

Teachers' Perspective on Online Learning during COVID-19: A Case Study in Greek Primary Schools

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The global pandemic due to COVID-19 has changed the way of teaching, and Online Learning came to the forefront. The aim of this study is to investigate primary school teachers' perceptions on Online Learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. A case study was conducted with 14 teachers from 5 Primary Schools in Greece. A thematic analysis of the semi-structured interviews showed six themes: Motivation, Support, Strategies, Benefits, Challenges and the Future of Online Education. First of all, teachers showed their initial stress, progressively their high motivation and, at the end, their tiredness. In addition, teachers perceived as important the support from different groups of people, including students' parents, colleagues, the school principal and family members. They also used a variety of instructional strategies for the implementation of Online Learning, such as the use of asynchronous online platforms, the use of educational videos and internet-based learning materials. Moreover, teachers perceived that they have benefited from this experience by digitising new teaching material and by maintaining the learning process. However, they have faced a considerable number of challenges, such as lack of resources, technical problems, lack of training and difficulty in the participation of all the students. Finally, teachers were uncertain about the future of Online Learning without denying its possible use as a complementary tool. To conclude, implications for practice and for future research are discussed.

Keywords: perceptions, teachers, primary education, online learning, pandemic COVID-19

Introduction

The continuous development of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) has transformed the concept of Distance Learning and Online Learning (Ravanelli & Serina, 2014). The situation of pandemic caused by the SARS CoV-2 [COVID-19] brought to light the relevance of Online Learning as the main mode of transmitting knowledge worldwide. This has forced educators to transform their lessons into online and to digitise all teaching materials in a short period of time (Barbour et al., 2020; Huang et al., 2020; Van der Spoel et al., 2020).

The short transition period from Traditional to Distance Learning created an urgency for the professionalisation of teachers in terms of digitisation (Van der Spoel et al., 2020), with an emphasis on increasing teachers' digital competence. Undoubtedly, the implementation of Online Learning, which appeared as an

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emergency solution, provided an opportunity to further cultivate and deepen the digital skills of the educational community. This could contribute to the formation of a suitable framework for the development and consolidation of digital culture, which is expected to have a positive impact on family and social life (Stachteas & Stachteas, 2020). Likewise, towards this perspective the Agenda of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation [UNESCO] is defined, whose objectives have been hampered due to this unexpected emergence of COVID-19 (Portillo et al., 2020).

It has become clear that Online Learning is a modality that has gained much relevance. It is necessary to investigate in detail its implementation so that these enquiries allow us to advance in the knowledge of this type of teaching and that it would be carried out with guarantees of quality and success in Primary Education schools (Fauzi & Khusuma, 2020). Teachers have an important role in a learner's life and thereafter their perceptions play a crucial role in promoting effective teaching, especially when using technology. Therefore, this empirical study can help to bring solutions to Online Learning that might be carried out in Primary schools in the future.

Most of the studies found on this topic bet on the quantitative paradigm (Astuti & Solikhah, 2021; Babinčáková & Bernard, 2020; Catalano et al., 2021; Fakhrunisa & Prabawanto, 2020; Fauzi & Khusuma, 2020; Grivas, 2020; Lapada et al., 2020; Liakopoulou; 2020; Montenegro et al.; 2020; Niemi & Kousa; 2020; Nurliani et al., 2021; Portillo et al., 2020; Stachteas & Stachteas, 2020; Todd, 2020; Van der Spoel et al., 2020). For this reason, the originality of the research presented here is due to the qualitative nature of the methodology employed. Specifically, this study used a qualitative design to investigate Greek teachers' perceptions of online teaching during the pandemic.

Literature Review

Online Learning during COVID-19

The sudden closure of school activity came as a shock to the entire education community (Affounh & Burgos, 2021). Many institutions maintained the teaching and learning process using online education, opting to cancel all face-to-face instruction to help prevent the spread of the virus (Barbour et al., 2020). Researchers and education practitioners saw Online Learning as a unique opportunity to support both students and institutions, as it fills the gap left by conventional education (Vlachopoulos, 2020).

It is important to note that because Online Teaching was implemented during a period of crisis, it is geared more towards an "Emergency Remote Teaching" which differs in essence with Online Learning (Hodges et al., 2020). Forces beyond the control of educators made them to employ a completely different method than they were used to (Wang et al., 2021). However, under these circumstances, it is very problematic to compare Face-to-Face Learning with Online Learning (Hodges et al. 2020).

