

The Benefits of Distance Education, During the Covid-19 Pandemic: Greek Teachers' Opinions

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Abstract

In Greece, the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in the schools' closure during the 2019-2020 school year. The Ministry of Education tried to develop online platforms so that the students could have access to education. The use of distance learning came to the fore. The teachers used the online teaching tools available as a response to this challenging situation. Nevertheless, most of them had not received any relevant training and had at their disposal minimal resources, mainly of their own and not public ones. A nationwide survey was designed investigating teachers' views on distance learning benefits. 515 teachers working in Greek primary education sector - both at kindergartens and primary schools-participated in the research. Their answers show three main benefits from the distance learning implementation at school education: (a), it enabled some students to access school education. Those students could not otherwise attend school education (b) it contributed to the communication among students as well as between students and teachers, and (c) it increased the ICT use by teachers. Despite these benefits mentioned, teachers stated that distance learning is not a substitute for ordinary classes and face-to-face learning.

Keywords: distance education, Covid-19 pandemic, Greece, teachers, primary schools, benefits

1. Introduction

The rapid developments and the suspension of the school units' operation due to the Covid-19 pandemic, indicated distance learning as the only plausible solution for the educational and pedagogical process to continue (Foti, 2020). Under these circumstances, teachers' diligence and goodwill to provide psychological support to their students were the main stimulus for this effort (Orhan & Beyhan, 2020). On the other hand, the Greek Ministry of Education, despite the lack of preparation, immediately tried to organize synchronous and asynchronous learning platforms and helpdesk. Later on, it offered some tablets and laptops to students as well as a free of charge access to national online platforms, data, and software (Eurydice, 2021).

In general, distance learning has a long history. As early as the 1970s, Moore and Holberg (cited in Bozkurt, 2019) attempted to define distance education as a method that allows learners to access teaching materials through printed mechanical and/or audiovisual media and devices (e.g., mail, books, radio, television, telephone, computer, satellite) (Keegan, 1993).

Starting in 1990s, when the first e-learning platforms appeared in the field of education, distance education has been an object of study for many researchers (Arnesen, Hveem, Short, West & Barbour, 2019). Gradually, distance education was perceived as a pedagogical process different from conventional education methods, while it also provides educational opportunities to a wide range of citizens with different social, economic, cultural and personal characteristics (Karagianni & Anastasiadis, 2009).

According to UNESCO's definition (2002), distance school education is the distance education offered to students and/or adults at primary and/or secondary level. A key feature of distance education is its ability to function independently of the conventional (face-to-face) education, but also in a complementary way to it (Anastasiou, Androutsou & Georgalas, 2015 · Karagianni & Anastasiadis, 2009 · Niemi & Kousa, 2020 · Vasala, 2005). When it functions independently of the conventional education, students attend recognised educational institutions that provide comprehensive curricula and award diplomas equivalent to conventional institutions (Vasala, 2005). In the case of distance education's complementary function, learners mainly attend courses in conventional schools. However, at the same time students are given the opportunity to choose courses from other educational organisations and as a result, their curriculum becomes more inclusive with different thematic modules, while the students are able to participate in a variety of school networks (Niemi

& Kousa, 2020 · Vasala, 2005). The development of supplemental distance education has taken place in the context of the modern pedagogical approach that highlights the multidisciplinary approach to knowledge (Matsagouras, 2002, as cited in Anastasiadis, 2017).

Distance learning is addressed to people who are interested in training or getting in touch with something different from their main area of study. It can be divided into 3 categories, based on the description of the learning process: (a) synchronised, (b) asynchronised and (c) blended learning. However, the means used to achieve the educational goals set are the same. These three categories are only differentiated based on how the educational activities alternate during students' learning process (Alhumaid, Waheed, Zahid, & Habes, 2020).

