

The Attitude of High-School Students Regarding Online Learning During Covid-19 Pandemic Situation: The Case of Albania

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, we present a study of the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic situation created in the pre-university education system in Albania for two years. We are mainly interested in students' attitudes on online learning and its effect on their knowledge and future learning. For this, we have performed a survey composed of 28 questions answered by 1506 high-school students, of which 67.5 % study in public schools. Most students, 87.7 % of them prefer traditional learning, i.e., being in the classroom, while only 6.6 % seem to prefer more online learning. 79.4 % of the students have answered that they had the entire necessary appliance for online learning, but only 9.3 % of the total students admitted that they never had technical problems during online learning/teaching, while most of them usually had. The majority of students admit that their performance during the online classes was not at a high-quality level. Although they feel comfortable being online most of the time, they don't feel the same about being online for studies purposes. They don't feel very motivated to study online, because among other reasons, interestingly, they all admit that they are not self-disciplined and independent to do that. Consequently, they were not willing to regularly learn during online lessons, and they tend to cheat during the online exams. Unfortunately, this attitude has caused them a lack of knowledge to use in future classes. The results show that Albanian high-school students are not confident about online classes, and their attitude toward online learning seems to be not as good as pretended. Nevertheless, their behaviour and attitude seem to be improved during the second year of online teaching. However, from their responses, we conclude that they would like to combine online learning with the traditional one time to time because they believe this will help them become more independent and more responsible for the future.

Keywords: Online learning, education system, COVID-19 pandemic, high school students, students' attitude.

1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, when we think or talk about online teaching/learning our mind jumps directly to distance learning we all were somehow affected during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, this technique is used by teachers for a long time to send materials to students and to communicate with them in a case when someone was absent or they could not be present in the class [1, 2], it seems like this method now is turned to be the only technique to approach all levels and all ages of students, all over the world, toward the learning process during such emergencies [3]. For almost two years, the world faced

an immediate lockdown and found the education system not well prepared for dealing with all the unexpected issues that came out of [4]. The effects caused by distance learning are somewhat understandable [5], but their consequences will be felt for a long time [6]. Especially in small countries, this situation was even more difficult so teachers and students had to adapt fast and try their best for the educational system to continue and not collapse [7]. The same situation seemed to be in Albania, where teachers and students never tried before online teaching and learning. Some of them might have been using emails for some communications but none of them have ever tried distance learning for any reason. This situation was even worse for high-school education while, in universities, online communication seems to be much known and welcomed [8, 9]. For Albanian high-school students, this technique was completely new and the whole process was not easy, especially in its beginning. The education system in Albania was not pre-prepared for such a situation so that everything had to be adapted fast and in a very short time [10]. After two years of online teaching/ learning, due to the COVID-19 pandemic's situation, the focus now is to understand if all this transformation process, going from teaching and learning in the classroom to teaching and learning online, was successful or not. The attention around the world is mostly focused on studies related to the adaptation of students in higher education [9] and less on high-school students [11]. For Albanian students, of all educational levels, the adaptation to distance learning is more difficult compared to other students outside the country. Moreover, the approach toward it seems to be easier for students of higher education rather than for high-school students, and it becomes even worse for younger students. These difficulties are related to demographic factors such as students' age, the socio-economic conditions they have in their families, and their educators and schools where they study, as mentioned in previous studies [12, 13].

