

## ONLINE LEARNING METHODS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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### ABSTRACT

Last years, showed an increased interest on the concept of life long learning, especially in the European countries. Many activity fields, including maritime area involve this concept.

The best way of bringing school in the life of many people, often catch in the economical activities that do not give the opportunity to really participate into teaching process, is represented by the use of the online teaching techniques.

The present paper is showing on already applied online teaching system used by our university, designed to offer easy access to information for teachers and students, but also available for former students, now officers onboard ships, in order to be able to update latest information's about technical development in maritime field necessary in their duty activities.

The online teaching techniques are used for the develop of the concept "train the trainers" in our university for younger lecturers, to help them to integrate in the academic training system, through the project named "Seafarers' environmental, social and cultural implications of sharing life on board ship within multinational crews – SeaCultLife", dedicated to the development of the younger and experienced lecturers competencies related to the training domain requirement and also development and improvement of the skills in using of the newest teaching and training techniques.

**Keywords:** *Online teaching, knowledge's development, maritime field, life long learning, modern technology*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

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In the present, inside of the training system are used two concepts of teaching and training, in generally, the traditional concept, based on paper text and courses audition and the modern concept, using computerized technologies, as simulators, virtual reality and online courses. Both concepts are usefully, because not all types of information can be communicated using solely the traditional or the modern one.

There are knowledge, as fundamentals, which are better developed using the traditional concept, where the teacher expresses clearly the terms, definitions, formulas and interact with the students for a higher understanding.

On the other side, courses developed especially for specialization or for upgrading of the knowledge, after finishing of the academic training, can be more easily communicated through the modern technology, as online or distant learning. In this case it is considered that the receivers of information already have the fundamental knowledge and this new information come to complete it.

Also, the online teaching techniques are more accessible for persons involved in the social and economical life of civil society and do not have enough time to attend the classes.

The modern society need citizens more trained and specialized for its evolution and development. These requirements can be covered through a better opening of the scholar system, at all levels, to the civil society.

An important mission of the system, mainly of the academic level training system, is to ensure the necessary techniques and information volume for a more

educated society, with a higher level of knowledge, in a continuous contact with the latest researches and technical development.

The completion of this mission can have benefits for the system itself, offering possibilities to bring inside persons with a higher level of knowledge, able to improve and continue the development of the present methodologies.

One of the activity field intensive interested in this learning opportunity, the online procedure, is the maritime field. Here, the characteristics of activity cannot allow the direct presence in the classes for improving of the existing knowledge and skills. In the last decades, the changes, especially technically, have been produced, making necessary a periodically improvement and update. The online teaching techniques represent the better solution for this case, the internet being accessible from the middle of the ocean now.

### 2. THE ONLINE LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

In the present days, the computers and computerized programs are part of the life for many people. The computerized technologies became indispensable for many activity fields, computers being part of the production processes, or even the essence of the work.

Taking these aspects in consideration, to put the school in the virtual environment seems to be a good idea. In many cases, the interaction between person and computer is more benefic than an interaction person to person related to the process of information and knowledge transfer. The computerized information is taking as impersonal by the receiver and can be interpreted and adapted to the own perception. When the same information is expressed by a person, than can

become personalized, the sender putting belong the information, his own remarks or opinions.

Other important characteristic of the online learning is giving by the possibility to have access to the information all the time, according with the user schedule. This option is value for those persons who have a heavy life program, for who the regular teaching schedule is difficult to be kept. This is one of the possibility offers by the online learning technique with a great importance in the maritime activity, where the program is made under the local time, ship hours, mostly different by the school local time.

An advantage of the online learning is represented by the possibility of different computerized programs correlation inside of the same course. This lets the user to access the necessary technologies more easily from one place, not needing to change places for each in part. In this way, it is possible to develop the online courses for initial or specialized training which requests the use of the simulation technology or designing programs.

