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**Synchronous and Asynchronous forms of Distance Learning in the University's Department of English Language and Literature: Case study in Three Universities: South East European University in Tetovo, Goce Delcev University in Shtip and Sinergia University in Republic of Srpska**



**Abstract:** - We live in a technological era of changes. Language acquisition is not resistant to them. In order to adapt to the new world, education needs to be modified. The biggest modifications are happening right in front of our eyes, from new instruments for improving traditional instruction to planning instruction not bounded to time or place. Having physical classroom is no longer necessary. The virtual world, the new reality, offers numerous choices. Distance learning is growing quickly. What academicians and scholars are discussing is the dichotomy between synchronous and asynchronous forms of distance learning. The first cannot happen anytime, but it can occur anywhere, there is temporal restriction. The latter can occur at any time, place, and speed. There are no restrictions on time or location. The success rate of English language learners in both types of distance education as well as the teachers' and students' preferences for each type are the key concerns for this paper. Three tools are utilised to achieve this: lesson observations, teachers' interviews, and the Online Self-Regulated Learning Questionnaire (OSLQ), which is designed to distinguish between synchronous and asynchronous forms of DE. The study indicates that teachers favour synchronous learning, whereas students favour asynchronous learning.

**Keywords:** interviews, lesson observations, remote education, questionnaires.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Every aspect of human life has changed with the beginning of the digital age. The field of education has not remained resistant. Since materials may be supplied by mail, distance education has existed since the turn of the 20th century. Due to the growth of the Internet, there are now many educational institutions worldwide that provide both distance learning and traditional classroom instruction. Up to now, research papers have addressed the differences between these two kinds of education, brick and mortar vs. distance education.

However, everyone who took part in education had no choice but to fully commit to distance learning form, when it proved to be the only possible way for completing the school year. Technology has been adopted by teachers and students worldwide in order to accomplish their goals and avoid a gap in education of one or more academic years. This was possible, but further research is still required to determine the degree of success.

This study is crucial because it will help address some of the current problems that professors are facing. It will analyse the distinction between synchronous and asynchronous forms of DE that exists. While significant research has been done on this new subject, there are still some unanswered questions. Given the amount of experiences to be gathered from the two academic years of pandemics, this is a topic that may be further expanded and addressed. We intend to provide answers to some of the contemporary issues that affect everyone involved in the educational field today by carrying out the planned research. In any case, DE is here to stay, and we aim to identify the best practices that will support its continued development.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

It is a fact that we live in a new era. However, the idea of digitalising education is not new, even though it is throughout the pandemics that our nation switched from traditional brick-and-mortar classrooms to virtual ones. Many universities now offer the option to study remotely thanks to the development of technology and the Internet.

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Courses offered via distance learning are not new to society. As a result, there has been much research done on this subject, and conclusions can be drawn from them.

Barnard et al. (2009) pointed out that the number of students who opt for online or blended learning is increasing worldwide. Hence, there appeared the necessity to develop an instrument that measures self-regulation of learning in an online environment, and explaining its importance in that type of learning. Their study compared the self-regulating ability of two groups of students, the first consisting of students attending online courses and the second consisting of students attending blended or hybrid course format. They developed the instrument Online Self - Regulated Learning Scale (OSLQ) for that purpose. It was a 5-point Likert scale instrument. Their studies confirmed the acceptability of the questionnaire to measure self-regulation of student in online and blended learning as the results show that more and more students opt for this form of education instead of traditional one.

Kirmizi (2013) explored the self-regulating habits of distance education students at the English language and literature department of Karabuk University. The research was directed to six dimensions of self-regulated learning such as Goal Setting, Environment Structuring, Time Management, Time Seeking, Self-Evaluation and Metacognition. The first five dimensions were measured using the Online Self-Regulated Learning Scale (OSLQ) and the sixth dimension with the Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (MSLQ). The results from the study suggested that students were highly successful in Goal Setting and Metacognition, which are very important aspects of distance education. Regarding the other four aspects, students were moderately successful, which is not bad, but it is an important indicator of what should be the further focus of attention.

