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# The Impact of Educational Approaches in Cyprus During COVID-19 Restrictions<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract** The objective of this study was to identify how teaching staff in Cyprus adjusted teaching methodologies during 2020 COVID-19 restrictions and what their expectations were in regards to intended learning outcomes of their students. This is fundamental in case COVID-19 restrictions and on-line learning is extended in the future. First results of a group of sixty-two lecturers show that the majority of the respondents has at least to some extent adapted conventional methodologies of teaching to the new conditionalities. Also, that restrictions have for a large group of lecturers negatively impacted quality of teaching while about half of the lecturers consider that the attainment of intended learning outcomes for students may have been curtailed.

**Keywords:** on-line learning, HEIs, COVID-19, adaptation strategies, learning outcomes, students

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## 1. Introduction

COVID-19 was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO) on 11 March 2020 and expanded around the globe. Educators in Cyprus, experienced challenges in having to adapt programmes and learning across the education continuum (Cleland et al., 2020) undergoing an unprecedented “migration” from traditional in-class face-to-face education to online education (Bao,

2020). As of 19 March 2020, almost a billion of young people, as declared by UNESCO, had to stay away from schools and Universities. Following the government's requirements for “nonstop teaching and learning,” coordinated under a common European response to the outbreak of COVID-19 (Coronavirus European Response, 2020), most Cypriot Higher Education Institutes (HEI) commenced distance learning mode of delivery for each Programme of Study, applying online and digital tools and techniques (CYQAA, 10 March 2020). HEIs reassured “the high quality of education offered by universities in Cyprus continues to be assured, with the active support and constructive contribution of the Cyprus Agency of Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education (CYQAA)” (Rectors Conference, 2020). In a short time period, hundreds of faculty staff started to teach online while their students had to stay at home and take the courses through specialized platforms, following the guidance by CYQAA which underlined the need students not to drop a whole year (CYQAA, 10 March 2020).

On March 31<sup>st</sup> the CYQAA Guidelines for Quality Assurance allowed alternative forms of student evaluation permitting thus both studying and assessing in distance mode, facilitating also the needs of many international students who were not permitted to return to Cyprus from their home countries. Approximately 50,000 Cypriots, Europeans and International students are enrolled in HEIs of 53% are non-Cypriots based on Ministry of Education calculations.

Teaching techniques and approaches are of a paramount importance (Toquero, 2020). Online learning techniques allow flexibility in terms of time management and place of teaching as pointed by Corbeil (2007) and offer the possibility, under specific circumstances, to students to self-regulate learning (video on demand) as per Sha Looi (et al., 2012). Online Learning tools in Higher Education can assist in improving teaching quality (Caballero-Hernandez, 2020). Within a small period of time after its eruption, the COVID-19 pandemic enhanced the role of remote working, e-learning, video streaming on a broad scale (Ebner et al., 2020). Though the aforementioned are true, there is “ambiguity and disagreement about what to teach, how to teach, the workload of teachers and students,

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the teaching environment, and the implications for education equity” (Ali, 2020). Moreover, deficiencies, such as inexperience of online teaching, complex environment at home, are also present ((Murgatrot, 2020).

### 1.1 Purpose.

The objective of this study was to explore the potential adaptation of learning methods during the transit from face to face to online teaching during COVID 19 restrictions and to contribute to discussions about quality in teaching and learning outcomes acquired by students during this period of time. Such research is useful to enhancing the adaptation of the learning process to the new conditions posed by the pandemic.

### 1.2.Methodology

Participants consisted of 62 academics from four HEIs in Cyprus, who after approval by the National Bioethics Committee of Cyprus, were administered an online questionnaire consisting of fifteen questions.

## 2. Sociodemographic characteristics of the sample

The majority of the participants has over ten years’ of teaching experience (n=36), eight have more than six years of experience and the rest, five years or less. As far as their job status is concerned, the majority (n=41) is full time and the rest work on a part time contract. 89% of the participants normally teaches (last three years) at undergraduate or both undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

## 3. Findings

The vast majority of the sample (97%) had received and or discussed guidelines or best practices in teaching online during COVID-19, therefore were familiar with distance learning strategies and methodologies (Table 1).

