University Professors' Perceptions of Online Learning during the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Case Study

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***Abstract*—Higher education around the world has undergone significant transformation as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. This transition compelled Kosovar teachers at all levels to switch to an online mode right away. This study aims to investigate professors' perceptions of online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. A qualitative descriptive approach was used in this study. A questionnaire was used to elicit the responses of 20 professors at University ''Ukshin Hoti'' Prizren, Kosovo. The questionnaire used a 5-point Likert scale. The data were processed using simple statistical analysis. The findings of this study revealed that, on average, professors had positive perceptions towards online classes during the pandemic. This study also revealed that most of professors experienced several technical problems during online classes. Although they experienced some technical problems, the study showed that most of professors enjoyed the online teaching experience. The outcomes of this study will help policymakers and educational institutions design practical and useful online teaching methods and techniques for teachers in the post COVID world.**

***Index Terms*—COVID-19 pandemic, online learning, professors' perceptions.**

I. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused many problems worldwide. Governments and other world leaders decided to close all schools to slow down the spread of the virus [1]. In response to this emergency, all educational institutions in Kosovo switched from face-to-face to online learning in 2020. Online teaching/learning has become a strategic solution to face many challenges imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic [2]. The educational process was carried out through Zoom, Google Meet, Google Classroom, etc. Online learning/teaching is not an easy task for both teachers and students. This emergency mode of teaching and learning as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic has been challenging for both students and teachers [3]. Students and teachers were forced to start using Zoom and other platforms [4]. Thus, this transition has had complexities and limitations. Most teachers have adapted to this new model of teaching [5], but there were others who had little experience with online teaching [6]. In line with this, senior teachers struggled more with the use of technology than younger teachers [7]. This implies that few of them had used online tools or applications as additional teaching resources with their students, but none had taught whole courses online or conducted sessions in an online setting [8]. In addition, one of the reasons why teachers faced challenges is that they had not received education on how to teach online courses [9]. Teachers used different digital platforms for instruction and assessment of students to perpetuate their academic interests [10]. Additionally, teachers were expected to quickly create new strategies for lesson planning and adapt strategies to a fully online learning environment [11].

Although online teaching/learning continues to grow rapidly in developed countries, it remains at an early stage of development in Kosovo [12]. Therefore, this study aims to answer the following research questions:

1) What are Kosovar university professors' perceptions of online teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic?
2) What are the benefits of online teaching?
3) What are the challenges of online teaching?

II. Literature Review

This part presents some of the main findings of the studies on online teaching/learning conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic. These studies have highlighted different aspects of online teaching/learning. A study [13] explored EFL instructors' perceptions toward online teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. The participants in this study were 43 EFL faculty members from the Department of English at Qassim University, Saudi Arabia. A semi-structured questionnaire was used to collect the data. The results revealed that e-teaching could not easily replace traditional education.

Another study in the same year [10] examined teachers' perceptions of online teaching and the obstacles they faced in online teaching. The researchers used a quantitative sample survey approach. A Google Form questionnaire was used to obtain a sample of 200 Delhi school teachers in March and April 2021. Data were analyzed using SPSS software. The results of the study indicated that teachers had a positive perception of virtual teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, teachers encountered several obstacles in online teaching, such as technical obstacles, online exams and assessments, etc.

A recent study [14] assessed the perception of and preference for e-teaching among 438 faculty members. The study revealed that teachers perceived e-teaching as effective during the pandemic, time-efficient, easy-to-share materials, unsuitable for monitoring or conducting practical classes, and less effective for evaluation. In addition, more than three-fourths of the teachers preferred online teaching during the pandemic and most preferred both physical and mixed teaching in the post-pandemic era.

Another study [15] explored Saudi teachers' and students' perceptions of the use of virtual classes for teaching or

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learning English at the English Language Institute (ELI) at King Abdulaziz University. The researchers examined 20 teachers and 22 students. The study demonstrated that the majority of teachers and students held positive attitudes towards virtual classes; however, they preferred face-to-face classrooms. Likely, a study [16] was carried out to explore the opinions of 20 lecturers taking online courses. The results of this study showed that instructors supported online teaching options.

Another study [17] investigated the applied strategies and problems faced by teachers in conducting e-learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings showed teachers' inability to access technology, inadequate school facilities in supporting e-learning, difficulties in explaining the material, students' limitations in accessing the Internet, students' economically disadvantaged family backgrounds, and parents' support systems. In addition, teachers also expressed that the e-learning system relieved their responsibility for conducting teaching and learning processes during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The aforementioned studies were conducted in different foreign contexts. This present study differs from the aforementioned studies in terms of context. This study attempts to analyze professors' perceptions of online learning/teaching as well as the benefits and challenges they experienced during online classes at the University "Ukshin Hoti" in Prizren, Kosovo.

