

The Context of Distance Learning Trough the Views of Pupils and Students as Experienced During Covid Period

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Abstract: In the event of the recent health crisis of last months, we observed changes in many areas of activity. One of them was education, in which students and teachers were invited to work via Distance Learning. This article mentions some characteristics of Distance Learning, the new role of teacher and the governing principles of the material of this type of learning. Finally, are presented the results of a survey on the views of pupils and university students about distance learning. The main results of the result showed that there are some differences of opinions between learners depending on the level of education that they followed. Generally, university students were more positive about distance learning than pupils at secondary education.

Key words: distant learning, teachers, investigation, students-university students

1. Introduction

The rapid development of technology, of course, could not leave unaffected the educational space, in which in recent years there is a lot of talk about new technologies, educational software applications and digital technologies. All of these modern learning environments are often at the center of scientific discussions about how they influence or support learning

Extending the concern for the possibilities of New Technologies in the educational process, the issue of distance education also arises effortlessly, which, although applied in several cases worldwide with institutionalized distance studies-especially at undergraduate or postgraduate level - but the recent situation which arose due to the global health crisis, brought the issue of distance education “from theory to practice”.

Open and Distance Education is a general term, that includes also distance learning, e-learning, and online learning, and it refers to a wide range of ways of teaching and learning, in conditions of distance of the learner from the teacher, while it is related to the concept of distance. It is the distance that separates this type of education from the living educational process (Kokkinos, 2005). Keegan defines distance education as a form of education that is determined by the distance that separates the teacher from the learner and this distance is encountered almost throughout the educational process (Keegan, 2001). The development of such a perspective in education in recent years has been favored by developments in technology, but also in the economy, as well as in social structures (Vergidis et al., 1998).

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The introduction of Distance Education aimed from the beginning at giving access to education to people who could not otherwise participate in it, due to distance, lack of time or other special problems. Thus, Distance Education tried to enable education with greater flexibility of place and time. As a result, a wide range of educational institutions emerged that use the methodology of distance education, attempting to adapt it to the circumstances, as well as its response to the needs of each society (Vergidis, Lionarakis et al., 1998).

Today, distance education is largely linked to distance learning. In recent months the method has appeared in Primary, Secondary and Higher education, as a last resort for continuing courses due to a pandemic by changing educational approaches and practices.

The term distance education is defined primarily by the distance - spatial and consequently psychological, social, pedagogical-between teacher and learner. In particular, synchronous distance education, in which communication takes place in real time, includes teleconferences with audio or video (audio/video conferencing), text messaging (chat, instant messaging), application sharing, but also special internet software that allow communication - collaborative activities, which simulate face-to-face communication (Mikropoulos et al., 2011). Thus, e-learning, the application of which has expanded in a time of pandemics, seems to be beginning to gain ground in new ways of teaching. It appeared as the only solution to the impasse of continuing education and raises concerns about achieving a healthy learning communication.

In the following, the basic parameters of this way of teaching and learning will be presented, as well as the results of an original research which highlights the views of students of higher education, but also of students of Higher Education, on how they experienced distance learning due to recent emergencies. conditions worldwide.

2. Characteristics of Distance Learning and Distance Education

It is a fact that the term “distance education” (tele-education) or “distance education” is often synonymous with the term “distance learning”. In general, all these concepts are usually included in the term “e-learning”. Thus, the terms “Distance Education” or “Open Distance Education” have prevailed in pedagogical research in order to interpret the international term Open & Distance Learning (ODL). In this form of learning, Information and Communication Technologies are used with or without the simultaneous presence of the instructor and it is possible to take place in a classroom, at the learner’s space or even in virtual learning environments. It is therefore understood that the terms can be identified or used against each other (<https://www.nmc.hmu.gr/el/node/65>).

It is a fact that distance education utilizes the interaction of learners with teachers or the interaction of all participants, moving away from traditional ways of learning, since communication is mainly through ICT (e-mail, digital platforms, videos, video conferencing). This finding gives distance learning the hallmark of a more autonomous learning process. In particular, the distance learning process is not a teacher-centered process, as it is based on the ability of individuals to actively learn through processes of active knowledge acquisition, which makes it a multifaceted learning process (Mouzakis, 2006).

