UN WOMEN

TU OPORTUNIDAD - SECOND CHANCE EDUCATION PROGRAMME: LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS IN ONLINE LEARNING FOR WOMEN

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I. Introduction

The Tu Oportunidad – Second Chance Education Programme is a global UN Women initiative currently being conducted in six countries: Mexico, India, Australia, Cameroon, Jordan and Chile. Its goal is to empower women economically by enhancing their employability and entrepreneurship through the use of information technology within a framework of public-private cooperation.

The social and economic effects of the Covid-19 crisis have laid gender inequalities bare: women are the ones most affected by the increase in unemployment, poverty and overload from unpaid care work. Therefore, programmes and initiatives to promote economic empowerment, especially for those women the hardest hit, require innovation and the use of technology tools to provide concrete responses and contribute with a gender perspective to the economic recovery.

Due to lockdown under the pandemic and restrictions on movement and the use of public spaces, the Programme adjusted its form of implementation from face-to-face to online, in order to contribute to women's economic empowerment during the economic and social crisis resulting from Covid-19.

In this context, a limited pilot intervention was conducted in the first half of 2020 in Chile, in order to gather information, learn lessons and discern best practice specifically on methodologies for online training for women. This initiative,

that preceded implementation of the Programme, enabled successful elements to be incorporated into work with women on e-learning platforms and their appropriate support, based on the experience of the women themselves.

Execution of this pilot initiative covered the design of the invitation, support for the women involved, monitoring of their progress on Kolibri[1] and gathering information about participants and their experiences. This was followed by an analysis of the information collected during the process, which is presented in summary form in this document.[2]

The next section will present the theoretical framework for adult education, distance education and gender. This will be followed by the history and characteristics of the Programme implemented, which will in turn be followed by a section setting out the lessons learned and recommendations from the trial.

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1. Kolibri is an e-learning library with content specifically selected for UN Women.
2. Chilean consultancy firm Compás Pedagógico was responsible for conducting this pilot exercise.

II. Theoretical Framework

Implementation of the Programme requires a review of the literature on adult distance education.

a) Adult learning and gender

Increasing the participation of women in education helps to improve their future incomes, their levels of economic empowerment and autonomy, their levels of productivity and their employment opportunities. It also fosters more-inclusive economic growth. Women's participation in the education system is currently higher than ever and, while there is now gender parity in terms of enrolment, it is not sufficient to analyse gender parity, as gender inequality in education takes various forms (UN Women, 2020a).

Gender discrimination works in many ways to weaken women's prospects of receiving an education. Teenage pregnancy and unpaid domestic and care work lead many girls and young people to drop out of school.

As stated by Azúa (2016), women's opportunities for development are restricted from a very early age because of the hidden heteronormative curriculum in schools where children are educated according to gender stereotypes. In primary and secondary schools, male learners are generally given intellectual and/or physical challenges while female learners are focused on the caretaking and tasks historically associated with their gender. In addition, girls tend to interrupt their studies due to a number of contextual factors that, together with individual factors, lead to school dropout. Women tend to abandon their studies because they have to take care of others or because they are pregnant (Cortés-Rojas, 2019).

As adults, women face a series of barriers and factors that have the effect of reducing their chances of resuming and/or continuing their studies. These are work in the home, caretaking within the family and other activities that have historically been considered to be proper to their gender, all of which has limited their options to resume formal education. In fact, 87 per cent of the young people aged between 15 and 29 years and not in employment or education are women who devote their time to caring for others and domestic tasks that are neither remunerated nor socially recognized (González, 2016).

Against the background of the Covid-19 crisis, and as access to formal and informal childcare alternatives decreases, increasing demand for unpaid care work probably falls mainly on women. This is not only due to the prevailing structure of the work force, but also to social norms. This situation raises barriers to women's opportunities to undertake paid work or education and training.

When remote working is possible, the risk is run of increasing the tasks carried out simultaneously, to the detriment of women's physical health and mental well-being. Even basic care tasks, such as obtaining foodstuffs to prepare the family meals become harder in the context of huge interruptions to livelihoods, limited access to the public space, and increased food shortages (UN Women, 2020b).

b) Adult distance learning

One of the main theories of adult learning is the "Andragogy" theory proposed by Knowles (1989). In it, he suggests five characteristics that the learning process must possess in order to be effective:

1. The person must be able to direct their own learning.

2. It is essential that they use their prior experience as a source for future learning.

3. It is important that they take account of their changing social roles (worker, spouse, member of an organization, etc.) in their readiness to learn.

