

Enhancing quality in open and distance education. Learners' perceptions of quality in communication with tutors-counsellors

Dr. Xanthopoulou Panagiota,
Hellenic Open University, School of Humanities,
Parodos Aristotelous 18 Str., Patras, Greece
xanthopoulou.panagiota@ac.eap.gr (**corresponding author**)

Solomou Persefoni (MSc in Humanities),
Hellenic Open University, School of Humanities,
Parodos Aristotelous 18 Str., Patras, Greece, persasol24@hotmail.gr

Dr. Ioakimidou Vasiliki, Hellenic Open University, School of Humanities,
Parodos Aristotelous 18 Str., Patras, Greece
ioakeimidou.vasiliki@ac.eap.gr

Abstract

The aim of the research is to investigate learners' perceptions about the quality of their communication with their tutors-counsellors in distance education. The sample consisted of 120 postgraduate students at the Hellenic Open University. A quantitative research method was followed with the distribution of online questionnaires regarding the factors that determine the quality of communication between tutors-counsellors and students in distance education. Among others, determinants such as the friendly atmosphere between themselves and their tutors-counsellors, the clarity, and the completeness of the messages they receive, the encouragement from the tutor and the understanding of their feelings, the proper use of verbal and non-verbal communication, the adequacy of the available communication tools and the regular communication were mostly mentioned. The results also showed that quality communication helps the tutor to meet the needs of his/her students for advice and support, in the immediate resolution of questions, while it also enhances the exchange of views, encourages students to continue their effort, reduces their feelings of stress and helps them identify their weaknesses. The results could be useful for distance education stakeholders such as tutors and policy makers to better communicate and indicate new factors and practices that will assure the effectiveness in learning process and build trust between tutors and learners.

Keywords: Distance Education, Communication, Quality, Tutors-Counsellor, Learner.

1. Introduction

Distance education is the education supported by means of communication (e.g., email, television, telephone, video conferencing, computer, etc.) (Kamal & Nurul, 2020). A main characteristic is the absence of interpersonal contact between the tutor and the students. The participants in the educational process (the tutors and the students) are physically separated and communicate using different means, at different times. Technology has a vital role in this form of education, as it mediates to create a two-way communication between tutors and students (Ferri, Grifoni & Guzzo, 2020). The development of communication between the tutor (as known in terms of distance education) and the learners is very important, as it can significantly minimize any possible problems that arise (for instance technical ones or problems related with stress and

difficulties to manage time and deadlines). Through a constructive and meaningful communication, creative relationships are developed between the student and the tutor, while at the same time the desirable learning results are more easily achieved (Berge, 2013; Martin & Bolliger, 2018). At the same time, bonds of trust and respect are developed, while mutual respect, cooperation and teamwork are promoted among those involved (Aydin, 2013; Alawamleh, Al-Twait & Al-Saht, 2020). Assuring quality communication requires the tutors' appropriate skills (both soft and hard ones), so that they can increase the participants' engagement in the learning process. Every educator should try to eliminate the negative feelings and reservations of the students, to limit the sense of loneliness they may feel which can lead to failure (Alawamleh et al., 2020; Curelaru, Curelaru & Cristea, 2022). A student's call for communication should have an immediate response from the tutor, to strengthen trust between them (Berge, 2013) and to allow both sides to offer and benefit from effective feedback (Brookhart, 2017). Communication especially in the field of education has received several studies and research in recent years as communication between tutors and students has the potential to improve the learning experience and help achieve academic results. Communication is the transfer of information from one person to another or from one group to another. Effective communication is a process of exchanging ideas, thoughts, knowledge, and information in such a way that the purpose or intention is fulfilled in the best possible way. In other words, it is nothing but the expression of the sender's views in a way that the receiver understands best. Research carried out in Greece has shown that most students seek communication with the tutor, psychological support, and encouragement (Zygouris & Mavroidis, 2011; Xanthopoulou & Stavrakakis, 2019), while they wish their tutor to have communication skills (Xanthopoulou & Lappa, 2021). Other research has shown that the absence of communication skills on the part of the tutors, resulted in the strengthening of the feeling of alienation and isolation on the part of the students (Doukakis, Niari, Malliou, Vlachou & Filippakopoulou, 2022; Paulovčáková, 2022). When tutors communicate with students, either in the classroom in person or through a teleconference, they communicate with the purpose of imparting knowledge and developing relationships. Communicating with students in an online environment such as that imposed by distance education requires more thought and planning, as most often lacks body language. Communication barriers, on the other hand, as in any communication process, also exist in distance education for reasons such as physical distance between members, difficulties in dealing with new media, time constraints, cognitive background, limited skills in using technology, etc. (Oliveira, Grenha Teixeira, Torres & Morais, 2021; Papadimitriou, Lionarakis & Ioakeimidou, 2019).