Our university experiences this option inside of a course for familiarization training for petroleum tanker ship operation. Inside of the online course, the students and already certified seafarers interested to attend to a job on a tanker ship, have the possibility to visualize simulated application regarding different operation necessary to be known on a tanker ship, previously, reading and learning the theoretical modules about these.

Using the online teaching techniques, the student or trainee has the possibility to access more courses on the same time, option to take all the information one time and cover the curricula in a shorter period than will be done during the regular classes.

The communication between trainers and trainees can be done through different ways, using the electronic correspondence or an open forum for general impressions and opinions. These communication procedures can help to the improvement of the present data and to generate the development of additional subjects with role of covering of missing date or useful information for the main course.

Taking into account the actual trend in technology and techniques development in the maritime field, this kind of informative issuing can realize a continue and constant flow of information to the interested people, involved in ship operation and maintenance.

### **3. THE LONG LIFE LEARNING CONCEPTS AND PRINCIPLES**

Long life learning is a term that is widely used in a variety of contexts; however its meaning is often unclear. The term recognizes that learning is not confined to childhood or the classroom, but takes place throughout life and in a range of situations. During the last fifty years, constant scientific and technological innovation and change have had a profound effect on learning needs and styles. Learning can no longer be divided into a place and time to acquire knowledge, the school and a place and time to apply the knowledge acquired, the workplace.

Also, life long learning is used for combining formal, informal and non-formal education and training, with a reconsideration of professional recognition and quality assurance processes. It is the process of acquiring and expanding knowledge, skills and dispositions throughout the life to foster well-being.

Long life learning is viewed as all-purposeful learning activity, undertaken on an ongoing basis with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competence. Such learning contributes to promote both employability and active citizenship and combating social exclusion.

The philosophy of education system is now changing globally and rapidly towards a continuous learning process. The change in the education system opens up the opportunity of part-time higher education in vocational and non-vocational streams. Life long learning puts emphasis on the initiative, zeal and motivation of learners to educate himself/herself according to his/her space, need and time rather than on the educators. Its necessity arises out of quest for knowledge, recognition, needs to solve many of his/her problems and develop capability and competency to survive in society and market place. In a professional discipline, the need for long life learning is more to prepare own person for fast changing professional competencies.

Long life learning is, thus, a philosophy that makes one to learn throughout the life of an individual either formally or informally. The informal learning process takes place through various ways and means such as observation, experience, environment and the need of individuals. The formal learning process is through well defined, structured method of education. In this context, the continuing professional education plays a catalytic role augmenting the method of long life learning.

In October 2006 the European Commission published a Communication entitled "Adult learning: It is never too late to learn". This document suggests long life learning to be the core of the ambitious Lisbon 2010-process, in which the whole of the European Union should become a learning area. In December 2007, the European Parliament's Committee on Culture and Education published a "Report on Adult learning: It is never too late to learn", which recognized the Commission Communication and a number of related recommendations and resolutions, and which urged member states to establish a long life learning culture.

Corroborating the European Commission policy with the population ageing of European countries, the role of lifelong learning and the educational system position near this situation must be an important one.

Putting together the social and economical conditions, economical being prior, and the opportunities creates by the online teaching procedures the development possibilities of this lifelong learning concept increase considerable.

In an informative society, the use of the latest technology inside of the learning process, at any age, is the easiest and cheapest way of knowledge's propagation.

#### 4. THE FORMATION OF LECTURERS TO PROVIDE ONLINE TEACHING

The principal providers of the long life learning in this moment, all over the world, are the universities and associated graduate institutions. At this level, there are possibilities to create and develop material, as courses and practical applications, for graduates of the same or inferior level.

To provide the necessary knowledge for a specified activity domain is most important to have your own trained persons, as lecturers, as institution. Taking into account the differences between this kind of learning and the formal learning, it is obviously requested to institution to have persons in charge with necessary skills for this.

In this idea, the previous step in creation of the learning curricula is the process of train the trainers to be qualified for this activity.

