THE IMPACT OF EDUCATIONAL APPROACHES IN CYPRUS DURING COVID-19 RESTRICTIONS: IMPLICATIONS TO HIGHER EDUCATION ORGANISATIONS

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19th Scientific Conference “CURRENT CHALLENGES FOR HUMAN ACTIVITY”

15th of December 2021

Organised by Faculty of Social Sciences - Siedlce University of Natural Sciences and Humanities, Poland; the Faculty of Management - National University of Political Studies and Public Administration, Romania; Institute of Rural Development and Sustainable Economy

The OBJECTIVE... Identify Teaching Strategies and Impact

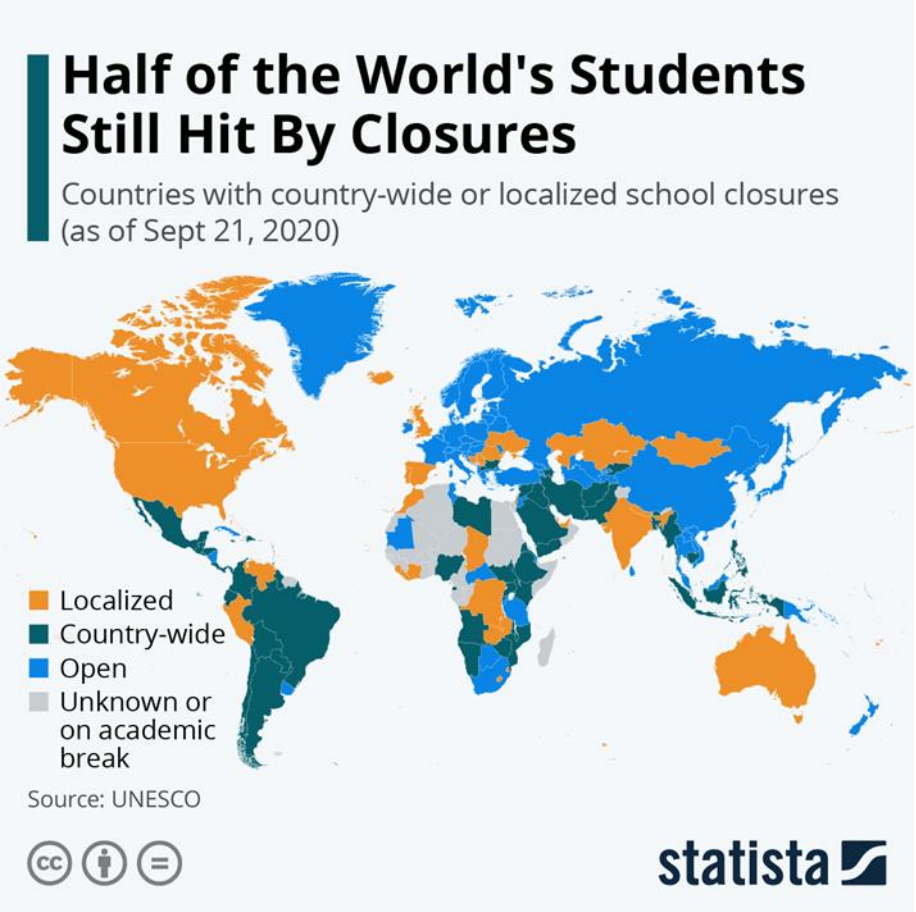
- The **aim** of the study was to identify HOW teaching staff adjusted teaching methodologies during 2020 and WHAT their expectations were with regards to intended learning outcomes of their students and consider implications for HEI learning and management

Methodology

- Participants consisted of 76 academics
- from four HEIs in Cyprus, who after approval by the National Bioethics Committee of Cyprus,
- were administered an online questionnaire consisting of fifteen items.