Focusing on high-school students, we have conducted a study based on a survey applied to them and from which we reach several conclusions that are somehow previously assumed and some others that are interestingly different from what we first thought. The purpose of this study is to analyse students' responses and to check either their opinions and feelings or their attitude and behaviour to adapt and improve throughout distance learning. All the students' responses depend on the fact that they have never experienced any distance learning before so that their perception of the pros and cons about it is understandable [14]. Despite all the unpleasant feelings and negative perceptions, students might have, and despite all the disadvantages of online learning, there are many advantages too, applied for all levels of students [15, 16]. There are several advantages of online learning, compared to traditional learning [17], and we affirm some of them, mentioned even in [18], that we believe to be good for the development of the students and their future. We conclude that online learning:

- Increases students' independence toward learning, their self-esteem, and their self-confidence that they can do it.
- Increases students' multi-tasking skills because they are asked to listen, write, use the computer, discuss and probably explore the information at once.
- Boost students to improve their technical, computational, and communication skills. Students learn to be flexible and to rationalize their time, too.
- Decrease somewhat the stress and the pressure, found in traditional learning because during online learning, students can communicate through the screen (which seems to be easier for many students) and they can explain, make decisions, send tasks or perform tests, get some feedback, and the results in real-time.

We have valued all these skills to be very important for students' future because these skills are on demand nowadays and can help them develop their minds and abilities to face different situations and challenge those unexpected ones.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Preparing the questions

In this section we have created a file of more than 50 questions and then discussed them with several groups of interest, such as high-school students and teachers. We, firstly, consulted students and teachers close to us. Then, we have decided the appropriate questions to ask in the survey. Deliberately, the questions selected allow us to analyse the situation and get a proper estimation of it. Finally, we prepared the online survey in a Google form, composed of 28 questions, which could be accessible by every high-school student of age 15-18 years old. The survey has four parts, each of them composed of some questions of the same nature. The first part provides us information about students' general information, such as grades and the type of school they follow (for exp., if they study in a public or non-public school), gender, and the city where they study.

The second part of the questions provides us the information about the conditions they had in their homes to follow online classes regularly, such as the necessary appliance they need, technical issues, and other relevant information they could provide. The third part of the questions was about the students' attitude in general and how serious and correct they were during the online classes. They had to answer questions about their everyday preparation as well as about their attitude during the online exams. The fourth and last part of the questions was about students' perception of online classes and how they felt during that time. They explain their feelings about the situation shortly, and they give suggestions for the future if this method of teaching and learning will continue to be applied.

2.2 Sharing the survey

Firstly we have shared the online survey via email. Afterward, we used social networks such as LinkedIn, WhatsApp, FaceBook, and Instagram. Due to the age of the students interested in this survey, social networks such as WhatsApp and Instagram were more successful in attracting students' attention. In the beginning, we were sharing the questionnaire, but then, satisfactorily, we noticed the students themselves started sharing it. They shared the survey with their peers and friends from different cities in Albania. The students had time to take the survey from April – July 15, 2021.

2.3 Data Analysis

All the results were initially statistically processed directly by Google form. Thus, we could see all the answers and check the corresponding percentages, in general, directly from it. The data analysis depends mostly on direct observations. Continuing further, some additional analyzes were performed using Excel and Origin programs. We use them to build the aimed graphs and, also, to calculate some correlation coefficients, which can help us evaluate the fit that our data show with a linear distribution.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The questionnaire was fully completed by 1506 high-school students, of which 67.5% study in public schools of Albania. In this 2020-2021 academic year, 32.2% of the respondents completed the 10th grade, 34.7% completed the 11th grade, and 33.1% completed the 12th grade. The results show that most of the students prefer traditional learning compared to online learning. The final data indicate that remarkably 87.7% of the students affirm that they prefer more traditional learning. A slight percentage of 6.6% declared that they like online learning more, and another lower percentage of 5.7% counted their preference as equal. Furthermore, 52.9% of students claim that they needed too much time to adapt to online learning even though most of them, specifically 79.4% of all students, admitted that they have all the necessary appliances to conduct online learning. Nevertheless, although almost all of them have usually faced technical problems during online learning, 66.9 % of them admit that it was harder during the first year of online learning while during the second year of distance learning, everything such as adaptation of students and teachers, technical issues, etc., were clearly improved in the Figure 1.