4. As a fourth characteristic, the author suggests the importance of the immediate relevance of what is learned. This is why it is recommended to clearly state the reasons justifying the importance of the content to be learned and how people could benefit in their daily work from acquiring this knowledge.

5. Knowles emphasizes that the motivation that adults need to learn is derived from internal, rather than external, causes.

Although Knowles' proposition (1989) is one of the major theories of adult learning, some authors have suggested that his proposal has some theoretical limitations. Thus, Cercone (2008) suggests that a theory of adult learning should take into account, among other aspects, the cultural context in which learning happens; a recognition of individuals' different learning styles; a focus on critical reflection and the need for dialogue and debate as central components of the learning process.

Similarly, online education, especially against a background of the health emergency caused by Covid-19, brings with it social and cultural gaps that affect women and girls more. The evidence shows that women use fewer technological tools than men, that they have less time to use such tools and that they say that they are less digitally skilled than men (OECD, 2019). It is important to note that the negative experiences that many girls and women endure on line can have negative consequences on their lives.

Online bullying and gender stereotypes contribute to women not feeling secure or comfortable about assuming leading roles in virtual scenarios. Added to this, especially in rural communities and in the lives of people living in socio-economic vulnerability, are restrictions on access to internet-enabled devices, which poses an additional entry barrier to online learning.

The following table presents six dimensions that group characteristics of adult learning, based on the proposals of a number of authors (Cercone, 2009; Brookfield, 1995; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999; Mezirow, 1997; Lowry, 1989). In addition, each of these dimensions also includes specific recommendations for adult online learning selected from recommendations proposed by Cercone (2008) for adult distance learning.

Table 1:
Characteristics of adult online learning

Category	Recommendations for online learning
Biological and life-stage conditions: Biological aspects (failing sight and memory as adults get older) and aspects related to life stage (lack of time available for study due to having multiple obligations) that influence adults' learning.	Use easily-legible font sizes and colours. Use a clear menu structure. Opportunities for practice and for receiving feedback. Be consistent in the use of metaphors. Ensure that there is no cultural bias in language used. Use graphics, images and visual organizers. Organize information into 5-9 capsules.
Individualization of the learning experience: The importance of incorporating learners' different learning styles and prior experience into the design of learning processes.	Ensure that learners are able to progress at their own pace within the learning structure. Make opportunities available for learners to easily access previous learning. Be sure to address different learning styles; present the same content as text, images, audio, etc. Use diaries, reflection, guides, etc. to support reasoning and guided questioning. Include tasks and activities that allow learners to use their prior knowledge. Clearly explain the importance of the learning content. Use practical examples when presenting new content. Design activities through which learners can diagnose their own needs.