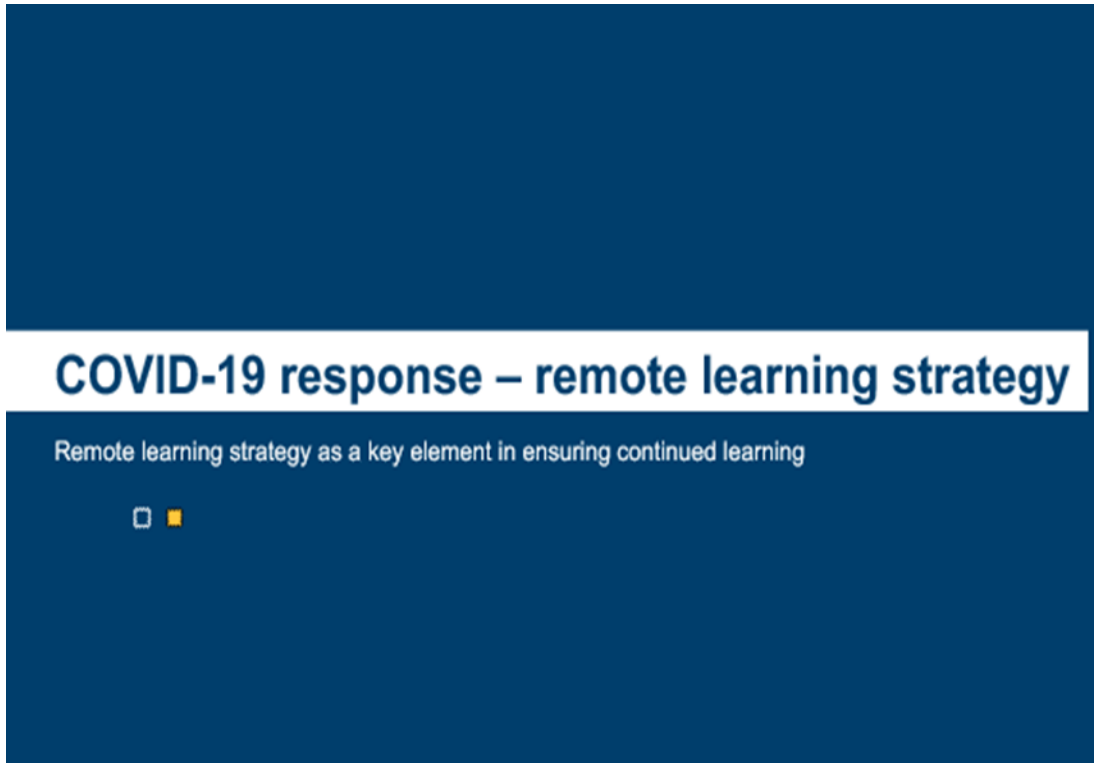
Background:COVID-19 Restrictions & Learning

- COVID-19 was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO) on 11 March 2020 and expanded around the globe.
- As of 19 March 2020, almost a billion of young people, as declared by UNESCO, had to stay away from schools and Universities.
- Most Cypriot Higher Education Institutes (HEI) begun distance learning mode of delivery for each Programme of Study, utilizing online and digital tools and techniques (CYQAA, 10 March 2020).
- Educators in Cyprus, like in the rest of the world, were experiencing 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).



Background

- 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 CY-QAA which underlined the need students not to drop a whole year (CY-QAA, 10 March 2020).
- Approximately 27,000 European and International students are enrolled in HEIs, half of the total student population
- Extraordinary conditions and government directions posed challenges to the quality of teaching therefore it is of significance to study adaptation strategies in teaching and lessons learned in an era where conventional programmes of study taught in classroom were sought to be converted to on line



Quality of Education & New Problems

- Online Learning tools in Higher Education may
- allow flexibility in terms of time management and place of teaching (i.e. home) as pointed by Corbeil (2007)
- allow under specific circumstances students to self-regulate learning (video on demand) as Sha Looi (et al., 2012).
- Therefore, Online Learning tools in Higher Education may 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, etc. on a broad scale (Ebner et al., 2020).
- **But still** there is "ambiguity and disagreement about what to teach, how to teach, the workload of teachers and students, the teaching environment, and the implications for education equity" (Ali, 2020). Also deficiencies, such as inexperience of online teaching, complex environment at home, do exist ((Murgatrotd, 2020).

