First Reading and Writing in Greek Using Asynchronous Distance Learning

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Abstract

Advances in technology have affected all aspects of human life. Education was forced to make intensive use of information technology and telecommunications during the COVID-19 period almost all over the world. Distance learning has been widely adopted, evolved and improved and is mainly presented in two forms, synchronous and asynchronous learning. The introduction of new technologies in the teaching of literacy skills opened up new horizons in educational practices, using digital tools that students are familiar with, tools that inspire them
and attract their attention. However, this does not mean that traditional teaching methods should be abandoned or discredited. Digital tools for classroom can be used as complementary methods to traditional methods of teaching, enhancing students’ literacy skills. The early literacy curriculum that is developed and presented at this study, has been integrated to an asynchronous learning platform for use, as a complementary tool in early literacy teaching and can work in parallel with traditional teaching. Face-to-face and distance education will be alternated in this way and students will receive additional support, according to their individual learning needs, providing also flexibility in teaching. The introduced First Reading and Writing in Greek using Asynchronous Distance Learning program can be attended at home or in the Integration Department, by students with reading and writing difficulties, regardless of the class in which they attend. The structure and instructions of the proposed Modules on the asynchronous platform are designed to guide students in an easy way, so that they can attend the lessons, dedicating the appropriate time for learning individually.

**Keywords:** asynchronous education platform, early literacy, reading, writing, education courses, eclass

1 Introduction

Conventional Education is the education that takes place in a classroom where the teacher and the student are in the same place at the same time. Distance education in primary and secondary education is addressed to school-age persons and is distinguished into autonomous and supplementary. Autonomous distance learning is applied independently of conventional school education and students are educated exclusively through it [6]. This kind of learning is treated as an equal to the conventional educational process and leads to a corresponding qualification. In Greece there are no primary and secondary schools that offer autonomous distance education. Supplementary distance learning works in parallel with conventional school teaching methods, using educational software or advanced asynchronous training platforms, providing additional support to the lessons [4]. Supplementary distance learning is a flexible form of teaching due to the alternating face-to-face and distance education in the educational process and can be attended at home or in the Integration Department, by students with reading and writing difficulties, regardless of the class in which they attend [10], [5]. Distance education, is divided in two main categories, the synchronous and the asynchronous. In synchronous education, teaching and learning take place remotely through the Internet in real time. The instructor provides his students with knowledge through discussion with them, but also by using material from various sources or material developed by
him. In asynchronous education, communication between teacher and students takes place at different times. The teaching material, assignments, comments, evaluations and video lessons are posted on specially designed platforms where students can attend on their own schedule.

Asynchronous education enables students to connect to an e-learning environment at any time downloading documents or sending messages to teachers or peers. Students can spend more time improving their performance, which is generally considered better compared to their performance in synchronous learning [9].

The term ”First reading and writing” refers to the stage where the student learns the basic mechanism of reading, like learning to read in elementary school [8]. ”First Reading and Writing” is the systematic teaching of decoding the letters and finally the development of the ability and skill to read and write[2].

2 Methodology and Materials

The books of the first class (book of a teacher of the first grade) for the teaching of reading and writing are created using a model that combines elements of the analytico-synthetic methodology with elements of emergent writing and also an holistic approach to language [1]. The above approach is adopted at this study for the development of the proposed educational program and the related course.

The introduced educational program for learning First Reading and Writing in Greek is uploaded on an asynchronous e-learning platform [3] and consists of 46 Modules, which contain images, videos, songs, fairy tales, interactive exercises, constructions of educational games, hand written and digital self-assessment questions in order to include many tools for learning unique letters in the beginning and eventually for reading and writing. The educational material developed for the proposed course consists of:

- 121 Cards (standard words, letters, diphthongs, syllables, words)
- 140 Audio Files (phonemes, letters, syllables, words, storytelling)
- 124 Video Links (letters, vocabulary, grammar)
- 120 Links with more than 300 interactive games
- 50 Cards for the construction of board games (with standard words, letters, diphthongs)
- 122 Assignments with written exercises
- 21 On-line repetition exercises

The Modules are divided into seven groups according to the subject they are dealing with. The first group deals with the learning of standard words and syllables, the second group presents the letters with a variety of activities and
tasks for extensive learning, the third one lists in order the letters of alphabet, the fourth deals with diphthongs and combinations, group five helps students become familiar with and practice symphonic complexes, the sixth group is an introduction to the basic terms of Grammar, and the seventh group contains revision and evaluation exercises.