Distance learning is a distinct type of education, which cannot be considered a substitute for traditional/conventional education (Niemi & Kousa, 2020). Because the transition to distance education happened suddenly, educators had not been able to perceive it as a method and a distinct field of education, but as a complement to face-to-face education (Orhan & Beyhan, 2020), which also requires different skills (Baran & Correia, 2014).

1.1 Distance Learning Contribution to Education

Within lesson planning, the teachers act as knowledge mediators (Foti, 2020). Teachers offer their guidance to students who acquire and develop a discovery learning method (Niemi & Kousa, 2020). Saykılı (2018) presents distance education as a form of education, which gathers both the students and the teacher in a common online environment, where the teacher functions as the mediator-facilitator in the learning process. This environment offers planned and structured learning experiences and facilitates students and teacher interaction as well as the exchange of teaching materials.

Distance learning involves flexible scheduling, individualized feedback, and the option of an individualized pace of learning for each student, thus it provides an alternative to students who otherwise struggle in the conventional classroom (Ge, 2012 · Repetto, Cavanaugh, Wayer & Feng, 2010 · Tsai, 2009). Distance education gives students the chance to function independently and incite them to the route/course of self-learning (Lionarakis, 2005). The various audiovisual media used by distance learning motivate students to creatively study the material and facilitate the dissemination of knowledge, attitudes and skills without demanding students' physical presence (Bozkurt, 2019 · Schlosser & Simonson, 2002). According to teachers, during the covid-19 pandemic students were activated and showed more responsibility concerning their learning. The time saved due to the circumstances of distance learning was helpful for the lesson to be more enjoyable (Van Der Spoel, Noroozi, Schuurink & Van Ginkel, 2020).

All the above explain why many training programmes on distance learning were offered to teachers during the last decades. These programmes included the preparation of strategies and techniques required for distance education. Other educational programmes for teachers focused on the use of new technological tools and on students' educational needs (Manousou, 2004).

1.2 Distance Learning Contribution to Communication

The use of online tools may have positive results in improving school curriculum, but also in improving the communication between teachers and students (Marteny & Bernadowski, 2016). On the other hand, the roles of both teachers and students become more complex, as their interaction extends beyond the classroom's context (Makrodimos, Papadakis & Koutsoumpa, 2017). Cooperative learning activities among trainees create bonds of cohesion within a group of students (Argyriou & Koutsouba, 2011, p. 656). However, distance education challenges teachers so as to find more attractive ways to develop and strengthen students' social bonds. For example, teachers may choose to enforce students' participation in online platforms so as to share their experiences or to be engaged in other social activities (Trust & Whalen, 2020). The challenge and the goal of distance education is to create an environment developing a sense of belonging to students, not letting them to feel isolated. (Trust & Whalen, 2020). In parallel, teachers offer support to their students and along with their mentors or advisers contribute to students' success (Marteny & Bernadowski, 2016). Since distance learning requires individual work, it is necessary to empower both teachers and students. The aim in distance education is to restore the relations between teachers and students because teamwork plays a key role in their bonding (Niemi & Kousa, 2020). Teachers should also manage to modify/adjust to distance learning all the educational elements they use i.e., teaching methods, teaching time, teaching materials. Moreover, teachers should control on social and psychological factors that may affect their own motivation. (Rasmitadila et al., 2020).

During covid-19 pandemic, the transition to distance education disrupted children's social life. Students who were unable to access the digital classroom experienced loneliness (Popyk, 2021) or feelings of isolation (Dereshiwsky, Papa & Brown, 2017), and lack of active interaction (Babinčáková & Bernard, 2020). Contrary to the above, some opinions attested that students who experienced negative emotions in the conventional classroom were positively expressed concerning the distance classroom (Anastasiadis, 2017).