Bernard et al. (2004) examined the quality of quantitative research regarding distance education from 1985 to 2002. In their examination, an interesting point was made where DE was actually perceived from the point of view of the synchronous and asynchronous methods of communication. It was rightfully determined that the synchronous method of DE, using merely teleconferencing, was similar to classroom education, where students worked as a group, communicating at designated time and place. The asynchronous method of DE, on the other hand, did not include group communication, so every student was able to work individually, on their own, at any time or any place using email or CMC as a means of communication. In this research, the synchronous method was marked as group-based, while the asynchronous method was marked as individual-based. This study further suggests that the following studies should be conducted within the DE, not outside the DE form. It means that the well-known dichotomy of synchronous and asynchronous methods of DE is a valuable issue for additional research. This study additionally points out that the outcomes are higher regarding the asynchronous method of education. However, the dropouts are higher as well compared to the synchronous method of education where retention rates are grater.

Murphy et al. (2010) speak about the experience of using synchronous and asynchronous tools in high school education in Canada in the so-called virtual schools. They point out that there are no temporal or geographical constraints regarding asynchronous tools which include email, discussion forums, social media as blogs or wikis as well as learning management systems as WebCT, Moodle or Blackboard. On the other hand, there are temporal constraints regarding synchronous tools which include text-based chat, analogue telephone, digital telephone such as Skype, videoconferencing, audioconferencing, whiteboards and application sharing with the opportunity to be recorded for later asynchronous use. According to this study and the experience of 42 high schools in Canada, students preferred the asynchronous form for learning in DE, since it is a self-paced, independent and self-regulated form of studying.

Nilles (2002) speaks about synchronous and asynchronous education measured through the eyes of the students and their satisfaction. Even though the terms were clear back then, there were several obstacles to DE, especially the synchronous form, such as fear of microphone, fear of camera and not that great Internet connection. Despite everything, the level of student satisfaction was high since they no longer needed to have an educational opportunity within close driving proximity. Furthermore, adult learners were especially satisfied with the convenience and flexibility of asynchronous education, as they were able to keep their job and still progress educationally. The negative sides of asynchronous education were emphasized as being heavily text-based, with the possibility to become tiresome and cause eye fatigue. Another downside to the asynchronous form was student isolation, since interaction, reflection and discussion cannot be best achieved. Hence, communication was assumed to be the priority. These issues are not present so much in the synchronous form. Nevertheless, in the end it is concluded that it is not technology that is so important, but the students, and these courses should be carefully planned to achieve the most difficult task - involvement of learners.

Another interesting research was done by Perveen (2016), who researched several questions, such as what the perceptions of learners are about the different synchronous and asynchronous e-language learning activities in the virtual environment, if asynchronous learning hinders or facilitates English language learning and if blend of the two forms of distance education is the best solution for English language acquisition. The research was carried out at the Virtual University of Pakistan. According to the research, the asynchronous form of learning is suitable for working on written assignments, quizzes, or participation in discussion boards. On the other hand, the synchronous form of education is suitable for oral discussions, activities that require immediate solution or feedback from the teacher. The research demonstrated that asynchronous learning does not hinder English language learning as it sometimes functions even better, for example when students are given ample time to think and produce language in different activities and it also decreases the affective filter. However, the major conclusion in this research was that a blend of the two forms of DE is the best solution, as collaborative language learning can happen in both forms of DE. Hence a blend of synchronous and asynchronous forms is ideal for teaching-learning language.

Moreover, a recent research that examines students' preferences regarding distance education is the one by Lyn & Gao (2020), which investigates the sense of community and the perspectives of synchronous and asynchronous online courses in China. The authors explain that there was not an actual distance education in China before the outbreak of Covid-19, as it was a common practice in many top world universities. The measuring instrument was an adapted Classroom Community scale based on questions using a 5-point Likert scale including statements in six categories: interaction, classroom environment, course quality, learning progress, technology issues and distraction, taken separately for the synchronous and the asynchronous forms of DE. According to the answers, students have stronger sense of community in interacting, discussing and sharing ideas in the asynchronous form of DE. The results are unexpected as we are aware that there is greater and immediate interaction in the synchronous form of DE. The reason for this outcome might be related to the national characteristics of the students, they might be shyer or introvert and they express themselves better if the communication is not happening face-to-face, with cameras turned on, but it is delayed as in a discussion forum.

