

**CHALLENGES OF ONLINE CLASSES FOR STUDENTS AND TEACHERS IN
TOURISM HIGHER EDUCATION IN COVID-19 PANDEMIC CONTEXT.
STUDY CASE ALBANIA AND ROMANIA**

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Abstract: The present study aims to identify the main challenges facing students and teachers in 2 tourism higher education units in Albania and Romania in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Using the questionnaire as a research tool, the authors of the article identified the problems faced by students and teachers in online courses and how they chose to deal with it.

Key words: *online classes, higher education, tourism*

INTRODUCTION

Over time, the educational system has been continuously subjected to a multitude of challenges, this determining its evolution over time [5,8,9]. At the level of each country, the educational system has its particularities, depending on the national educational policy adopted [1].

However, the year 2020 remains a very special year for the educational system around the world, the COVID-19 pandemic has determined a "revolution" in each country. Both teachers and students are forced to adapt to new teaching strategies, new methods of teaching and learning online.

As an important part of many economies, tourism needs to be ensure with high-quality resources (human, material, informational, financial) and factors. In this context human resources needs a special attention, and the educational system has a crucial role. An efficient labor market request high-quality human resources [7,11].

The Internet is widely used around the world, and education is a field in which it took place a long time ago. Online education is not a novelty, many educational institutions developing online study programs. But so far this year the face-to-face interaction has been the most common. Both education systems have their advantages and disadvantages [2,3,4,6].

Changes in the education system have led to a new approach of teaching, there were replaced face-to-face interactions with meetings mediated by applications in a virtual environment. The new approach of education is aimed to developing the self-education of students and teachers, because no one has been prepared for online learning. Teachers have been challenged to adapt quickly and send an important message to students: lifelong learning beyond school, and with online tools accessible to all and a lot of determination can make progress, students can be encouraged to learn and work independently [12,13,15].

Certainly, this great step taken by the educational system towards the online environment will also lead to the acquisition of new skills necessary for the future, a digital future. And students as future employees are in a position to earn skills for "jobs of tomorrow". According to Future of jobs Report 2020 (World Economic Forum) types of skills "suitable" 2025 are: problem solving, self-management, working with people, technology use and development. In this context the most important 10 job skills of tomorrow are: analytical thinking and innovation, complex problem-solving, critical thinking and analysis, creativity, originality and initiative, reasoning, problem solving and

ideation, active learning and learning strategies, resilience, stress tolerance and flexibility, leadership and social influence, technology use, monitoring and control, technology design and programming [14].

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The two European countries that are home to the respondents selected for the purpose of the present study are geographically located in South –East of Europe. Each of them has particular features, different traditions, own education system, and it is exactly these particularities that made us think of the assumption that people from different countries might give different answers to the questions included in the questionnaire.

Albanian tourism is one of the most strategic sectors regarding the Albania's economic growth. In the recent years, tourism sector has been considered as one of the priority sectors in the country's economic development. According to The Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report 2017, in Albania the number of international tourists arrivals was 3,784,357 and international tourism inbound receipts 1,500.5 million dollars with 396.5 dollars average receipts per arrival. Albanian Travel and Tourism Industry generate 51,005 jobs (5.5% from total) and 697.1 million dollars (6.0% from GDP). From the competitiveness point of view Albanian tourism and travel is placed on 98th rank (from 136 countries analyzed) [10].

Also, according to The Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report 2017, in Romania the number of international tourists arrivals was 2,234,520 and international tourism inbound receipts 1,712.0 million dollars with 766.1 dollars average receipts per arrival. Romanian Travel and Tourism Industry generate 189,769 jobs (2.2% from total) and 2,318.9 million dollars (1.3% from GDP). From the competitiveness point of view Romanian tourism and travel is placed on 68th rank (from 136 countries analyzed) [10].

And because tourism is an important economic sector, in both countries the educational offer has been adapted to the requirements of the labor market. So, in both countries are universities with faculties or study programs in the field of tourism.