Constanta Maritime University developed a project dedicated to formation of the lecturers, younger and experienced, in the new teaching technology, to acquire and improve the present skills and knowledge about the new forms of learning, including online learning techniques and providing of training for graduate persons.

The "Seafarers' environmental, social and cultural implications of sharing life on boardship within multinational crews – SeaCultLife" project is based on politics and strategies fated to support the European maritime academic system position into the worldwide context.

The project is developed according with the Lisbon European strategies with the scope to make from European Union a dynamic and competitive community with an economy based on knowledge, with much and better working places, increasing investment in education and research activities. For this purpose, the Commission in relation with the member states and universities put into practice concrete actions related to continuous professional formation in the educational field.

Starting from 2001, once the e-Europe plan has been launched, through e-Learning initiative, the communication and computerized technology became an important element of educational system.

All of these strategies opened new possibilities for universities and their staff, as increasing of quality in academic level, professional promotion to easement the economical grow and develop of society based on knowledge.

European Commission considers the maritime transport development as an important element in general economical growing. In this context, the maritime training system is the part which offer qualified work force on the European market.

Also International Maritime Organization put accent on the level of training in the maritime educational system. With the latest intentions of changing of the levels of training, in order to improve the STCW Convention, it appeared as necessary to be known the actual equipments and technologies met onboard ships. These requirements need people trained

and familiarized with equipments, able to train the others.

The development of the maritime industry imposes the implementation of a framework for providing of advancing programs due to continue changing of this activity domain.

Beside general objective of the project, the specifically objectives are:

1. Increasing of lecturers competencies through promotion of knowledge and technologies in the academic maritime field.

2. Creation of a development, update and on-line management framework for initial and continue formative of the human resources.

3. Realizing of studies and analyze to define formative programs dedicated and an optimum correlation of these with maritime industry necessities.

4. Increasing of access and participation of lecturers to formative programs and to obtain a double qualification.

5. Encouraging of lecturers to maintain a high qualification level through participation at specialized courses.

6. Introduction of carrier advancing opportunities for younger lecturers.

7. Verifying of the process and teaching activities through initial and continue formative programs in scope of improvement of TIC using level.

All these objectives are based on the premise that continue learning is the main condition for restructuring and development of educational and formative systems, for assuring the decisive competencies during life and to realize the coherency among persons involved in the maritime academic system.

A high level of qualification has to be guaranteed by the training institutions through modular and flexible educational structures, completed with high standard personnel.

This project tries to involve maritime lecturers in international maritime transport framework, to put them in direct contact with the end users of their work, the companies from maritime industries and to know exactly their needs. The international maritime companies are the necessary source of information regarding worldwide requests for employ of the maritime personnel.

This information is used to know what are the actual requirements for the new enters in the maritime field, younger officers, also, to have acknowledge about the necessary skills and knowledge requested to the present acting persons. In the first case, the completion of the training for the maritime officers is done during the academic school years through the regular courses according with the international required curricula.

For the acting persons, with years of experience in the field, the training process is commonly based on courses and updated information that can be combined or added to the existent knowledge.

Most of these materials are provided online using our own web portal, access being free or using identification element, offered by the trainer lecturer.

During time, the users number of this portal has tripled, the biggest number being represented by the former students or seafarers interested.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

In the present context of society, development is necessary to have people trained at the higher level and to maintain the training level from the begging to the ending of their activity. For this reason it is compulsory to develop or create systems able to provide adequate training and to offer possibilities to acquire new competencies and knowledge during life.

The use of the newest techniques as online and distant learning, combined with the traditional forms of training, or based on these, seems to represent the optimum solution for a better and high quality learning system inside of the life long learning concept.

The learning system requests trainers and lecturers capable to offer the necessary learning materials for the process. Constanta Maritime University started programs dedicated to the life long learning, based on a series of online courses and in parallel in order to improve its capacities for this learning method, training lecturers to be able to offer in the future the requested knowledge and information for the people involved in the maritime industry.

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