The Case of Greece during the Pandemic

According to UNESCO (2021) and data collected from the global monitoring of school closures, Greece maintained a total school closure for 32 weeks, a number similar to most Eastern European countries and one of the highest in Europe. Furthermore, Liakopoulou (2020) highlighted that the Greek government adopted a rather technocentric approach and did not provide training for teachers and coordinators. Teachers from all over the country were invited to teach online, without being adequately prepared for it. Technical support was mainly offered by ICT teachers in each school and later support was given through online platforms (Grivas, 2020).

Also, it should be noted that there were no properly designed teaching materials or adequate logistical and networking infrastructure and technological equipment in the schools (Amorgianioti, 2020). In addition, a complex process was chosen for the initiation of asynchronous learning during the 2019-2020 school year. Later on, during the 2020-2021 school year, more emphasis was placed on synchronous Distance Learning through the Webex platform, however, other obstacles emerged, such as personal data protection and/ or copyright protection, including the fact that these legal issues were not explained in detail to the members of the school community (Liakopoulou, 2020).

Perceptions of Teachers

Various research that found globally, addresses Primary and Secondary teachers' perceptions of Online Teaching during COVID-19 (Aditya, 2021; Amorgianioti, 2020; Astuti & Solikhah, 2021; Babinčáková & Bernard, 2020; Catalano et al., 2021; Fakhrunisa & Prabawanto, 2020; Fauzi & Khusuma, 2020; Grivas, 2020; Lapada et al., 2020; Liakopoulou, 2020; Lie et al., 2020; Montenegro et al., 2020; Niemi & Kousa, 2020; Nurliani et al., 2021; Orhan & Beyhan, 2020; Portillo et al., 2020; Putri et al., 2020; Rasmitadila et al., 2020; Shamir-Inbal & Blau, 2021; Sokal et al., 2020; Stachteas & Stachteas, 2020; Todd, 2020; Van der Spoel et al., 2020). Organisational and technological challenges perceived by teachers were highlighted, such as identifying motivating activities, grading student assignments, providing feedback on student work, and the challenge of better coordination with peers by teachers, principals and parents (Fakhrunisa & Prabawanto, 2020; Putri et al., 2020; Todd, 2020). Likewise, Rasmitadila et al. (2020) highlighted students' distraction at home, problems with their participation and maintaining their enthusiasm and motivation towards subjects.

On the other hand, the familiarisation time given to teachers was very short, so many felt that it was a temporary solution. They appeared not to be prepared at the beginning of the pandemic (Astuti & Solikhah, 2021). The technological expertise of teachers was very low, as there were teachers who were not proficient with applications, technological tools and computers (Rasmitadila et al., 2020). Orhan and Beyhan (2020), found that most of the educators perceived Online Learning as a technology-oriented process rather than a new teaching model, and

therefore maintained traditional teaching techniques and material development during distance classes.

Other studies also mentioned the positive aspects of the new teaching experience and its benefits. Some teachers focused on the pedagogical value of Online Learning (Stachteas & Stachteas, 2020; Fakhrunisa & Prabawanto, 2020) and others on the importance of support from colleagues, parents and principals (Rasmitadila et al., 2020). Whilst others focused on the new pedagogical, technical and digital skills they acquired highlighting though the need for further training, the absence of which may increase the perceived challenges (Shamir-Inbal & Blau, 2021).

Last, some studies demonstrated teachers' attitudes, as well as their motivation, fatigue and perceived level of stress caused by this transition to Online Learning (Sokal et al. (2020); Fauzi and Khusuma, 2020). Teachers' previous experience and personal characteristics play an important role in their expectations of this teaching modality (Van der Spoel et al., 2020), as well as deficiencies in their digital competence training (Portillo et al., 2020).

Methodology

Research Problem and Questions

The global pandemic forced educational institutions to adapt to remote learning. In Greece, primary school teachers faced the challenge of moving from traditional teaching to online teaching. Faced with this problem, it is convenient to know and analyse the perceptions of teachers towards this new teaching model, this aspect is a priority in order to evaluate its effectiveness and identify areas for improvement that will allow us to move forward in these educational models.

Research should not simply launch into an exploration without presenting reasons for it (Thomas, 2013). It is about telling what the project will achieve. In particular, this study pursues the following objectives:

General Objective:

- To identify the perceptions of Primary Education teachers in Greece about Online Teaching implemented during the pandemic by COVID-19.