The purpose of this paper is to identify challenges facing students and teachers in 2 tourism higher education units in Albania and Romania in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In order to emphasize this, authors were made the next steps: literature review, research conducting through questionnaires, data processing and analysis, conclusions drawing.

The survey was realized using the application provided by Google Drive and in order to complete it students and teachers had to access a link. Were applied two different questionnaires, one for students and one for teachers. The survey was realized using the internet.

The students questionnaire has 23 questions and four sections (General information, Technical support for online classes, Online classes and Students and teachers interaction).

First section (General information) has 4 questions (gender, age, country, university/faculty/study programme).

Second section (Technical support for online classes) aims to obtain information about technical support, used platforms for online classes and main technical problems. The 6 questions from this section are closed questions with a single correct answer (1, 3), closed questions with multiple answers (2,4) and evaluation scales (5,6). So, students answered to following questions:

1. It was necessary to purchase products or services to ensure the smooth running of online courses (devices, webcams, microphones, headphones, internet services, access to educational resources, graphics tablet, mousse pen etc.)?

2. Which platform do you use for online classes?
3. Did you used this platform before the COVID-19 pandemic?
4. How did you learn to use it?
5. How easy is for you to use this platform?
6. What are the main technical problems you face in online courses?

Third section (Online classes) has 7 questions, one closed question with a single correct answer (1), one open questions (3) and 5 evaluation scales (2,4,5,6,7). So, students answered to following questions:

1. What do you prefer? (except COVID-19 pandemic context)
2. How effective do you consider online teaching?
3. Which are the main challenges you face in online classes?
4. Online classes are more demanding for me compared to face-to-face teaching
5. Online classes has led me to learn new things
6. I can't adapt to online classes
7. Teachers adapted the content of their courses very well to online teaching

Last section (Students and teachers interaction) of the questionnaire has 6 questions: one closed question with a single correct answer (6) and 5 evaluation scales (1,2,3,4,5). Students answered to following questions:

1. Being in different places during online courses I am distracted by what is happening around me and are not 100% present
2. As a student I interact with teachers during online courses
3. As a student I interact with my colleagues during online courses
4. I am attentive during online classes
5. I assimilate all the concepts taught
6. How do you consider online courses in the field of tourism?

The teachers questionnaire has 36 questions and four sections (General information, Technical support for online classes, Online classes and Students and teachers interaction).

First section (General information) has 5 questions (gender, age, country, university/faculty/study programme and position).

Second section (Technical support for online classes) is similar with second section from students questionnaire.

Third section (Online classes) has 19 questions, 3 closed question with a single correct answer (1,15,17), 3 one open questions (3,16,18) and 13 evaluation scales (2,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11,12,13,14,19). So, teachers answered to following questions:

1. What do you prefer? (except COVID-19 pandemic context)
2. How effective do you consider online teaching?
3. Which are the main challenges you face in online classes?
4. Online teaching is more demanding for me compared to face-to-face teaching
5. Online teaching determined me to reinvent myself (as a teacher)
6. Online teaching has led me to change my teaching style
7. Teaching online determined me to reorganize the entire content of courses
8. Teaching online is a challenge for my teaching career
9. Teaching online has challenged me to become better at what I do
10. Teaching online has made me more creative
11. Teaching online requires more effort on my part, as I spend more time preparing for classes
12. Teaching online has led me to learn new things
13. I can't adapt to online teaching
14. I feel awkward when I teach online and students' cameras / microphones are turned off

15. Do you use learning resources/applications to capture students' attention and make the learning process easy?

16. If yes. Which are these?

17. Do you use different tricks to get students' attention?

18. If yes. Which are these?

19. Do you have tricks prepared in advance?

Last section (Students and teachers interaction) of the questionnaire has 6 questions: one closed question with a single correct answer (1) and 5 evaluation scales (2,3,4,5,6). Teachers answered to following questions:

1. How do you appreciate students participation in online classes?

2. Being in different places during online courses students are distracted by what is happening around them and are not 100% present

3. Students interact with me during online courses 4. I am attentive during online classes

4. Students interact with each other during online courses

5. Students are attentive during online classes

6. Students assimilate all the concepts taught

The questionnaires were applied between 1st November 2020 – 8th November 2020 among students and teachers.