Another feature of distance education is that the responsibility that the teacher has for the living class, he now shifts to the teaching material. In particular, the trainee studies the educational material of the unit, collaborates with the other members, who can also be active in groups, exchanges views in order to complete the activities assigned to them in a specific time frame (Lionarakis, 2001). Thus, synchronous and asynchronous communication tools are used to facilitate the student and to manage the educational material the way he wants. All the above lead to a form of learning process much more autonomous compared to traditional, since distance learning is a dynamic self-action

of the learner, makes him a much more autonomous entity pushing him into a revealing process of self-education (Lionarakis, 2001).

3. The Role of the Teacher in Distance Education and the Conditions for the Performance of His Work

As has already been pointed out by the above, the role of the teacher in distance learning conditions is redefined and acquires another dynamic in relation to traditional and lifelong learning. The teacher, while in lifelong teaching uses various teaching techniques to provide and transmit knowledge, in distance learning must organize appropriate electronic learning environments and such teaching processes, more active learning, in order to build knowledge, (Armakolas, 2018).

At the same time, the teacher in distance education assumes the roles of coordinator, counselor, mentor and animator in the educational process in order to encourage his students in this particular learning process (Papadimitriou & Lionarakis, 2016). More specifically, the distance teacher is called upon to pedagogically design a more complex teaching, the preparation of which is clearly more time consuming. Thus, it is called to guide, facilitate, motivate and lead students to more active forms of learning by enhancing self-regulation and self-learning in a more interactive and collaborative learning environment (Kelenidou, Antoniou, & Papadakis, 2017), as it appears from the digital environments utilized. With this learning activation of the student, the teacher leads him to autonomy, so that he can manage knowledge, self-evaluate and give feedback (Armakolas, Panagiotakopoulos & Massara, 2015).

In addition to the above, in order to create a more effective learning environment, the teacher chooses the composition of groups or forums on asynchronous education platforms. In this way he informs his students about everything related to the educational program that the students attend and enhances the interaction between them through relevant discussions. Thus, in addition to his didactic intervention, he strengthens the support and encouragement by acting as a consultant (Papadimitriou & Lionarakis, 2016).

All of the above actions create learning community that operates in an electronic environment utilizing digital tools and the internet. This is how the construction of knowledge is attempted through the use of collaborative tools and the interaction of those involved in learning. At the same time, the teacher provides support, motivates and is in constant communication with the learner, giving him feedback through various forms of assessment (Amorgianioti, 2020).

At this point it is worth noting that in order for the implementation of distance education to be successful, a necessary condition is scientific training and familiarity of the teacher with the principles and methodology of distance education as well as familiarity with digital media and tools. Finally, in order to facilitate his work, preparation time, ready educational material and didactic planning of the distance education program are required (Armakolas, 2018).

4. The Educational Material in Distance Education

Since there was a reference above for the educational material that the teacher must have prepared in order to effectively organize a distance learning, the principles that must be met will be briefly presented below, in order to make up for the teacher's absence. It is already understood that distance education students or learners depend on educational material much more than on conventional education systems. For this reason, the educational material

used in Open and Distance Education should provide students with the opportunity to study and learn in their own place and time, at the pace of their choice, while at the same time achieving the attention of students. for the distance learning course. Thus, some characteristics that must be taken into account for the composition of educational material in distance education according to the above, are the following:

- The reference of clearly stated objectives in each important section of the material, so that the student knows the general reference of what is to follow.
- The announcement of specific “expected results”, which will guide the student in his study, will enable him to assess his progress and will encourage him to continue his effort.
- Self-assessment exercises and individual or group activities, which, when accompanied by the correct answers with the aim of further reflection, offer students the opportunity to self-assess and self-improve.
- Illustrations and blueprints can also better replace a text, offering clarity and explanatory content (Panagiotidou, 2014).

Finally, according to Manousos (2007), in the constructive approach to learning, the following principles of material design will assist in distance education:

- Interaction: activities that contribute to the functional understanding of information, in order to lead to problem solving.
- Flexibility: the material must be able to be shaped and adapted based on the needs of students in learning activities.
- Stimuli: more than ever it is easier and more useful in distance education the multiplicity of sources, the virtual examples and the simulations and the variety of means of transmitting information, in order to make the content of the teaching more comprehensible.
- Finally, attractiveness: factors that can stimulate interest and direct the student's attention are indicative, the way the image is composed, the color, the layout of the space, the attractive slides. However, in addition to the above, attractiveness also depends on factors that have to do with the content and the way the teacher presents his material.