According to studies, teachers believe that the use of technology, and especially internet, may lower students' critical

thinking and downgrade the educational process to a mechanical transmission of information (Moisi, 2020). This potential threat can be exceeded if the focus is placed on the interactions taking place in distance education (e.g., between the teacher and the students, among the students, between the student and the teaching materials) (Moore 1989 · Hillman et al., 1994, as cited in Lindner J.R., Clemons, Thoron & Lindner, N. J., 2020). In fact, the student's interaction with the teaching material is the easiest to be enhanced (Dooley, Lindner, & Dooley, 2005). The content of the teaching material can attract learner's interest. When the learner successfully interacts with the material, this contributes to the learning process (Karagianni & Anastasiadis, 2009). Efforts are made to ensure that the teaching material created for distance learning to be student-centred, allowing a better interaction with the students. (Anastasiou et al., 2015).

1.3 The Contribution of Distance Education to ICT Use

Distance school education can be supported by the new teaching methods (Makrodimos et al., 2017). ICT contributed to tools' development (e.g., Moodle), offering plenty of educational opportunities to learners. ICT enables students to collaborate, communicate and interact with a large database (Papastergiou & Antoniou, 2003). In this way, ICT contributes to students' experiential participation (Efthimiadou & Sansoniou, 2015 · Papanikolaou & Manousou, 2019).

Distance education results in a more interactive learning, enhances collaboration, while individualized teaching is supported (Duffy & Bruns, 2006 · Huffaker, 2005 Siemens & Tittenberger, 2009). There are new learning environments created that are attractive to students and easy to navigate (Nielsen, 2003, as cited in Kofteros, Triantafyllidis, Skellas, & Krassa, 2009). These environments provide access to a large amount of information (Papastergiou & Antoniou, 2003, as cited in Anastasiou et al., 2015), attracting students' interest (Moisi, 2020).

The online platforms promote students' active learning and interaction. Thus, they ultimately contribute to the acquisition and assimilation of any new knowledge by the students (Arapoglou, 2010, p. 29).

When a teacher chooses the appropriate technological means, he/she enables his/her students to cultivate their skills that refer to the use of technological means and, teaching material, to the accomplishment of tasks, conducting research, etc. In this way, teacher encourages the students' active self-learning. (Lionarakis, 2003, 2005). It is critical for young learners to use ICT as it is indicated in the kindergarten curriculum (Foti, 2020).

A challenge teachers had to face in distance education is their technological expertise on effectively using online environments. However, it is highly important since it contributes to the successful implementation of educational activities (Conrad & Donaldson, 2011 · Ko & Rossen, 2017 · Watson, 2020). It was documented that only a small percentage of teachers allocated their time to organise their teaching activities in a more innovative than traditional way (Giovannella, Passarelli & Persico, 2020). Despite this fact, they consider that their teaching and subsequently the learning process is constructed on a learner-centred way (Moisi, 2020).

After reviewing the existing relevant literature (e.g Arnesen, et al, 2019 · Bozkurt, 2019 · Dereshiwsy et al, 2017 · Foti, 2020 · Giovannella, et al, 2020 · Niemi & Kousa, 2020 · Orhan & Beyhan, 2020 · Rasmitadila et al, 2020), the researchers formed the research question as follows. Also, the researchers took into consideration their own experience in different positions within the Greek education system.

The research question investigated was: *“What are teachers' opinions concerning the benefits of distance learning implementation, during the Covid-19 pandemic?”*

2. Method

The method of qualitative approach was chosen, because it allows the participants to express themselves freely and clearly, without restrictions or second thoughts. Through this method, a researcher has an in-depth understanding of human action and behaviour, taking into consideration that social processes and conditions determine human behaviour (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007).

2.1 Participants' Characteristics

The participants of the study were teachers – both teachers of general subjects and specialty teachers- working in primary schools and kindergartens in the 13 Educational Prefectures of Greece.