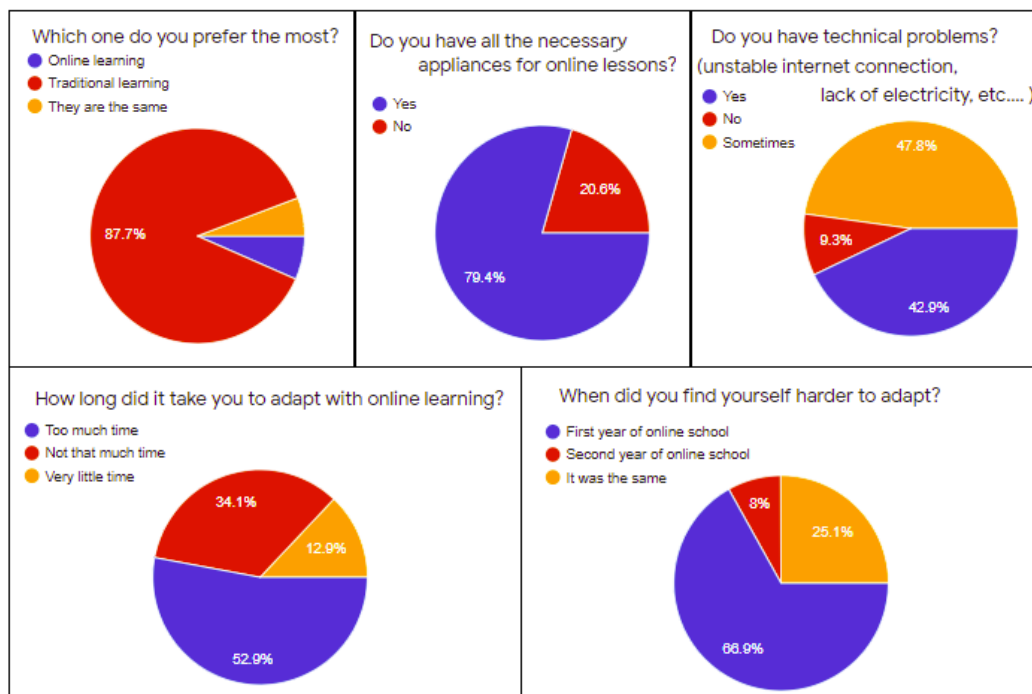


Figure 1. Results of answers that high-school students have given to questions related to their general adaptation and how they feel about online learning.

Results in Figure 1 give the idea that high-school students were really not prepared to attend online classes although they usually spend a lot of time in front of the screen of an electronic device. They all know that some international educational institutions offer online courses, and some of the students have even experienced some of them, but the results show that students were still not prepared for this experience, i.e., they were not ready to follow online classes every day for several months and pretend to act as they were physically in the class. Although most of them had difficulties adapting to this new experience, their attitude was clearly improved during the second year. Figure 2 shows these results, whereas Table 1 gives all the reasons mentioned by the students, justifying why they didn't attend the online classes regularly and didn't feel confident and comfortable about it. Besides the unpleasant effect that COVID-19 caused in

everyone's life, the jump from traditional learning to online one caused a lot of confusion in everyone's daily routine, which was definitely reflected in their education.