Summarizing the above theoretical framework, it becomes obvious that in distance education the student learns in an electronic environment with the use of appropriate digital tools and the internet. Therefore, it is imperative for the teacher to make efforts to build knowledge through interaction using collaborative tools. At the same time, it must provide support, motivation and is in constant contact with the trainee giving him feedback with the assessment. Finally, suitable material designed according to the basic principles mentioned above is required.

For all the above, it is reasonably required scientific training and familiarization of the teacher with the principles and methodology of distance education, as well as with the New Technologies. Finally, research studies have shown that in order to facilitate distance learning, preparation time is required, both ready and adapted. educational material and strategic planning, so that the didactic approach is effective (Armakolas, 2018). Therefore, in order to determine the extent to which the above principles and conditions of effectiveness of distance education and distance learning apply, and what impact they have on learners, this research was conducted, which will be presented below.

5. The Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this study is to investigate the views of learners about distance education in both school distance

education and university education. In particular, an attempt was made to record the views of pupils and students on key points of distance education, as experienced by the trainees themselves in the digital classrooms in recent months, from November 2020 to May 2021, due to Covid.

6. Research Questions

- Was there a differentiated attitude between Secondary and High School students towards e-learning, as they experienced it from November 2020 until May 2021?
- Did they recognize positive or only negative characteristics in e-learning?
- Is the attitude of each group towards distance learning influenced by the nature of the respective subject.

7. Sample

The respondents, as mentioned above, were exactly 100, and were selected because of the ability of the researcher to access them. Of these, 50 were students of D.M. Education and more specifically 20 high school students of the 1st High School of Glykon Nera, Attica, 20 students of the 2nd Lyceum, of the 2nd GEL Artemis Attica and 57 of the DG General Lyceum mainly from the 1st GEL Artemis, but also a few from the 1st GEL Agia Paraskevi Attica.

Also, another 50% of the respondents were students mainly of the 2nd year of studies, with 25% being from the ASPAITE school of Athens and with the remaining 25% studying at the School of Architecture of Volos.

