

# Exploring the views of tourism education and training professionals on their level of satisfaction with participation in distance learning programmes

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## Abstract

The present study aims to explore the views of tourism, education and training professionals regarding their level of satisfaction with participation in distance learning programmes. The theoretical section examines the concept of e-learning, outlines its key characteristics, and discusses the advantages and challenges associated with its implementation. The study was conducted between October 2024 and February 2025. The research sample consisted of ten (10) tourism education and training professionals. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted online via the MS Teams platform. The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The analysis further identified factors contributing to participants' satisfaction with distance learning programmes. These factors primarily relate to the role of the instructor, the methodological approach adopted, the educational material, as well as the structure and duration of the programme. The findings indicate that opportunities for active learner engagement, the connection of learning content with real-life examples, short programme duration, flexible structure, and interactive educational material are perceived as key determinants of the effectiveness of distance learning programmes.

**Keywords:** Distance Education, Satisfaction, Educational Process, Tourism Education, Tourism Training.

## 1. Introduction

The present study aims to explore the views of tourism, education and training professionals regarding their level of satisfaction with participation in distance learning programmes. The theoretical section examines the concept of e-learning, outlines its key characteristics, and discusses the advantages and challenges associated with its implementation.

There is no universally accepted definition of e-learning in literature, resulting in a wide range of interpretations and uses of the term. Nevertheless, these definitions converge on a broader understanding of e-learning as learning that is delivered and supported through electronic means (Abbad et al., 2009). The term is used to describe the integration of



Information and Communication Technologies (I.C.T.) in teaching and learning, blended forms of face-to-face and distance education, as well as education delivered exclusively via the internet, either synchronously, asynchronously, or through a combination of both modes.

According to several scholars, the term *e-learning* is increasingly used interchangeably with *distance education*, reflecting the growing emphasis on technology-mediated learning environments. E-learning can be implemented in both formal and non-formal education contexts, with policymakers, researchers, and higher education professionals often using the terms *distance education* and *e-learning* synonymously to distinguish them from conventional face-to-face education (Evans & Nation, 2000; Twigg, 2001; Ryan, 2002).

Clark et Mayer, (2016) define e-learning as encompassing any form of education that makes use of the internet, I.C.T., mobile devices, software applications, and related technological tools. Similarly, CEDEFOP (2014) conceptualizes e-learning as an umbrella term that includes related concepts such as online learning, web-based learning, and distributed learning.

The implementation of e-learning can occur through synchronous and asynchronous modes of instruction (Hrastinski, 2008). In asynchronous learning environments, instructors and learners are not required to participate simultaneously, allowing learners to access and study educational material at a time of their choosing. In contrast, synchronous distance education is characterized by real-time interaction between instructors and learners. This interaction is facilitated through technological tools such as videoconferencing and chat functions, which support communication, collaboration (e.g., screen sharing and file exchange), and interactive learning activities such as group work and shared tasks (Gkounela, 2022). In this context, communication becomes bidirectional, incorporating visual, auditory, and textual elements (Panagiotakopoulos et al., 2013).

The introduction of e-learning has led to substantial changes in the educational landscape, transforming the roles of instructors and learners, redefining learning objectives, and reshaping teaching approaches. At the same time, it has influenced all dimensions of the learning process by enabling access to knowledge anytime and anywhere (Pattnayak, 2020). Learners are also provided with access to a broader range of information, allowing for deeper exploration and engagement with learning content. Core characteristics of e-learning include learner autonomy, control over the learning process, and reduced dependence on the instructor. Within this framework, the instructor often assumes the role of a facilitator who poses questions, encourages participation, stimulates learners' interest, and provides support when necessary. Moreover, instructors are required to continuously adapt their pedagogical approaches and teaching practices in response to learners' needs.

Beldhuis (2012) and Sirohi (2007) identify several advantages of e-learning, including:

- reduced costs resulting from the elimination of travel requirements,
- adaptation of educational content to learners' needs, characteristics, and interests,
- temporal and spatial flexibility,
- opportunities for repetition of learning content, and
- the presentation of abstract concepts through the use of technological tools.