The sample consisted in 108 subjects (77 students and 31 teachers) who are study or teach in programmes or faculties in the field of tourism and participate in online classes.

RESEARCH RESULTS

According to the answers provided, students from Albania and Romania face similar challenges when participating in online courses. It seems that students' challenges are related to the internet connection and communication with their teachers or colleagues. Most students said they face with lack of communication or difficult communication, low internet connection, loss of attention during classes (figure 1).

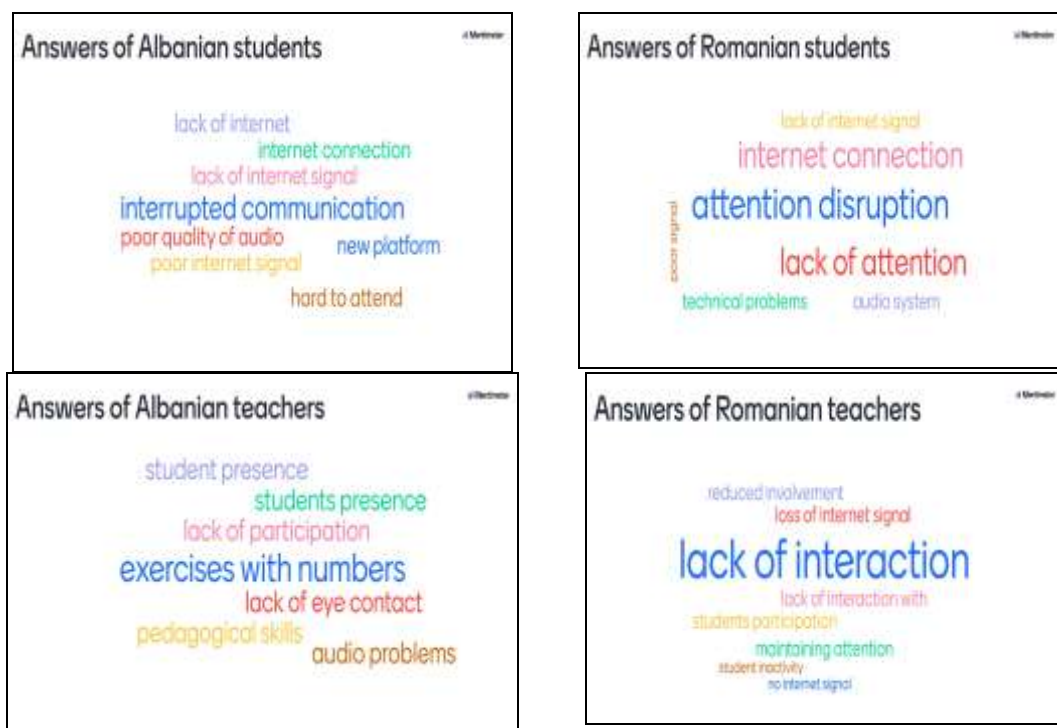


Figure 1. Which are the main challenges you face in online classes?

Responses of questions were processed with application provided by mentimeter.com

Teachers from Albania and Romania emphasized similar challenges in online courses, in this way they face with low involvement of students or low internet connection.

They also have similar technical problems, sometimes they have poor quality of audio and video, poor or lack of internet signal, but almost never they don't know to use platforms (figure 2).