3 Implementation

The educational material of the proposed course *First Reading and Writing in Greek* is in line with the curriculum proposed by the pedagogical institute of Greece for teaching the Greek language [7] and is available at http://83.212.59.112/projects/eclass/courses/135

At the beginning of each Module, 'The Objectives of the Module' are presented and an e-book (1-6 pages) is provided, giving detailed instructions for each activity and the study time required for the completion of the module. These instructions are indicative and the users are free to learn on their own schedule. The users are able to repeat the module’s activities many times until they manage to fulfil the required objectives.

3.1 Cards

A Module starts with the presentation of a letter (or diphthongs or digits) as a card with the shape of the letter (e.g. β, Β) and with a word example using this as the beginning of the word (e.g. βάζο). Underneath the presented Card there is the sound of the letter and the corresponding word (the Card can be printed and is always available to the trainees as visual material).

3.2 Video

In each Module there is a video that presents the letter (or diphthongs) and the corresponding words through pleasant songs and images. This facilitates learning and at the same time enriches the student’s vocabulary.

3.3 Assignments

In the majority of the Modules there are assignments with exercises of increasing difficulty. They begin with a stimulus for the letter. They continue with the recognition of the letter in words. They make a first attempt to write it and complete with the formation of syllables that place them in words. Their purpose is a more comprehensive and complete knowledge of the letter. Assignments can be printed by the student, completed, and sent for review.
3.4 Interactive Games

The multiple interactive games that exist in the program aim at a better acquaintance and greater familiarisation with the letters, the diphthongs, the
syllables and the words, through the active participation of the student, for their discovery among others, and the immediate personalized information about the course of each activity.

3.5 Cards for Board Games Construction

The construction of a board game with cards of a Greek letter (capital and small), a word starting from this letter and the related image is important for effective learning through interaction with objects. The cards of all letters (or diphthongs) can be gradually collected in a box for constant availability at any time by the trainees, providing also the ability of syllable composition.

3.6 Texts for Practice in Reading

In the majority of the Modules there are documents designed to entertain through a didactic myth. The according printout will also be a text for practising reading and part of a book with myths (when all the letters and diphthongs will be completed). In addition, there is the recording of the myth to help in the initial stages of the acquisition of reading ability.
3.7 Self-assessment Quizzes

The self-assessment quizzes, are developed with scalable difficulty and are placed within the Training Program. When five Modules are completed (e.g. Sections with the letters or Sections with the diphthongs) the student must perform repetitive exercises. In these, he must recognize the sound of a letter(or diphthongs) by selecting it with the help of its image and of the image of the word starting from it or to type it without any help. Through these exercises, the trainee and the teacher are informed about the progress and the achievement of the initial goal.
4 Conclusion

There are many educational platforms that offer visual or auditory media or curricula or textbooks or other disposable or non-disposable items such as cards with the shape of a letter, videos, songs, interactive games or writing exercises and most of them are focused on preschoolers. The large variety of educational material for learning *First Reading and Writing in Greek* makes it rather difficult for people who do not have the knowledge or experience or the time to choose the appropriate material for their needs. This large dispersion of educational material led to the development of an educational program for learning *First Reading and Writing in Greek* with material organized in a way that will guide the user from the beginning to the end of his training overcoming the above mentioned difficulties with contribution to the teaching of the conventional school. The 46 modules of the developed e-learning course, provide a comprehensive teaching with goals and instructions for the activities they present. These modules contain a variety of audiovisual media.
in order to involve as many senses as possible for the learning of each letter initially and of Reading and Writing eventually. The proposed educational program can complement the traditional school and offer flexibility as the educational process will alternate face-to-face and distance learning and will provide additional support in language teaching according to the needs of each student (personalized learning). The program’s Modules are in line with the school’s syllabus [7] and through a variety of activities the student is guided from the initial acquaintance with the letter (or diphthongs) to the complete knowledge. The student after completing five Modules must perform repetition exercises. Through these, only the student and the teacher are informed if he has achieved the initial goals and can continue his effort relieved of the pressure of the group. These exercises are electronic and most of them directly inform the student about the results of his efforts (feedback of learning). This program can be a useful tool to overcome learning difficulties (through the rich audiovisual material and the continuous practice) as it presents the opportunity, to attend it from their home, or from the Integration Department, students who have difficulties in learning reading and writing (regardless of the class in which they attend). The instructions in each Module have approximately the same structure, so that the student who attended one Module with guidance, can move on to the next ones on his own, whenever he wants and for as long as he needs to. Finally, another use of the presented program is the learning of reading and writing in Greek by people from other countries. With some modifications (e.g. adding voice instructions in the student’s language, highlighting the most appropriate activities and exercises) it could be attended by adults who have learned to speak Greek and want to learn how to read and write. The proposed educational program is hosted on an Open eClass platform and is provided free of charge hoping to help students, parents and teachers and contribute, through the varied and organized activities it offers, to the complete acquirement of the First Reading and Writing in Greek.

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