The present research examines students' opinions regarding their communication with tutors-counsellors in distance education programs in tertiary education that participated in. The contribution of the study lies in several points. First, while several studies have been conducted on distance education and the interaction between students and tutors, however, there is very little research that focuses on communication and more specifically on determinants of its quality. The particular importance of the research lies in the analysis of learners' perceptions regarding the quality in their communication with the tutors in distance education. Therefore, their answers provide a clear picture of the quality of communication that develops during the educational process in open and distance education (ODE), highlighting at the same time possible problems or obstacles or even reinforcing its advantages or positive elements. More specifically, this research can be a source of important information and statistics about the communication that develops between instructors and students in distance education. In this way, suggestions can be noted that will improve the existing communication conditions and will be an important factor in improving the educational process in distance education in the future.

2. Literature review

2.1 Communication in Open and Distance Education

Communication is the medium that contributes to the creation of meaningful learning and according to theorists it determines to a significant extent the outcomes of learning (Anjum, Bhatti & Iqbal, 2022). Overcoming distance was, from the beginning, the primary goal of the first distance education institutions. Initially, the post office was the first distance education provider as far as communication is concerned.

Along the way, the telephone, the radio, and the television were used as communication and information networks. Historically, it is believed that the real growth of distance education coincided with the invention of the postage stamp and the generalization of cheap postal services (Henry & Kaye, 1985). More specifically, communication was ensured with the correspondence courses proposed by Pitmann in 1840, due to the cheap postal services of the time. However, the development of information and communication technologies played a decisive role in the evolution of distance education. According to Moore (1989) there are three types of communication: a) student-to-student communication, b) tutor-to-student communication, and c) learner-to-learning material communication (Harvey & Newton, 2007). It should be mentioned that the role of teaching in distance education is complex and more demanding than that of traditional institutions. Communication between a tutor-counsellor and student, but also between students, is a fundamental element of educational process (Moore & Kearsley, 2012). The tutors' ability to listen to the student is related to oral and written language. Also, communication should be interpreted (Esra & Sevilen, 2021; Ajmal & Ahmad, 2019). When tutors and learners communicate at the same time in different places, then the communication is called synchronous, while it is asynchronous when the communication takes place at a different time and in a different place. These last two forms of communication, which are carried out over the Internet, currently support the virtual classrooms of open and distance education (ODE) (Shearer, Aldemir, Hitchcock, Resig, Driver & Kohler, 2020). Cooperative learning plays an important role in the educational process as it exhibits a significant number of advantages. First it affects learning outcomes and social skills. It also increases the number of students who complete their degree (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002; Chatterjee & Correia, 2020; Peacock & Cowan, 2019; Weinbren, 2020). Collaboration and communication between students are characteristics of distance education (Octaberlina & Muslimin, 2020). According to Lee, Song & Hong, (2019) the communication that develops between students shows that they do not develop relationships of competition, but of cooperation during education. This has the effect of increasing their performance and prevents them from stopping their studies. When students communicate and collaborate with each other, they are more easily led to solve problems, while they can use metacognitive techniques in the best possible way. Communication among students also leads to innovative ideas and solutions. Finally, students' communication with the appropriately designed, developed, used and assessed educational material is a defining characteristic of education (Sadeghi, 2019). Without it barriers to the learning process will probably occur, as the process of interacting with the educational content leads to changes in the student's understanding and consequently in the acquisition of knowledge.