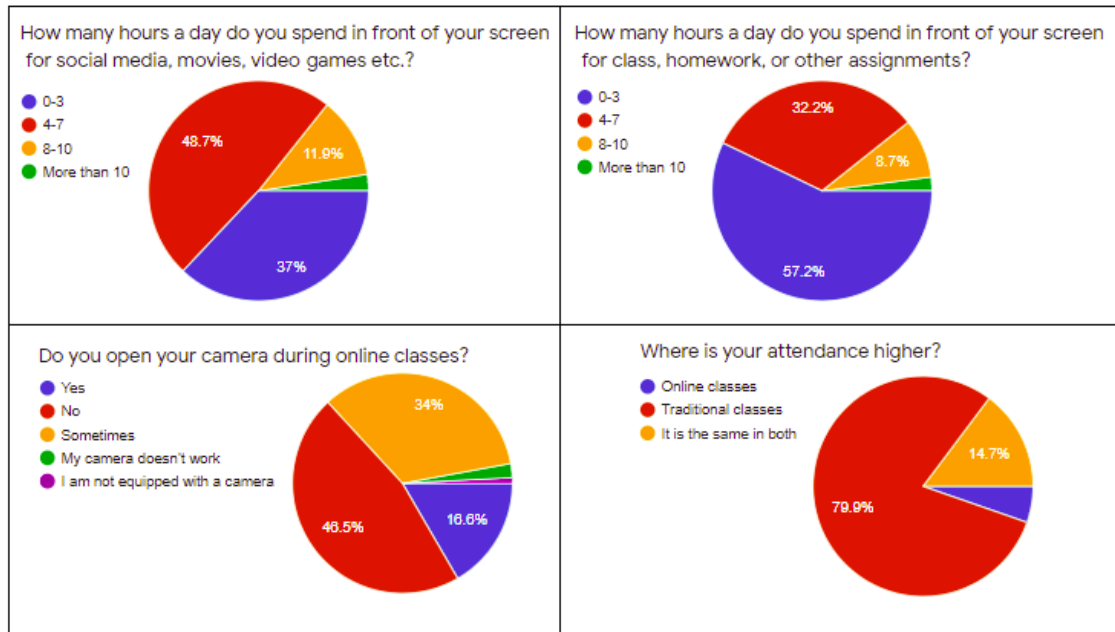


Figure 2. Results that show how much were the high-school students willing to adapt to a long-term online learning because the circumstances created by COVID-19.

Table 1. Reasons claimed by high-school students and their percentages indicating why they didn't attend the online classes regularly.

Reasons	Percentage of students
Technical problems	66.5%
Not prepared for the lesson	11.5%
Lack of motivation to study from home	1.2%
Felt tired to stay for hours in front of a tech appliance	0.3%
Health and family problems	0.6%
Other reasons related to the loss of the interest to follow online learning	19.9%

Another notable finding is that students demonstrate a lower level of productivity and creativity when learning online. The data suggest that significantly 83.6% of the students found themselves to be more productive in classroom learning rather than in online one. 10.3% of them thought that the productivity amount was equivalent comparing both environments and only 6.1% of the fellow students considered their productivity to be in higher terms during online lessons. Being uncomfortable with online learning made students follow their teachers' explanations and instructions for homework and independent projects less. During traditional learning, students used to follow their teachers' instructions more and be more updated about homework and projects. It is visible that, being in these conditions, high-school students tend to skip their responsibilities, and consequently, they tend to learn less and prepare even less for the next lesson. This is clearly shown when only 28.9 % of the students admit that they always did their homework by themselves. The results show that most of them have copied the homework at least one time. When students are asked if they have ever cheated during an online exam, unfortunately only 17.7 % of them admit that they never

cheated on their online exams. Most of the high-school students have cheated in at least one of the online exams, and the way they used to do that was different. Interestingly, they give several ways of the methods they use to cheat, but most of them claim that, during an online exam, the communication between them is crucial. The students were asked to mention all the ways they use to cheat as can be seen in Figure 3, the results shown correspond to the fact that one student has cheated more than one time and he/she might have used all the methods mentioned for at least one time.