Quality of Education & New Problems

The Relation between LOs and Student Satisfaction gives reason of Concern

- For HEIs Management Teams, Student Satisfaction (linked to perceived Learning Outcomes(LOs) from measures such as curricula amendments is crucial since changes influence education performance and attainment goals (Choi et al., 2020) .

- Baber (2020) found that the factors–interaction in the classroom, student motivation, course structure, instructor knowledge, and facilitation–are positively influencing students' perceived learning outcome and student satisfaction.

Also,

- Students **With Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder** faced significant challenges in adapting to online learning during the pandemic (Hai et al., 2021).

"Student engagement slips as pandemic curtails collaboration" | Times Higher Education (THE)

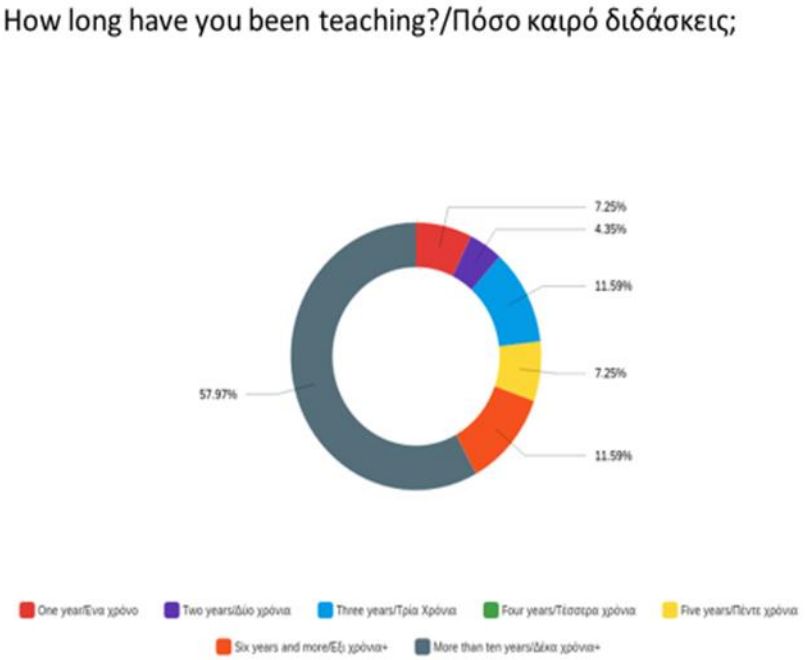
Sample Characteristics

The majority of participants have more than ten years of teaching experience (57%),

12% more than six years and the remaining five years or less.

As regards their employment status, the majority (n=41) are full-time and the rest are on a part-time contract.

89% of the participants usually teach (last three years) at undergraduate or simultaneously at undergraduate and postgraduate level.



