printed material trigger the participation of the student, since they feel like they are constantly in front of the "blackboard". On the other hand, the teaching process, as designed, gives a highly personalized character. Both the activation of the learner's participation and the individualized teaching are elements of the principles of the adult learning, and thus ensure the effective learning (Kokkos, 1998).

The educational objectives of the specially designed radio class in Radio ECCA is to activate the attention and interest of the learner in the topic of the printed material, to provide all the explanations for completing the gaps and to encourage individual study. Therefore, the way that the teacher presents the radio "lesson" is not pre-planned. They are ready to improvise in front of the microphone, as they would in front of a classroom where he would teach face-to-face (Gohla, 1994).

"... We try to explain the issues in a very simple way. I do not take anything for granted and I think that if, for example, there are some students that attend the first

basic level, they know nothing and so they do the lesson [...] so the teacher when he records the class he should be interactive, thinking, talking as if all students were there in front of him[...] we must be enthusiastic when we record in order to keep the student in front of the radio [...] some students may be abstract, so we must be interactive to keep their interest and also select very carefully the content of the lesson. "(II).

The first two pillars of the system, printed materials and radio classes, are in fact the ingredients of a "distance learning package", which is what "basically teaches learners, who are in the process of self-learning" (Lionarakis, 2001b, p.187). The main characteristic is the complementation of the two components of the package, in the concept of combined use of these two modes of information, since the use of printed learning materials without the simultaneous attendance of the radio classes or otherwise, the attendance of the radio class without the simultaneous study of the printed material, has no learning effect.

Luis Cepeda (1983) describes successfully the simultaneous use of printed materials and radio class as being in an ordinary classroom, where students are in front of the school blackboard (in distance learning the printed material) and listens to the teacher (radio class). The physical distance that exists between the student and the teacher are compensated by the specific characteristics of the two components, printed material and radio classes, of distance learning. Radio classes do not have the character of the lecture or monotonous teaching, typically found in conventional education, but of an interactive process. The printed material, on the other hand, contains gaps, exercises, activities, key words, illustrations, details of high educational value (Gohla, 1994), which make it an interactive and effective learning tool, through which the heuristic path to knowledge is achieved, being an important factor in adult learning (Kokkos, 1998). The interpretation of the research data, as cited above, leads to the conclusion that this is an "open learning pack", which, according to Race (1999), allows learners to work on their own with it.

c) Weekly face-to-face tutorials

According to data collected by the method of bibliography review and the interviews, the weekly meeting, which is optional, is carried out in the Tutorial Centers of Radio ECCA and the students who attend the meetings, regardless of the program they follow, are those who belong geographically to each center. These meetings are held by one teacher, who, irrespective of their specialty, has to handle all the queries of students and also to perform administrative tasks, such as the distribution of printed material, information on the programs of the institution, etc. Due to the heterogeneity of the level of students, it is not possible for the teacher to provide group tutoring, but only at the individual level.

Face to face tutorials do not have the character of teaching but they intend to cultivate communication and provide guidance and support of the students.

Characteristics of the meetings:

- Weekly frequency
- Voluntary participation
- The variation observed among participating students, regarding programs and level of study, leads to individualized teaching and guidance

Objectives of the meetings:

- Answering questions and gaps with respect to the material and radio classes and performing complementary activities

- Developing interaction between teacher and students and among students
- Guidance, support and facilitate the learning process

"... In distance learning they are not mandatory (the weekly meetings). We tell the students that they need to finish their studies. We explain that it is very difficult for someone who sits alone at home, listens to the lessons, but not be in contact with the teacher, to succeed." (I1) "... Teachers answer questions, clarify issues of students, advise them regarding the courses and deliver the material of the next week" (I1) "Communication is an important part in the weekly meetings. It is amazing how students communicate with each other and share their experiences. And also they do not feel alone in the world "(I2).

Face-to-face weekly meetings or tutorials are the third pillar of the Radio ECCA system. Participation is optional, as according to the results of the research, the teaching material, printed and radio classes, should be enough for the effective process of teaching-learning. The frequency which they are carried out, once a week, favors the climate of interaction and cooperation, being an important factor for adult learning (Kokkos, 1998) and enhances the direct communication element, which is essential in distance learning (Vassala, 2003). Another advantage is the frequent feedback to the student, who delivers the work each week and receives the corrected one of the previous week. Galusha (1997) states that one of the difficulties of distance learning is the sparse contact and feedback learners have from their teachers, which may lead to reduced confidence.

The objectives of the weekly meetings are related to solving the queries of students, to develop interaction between students and teacher and among learners, to guide and facilitate the process of learning, to motivate, recognize and support of students. Also, the delivery of homework for assessment and distribution of printed materials for the week that follows are added to the meeting's objectives. In distance learning, face-to-face meetings between teacher and student do not have the meaning of the additional instruction, but the counseling of students, providing information and explanations about the teaching materials and curriculum, and the exchange of views and experiences (Kokkos, 1998).

5. Conclusions

According to the research results, as illustrated above, someone could reach the safe conclusion that distance learning in Radio ECCA, in primary and secondary level, is largely effective, since the characteristics are consistent with those of distance learning principles and also those of the adult education. More specifically:

- The organization of the programs in primary and secondary education enables learners to choose the learning pace (Lionarakis & Lykourgiotis, 1999), depending on their adult responsibilities and their personal learning style (Rogers, 1999). The recognition of prior cognitive experience, the transfer of didactic units and the choice of the courses enable students to formulate at a degree their educational pace.
- The requirements to attend the programs in Radio ECCA reflect a flexible system which allows those adults who wish to be trained to attend without restrictions on age, knowledge and with very low tuitions. At the same time it reflects the organization of the Foundation, which aims to operate smoothly and facilitate the students. Adulthood as a prerequisite for the participation in the programs is a typical one for educational institutions for adults, as at Radio ECCA. The very low tuition fees are contributing to the costs of design, development and production of the educational programs and in most cases do not constitute a barrier to access, as the

policy of the Foundation is to provide educational opportunities even for those who find it difficult to participate financially.

- The Radio ECCA system reveals the character of an open and flexible distance methodology. The printed material and radio classes support the title of “package of open education” since students are able to work on their own with it (Race, 1999). Face-to-face tutorials become an effective process through the individualized teaching and support, which makes the student center of the learning process (Kokkos, 1998) and it turns out to be an important supportive factor, as the student in open and distance education prefer personalized face-to-face contact and feedback (Rowntree, 1992).

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