To topic of synchronous and asynchronous forms of DE was discussed two decades ago in Clause's (2001) doctoral dissertation one of the questions that the author paid attention to is what factors facilitated success with the synchronous and asynchronous delivery mode of interaction. Regarding the synchronous form of DE, it was the interactive discussion and the fun and humor added to it, which made online course interesting according to students. When speaking about the asynchronous form of DE regarding essays or other assignments, having time at their disposal was one of the factors that contributed to greater success of the student. In the end the author draws the conclusion that a mixture of both types of education functions the best for an online environment.

Lowenthal et al. (2021) carried out a remarkable research on university professors' perceptions regarding the synchronous form of distance education before and during COVID-19 as opposed to the asynchronous form, which was mostly in written form. The research instruments included structured and semi-structured surveys with 200 professors and interviews with 18 professors who were willing to take part. The research began in the summer of 2020 when it was evident that education would continue merely in its distance form. The responses of the professors were different. For the largest part, they liked the convenience of video-conferencing compared to the option to commute. Some of them even held the opinion that they would continue with this type of education when the pandemic was over. Others even implemented synchronous courses a long time before the pandemic. However, there were a lot of respondents that experienced troubles with constant turning off the cameras, some of them experienced "Zoom fatigue" and felt the urge to return to traditional classes once the pandemic was over. There was one interesting point made that synchronous video-conferencing is not fair to females who have household obligations at the same time and students that live in multi-generations households and have peace only at nights, hence the asynchronous form is more suitable for them.

As we can witness ourselves, the topic of distance education is very popular nowadays. It is something that still needs to be researched and conclusions need to be drawn on how to proceed in the future. Some of the aspects have been researched so far. We can benefit from previous research and contribute to the field with our own that could help academic staff especially with the decisions that are to be made for the inevitable digital education before us.

### III. METHODOLOGY OF RESEARCH WORK

#### *Aims of the research*

The goal of this study is to add to the growing amount of knowledge on distance education, which has been a problem for academics and professors around the world for the above mentioned two years. The goal of this study is to compile as much information as possible about synchronous and asynchronous distance learning. We will determine whether one kind of DE is preferred or if both are equally successful by examining the data from questionnaires, interviews, and lesson observations.

The study will concentrate on how well students manage their time in the two types of distance learning and how professors perceive the two formats. Additionally, lesson observations will be included to demonstrate how productive and receptive skills are learnt through the use of distance education tools. Finally, conclusions regarding the most practical combination will be made. Considering that things have changed and we are all back in traditional classroom settings, advice on how to organise education going forward will be provided; still, DE in one way or another is here to stay.

#### *Research questions*

As previously indicated, the goal of this article is to provide answers to a number of research issues that affect people who are impacted by the condition of education both now and in the future, particularly students who specialise in English language studies. Therefore, the goal of the paper to provide answers to the following questions:

1. Which form of DE—synchronous or asynchronous—produces better results?
2. In terms of DE, which type—synchronous or asynchronous—is favoured by teachers on one hand and students on the other hand?
3. Do part-time students participate more in real-time lectures of DE compared to those in traditional form of education?

#### *Research participants and instruments*

The primary objective of this research is to conduct a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the experiences of university students who participated in the distance education process during the 2021–2022 academic year. In particular, we are focused on the professors and students in the English language and literature departments within the philology faculties of two universities located in the Republic of North Macedonia and one located in the Republic of Srpska. We aim to compile information on their experiences and draw conclusions that will help programmes for studying English language and literature develop in the future.

About thirty students from each university's English language and literature department compose the 94 participants in our study. More specifically, thirty students from Sinergia University's Department of Anglistics in the Republic of Srpska, thirty students from the Faculty of Languages, Cultures and Communication at South East European University in Tetovo, and thirty students from the Faculty of Philology at Goce Delcev University in Stip are involved in the study. They all completed already existing questionnaires and contributed to the quantitative part of the study.

For this study, five professors from each university were interviewed. This indicates that fifteen professors in all participated in the study. They contributed to the qualitative analysis in this study. Additionally, Goce Delcev University's two professors of Contemporary English Language 6 gave permission for their Microsoft Teams classes to be observed for the purpose of this study. Since there were 20 students in each of their classes, we observed 40 students in all. These lesson observations are part of the qualitative results we obtained.