In Greek primary schools, teachers are teaching general subjects (e.g., Literature, Maths, Physics), while specialty teachers teach subjects such as Music, Physical Education, Arts, ICT and Foreign languages. The participants' characteristics are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. The participants' characteristics

| Variable | N | % |
|---|-----|------|
| Gender | | |
| Male | 119 | 23.1 |
| Female | 396 | 76.9 |
| Their position at school | | |
| Executives (Head teacher, or coordinators of education) | 61 | 11.8 |
| Teachers (in a primary school or in a Kindergarten) | 350 | 68.1 |
| Special education teachers | 50 | 9.7 |
| Specialty teachers | 54 | 10.4 |
| Highest degree earned | | |
| Postgraduate diploma studies | 289 | 56.1 |
| University degree | 226 | 43.9 |
| Education in ICT use | | |
| Basic | 195 | 37.9 |
| Diploma | 280 | 54.4 |
| None education | 40 | 7.7 |

Concerning the Prefecture the participants worked, 49.5% (n=255) worked in the Prefecture of Western Greece, 11,1% (n=57) worked in the Prefecture of Eastern Macedonia & Thrace, 8.5% taught in the Prefecture of Peloponnese (n=44), 8,2% (n=42) taught in the area of Attica, 7,4% (n=38) taught in the Prefecture of Thessaly (7.4%). Moreover, 4,9% (n=25) of the teachers participated were allocated in the area of Central Macedonia, 3,5% (n=18) in Crete, 2.9% in the Ionian Islands (n=15), 1,6% (n=8) in the area of Epirus, 1,4% (n=7) in the Prefecture of South Aegean, 0,4% (n=2) in the area of North Aegean and the same percentage of teachers worked in Central Greece (n=2, 0.4%) and in Western Macedonia (n=2, 0.4%). In other words, the teachers' sample inquired was representative of the Greek teachers' population throughout the country.

2.2 Sampling Procedure

This research was carried out from May to June 2020. In February 2020, a pilot study was conducted to detect and eliminate any possible flaws. The pilot study was conducted on a sample of 30 primary school and kindergarten teachers who were attending a postgraduate university program at the time.

Greece is divided in thirteen educational prefectures, each of which is under the supervision of a Regional Director of Education. The sample used in the study was randomly selected, as the electronic questionnaire was sent through the Directorates of Education to the school units all over Greece. Then, the same email was forwarded to teachers' emails. Because of the covid-19 pandemic, teachers' professional emails had been updated. So, all emails with the questionnaire reached their recipients who made a choice to answer it or not.

2.3 Material and Methods

The questionnaire consisted of nineteen (19) questions: two (2) open-ended questions, two (2) closed-ended questions (choice between numbers of statements) and fifteen (15) multiple choice questions (based on a five-point Likert scale). This article presents the participants' responses to an open-ended question of the questionnaire, concerning the benefits of distance education implementation in Greek primary schools during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The validity of the study was ensured based on the depth and breadth of the data collected. Furthermore, the participants voluntarily participated in the research and the researchers, given their subjectivity, had no interest that could possibly hinder the research (Winter 2000, as cited in Cohen et al., 2007, p. 133). The reliability of the research was based on its validity, the design of the methodology, and on the complete and accurate description of the data collection process.

Also, there was an articulated presentation of the data analysis method, while the researchers were closely associated with the education sector. Thus, two of the researchers undertook the task to check if the data recorded were properly used (Lincoln, 2001). Ethics rules were also followed: participants' anonymity was ensured, while all the information regarding the research and its goals was provided. Moreover, the participants were informed that they had the right to withdraw their participation at any stage of the study (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

2.4 Analyzing of Data

For the analysis of the data collected, the method of thematic content analysis was selected (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The method consists of 6 phases. At first, the data were carefully studied, then they were coded, and the first thematic categories were organized. Afterwards, the thematic categories were re-examined, the thematic units were confirmed and finally the analysis was performed. At last, teachers' answers were divided into three groups. The first group includes

teachers' answers stating that a benefit of the distance education implementation was accommodating both students and teachers. In the second group of answers, teachers consider the student-teacher interaction as the main benefit of distance education. In the third group of answers, teachers underlined as main benefit the fact that teachers acknowledged the importance of ICT use in the teaching and learning process. The answers were not categorised according to teachers' socio-demographic characteristics (i.e., gender, position in school, degree, ICT use), as the research focused generally to teachers of all expertise, working in primary education.