Adult learners, in particular, benefit from the opportunity to follow their own learning pace, submit assignments electronically, and receive feedback aligned with their personal schedules and individual needs. This flexibility enables them to combine learning with personal, family, and professional responsibilities associated with adult life. Pandey (2013) emphasizes that e-learning environments allow learners to study at their own pace, in a



location and at a time of their choosing, without the physical co-presence of instructors and learners.

Despite its advantages, e-learning also presents challenges that may hinder the learning process and therefore need to be taken into consideration in order to enhance its effectiveness. Research indicates that during synchronous distance education, learners may become distracted or disengaged, primarily due to the lack of visual contact and the absence of non-verbal communication (Elzainy et al., 2020). Sirohi (2007) notably argues that “the greatest disadvantage of e-learning is the absence of human contact,” as the lack of face-to-face interaction limits opportunities for interpersonal communication, which is essential for learners’ personal development.

Additional challenges include delayed feedback, limited immediacy in communication, insufficient teaching and social presence of the instructor, and the absence of a sense of belonging to a learning community. These factors may lead learners to experience feelings of isolation and reduced motivation to participate in distance education programmes (Lindzeris & Karalis, 2022).

## **2. Methodology**

### **2.1. Objective and research questions**

The aim of the present study is to explore the views of tourism education and training professionals regarding their level of satisfaction with participation in distance learning programmes. More specifically, the study seeks to examine participants’ satisfaction with their involvement in distance education in the role of instructor and/or learner, as well as to identify the factors that contribute to this satisfaction.

In particular, the study addresses the following research questions:

- What are the views of tourism education and training professionals regarding their satisfaction with participation in distance learning programmes?
- What are the views of tourism education and training professionals concerning the concept of e-learning?

### **2.2. Sample**

The sample of the present study consisted of ten (10) tourism education and training professionals from across Greece. The participants were certified adult educators in the field of tourism, as well as professionals holding senior administrative positions in hospitality and food service organizations.

### **2.3. Research Method**

The analysis of the interview data was conducted using thematic analysis, a qualitative research method that focuses on the diversity of meanings and interactions that emerge from the interpretation of a phenomenon by different participants (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007; Isari & Pourkos, 2015; Tsiolis, 2018). This approach enables the categorization of data through the use of codes based on the frequency and content of participants’ responses.

Through thematic analysis the study aims to identify patterns of meaning without seeking to establish statistical regularities. The coding process facilitates the transition from raw data to theoretical relationships and concepts. Theoretical conceptualization, through the development of categories, their clarification via the identification of dimensions and properties, and the exploration of relationships among them, contributes to a more generalized theoretical understanding (Tsiolis, 2014; Tsiolis, 2018).



## **2.4. Research tool**

Data were collected using semi-structured interviews. The interviews were conducted online via the MS Teams platform during the period from October 2024 to February 2025 and lasted between 30 and 40 minutes.

The first part of the interview focused on the collection of participants' demographic information, including age, tourism-related educational background, professional experience in the tourism sector, occupational role within tourism education structures, and certification in new technologies. The second part comprised questions aligned with the research questions, focusing on participants' knowledge and views regarding e-learning, as well as their level of satisfaction with participation in distance learning programmes.

## **3. Results**

### **3.1. Participant profile**

Six of the ten participants were women and four were men, with the majority aged between 41 and 46 years. Seven participants were graduates of tourism-related university departments, while three had completed their studies at Higher Schools of Tourism; six also held a postgraduate degree.

All participants had professional experience in the tourism sector, ranging from seven to thirty-nine years. Nine were instructors in Public Institutes of Vocational Training (SAEK) in the field of tourism, two of whom concurrently held senior positions in hospitality and food service organizations. Additionally, nine participants possessed recognized certifications in Information and Communication Technologies (I.C.T.).

### **3.2. Views of tourism education and training professionals on e-learning**

In response to questions regarding the characteristics of e-learning, the majority of participants (8/10) identified synchronous and asynchronous distance education as its primary forms, as well as temporal and spatial flexibility. This flexibility was associated with economic benefits, particularly due to the avoidance of travel costs and expenses related to the purchase or printing of educational material.