Hence, we used three instruments for our research. Our first instrument includes two questionnaires for students, adapted from the Online Self-Regulated Learning Questionnaire (OSLQ) (Barnard et al., 2009) and modified to give answers for the synchronous form of DE as well as the asynchronous form of DE. The survey consists of 5-point Likert scale questionnaire and the students assess how well they use a certain skill or strategy or how often they perform a certain task with answers from 1 to 5, 1-never to 5- always. The questionnaires consists of six subfields: Goal Setting, Environment Structuring, Task Strategies, Time Management, Help - Seeking and Self-Evaluation. The second instrument is an interview with professors at the English language departments of the above-stated universities. There are eight open-ended interview questions and the professors had to provide answers regarding both forms of distance education, their experience, the positive and negative aspects, their preferences,

and students' participation, the behavior of regular and part-time students. The third instrument for this research is lesson observations of Contemporary English Language 6 lessons, in the spring semester of the academic year 2021/2022, when all the lectures were realized using the tools for distance education. We observed the lessons on Microsoft Teams at Goce Delcev University in Stip, at the Faculty of Philology.

*Research procedure*

As we have previously mentioned, we used three instruments for our research. While participants of the Department of English language and literature at the Faculty of Philology at Goce Delcev University responded to a printed version of two questionnaire, the students from other two Universities received an online version of the questionnaires, created using Google Forms, to which they responded online as well. Afterwards, the mean value for the use of each strategy, as well as the mean values for each subfield and each form of DE were calculated. Thus, a comparison of the experiences of the students from these three institutions, two in our country and one abroad gives us some answers regarding students' opinions and beliefs about the two forms of distance education. The second instrument, the interview with professors was conducted face-to-face with the professors from Goce Delcev University in Stip. The Google Meet tool was used to conduct interviews with the professors from SEEU in Tetovo. The Zoom Platform was used to conduct interviews with professors from Sinergija University. Their responses give us a clearer idea of their views and beliefs regarding distance education and the two forms of distance education they were required to put into practice.

The third instrument, the lesson observations were conducted on the Microsoft Teams Platform at Goce Delcev University – Stip, since there the whole process of education was still in a distance learning form. This instrument gave us the opportunity to observe distance education in practice.

IV. RESULTS

*Results of the first instrument*

The two tables below show the results from the questionnaires answered by the students of the three universities. The tables are shortened versions, not all strategies are given, but only the mean value is calculated, for each subfield, for each University and the general mean value for the type of distance education.

**Table 1.** Online Self-Regulated Synchronous Learning Questionnaire (OSLQ) (Barnard et al., 2009)

Researched Universities	UGD	SEEU	Sinergia
Goal Setting- mean score	3.34	3.57	3.52
Environment structuring – mean score	4.19	4.06	3.73
Task Strategies – mean score	3.09	3.42	3.1
Time Management – mean score	3.03	3.59	3.33
Help-Seeking – mean score	3.53	3.26	3.15
Self-Evaluation mean score	3.64	3.58	3.09
Mean score for each University in the six subfields	3.47	3.58	3.32
Total mean score for synchronous form of DE			3.46

From the table about synchronous form of DE, we can conclude that the subfield of Environmental Structuring has the highest mean scores of all six subfields, which is above 3.5. for all three universities and it makes the participants high users of the strategies for that subfield. All results taken into consideration, the subfield of Task Strategies has the lowest mean score, below 3.5. for all three universities. Hence, participants are moderate users of the strategies in that subfield.

**Table 2.** Online Self-Regulated Asynchronous Learning Questionnaire (OSLQ) (Barnard et al., 2009)

Researched Universities	UGD	SEEU	Sinergia
Goal Setting- mean score	3.38	3.7	3.27
Environment structuring – mean score	4.04	4.09	3.72
Task Strategies – mean score	3.29	3.63	3.24
Time Management – mean score	3.03	3.69	3.12
Help-Seeking – mean score	3.36	3.27	3.42
Self-Evaluation mean score	3.77	3.63	3.34
Mean score for each University in the six subfields	3.48	3.67	3.35

<b>Total mean score for asynchronous form of DE</b>	3.5
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For the asynchronous form of DE, the subfield of Environment Structuring has again the highest mean score of the six examined subfields, which is above 3.5 for all three universities and it makes the participants high users of the strategies in that subfield. The subfield to Time Management has the lowest mean score in this form of DE, with the results below 3.5. for all three universities. It makes the participants moderate users of the strategies in this Subfield.