Specific Objectives:

- To investigate the motivation of Primary Education teachers in Greece.
- To examine teachers' perceptions of the school's instructional strategies and personal strategies.
- To explore the technical support available during Online Teaching, according to the perspective of Greek Primary Education teachers.

- To identify Primary Education teachers' perceptions of the benefits and challenges of using Online Teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- To determine the possible change in perceptions between the 2019-2020 academic year when the pandemic started and in the 2020-2021 academic year.

As Silverman (2014) suggests when studying this type of behaviour, it is often best to start without a hypothesis, keeping your research question simple. According to the stated objectives, and the theoretical framework of reference, the research question posed in this study is:

What are the perceptions of Primary School teachers in Greece about the Online Teaching modality that was implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Design and Participants

A non-experimental design was implemented using the qualitative paradigm. Semi-structured online interviews were conducted involving 14 teachers from five public schools in South and West Attica, Greece that used online teaching during the school years 2019-2020 and 2020-2021. Convenience sampling strategies were applied in the sample selection process of this study. In addition, in order to achieve a more diverse sample, gender, age, years of teaching experience, level of ICT training were taken into account by trying to investigate participants with different demographics, levels of education and experience (see Table 1).

Table 1. Participants' Profile

		Frequency	%
Gender	Men	3	21.4%
	Women	11	78.6%
Age	Less than 30	1	7.1%
	31-40 years	5	35.7%
	41-50 years	4	28.6%
	51-60 years	4	28.6%
Teaching Experience	5-10 years	1	7.1%
	11-15 years	4	28.6%
	16-20 years	4	28.6%
	21 years or more	5	35.7%
ICT Experience	Little	3	21.4%
	Basic	7	50.0%
	Advanced	2	14.3%
	Master	2	14.3%

In addition, participants were asked open-ended questions to answer independently and in any way they wished. The structure of the interview was also divided into two parts. The first part included questions on demographic characteristics (gender, age, years of educational experience, level of ICT literacy). The second part of the questions was based on the main topic of the study. The main themes and questions are presented below.

Themes: Teacher Motivation, School and Personal Instructional Strategies, Technical Support, Benefits and Challenges of Online Teaching.

Questions:

1. How have you reacted to the COVID-19 pandemic scenario at the beginning of the crisis and the following school year?
2. Has the level of your motivation been consistent from the initial school closure until the end of last school year? And at the beginning of the new school year until now?
3. What instructional strategies were adopted in your school to implement Online Teaching? What about you as a teacher?
4. Do you think that the methodology used has been appropriate? (Justify)
5. What technical support did you use for the online teaching?
6. What kind of preparations do you carry out in order to create a productive classroom environment in the online learning process?
7. What do you think are the benefits of online learning in general and especially in times of pandemic?
8. What challenges do you see in online learning?
9. What measures have you implemented during the pandemic to improve Online Teaching with your students? What improvements do you think Online Teaching should implement?

Thematic Analysis and Ethical Considerations

Thematic analysis was used for this project following the procedures set out by Braun and Clarke (2006), and also, ATLAS.ti 9 was used to facilitate the initial coding and categorisation. To ensure the transparency of the information provided, the research was conducted in a comprehensive manner, and the transcription and reporting of the data was carried out in accordance with the needs of transparent analysis. In addition, the intention to have a variable, albeit small, sample size also increases the reliability of the results. The ethical guidelines of the British Educational Research Association [BERA] (2018) were followed in this study; consent forms were secured, anonymity and consent for the recording of the interview was guaranteed.

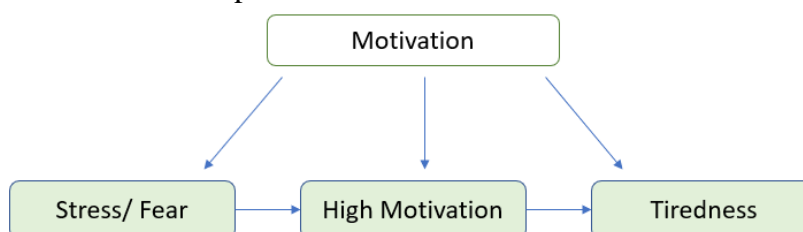
Results

After coding the interview transcripts, 32 codes/themes emerged, which were categorised and prioritised into six broad categories. These categories are: Motivation, Support, Strategies, Benefits, Challenges and the Future of Online Education, which will be analysed below.

