



LEARNING GREEK AS A SECOND/FOREIGN LANGUAGE BY DISTANCE: STUDENTS' VOICES

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Abstract:

The aim of this research is to investigate the advantages, challenges and effectiveness of distance learning in teaching Greek as a second/foreign language (L2). In particular, it examines the advantages of distance learning as perceived by students who learn Greek as an L2. Moreover, this paper explores the difficulties that these Greek language students face during the lessons, as well as whether distance learning is as effective as face-to-face learning. The researchers employed a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative techniques in order to triangulate the research findings. Under this concept, they used an online questionnaire completed by 143 students of Greek as L2 and conducted semi-structured online interviews with 5 students who were taught Greek as L2. The results of the research indicate that the students who learn Greek through distance education identify that the most important reason for choosing it is the flexibility in their daily schedules that online courses offer (47.6%). In addition, the biggest disadvantage of learning a language through distance education is that students are physically distant from their teacher and their classmates, too (31%). Concerning the perceived effectiveness between distance and face-to-face teaching, the students stated that they prefer online courses, because they can attend lessons at any time and from any place (97.6%).

Keywords: distance learning, face-to-face teaching, second/foreign language, Greek as L2

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1. Introduction

In recent years, more and more people from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds are interested in learning Greek as an L2 for many reasons, such as to be able to communicate with their Greek friends, relatives and/or spouses (Vogiatzis, 2024). According to Davis, Gough and Taylor (2019:256-263), learning a language at a distance helps people who face health problems or live in remote areas and are therefore unable to attend traditional face-to-face courses. Distance courses enable students to attend classes from wherever they are without having to travel long distances regularly. For teachers, distance courses enable them to organize their courses with flexibility, regardless of their location. Furthermore, teachers can share comments on tasks effectively or even provide feedback through videos.

The purpose of this research is to investigate the motivations behind students' decisions to study Greek through distance learning. More specifically, it examines the advantages and the challenges that students face during courses and, finally, whether learning Greek through distance education is as effective as face-to-face learning. The paper addresses the following research questions:

- 1) What are the advantages of learning Greek through distance education?
- 2) What are the main challenges that students who learn Greek at a distance face?
- 3) Is distance learning of Greek as effective as face-to-face courses?

In order to answer these questions, semi-structured interviews with students were undertaken, and an online questionnaire was completed by students. The results presented in this paper highlight important aspects of distance learning and raise issues that need to be addressed by teachers in the field of teaching Greek as an L2.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Clarification of Concepts

Nowadays, distance education refers to the various ways of teaching and learning that are based on technological means (Klisowska *et al.*, 2021). According to Sokolova (2018), distance education is defined as a form of education that differs from conventional teaching, since it is not based on face-to-face transmission of knowledge, but on the individualization, autonomy and independence of learning. In distance education, many educational materials are provided, such as articles, educational guides and also supplementary resources. Moreover, the teacher and the student are separated in time and space.

Distance education involves acquiring knowledge and skills through indirect instruction and guidance, supported by technological tools that enable various forms of remote learning. It combines teaching and learning processes with both interaction and interactivity, often facilitated via synchronous and asynchronous communication channels. Courses are designed to meet individual learner needs, making use of digital learning resources, multimedia tools, and two-way communication technologies that connect instructors and students regardless of their location (Singh & Thurman, 2019).

According to Fabriz *et al.* (2021), interaction and communication between participants attending distance education courses can be achieved in either synchronous or an asynchronous manner. More specifically, in modern communication, there is simultaneous participation of learners and teachers in the online classroom (also in Martin & Oyarzun, 2017; Karasimos, 2022). These interactions occur in real time through audio-visual media and text-based messaging software (Dhawan, 2020).