Findings

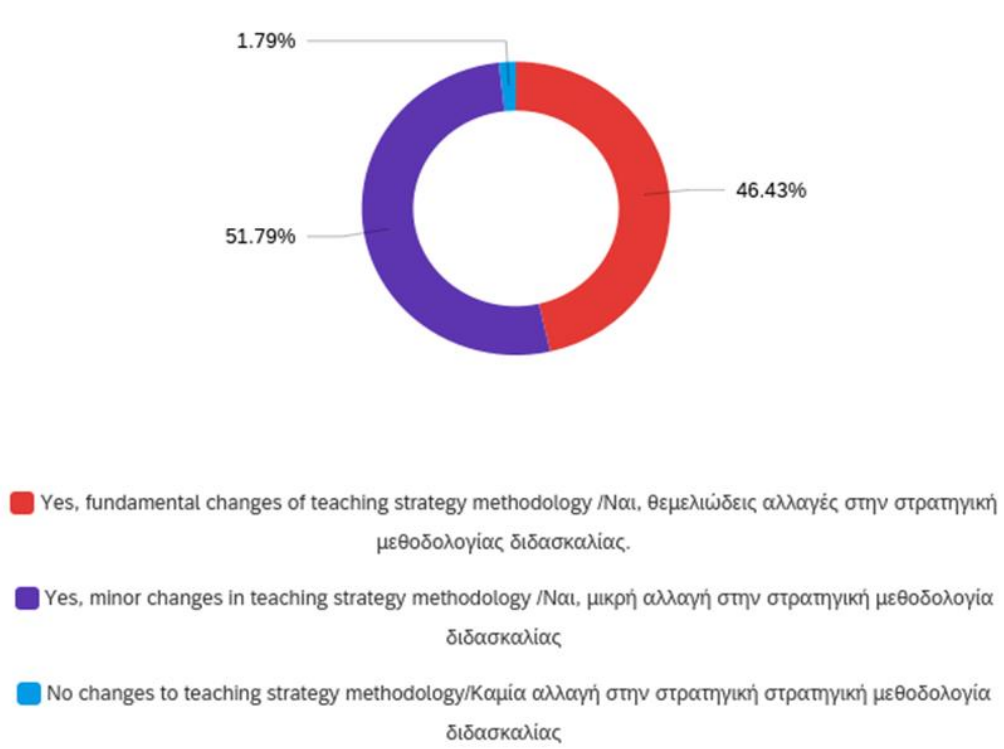
The vast majority of the sample (97%) had received and or discussed guidelines or best practices in teaching online during COVID-19, therefore were familiar with distance learning strategies and methodologies

#	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 peers for Teaching during COVID 19 restrictions	28.83%	32
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

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

#	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

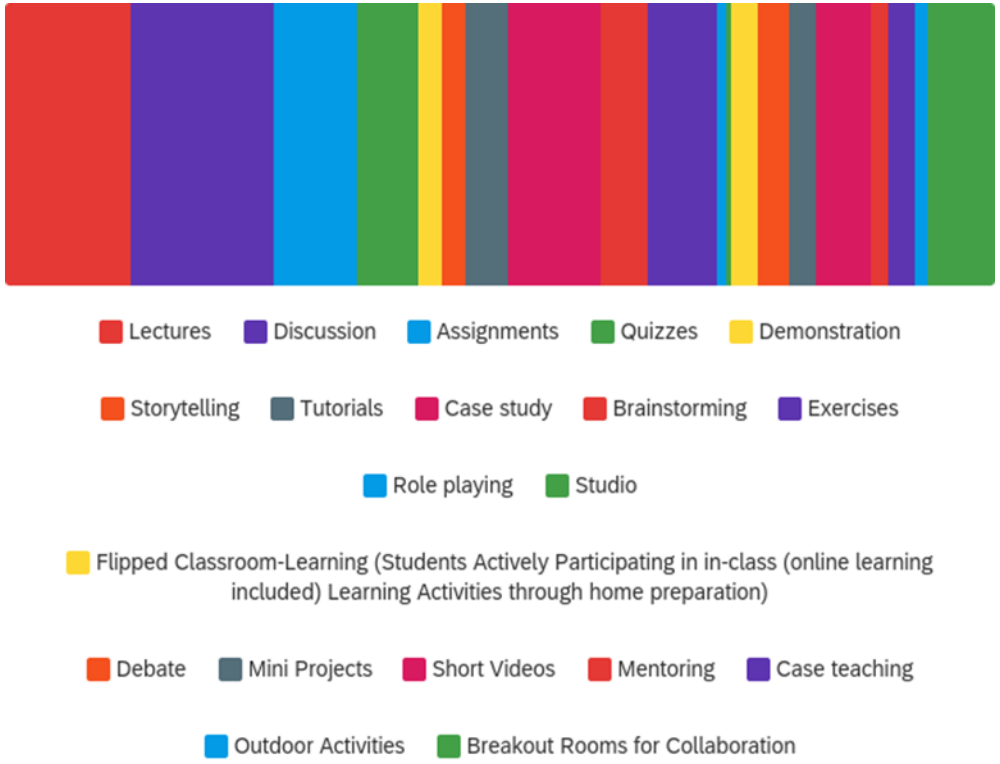
Findings: Shift in Teaching Strategy and Methodology