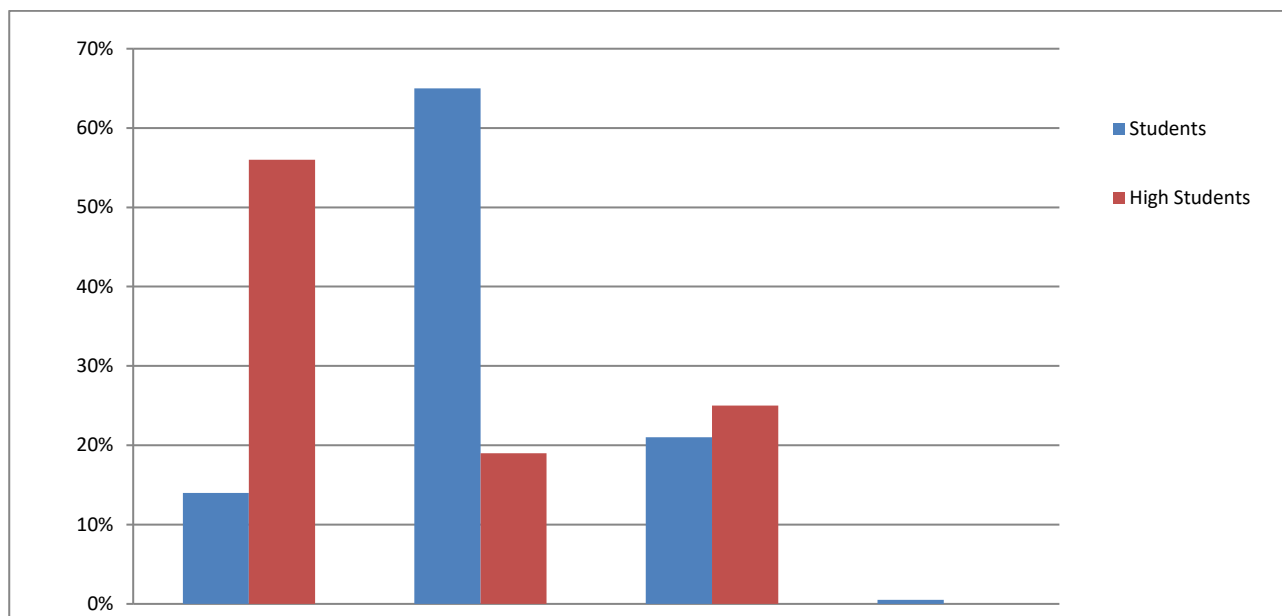
8. Methodology of Investigation

The survey was conducted in June 2021 and the method used to conduct it was the quantitative approach using an electronic questionnaire, due to the ease of answering by more respondents and the availability of more reliable data. In particular, a digital questionnaire of 6 closed-ended questions with four, three or two alternatives was sent. Also, the questionnaire was anonymous, with only requested information about the class, school or college. The subjects of the research were asked to answer questions regarding their experience from distance education and how they evaluated it holistically. The office forms tool was used to complete the questionnaire. Then, the statistical software SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) was used and the data were recorded in files identified by the program.

9. Summary Findings of the research

More specifically, and analyzing the findings of the research, it was found that in the first question “**what do you dislike most about distance education according to your experience**”, the suggested answers were:

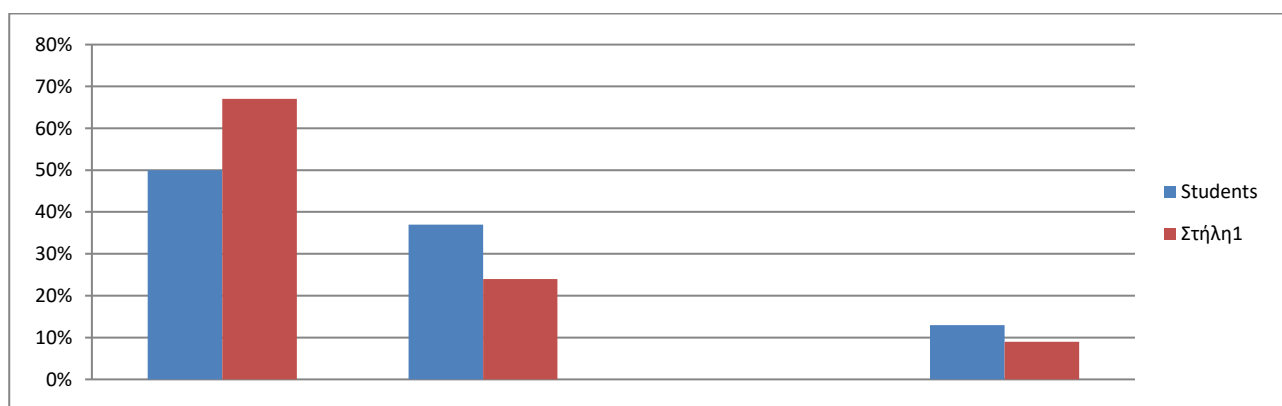
- The difficulty of concentrating in the lesson is greater.
- Lack of communication with those involved in learning.
- The difficulty of understanding the course.
- The difficulty to handle new technologies and digital systems.



65% of students answered: the lack of communication with those involved in learning, while this answer was given by 19% of students. 56% of the students answered the difficulty of concentration, something that in the students was 14%. Also, in the first question, a percentage of 25% of students and a corresponding percentage of students (21%), mentioned the difficulty of understanding the course as an element of dissatisfaction. The difficulty of handling was mentioned by only one student, i.e., a negligible percentage

Continuing with the second question “**what do you enjoy most about distance education**”, students had to choose between the following answers:

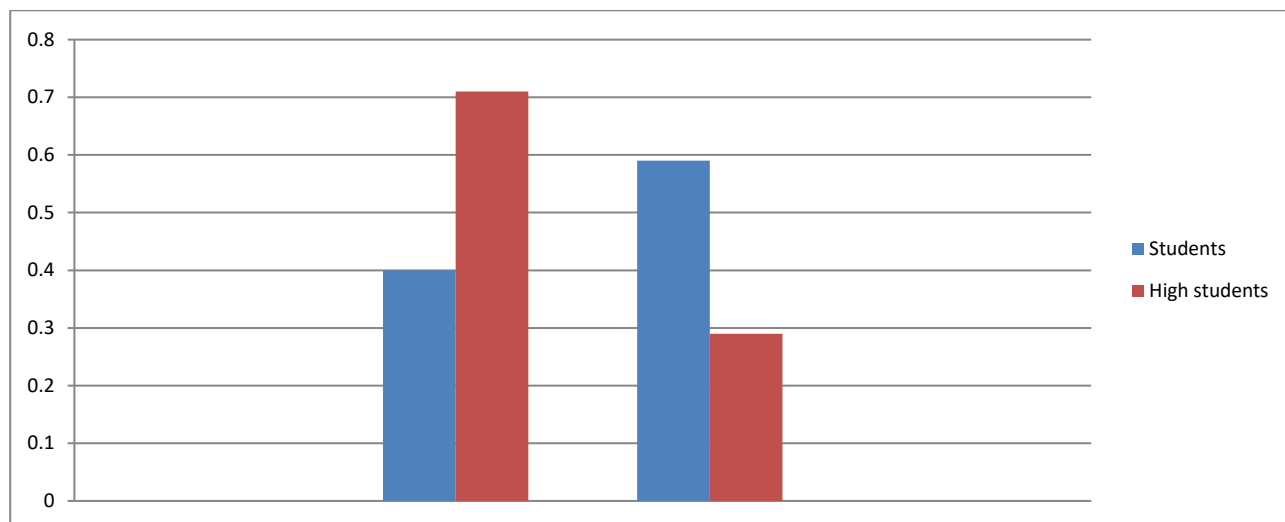
- Saving time.
- Learning in the comfortable environment of the house.
- Less “exposure” than the actual classroom.
- The attractiveness created by modern media.



50% of the students considered the most positive element as saving time and 37%, learning that takes place in the comfortable environment of the house, while the remaining 13% considered that what they consider pleasant in distance learning, is the attractiveness of modern media. Respectively, 67% of students answered the time savings, while 24% the comfort of home and the remaining 9% the attractiveness of the media.

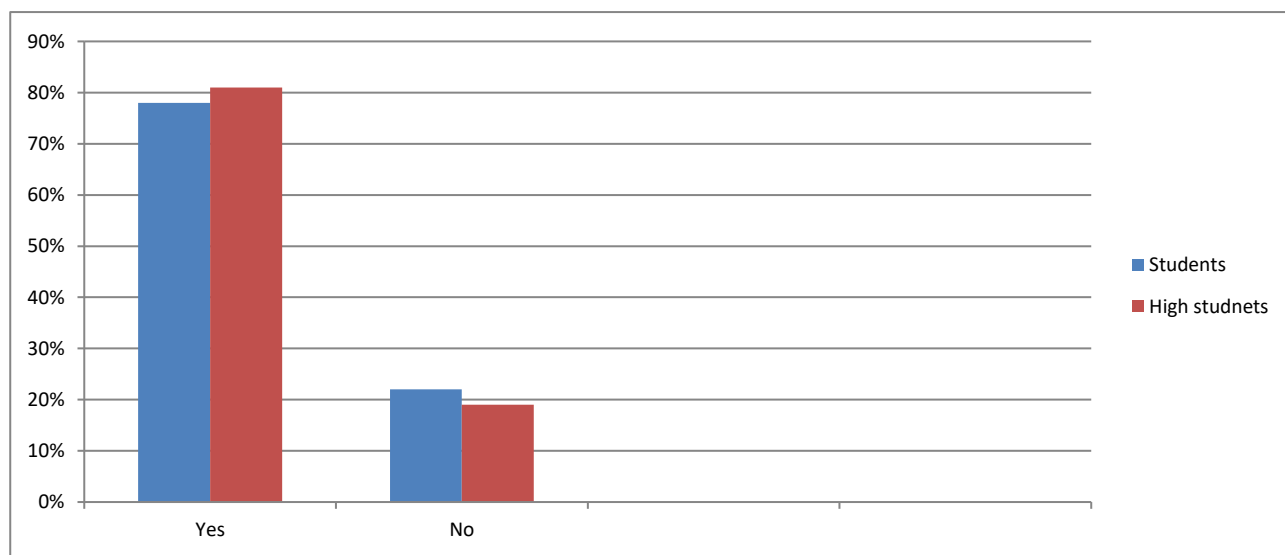
Then, in the third question about the **effectiveness of the teacher in distance education**, the respondents had to choose between the answers:

- More effective
- Equally effective
- Less effective



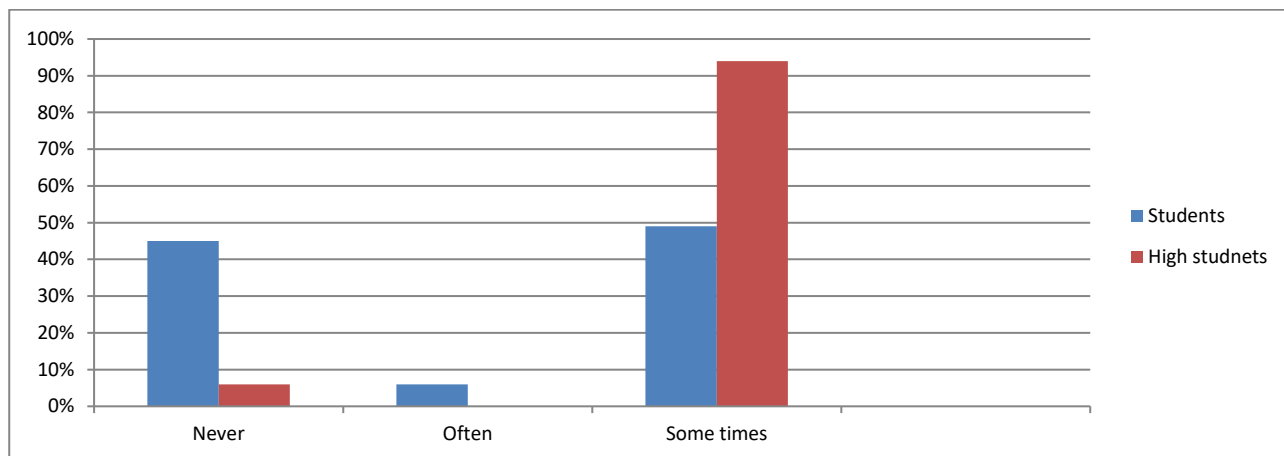
Thus, 59% of students answered that their teacher was not as effective as living, while 40% answered that it was just as effective. On the other hand, 71% of students answered that the effectiveness of the teacher was not affected by distance learning, and only 29% considered that he was less effective in this form of education. In no group was the answer chosen by anyone that teaching was more effective in distance learning.

Regarding the fourth question **as to whether the nature of the subject matter influenced the trainee's attitude towards distance learning**, and the given answers: YES / NO, 78% of the students answered that their attitude depended on the subject matter. and the remaining 22% answered in the negative. Respectively, 81% of the students answered positively and 19%, answered negatively.



In the fifth question about **how often distance education have be place** the options were:

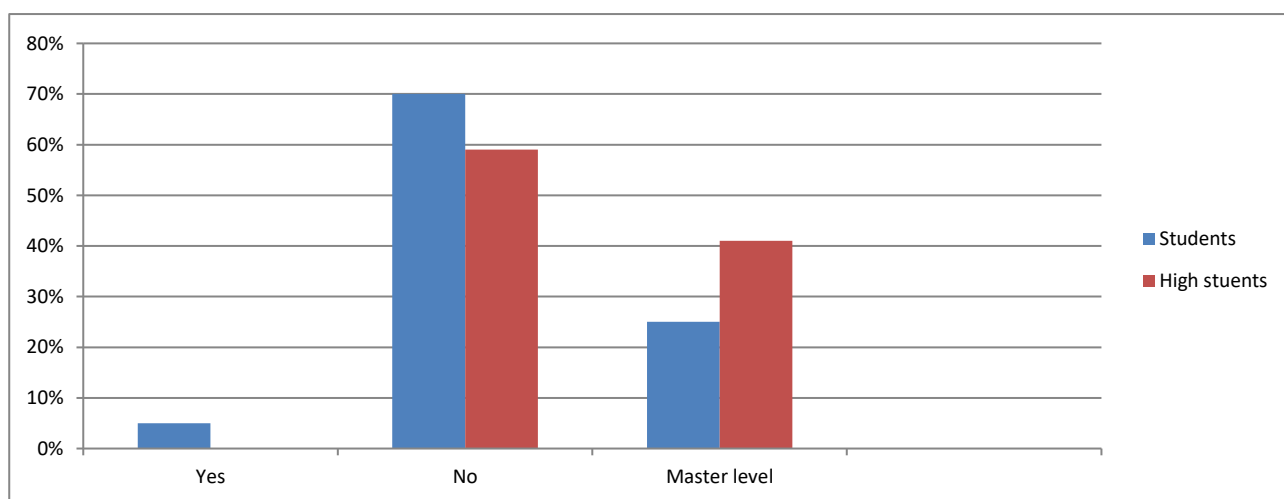
- Never do.
- To be done continuously.
- To be done occasionally in combination with lifelong learning.



In the above, 49% of students answered that distance education should be done occasionally and in combination with living, but 45% answered that distance learning should never be done, while only 6% thought that they want it to be done continuously. Respectively, 94% of the students answered that they want distance education occasionally and in combination with life, while only 6% considered it best to never do it.

Finally, in the sixth question whether they would choose to study entirely remotely, the options were:

- Yes
- No
- Only at postgraduate level



70% of the students answered negatively, 25% answered that only at postgraduate level they would choose to study distance, and 5% were positive in the whole distance education. Respectively, the students answered negatively by 59% and the remaining 41%, considered that they would choose this type of study only at postgraduate level.

10. Conclusions

Summarizing the above numerical data and comparatively looking at the answers of pupils and students, we notice that there is some difference in the attitude they show towards e-learning. In particular, we observe that communication in lifelong learning is more important for students than students, while both groups of respondents seem to be more pleased that time is saved by this form of education. Also, more students viewed the effectiveness of teachers in distance education negatively, in contrast to students, who most considered teachers to be just as effective. Subsequently, it appeared that both pupils and students correlated their view of distance learning by the nature of the subject matter. Finally, the students had a positive attitude to a greater extent, compared to the students, to do occasional distance learning in combination with life, as they chose in a larger percentage and the case of distance learning, even at postgraduate level. The above shows that perhaps this form is more acceptable to older and more mature age groups of learners and not so acceptable to students.

11. Discussion

From the above, some notable remarks emerge. We see that depending on the age of the respondents, the experiences from the distance learning experience are evaluated differently. At the school level, students felt more strongly the lack of communication they had in lifelong learning, more so than students who emphasized other difficulties.

However, the answers given by the two groups regarding the positive aspects of distance education were more similar. On the contrary, the students found the teachers less effective than the students' assessment of the subject, which may be related to greater experience and learning maturity.

At the same time, both students and pupils aptly linked the nature of the subject with the effectiveness of its transmission through distance learning, as some subjects “require” to a greater extent lifelong teaching (Kassellidis & Politis, 2016).

Finally, it appeared from the last answers of each group that students are more receptive to distance learning and more willing to accept it than students, because they may operate in a more autonomous context and feel more mature for the self-action required by the outside. distance education. Respectively, a positive trend, despite some concerns due to lack of knowledge about communication and dialogue opportunities, first-year students showed in another research conducted to find out their views regarding distance learning (Tsoni, etc.). (2015). Probably, then, the students are more familiar or prepared in relation to the students of D. Education, to accept this way of learning, despite some disadvantages that they identify themselves (Tsoni et al., 2015).

In summary, distance education and distance learning have some characteristics that those who apply them should take into account. Also, an important role is played by the teacher, whose guidance, preparation, familiarity with digital technology and appropriate didactic planning play an important role in the effectiveness of teaching. Finally, the learning material must be governed by the above principles, in order to meet the learning needs that arise. These actions will make distance learning more effective, which, according to learners, cannot replace the real classroom, but can be an acceptable alternative to emergencies.

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