ΠΑΝΕΠΙΣΤΗΜΙΟ ΚΡΗΤΗΣ
UNIVERSITY OF CRETE

PTDE NEWS:
EDUCATION, INNOVATION, FUTURE

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Research News:

24/10-19/12/2025: University of the Third Age

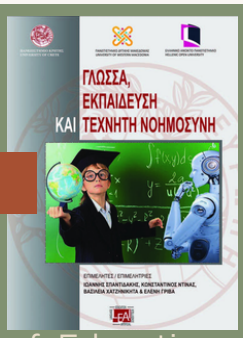
The "University of the Third Age" is being implemented for the first time by the Center for Lifelong Learning of the University of Crete, in collaboration with the Department of Primary Education and the Laboratory of New Technologies in Lifelong and Distance Education (Director: Prof. Panagiotis Anastasiadis). The program is addressed to individuals over the age of 60 and aims to improve their quality of life through the acquisition of contemporary knowledge and essential skills in key areas of everyday life, as well as to enhance their physical and mental well-being.

Research project Unpacking the "Black Box" of Orthographic Learning: Identifying the Foundational Skills Underlying Efficient Reading for English-and Greek-speaking Children (LEXIS)

The Department of Primary Education of the University of Crete (Postdoc. Sofia Yazitzidou, Prof. Angeliki Mouzaki), in collaboration with the Department of Psychology and Neuroscience of Dalhousie University (Hélène Deacon) investigates how children learn to recognize words fluently, focusing on the mechanism of orthographic learning - that is, the development of mental representations of words that enable automatic word recognition and facilitate reading comprehension. It is an internationally oriented research program involving over 600 participants, adopting a contemporary and multilingual perspective, as it examines the orthographic development of children whose first language is Greek or English, from preschool to early primary school age.

3/12-6/12/2025: Participation in the 75th Annual Literacy Research Association Conference (LRA 2025), Las Vegas, USA.

Prof. Eleni Katsarou participated in the conference under the auspices of the Department of Primary Education of the University of Crete and the TALOS AI Lab program. Her presentation, entitled "Unmasking the L1 Curriculum: AI-Powered Analysis for Evidence-Based Reform," focused on methodological issues related to the use of Natural Language Processing (NLP) tools for the analysis of the Language Curriculum.



Publication of the collective volume "Language, Education, and Artificial Intelligence" by the School of Education of the University of Crete, under the auspices of the LEAI (Language, Education, and Artificial Intelligence) Conference.

The volume covers a wide range of topics related to language, education, and artificial intelligence. Its six thematic sections highlight the richness of research approaches and teaching practices: from language teaching and literacy in the age of artificial intelligence, to its application across various educational fields and Special Education. The volume was edited in collaboration with the Faculty of of Education of the University of Crete (Prof. Ioannis Spantidakis), in collaboration with the Institute of Greek Language of the University of Western Macedonia (Prof. Konstantinos Dinas, Prof. Eleni Griva) and the Master's Program in "Educational Sciences" of the Hellenic Open University (Prof. Vasileia Chatzinikita).

Publication of two articles in international peer-reviewed journals by Prof. Nelli Kostoula.

The article "Professionalization of Academic Teaching in Latin American Universities to Address SDGs Applying the Stages of Concern Theory" (Makrakis, V., Kostoulas-Makrakis, N., Siegmund, A., et al.) examines the professionalization of university teaching in Latin America, aiming to integrate the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into learning and curricula, using the Stages of Concern Theory. The article "Training Teachers to Cope with Refugee Children's Needs through the Lens of SDGs" (Makrakis, V., Kostoulas-Makrakis, N., Ramzy, O., & Anwar, M.) focuses on teacher training for the effective education of refugee children, emphasizing teachers' satisfaction with a training program (RefTeCp) and its connection to the SDGs, particularly the reduction of inequalities and the promotion of quality education.

Activities and events:

13/10/2025: **The National Action against Childhood Obesity**, a collaboration between the Ministry of Health, the University of Crete, and UNICEF, took place in Rethymno. The Department of Primary Education also participated, with presentations by Prof. Eleni Katsarou on the prevention of childhood obesity and demonstrations of tools that can be used in the classroom to promote healthy eating and physical activity.