Motivation

Firstly, it seems that some teachers expressed some stress and fear at the beginning of the implementation of Online Learning. As it was a new experience for most of them, they mentioned that they did not know how they should act and what to do (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Thematic Map: Motivation



One teacher mentioned that *"at the beginning I was scared and nervous as I had never worked on the Webex platform because there was no do need to use it professionally before"* (Teacher 14, 45. F. basic). In any case, they all perceived that there was a relaxation during the second wave of pandemic as they already had the experience of the first round of implementation of Online Teaching.

Most of the teachers interviewed who expressed fear and stress, had little experience with the technologies and only one teacher had experience at Master's level. This perhaps means that previous experience with the technologies may have affected the initial reaction in terms of motivation of the teachers interviewed. Those who had previous experience in using technology or experience in this type of teaching modality felt more confident. Moreover, this initial fear was expressed from both younger and more senior teachers.

On the other hand, almost all teachers showed high motivation to use this kind of modality. Some directly from the beginning and others after their first online contact expressed that they wanted to support their pupils as they loved these children and their job.

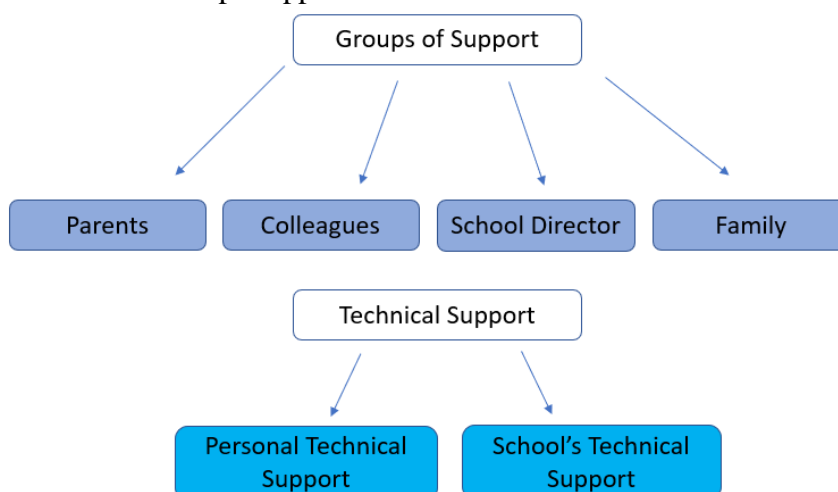
However, the motivation of the teachers went through many uncertainties.

Towards the end, just before Easter, I felt tired... I felt that it was time for schools to open again, that we had to stop this whole process... psychologically I couldn't do it anymore, imagine that during the Easter holidays I didn't even want to turn on the computer anymore (Teacher 2, 53. F. master).

Support

The Support category includes different kinds of support that teachers received both on a personal and technical level, and was therefore grouped into two subcategories: "Support Groups" and "Technical Support". On the one hand, the different groups of people who supported the teachers were the students' parents or their own family members, colleagues and the school principal. On the other hand, the technical support is divided between the "Personal Technical Support" and the "School's Technical Support" (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Thematic Map: Support



First of all, all the teachers interviewed perceived support and communication with the students' parents as important. They maintained a continuous collaboration with them and consider their role in the implementation of Online Learning as indispensable. Moreover, teachers reported that most parents were at their children's side to look up, upload or print homework assignments and explain homework to them. However, teachers also noted that there were parents who were not involved and did not communicate regularly.

On the other hand, the role of both the school principal and the collaboration between colleagues was an important support that was particularly emphasised in the teachers' interviews. Teachers highlighted that by working in groups they helped each other and acted as a team.

The ICT teacher helped me personally with Webex. He taught me what he knew, how to turn off the platform, how to test the microphone, how to test the camera, etc. So, it was the colleagues' solidarity in the school that helped me (Teacher 12, 29. F. little).

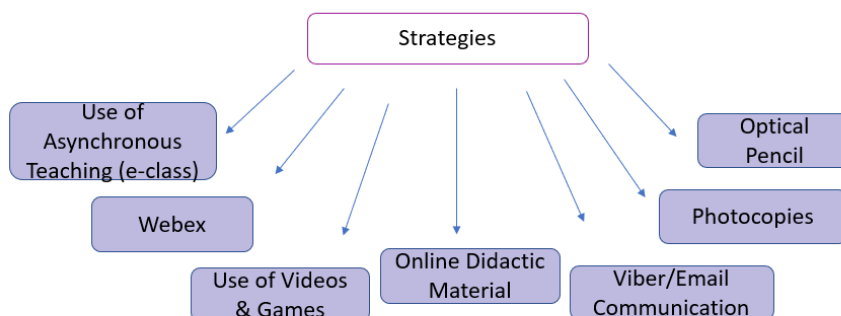
Also, a few teachers highlighted the importance of the psychological support and technical support they received from family members, such as their partners, their own children or their friends.