III. Methods

A qualitative descriptive approach was used in this study. It was conducted with a group of professors who teach at the University "Ukshin Hoti" Prizren, Kosovo. Twenty professors participated in this study (male and female). The majority of participants were female, and only eight professors were male. The study population included faculty members of different academic ranks. Most of them had considerable professional experience (see Table I). This study involved professors from the Faculty of Philology (Department of Albanian Language and Literature and Department of English Language and Literature), Faculty of Law, Faculty of Education, and Faculty of Computer Science.

TABLE I: Demographic Background

Age	30 years and below	5
	31- 45 years old	15
Gender	Male	8
	Female	12
Teaching experience	1-10 years	7
	11-20 years	13
Education level	PhD	15
	MA	5

To determine the perceptions of professors regarding the online teaching mode at the University of Prizren, the researcher compiled a questionnaire based on a questionnaire used in another study [13]. There were 20 closed-items on a five-point Likert scale. The options included were 1=strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3=neutral, 4= agree, and 5= strongly agree. Google Form was used to collect the data. The link of the questionnaire was sent to participants via email. After collecting data from all professors, the researcher followed further steps to analyze their questionnaires. The researcher used Google Forms to provide numerical data of this study and then analyzed their perceptions regarding the benefits and challenges of online learning/teaching.

IV. Results

The questionnaire investigated university professors' perceptions of online teaching/learning during the COVID-19 pandemic according to the following dimensions: challenges and benefits.

TABLE II: Professors' Perceptions of Online Classes-Questionnaire Results

Statements	Percentage	
1. I frequently experience technical problems while teaching online.	Strongly agree	0 %
	Agree	40 %
	Neutral	35 %
	Disagree	25 %
	Strongly disagree	0 %
2. Online teaching platforms offer innovative methods of teaching.	Strongly agree	40 %
	Agree	35 %
	Neutral	15 %
	Disagree	10 %
	Strongly disagree	0 %
3. Students understand lectures fully while studying online.	Strongly agree	20 %
	Agree	15 %
	Neutral	65 %
	Disagree	0 %
	Strongly disagree	0 %
4. My students struggle with online learning.	Strongly agree	0 %
	Agree	25 %
	Neutral	40 %
	Disagree	30 %
	Strongly disagree	5 %
5.The online learning environment is not an interactive teaching environment.	Strongly agree	10 %
	Agree	10 %
	Neutral	15 %
	Disagree	65 %
	Strongly disagree	0 %
6. Teaching techniques are limited within virtual classrooms.	Strongly agree	0 %
	Agree	20 %
	Neutral	25 %
	Disagree	40 %
	Strongly disagree	15 %
7. Online mediums offer additional tools useful for in-class discussions (e.g., live chats, voice answers).	Strongly agree	40 %
	Agree	40 %
	Neutral	15 %
	Disagree	5 %
	Strongly disagree	0 %
8. Students can interact easily with their instructors through online teaching channels.	Strongly agree	15 %
	Agree	65 %
	Neutral	20 %
	Disagree	0 %
	Strongly disagree	0 %
9. I can easily assess my students and track their progress while teaching online.	Strongly agree	0 %
	Agree	65 %
	Neutral	25 %
	Disagree	10 %
	Strongly disagree	0 %
10. Online teaching platforms offer innovative methods of assessment.	Strongly agree	25 %
	Agree	55 %
	Neutral	20 %
	Disagree	0 %
	Strongly disagree	0 %
11. I enjoy the experience of teaching online.	Strongly agree	15 %
	Agree	40 %
	Neutral	35 %
	Disagree	10 %

	Strongly disagree	0 %
12. I prefer online teaching to traditional in-class teaching.	Strongly agree	5 %
	Agree	15 %
	Neutral	10 %
	Disagree	45 %
	Strongly disagree	25 %
13. Educational platforms offer multimedia teaching tools that are absent in traditional classrooms (e.g., audio and visual aids).	Strongly agree	30 %
	Agree	55 %
	Neutral	5 %
	Disagree	10 %
	Strongly disagree	0 %
14. I think that online teaching can easily replace traditional in-class teaching.	Strongly agree	5 %
	Agree	15 %
	Neutral	55 %
	Disagree	25 %
	Strongly disagree	0 %
15. Online studying has no negative effects on students' performance.	Strongly agree	0 %
	Agree	15 %
	Neutral	65 %
	Disagree	20 %
	Strongly disagree	0 %
16. I see no change in students' achievement levels as a result of online learning.	Strongly agree	5 %
	Agree	30 %
	Neutral	55 %
	Disagree	10 %
	Strongly disagree	0 %
17. Teaching online is boring.	Strongly agree	5 %
	Agree	5 %
	Neutral	30 %
	Disagree	35 %
	Strongly disagree	25 %
18. Online classes save time.	Strongly agree	60 %
	Agree	40 %
	Neutral	0 %
	Disagree	0 %
	Strongly disagree	0 %
19. Online classes increased my technological skills.	Strongly agree	75 %
	Agree	15 %
	Neutral	5 %
	Disagree	5 %
	Strongly disagree	0 %