31/10/25: The Department of Primary Education participated in the University of Crete **Career Day 2025** at the Voutes campus. In the Department's presentation, Prof. Eleni Vasilaki highlighted the multiple professional opportunities available to graduates beyond the school setting, as well as the Department's commitment to the holistic development of students and future professionals.

19/11/25: On the occasion of **World Philosophy Day** (November 20), the Department of Primary Education, within the framework of the seminar "Philosophical and Religious Concepts in Art: Educational Implications" (Lecturer Spyridoula Athanasopoulou-Kypriou) and the postgraduate course "Literature, Children's Books, and Contemporary Communication Codes" (Assistant Prof. Vasiliki Vasiloudi), participated in a **special evening of philosophy and cinema.** The event was organized under the auspices of the Department of Philosophy of the University of Crete, in collaboration with the Public Central Library of Rethymno, the Center for Ancient Greek and Chinese Culture (CELKIP), and the Library of the University of Crete.

28-30/11/25: The Department participated in **Innodays – Innovation Days 2025** with a presentation by PhD candidate Christina Smaropoulou. The presentation, entitled **"Journey to the ARIELS Islands: Exploring Social-Emotional and Self-Regulated Learning"**, showcased a contemporary and scientifically grounded methodology aimed at enhancing students' social-emotional and self-regulated learning through the use of artificial intelligence.

The department goes to the cinema and the opera!

11/11/25: The seminar organized by the Department of Primary Education, "Philosophical and Religious Concepts in Art: Educational Implications" (Lecturer Spyridoula Athanasopoulou-Kypriou), invited students to engage in philosophical reflection and critical thinking through the screening of Yorgos Lanthimos' recent film "**Bugonia**" at a local cinema in Rethymno.

3/12/25: Students and instructors of the Music Education laboratory courses (S.E.S. Kyriaki Trichaki) attended the iconic one-act opera "Pagliacci" by Ruggero Leoncavallo, performed at the Heraklion Cultural and Conference Center. This activity was part of a broader program aimed at broadening students' thinking and reshaping their perspectives on the arts and the educational process.

12/12/25: Fourth-grade students from the **6th Primary School of Rethymno** visited our Department. They participated in exploratory activities at the **Biology and Environment Laboratory** of Laboratory for the Didactics of Science and, under the guidance of Prof. Marianna Kalaitzidaki, engaged with plants and insects, observed them using stereoscopes, visited the library, explored the university grounds' plant life, and enthusiastically took part in group games in the indoor gymnasium.

16/12/25: The research team of the Department of Primary Education and the Laboratory of Science Education, "Science in the City," participated in the Christmas events of the 7th and 14th Primary Schools of Rethymno.

17/12/25: The university volunteer group **"Care and Act" [Noiazomai kai Dro]** visited the **Pediatric Clinic of Rethymno,** distributing toys, books, and Christmas cheer to the children, collected from students, teachers, academics, and other members of the university.

The Department's first English-taught course is coming soon:

In the spring semester of 2025–2026, Prof. Eleni Vasilaki and Assistant Prof. Aikaterini Vasiou will offer the Department's first course in English: **"Mind Full or Mindful? Mindfulness in Education" (B0111).** The course presents the science and practice of mindfulness, providing practical tools to enhance focus, emotional regulation, memory, and overall well-being. Grounded in psychology and neuroscience, students will learn how mindfulness reduces stress, strengthens emotional intelligence, and supports effective educational practices.

22/11/25 Graduation Ceremony of the MSc Program "Special Education":

The graduation ceremony of the graduates of the Interdepartmental Postgraduate Program "Special Education" took place in an emotional atmosphere at the Rethymno Campus.

During the event, the Program Director, Prof. Ilias Kourkoutas, emphasized the value of in-person education and the high caliber of students admitted through written examinations. The importance of specialized knowledge in the field of education was highlighted by the Chairs of the Pedagogical Departments, Prof. Dimitrios Stavrou and Prof. Theodoros Elefterakis.