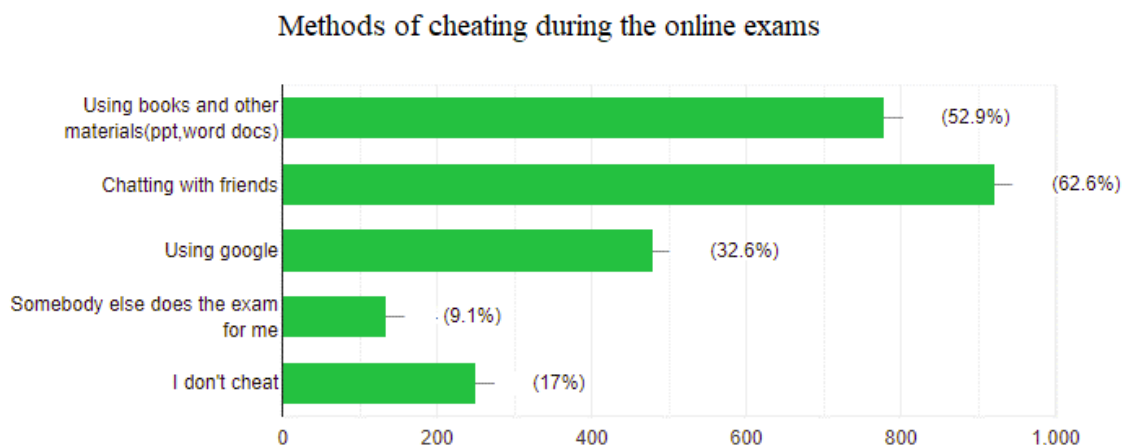


Figure 3. Reasons that were given by students on the way they use to cheat, during an online exam, and the percentage of students that have tried the same method.

Despite the reasons students have mentioned above, following online classes, and trying their best to adapt and act, as they were attending the traditional classes, remains still a very important experience and challenging that will help all students for their future. Although they might not be aware of the benefits of this process, the fact that they didn't enjoy it, in general, is now a fact and they spoke about it. When students were asked to evaluate, on a scale from 1 to 10, how interactive and interesting was online learning on one side, and how stressful it was on the other side, it seems like all of them converge almost in the same results. As shown in Figure 4, the majority of the students have given low evaluation about the first question and high evaluation on the second one. This means that students didn't feel happy attending online classes every day, on the contrary, they were very stressed about this. The results in general give us that picture that describes high-school students as young people being stressed and unhappy with this situation, and they barely attended online classes. If they were free to choose, they would have definitely chosen not to follow or learn independently through an online mechanism. Indeed, 61.9% of the students admit that they are not educated enough to be independent, and they are not those kinds of autodidact students that could have handled these situations by themselves. They don't feel confident to succeed in this process because they don't think they can do that, but on the contrary, they need their teachers' help and guidance. Although their general unpleasant feelings, 31.3% of students admit that they were pleased with their teachers' explanations during the online classes as well as their attitude confront their students. On the other side, 15.9% of the students admit that they were not satisfied with their teachers, whereas the other part of them preferred to be neutral in front of this issue. This means that teachers have done their best, even though they were not pre-prepared about online classes and as their students, they had no idea that this situation would have happened immediately. Results show that teachers have been trying to make online teaching as much interesting as possible, and on the other side, they have tried to encourage their students to interact

with each other. These interactions are more visible between students studying in non-public high schools than in public schools.