3. Results

The findings of the thematic analysis on teachers' answers follows, based on the three categories mentioned above: (a) mean of accommodation, (b) communication, and (c) ICT use. It should be also noted that in many cases, teachers gave more than one answer.

3.1 Distance Education as a Mean of Accommodation in the Learning Process

A significant number of teachers' responses (133) referred to distance education as a facilitating factor in the learning process for both students and teachers. Also, it was highlighted that distance education circumstances enabled the access to education for some students who otherwise could not attend conventional face-to-face school classes.

Some of teachers' statements follow:

«The lesson is available at almost any time, it does not require learner's physical presence. It is a flexible form of education that gives the freedom to both instructors and learners to organise their own personal programme with a lower cost. People living in isolated areas and/or people facing health problems such as mobility issues can benefit from distance education so as to be educated, trained and specialized »

«It ensures the chance of being educated for people who cannot be educated face-to-face in person (due to the long distance from the educational institution, lack of time, health problems, and/or – at last- due to the lockdown)

«It gives to each student the option to work at his/her own pace, at his/her own time and place, based on his/her capabilities (asynchronized distance learning) »

"Students coming from remote areas or with special needs can participate. These students cannot participate in a lesson otherwise, since they cannot take part in a face-to-face learning process »

«Distance education adjusts the time of knowledge assimilation to each student's personal needs. Also, it permits each student to manage his/her education at his/her own pace »

«The trainee can attend the lesson in his/her personal space with a small cost compared to face-to-face education. An access to education is given to specific groups (e.g., mothers, people with mobility problems and to people living in remote areas »

«A flexible form of education based on the learner's personal space and time and with low cost »

«Studying takes place in the students' personal space, on their space time and on their own pace »

«Distance education for teachers shows many positive aspects, especially because it does not require teacher's relocation and entails flexibility in terms of time »

«It is a flexible form of education that allows to both teachers and students to organise their own personal schedule »

«There is a flexibility concerning the time lessons take place »

«You don't waste your time in transport to work, while you work when you are available »

«It provides to the teacher a greater flexibility, since his/her working hours are more flexible, and he/she can successfully combine professional and family obligations »

«Distance education serves as a way of facilitating the student so as to study the educational material without any time pressure »

«The students are familiar with the distance education environment. There is an easy access from any device connected to Internet. There are no restrictions on when someone can access the asynchronized e-learning educational tools. »

3.2 Communication

Another positive aspect of distance education as indicated in teachers' responses (73 responses) was the communication

and the interaction among the students as well as with the teacher. They also underlined the distance education benefits on a cognitive, psychological and social level. Some of their statements concerning distance education were:

«We learn to interact by exchanging ideas and developing topics »

«It brings students in touch with the educational process, especially for psychological reasons »

«It helps us to keep in contact with our students, especially in difficult times like the pandemic »

«It is a way for the communication between teachers and pupils to continue beyond the school program »

«It enables a personal contact with the student who can receive individualized advice and other suggestions »

«When attending a school class is impossible, distance education is the only solution so as the student to be kept in contact with the school process »

«Distance education gives the opportunity to the students to maintain contact with their lessons, their teacher and their classmates (in the case of the synchronized education) »

«It enables a greater interaction with the educational material »

«In case of emergency, distance education helps the students to be kept in touch with the educational process »

«From a positive perspective, distance education ensures students' interaction with the educational material »

«By means of the synchronized and asynchronized teaching, there was a direct and indirect interaction of the students with their teacher and their learning content »

«It facilitated us not to be out of touch with our personal work, our personal obligations and interests »