Category	Recommendations for online learning
Learning process: The importance for adults of being protagonists, actively involved in their learning processes; this enables them to link the process with their prior experiences, daily lives and practical aspects of knowledge, giving greater priority to this aspect than to receiving an abstract, detailed theoretical framework.	Consistent and regular communication with the learners or work groups.
	Provide actions and evidence that demonstrate that comments and posts are being read.
	Include group projects, role play, case studies and simulations, in order to stimulate self-directed learning.
	Include small spaces of time to move on from closing one subject, content or step to beginning another.
	Incorporate learning signposts in the text, such as "this is a long unit", "this is important content".
	Provide spaces and opportunities for group problem solving.
	Encourage learners to apply learning content to real life.
	Ask learners to write down their learning goals for the class, so that they can revisit them throughout the course.
	Set a level of difficulty that is sufficiently challenging but does not frustrate or block the adult learners on account of the complexity of its content.
Relationship with the teacher: The relationship with the content scaffolding that the instructional design must provide and the horizontal, facilitating relationship that must prevail in the interactions between teacher and learners.	Close each unit by summarizing its main themes and concepts.
	Take into account the fact that they are adults who may feel intimidated by taking the risk of trying something new in their tasks.
	Use challenging questions that encourage learners to think more broadly.
	Provide each learner with help after the initial sessions. This can be by presenting videos or suggesting the creation of study groups with other learners following the same course.
	Encourage learners to articulate any problems that they are facing and at the same time provide examples of problems that have been fully resolved and how their resolution was achieved.
Paradigm shift: Adults often have a history of previous learning characterized as education conceived as a more or less hierarchical space in which an instructor or teacher "transmitted" content. In online learning, on the other hand, each individual directs their own learning, and this requires the creation of new skills in the adult learners. For this, they need spaces that allow them to reflect on their own learning processes and to learn how to take control and responsibility for them.	Encourage learners to post answers to questions and engage in online debate.
	Structure debates and create multidisciplinary projects with delivery dates for public presentation.
	Organize an opportunity in the course to discuss the online learning process from personal experience.
	Provide spaces for metacognitive reflection, such as journals and discussion groups.
Relationships with other learners: Adult learning requires a climate of collaboration and mutual respect. Adult learners need to learn with others; to do this, there is a need for opportunities for dialogue and collaboration.	Recognize the multiple perspectives that different people bring to the course. For example, start from course members' general descriptions: their geographical locations, specialisms, genders, ages, etc.
	Create a respectful space where every voice gets heard.
	Facilitate contact between learners with similar interests.
	The Facilitator needs to keep up to date with online discussion and summarize, paraphrase and support the group as needed.
	Design a space in which students can present themselves and talk about who they are and what their interests are, and publish their contact details if they so wish.
	Use learning based on specific problems or cases.
	Incorporate multiple feedback methods into the course.
	Evaluate using specific criteria that are known to all in advance (headings).

Source: Compás Pedagógico Final Report

As detailed in the table below, author Gillly Salmon (2011) proposes five stages for the implementation of online learning processes for these to be truly effective. Her proposal is based on tutors or teachers providing students with support on a temporary basis that is gradually reduced, promoting students' independence of learning. In this model, the experience of the learner is fundamental to the process of knowledge construction and learning being as effective as possible.

Table 2:
Stages of online learning

Stage	Online learning systems	Recommendations for virtual tutoring
Access and motivation	The tutor focuses on guiding, supporting and facilitating access to the platform and online learning environment, motivating students to use the resources.	Be welcoming and encouraging to each course member.
Team-building	The goal is to promote the creation of a learning community through the various online socialization spaces.	Familiarize and build bridges between cultural, social and learning environments.
Information exchanges	Encourage and generate exchanges of information, tutors-students and student-student.	Facilitate tasks and provide support in the use of materials developed during the course.
Knowledge construction	It is expected that students will contribute to the construction of collaborative learning.	Facilitate the knowledge that is wished to be transmitted to participants.
Review	During this stage, students feel comfortable in collaborative spaces and are able to reflect on their own learning processes.	Supportive responses to participants.

Source: Adapted from data reported in the Compás Pedagógico Final Report

c) Indicators for evaluating the quality of an online education course

Taking account of the topics addressed in realtion to remote, online, adult learning with a particular focus on gender, the following table will present alternatives for the monitoring and evaluation of online courses.

Author Mireya Ardila-Rodríguez (2011) proposed a set of indicators grouped into five processes that structure the implementation of an online education programme.

Table 3:
Quality indicators for digital educational platforms

Process	Indicator
Course operation, planning and programming	• The course has objectives, resources, etc. • Course objectives are shared in a timely manner. • Course administration is efficient. • Course documentation and bibliography are available and updated. • The competencies expected of those completing the course are clearly stated. • The time for each activity is assigned. • The course has a calendared study schedule. • The pace of the course is appropriate. • Materials are appropriate for virtual learning.
Teaching programme content	• Course contents are kept updated. • Course contents allow practical application. • Course contents are relevant.
Methodology and teaching competence	• Pedagogical strategies are used for independent learning. • There is timely feedback on learning evaluation processes. • The teacher complies with schedules for virtual meetings. • Discussions in forums are well organized. • Questions are answered within a given set time (48 hours maximum). • The teacher demonstrates skill in facilitating collaborative learning. • The teacher demonstrates teaching competence. • Exemplification is consistent with the virtual environment and content. • The teacher presents options for the use of resources.
Communication and interaction	• Students are invited to share ideas and knowledge. • Students are encouraged to communicate with the teacher. • There is a dynamic communication environment. • There is a good level of communication between fellow students.
Allocation and use of media and resources	• Course materials are digitized and/or virtualized. • The platform interface is easy to use. • Synchronous and asynchronous communication processes are effective. • Database management programs are effective. • The virtual library contains multimedia materials. • The system for navigating the platform orients its use. • There are activities for students to self-assess their learning. • The platform has suitable response times.