Participants further identified wide access to educational material, immediate system responsiveness to learners' actions, and the presence of assessment mechanisms as key characteristics of e-learning. At the same time, they highlighted the limited interaction and lack of meaningful communication among participants, which they attributed to the absence of non-verbal cues.

Illustrative excerpts:

P1: "This was asynchronous distance education. It consisted of a series of pre-recorded lectures with thematic units uploaded to the platform, which I was required to follow. At the end of each thematic unit, I had to complete comprehension tests, and once the required training hours were completed, I was asked to participate in a final quiz."

P2: "Both synchronous, in the form of an online classroom, and asynchronous learning. Communication was mainly through email."

P4: "Synchronous and asynchronous are two forms of distance education; I would describe them as two different modes."

P8: "What I can think of is that it includes both synchronous and asynchronous formats."

P5: "Asynchronous learning does not really support interaction with the instructor. If you have a question, you cannot easily express it. Learners receive the material and study it on their own. Synchronous learning, on the other hand, offers opportunities for interaction. Another



issue I observe is that when many participants attend an online class, the instructor may not be able to identify who is actively participating. In a face-to-face classroom, it is easier to identify disengaged learners and encourage them to participate. In online classes, visual contact is often missing, which creates challenges that still need to be addressed.”

P4: “Asynchronous learning certainly has its advantages, but there is no direct contact with the instructor. In some programmes I attended, communication took place via email, but I never actually saw the instructor. Synchronous learning is clearly more effective.”

Participants emphasized temporal and spatial flexibility as a defining characteristic of e-learning, highlighting its contribution to learners’ ability to attend distance learning programmes at a time and place of their choosing.

P3: “It was entirely asynchronous. You could rewatch the recorded lesson whenever you wanted. If you had questions, you could listen to it again.”

P4: “Another important aspect is that I can attend a programme from any location and at any time. For example, I once participated in a training programme delivered from New York. Time is particularly important, because you can attend from anywhere in the world, at any time.”

Temporal and spatial flexibility was reported as particularly beneficial for adult learners, who must balance multiple personal, family, and professional responsibilities. Participants noted that effective time management in e-learning environments can be supported through adherence to schedules and structured organization of learning activities.

P3: “It definitely helps with time management. In addition, the type of exercises we had - judgment-based questions that had to be completed within a specific time frame- required us to manage our time effectively.”

P6: “Distance learning through an asynchronous platform is particularly helpful for older learners who have many obligations and limited time but still want to learn. The platforms have helped me because I upload the material in advance, and we do not waste time during the session. Learners study the material and then discuss it in the following meeting. In this way, instructional time is used more effectively, and learners also have more time to complete assignments without pressure.”

P7: “What comes to mind is flexibility and time management. This applies more to asynchronous than to synchronous distance learning. You can study at your own pace and submit assignments by a specific deadline. You also save time because you can attend from home or your own workspace without having to travel. There is flexibility both in terms of time and location.”

P9: “There is flexibility in terms of our schedules and the place from which we can participate in digital learning.”

Another key characteristic identified by participants was the wide accessibility of educational material, particularly its contribution to the inclusion of learners with mobility impairments or those living in remote areas.

P9: “We can access educational material at any time. It also greatly facilitates participation for individuals with mobility difficulties or those living in remote locations who do not have access to face-to-face learning.”

Moreover, participants highlighted the immediate responsiveness of e-learning applications to learners’ actions, which they associated with more effective communication among participants and timely provision of feedback.