At the same time, the technical support they received was either from their school, or equipment belonging to themselves or their family members. On the other hand, there were teachers who had to make a financial outlay to buy technical support from their own budget.

Strategies

Teachers used various strategies during the implementation of Online Learning, such as the Webex and e-class platform, the use of educational videos and games, the use of online didactic material, photocopies for homework, communication with parents via the Viber application and emails, and the use of optical pencil (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Thematic Map: Strategies



Synchronous and Asynchronous teaching was used in a complementary way. *Along with Synchronous Teaching, I used Asynchronous because some students might not have been able to connect, so the lesson material, the instructions, I uploaded them to e-class...and everyone could see the assignments, what we had done, or send me questions if they didn't understand something* (Teacher 7, 35. F. basic).

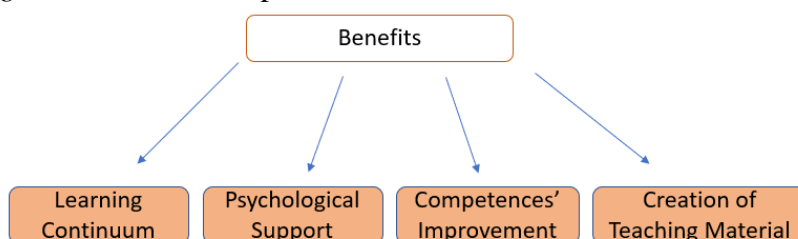
On the other hand, there were many teachers who used the Viber application or e-mails for communication and not the e-class platform recommended by the Ministry of Education and Religion. With these communication tools (Viber and email) it seemed easier and quicker for them and the parents to communicate. Another strategy of the teachers was the use of didactic material they found on the internet or Open Educational Resources (OER) such as blogs, photocopies already made by other teachers that they thought could be useful and they shared and used them with their students.

It is also important to note that many of the teachers who participated in the research attempted to continue the traditional model of teaching. Therefore, they prepared photocopies, sent them to the students and their parents printed them out. Teachers mentioned that *"they sent the photocopies during the weekend so that parents had time to print them"* (Teacher 10, 36. M. advanced), and that *"for students who could not print, they sent the homework to the principal and the parents picked it up from school"* (Teacher 12, 29. F. little).

Benefits

Four themes emerged from the data analysis that were grouped under the category of Benefits that teachers perceive to have gained from the implementation of Online Learning. These are: continuity of learning, psychological support, creation of teaching materials and improvement of their digital competences (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. Thematic Map: Benefits



Firstly, teachers mentioned that *"the only solution during the pandemic was Distance Education"* (Teacher 7, 35. F. basic). *"They were not so much concerned about the curriculum, whether students would be left behind, etc., but mostly that students would not lose contact with the school"* (Teacher 10, 36. M. advanced). Many of them see it as a *"necessary evil"* for the continuity of learning and contact with students.

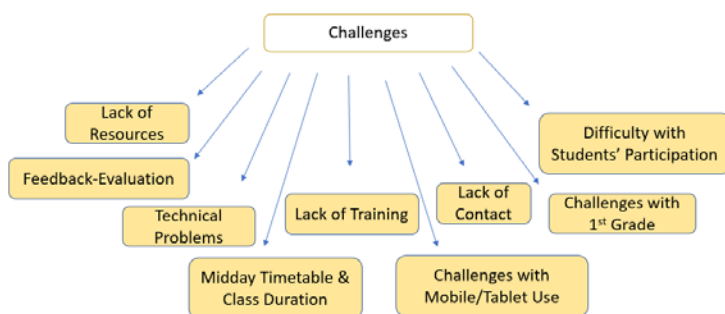
At the same time, according to the teachers, the monitoring of online classes functioned as a psychological support for all parties involved. In particular, one teacher emphasised that *"he thinks that with many of his students he is closer now, because he was there when they needed him.... he was their psychological support"* (Teacher 10, 36. M. advanced).

