

# DISTANCE EDUCATION PROGRAMS AND GREEK UNIVERSITY INSTRUCTORS: DEFINING AND ASSESSING THEIR TEACHING STYLES PREFERENCES

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## Abstract

COVID19 has completely reengineered the ongoing educational programs. A great shift has taken place in the current educational system. Educators, instructors, professors, teachers are called to offer their knowledge through online systems and virtual classrooms. Students are no longer face to face with their instructors. Instead, they may be thousands of kilometers away. Therefore, the educational system has moved from its traditional form and caused changes to the requirements of the instructors that take part in distance learning educational programs. The current research agenda investigates distance educational objectives, distance educational students and their needs, adult learning theory, human and organizational limiting factors, implications for instructors. The current paper focuses on clarifying a number of teaching styles and then defining the ones that are adopted by Greek Instructors. An investigation has taken place during the last year to collect data regarding instructors and distance education within Greece. In order to collect relevant information a questionnaire was designed, and a following survey took place. The sample of the Greek University Instructors is equal to 158 responses. The responses were appropriately inserted into a database and were classified either as quantitative or qualitative data. The number of questions that the instructors answered was equal to 100. The survey was disseminated through email. The language of the survey was Greek and succeeded in collecting data regarding distance education experience, teaching styles, and the participants' personality characteristics. The findings of the current research indicate that instructors carefully choose to set priorities and then stick to them. Instructors like to be creative and spark creative ideas to students. They welcome team teaching and like to experiment with new teaching methods. Finally, this study will try to correlate the profile of the instructors with their preferences.

Keywords: Distance Education, University Instructors' Characteristics, Teaching Styles, Questionnaire Survey.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Distance learning is gaining momentum during recent years. Especially due to COVID pandemic distance education had become the standard approach to learning. These events increased the demand for distance education and created numerous developments in all aspects of distance education. Infrastructure, software, educators and learners have created a new reality in the context of knowledge sharing. Our paper focuses on the human factor of this educational approach and more specifically on instructors. On this end instructors feel that this distance learning approach is something new and need time to adapt to new requirements. In this context a number of relevant studies have taken place to provide feedback and insights on the subject.

A study focused on faculty perceptions of online learning in undergraduate sport management programs. This study explored the perceptions of Sport Management faculty in an effort to ascertain their thoughts on online delivery and which courses they feel are conducive to online formats [1]. Results suggest that most faculty have negative views of online learning and feel face-to-face options are more appropriate in the curriculum [1]. The next paper explores the challenges online teachers face in establishing a teaching personality. Providing students with purposefully varied interactions can help students to develop a more realistic perception of who the teacher is, creating a stronger sense of a teacher's presence, and solidifying a strong bond between student and teacher, all of which can help the student succeed. For online teachers, the relationship with students through shared experiences can do more

to enhance a student's perception of a teacher than could any action on the part of just the teacher. To help students establish a sense of the teacher, creating a course that communicates in ways other than just written text provides the opportunities necessary for all students-not just students who are excellent readers of written text [2]. The following paper's findings demonstrate a relatively high students' satisfaction with their distance learning. At the same time, there are some controversies in the ways, in which students evaluate the effectiveness of their distance learning compared to other education patterns. Being positively motivated to take an online course of study, they, nevertheless, face a number of challenges while learning at a distance. These involve low self-organization, lack of control on the instructor's side, lack of effective interaction and sense of isolation, which obviously decrease their satisfaction with online learning experience. These findings prove the thesis that to be highly successful and effective distance learning requires considerable attention and commitment on the part of faculty. The role of faculty is manifested in the way the instruction is designed and delivered as well as in the faculty ability to incorporate relevant course content with the emphasis on student support, interaction and assessment techniques as these are the key issues in effective distance learning [3].