Table 1. Characteristics of e-Learning

Thematic Category	Subcategory	Illustrative Excerpts
Forms of e-learning	Synchronous and asynchronous e-learning	“Synchronous with an online classroom and asynchronous learning” (P2) “two modes” (P4) “synchronous and asynchronous communication” (P5) “pre-recorded lectures, comprehension tests” (P1) “you could rewatch the lesson” (P3)
System Responsiveness and Feedback	Immediate responsiveness to learner actions, providing instant feedback	“.....is the ability to react quickly, for instance to messages posted in the chat” (P10)
Temporal and Spatial Flexibility	Practical benefits adherence to schedules,  Time management	“Accessible from any location at any time” (P4) “Beneficial for older learners with limited time” (P6) “No preparation or travel required” (P7)
Accessibility and Inclusivity	Participation for individuals with mobility impairments Access to digital resources	“Suitable for individuals with mobility challenges” (P9)

Regarding participation in distance learning programs, all participants reported engagement for both professional and personal development purposes. With specific reference to tourism education and training, all interviewees indicated prior participation in relevant programs, covering thematic areas such as alternative forms of tourism, oenology, management, and hospitality more broadly.

Illustrative excerpts:

P1: “Yes, I attended a program on teaching tourism enterprises and tourism units about three years ago. It was a 400-hour tourism education and training program.”

P2: “Yes. I recall participating in programs related to tourism geography, economics, front desk staff, and similar topics.”

P3: “Yes. I remember one program specifically about wine. It was asynchronous, and we could watch videos even several days afterward. Some exercises I recall involved looking at a dish and determining which wine paired with it, considering sweetness and acidity. All of these were exercise-type activities. For example, I have this dish with this flavor, and the wine, let’s say, didn’t pair with any dish.”

P10: “It was a program from Cyprus. I don’t remember the exact name, and it focused on alternative forms of tourism. I have also participated in programs on management and restaurants.”

Table 2. Participation in Tourism Education and Training Programmes

Thematic Category	Subcategory	Illustrative Excerpts
Programme Themes	Alternative forms of tourism Oenology, management, hospitality, geography, economics	Teaching tourism enterprises and tourism units” (P1) “Tourism geography, economics, front desk staff” (P2)



		“Focused on alternative forms of tourism” (P10) “Specifically about wine” (P3)
Methodology	Linking theory with practice	We would look at a dish and determine which wine pairs with it... all of these were exercise-type activities” (P3)
Use of Asynchronous Distance Learning	Utilization of digital tools, such as videos and interactive tests	“It was asynchronous. We could watch videos even several days afterward” (P3)

Regarding the roles assumed in distance learning programs, the majority of participants (8/10) reported having engaged both as instructors and as learners, while two participants (2/10) indicated participation exclusively in the role of learner.

Illustrative excerpts:

Participation in distance learning programmes as a learner:

P1: “I have participated in e-learning programmes, such as the one I mentioned earlier, as a learner, not as an instructor. However, I have experience with e-learning, which I apply in my face-to-face lessons as an instructor at IEK/SAEK.”

P9: “Mainly as an instructor. Less frequently as a learner.”

Participants who had assumed both roles emphasized that their engagement in e-learning environments was significantly shaped and intensified during the COVID-19 pandemic, which necessitated the widespread adoption of distance education across educational institutions.

P6: “Yes, I attended e-learning programs before 2019 as a learner, and I also participated as an instructor during the COVID period when all institutions moved online. So, I participated in these programmes in both capacities.”

P10: “Both roles. One was with INESEP as an instructor, and another in a private setting. During the COVID pandemic, we were forced to incorporate distance learning into our work.”

One participant highlighted that assuming both roles contributed to the development of empathy, as it enabled a deeper understanding of the respective challenges and expectations associated with each position.

P4: “Both, as a learner and as an instructor. Next week, for example, I have a three-day presentation at EKDDA, and in the following days, I am a learner in another distance learning program. So, I happen to be both an instructor and a learner simultaneously. This is what we call cultivating empathy—you step into both roles and can understand them better.”