On the other hand, it is interesting that many teachers perceived the creation of the didactic material as a benefit, even though it is very time-consuming. *"It was an opportunity to update it as I had to reconstruct everything digitally"* (Teacher 2, 53. F. master). Among the digital material they created presentations, photocopies, own texts, exercises, etc. Finally, the teachers emphasised that they improved their skills and that *"this occasion also allowed them to update their pedagogical methodologies"* (Teacher 4, 38. F. master).

Challenges

Nine themes emerged from the data analysis that were grouped under the category of teachers' perceived challenges in dealing with Online Learning during the pandemic. These are challenges that teachers believe call into question the effectiveness of the implementation of Online Learning (see Figure 5).

Figure 5. Thematic Map: Challenges



First of all, it is essential to note that almost all teachers mentioned that there was no infrastructure for the implementation of Online Learning. Moreover, during the second school year it was compulsory. The schools are not equipped to offer quality Distance Education to the students. Also, there were families with many family members that needed more computer resources and they did not have enough devices for everybody.

The government depended on us and we paid for everything at our own expense, I had to upgrade the internet line at home to be able to do the lesson, get a new computer, get an optical pen to write and send materials... (Teacher 9, 50. F. basic).

Apart from the lack of resources, teachers highlighted that there were often technical problems that made distance learning difficult. In particular, the connection was bad, microphones did not work, platforms collapsed and many computers were obsolete.

At the same time, quite a few teachers mentioned that challenges arose with the use of the mobile phone or tablet. Many students used their mobile phones, which made it difficult for them to participate in the lesson. In particular, *students using the mobile phone found it more difficult to concentrate, to see what was on the screen because it was small, or to do homework and send it to us* (Teacher 9, 50. F. basic).

Also, most of the teachers perceived the difficulty in assessing students within the Online Learning. They perceived that it was much more time-consuming to correct the students' assignments as the correction was through the pictures they received with the completed homework. Similarly, many teachers found it difficult to implement Online Learning with students in the first year of Primary school, mainly due to their age and the fact that they cannot read and write yet, a distance collaboration was more difficult. Also, *"it is difficult for them to sit so many hours in front of a computer and follow the programme they are given"* (Teacher 6, 37. M. basic).

On the other hand, the teachers interviewed find it difficult to follow the midday timetable proposed by the Ministry of Education and Religion, and the 30-minute duration of each class. Some teachers suggested that *"because it is a special condition, the classes have to be readjusted"* (Teacher 10, 36. M. advanced).

In addition, many teachers highlighted that one of the main drawbacks is related to socialisation and the absence of pupils' contact due to Online Learning. *"These two generations of children were deprived of many things that face-to-face education offers ... their friends, socialisation"* (Teacher 6, 37. M. basic).

Also, most of the teachers perceived a lack of training to take on this teaching modality with quality guarantees. They say that they would like to be updated and better trained in Online Learning. They consider that the few seminars that were given were very theoretical, optional and offered very late, which forced them to "train themselves".

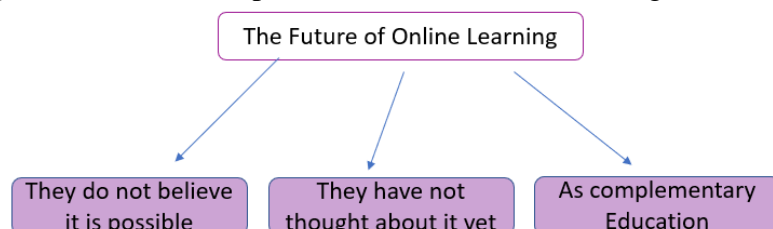
Finally, there were students who, due to their learning difficulties or the lack of training of their parents, or sometimes due to financial difficulties, were not able to participate and have the corresponding attention from the teacher during Online

Learning. Therefore, when they returned to face-to-face learning at the end of the school year, they made less academic progress compared to the rest of the class. In particular, some teachers expressed their concern, *"the students who had difficulties came back with more difficulties...or some students got lost within this process"* (Teacher 5, 52. F. little). However, other teachers mentioned that there were cases of students who, although they had attention deficit or hyperactivity, had more participation during the online classes. Concluding that *"may be due to the fact that there was less distraction because they had their parents next to them"* (Teacher 4, 38. F. master).

The Future of Online Learning

In terms of teachers' perceptions of a future use of Online Learning, three categories emerged: teachers who do not think it is possible and those who have not yet thought about it. In addition, there is a group of teachers who consider its use in a complementary way (see Figure 6).

