Distance learning and teaching in the field of Management Education in the post covid era: an exploration of the challenges arising for Higher Education Staff

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The attention to e-learning in higher education (HE) has been raised in the past years, after the arrival of the massive online open courses (MOOCs), while digitalization in HE stands high on policy agendas at European and national levels [1]. Yet, the Covid-19 pandemic has caused the largest disruption of education in history, having an impact on learners and trainers in all levels and types of education [2]. The transition to online training was not an easy task, especially for the educational staff. The higher education staff (HES) and particularly those that teach more theoretical topics do not necessarily have the appropriate ICT knowledge and skills to successfully support online training. Successful online teaching is not only accomplished by using online educational methods and tools, but also the appropriate online delivery pedagogy that engages students in such online learning environments.

In management education (ME) this process is even more demanding since it involves a set of social and economic studies and is associated with solving problems and decision-making situations [3]. Thus, theory, practice and reflection must continuously be linked in the learning process. In this context, HE educators should integrate technologies and pedagogies in order to create and maintain positive learning environments, where students are actively engaged, cooperate, analyze situations, make decisions, face and solve problems. In this study we sought to explore the training needs of HES in Management Education and the challenges that they faced during distance learning settings imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic, in relation to their self-perceived qualifications in teaching online.

This study was conducted in the context of the OLMedu Erasmus+ project (Open Lab for the up-skilling of higher educational staff in online Management Education). A quantitative method approach was followed through the administration of an online questionnaire to address the research questions. A total of 31 HE training staff from Greece, Italy, and Cyprus participated in this study by anonymously completing an online questionnaire, after having provided their consent for the use of their responses for reporting and research purposes of the project. The questionnaire was comprised of twenty-two 5-point Likert scale items for measuring 4 variables HES' self-perceived qualifications in teaching using online technologies, challenges, type of technologies that they have used, and training needs. A K-means clustering analysis has revealed two profiles, which had statistically significant differences in relation to HES' self-perceived qualifications in teaching using online technologies, and specifically in relation to HES' knowledge and skills experience, and familiarity. Predominantly, HES allocated to the second cluster had higher self-perceived knowledge and skills, experience, and familiarity in using online technologies in their teaching, in comparison to HES allocated to the first cluster.

We further ran a non-parametric test to compare the distributions of the two clusters in relation to their responses on the challenges that they faced during teaching online in the post-covid era, the type of technologies that they used, as well as their training needs. Statistically significant differences were found to exist among the two clusters in relation to the challenges faced during teaching online. Specifically, discomfort due to the new working conditions, and increase in working hours and complexity. Statistically significant differences were also found to exist among the two clusters in relation to their training needs, mainly, the need to be trained in the use of augmented and virtual reality technologies, scenarios, games, simulations etc. in ME and in using design thinking in digital material development. Expectedly, HES from cluster 1, with fewer self-perceived qualifications in

teaching online, rated the challenges that they faced in online teaching as greater, in comparison to their counterparts. Interestingly though, HES from the second cluster, with higher self-perceived qualifications in teaching online, demonstrate a higher need in receiving training in AR, VR technologies, gaming etc., as well as in using design thinking in digital material development, in comparison to their counterparts. This might be attributed to their competences and interest in technologies. Overall, the need for designing and implementing online training programs for HES emerged as important for tackling the need for digitalization of training in the period of covid-19 in all cases and it is the level of expertise in ICT that determines the priorities for up skilling.

KEYWORDS

Higher Education Staff, Management Education, Online teaching.

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