#### *Results of the second instrument*

From the conducted interview on eight open-ended questions we can draw several conclusions. Professors have different experience in general teaching and also in the distance education teaching, for most of the questions their responses are similar. However, the most experienced in online teaching are professors from SEEU. They all try different things to engage and motivate students to learn and be active. All in all, the professors made classes more interactive, including quizzes, visual aids, sounds and role-plays, which was possible with the tools for distance learning. Moreover, they paid special attention to assigning participation points and requesting cameras on all the time, for the purpose of not losing the eye contact. They also managed to grade students' assignment timely merely using asynchronous distance education tools. Some of the professors also tailored the activities to suit the learners with different learning styles. Regarding their preference for the two forms of DE, although they hold the opinion that one cannot function without the other, they prefer the synchronous form DE as it mostly resembles the traditional classroom. They all use similar tools for synchronous and asynchronous forms of DE, such as Microsoft teams, Google meet and Zoom for the synchronous form and Moodle or Google classroom for the asynchronous form, regarding what their university asks them to use. Regarding the general participation rate, most professors agree that it is the same as traditional classes, although some hold the opinion that students hide easier in online environment. Hence, the results of the interviews are similar. The difference is only in the participation of the part-time students as some professors have a history in offering DE courses for part-time students, while others have noticed greatest participation of part-time students after the pandemics, because it was the first time they offered such courses.

#### *Results of the third instrument*

As we explained previously, we observed four lessons of Contemporary English Language 6, for each skill- reading, writing, listening and speaking on the Microsoft Teams platform. As we noticed, the lessons were ongoing without any obstacle. Students' cameras were on, so professors were able to see the facial expressions. The tool offers various options as to share desktop, play recording, raising hands to answer, creating different groups for different tasks, either manually or automatically and so on. There is an option to download the attendance register. The professors used different tasks to motivate and engage students like video sharing, vivid discussions. They also tried to accommodate the assignments to the different learning styles. Also, participation of part-time students was noted, as most of them could not join the traditional lessons due to work or travelling, but when they had instructions a click away, they used the opportunity. The lesson observation proved us that distance education is possible if the professors are willing to engage in it.

## V. DISCUSSION

As we discussed previously, distance education has existed for so long, when postal services made it possible. Sending studying material to students that lived in remote areas marks the beginnings of the distance education. However, the technological expansion transformed it to something normal and not strange at all. Hence, attending the whole process of education on desktop computers, laptops, even mobile phones is not new. We made the above-mentioned research to find out how successful is this distance education, especially regarding its two forms, synchronous and asynchronous.

We will firstly discuss the results obtained from the questionnaires. From the research conducted, we cannot see significant difference between the use of strategies in synchronous and asynchronous form of DE. There is no significant difference on University level as well. From the research conducted on three Universities, "Goce Delcev" University in Stip, South East European University in Tetovo and Sinergija University in the Republic of Srpska, the results we obtained are mostly similar, like they follow a similar pattern of behavior. The subfield that dominated the most in the two forms of DE as well as on the three Universities is the subfield of Environment Structuring. This leads us to conclude that students mostly care about the place of learning regarding distance

education and they are proficient in choosing the right place to avoid distractions, the place where they feel comfortable and efficient in learning. With the results above 3.5, students in both forms of DE in all three Universities are high users of the strategies for Environment Structuring. However, the results from the other subfields that go from 2.5 to 3.5 demonstrate that students in two forms of DE in all three Universities are moderate users of the strategies. If they become more proficient in those strategies, their success in DE will be greater.

The first research question regarding which form of DE gives better results acknowledges that even though the difference is very tiny, asynchronous form of DE gives better results. Being present on the lessons that resemble a lot to real-life traditional face-to-face lessons was considered the key to success, compared to learning on your own, without being guided. However, considering how students master the strategies in the 6 subfields for synchronous and asynchronous form of DE separately, we were faced with the fact that they better handle the asynchronous form of DE. Even though the results are similar, there is no significant difference, the asynchronous form is still dominant. If the synchronous form was as successful as it supposed to have been, then the distinction would have been obvious in favor of the synchronous form of DE.