Figure 6. Thematic Map: The Future of Online Learning



On the one hand, some teachers were opposed to the future use of Online Learning in Primary schools, stating that it was something they did not want to do again and that it would be quite tedious to use two forms of teaching, face-to-face and online, at the same time. Therefore, according to their perspective it is a form of teaching that they would only use in emergency situations or because its implementation would be compulsory.

I wouldn't like to use Online Teaching in the long term, I don't know why... maybe I don't feel so confident, I don't feel the satisfaction of being able to offer what I have prepared in my mind or I don't see the result in the students as I expect (Teacher 5, 52. F. little).

On the other hand, other teachers were sceptical about the future use of Online Education. It is something they have not yet thought about and cannot answer. Finally, there were some teachers who stated that they would like to use Asynchronous Teaching as a complementary instruction. That is, to integrate into their teaching the use of a platform, e.g., e-class, for uploading lesson material, extra material or feedback to students.

You can easily combine an asynchronous platform to create your flipped classroom. That is, you can send your videos through the platform, your questions, your feedback and whatever you want for the course and at the same time do Face-to-Face Teaching. (Teacher 1, 43. F. basic).

Discussion and Conclusions

In the analysis of the results, the themes that emerged were organised into six broad categories: Motivation, Support, Strategies, Benefits, Challenges and the Future of Online Learning.

When considering the motivation of the teachers in the study, it seems that, according to the results, their motivation went through many variations and concerns: from stress and fear, to high motivation and lately to tiredness. The teachers' tiredness could be justified by the long duration of this situation. This is alarming because high levels of stress over a long period of time can lead to teachers' burnout (Sokal et al., 2020; Tzifopoulos, 2020).

On the other hand, many of the teachers participating in this research, who expressed fear and stress, had little or basic experience with technologies. Previous experience with technologies may have affected the initial reaction in terms of motivation of the teachers interviewed (Van der Spoel et al., 2020; Portillo et al., 2020). However, interestingly, a worldwide research finding of more than 20,000 teachers showed that years of classroom experience also seems to be important when implementing this type of teaching. Older and more experienced teachers were much more willing to experiment with new modes of digital instruction than less experienced teachers (Pota et al., 2021).

As for the category of personal or technical support, both kinds of support were considered very important for the implementation of this learning and teaching modality. In many cases, especially at lower educational levels, such as the first grades of Primary Education, Distance Education is not feasible without extensive parental involvement (Portillo et al., 2020; Di Pietro et al., 2020).

When considering the different strategies, according to the results, several possibilities emerged that teachers in this study used during the implementation of Online Learning (Webex and e-class platforms, Viber application, e-mails, internet teaching materials). At the same time, a quite popular strategy of the interviewed teachers was the use of teaching material they selected from the Internet, such as photocopies, ready-made assignments, videos or educational games, which depending on their use may raise legal issues about copyright protection and Creative Commons licences. However, these legal issues were not explained in detail to members of the school community (Liakopoulou, 2020).

In terms of the benefits of Online Learning, teachers highlighted the continuity of learning and psychological support, as well as the opportunity for the improvement of their competences and the creation and updating of new teaching material as highlighted in the research of Shamir-Inbal & Blau (2021).

Moreover, teachers perceived that the implementation of online learning faced a number of challenges. Notably, in many cases there was neither adequate logistical and network infrastructure nor equipment in schools or in students' homes (Amorgianioti, 2020; Fauzi & Khusuma, 2020). This, coupled with technical problems, poor internet quality or problems with mobile phone use (Liakopoulou, 2020; Rasmitadila et al., 2020), led in some cases to ineffective learning (Hodges et al., 2020).

Also, teaching in the middle of the day and the short duration of each lesson (30 min), according to the directives of the Greek Ministry of Education and Religion, made it even more difficult for teachers to implement effective lessons. On the other hand, during the implementation of Online Teaching due to the "centralised" approach of the Greek Educational system (Mattheou, 2007), the same instructions were given to all Greek schools. Therefore, teachers were deprived of the possibility to adapt their lessons to the needs of their students and the specific infrastructure of each school.

Feedback of students' work and grading of assignments are important processes that, due to the change in teaching during the pandemic, were a major challenge for teachers (Putri et al., 2020; Fauzi & Khusuma, 2020). However, according to Tsai and Machado (2002), merely publishing or transmitting learning materials to learners on relevant platforms is not Distance Education.