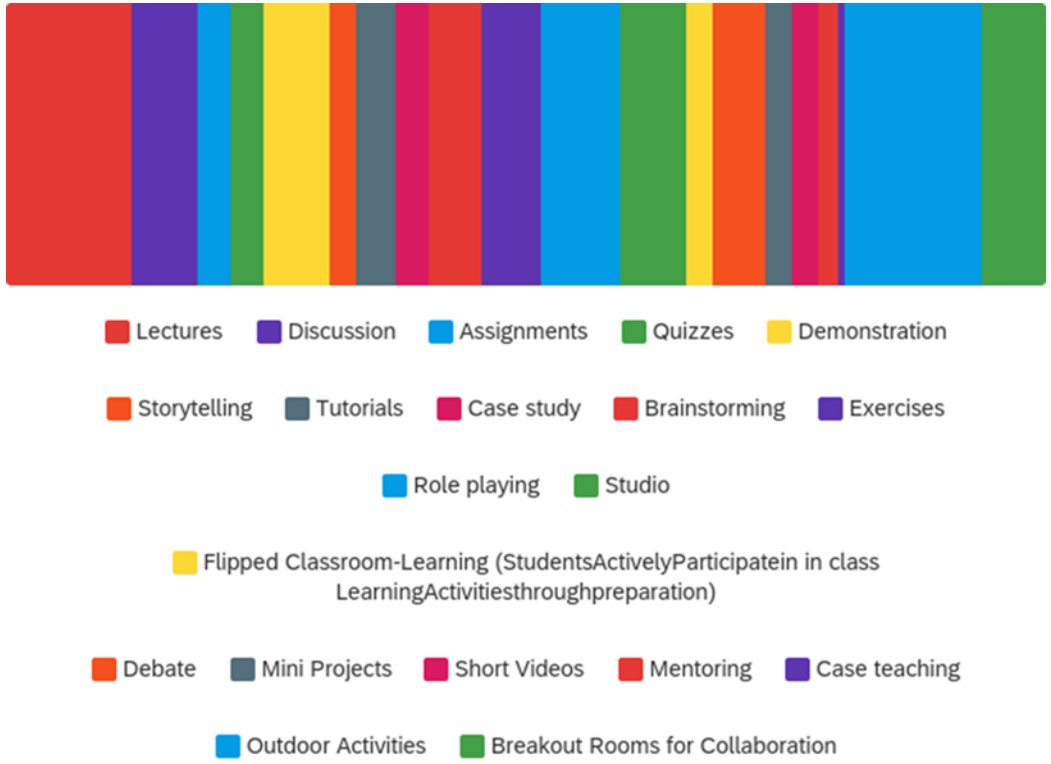
- 46% of the sample experienced a fundamental shift of teaching strategy/methodology due to COVID-19 restrictions while 51.7% made at least minor interventions to teaching strategy and methodology due to COVID-19 related restrictions.

20 Techniques for the Transfer of Knowledge and Learning Outcomes with/to students

Out of 20 techniques, Instructors 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.