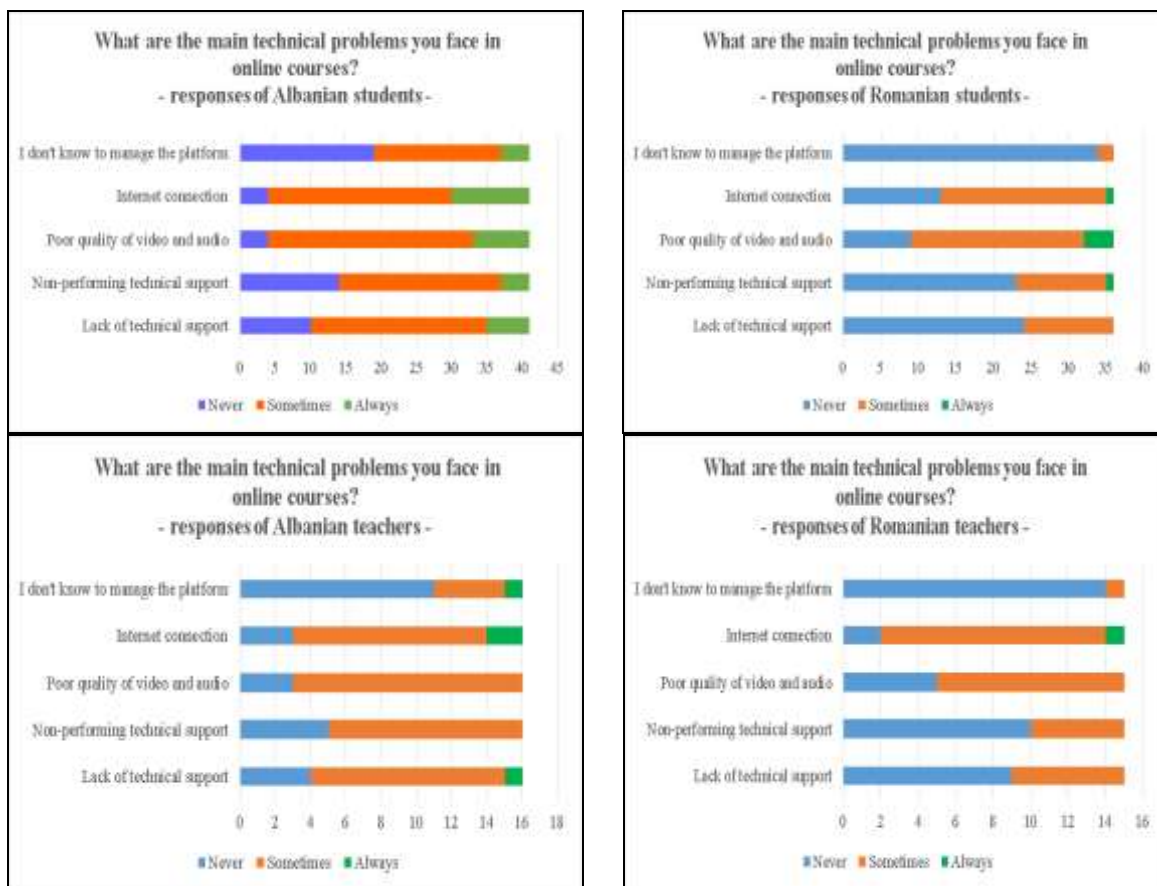


Figure 2. The main technical problems faced by respondents in online courses

Related to students and teachers preferences about online courses vs face-to-face teaching, most of them prefer face-to-face courses and some of them prefer both (figure 3).