3/12/25 Graduation Ceremony of the Department of Primary Education:

The December 2025 graduation ceremony marked a moment of pride for the graduates of the Department of Primary Education, who were awarded their degrees. The event featured greetings from the Department Chair, Prof. Dimitris Stavrou, and the Dean of the School of Education, Prof. Andreas Fountoulakis. The speeches highlighted the skills and knowledge that the new graduates acquired during their studies and their significance in a rapidly changing world. Special emphasis was placed on the role of technological development and artificial intelligence applications, highlighting the need for future educators to use them creatively and with a human-centered approach.

A few words from the top graduate of our Department...

"The graduation ceremony marked the end of four wonderful years and the beginning of a journey into the world of education, which I hope will be exciting, full of smiles and love. A childhood dream came true at the Department of Primary Education in Rethymno, thanks to my own efforts, the contribution of my professors, and the support of my loved ones!"

Paraskevi Kalogeraki

Welcoming new members:

Spyridoula Athanasopoulou-Kypriou
The new lecturer of our Department in the field of Social and Political Theology

Our Department welcomes Spyridoula Athanasopoulou-Kypriou, Faculty Member and Lecturer in Social and Political Theology. Her research interests focus on religion and its relationship with culture, gender, politics, society, and education.

As I understand it, Social and Political Theology studies ***the position of religions in the public sphere and culture, and engages with contemporary social and political issues.*** *It is directly connected to education insofar as both fields aim at finding meaning, human empowerment, critical understanding of power relations, the establishment of justice, and environmental protection. At a broader social level, this branch of theology seeks to contribute to the development of a pedagogy of justice, democracy, inclusion, and freedom.*

The most interesting aspect of my field, for me, is ***the intersection of theology with social, cultural, and political issues: for example, how religions and theology intersect with literature, psychoanalysis, the sciences, and matters of gender relations and human rights.*** *The challenge is to highlight ways in which theological thought can operate critically and transformatively within contemporary multicultural societies and today's schools.*

"My experience at the Department of Primary Education at the University of Crete has been particularly creative, *in an environment that encourages collaboration, dialogue, interdisciplinarity, and research. I feel that I am constantly learning alongside students and colleagues. Equally valuable is the connection with the local community, through activities that bring academic knowledge into dialogue with the needs, experiences, and creativity of local people. It is a space where teaching, research, and social engagement come together as processes of reflection and collective action."*

For the academic year 2025–2026, she offers the following courses:

- Religion, Culture, and Education (D02P16)
- Philosophical and Religious Concepts in Art: Educational Implications (D02S04)
- The Relationship between Religion and Science: Social, Political, and Educational Perspectives (D04P09)
- Political Theology and Liberatory Pedagogy (D02S05)

"What I consider most important for students to gain from my courses are ***attitudes and skills in critical thinking, dialogue, and reflection.*** *If we can all reinterpret the world, see it differently, and avoid being trapped by prejudices and stereotypes about others' worldviews and ways of life, I will be very happy."*

"The challenges of our time - social inequalities, polarization, environmental and existential crises - call us to reconsider what education truly means. Education has a pivotal role to play by fostering critical thinking, responsibility, democratic values, and love—love as an attitude of respect, care, and openness toward others. Only in this way can we believe that the world can change through knowledge, collaboration, and human relationships."

The Fields of the Department of Primary Education

A – Theory and Sociology of Education
Study of the phenomenon of education in its historical and social evolution, including all contemporary theoretical perspectives.

B – Educational Psychology & Research Methodology
Study and research of the psychological dimensions of education for typically developing individuals and individuals with special needs, including an introduction to scientific research methods for students.

C – Educational Programs, Teaching Methodology & Educational Technology
Study of the concept of curricula, including their applications and contemporary theoretical and practical aspects in educational practice.

D – Humanities and Social Sciences
Study and research of subjects in the areas of Language, Literature, Philosophy and Religion, Aesthetic Education, Physical and Music Education, History, and Sociology.

E – Natural Sciences
Study and research in the natural sciences, oriented towards linking scientific knowledge with educational practice.

The Laboratories of the Department of Primary Education

Laboratory for the Didactics of Science **[Director: Prof. Dimitris Stavrou]**
Supporting teaching and student practicum, conducting research in the didactics of the natural sciences, and collaborating with organizations to promote shared educational goals.