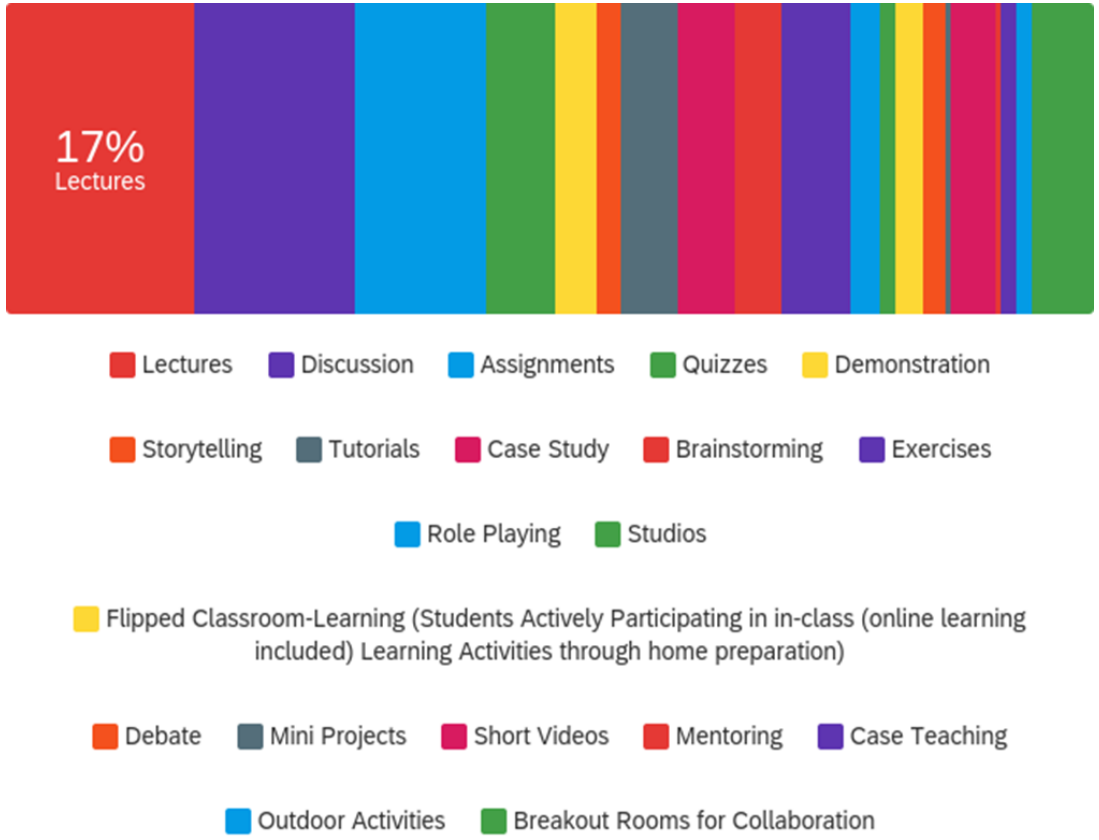


- **Out of 20 techniques, Instructors** selected the 3 LEAST USEFUL: EXTERNAL ACTIVITIES, LECTURES AND ROLE PLAYING.



Methodology and the Future

- Instructors among 20 techniques selected which three teaching/learning methods and techniques they would consider INDISPENSABLE for implementation in case COVID-19 restrictions continue until next year.
- Again, LECTURES, DISCUSSIONS, ASSIGNMENTS were by far the TOP three methods suggested by Academics