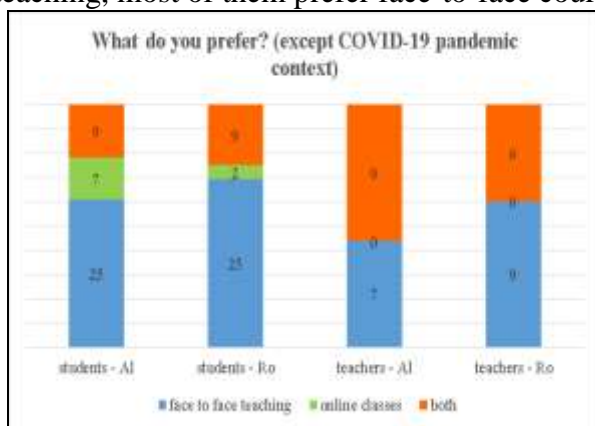


Figure 3. Students and teachers preferences about online courses vs face-to-face teaching

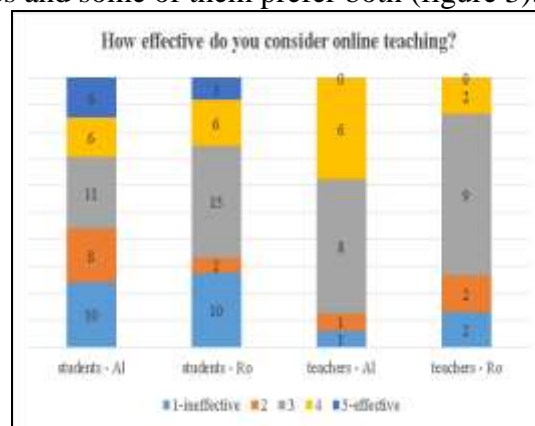


Figure 4. Effectiveness of online teaching

Online teaching is neither effective, neither ineffective, in opinion of many respondents, a part of students consider online teaching even ineffective (figure 4).

Concerning the perception of students and teachers about online classes compared to face-to-face teaching for many of them online classes are more demanding compared to face-to-face teaching (figure 5).

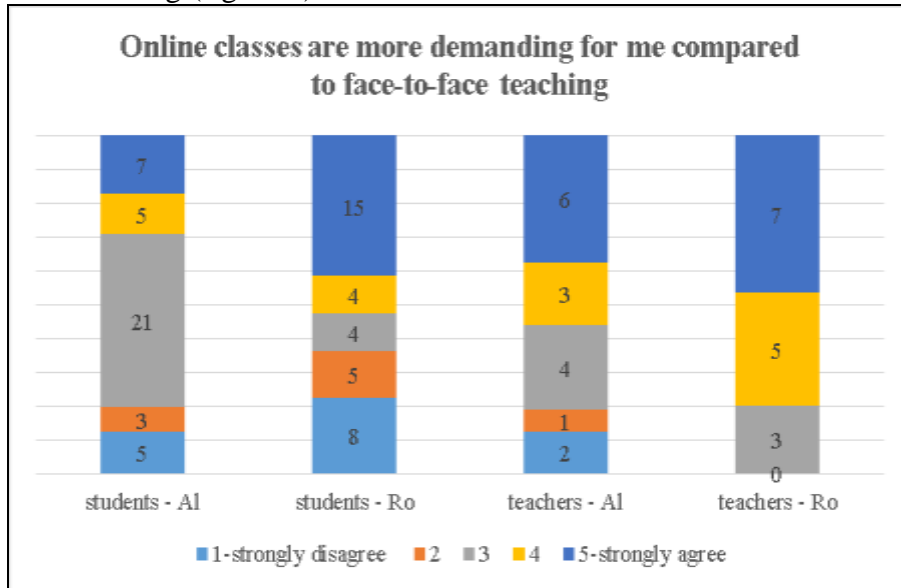


Figure 5. Perception about online classes compared to face-to-face teaching

Related to perception of students about online classes, we can observe that just a part of them learn new things attending to online classes, many of students consider themselves neither adapted neither unadapted to online courses (figure 6 and 7).

In students opinion teachers adapted content of courses very well to online teaching (figure 8).