2.2 Barriers to communication in Open and Distance Education

The success or failure of an online learning program can be influenced by a variety of factors, ranging from student-led factors to educators-led factors (Garrison & Shale, 1987; O'Doherty, Dromey, Loughed, Hannigan, Last & McGrath, 2018). Distance education allows everyone to learn better and have more choices based on the constructive approach. Technological means are an important necessity for distance education and students have a more flexible educational opportunity. On the other hand, the lack of personal contact between tutors and students can lead to a loss of motivation for the latter. Besides, there are many obstacles in the teaching and learning process in distance education (Berge, 2013). The literature has a wealth of studies on the various barriers that arise in open and distance education (Berge, 2013; Abuhammad, 2020; Rahiem, 2020). These can be categorized in various ways such as psychological, pedagogical, technical, social, cultural, and so on (Berge, 1998). Regardless of how they are categorized, to some extent most of these barriers overlap and merge (Dabaj, 2011). Ineffective communication is at least a partial cause of most of these barriers to distance teaching and learning (Ozelkan & Galambosi, 2012). Communication barriers can arise at all stages of distance education process: planning, development, delivery, or implementation of distance learning courses. The most common barriers include the ignorance of the roles of both tutors and learners. Studies (such as Abuhammad, 2020; Bastos, Carvalho, Brandão, Bergamasco, Sandars & Cecilio-Fernandes, 2022) show that barriers to distance education fall into categories

such as cost, motivation, feedback, and communication with tutors-counsellors. They are also found in student support and services, alienation, lack of experience and training. In addition, due to the lack of information about their role in distance education, there are barriers in the faculty and organization. The content of the courses on the other hand is another obstacle and needs to be modified. There are some differences between the types of communication in distance education and learning that takes place in the traditional classroom. Technical communication barriers can be created due to tutors' and learners' lack of experience with technology and can cause significant problems in communicating with each other, for example creating misunderstandings in communications (Perreault, et al., 2002; Gan & Sun, 2022; Yeung & Yau, 2022). Therefore, it is important to also address communication barriers due to the use of technology if specialized and effective distance education is to be pursued. For the use of new technologies to be effective, both students and tutors should be familiar with the use of new technologies which should be planned with the appropriate pedagogical approach. In this way they can reap the maximum benefits to the learners (Zygouris & Mavroidis, 2016; Amir et al., 2022).

2.3 The quality of communication in Open and Distance Education

Distance education includes activities which can lead to learning; thus, communication media is a key factor that forms the bridge between those involved in the educational process (Dimpleby et al., 1992). There is a common view in the literature that communication plays an important role in the learning process (Xanthopoulou, 2020; Gecer, 2013; Watts, 2016; Khoo, Forret & Cowie, 2010). Among others, Nielsen, Chan & Jahng, (2010) point that communication allows the exchange of information, thoughts and ideas that contribute to learning. For this reason, efforts are being made to establish more effective ways of communicating in distance education programs to compensate for the lack of face-to-face interaction between the tutor and the student. Distance education requires an instructional design approach that can lead to educational transformation. This is characterized by advanced flexibility, learner autonomy and extensive use of digital technologies to improve learning outcomes. The main feature of this methodology is the physical distance between teaching staff, peers, and educational institutions. Various technological tools are used to bridge this distance and improve communication and interaction (Vlachopoulos & Makri, 2019). In the context of distance education, communication and understanding between participants is essential. Also, communication between tutors and learners is a vital element of successful distance education. However, as mentioned above, to achieve learning and its understanding by the learners, there should be no barriers should be diminished or ideally overcome. It is very important to make continuous efforts to improve the way students and tutors communicate, including the following elements:

- Provision of clear statements about course objectives and the purpose of online activities and assignments.
- Provision of navigational assistance so students know where course activities and resources are located, when, where and how assignments are to be submitted that clearly link content, activities and assignments to course assessment and objectives.
- Use of a clear, concise language in assignments, curriculum, and publications.
- Provision of summaries, additional resources, and feedback to help students assess their learning.
- Guidance on appropriate team procedures and appropriate division of labor/tasks.
- Design the materials and processes of the online classroom that will help students get to know each other and have an opportunity to build trust, especially before assigning group work (Sarrafzadeh & Williamson, 2012; Wang & Kang, 2006).

3. Methodology

The purpose of this study is the research of students' perceptions in an open university regarding the quality of student-teacher communication, students' needs on which tutors should respond enhancing the quality in their communication, as well as students' suggestions on how this kind of communication may enhance its quality. The research questions for this paper are:

1. What factors determine the quality of communication between tutors and students in distance education?
2. What kinds of needs could be covered through students-teacher communication?
3. What ways of improving communication with the tutor do the students suggest?