As shown in Table II, 8 out of 20 professors (40 %) agreed that 'experienced technical problems while teaching online', followed by 5 professors (25 %) who 'disagreed', and 7 professors (35%) who were 'neutral' about this. In examining the second item, 40 % strongly agreed that 'online teaching platforms offer innovative methods', 35 % 'agreed', 10 % 'disagreed', and 15 % were 'neutral'. A majority of professors (65 %) were 'neutral' that 'students understood lectures fully while studying online', 20 % 'strongly agreed', 15% 'agreed', and no professors (0%) gave 'strongly disagree' and 'disagree' responses. About 40% of them were neutral that students struggled with online learning, whereas 30% 'disagreed', 25% 'agreed', and 5 % 'strongly disagreed'. 65 % of them said that the online learning environment was not an interactive teaching environment, 10 % 'agreed', 10 % 'strongly disagreed', and 15 % were 'neutral'. 40 % of them agreed that 'teaching techniques are limited within virtual classrooms', 25 % were 'neutral', 20 % 'agreed', and 15 % 'strongly disagreed'. To a statement whether online media offer additional tools useful for in-class discussions (e.g., live chats, voice answers), 8 out of 20 professors (40%) 'strongly agreed', 40 % 'agreed', 15 % were 'neutral', and 5 % 'disagreed'. A high percentage of professors (65 %) 'agreed' that 'students can interact easily with their instructors through online teaching channels', 15 % 'strongly agreed', and 20 % were 'neutral'. Moreover, 65 % of them 'agreed' that 'they could easily assess their students and track their progress while teaching online', 10 % 'disagreed', and 25% were 'neutral'.

Regarding item 10, the majority of professors (55%) agreed that 'online teaching platforms offer innovative methods of assessment', 5 out of 20 professors (25%) 'strongly agreed', and 20% were 'neutral'. Surprisingly, about 40 % of them 'agreed' that 'they enjoyed the experience of teaching online', 15 % of them 'strongly agreed', 35 % were 'neutral', and 10 'disagreed' about this. The majority of professors, 45 % of them 'disagreed' that they 'preferred online teaching to traditional in-class teaching', 25 % 'strongly disagreed', 15 % 'agreed', 5% 'strongly agreed', and 10 % were 'neutral'.

In examining item 13, a high percentage of professors (55%) 'agreed' that 'educational platforms offer multimedia teaching tools that are absent in traditional classrooms (e.g., audio and visual aids)', 6 professors (30%) 'strongly agreed', 2 (10%) 'disagreed', and 1 professor (5%) gave 'neutral' response. About 55% of professors were 'neutral' that 'online teaching can easily replace traditional in-class teaching', 15 % 'agreed', 25 % 'disagreed', and 5 % 'strongly agreed' about this. 65% of them were 'neutral' that 'online studying has no negative effects on students' performance', 15 % 'agreed', and 20 % 'disagreed'. 55 % were 'neutral' that they 'see no change in students' achievement levels as a result of online learning', 30 % 'agree', 5% 'strongly agree', and 10% 'disagreed'. Moreover, there was a slight difference for item 17. About 35% of them disagreed that 'teaching online is boring', 25% of them 'strongly disagreed', 30 % were 'neutral', 5% 'strongly agreed', and 5% 'agreed' about this item. Furthermore, 60% of them 'strongly agreed' and 40 % 'agreed' with item 18 regarding saving time. Additionally, 15 out 20 professors (75%) 'strongly agreed' that 'online classes increased their technological skills', 15% 'agreed', 5% 'disagreed', 5 % were 'neutral' about this item.

V. Discussion

This study attempted to examine professors' perceptions of online learning/teaching and investigate the benefits and challenges of online learning/teaching in Kosovo during the COVID-19 pandemic. Regarding the first research question, the results showed that professors had positive perceptions towards online teaching/learning satisfaction. Their experience during the COVID-19 pandemic has led professors to develop positive perceptions [18]. The results of this study were consistent with previous studies conducted by other researchers on online teaching/learning during the COVID-19 pandemic [1], [10], [14], [16].

Regarding the second research question, the findings revealed some benefits related to online teaching/learning. Online teaching/learning has been a blessing for teachers in the sense that it offers professors a chance to improve their technological skills and be creative [18].