**Table 1. Have you formally received/discussed with peers guidelines and or best practices for Teaching during COVID 19 restrictions? You are allowed to respond to more than one answer**

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Received Guidelines and or best practices for Teaching during COVID 19 restrictions	21.62%	24
2	Discussed Guidelines and or best practices with	28.83%	32

	peers for Teaching during COVID 19 restrictions		
3	Received and discussed with peers Guidelines and or best practices for Teaching during COVID 19 restrictions	31.53%	35
4	I have specifically Discussed Best Practices for Teaching with peers during COVID 19 restrictions	15.32%	17
5	None of the Above	2.70%	3
	Total	100%	111

Almost all have regularly taught via distance online learning during COVID-19 restrictions (96.4%) as seen in Table 2)

**Table 2. Have you regularly taught via distance online learning during COVID-19 restrictions?**

#	Answer	%	Count
1	I have regularly taught via Distance Online Learning during COVID-19 restrictions	73.21%	41
2	I have NOT regularly taught via Distance Online Learning during COVID-19 restrictions	3.57%	2
3	I have regularly taught BOTH via Distance Online Learning AND Face to Face Learning during COVID-19 restrictions	23.21%	13
4	I have only taught regularly via Face-to-Face Learning during COVID-19 restrictions	0.00%	0
	Total	100%	56

Figure 1. shows that 46% of the sample experienced a fundamental shift of teaching strategy/methodology due to COVID-19 restrictions while 51.7% made at least minor interventions to teaching strategy and methodology of teaching due to COVE-19 related restrictions.

Figure 1. Influence to teaching strategy

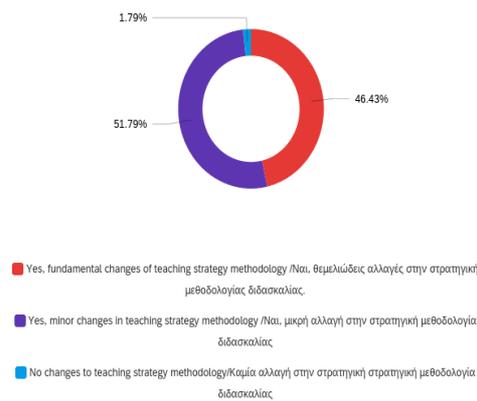
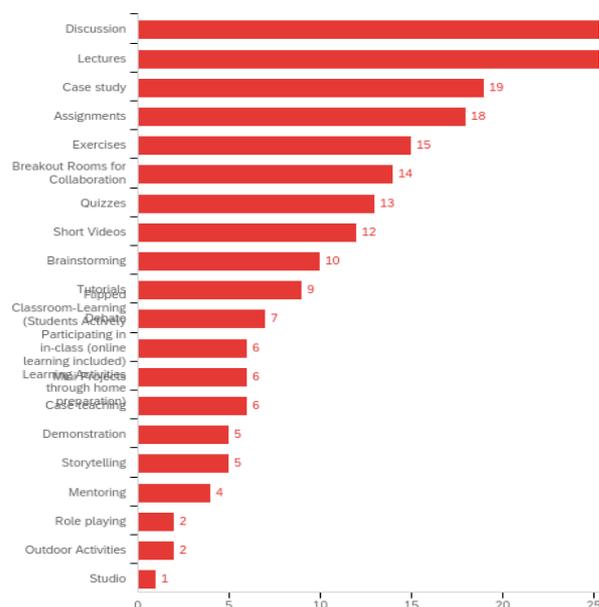


Table 3 shows that out of 20 techniques, teachers pointed to discussion, lectures, and case study as the most helpful techniques in transferring knowledge/learning outcomes during COVID-19 restrictions, to students. Closely follow, assignments, exercises and break out rooms for collaboration.

Table 3. Based on your recent experience (last 12 months) which teaching/learning method-technique have you found MOST helpful in transferring knowledge/learning outcomes during COVID-19 restrictions? You may respond to up to three choices



The majority of the participants (54%) believe that students will “acquire the intended learning outcomes at the same level like last year” (2019) while 30% “expect less students to acquire intended learning outcomes in comparison to last year” (Table 4).