A quantitative method was followed, as the object of the research is clearly described, while there is complete demarcation of the dependent and independent variables. High data reliability rates are also achieved through this method (Henson, Stewart & Bedford, 2020). The sample consisted of 120 distance learning students who attended exclusively online classrooms/ group advisory meetings. Here it should be mentioned that before pandemic, Hellenic Open University was scheduling three or five group advisory meetings in traditional, face to face classrooms. Due to the current situation of the pandemic crisis, students meet their tutor online. The research tool used was an online questionnaire that was distributed and completed electronically using the GoogleForm platform. The questionnaire consists of individual sections that, through the closed-type questions, provide answers to the research questions that have been raised. Closed-ended questions make it easier for participants to complete them, as they are simple and understandable (Cresswell, 2011).

The data were collected and grouped with the help of Excel and were finally analyzed through SPSS statistical tool.

4. Results

From the Reliability Statistics (table 1) we have that the Cronbach's coefficient is very satisfactory (0.905) since it tends to 1. To qualify a questionnaire as reliable, the Cronbach's α reliability index should be greater than 0.70. So, these 23 questions satisfactorily compose a scale. In addition, the composition of the questionnaire was based on the studies of Iliadou & Anastasiadis (2010) and Iliadou (2011), thus ensuring its validity.

Table 1. Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
,905	23

According to the data presented in table 2, the factors that determine the quality of communication between tutors and learners in distance education are the friendly atmosphere between them, the clarity and completeness of messages from the tutor-counsellor, the encouragement that helps them to develop quality communication, the understanding of the student's emotions (stress, pressure, etc.) by the tutor, the correct use of verbal and non-verbal communication by the tutor, the adequacy of the available communication tools (operating system, technological equipment, etc.) and the regular communication (e.g. once a week) between the student and the tutor. Finally, the tutor's interest in the family, work, and personal situation of the learners, according to the opinions of the sample, is not a key factor in ensuring quality in communication.

Table 2. Factors that determine the quality of communication between tutors and students in distance education

Factors	Average
The friendly atmosphere between tutor and students is an example of quality features in student-teacher communication	4,28
The clarity and rich content of messages from the tutor is an example of quality communication	4,50
Encouragement helps to develop quality communication	4,55
Tutor's understanding of the student's feelings (stress, pressure, etc.) as well as empathy leads to the development of quality communication.	4,37
The correct use of verbal and non-verbal signs by the tutor helps to develop quality communication	4,46
The tutor's interest in the family and work situation of the students is an feature of quality communication	3,69
Students should be or become familiar with various communication tools (operating system, technological equipment, etc.), helps to develop quality communication	4,23
Systematic communication (e.g. once a week) between the student and the tutor helps to develop quality communication	4,20

Table 3 presents the educational needs covered by quality communication between tutors and students. First, quality in communication helps the tutor to respond to students' needs for advice and support, through e.g. frequent announcements. It also helps to the appropriate guidance in the activities that the students are asked to carry out, it strengthens the exchange of opinions between the student and the tutor on educational issues (e.g. teaching topics, educational materials, etc.), it encourages students to keep trying, it reduces students' feelings of anxiety and insecurity, and helps them identify their weaknesses more easily. Finally, the respondents argue that the quality communication between tutors and students helps a lot in developing a friendly and open relationship between them.

Table 3. Educational needs covered by quality communication between tutors and students

Educational needs	Average
The tutor Develops a friendly and open relationship between them.	3,88
The tutor responds to the students' needs for advice and support, through e.g. frequent announcements	4,18
Immediate resolution of students' questions by the tutor.	4,43
Appropriate guidance in the activities that the students are asked to carry out.	4,36
It enhances the exchange of views between the student and the tutor on educational issues (e.g. teaching topics, educational material, etc.).	4,38
It encourages students to continue their efforts.	4,51
It reduces students' feelings of anxiety and insecurity.	4,26
It helps students identify their weaknesses more easily.	4,13

Finally, table 4 lists all the ways to improve communication with the tutor, suggested by the students.