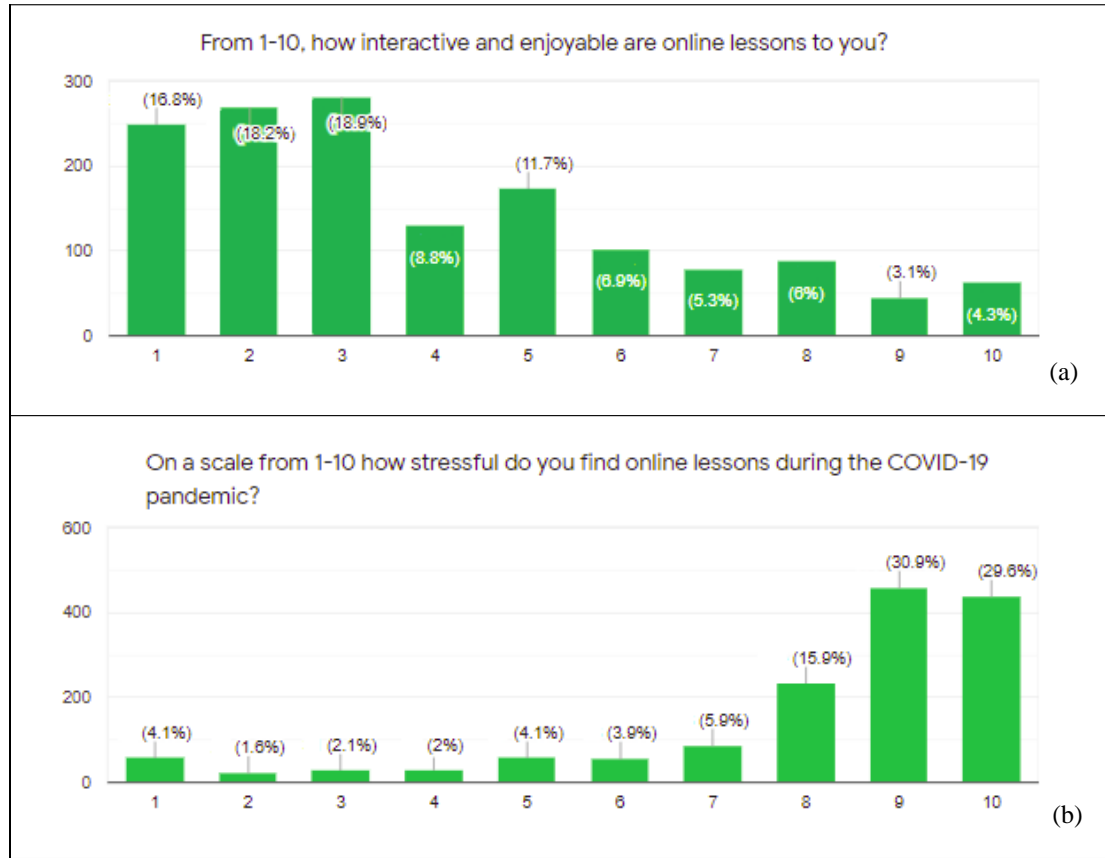


Figure 4. The evaluation that is given by high-school students about: (a) how interactive and enjoyable, and (b) how stressful were online classes during the two years of the COVID-19 pandemic situation.

Furthermore, according to the students, the uncomfortable situation created during online learning seems to depend on the type of subject they had to follow, as well. Students claim that it was not easy to follow science subjects from the screen of a computer or smartphone, which made them feel stressed; while subjects such as language, social science or geography, and history were much easier and enjoyable to follow. In Figure 5, we give the evaluation rate given by the students for most of the subjects. As shown, due to their point of view, a considerable number of students have considered science subjects such as Chemistry, Maths, Physics and Biology to be difficult to follow, in circumstances like Online Learning. Similarly, a large number of them have described social subjects such as English, History, Geography, Philosophy, Literature, and Albanian Language to be easier to pursue. They, also have included ICT as an easy subject to be studied online, since the proper environment to conduct it is the online one with all their personal electronic gadgets provided. Furthermore, students have considered Physical Education (PE) to be very hard to attend because of the environment it requires.