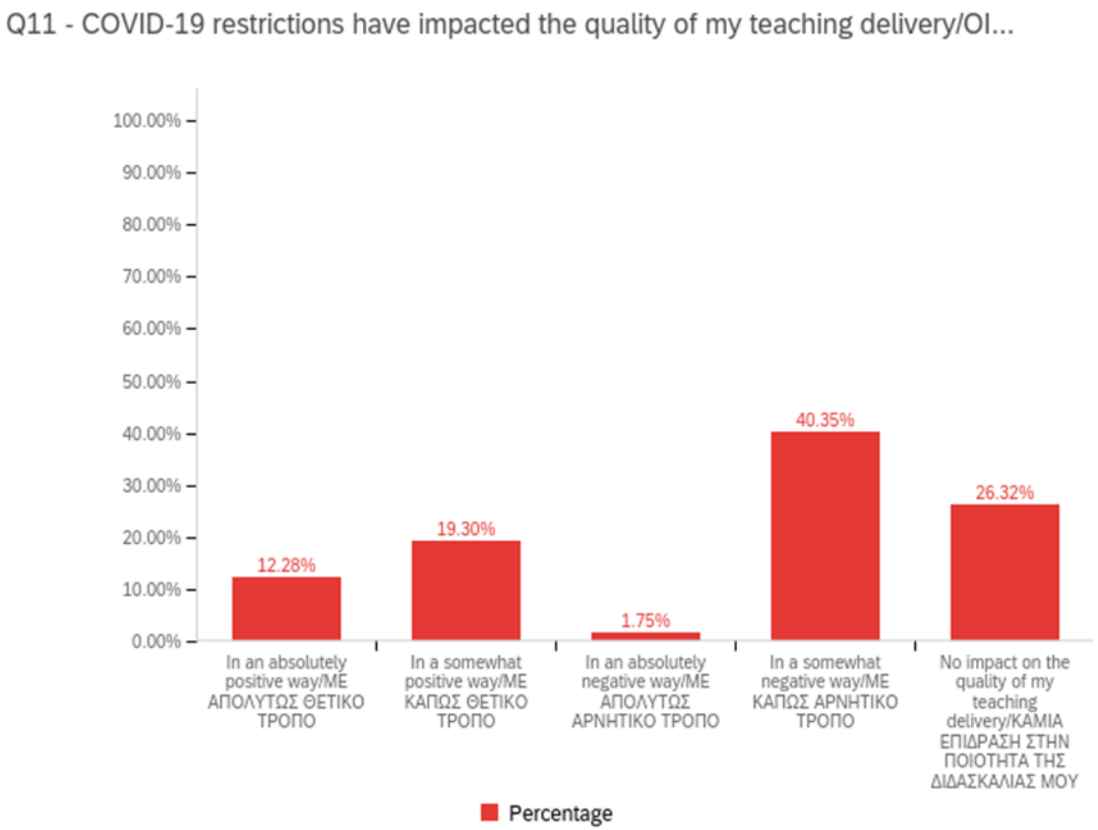
Self-Evaluation of the Quality of Teaching by Academics

- **Assess the positive or negative impact COVID-19 restrictions had to the quality of teaching delivery**

40% reported a somewhat negative impact on the quality of teaching while

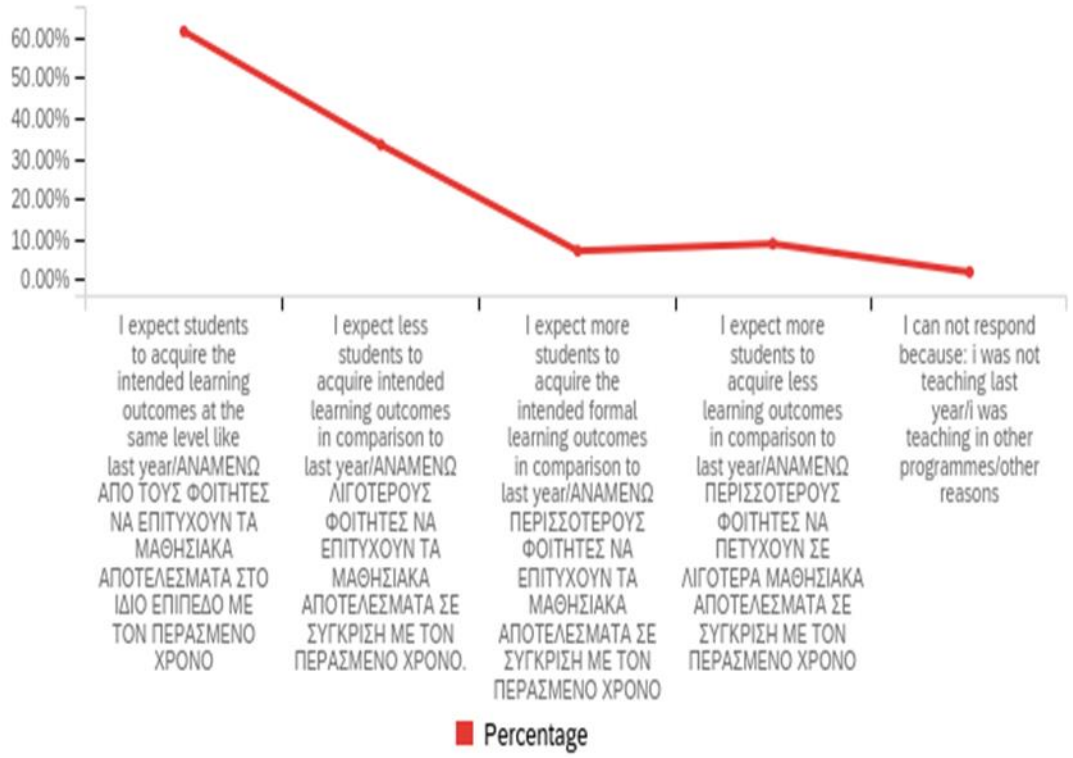
32% reported that the quality of teaching was positively influenced.

