Introduction

Just as motivation is a key factor in learning and achievement when face-to-face educational strategies are used, so it is in distance learning environments (Jones & Issroff, 2005). Nevertheless, it is true that motivation has not received the deserved attention in online learning, despite its effectiveness on learning consequences (Rovai & Barnum, 2003); studies that explore motivation to learn in online contexts are relatively limited both in number and scope (Artino, 2008; Bekele, 2010). As suggested by Miltiadou and Savenye (2003), studies of motivation in distance learning environments have adopted various frameworks to underpin their research. Of these, intrinsic–extrinsic motivation theory has often been used to explore students’ behaviour (persistence or dropping out intention) in online environments (Martens, et al., 2004). A theory that explicates intrinsic–extrinsic motivation in depth, and also how contextual factors can influence the learning activity, is self-determination theory (SDT) developed by Deci & Ryan (1985).

Self–Determination Theory

Self-Determination Theory is a contemporary theory of situated motivation that is built on three basic needs of a learner: autonomy, relatedness, and competence. Recent research (Chen & Jang, 2010) has demonstrated that Self-Determination Theory provides a useful analytic tool for exploring the complexity of motivation in online contexts (Ryan & Deci, 2002). The theory assumes that different motivational regulations exist in the individual, or in the environment, each reflecting varying levels of self-determination.

Motivation has been theorized to fall on a continuum (Figure 1), from external regulation of behaviour to self-regulation of behaviour (Deci & Ryan, 1985). At the most controlled end of the
continuum lies extrinsic motivation and at the most autonomous end of the continuum lies intrinsic motivation. Beginning with the nonself-determined behaviour, Amotivation, refers to a perception that no worthwhile purposes or expectation for the specific activity exist, and hence results a complete absence of self-determination (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Then, Extrinsic motivation refers to partaking in an activity to attain an outcome separate from the activity itself (e.g. enrol to a course in order to gain more money). Extrinsic motivation can be further divided, in a descending order of self-determination. The more self-determined forms of extrinsic motivation include: integrated regulation (e.g. pursuing an activity because it is congruent with other aspects of the self) and identified regulation (e.g. undertaking an activity because one accepts the value of the activity). The less self-determined forms of extrinsic motivation include introjected regulation (e.g. engaging in an activity because of internal pressures such as guilt or shame) and external regulation (e.g. doing an activity because of external pressures or incentives). Finally, Intrinsic motivation involves pursuing an activity out of interest and enjoyment and without external contingencies (e.g. for the pleasure of expanding someone’s knowledge, for the satisfaction of fulfilling someone’s objectives).

![Figure 1. The Self-Determination continuum](image)

Furthermore, motivations are indirectly influencing emotions. It seems that intrinsic or extrinsic motivations are activating the appropriate emotions as well, that is intrinsic emotions (more learning process enjoyment) and extrinsic emotions (task oriented satisfaction) (Pekrum, et al., 2002). Moreover, there is a slight difference among the types of motivation and gender, as research has shown, that women reported higher levels of intrinsic motivation and identification, but lower levels of external regulation and amotivation than men (Vallerand & Bissonnette, 1992).

**Self-Determination Theory and Learning Context**

Besides the psychological factors, Self-Determination Theory implies that self-determined behaviour can further be enhanced by autonomy supportive environments. For example, encouraging social agents (family, instructors, etc.), organizational stuff and educational material have a major impact on learning outcomes (achievement, course satisfaction, emotional state etc.). The notion of contextual support is especially valuable, as online learners need a variety of support from instructors, peers, administrators, and technical support personnel (Tait, 2003). Autonomy support is the interpersonal framework one person provides, in order to involve and nurture another person’s internally focused volitional intentions to act. When focusing on instructors, such behaviour is manifested when a teacher supports student’s psychological needs (e.g. autonomy, competence, and relatedness), interests, preferences, and values. This kind of supporting behaviour is
fundamental with respect to motivation, thus providing students with autonomy support, awakening their self-determined motivation (Vallerand, et al., 1997). Other characteristics of an autonomy supportive teacher are to listen more, to show empathy and to propel internalization (Reeve & Jang, 2006).