The results showed that professors considered online platforms and applications to be effective in learning and teaching processes because they could easily assess their

students and track their progress while teaching online. This result is consistent with that of Saha *et al.* [14]. However, it is not consistent with the study conducted by Mounjid *et al.* [1], which showed that the majority of participants considered online assessment as an inefficient process to evaluate students' performance and progress. Furthermore, this study is not consistent with the study conducted by Todd [6]. Assessing students' performance is problematic because assessment practices have been forced to change along with teaching because no exams or in-class presentations can be organized due to restrictions set by governments worldwide [6]. Similarly, another study [19] revealed that teachers face several challenges when assessing students' performance. Performing assessments during online learning is quite tricky, and teachers require suitable forms of assessment [20].

The results of this study showed that the respondents agreed that online media offer additional tools useful for in-class discussions. This aligns with the study conducted by Todd [6] that showed that teachers had a positive attitude towards the use of technology during the Covid-19 pandemic. This implies that teaching platforms are not limited to virtual platforms. The use of several applications in online learning is beneficial for teachers and students in this learning process [21]. Furthermore, they perceived online teaching as more convenient in terms of saving time compared to face-to-face teaching in the classroom [22]. Most professors agreed that students could easily interact with their instructors through online teaching channels. Therefore, they disagreed that the online learning environment was not an interactive teaching environment. This is not consistent with the study [21], which showed that the majority of teachers found online learning systems to be less effective because of the lack of communication and interaction quality between students and teachers.

The results of this study further revealed that professors enjoyed the experience of teaching online; however, they preferred traditional in-person instruction over online teaching/learning. This aligns with the study conducted by Khalawi and Halabi [15]. Similarly, the results of this study are consistent with the study conducted by Joshi *et al.* [5], which showed that 95% of faculty members expressed that face-to-face teaching is better than online teaching. The respondents gave neutral and disagree responses to the statement that online teaching could easily replace traditional in-class teaching. This indicates that online learning can supplement rather than replace in-person instruction [5].

The implementation of online learning has led to many complex problems that are difficult to solve [23]. Regarding the third research question, the results showed that professors encountered technical problems during online classes. It was the first online class experience with online classes for all professors [24]; however, they managed to overcome technical problems and teach effectively [25]. Thus, to overcome these obstacles, teacher training courses should be held to further improve teachers' skills in teaching with new technologies [24]. Moreover, they disagreed that online learning is boring.

It should be noted that this study showed some 'neutral' and 'disagree' opinions when it comes to some statements. For example, most professors gave 'neutral' and 'disagree' responses whether 'students understand lectures fully while studying online', 'if they struggle with online learning', 'online studying has no negative effects on students' performance', and 'see no change in students' achievement levels as a result of online learning'. One of the reasons why their opinion was 'neutral' and 'disagree' could be linked with the notion of virtual or online learning as a new mode of teaching/learning in Kosovo [1]. Another reason could be the lack of statistical data regarding these issues. To determine the level of satisfaction, the university should have designed a survey and gathered data from academic staff related to online teaching/learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

VI. Conclusion

The findings of the study revealed that, on average, professors had positive perceptions towards online teaching/learning during the pandemic. The study revealed that most of professors found online teaching effective when it came to platforms that they used with their students. However, they have encountered several challenges in online classes [26]. Most professors agreed that they faced several challenges that interrupted the online/teaching processes and that this transition was not smooth at first [27]. Although they experienced technical problems, most professors enjoyed online teaching experience.

Online learning is not very popular in Kosovo. Therefore, the Ministry of Education, Science, Technology, and Innovation (MESTI) should undertake more research to better understand how to improve and integrate technology into the educational system. The findings of this study can help educational institutions and policymakers to design better ways of teaching and learning. Thus, it is necessary to consider or highlight professors' experiences to improve the quality of online education [1]. In addition, their perceptions can be used as data when it comes to implementing newer methods and techniques of teaching and learning during and after the pandemic [10]. Ultimately, since online teaching is a new mode for Kosovar teachers [22], all educational institutions in Kosovo should provide ongoing training to teachers regarding technology, online platforms, and other applications that are necessary in the classroom.

VII. Limitations of the Study

The strength of this study lies in its focus on a novel topic [19]; however, this study was not without limitations. First, this study collected data from 20 university professors at University ''Ukshin Hoti'' Prizren, Kosovo. This limits the generalizability of the findings, because the data did not represent the entire number of Kosovar university professors.

VIII. Recommendations for Further Studies

Investigating perceptions of teachers and students at all levels is suggested because those studies would provide a more complete picture of online learning/teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic in Kosovo. Second, it used a quantitative approach. Thus, future research may adopt other

methods to provide more supporting evidence regarding online learning/teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. Future studies are suggested to examine other online learning components. Finally, further studies may investigate other stakeholders at all levels to gain a deeper understanding of online learning during the pandemic. To summarize, the results of this research, as well as research conducted in different countries and contexts, should guide future decisions about implementing online learning/ teaching [6].

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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