Source: Mireya Ardila-Rodríguez (2011) Compás Pedagógico Final Report

III. Pilot Scheme

a) Background

The pilot was originally going to be implemented in a blended format in the communes of Pudahuel, Lo Prado and Cerro Navia of the Metropolitan Region, for women who had not completed their secondary education.

However, the Covid-19 pandemic meant that the project had to be adapted to suit the new health situation.

b) Objectives

The pilot phase of the Tu Oportunidad Programme sought to implement and evaluate a methodology for the online education of women, through a virtual education platform that was pioneering in Chile, focused on improving educational levels, employability and entrepreneurship.
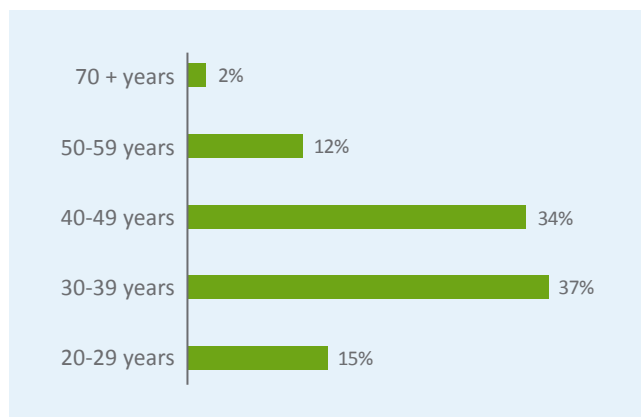
c) Participants

54 women took part in the Tu Oportunidad pilot. Due to the Programme's being implemented online, it was possible for women from across the country to take part.

The following charts present information on Tu Oportunidad participants.

Participants ranged from 22 to 70 years in age, with a concentration in the 30-49 range, which accounted for 67 per cent of participants.
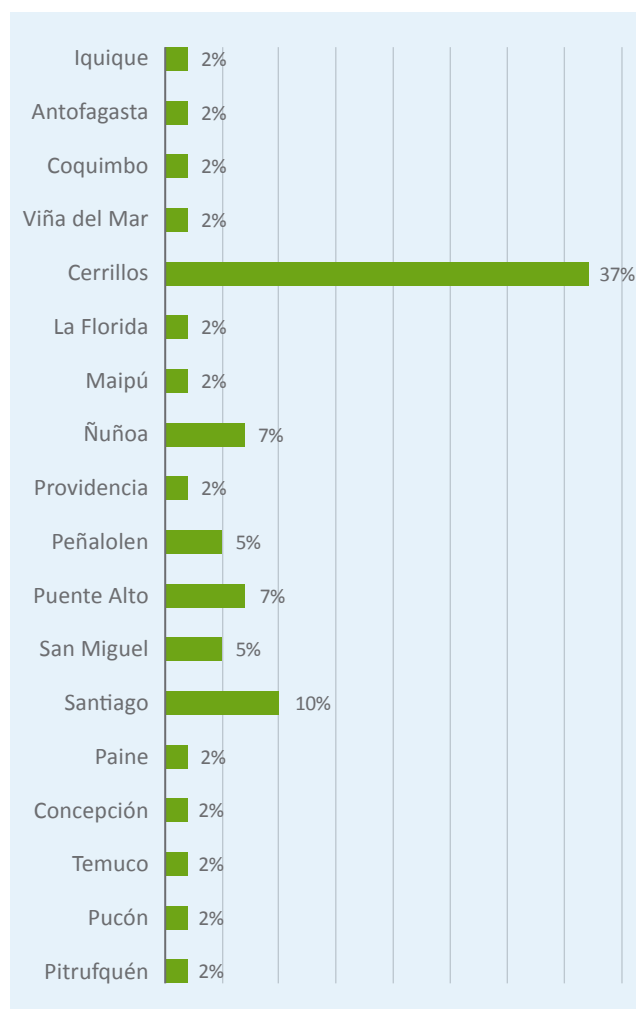
Chart 1:
Age range of Tu Oportunidad participants