Due to the indirect perception of this supportive behaviour, the term most commonly used to describe the autonomy supportive context in SDT is Learning Climate (Williams & Deci, 1996). Reeve (2002) has performed a meta-analysis of the advantages of Autonomy Supportive Climate and found that these are: better self-esteem and feeling of competence, higher creativity and flexibility of thought, better conceptual reasoning and long-term memory, better school performance, and a more positive emotional state. Learners’ confidence in their ability to learn is highly likely to affect their actual ability to learn. Learners’ who are not confident may not feel they are capable of learning and this negative motivation may discourage them from allocating effort towards learning and subsequently performing with e-learning courses. Positive activating emotions, such as enjoyment of learning, may generally enhance academic motivation, whereas negative deactivating emotions (e.g. boredom) may be harmful for the learning activity itself. Positive emotions facilitate the use of flexible, creative learning strategies (autonomous style), while negative emotions lead to more controlled types of learning (Pekrum, et al., 2002). The warm relationship enhances not only the intrinsic motivation, but also the willingness to accept external goals – essential for learning in adult learning education (Eccles, et al., 2002).

Consequently, the autonomy supportive instructor’s behaviour is linked with several positive learning outcomes, such as, student engagement to the course (meaning intensity and emotional quality of students’ involvement during learning) high achievement and high course satisfaction. Whereas, controlled methods of teaching often lead to negative learning outcomes, such as amotivation, boredom, underachievement, and high dropout intention etc. (Connell & Wellborn, 1991).

Self – Determination Theory and Learning outcomes

The corporate e-learning environment is often not structured or controlled. Corporate e-learners are susceptible to distractions from both their work and social surroundings, which can reduce effort allocated to the task at hand. Research has typically shown that attrition rates are often 10-20% higher for online courses than for traditional, face-to-face classrooms (Holder, 2007). Dropout rate is an issue of concern for HOU as well, as more than 30% of freshmen quit their studies each year, mostly in undergraduate studies, whereas a smaller percentage exists in graduate programs (14%) (Pierrakeas, et al., 2004).

Although several studies have attempted to identify the variables that contribute to student dropout in distance learning courses, “the decision to drop out or to persist is a result of the interaction of both internal psychological variables and the external environment” (Morgan & Tam, 1999). Vallerand and his colleagues (1997), support that the dropout students had perceived their social agents (teachers, parents) to be less supportive about continuing their studies, and less autonomous motivating (low levels of intrinsic motivation and identification). Actually, there was a significant relation between high levels of amotivation and boredom among those who interrupted their studies.
Most studies in distance learning education focus on self-regulatory processes with regard to the educational procedure only. There has not been in depth research of the reasons for which someone enrolls in an adult distance learning course. Such a research could provide useful information about drop out intention rate in online adult education, especially when it involves learners who are also workers. It is true that, drop out in online courses should be evaluated carefully as the demographics for online courses are different from that of the traditional classroom. Students are adults and have some factor prohibiting attendance on a traditional campus, such as family and work overload and work - family conflicts. One of the internal factors that can be categorized as an individual factor is the lack of motivation (in other words, learning difficulties, miscalculation of time students need to study). External factors typically include environmental influences, such as organizational support as well as socioeconomic difficulties, or unexpected events such as health and family problems. Taking all these into consideration, we propose that Self-Determination Theory has the potential to address both positive and negative learning procedure outcomes, such as student’s course satisfaction and dropout intention in the online learning environment.