The question that we now ask ourselves is why we are faced with such a situation, having the newest technology, with numerous options at our disposal. Moreover, having such students that are digital natives, born with technology, being dependent on it much more than we are, it is quite strange that we obtained such results. One of the possible issues might be the behavior of the professors. They are the most important part of the education, the driving force. They are the ones who organize the lectures, the variety of activities. They are supposed to motivate the students and teach them strategies to better cope with the learning process. Even if the education is fully online, the job of the professors remains the same. Having full technological equipment, with all possible options to organize interesting and real-like lectures, we do not see why this was not possible. However, another issue might be the students and their not serious approach to responding to the questionnaires. They might have been demotivated to respond fairly to it, since they are adults and they receive no reward for doing so. Moreover, since the questionnaires are anonymous, we have no insight into who responded and how. Nevertheless, those issues are not something we can prove, hence we have to consider the responses as they are and draw conclusions from it.

Our opinion is that synchronous form is a valuable substitution to traditional, face-to-face learning. The technology offers many opportunities. The teachers can have different forms of work, especially important for language teaching. They can record lectures, check attendance with the click of the mouse. They can share the screen, the exercises and the presentations. Students as well can share their work. Assignment can be given. Lectures can be enriched with audio and video materials. There are options for hand-raising, asking for clarification and so on. Everything that resembles a real lecture. They have as many opportunities as they like. The only important thing is to take a serious approach to online teaching and try to use the most of what you can as a teacher. There are no limits to teachers who love their job and who are real professionals.

If we compare our research to other similar researches, we can draw similar conclusions. Kirmizi (2013) investigated the ability of self-regulation of students in distance learning. This study points out that there are subfields in which students are very good, but in most of the subfields they are moderate users. These results are similar to our research, which indicates that there are fields in which further work can be dedicated, so the students can become more proficient distance learners. Another research of Bernard et al. (2004) points out that according to the quantitative measures, the outcomes of the students are higher in asynchronous form of DE, which was confirmed with our research as well. According to this research and our research, students are more successful in asynchronous form of DE. Maybe students need more time to get accustomed to the synchronous form of DE. As the results for now show, they are more successful in the asynchronous version of DE, which is not bound by time, it can happen anywhere and they have a lot of time to think and learn on their own.

The second question, which consisted of two parts turned out actually as we thought. It was logical to assume that students, being young adults, would prefer education which is not bound by time or place. Having the time on their disposal and the ability to learn with their own pace is something that young generations would definitely opt for. Our research has confirmed that assumption, but not with very high distinction. Moreover, in this part of the research, we paid attention to the strategies that are preferred and not preferred by students. We can conclude that there is some similar pattern in all three Universities. Maybe this is due to the fact that students in the closest region behave in the same way. From the analysis we conducted, we can again draw a conclusion that all students behave the best in synchronous and asynchronous form of DE in the subfield of Environment Structuring. The highest grades in all three Universities are given to strategies from Environment Structuring, which emphasizes the

importance of the studying place for the students in distance education. The lowest grades on the other hand received strategies in the subfield of Help-Seeking or Self-Evaluation. This means that students are not eager to seek help from the instructor or the peers as well as they are not very enthusiastic for arranging face-to-face meetings with the peers and comparing their work, their strengths and weaknesses. If the use of these strategies was higher, especially for asynchronous form of DE, where students do not have any contact with the peers, maybe their preference would have been different or maybe even the difference would be bigger and more significant.

If we compare our research to other researches we can also notice similarities. For example the research of Murphy et al. (2010) confirms the students' preference of asynchronous form of DE since it is self-paced, independent and self-regulating. It is not surprising that students, being mature enough in their higher education, would prefer education that does not interfere with their everyday activities. They would vote for education without constraints and limitation that depends solely on them and their ability of self-regulation. However, this entails a huge responsibility for the students and if they are not self-aware students, they will fail in this type of education. The research of Lyn & Gao (2020) acknowledges our research findings as well. According to this research, students are more inclined to asynchronous form of DE as they feel a greater sense of community there.