Table 3. Participation in Distance Learning Programmes as Instructor and Learner

Thematic Category	Subcategory	Illustrative Excerpts
Dual-role participation in distance learning programmes	Dual role that fosters empathy Experience solely as learners, which is subsequently applied in their teaching practice	Both roles... You step into the shoes of both roles” (P4) “I have attended... and also participated as an instructor since the COVID period” (P5) “Both roles... during the COVID pandemic...” (P10) “I have participated... as a learner... and I use this experience in my teaching” (P1)



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Adaptation Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic	Experience with e-learning was enhanced during the COVID-19 period.	During the COVID pandemic, we were forced to integrate distance learning into our lives” (P10) “I attended... and also participated as an instructor during the COVID period” (P5) “Yes, I attended e-learning programs before 2019 as a learner, and I also participated as an instructor during the COVID period, when all structures moved online. Therefore, I took part in these programs in both roles” (P6)
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### ***3.3. Views of Tourism Education and Training Professionals on the Development of Soft Skills through Participation in Distance Learning Programs***

Regarding participants’ level of satisfaction with their participation in distance learning programs in the role of instructor, two out of ten participants (2/10) did not respond, as they had experience exclusively in the role of learner. Among the remaining eight participants, five (5/8) reported being very satisfied with their participation as instructors, two (2/8) reported being fairly satisfied, while three (3/8) stated that they were not satisfied at all.

An initial finding emerging from the analysis of instructors’ responses was the perceived superiority of face-to-face teaching compared to distance learning, particularly in terms of communication and interaction. This perception was reflected in the following excerpts.

Illustrative excerpts:

P4: “I was not satisfied. For me, the ideal mode is face-to-face teaching. In face-to-face settings, non-verbal communication also plays an important role.”

Similarly, P10 emphasized the importance of visual contact:

“In face-to-face interaction, you also have eye contact. In contrast, in synchronous distance learning, participants usually do not want to turn on their cameras. However, it is beneficial to see others and their reactions.”

When asked about their level of satisfaction in the role of learner, half of the participants (5/10) reported satisfaction, while the remaining half expressed dissatisfaction with their learning experience. Analysis of the responses indicated that dissatisfaction was primarily attributed to the impersonal nature of communication, limited opportunities for interaction between learners and instructors, instructor-related characteristics, the excessive duration of distance learning programs, and outdated educational material.

Illustrative excerpts:

P1: “From my participation, I cannot say that I particularly enjoyed it or that I was satisfied. I personally value communication, collaboration, and being part of a group. This experience felt somewhat lonely. Overall, it was impersonal, and there was no possibility for communication. The program did not allow communication with the instructor, not even via email. The material related to the teaching of tourism enterprises -which I am familiar with due to my work in hotels- was quite outdated.”

The lack of communication opportunities was frequently attributed to the instructor’s pedagogical approach, particularly the absence of active and participatory teaching techniques. As P10 noted: “As a learner, there were distance learning programs in which I felt very disappointed, mainly because of the instructor, who appeared to conduct the seminar in



a purely procedural manner. He did not ask us anything; he only talked. There was no communication at all between learners and the instructor.”

P6: “However, I would have liked more personal interaction. I attended a program where the instructor played videos for one to one and a half hours. I have also encountered instructors who were not well prepared. They uploaded the material and simply read it during synchronous distance learning sessions. In asynchronous distance learning, interaction with the instructor was limited to email, which I believe undermines the essence of meaningful communication.”

Additionally, dissatisfaction was linked to educational material that did not adhere to the principles of effective distance education, as well as to the extended duration of programs. P8 emphasized issues related to time management and content quality: “As a learner, in several programs I participated in, I was not satisfied because the program was very long and became boring after a certain point. Time is very important to me in distance learning. Moreover, the quality of the material plays a crucial role. There is a clear difference between concise, well-structured material and material overloaded with information that the instructor merely reads.”

In contrast, participants who reported satisfaction attributed their positive experiences to the instructor’s role and the quality of the educational material, which facilitated interaction, was well structured, and aligned with learners’ cognitive levels. For example, P2 stated:

Illustrative excerpts: “I am satisfied in terms of the instructor’s effectiveness and the quality of the material. The instructor did not merely deliver a lecture but used modern techniques such as group work, encouraged our participation, and provided feedback. Moreover, the material was carefully designed, structured, comprehensible, and interactive. In the end, it was evident that we had understood what the instructor conveyed and that the objectives of the program were achieved.”

Similarly, P5 referred to instructors who demonstrated high levels of interaction and effective communication. P5: “There were, of course, very good instructors with excellent interaction and communication.”