**Study objectives**

In this paper, we present the results of a study we conducted among first year students of Hellenic Open University. The purpose of this study was to examine the relations between personal factors (e.g. motivation to enrol in a course) and contextual factors (e.g. learning climate) as well as demographic data of adult learners with some outcomes: course satisfaction and drop out intention. Based on a theoretical framework derived from social-cognitive theory, as well as previous empirical work, we test the research hypothesis that autonomous motivational beliefs of attending a course in Hellenic Open University, as well as autonomy supportive learning climate can positively predict course satisfaction and negatively predict drop out intention. The paper is structured as follows. The next section describes the methodology we used to conduct the study. Then the most important results of the study are presented, followed by a discussion on the findings.

**Methodology**

**Context and participants**

The sample of this study was one hundred and twenty four students (N=124). They are adult students in 6 undergraduate programs provided by HOU, who have completed their first year of study. Participants were randomly selected from the courses’ catalogues, after had been categorized by two conditions: (a) they had selected only one course in their first year of study and (b) they had just sat for exams. That precondition was made so as to focus on one instructor’s behaviour in order to avoid confusion and get more valuable results in the learning climate questionnaire (LCQ), which refers to a relationship with “…the instructor”.

Hellenic Open University (HOU) is the sole public higher education institution that offers distance learning in Greece. By law, students that enrol in HOU must be older than 25 years of age. HOU
(www.eap.gr) is structured in 4 Schools, which in total offer 6 undergraduate and 36 graduate courses. To graduate from an undergraduate course, students have to successfully attend 12 Units; in graduate courses a student has to attend 4 Units and submit a Diploma Thesis. During each academic year, an undergraduate student can attend up to three courses; for graduate students, this number is 2. Students submit papers to their tutors throughout the year (on average, a tutor is responsible for 23 students; this number never exceeds 33). In order to successfully attend a course, students have to successfully pass the exams that take place each summer.

Procedure

At first, an application letter was submitted to the Managing Committee of HOU asking for permission to access the courses’ catalogues, in order to select students with the same characteristics. The data was collected with the use of an online survey tool (SurveyMonkey©) and the internet version of the questionnaire was developed by an expert according to the principles of conducting behavioural research over the internet (Fraley, 2004). Data collection started one week after the completion of the course and lasted 20 days, so that the students would have substantial exposure to their respective courses. The research team e-mailed students on a weekly basis during the collection stage, providing them all the necessary information regarding to the survey, and encouraging them in order to complete the filling of the questionnaire.

Instruments

This study made use of appropriate tools to collect useful information about the demographical data, measuring contextual and motivational factors, as well as learning procedure outcomes. The composed questionnaire consisted of 43 items, distributed as described below.

Demographical data. A 9-item questionnaire was created in order to obtain some demographical data from the participants. These are: Gender, Age, Marital status, Area of Residence, Course of attendance, Occupational status, Working hours per week (0-20, 21-40, >40), and Studying hours per week for this course (0-4, 5-10, >10).

Contextual support. To measure autonomy supportive behaviours exhibited by Hellenic Open University professors we used Williams & Deci’s (1996) Learning Climate Questionnaire (LCQ). The original LCQ scale has 15 items, but for the sake of brevity the short 6-item version was chosen. The questionnaire is typically used with respect to specific learning settings, such as particular class. Students replied using a 7-point Likert scale (1- strongly disagree, 7- strongly agree), about the degree in which their instructor supports their autonomy. The LCQ has a single underlying factor with high internal consistency (a=.96) (Williams & Deci, 1996). The questionnaire was translated and adjusted in Greek by the research team. In this study Cronbach’s Alpha was high as well (a=.90).