The purpose of the next research is the identification of the most efficient approaches to the organization and management of distance education in the field of humanitarian education with the use of Internet technologies and the development of practical suggestions for their implementation and improvement. One of the strategic directions of computerization of education in the Republic of Kazakhstan is the creation of high-tech automated system of monitoring, analysis and management of educational institutions. It should provide an efficient documentary interchange and support of system database of strategic data corresponding to the reporting forms of educational institutions. Qualitative monitoring of the objective state of the education system as a whole and for each area of production and educational activities should also be provided. A key role in the field of information and education is given to pedagogical managerial staff. In accordance with the strategic objectives, it should be focused on the widespread use of IT-technologies in their professional activities. The courses on the methodology of education, based on IT-technologies, are recommended to be introduced in the curriculum of teacher training in secondary, technical and vocational, and higher education [4].

Semradova and Hubackova (2016) managed to capture different levels of responsibility and the tendencies in the perception of teacher responsibility in connection with the changing concept of education and with the use of ICT in distance education. In their essays students - future teachers express their opinion that teacher responsibility in connection with the implementation of ICT into the educational process is the same or higher if the teacher is also the author of a distance education course. The surveyed teachers assume that responsibility in traditional face-to-face teaching is generally higher than in distance education [5].

The objective of the following paper is to examine the quality of online academic courses using a multidimensional assessment of students' activities and perceptions, using educational data mining and an online questionnaire. The assessment focused on four aspects: instructional, communication, course workload and overall learning experience. The course instructional model was found well-structured. The video lectures, assignments and materials designed for the online course were the most used and contributing learning resources. However, the number of students who entered the video lectures decreased as the course progressed. Low activity was found in the discussion forums. Students perceived the course workload as low. Overall, the learning experience was high and the students were highly satisfied [6].

In this study, factors related to instructors' satisfaction in e-learning systems have been investigated in order to develop a basic model called "E-Learning Success Model for Instructors' Satisfaction" which is related to social, intellectual and technical interactions of instructors in whole e-learning system. "E-Learning Success Model for Instructors' Satisfaction" could be a basic guide for e-learning designers, online instructors and policy makers to understand interaction and usability outcomes related to satisfaction of instructors. It should be mentioned that satisfaction is one of the parameters that affect usability of the system which also directly affect instructors' performance. In this study, factors related to instructors' satisfaction in e-learning systems have been investigated. In the current research a base guideline called "E-Learning Success Model for Instructors' Satisfaction" is provided. This model is based to social, intellectual and technical interactions of instructors. E-learning designers, online instructors and policy makers can benefit from such a model in order to understand interaction and usability outcomes related to satisfaction of instructors. In conclusion, the proposed model, could be a starting point to show the related factors that could be independent variables in order to investigate this model with empirical based studies [7].

Finally, the types of instructors were defined by Sternberg and Zhang [8]. These types are classified and included, in the following list:

- a. A monarchic teacher
- b. A hierarchic teacher
- c. An oligarchic teacher
- d. An anarchic teacher
- e. A local teacher
- f. A global teacher
- g. An internal teacher
- h. An external teacher
- i. A liberal teacher
- j. A conservative teacher

The current paper is presenting its methodology, then follows the results and finally the conclusions of the study are presented.

## 2 METHODOLOGY

The current paper focuses on clarifying a number of teaching styles and then defining the ones that are adopted by Greek Instructors. An investigation has taken place during the last year to collect data regarding instructors and distance education within Greece. In order to collect relevant information a questionnaire was designed, and a following survey took place. The sample of the Greek University Instructors is equal to 158 responses. The responses were appropriately inserted into a database and were classified either as quantitative or qualitative data. The number of questions that the instructors answered was equal to 100. The survey was disseminated mainly through email. The language of the survey was Greek and succeeded in collecting data regarding distance education experience, teaching styles, and the participants' personality characteristics.