Table 4. Satisfaction with Participation in Distance Learning Programs as Learners

Thematic Category	Subcategory	Illustrative Excerpts
Communication and Interaction	Impersonal nature and lack of communication and interaction	“It was generally impersonal, and there was no communication...” (P1) “There was no communication at all between learners and the instructor” (P10)
Quality and Structure of Educational Material	Up-to-date Well-structured Clear and interactive Outdated	“The material was quite outdated” (P2) “The material was carefully designed, structured, clear, and interactive” (P1) “In other programs, material was uploaded without being effectively utilized” (P6)



Instructor	Use of contemporary teaching techniques Encouragement of participation Provision of feedback	The instructor used modern teaching techniques..." (P2) "The instructor conducted the seminar in a purely procedural manner" (P10) "I encountered an instructor who played videos for an entire hour..." (P6)
Duration and Time Organization	Program duration Flexibility of attendance	"The program was lengthy and became boring" (P8) "The asynchronous format helped me organize my time" (P9)

### 3.4. Factors Contributing to Learner Satisfaction in Distance Learning Programs

Regarding the factors that contributed to participants' satisfaction with their participation in distance learning programs, the analysis of responses highlights time flexibility and the instructor as dominant factors.

Specifically, the instructor's role appears to be crucial in determining participant satisfaction. Half of the participants (5/10) considered the instructor to be decisive in whether the program met their expectations. More precisely, the instructor should possess strong communication skills, actively engage participants in the learning process through the use of contemporary teaching techniques, foster communication and interaction, provide feedback, and understand the learners' needs in order to tailor the program to their characteristics and requirements.

Illustrative excerpts:

P4: "The instructor knew who the participants were, their profile, and their needs, and therefore adapted the program objectives to suit them."

P7: "Secondly, the instructor plays a very important role, particularly if they have well-developed communication skills and can spark our interest. It also matters if they use modern techniques and methods."

P5: "For me, the instructor definitely mattered, specifically because they fostered communication and interaction rather than just talking the whole time. If they use modern techniques and tools such as dialogue, discussion, videos, and of course manage time effectively, allowing me to follow the program in line with my obligations."

P2: "I am satisfied with both the instructor's effectiveness and the material. The instructor did not merely deliver a lecture but used modern techniques such as group work, encouraged our participation, and provided feedback. Moreover, the material was carefully prepared, structured, understandable, and interactive. As a result, it was evident that we had understood what the instructor conveyed and achieved the program's objectives."

P5: "Of course, there were also very good instructors with excellent interaction and communication."

Concerning time flexibility, the majority of participants (6/10) identified the program's ability to allow study, engagement with educational material, and completion of assessments according to their own schedules as a key factor. This feature was deemed particularly important, given that the participants are adult learners with substantial personal, family, and professional obligations.



Illustrative excerpts:

P1: "If I could highlight something positive, it would be time management, as I could study the material at my own pace and submit my assignments accordingly."

P7: "Also, the flexibility of time. It allowed me to save commuting time and to study at my own pace as a learner, because everyone studies at their own rhythm, and as an adult, one has many responsibilities."

P5: "...and of course, how the time is allocated, meaning whether I can follow the program in line with my obligations."

P8: "If I were to mention something, in some seminars we had short exercises and tests, as well as assignments that we could submit within a given timeframe, which allowed sufficient time to complete them."

Table 5. Factors Contributing to Learner Satisfaction in Distance Learning Programs

Thematic Category	Subcategory	Illustrative Excerpts
Time Flexibility	Opportunity to study at one's own pace	"I could study the material at my own pace..." (P1)
	Time for assessment	"Time flexibility... everyone studies at their own pace..." (P7)
	Time saved from commuting	"We had time to submit or upload our assignments..." (P8) "...if I can follow it according to my obligations" (P5)
Instructor Role	Communication skills	"The instructor knew who the participants were" (P4)
	Use of contemporary teaching techniques	"If they have well-developed communication skills..." (P7)
	Encouragement of engagement Awareness of learners' needs and adaptation to them	"Fostered communication and interaction..." (P5)
Time Flexibility	Opportunity to study at one's own pace	"I could study the material at my own pace..." (P1)
	Time for assessment	"Time flexibility... everyone studies at their own pace..." (P7)
	Time saved from commuting	"We had time to submit or upload our assignments..." (P8) "...if I can follow it according to my obligations" (P5)