Scores are summed, with higher scores indicating greater perceived autonomy support. Each of the six items reflects the autonomous supportive teaching behaviours, such as avoiding directives (“My instructor provides me choices and options”), demonstrating empathy and interpersonal skills, enhancing confidence (“My instructor conveyed confidence in my ability to do well in the course”), avoiding criticism, enhancing internalization processes, nurture intrinsic motivation (Deci et al.,
Motivational factors. To measure motivational factors was used the Academic Motivation Scale (AMS), college version developed by (Vallerand et al., 1992) which consists of seven subscales. The original AMS contains 28 items (four for each subscale), but in the short version we used 14 items (2 for each subscale). Previous studies (Vansteenkiste et al., 2004) suggested that it is possible—for methodological reasons—to merge the three types of intrinsic motivation (to know, to accomplish, and to experience stimulation) into one, and do the same for the three types of extrinsic motivation as well (identified, introjected, and external regulation). We finally have three major subscales; one of Intrinsic motivation, a second one for Extrinsic motivation and the third one, to represent the Amotivation.

The reliability test indicated that AMS has satisfactory internal consistency across subscales, ranging from .77 to .96. The scale was translated and adjusted by the research team. In the current study, the three major subscales had the following rates at internal consistency test: Autonomous/Intrinsic motivation (a=.88), Controlled/Extrinsic motivation (a=.81), and Amotivation (a=.62). Instead of “college” we used the word “HOU”, and we made some slight changes to fit in the research context. Participants had to answer using a 7-point Likert scale (1—does not correspond at all to me, to 7—corresponds exactly), in questions regarding the reasons to attend the course: “I experience pleasure and satisfaction while learning new things”, “In order to obtain a more prestigious job later”, “I really feel that I am wasting my time in HOU”.

Course satisfaction scale. Hao’s Course Satisfaction Scale (Hao, 2004) evaluates the general course satisfaction of the online students, using 11 items, which measure several aspects of course satisfaction, such as online teaching method, instructor’s attitude and help provided, educational material (video, web seminars, books etc.). The items have been modified to fit to the research context. The reliability test on the original CSS revealed a satisfactory internal consistency (a=.93). In the translated version, the reliability test revealed a high value (a=.90), as well. Using a 7-point Likert scale, participants had to underline the grade that the items (e.g. “I am satisfied by the relationship I have with my instructor”, “I am satisfied by the course’s technical infrastructure provided”) describe better their feeling (1—does not correspond at all to me, to 7—corresponds exactly).

Dropout intention Scale. Due to the lack of questionnaires available for dropout intention for online learning contexts, we created a 3-item dropout intention scale (“During the last year I thought plenty of times dropping out my studies” or “I am sure that I will complete my studies” -reversed item) using a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from “I strongly disagree” (1), to “I strongly agree” (7), in which participants declared their intention to discontinue their studies. The internal consistency test showed a quite high alpha (a=.83). Complementary, the dropout part contained one multiple choice question, in which students were asked to choose the most important potential reason for quitting their studies. The available reasons were: financial, family, learning difficulties, and other reason, so that potential correlations with demographic data could be made.

Limitations

A number of factors could be considered as limitations of this study. A low response rate and small
sample size were attained for this study which may limit reliability of findings. The low response rate has affected the results not only in a quantitative way but also in a qualitative way, because those who filled in the questionnaire were probably those who are more emotional engaged with their studies in HOU. To further explain that rate, students that have decided to drop out their studies after the first year, or those who are considering it seriously, have probably neglect to fill in the questionnaire. This fact combined with the specificity of sample (individual characteristics of adult students of HOU) may limit the generalization to other students group, population, or context.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

One hundred and twenty four (N=124) students participated in this study (69 Female and 55 Male), all students of undergraduate courses. The majority of participants ranged between 25 - 44 years old (85.5 %), the rest (14.5 %) were older than 45 years old (45 -64). Slightly more singles (46,8%) than married (40,3%) have enrolled in last year’s courses. Half of the participants’ declared as a residence area, the wider capital region of Athens. The other half was distributed among thirteen other districts of Greece. As far as the “Course” major is concerned, the majority was from Humanities School (66,1%) [SEC, SGC, HLCS], the rest was from Natural Sciences and Technology School (27,4%) [SNS, CS], and from the Social Sciences School (6,5%) [BA] (Figure 2). More than 80% of the participants were employed, as in every distance learning program. As it is shown in the Figure 3, their occupational status included private employees (36,3%), civil servants (30,6%), unemployed (18,5%) and self-employed (14,5%). In respect of their working hours, the majority of the sample works more than forty hours per week (42,7%). In the question about the possible reasons of dropping out the rates were the following: Financial related difficulties (77,4%), Family related difficulties (12,1%), Learning related difficulties (3,2%).