Laboratory for the Study of Language and Literature **[Director: Assoc. Prof. Paraskevi Thomou]**
Research and educational application of Language, Literature, and History, teacher training, and development of educational materials.

Laboratory of Intercultural and Migration Studies **[Director: Prof. Aspasia Chatzidaki]**
Addressing topics in intercultural and migration education, providing professional development for teachers, and creating teaching materials for Greek as a Second Language.

Laboratory of Psychology and Special Education **[Director: Prof. Aggeliki Mouzaki]**
Research and implementation of innovative pedagogical and psychological interventions, provision of clinical services, and teacher training, in collaboration with research and social organizations, aiming at the psychosocial and academic empowerment of students.

Laboratory of Advanced Learning Technologies in Lifelong and Distance Education **[Director: Prof. Panagiotis Anastasiadis]**
Research and development of innovative applications in Lifelong Learning and Distance Education, with an emphasis on the pedagogical use of advanced learning technologies and social networks.

Center for the Study and Research of the History of Education and the Teaching Profession **[Director: Prof. Antonis Hourdakis]**
Preservation and study of educational cultural heritage, conducting research, fostering scholarly dialogue, and connecting the University with the educational community through activities, digital tools, and professional development programs.

Laboratory of Audiovisual Media **[Director: Prof. Nelli Kostoulas]**
Supporting teaching and research in the educational sciences, with an emphasis on pedagogy, educational technology, and assessment, while developing research projects, collaborations, and innovative educational initiatives using new technologies.

Life Before and After Graduation – Alumni Stories:

"Maria turns a new page in her life with... virtue, courage, and freedom!"

Maria Nikoletaki is 46 years old and studied at the Department of Primary Education from 2021 to 2025. She is currently in Rethymno and works as a parallel educational support teacher...

Before Graduation

Why did you choose to study at the Department of Primary Education – University of Crete?

"My decision to study at the Department of Primary Education of the University of Crete was driven by a combination of personal aspirations to expand my pedagogical knowledge and my family responsibilities as a parent. My mother was a primary school teacher, and from a young age I had many formative influences related to effort, love, boundaries, discipline, honesty, and truth. My previous job was in banking and involved impersonal numbers, targets, profits, and sales. ***In education, however, we work with human souls, with the new leaven of this world, with tomorrow itself. This is what moved me deeply and became my greatest motivation.*** *In 2020, I completed a one-year program in pedagogical and teaching competence at the University of Crete in Rethymno, which gave me the impetus to further develop my knowledge through studies at the Department of Primary Education in Rethymno."*

How were your studies?

"My studies at the Department of Primary Education ***were an unforgettable and unique experience that enriched me intellectually, morally, and emotionally.*** *My collaboration with fellow students and professors was excellent; we all gave our best and received love and respect from people of all ages. Each professor provided us with the appropriate tools to gain a deep understanding of the many dimensions of childhood and children's ways of thinking. In particular, one course that deeply moved me was European Literature. Through this course, we traveled back in time, exploring figures and aspects of childhood existence and survival during periods of war and hardship."*

After Graduation

Where are you today?

"A few months after graduating, I am in Rethymno working at a primary school as a parallel support teacher. I believe that my studies have contributed to a very great extent to what I do today; I would even say that ***they have influenced my entire life and the way I think.****"*

What are your goals?

"My greatest goal is ***to teach children how to learn,*** *something we were already discussing in the department's courses from the very first year."*

Would you like to share a piece of advice?

"To conclude, I would like to share a quote by Andreas Kalvos: ***'Freedom requires virtue and courage.'*** *At the beginning, changing careers was extremely difficult and seemed almost impossible. Many times, I thought about giving up, but in order to turn a new page, one must struggle and work hard. I felt the need to turn time back to where it all began, at the age of seventeen. Family and professional responsibilities were many and demanding, yet everything ultimately depends on the power of one's mindset. I then reflected on the fact that the teaching profession is of great importance, because it truly encourages children to learn how to live with values - something that is sadly fading in our times. And through teaching, we as educators receive even more from children; we learn how to love through their unfiltered affection and become freer ourselves."*