The questionnaire includes 100 questions, as mentioned earlier and It includes four discrete parts:

- Participant Profile
- Distance Education Experience
- Learning and Teaching Styles
- Personality Characteristics

An SPSS Database was created. Corresponding parameters were created for the data to be inserted in the SPSS database. The sample of the Greek University Instructors is equal to 158 responses. The average age of the participants is fifty years, and the mean number of semesters of distance learning education taught is equal to 6,7 semesters. The sample consists of 37,3% female participants and almost 50% were male participants. A number of participants didn't provide an answer and a small number replied with other. Regarding the marital status 64,6% are married, while 16,5% are single. 87,3% of the instructors are working in State Government Universities, while 1,3% in Private Colleges. From the participating instructors 24,7% are certified for distance education programs while 56,3% are not certified. Regarding the level of computer expertise the majority, equal to 32,3% assess themselves as average to good. In addition, the majority of the participants (32,9%) consider distance learning as an average efficiency method of education. Regarding the preference of among face to face and distance education, the overwhelming majority (76,6%) prefer face to face educational methods. In distance education and online courses most instructors prefer smaller groups of students (<30 Students).

The teaching style preferences selected in the current study included a number of statements, where the instructors were called to suggest how much those statements described themselves as an instructor. These sentences are in complete correspondence with the classifications presented in the introduction (a to l). The range was the following (1 not at all to 5 completely) [8]:

- a. *I have a preferred way of doing things, and I do not much like to do things in other ways.*
- b. *I carefully set priorities and then stick to them.*
- c. *I do not easily allocate class time so that the most important things receive the most coverage.*
- d. *I am not so organized in my teaching style, but I am very creative, and I spark creative ideas in*

my students.

- e. *I tend to be very detail - oriented in lecturing.*
- f. *I tend to be very general in my teaching and concentrate on the big picture rather than the details.*
- g. *I am not so enthusiastic about team teaching and prefer to teach on my own.*
- h. *I welcome team teaching or other opportunities to collaborate with fellow instructors.*
- i. *I like to teach in new ways and to try new teaching techniques.*
- j. *I like to teach in traditional ways, and I am hesitant to try new ways of teaching.*

In the following sections, descriptive analysis has taken place and the respective results are presented.

### 3 RESULTS

According to the questionnaire survey and the descriptive analysis the study highlighted the following responses that received the greatest percentages and correspond to the above-mentioned teaching preferences:

- a. 28,5% responded with moderately to their adoption of monarchic teaching style
- b. 41,8% responded with **very** to their adoption of **hierarchic** teaching style
- c. 41,8% responded with **very** to their adoption of **oligarchic** style
- d. 24,7% responded with moderately to their adoption of anarchic teaching style
- e. 26,6% responded with moderately to their adoption of local teaching style
- f. 36,1% responded with moderately to their adoption of global teaching style
- g. 35,4% responded with moderately to their adoption of internal teaching style
- h. 24,1% responded with moderately to their adoption of external teaching style
- i. 35,4% responded with **very** to their adoption of **liberal** teaching style
- j. 31,0% responded with slightly to their adoption of conservative teaching style

The graphs (Figures 1-3) describing the teaching styles that received the response “**very**” are presented below:

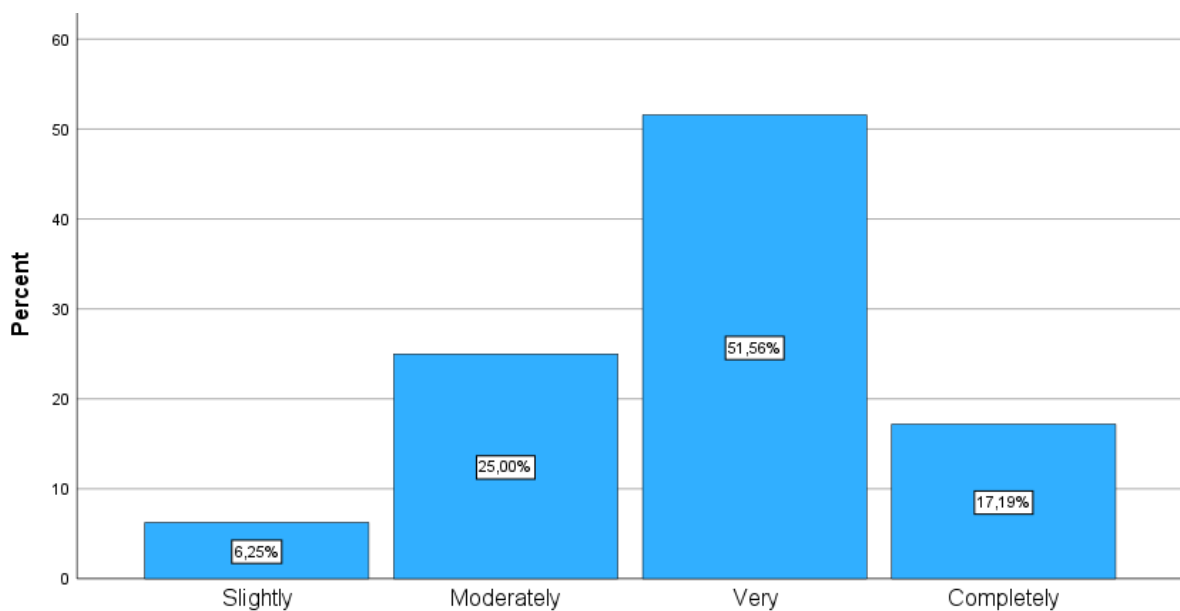


Figure 1. *Instructor that carefully sets priorities and then sticks to them.*

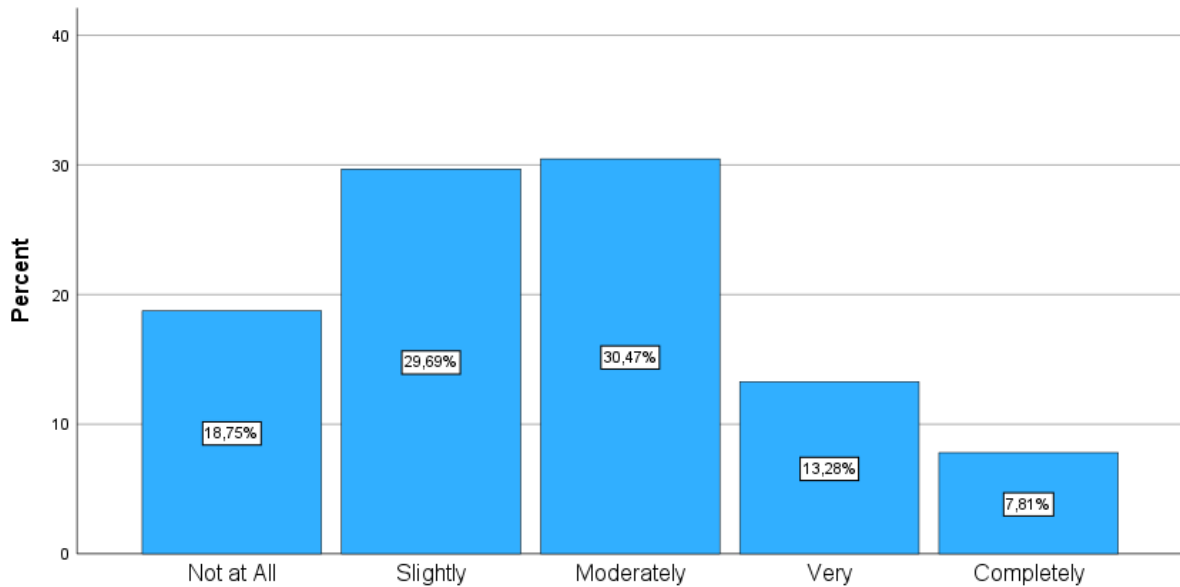


Figure 2. *Instructor that does not easily allocate class time so that the most important things receive the most coverage*