Table 4. Based on your recent (last 12 months) experience (during COVID-19 restrictions), when learning is concluded, what quality of learning outcomes do you

expect from your students in comparison to last year (2019-2020)? You may choose up to two options

Answer	%	Count
I expect students to acquire the intended learning outcomes at the same level like last year	53.97%	34
I expect less students to acquire intended learning outcomes in comparison to last year	30.16%	19
I expect more students to acquire the intended formal learning outcomes in comparison to last year	6.35%	4
I expect more students to acquire less learning outcomes in comparison to last year	7.94%	5
I cannot respond because: i was not teaching last year/i was teaching in other programmes/other reasons	1.59%	1
Total	100%	63

Teachers were asked which three teaching/learning methods-techniques would they consider as indispensable to use should COVID-19 restrictions continue through to the next year. Again, lectures, discussion, assignments were by far the top three methods which teachers propose (Table 5).

Table 5. If COVID-19 restrictions continue through to the next year, which THREE teaching/learning methods-techniques would you consider as indispensable to use?

#	Answer	%	Count
4	Lectures	17.55%	33
5	Discussion	14.89%	28
6	Assignments	12.23%	23
7	Quizzes	6.38%	12
8	Demonstration	3.72%	7
9	Storytelling	2.13%	4
10	Tutorials	5.32%	10
11	Case Study	4.79%	9

12	Brainstorming	4.26%	8
13	Exercises	6.38%	12
14	Role Playing	2.66%	5
15	Studios	1.60%	3
16	Flipped Classroom-Learning (Students Actively Participating in in-class (online learning included) Learning Activities through home preparation)	2.66%	5
17	Debate	2.13%	4
18	Mini Projects	0.53%	1
19	Short Videos	3.72%	7
20	Mentoring	0.53%	1
21	Case Teaching	1.60%	3
22	Outdoor Activities	1.60%	3
23	Breakout Rooms for Collaboration	5.32%	10
	Total	100%	188

Finally, in assessing the positive or negative impact COVID-19 restrictions had to the quality of teaching delivery (Table 6.), 40% reported a somewhat negative impact on the quality of teaching and 32% that the quality of teaching was positively influenced. For some, 27% there was no impact on the quality of their teaching therefore, no influence of student intended learning outcomes.

Table 6. COVID-19 restrictions have impacted the quality of my teaching delivery

#	Answer	%	Count
1	In an absolutely positive way/ΜΕ ΑΠΟΛΥΤΩΣ ΘΕΤΙΚΟ ΤΡΟΠΟ	12.50%	7
2	In a somewhat positive way/ΜΕ ΚΑΠΩΣ ΘΕΤΙΚΟ ΤΡΟΠΟ	19.64%	11
3	In an absolutely negative way/ΜΕ ΑΠΟΛΥΤΩΣ ΑΡΝΗΤΙΚΟ ΤΡΟΠΟ	1.79%	1

4	In a somewhat negative way/ΜΕ ΚΑΠΩΣ ΑΡΝΗΤΙΚΟ ΤΡΟΠΟ	41.07%	23
5	No impact on the quality of my teaching delivery/ΚΑΜΙΑ ΕΠΙΔΡΑΣΗ ΣΤΗΝ ΠΟΙΟΤΗΤΑ ΤΗΣ ΔΙΔΑΣΚΑΛΙΑΣ ΜΟΥ	25.00%	14
	Total	100%	56

#### 4. Discussion

This study aimed at exploring the adaptation of learning methods during the transition to online teaching during COVID-19 through assessing the views of academics in HEIs of Cyprus about the impact restrictions had on quality in teaching and learning outcomes acquired by students. Despite the small sample, there are indications that HEI teachers in Cyprus use discussion as a technique more rather than for example lectures or at least at the same extent therefore attempting to keep the concentration and interest of students to the distant learning content. Along with assignments (instead of written exams and tests), academics view these three methods as indispensable to their online teaching should restrictions continue. A noteworthy share of the academic personnel reported negative impact of COVID 19 to their quality teaching at least to some extent. This realistic approach may be potentially associated to the non-optimistic expectation (expressed by one third of the participants), that fewer students are expected to acquire intended learning outcomes in comparison to 2019-2020. This may challenge findings that show that there is a significant positive effect of the COVID-19 confinement on students' performance (Gonzalez, 2020). Indeed, challenges both to national and international students may depend on how the learning process develops therefore positive or negative outcomes are open and may even coexist. To this end, new methods need to be employed to facilitate a student-centered environment despite difficulties (ECTS Users' Guide, 2015).

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