3.3 ICT use

A majority of the teachers' participating in the research answers (96) reported that distance education implementation resulted in an update of their knowledge on ICT use. They managed to use new teaching resources which they found them as both interesting and beneficial for their students, especially in contemporary digital era. Some of their statements were, as follows:

"The development of digital literacy and multi-literacy"

"Teachers' self-improvement on ICT use"

"Acquiring new knowledge on ICT"

"Introduction of new tools that helps both students and teachers to update their technological knowledge"

"Distance education provides more educational tools helping the teacher to build a lesson more attractive to student"

"There are many and more attractive ways of education"

"To organize the teaching material on another form"

"Alternative and modern ways of learning"

"Distance education is equivalent to the use of multimedia (image, sound), the speed of communication, the children's excitement, because a new "tool" (computer) is used in education. It serves as a means of communication, when students' physical presence in the classroom is not possible"

"A positive aspect of distance education is that keeps the students active within the learning process, when the conditions do not permit face-to-face education"

"The students acquire more skills"

"It helps children with an audio-visual and/or emotional perception of things"

"Students get excited, because the lesson becomes more enjoyable and interactive"

"It prepares the student for the information society"

"It was an opportunity for me to teach my students how to use the internet to their advantage"

4. Discussion

A significant number of teachers' responses (133) referred to the flexibility of distance education concerning the organisation of students' personal schedule based on their needs (Lionarakis, 2001, as cited in Manousou, 2004 · Vasala, 2005), on their time available (Niemi & Kousa, 2020 · Van Der Spoel et al., 2020), on their pace of learning, (Ge, 2012 · Tsai, 2009). Distance education takes place at students' personal space, with a lower cost since no transport is

needed or their physical presence (Bozkurt, 2019 · Schlosser & Simonson, 2002 · Van Der Spoel et al., 2020). This flexibility due to distance education is also attested as a benefit for the teachers.

Moreover, many teachers pointed out that distance education enabled the access to the educational process for students living in remote areas (Anastasiou et al., 2015) and/or facing health problems. In such difficult circumstances such the covid-19 pandemic, those students would not have the opportunity to receive education (Vasala, 2005). Also, the teachers participating identified as a positive aspect of distance education the fact that it allowed students to maintain a contact with the educational process on a cognitive and social level (Niemi & Kousa, 2020). Distance learning can act as a facilitator of the learning process, though mentoring and the communication between teacher and students are of utmost importance (Burdina, Krapotkina & Nasyrova, 2019). Research before the covid-19 pandemic has shown that a good teacher–student communication contributes to students’ engagement and higher achievement (Fredericks & Alexander, 2021 · Kraft & Dougherty, 2013). During the covid-19 pandemic, technology enabled the development of students’ participatory learning through their interaction among themselves, with the teacher and the educational material. In this way, the effects stemming from the lack of school education were minimized (Dooley et al., 2005 · Efthimiadou & Sansoniou, 2015 · Karagianni & Anastasiadis, 2009 · Marteney & Bernadowski, 2016 · Mpanou 2001 · Papanikolaou & Manousou, 2019 · Papastergiou & Antoniou, 2003). The ICT use in the educational process must be student-centred and enhance the students’ interaction with the teaching material. In critical times, maintaining a contact with students enhances their psychology, since they are able to exchange ideas and discuss issues of concern (Papastergiou & Antoniou, 2003). Based on teachers’ responses, the teacher’s role as counsellor is highlighted, because the teachers stated that they were called upon to offer personalized advice on issues concerning the students (Ge, 2012 · Makrodimos et al., 2017 · Rasmitadila et al., 2020).