Table 4. Ways to improve communication with the tutor

Suggested ways	Average
The tutor must take into account the special characteristics and interests of the students (e.g. learning difficulties, etc.)	4,50
The tutor should explain from the beginning of the semester the advantages of regular communication.	4,21
The tutor should monitor the frequency of communication with the trainees.	4,03
If students do not respond immediately, the tutor should contact them to determine if they need help	3,93
The tutor should encourage the trainees to express their opinion using the forum and teleconferences in order to reduce feelings of loneliness and insecurity	4,30
Feedback on student work through constructive and effective feedback improves quality in communication	4,53
The tutor should clearly explain to the students the appropriate methodology for each task.	4,63

5. Discussion

The results on the factors that determine the quality of communication between tutors and students in distance education highlights the friendly atmosphere between the tutor and the student. Many studies also come to similar results (Shearer et al., 2020; Ozelkan & Galambosi, 2012; Abuhammad, 2020; Bastos et al., 2022; Perreault, et al., 2002; Gan & Sun, 2022; Yeung & Yau, 2022). Accordingly, Blasquez and Alonso (2006) note that tutors must develop a friendly disposition, understanding, as well as skills on how to develop appropriate relationship with students. Clarity and completeness of messages from the tutor, encouragement from his side also helps to develop quality communication. Understanding the student's feelings (stress, pressure, etc.) is another factor that determines the quality of communication. Other researchers (Alawamleh et al., 2020; Curelaru et al., 2022) led to similar results, as most students appeared to request emotional support through their communication with the tutor. Generally, there is a shared opinion among researchers that communication contributes to removing the feelings of loneliness, exclusion and isolation of a distance learner (Blasquez & Alonso, 2006; Cekerol et al., 2007; Alawamleh et al., 2020; Curelaru et al., 2022; Harvey & Newton, 2007). In addition, the correct use of verbal and non-verbal communication by the tutor, the adequacy of the available communication tools (operating system, technological equipment, etc.) in turn help in communication. As other studies note, these specific skills are essential resources for every tutor (Aydin, 2013; Alawamleh et al., 2020; Xanthopoulou & Lappa, 2021; Oliveira et al., 2021). Also, regular communication (e.g. once a week) between the student and the tutor helps to develop quality communication. In other studies (Klimova & Poulouva, 2011; Jimerez, Rodriguez & Vidal, 2017) it is stated that the tutors-consultants in the open and distance education should seek to communicate regularly with the students in order to engage them in the educational process.

Regarding the educational needs covered by quality communication between tutors and students, quality in communication helps the tutor to respond to the students' needs for advice and support, among other things. Students, through their communication with the tutor-counsellor, seek and wish for their frequent guidance, the provision of advice and the development of a harmonious cooperation between them. This finding agrees with other researchers' work like Peacock and Cowan (2019), Xanthopoulou and Lappa (2021) and Weinbren, (2020). Similarly, Tait (2003) argues that students need the tutor's support and advice during their studies. Quality in communication also helps in prompt resolution of queries and leads to appropriate guidance in the activities that students are asked to carry out. In addition, quality communication enhances the exchange of views between the student and the tutor on educational issues (for example, teaching topics, educational materials, etc.). At the same time, it encourages students to continue their effort, reduces feelings

of anxiety and insecurity and at the same time helps students to identify their weaknesses and improve them more easily. These results agree with those of many studies such as Esra and Sevilen (2021), Xanthopoulou and Stavrakakis (2019), Ajmal and Ahmad (2019) who point out that the communication between tutors and students covers not only the educational, but also the emotional needs of the students.

The participants in our research suggest ways to improve student-tutor communication. The tutor should find details and keep in mind students' special characteristics (e.g. learning difficulties) and their interests. The teacher should explain from the beginning of the semester to the learners the importance and the advantages of systematic communication. Similar practices suggest among others Vlachopoulos and Makri (2019) and Peacock and Cowan (2019) to enhance students' sense of belonging. Besides, the tutor should monitor the frequency of his/her communication with the learners. Just in case there are students that it's long since they last communicated, the teacher should contact them to determine if they need help. Similar conclusions have been reached by other research which support that lecturers should spend more time communicating with students identifying and responding to their weaknesses or any other problems (Alawamleh et al., 2020; Zygouris & Mavroides, 2011; Kazana, Armakolas, Kazantzis & Krotký, 2022; Blasquez & Alonso, 2006; Cekerol, Torpac & Ozkalan, 2007; Jung, Wong, Li, Baigaltugs & Belawati, 2011). Finally, tutors should provide feedback on the students' work through constructive and effective comments that will improve the quality of communication, while he/she should also clearly explain to the students the appropriate methodology for each assignment or activity.