For some, (27%) felt there was no impact on the quality of their teaching therefore, no influence on student intended learning outcomes?



How about student learning: Teacher pre-Assessment of the Intended Learning Outcomes. Knowledge and Skills Problems?

- 60% of the Instructors expected/predicted the attainment (by students) of learning outcomes at least at the same level as in the previous regular year.
- 38% of Instructors expected fewer students to obtain intended learning outcomes or more students to attain less learning outcomes than in the previous academic period.



Sum up of Findings: Towards The Empowerment of Active and Interactive Approaches?

- 1. Although abrupt, the change in teaching approaches brought about academic discussion of best practices in most cases prior adaptation
- 2. The majority of HEIs instructors changed their teaching strategy in practice and were not static.
- 3. The quality of Teaching is estimated to have been negatively influenced for many academics
- 4. Lectures, discussions and case studies are perceived as irreplaceable techniques for teachers while less emphasis was placed on more innovative methods
- 5. It is estimated (by the Teachers) that due to COVID-19 restrictions and a sharp change in teaching data, a part of the students did not acquire at the same level (compared to the previous year) the intended learning outcomes, i.e. an additional knowledge and skills gap was created to some of our students. This needs to be recognised and addressed by HEIs and other stakeholders.
- 6. Not much use of Online Quizzes, Break-out rooms for online discussion and collaboration. But, Approaches that stimulate learning and contribute to active participation, strengthen the student's autonomy (communication, collaboration, empathy) in fully online and mixed programs are a necessary strategy especially, but not only, due to the pandemic.
- Suggestion: peer instruction and flipped learning to support flexible blended learning (Neratzi, 2020).
- Such Strategies can be used more to enhance skills and interaction

Learning as An Experience

Peer instruction

- Mazur (Harvard, 1997):
- Preparation of students outside the classroom (reading and answers to relevant questionnaires)
- In the classroom, the teacher poses conceptual questions and follows student collaboration (peer interaction), re-evaluation, etc.
- Objective: Transfer learning out-of-class and Identify and Address common (for students) comprehension difficulties through teacher support.

Flipped Classroom”

- Bergmann and Sams (2012):
- Learning outside the classroom using resources such as videos sent by teachers
- The aim is to "freeze time" so that there is cooperation through activities and Problem solving
- Application in the (online or face to face) Classroom
- In its most advanced form, students are invited autonomously or in collaboration to edit the material given to them instead of being ordinary consumers (Nerantzi and Hannaford, 2016).
- Objective: targeted support to problems of understanding