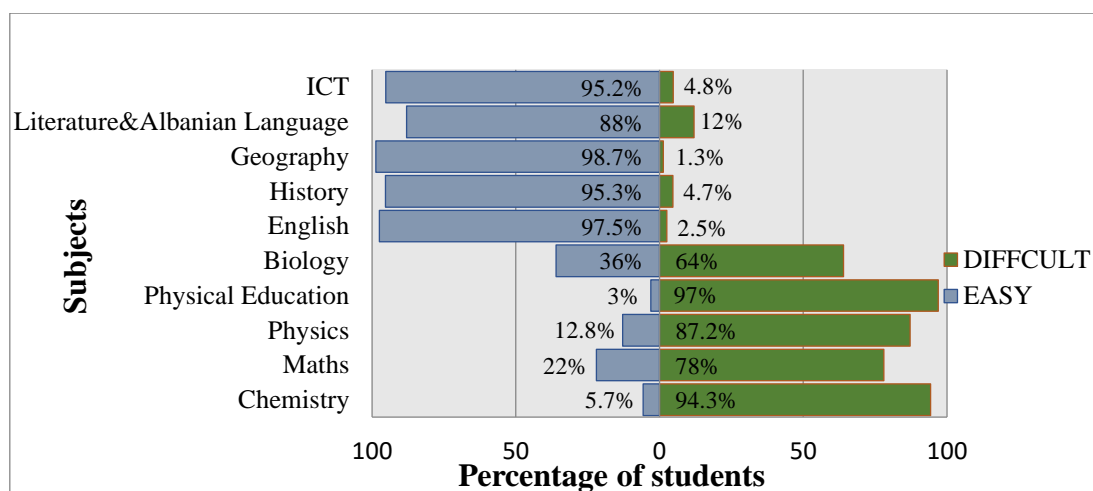


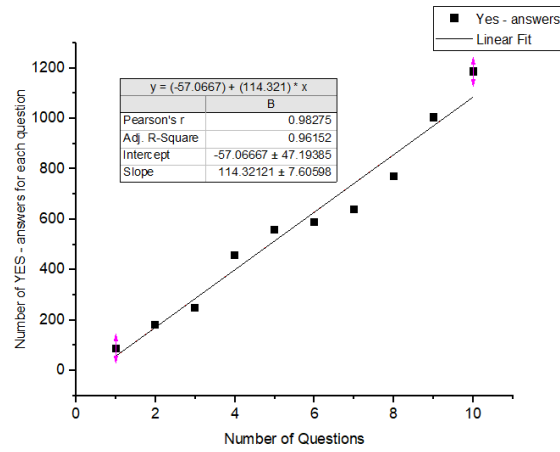
Figure 5. The evaluation that is given by high-school students about specific subjects' level of difficulty to follow and understand, during online learning.

Because of this evaluation regarding the specific subjects, we can try to understand that it was easier for students to make questions during the online lesson for these subjects compared to science subjects, for which sometimes the scheduled time was not enough. Nevertheless, as shown in Table 2, most of the students were not comfortable and capable of asking, during the online classes, because they felt shy and sometimes not sure of their questions. They give several reasons to justify this attitude in general, but it is important to mention that all students agree that even in the traditional classes they are reluctant to make questions, for almost the same reasons.

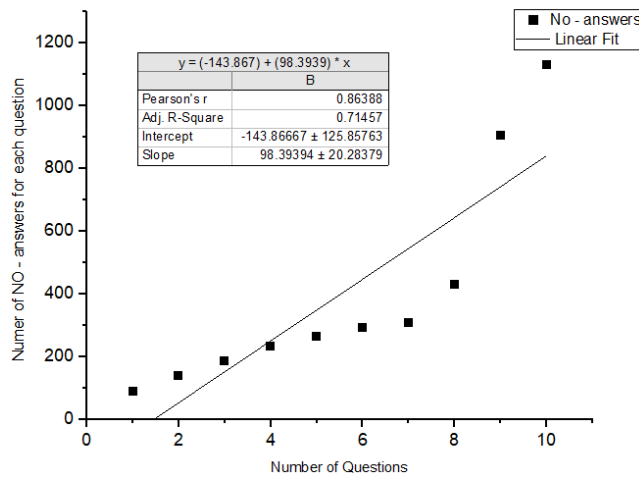
Table 2. Reasons claimed by high-school students to indicate why they were not willing to take questions during the online classes.