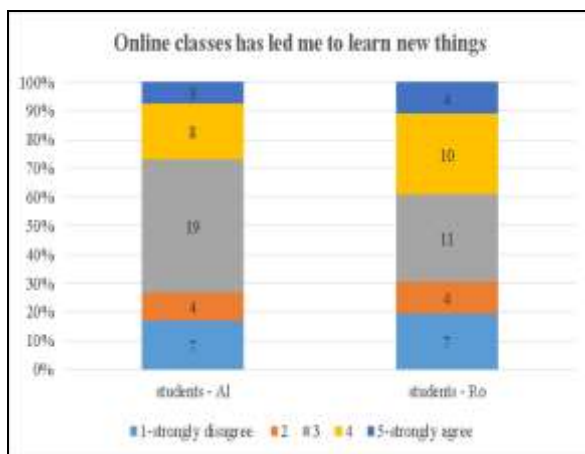


Figure 6. Perception of students about online classes

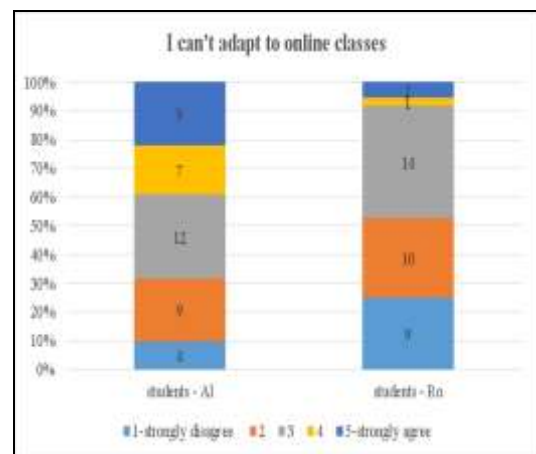


Figure 7. Students adaptation to online classes

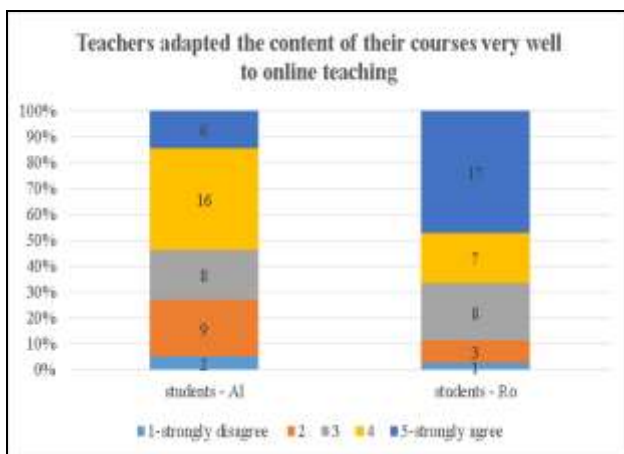


Figure 8. Perception of students about the content adaptation of online courses by teachers

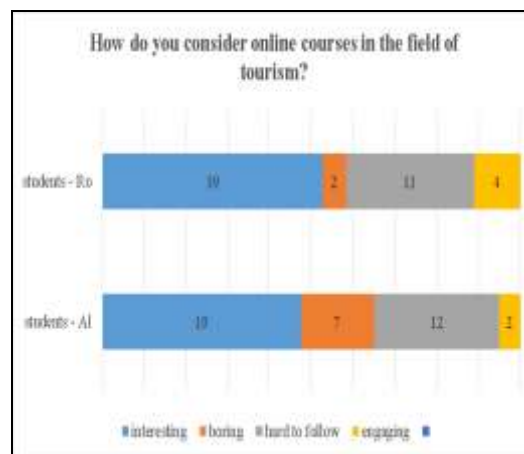


Figure 9. Students opinion about online courses in the field of tourism

Most of students agree that when they are in different places during online courses they are distracted by what is happening around them and are not 100% present (58.5% of Albanian students and 55.5% of Romanian students).

According to responses provided many students interact with teachers during online courses (41.4% of Albanian students and 55.6% of Romanian students) and just some of them interact with their colleagues during online courses (31.7% of Albanian students and 30.6% of Romanian students).