Conclusions and Suggestions for future research

This research recorded the opinions of postgraduate students at the Hellenic Open University regarding the communication between tutors-counsellors and students. At this point there are some limitations that should be mentioned. Firstly, due to the difficult conditions created by the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the imposition of restrictive measures, it was not possible to distribute the questionnaires and complete them by the participants in physical presence. Thus, possible questions when filling in the questionnaires from the participants, could not be solved by the researcher, which probably affected the answers and consequently the results of the research. In addition, the use of the questionnaire as a research tool limits the participants to analyze their thoughts and delve deeper into the topic under investigation. There is also the possibility that the answers are not objective, as the participants in their answers do not always express their opinions objectively, but sometimes try to "beautify" the situation. However, this may lead to unreliable conclusions.

Quality in education is determined by several factors. Teachers should take these factors under consideration so as to create an effective learning environment for their students. Students on the other hand should benefit from these conditions as possible. Lecturers should be friendly to students and make sure their messages are clear and understandable. They should also encourage students to contact them when they are in need. They should seek regular communication and be close to them, understanding their feelings, fears and anxiety that may possess them. Finally, the necessary tools and the necessary technological equipment should be ensured during teaching. Students have a variety of needs that teachers are asked to respond to them through their teaching. The development of quality communication can play a catalytic role in meeting these needs. Students need support and guidance. They also need a teacher to support and advise them, helping them to overcome problems during the course and emotional and psychological difficulties that they may experience in open and distance education. The quality of the communication between the teacher and the learner in open and distance education must be a priority for both sides. Tutors-counsellors should put the students and their needs (educational and emotional) at the centre of their teaching and adapt the course to them. Feedback plays a dominant role in open and distance education. Lecturers should provide students with appropriate and constructive feedback that will facilitate them in carrying out tasks and help them to overcome difficulties and obstacles in understanding the course. Findings also indicated that, the tutor should consider their special characteristics, he/she should also explain the advantages of regular communication, monitor the frequency of communication, encourage students to express their opinion in the forum and during the teleconferences, provide constructive comments in his/her feedback and clearly explain the methodology for each task.

The sample of the present study consisted of 120 students at the Hellenic Open University. This number can be considered relatively small compared to the volume that characterizes this population group. For this reason, it would be appropriate to repeat similar research in which a larger sample will participate so that the results can be generalized. It would also be of particular interest to record the views of the other side, specifically the tutors. For example, the research could include interviews with Tutors, where they will give their opinions on the specific topic being studied. In this way, a more holistic picture of the existing situation will be ensured, and more objective results will be able to be obtained. Finally, similar research could be conducted for other higher education institutions which provide open and distance education, such as the Open University of Cyprus. These results, even using a comparison, should enhance the way the Hellenic Open University, but also other open educational institutions, operates.