Age range	Percentage
70 + years	2%
50-59 years	12%
40-49 years	34%
30-39 years	37%
20-29 years	15%

Source: Data reported in the Compás Pedagógico Final Report

The geographical spread of participants was due to the online implementation of the Programme, which extended its coverage nationwide. Even so, 80 per cent of participants were from the Metropolitan Region and particularly from the commune of Cerrillos, where 37 per cent of participants resided.
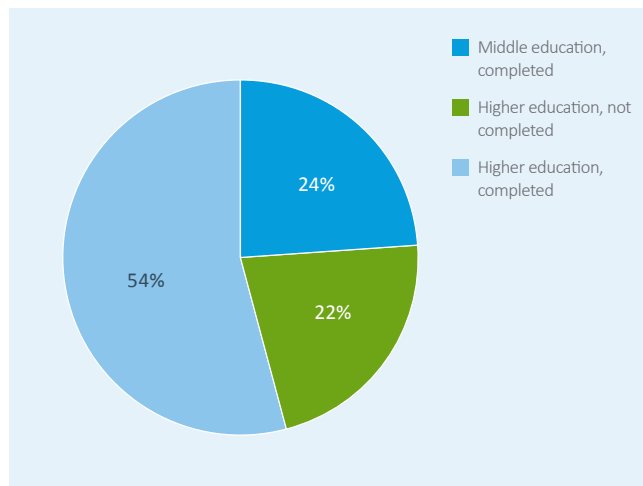
Chart 2:
Commune of residence of Tu Oportunidad participants

Commune	Percentage
Iquique	2%
Antofagasta	2%
Coquimbo	2%
Viña del Mar	2%
Cerrillos	37%
La Florida	2%
Maipú	2%
Ñuñoa	7%
Providencia	2%
Peñalolen	5%
Puente Alto	7%
San Miguel	5%
Santiago	10%
Paine	2%
Concepción	2%
Temuco	2%
Pucón	2%
Pitrufquén	2%

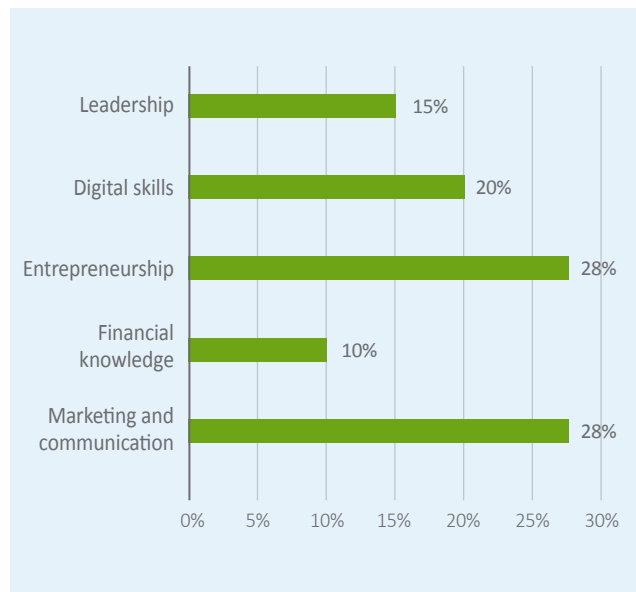*Source: Data reported in the Compás Pedagógico Final Report*

In terms of education completed, it was found that all participants had completed their school education and a majority of them (54 per cent) had graduated from higher education.