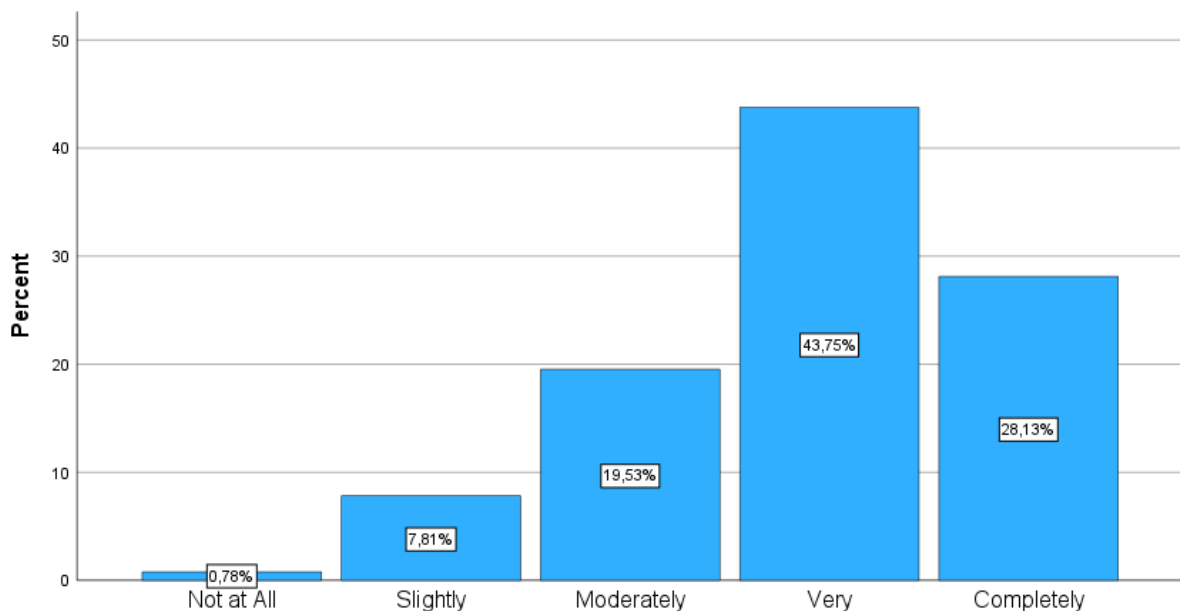


Figure 3. *I like to teach in new ways and to try new teaching techniques.*

## 4 CONCLUSIONS

The educational environment and approach has changed significantly in the last years and especially after COVID pandemic. This reality has changed the requirements needed by instructors, who try to adapt to the new reality. The specific paper has tried to identify the most preferred teaching styles. Ten teaching styles were presented to a corresponding questionnaire to instructors with sufficient experience. The most preferred teaching styles could be summarized in the following statements:

- *I carefully set priorities and then stick to them.*
- *I do not easily allocate class time so that the most important things receive the most coverage.*

- *I like to teach in new ways and to try new teaching techniques.*

In other words, the preferred teaching styles, could also be stated as follows:

- **Hierarchic**
- **Oligarchic**
- **Liberal**

The above mentioned teaching styles are the ones receiving most of the attention of the instructors. It seems that instructors like to plan the course / lecture flow, on their own personal way, assign the portion of time to each scientific field and are willing to experiment with new teaching methods. The last statement is very compatible with distance learning. These findings are useful for younger instructors, providing long - distance learning in order to become more efficient in their effort to provide knowledge.

In the current paper, ten specific teaching styles were presented to instructors. The responses collected were equal to 158. The questionnaires were collected during the last six months of 2023. Responses mainly originated from university faculty.

As part of future research, additional teaching styles could be considered, and the sample of responses could increase. The research could be continued in the coming years. It is a good opportunity to collect data from instructors of various levels of education. Furthermore, educational organizations could consider these data and use them to train young educators or even select the most appropriate ones.

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