Then, by elaborating the data, the following variables were exported: Learning Climate, Autonomous motivation (Autmot), Controlled Motivation (Conmot), Amotivation (Amotiv), Course Satisfaction (CourSat) and Dropout Intention (Dropout). Continuing with the descriptive statistics of our variables it was found that autonomous motivation had the higher median of other types of motivation; (MAutmot= 5,87, SD= 1,12), (MConmot= 4,51, SD=1,53), (MAmotiv= 2,21, SD= 1,49). The median of Course Satisfaction was 4,78 in a 7 point Likert scale (SD= 1,18), and finally the total Dropout Intention of the participants had a low average (M= 2,7, SD= 1,75).
The main objective of this study was to examine: (1) how all the above mentioned variables are correlated with each other and (2) if these variables are affected by the demographic data. First of all, we compared the effects of demographic data on the exported variables. To decide, whether to use parametric or non-parametric tests, we conducted a normality test of each variable. Due to the fact that the normality hypothesis was rejected, we moved on using the non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis and Mann-Whitney tests. Using Kruskal-Wallis test, we test if there is any difference between the medians of each variable.

The results, referring to the demographics effect on the testing variables are the following:

Grouping Learning Climate by the Age, there is statistically significant difference between medians of the three groups of age, at a 5% significant level ($x^2 = 8.577$, df= 3, $p$-value= 0.035). By measuring all the other factors, no statistically significant difference was found among the medians and therefore, no effect of the factor is reported, except for Occupational Status, where there is statistically significant effect of the factor ($x^2 = 8.624$, df= 3, $p$-value= 0.041). It seems that unemployed and younger participants (25-34) perceive the learning climate less autonomous supportive.

In regard to Motivational Factors, when Autonomous/Intrinsic motivation is grouped by Gender, there is statistically significant difference between medians at a 5% significant level ($U= 81425.000$, p-value=0.035, $g=-0.266$). We also observe statistically significant difference in Autonomous Motivation, when grouping the data by the Working hours per week ($x^2 = 9.057$, df= 2, p-value= 0.011). Men and participants working more than 40 hours per week exhibit less intrinsic motivation at the time of enrolment. Finally, Autonomous motivation is influenced by the factor of possible reasons of dropout. At a 5% significant level, there is statistically significant difference between the medians of each possible reason of dropout ($x^2= 8.172$, df= 3, p-value= 0.043). These reasons are financial, family-related and learning-related. Highly autonomous motivated participants, intent to dropout mostly due to financial reasons. Amotivation is significantly influenced by the hours per week devoted in studying for the course ($x^2= 10.078$, df= 2, p-value= 0.006), as amotivated students are likely to devote less or none time per week for studying.

Similarly to this finding, students studying very few hours per week (0-4h) demonstrate higher Dropout Intention. The opposite conclusion was found when Course Satisfaction grouped by studying hours per week, the more the studying hours per week the more course satisfaction they expose. That is, the sense of “engagement” in a course, increases in persistent students the rate in Course Satisfaction whereas decreases the ratio of dropout intention.