#### 4. Discussion

The findings concerning participants' satisfaction with distance learning programs are aligned with theoretical frameworks in both distance education and adult learning. In particular, the crucial role attributed by participants to the instructor is consistent with key assumptions of Moore's Transactional Distance Theory, in which distance education is understood as a function of dialogue, its structure and learner autonomy. The emphasis attributed by participants to communication, interaction, feedback and the use of participatory active teaching techniques highlights the importance of dialogue in reducing transactional distance and enhancing satisfaction in online learning environments (Moore, 1993; Moore & Kearsley, 2012).



Regarding time flexibility, in adult education it is a key factor in learner satisfaction, which is closely aligned with Knowles' andragogy theory. Adult learners are characterized as self-directed individuals who need to adapt learning to their personal, professional and family contexts (Knowles et al., 2015). Participants' appreciation of asynchronous learning opportunities, flexible deadlines and self-regulated study reflects key andragogy assumptions about autonomy and readiness for learning in adult education.

Furthermore, the importance attached to teaching approaches that promote active participation and relevance is linked to Kolb's (1984) theory of experiential learning. Participants expressed dissatisfaction with programs that relied primarily on passive content delivery, long duration, or outdated educational materials, suggesting a discrepancy with adults' preference for learning experiences that support reflection, application, and meaningful engagement. In contrast, programs that incorporated group work, discussion, feedback, and interactive materials appeared to facilitate experiential learning, enhancing learner satisfaction (Fragkoulis, Armakolas, & Papageorgiou, 2024).

Participants associated e-learning with the use of digital tools in both distance and face-to-face education, as well as with synchronous and asynchronous online learning modalities. This finding is consistent with Clark et al. (2020), who define e-learning as encompassing all forms of education that utilize the Internet, Information and Communication Technologies (I.C.T.), mobile devices, software, and related digital tools. Participants also tended to equate e-learning with distance learning, a perception supported by studies indicating that the two terms are frequently used interchangeably and share core characteristics (Evans & Nation, 2000; Twigg, 2001; Ryan et al., 2002).

Participants reported that synchronous e-learning facilitates interaction and enables immediate responses from instructors or digital tools, reflecting the high level of interactivity afforded by contemporary technologies. Such interactivity has been shown to support both individual and collaborative learning processes (Gros & Salvat, 2004; Byrd, 2018; Shi & Han, 2019). In contrast, asynchronous e-learning was primarily described as offering flexibility in terms of time and place, allowing learners to participate at their own pace and from their preferred location, either with limited or no instructor presence (Almosa, 2001; Al-Din & AlRadhi, 2008; Beldhuis, 2012; Pandey, 2013; Papadopoulou & Pavli-Korre, 2025).

Analysis of participants' responses highlighted both factors that positively influence engagement in distance learning programs and factors that hinder satisfaction and require improvement. Positive factors largely correspond to the defining characteristics of e-learning identified in the analysis and corroborate findings reported in the literature (Beldhuis, 2012; Pandey, 2013; Robra-Bissantz et al., 2019; Ghoshal, 2020; Pattnayak, 2020; Fareen, 2022). Conversely, factors contributing to dissatisfaction reflect persistent challenges in the design and implementation of distance learning programs. One of the most prominent challenges identified was the impersonal nature of communication, a concern also documented in prior research indicating that learners often disengage during synchronous online sessions due to limited visual contact and the absence of non-verbal communication cues (Sirohi, 2007; Elzainy et al., 2020).

## 5. Conclusions

Overall, the findings suggest that the effectiveness of e-learning is contingent upon its pedagogical implementation, the role of the human factor -particularly the instructor- and the quality of instructional design. When thoughtfully designed and implemented within a



targeted, participatory learning environment, e-learning may constitute an effective approach for the participants' satisfaction with distance learning programs.

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