The reasons that teachers found as obstacles to effective assessment, according to their own perspective, were, among others, lack of contact with their students (Niemi & Kousa, 2020) as well as lack of training on their part (Rasmitadila et al., 2020). Furthermore, both in this research and in line with other studies such as that of Grivas (2020), teachers mention that they need more practical rather than theoretical training; training mainly focused on "live demonstration" of the functions of online platforms.

In addition to specific training on Online Learning, teachers require general training to improve their digital skills. According to Tzifopoulos (2020), this lack of training is increased by two factors in the Greek education system. On the one hand, most teachers in Greece are close to retirement and do not have adequate ICT training, and on the other hand, there is a large percentage of substitute teachers who do not yet know their teaching subject very well, or their position in the school is temporary.

Regarding the challenge of participation of all students, teachers expressed concern about both the performance of these students and their socialisation due to the fact that there was little or in some cases no contact. The move to Online Learning highlighted the existence of a Digital Divide and exacerbated existing educational inequalities (Di Pietro et al., 2020; Cáceres-Muñoz et al., 2020; Montenegro et al., 2020). According to Cedefop (2020), learners from less favourable socio-economic backgrounds, refugees and immigrants, those from ethnic minorities and students with special educational needs are the ones who encounter more difficulties in their participation in Distance Education and therefore experience more learning losses.

Finally, regarding the future use of Online Learning, the teachers in the study considered its use as a temporary solution, so they did not have a very clear idea of its use in other teaching situations or were simply not in favour of continuing to use this system. However, some teachers agree to use Online Learning as a complementary tool to face-to-face education in a period when the school is functioning normally and therefore, as Stachteas and Stachteas (2020) point out, it is something that cannot be considered negligible.

As a final conclusion, it is clear that the COVID-19 crisis has changed schooling and teaching during the Emergency Remote Teaching, and even if that

differed from what we have known so far as Online Learning, has indeed provided an opportunity to penetrate new areas and offer sustainable and effective learning solutions.

Implications for Practice

The global pandemic due to COVID-19 has changed schooling and teaching in a way never experienced in our lifetime. Teachers had to modify their pedagogy very quickly and this change had implications for practice which leads us to explore recommendations and future lines of research.

Firstly, it is clear that the COVID-19 crisis has indeed provided an opportunity for Online Education to penetrate new domains and offer sustainable and effective learning solutions. However, education policy makers and school leaders must be prepared for exceptional learning arrangements, as another crisis may occur in the future. Each institution should have the flexibility to implement this learning according to its needs and resources. At the same time, there should be continuous monitoring and evaluation of these new environments (Vlachopoulos, 2020; Niemi & Kousa, 2020).

Along with the framework for the implementation of Online Learning, it is imperative that governments ensure the provision of infrastructural devices for all members of the school community. On this shift of education towards digital, the European Union has published the "Digital Education Action Plan" (2021-2027), which sets out the criteria for high quality, inclusive and accessible Digital Education for all in Europe (European Commission, 2020). In addition, the Digital Divide emerged from the crisis by COVID-19, reflecting on measures to be taken for equity in education and some more of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations 2030 Agenda (United Nations, 2020).

In addition, the implementation of Online Learning provided an opportunity to further cultivate and deepen the digital competences of the education community. However, more attention should be paid to the continuous training of teachers, the improvement of their digital competences and their further professional development, with an emphasis on the use of Online Learning and the inclusion of digital learning platforms.

The use of Online Learning in the future seems to be promiscuous. Right after this crisis, a door was opened for its use as a complementary teaching tool or within the Blended Learning Model in Primary and Secondary Education. According to Shamir-Inbal and Blau (2021), the blended environment seems to be the optimal way, as it can be an effective way to involve students as active participants in the learning process. Therefore, incorporating Blended Learning into school practices can strengthen both the pedagogical strategies of digital learning and students' self-regulated learning and teamwork skills.

Finally, further research on this topic is recommended. It would be interesting to investigate in the future how teachers incorporated Online Learning or digital learning platforms into their teaching. In addition, further research could be carried out in relation to the development of institutional technology integration plans to

better understand the situation of teachers and educational organisations. Also, this research should focus on building and testing instructional design principles for effective technology adoption within their educational practice.

The findings of this research bring value to the research community. Therefore, it is recommended that further research on this topic could be conducted in order to have a deeper understanding of the perceptions of teachers at all levels of institutions, as this crisis caused by COVID-19 brought new educational challenges and new ways of teaching and learning.

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