Lastly, teachers clearly mentioned that the distance education resulted in their digital literacy (Makrodimos, et al., 2017). Now, they understand that they may use many more technological educational tools so as to organise and present their teaching material (Lionarakis & Lykourgiotis, 1999 as cited in Karagianni & Anastasiadis, 2009 · Manousou, 2004 · Papastergiou & Antoniou, 2003). They indicated that ICT use made teaching materials more stimulating and interesting to students (Karagianni & Anastasiadis, 2009 · Moisi, 2020 · Trust & Whalen, 2020). Students are more involved in the lesson because of the ICT use (Anastasiou et al., 2015 · Duffy & Bruns, 2006 · Huffaker, 2005 · Lionarakis, 2005 · Niemi & Kousa, 2020 · Siemens & Tittenberger, 2009 · Van Der Spoel et al., 2020), while they are prepared for the Information Society (Lionarakis, 2005) when using technology at their advantage, when developing critical thinking skills and when knowing how to avoid the dangers hidden in it (Schlosser & Simonson, 2002). Even before the pandemic covid-19, research has shown the ICT use impact on students’ achievement and wellbeing (Aldama, & Pozo, 2016 · Braslauskiene, Smitiene, & Vismantiene, 2017). Apparently, the ICT use must follow the pedagogical methodology and accommodate each student’s characteristics (Marteney & Bernadowski, 2016).

5. Conclusion

The present study is one of the first ones in Greece focusing on the benefits of distance education implementation that followed the outburst of covid-19 pandemic and the suspension of the school units’ operation. It emphasizes some good points of distance learning as well, both for students and teachers, that it may drives to more flexible schedule of the education, although teachers do not believe that distance education can substitute face to face learning. The implementation of this distinct type of education was the only way for the educational process to continue (Foti, 2020). The transition from the face-to-face education to the distance education was sudden. Teachers’ goodwill and an effort to psychologically support their students were the main motivations behind this attempt (Orhan & Beyhan, 2020).

The method of random selection was chosen. 515 teachers of all expertise, working in primary education, participated in the research from all over Greece. They answered to a questionnaire, part of which was an open-ended question concerning the distance education benefits. Based on the data qualitative analysis, teachers acknowledge the three basic benefits of distance education. According to their answers, the distance education teaching method serves as a facilitating factor in the learning process. It can also help students experiencing difficulties in accessing face-to-face education. Additionally, distance education contributes to a better communication and interaction between the teacher and his/her students as well as among the students themselves. In this way, students benefited from distance education in a cognitive, psychological and social level. Moreover, teachers themselves practiced their skills regarding the ICT use as well as the new teaching material. It is this material that ensures more benefits for the students. Distance education is not comparable to the face-to-face teaching, but it can offer chances for some students who could not have access in education otherwise. It can also help students to keep in touch with the school process when communicating with their peers and their teachers by using ICT tools.

Another open-ended question focused on teachers’ views about the difficulties or risks of distance education. Although it is not the subject of this paper, it can be mentioned that teachers stated the lack of interaction and communication, that

teaching methods are teacher-centered, the creation of inequalities between students because of the lack of technical infrastructure, the lack of teacher in service training, and finally issues of personal data security (Manesis, Vlachou, Aravantinou, Barmpertaki, & Kanouri, 2022, forthcoming).

Future studies could study teachers' opinions on distance education benefits by means of close-ended questions and a qualitative data analysis. What is more, a comparison with the benefits of face-to-face education could be made, while students' opinions would be also asked on this topic.

One of the limitations of this study is that teachers could not connect the benefits of distance education with the type of distance education implemented by them, that is synchronised, asynchronised and blended learning teaching method. Moreover, teachers seem not to be able to evaluate the benefits of distance education compared to face-to-face teaching. Lastly, it should be mentioned that this study took place shortly after the distance education implementation happened. This fact may affect teachers and their opinions concerning the distance education benefits that they are able to recognize.

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Notes

Note 1. The research is part of a larger project about teachers' perceptions on educational changes during the pandemic Covid-19 in Greece. The first and the second author designed and implemented the research, while the other authors contributed to the analysis of the data and assisted in co-authoring theory and research outputs.

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