Source: Data reported in the Compás Pedagógico Final Report

Source: Data reported in the Compás Pedagógico Final Report

Lastly, chart 4 presents the areas of interest given by participants at the start of the Programme. It is noted that the most popular are Entrepreneurship and Marketing, which together account for 56 per cent of participants.
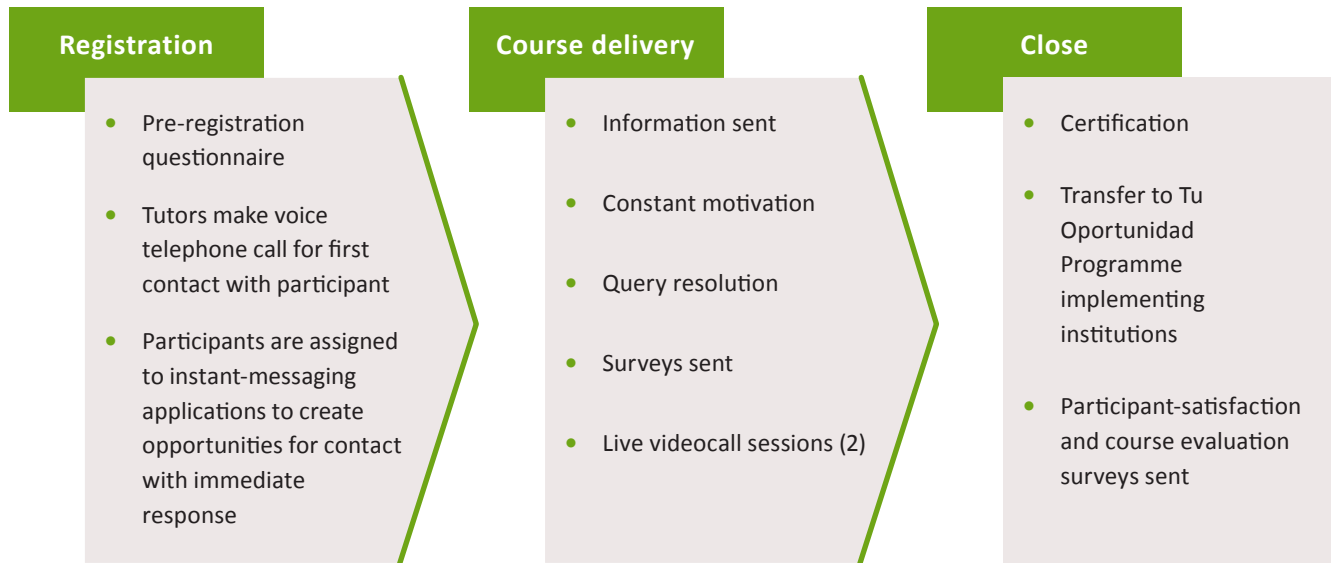
d) Stages and methodology

This section describes the pilot activities to which the women involved had access.

Target audience	Open invitation to every commune of the country, to women aged over 18 years, of all educational levels, with access to an internet-connected device.
Invitation	Infographics virally shared through social networks thanks to the support of influencers and organizations with a focus on gender issues.
Support	Four hours' support every day by means of immediate responses via instant messaging applications. Daily responses by email or individual instant-messaging applications. The purpose of this support was to guide the women participants and to prevent or reduce drop-out from the Programme.
Implementation	Women access a selection of 40 online courses on topic related to health, entrepreneurship and leadership. There were also two live sessions: "Induction" and "Talk on Entrepreneurship".

Source: Adapted from data reported in Compás Pedagógico Final Report

Registration	Course delivery	Close
• Pre-registration questionnaire • Tutors make voice telephone call for first contact with participant • Participants are assigned to instant-messaging applications to create opportunities for contact with immediate response	• Information sent • Constant motivation • Query resolution • Surveys sent • Live videocall sessions (2)	• Certification • Transfer to Tu Oportunidad Programme implementing institutions • Participant-satisfaction and course evaluation surveys sent

Source: Adapted from data reported in Compás Pedagógico Final Report

e) Monitoring and evaluation

For UN Women, the monitoring and evaluation of programmes and initiatives with a gender focus is a key foundation for the creation of robust systems to generate and use evidence to improve interventions and bring about gender equality and the empowerment of women.

The objective of the monitoring and evaluation carried out by the Compás Pedagógico team was to gather information to identify good practice in online education targeted at women. To do this, it sent surveys to participants to find out about their experiences on the Kolibri platform and of the Programme in general. In parallel, tutors wrote weekly logs recording emerging information and their interactions with the platform.

Surveys

Four surveys were used to gather information during the programme:

1. Initial questionnaire, to gather information related to the characterization of participants.

2. Questionnaire at the end of the first week, to gather participants' experiences of joining the platform.

3. Questionnaire during the third week, to find out about circumstances that affect use of the platform and about learners' learning experience.

4. End-of-course survey, to gather information, once the programme had ended, about the use of the platform and the support programme.

Logbooks

A daily support tool completed by tutors to record users' experiences of interactions using the various support platforms available. Five logbooks were completed, one per week. These recorded difficulties and unforeseen issues together with emerging issues that arose as the programme was delivered.