Reasons	Percentage of students
Feeling shy	49.2%
Not sure about the reason	20.7%
Not enough time to ask questions	15.5%
Technical problems made the questions difficult to be understood	14.6%

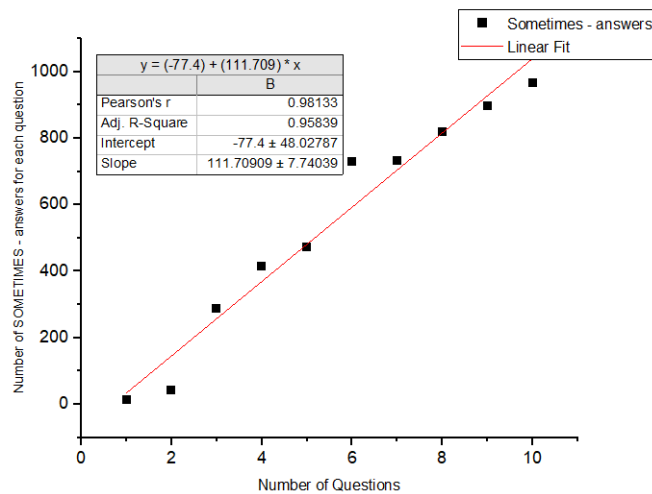
Finally, we have considered ten questions from the questionnaire as “Yes”, “No”, and “Sometimes” questions and we made a distribution of the type of answers given by the students in this case. The results are as shown below:



(a)



(b)



(c)

Figure 6. Distribution of answers given by high-school students for: (a) "Yes" – questions; (b) "No" – questions; and (c) "Sometimes" – questions.

We aim to define the positivity and negativity of students' adaptation toward several issues and situations created during online learning, in contrast to their neutral or insecure attitude. In Figure 6, we see that answers given, divided into three groups, show a linear distribution, according to which the best fit is performed by “yes” answer (Figure 6a) while “no” answers demonstrate to have the worst linear fit (Figure 6b). This means that high-school students are willing to show a positive attitude toward several issues related to online learning, and in case they have doubts they prefer to give an intermediate answer such as “sometimes”. This explains the very good fit of the linear distribution of the “sometimes” answer (Figure 6c). Indeed, high-school students seem to have a lot of doubts and they are much insecure in having a positive or a negative attitude about a specific issue. We believe that this is related to the fact that this long-term distance learning was a new experience for them, which they had to face and challenge for the very first time in the history of the Albanian education system.

Having more "yes" answers indicates that high-school students have not only clear ideas but what is more important is that they show responsibility in giving an honest answer and admitting their behavior and attitude toward online learning, even when their attitude was not correct. Comparing these specifications to those manifested by university students, we admit that the latter adapt more quickly and are shown to be more cooperative than high-school students [19]. This fact is not completely unknown and unexpected, as previous studies have declared this before [20, 21]. As teenagers, it is comprehensive why we have taken so many "sometimes" answers, but we believe this goes in favor of the positive attitude of the students. We like to think that high-school students are aware of their behavior but they are willing to change and improve it in future similar experiences. Nevertheless, their feelings about this overall confused situation seem to depend on their own expectations as well as other external conditions around them.

Obviously, most high-school students have difficulty adapting quickly and showing cooperative behavior to a new situation, such as online learning.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the results, we conclude that almost all high-school students prefer traditional learning compared to online learning. Nevertheless, almost all of them suggest that these two methods can be sometimes combined, during the academic year, because it can make students be more interactive throughout the academic year. High-school students' adaptation was not good in the beginning of online-learning but it was improved following it regularly. This was mostly identified during the second year of online learning, where students seem to show much interest to follow it and to improve their attitude. They used to be less cooperative in the beginning but are willing to improve the collaboration between them and their teacher's in future online activities. As an emergency and a situation not encountered before, all these results are obtained due to the satisfaction of students during these two last years of online teaching/learning that students experienced as well as their opinion and feeling they show related to this experience.

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CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors would like to confirm that there is no conflict of interests associated with this publication and there is no financial fund for this work that can affect the research outcomes.

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