Many students said that they are attentive during online classes (51.2% of Albanian students and 41.6% of Romanian students) and just a part of them assimilate all the concepts taught (48.8% of Albanian students and 38.9% of Romanian students).

Most of students consider online courses in the field of tourism interesting and at the same time hard to follow (figure 9). We can observe even they are from different countries and they interact with different teachers, their responses are similar. In our opinion this means that teachers succeeded to adapt very well to online classes, but there are more other factors which influence online courses conducting.

Responses provided by teachers are following:

- online teaching determined most of them to reinvent themselves (as teachers), 66.7% of Romanian teachers and 62.5% of Albanian teachers;
- online teaching has led 81.3% of Albanian teachers and 66.5% of Romanian teachers to change their teaching style;
- online teaching determined 68.7% of Romanian teachers and 50.3% of Albanian teachers to reorganize the entire content of their courses;
- for 53.2% of Romanian teachers and 43.8% of Albanian teachers online teaching is a challenge for their teaching career;
- online teaching online has challenged 53.3% of Romanian and 50% of Albanian teachers to become better at what they do;
- 86.7% of Romanian teachers and 62.6% of Albanian teachers are more creative;
- for 93.3% of Romanian teachers and 81.3% of Albanian teachers online teaching requires more effort on their part, as they spend more time preparing for classes;
- online teaching has led 93.4% of Romanian teachers and 81.3% of Albanian teachers to learn new things;

- 86.7% of Romanian teachers and 62.6% of Albanian teachers adapted to online teaching;
- 53.4% of Romanian teachers and 50% of Albanian teachers feels awkward when they teach online and students' cameras / microphones are turned off;
- 86.7% of Romanian teachers and 87.5% of Albanian teachers use learning resources / applications to capture students' attention and make the learning process easy;
- 53.3% of Romanian teachers and 68.8% of Albanian teachers use different tricks to get students' attention;
- 50 % of Albanian teachers appreciate students participation in online classes same to face to face classes, 73.3% of Romanian teachers appreciate a higher presence of students to online classes.

CONCLUSIONS

The period we are currently living in is a controversial period, the COVID-19 pandemic has generated major changes worldwide, in all economic sectors, which has influenced our lives in many ways (financial, social, physical and psychic health etc.)

In the current context, higher education in the field of tourism has not been bypassed by challenges, online teaching being one of challenges. The transition from face-to-face teaching to online teaching is the right solution to ensure the continuity and stability of the educational process. And even if they encountered various problems (technical support, educational interaction) both students and teachers had to adapt to the new conditions.

After analyzing the answers provided by students and teachers from Albania and Romania to the questionnaires we noticed the following:

- It was necessary for many students and teachers to purchase products or services to ensure the smooth running of online courses (devices, webcams, microphones, headphones, internet services, access to educational resources, graphics tablet, mousse pen etc.).
- For online classes ZOOM and Google Classroom are most used platforms.
- Most of students and teachers did not used these platforms before the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Over 80% of students and teachers from both countries learned to use online platforms by their self. Some of them also participated to courses or watched free tutorials.
- 56,3% of Albanian teachers prefers online courses and face to face courses, 43,7% prefers just face to face teaching.
- 60% of Romanian teachers prefers just face to face courses and 40% online courses and face to face courses.
- Most of students prefers face to face courses (65% of Albanian students and 70% of Romanian students)
- Some students prefers online courses and face to face courses (24% of Albanian students and 25% of Romanian students) and there are students from both studied country who prefers only online courses.

And as a final conclusion, we can say that adapting to online teaching has led to new learning opportunities, some skills were improved and some skills were gained by teachers (handling hardware and software, critical selection of educational resources, adapting teaching style to the new learning environment, manifestation of positive attitudes towards technology), as well as by students (computer use, internet access, use of online

resources, capacity for autonomy in learning and self-assessment, organization and management of learning, interest and motivation for learning, communication skills with the group, responsibility, spontaneity, promptness in solving tasks).

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