References

- Abuhammad, S. (2020). Barriers to distance learning during the COVID-19 outbreak: A qualitative review from parents' perspective. *Heliyon*, 6(11), e05482.
- Ajmal, M., & Ahmad, S. (2019). Exploration of Anxiety Factors among Students of Distance Learning: A Case Study of Allama Iqbal Open University. *Bulletin of Education and Research*, 41(2), 67-78.
- Amir, H., Windasari, D. P., Sriyanah, N., Ilyas, H., Alam, R. I., Ernasari, E., & Agus, A. I. (2022). Students' perceptions of online learning in nursing education in the COVID-19 pandemic. *International Journal of Health Sciences*, 6, 396-403.
- Aydin, H. (2013). Interaction between tutors and students in online learning. *Journal of Environmental Protection and Ecology*, 14, 1337-1352.
- Bastos, R. A., Carvalho, D. R. D. S., Brandão, C. F. S., Bergamasco, E. C., Sandars, J., & Cecilio-Fernandes, D. (2022). Solutions, enablers and barriers to online learning in clinical medical education during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic: a rapid review. *Medical Teacher*, 44(2), 187-195.
- Baticulon, R. E., Sy, J. J., Alberto, N. R. I., Baron, M. B. C., Mabulay, R. E. C., Rizada, L. G. T., ... & Reyes, J. C. B. (2021). Barriers to online learning in the time of COVID-19: A national survey of medical students in the Philippines. *Medical science educator*, 31(2), 615-626.
- Berge, Z. L. (1998). Barriers to online teaching in post-secondary institutions: Can policy changes fix it. *Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration*, 1(2), 2.
- Berge, Z. L. (2013). Barriers to communication in distance education. *Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education*, 14(1), 374-388.
- Brookhart, S.M. (2017). *How to give effective feedback to your students (Second edition)*. Alexandria, Virginia: ASCD.
- Cekerol, K., Torpak, E., & Ozkanal, B. (2007). The Planning and Application of a Communication Model for Quality and Effective Learning in Distance Education. Proceedings, EADTU's 20th Anniversary Conference "International courses and services online: Virtual Erasmus and a new generation of Open Educational Resources for a European and global outreach". 8-9 November, Lisbon, Portugal. Retrieved 29/10/2008 from <http://www.eadtu.nl/conference-2007/files/SAA6.pdf>
- Cohen, L., Manion, L. & Morrison, K. (2007). *Research Methods in Education* (6th ed.). London: Routledge.
- Dabaj, F., & YETKİN, A. (2005). Analysis of communication barriers to distance education: A review study. *Online J. Commun. Media Technol*, 1.
- Dimbleby, R., et al. (1992). *More than words: An Introduction to Communication*. New York: Routledge
- Esra, M. E. Ş. E., & Sevilen, Ç. (2021). Factors influencing EFL students' motivation in online learning: A qualitative case study. *Journal of Educational Technology and Online Learning*, 4(1), 11-22.
- Gan, I., & Sun, R. (2022). Digital Barriers and Individual Coping Behaviors in Distance Education During COVID-19. *International Journal of Knowledge Management (IJKM)*, 18(1), 1-15.
- Garrison, D. & Shale, D. (1987). Mapping the boundaries of distance education: Problems in defining the field. *The American Journal of Distance Education*, 1(1), 4-13.
- Gecer, A. (2013). Lecturer-student communication in blended learning environments. *Educational Sciences: Theory and Practice*, 13(1), 362-367.
- Harvey, L., & Newton, J. (2007). Transforming quality evaluation: moving on. In *Quality assurance in higher education* (pp. 225-245). Springer, Dordrecht.