IV. Lessons learned and recommendations

In keeping with the description of the theoretical framework and the trial conducted during the pilot phase, conclusions were reached mainly on aspects related to the design and implementation of online education programmes for adult women in the Chilean context. The following table summarizes the main enabling elements from this pilot trial.

Online support is a key facet of the programme. It is important that participants feel supported and guided during their self-learning process on the platform and that it is possible to answer their questions in a timely manner. It is recommended to conduct personalized monitoring of user participation in the programme's activities and provide constant encouragement by tutors so that participants remain interested in moving through the platform. Tutor support is vital to the success of the Programme and to prevent participant drop-out.

Channels of communication are a key element of distance education programmes. In this instance, telephone calls, emails and instant-messaging application groups were used. Each played a different role in communicating with participants.

- Telephone calls were used to confirm participation in the programme and welcome participants. This was found to be a key action for the commencement of the programme.

- The instant-messaging application group[3] made it possible to respond quickly to participants' needs, to enable tutors to constantly motivate them to participate and to facilitate their interaction, giving them an opportunity to form direct networks between themselves, thus strengthening group empowerment. This communication channel was viewed positively by participants.

- Email was a personalized channel used to share information about the programme's activities; learners used it to ask specific questions about the platform, which had to be answered within a maximum of four hours.

Videoconferences, or live activities, are essential to Programme implementation, since they are an opportunity for collaborative learning that generates face-to-face interaction between participants in a closer atmosphere. To some extent, these activities replace physical face-to-face sessions. They help to create an environment of trust among participants in which they share their experiences, and participants rate them highly. Even so, there is a clear need to ensure that participants are familiarized with the platform used, so that there is no uncertainty on their part and it is possible to reduce to the furthest-possible extent any technical problems that arise.

Participants rated the Kolibri platform as excellent. On the basis of users' experience, it can be concluded that it has a user-friendly format, is easy to access, is clear and has relevant content. However, since it is an international platform, some of its content is not suitable for the Chilean context. Learners appreciated being able to access a wide range of courses and that each course was free-standing, that is, there was no need to complete one course in order to access another. One of the main recommendations for the platform is to open up a space in which users can interact with each other and ask tutors any questions that arise from the learning process through some means built into the platform, such as a forum or chat space.

Turning to the presentation of the Programme, it is important to have a clear plan of course activities that is shared with participants to facilitate their understanding and encourage their commitment to the course. It is recommended to share with them the course objectives, the support schedule, the calendar, support times, the plan for progress through the self-learning platform and the key Programme milestones.

Lastly, on practical issues, it can be concluded that participants highly value the opportunity to organize their working time on the platform in a personalized manner, to fit it in with their daily tasks. At the same time, it is important to check the times of live activities with participants, in order to ensure the highest-possible number of women are able to attend.

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3. To avoid misuse of the group, it was established at the outset that it would be a means of sharing information related to the course, avoiding the forwarding of unwanted messages, false information and information unrelated to the process, in addition to establishing a daily two-hour response schedule.

Conducting this online trial made it possible to create virtual learning communities that transcend the limitations of geography, time and personal circumstances that characterize face-to-face learning. They allow women to have a self-regulated learning opportunity that enables them to access a range of courses aligned with their interests and to share this experience with different women. In this vein, this is an opportunity to generate networks of women who have common interests.

Table 5:
Summary of the enabling elements of the pilot

Invitation	• Use of social media
	• Attractively designed infographics with diverse messages
	• Support of influencers and public figures close to target audiences
	• Confirm participation via telephone contact
Use of the Platform	• A space that facilitates the creation of a learning and collaboration community: forum
	• Formative assessments and award of certification
	• Content adapted to the local context, recognizable language and avoidance of the gender bias that forms the hidden curriculum
	• Improve accessibility for users with functional and cognitive diversity
	• Allow offline access to content
Support	• Adaptability to changes in the context of implementation
	• Share support programming with users: calendar, support times, milestones
	• Daily monitoring and support for users' participation
	• Have immediate-response platforms available
	• Make spaces available for collaborative learning: forums, chat.
	• Replace face-to-face interactions by thematic videoconferences

Source: Compás Pedagógico Final Report

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