Correlations

Thereafter, continuing the analysis process we run the non-parametric Spearman correlation coefficient test to identify the relations among the variables. The correlations presented in the Table 1 below provide an estimation of the associations of all the variables:
Table 1. Spearman Correlations among variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LearCli</th>
<th>AutMot</th>
<th>ConMot</th>
<th>Amotiv</th>
<th>CourSat</th>
<th>Dropout</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AutMot</td>
<td>0.26**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ConMot</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.33***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amotiv</td>
<td>-0.17</td>
<td>-0.14</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CourSat</td>
<td>0.59***</td>
<td>0.31***</td>
<td>0.22*</td>
<td>-0.25**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dropout</td>
<td>-0.16</td>
<td>-0.35***</td>
<td>-0.21*</td>
<td>0.60***</td>
<td>-0.28**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(p < 0.001 ***, p < 0.01 **, p < 0.05 *)

First of all, Contextual factors – in terms of Learning Climate- have a strong positive correlation with Course Satisfaction ($r_s = 0.59$) at a 0.1% significant level. Course satisfaction is as expected positively related to Autonomous motivation student’s attitude ($r_s = 0.31$, p= 0.05), but on the other hand, negatively correlated with Amotivation ($r_s = -0.25$, p= 0.05).

The most important factor to analyze is Dropout Intention. Dropout Intention is negatively correlated with all the other variables, apart from Amotivation. The two variables are strongly correlated ($r_s = 0.60$) at a 0.1% significance level. Moreover, four out of five correlation coefficients are statistically significant.

Regression Analysis

Our purpose is to examine how Dropout Intention can be explained by all the other variables. In order to see which variables can serve as a predictor for Dropout, we use the technique of Stepwise Regression. By doing this process, we find out that only motivational factors could sufficiently explain dropout ratio.

The results of the estimation are presented in the Table 2 below:

Table 2. Stepwise Regression with Dropout Intention as dependent variable

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Explanatory Variables</th>
<th>Standardized Coefficients (beta)</th>
<th>P-value</th>
<th>R square</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Model 1</td>
<td>Amotivation</td>
<td>0.606***</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.367</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model 2</td>
<td>Amotivation</td>
<td>0.626***</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.459</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Controlled Motiv</td>
<td>-0.303***</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model 3</td>
<td>Amotivation</td>
<td><strong>0.607</strong>*</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td><strong>0.489</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Controlled Motiv</td>
<td>-0.243***</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Autonomous Motiv</td>
<td>-0.184**</td>
<td>0.009</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model 4</td>
<td>Amotivation</td>
<td>0.566***</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.478</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Controlled Motiv</td>
<td>-0.229**</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Autonomous Motiv</td>
<td>-0.177*</td>
<td>0.017</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Learning Climate</td>
<td>-0.062</td>
<td>0.389</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(p<0.001***, p<0.01**, p<0.05*)
The results of the estimation regression indicate that the use of one variable (Amotivation) explains a small percentage of the variability of Dropout Intention. However, the introduction of the other two motivational factors improves the variability of Dropout Intention, which is explained by this model. As we can see in Table 2, the 48.9% of the dependent variable is explained by the regression model ANOVA test indicates that our estimation model is statistically significant (F = 37.611, df1= 3, df3 = 118, p-value< 0.001). Controlled Motivation (beta=-0.243) and Autonomous Motivation (beta=-0.184) have a negative effect on the dependent variable. Instead of this, we observe that if Amotivation increases by one unit, Dropout Intention will be increased by 0.699 units (beta= 0.699).

It is thus noted that Amotivation is the most economically significant motivation factor for explaining the Dropout Intention among students. This result is in line with the outcome from correlation test before. In the model 4 we added Learning Climate, as an independent variable to dropout intention, but surprisingly, in the present study contextual factor did not show up as a significant factor in terms of predictability.