- Henson, R., Stewart, G., & Bedford, L. (2020). Key challenges and some guidance on using strong quantitative methodology in education research. *Journal of Urban Mathematics Education*, 13(2), 42-59.
- Jung, I., Wong, T. M., Li, C., Baigaltugs, S. & Belawati, T. (2011). Quality assurance in Asian distance education: diverse approaches and common culture. *International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning*, 12 (6), 63-83.
- Kamal Z. & Nurul, M. (2020). What do we mean by Distance Education? Theories and Practices: A Study for New Beginning. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. Doi.10.2139/ssrn.3572305.
- Kazana, A., Armakolas, S., Kazantzis, S., & Krotký, J. (2022). The Teacher's Cognitive Role in the Efficiency of Distance Education: A Case Study. *Social Education Research*, 299-306.
- Khoo, E., Forret, M., & Cowie, B. (2010). Lecturer-student views on successful online learning environments. *Waikato Journal of Education*, 15(3).
- Klimova, B. & Poulova, P. (2011). Tutor as an important e-learning support. *Procedia Computer Science*, 3, 1485-1489.
- Moore, M. (1989). Three types of interaction; The American Journal of Distance Education. *Volume 3 (2) Editorial*.
- Nielsen, W., Chan, E. K., & Jahng, N. (2010). Collaborative learning in an online course: A comparison of communication patterns in small and whole group activities.
- O'Doherty, D., Dromey, M., Loughheed, J., Hannigan, A., Last, J., & McGrath, D. (2018). Barriers and solutions to online learning in medical education—an integrative review. *BMC medical education*, 18(1), 1-11.
- Oliveira, G., Grenha Teixeira, J., Torres, A., & Morais, C. (2021). An exploratory study on the emergency remote education experience of higher education students and teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic. *British Journal of Educational Technology*, 52(4), 1357-1376.
- Ozelkan, E.C. & Galambosi, A. (2012). Overcoming communication barriers in online teaching: Understanding faculty preferences. In the Proceedings of the International Conference on Communication, Media, Technology and Design (ICCMD). Istanbul, Turkey. 09-11 May. pp. 292-298.
- Papadimitriou, S. T., Lionarakis, A., & Ioakeimidou, V. (2019). The Hellenic Open University: Innovations and Challenges in Greek Higher Education. *Ανοικτή Εκπαίδευση: το περιοδικό για την Ανοικτή και εξ Αποστάσεως Εκπαίδευση και την Εκπαιδευτική Τεχνολογία*, 15(1), 6-22. (in Greek)
- Peacock, S., & Cowan, J. (2019). Promoting sense of belonging in online learning communities of inquiry in accredited courses. *Online Learning*, 23(2), 67-81.
- Perreault, H., Waldman, L., Alexander, M., & Zhao, J. (2002). Overcoming barriers to successful delivery of distance-learning courses. *Journal of Education for Business*, 77(6), 313-318.
- Rahiem, M. D. (2020). Technological barriers and challenges in the use of ICT during the COVID-19 emergency remote learning. *Universal Journal of Educational Research*, 8(11B), 6124-6133.
- Sarrafzadeh, M., & Williamson, K. (2012). Multicultural, Virtual Work Places: Opportunities and Challenges for LIS Educato. *International Journal of Information Science and Management (IJISM)*, 10(1), 89-102.
- Tait, A. (2003). Reflections on Student Support in Open and Distance Learning *International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning*, 4(1).
- Vlachopoulos, D., & Makri, A. (2019). Online communication and interaction in distance higher education: A framework study of good practice. *International Review of Education*, 65(4), 605-632.

- Wang, M., & Kang, M. (2006). Cybergogy for engaged learning: A framework for creating learner engagement through information and communication technology. In *Engaged learning with emerging technologies* (pp. 225-253). Springer, Dordrecht.
- Watts, L. (2016). Synchronous and asynchronous communication in distance learning: A review of the literature. *Quarterly Review of Distance Education*, 17(1), 23.
- Weinbren, D. (2020). Learning to live together? The Open University, student-prisoners and ‘the Troubles’. *Family & Community History*, 23(1), 4-22.
- Wenger, E., McDermott, R., & Snyder, W. (2002). *Cultivating communities of practice: A guide to managing knowledge*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Business School Press
- Williams, J. (2016). Quality assurance and quality enhancement: is there a relationship?. *Quality in Higher Education*, 22(2), 97-102.
- Wilson, B. (2001). Sense of Community as a Valued Outcome for Electronic Courses, Cohorts, and Programs. Retrieved February 7, 2008.
- Xanthopoulou, P., & Stavrakakis, E. (2019). Supporting Students as a Means of Preventing Dropout in Open and Distance Education. *International Journal of Sciences*, 8(09), 9-19.
- Xanthopoulou, P., & Kappou, I. (2021). “The impact of communication between tutors-counselors and university students in Open and Distance Education on the autonomous and effective learning”, *International Journal of Engineering, Management and Humanities*, 2(1), pp.66-80. Retrieved March 3, 2021 from <https://www.ijemh.com>
- Yeung, M. W., & Yau, A. H. (2022). A thematic analysis of higher education students’ perceptions of online learning in Hong Kong under COVID-19: Challenges, strategies and support. *Education and Information Technologies*, 27(1), 181-208.
- Zygouris, F., & Mavroidis, I. (2011). Η επικοινωνία διδάσκοντα και διδασκόμενων στην εξ αποστάσεως εκπαίδευση. Μελέτη περίπτωσης στο Πρόγραμμα Εκπαίδευσης Εκπαιδευτών του ΚΕΕ ΕΝ. ΑΠ. *Ανοικτή Εκπαίδευση: το περιοδικό για την Ανοικτή και εξ Αποστάσεως Εκπαίδευση και την Εκπαιδευτική Τεχνολογία*, 7(1), 69-86.