The second part of the second question proved that teachers prefer the synchronous form of DE. Teachers, who are mostly very responsible professionals, prefer to have the eye-contact of the students, to be in touch, to be there for them, to engage in interactive teaching where students are not just inactive observers, but active participants. Speaking of Distance Learning, this is only possible in the synchronous form of DE, which is bound by time, fixed and scheduled. The preference of teachers for this form of distance learning was not surprising at all. By conducting interview with the teachers, we paid closer attention to how teachers handle distance learning, how they engage and motivate students, how they assess them continuously, if they pay attention to the different learning styles of the students in the online environment. Lesson observations also contribute to this fact. All these aspects are very important for us because they concern the distance learning in general. We research how distance learning functions in practice, hence all comments from the Professors are very valuable.

The research of Perveen (2016) has actually demonstrated that the best solution for DE is a combination of synchronous and asynchronous form of DE. As it is pointed out that asynchronous form is better for quizzes, writing assignments and discussion boards. On the other hand, synchronous is dominant for oral discussions and getting immediate feedback. However, asynchronous form does not hinder language acquisition but it improves it. Hence, the combination of both works the best. The Doctoral dissertation of Clause (2001) proves again that the best solution for DE is the combination of the two forms, since the humor and fun added to synchronous form of DE is what makes it not boring for the students. Having time at disposal on the other hand, for working on essays or other writing assignment is what makes asynchronous form of DE desired. Hence, the solution is the combination of both and some of the Professors of our research suggested.

The last question was related to the participation rate of students in distance education, mainly the participation rate of part-time students in the synchronous lessons, compared to the traditional face-to-face lessons in the traditional classrooms. This question was related to the last interview questions, when we asked the teachers about their experience regarding participation rate of part-time students in synchronous form of DE. We know that part-time students are part of the asynchronous form of DE, since they download their learning material from the available learning platforms and study on their own. This is not a new information. But with the presence of synchronous form of DE, we wanted to exploit the moment and see if anything is changed regarding the part-time students. According to some Professors, nothing has changes since their University has already organizes synchronous classes for part-time students and they participated in them. This sounds like a good idea for the Universities that do not offer such option for part-time students. However, the research shows that in the rest of the Universities, part-time students grabbed the moment to be part in actual lectures, video-conferencing with the teachers as well as the peers. Some of the Professors even organized afternoon classes to meet the schedule of the part-time students as their willingness to participate was obvious, but they did not have the opportunity before due to distance, working schedule etc.

The research of Nilles (2002) confirm the satisfaction of part-time students with distance education in general. They no longer needed an education with a close driving proximity. What is more, they were able to keep their jobs and still progress academically. This is also related to our research, as we wanted to prove how convenient is distance education for part-time student. Moreover, synchronous form of DE is even more important for part-time students



as they finally had the opportunity to have a real contact with the Professors and their peers and that contact is very important in any education.

We can draw a conclusion that even though we considered different researches, with different groups of participants and instruments, we still obtained some similar results. We can conclude, make comparisons and define a pattern of behavior. We can speak about benefits from both forms and we can discuss what steps should be taken by those involved in the process of education.

## VI. CONCLUSION

Our everyday life is constantly changing. In order to keep pace with modern living, with all the challenges as well as opportunities it brings, we need to know how to adapt to the changes and how to use most of them. Education is the driving force of society, hence teachers are the most responsible for creating capable individuals, because the current students, especially in higher education are our future and the future of the next generations. Cutting the links to the traditional brick-and-mortar classroom and turning to virtual classrooms was additional challenge for the teachers. How they approached the situation, what they learned from it, if they used it for personal benefit and growth in their profession is yet to be seen. What remains clear is that distance learning is here to stay, regardless of the situation. Being able to learn not bound by space and sometimes by time seems appealing to the new generations of students. Modern times call for modern forms of education and it is up to the teachers whether they accept the challenge and progress or remain unwilling to accept the changes.

In the end, we can conclude that we live in a versatile society. Every aspect of our lives has changed, especially in the last two decades. Technology has gone so far that offers numerous opportunities. Education is a field that was not resistant to the challenges and technological advances. Indeed, nothing is the same, from using different tools to enhance traditional face-to-face lesson to organizing education without temporal and geographical constraints. The ability to offer education for people living on the other side of the world is very appealing. Borders are no longer the limit. Moreover, being able to offer real-life courses without gathering students in the same traditional classroom is something we could have not imagined several decades ago. Hence, we should draw conclusions from the best practices and plan future education. We may be back to our brick-and-mortar classrooms, but distance education in some form will stay. We must prepare ourselves for the generations of digital natives, maybe this form of education will be our future.

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