With respect to factors explaining Course Satisfaction, we identify that Learning Climate is by far the most statistically and economically significant driver. To explain this, the more supportive the learning climate is the higher the course satisfaction is. Table 3, below, shows that controlled motivation exhibits the strongest influence among motivational factors, in forecasting Course Satisfaction. ANOVA tests indicates that our estimation model is statistically significant (F = 30.371, df1= 4, p-value< 0.001).

| Table 3. Linear regression with Course Satisfaction as dependent variable |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Explanatory Variables       | Standardized Coefficients (beta) | P-value         | R square        |
| Amotivation                 | -0.084                   | 0.212           | 0.497           |
| Controlled Motiv            | -0.155*                  | 0.027           |                 |
| Autonomous Motiv            | -0.109                   | 0.125           |                 |
| Learning Climate            | 0.614***                 | 0.000           |                 |
| (p<0.001***, p<0.01**, p<0.05*) |

Discussion

Based on these results, we can state that the type of motivation of enrolling in undergraduate courses in Hellenic Open University constitutes a significant predictor of the adult learner’s intention to drop out. It is important to know that most studies have focused on types of motivation for studying or devoting time to study, neglecting the fact that the reason of applying for enrolment in a distance learning course may sometimes play as crucial a role as the reason one devotes time and commitment to a course.

To summarizing our findings, as the regression analysis results revealed, Dropout Intention could be predictable by measuring the students’ motivation type, especially Amotivation. It is important to underline the finding that contrary to our expectations, that controlled motivation constitutes a
significant negative predictor of drop out, more than autonomous motivation does. This fact should be considered seriously by distance learning institutions as both external forces as well as intrinsic values can hold a strong effect on drop out. Therefore, factors of drop out are unique for the online population of students, making it difficult to apply existing attrition models, designed for traditional classrooms, to the online population. Another clue that traditional dropout models does not apply as such in adult online learning population is that contextual factors could not explain the dropout intention, as expected. As it is revealed in a previous study in the same population (students of HOU) tutors and educational material it was not cited as a reason for dropping out (Pierrakeas et al., 2004). Maybe there is something more to investigate in the “context” terminology for the specific population.

Furthermore, in relation with factors explaining course satisfaction, we observe the opposite result to the previous finding. Context factors revealed to be more significant than motivational factors. Autonomous supportive learning climate significantly increases level of course satisfaction that also indicates the direct emotions –motivations relation that we presented in the Introduction. On the other hand, motivational factors play a less significant role on the dependent variable.

Despite the fact that several studies have provided evidence for the positive correlation between students’ intrinsic motivation and perceived autonomy support (Assor et al., 2002; Roth et al., 2007), the present study expands these results by providing evidence for the correlation between the kind of motivation people perceive they had during applying to enrol in the university and the perceived learning climate. This is also in line with the assumption of SDT that the promotion of autonomy and social relatedness is important for intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2002).

This study provides several implications; one can be the role of an early counselling intervention to less motivated students during pre-enrolment procedure, in order to investigate their goals before studying. Other example, motivational factors could be taken into account on designing learning procedure and educational material, whereas during the learning procedure, should be an attempt from instructors enhancing contextual factors that improve the course satisfaction. Finally, institutions may change their policy and pay attention on sensitive dropout groups (amotivated and financially constrained students).

Our study aimed at examining some potential motivational and contextual factors affecting drop out intention and course satisfaction. The main findings of the study indicated that all kind of motivations of applying for a distance learning course can provide useful information about drop out intention while learning climate remains a very significant predictor of course satisfaction. Of course, qualitative data can add valuable information about the exact and personalized reasons of quitting studies. Future studies, should focus on how the factor of time influences the motivation type and the persistence in studying through years, or address the relationship of individual differences and autonomous supporting context, as it seems that a lot discussion should be made in that field. We hope that this study will encourage further research on the need of building a new model for explaining dropout intention applicable in online learning contexts. This new model meets the need of creating and standardizing tools adjusted in adult learners’ population.
Acknowledgement

The research presented in this paper has been co-financed by the European Union (European Social Fund – ESF) and Greek national funds through the Operational Program “Education and Lifelong Learning” of the National Strategic Reference Framework (NSRF) – Funding Program: Employment and Career Office of HOU (DASTA). We would like to thank Mr. G. Vorvilas for helping us with Survey Monkey and the HOU administration for supporting the survey.
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