Regarding asynchronous communication, this refers to the teaching and learning process in which time constraints do not apply. The main feature of asynchronous teaching is the independent choice of learning time and the self-directed collection of educational material by the student. Both synchronous and asynchronous communication complement each other within an entirely e-learning program. The nature of the course plays a key role in this communication is the type of lessons, as the students may attend self-directed learning programs, participate in semi-autonomous courses with regular meetings, while managing the rest independently, or engage in cooperative education, maintaining limited communication with their teacher but submitting assignments in a specified timeframe (see also in Culduz, 2024; Karasimos, 2022).

Li *et al.* (2023) conducted a systematic literature review and described how the distance education environment —the electronic or digital platform— enables and promotes the implementation of innovative teaching methods. The authors stated that Information and Communications Technology (ICT) contributes to the modernization of teaching, the improvement of student engagement/motivation, and the promotion of more creative and meaningful learning.

Keegan's (1998) research concluded that distance education is a form of education characterized by the following characteristics:

- 1) the presence of a physical distance between the student and the instructor, which remains constant throughout the educational process and differs from conventional education, which takes place in a classroom,
- 2) the central role of the educational institution, which plans, organizes and prepares the teaching material, undertaking the support of students, something that does not occur in self-teaching programs or personal research,
- 3) a distinction from, in terms of personal research and self-teaching, as the existence of an educational organization that plans and implements the educational material, providing support to the students, is considered essential.
- 4) the use of technological tools and media, such as documents, audio-visual materials, and digital media, which act as means for the transfer of the educational content as well as for the connection between the learner and the teacher,
- 5) the existence of two-way communication, enabling students to benefit from technologically supported dialogue, which differs from that in lifelong learning, since the use of technology is also related to additional functions.
- 6) the relative absence of a learning group and the emphasis on individualized forms of teaching, but allowing group meetings either face-to-face or through technological means (also in Simonson *et al.*, 2019; Berg & Simonson, 2023).

2.2 Previous Research

According to Martin, Sun and Westine (2020), it is observed that during the 1990s and 2000s, research was conducted on online learning. There was a slight decrease in the number of studies focusing on learning in 2015 and 2016, while there was an increase in the years 2017 and 2018. The majority of studies were based on qualitative research and were primarily carried out in higher education. They were categorized into twelve themes. A framework linking students, courses and professors, as well as at organizational levels, was created. The characteristics of students in online courses, as well as their relationship with the internet, were examined in a large number of studies and found to be consistent with the previous three systematic reviews.

Online learning has grown in recent decades, and especially in the United States, with the enrollment in institutions that provide online courses. In addition, various studies have been conducted on specific areas of online learning, such as innovations in online learning strategies (Davis *et al.*, 2018), quality of online education, modern online learning (Martin *et al.*, 2017), accessibility to online higher education, asynchronous online discussions, and self-regulated learning in online learning environments (Culduz, 2024).

Andria (2020:43–45) conducted qualitative research on teaching and learning Greek as a second language in various contexts, within the program “Learning to Teach and Teaching Greek as L2.” The research examined future teachers’ views on how this process impacts their professional development and classroom practices. Participants included Greek L2 teachers in Athens and Barcelona, postgraduate students from the University of Athens, and Erasmus students. Data were gathered through classroom observations and semi-structured interviews. Results showed positive outcomes: postgraduate students valued the connection between theory and practice, Erasmus students appreciated firsthand classroom observation, and teachers highlighted the importance of observation and reflection as key to self-assessment and lifelong learning.

2.2.1 Previous Research during the COVID-19 Pandemic

A cross-sectional study was conducted in June 2020 among 600 first-, second-, and third-year MBBS students at Rawalpindi Medical University (200 from each year; 300 male, 300 female), selected through convenience sampling. Data were collected via a self-structured questionnaire distributed both online and in person, following informed consent and ethical guidelines in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki. The study compared the overall effectiveness and specific aspects of online versus physical classes, such as flexibility, time management, and communication, and examined common online learning issues, including connectivity problems and reduced content delivery. Only consenting students from the first three years were included. In the study, 87% of students favored traditional learning over online learning. Most students (62%) reported no grade improvement with online classes, while 20% noted some improvement. Over half of them (52%) felt online learning encouraged creative activities like quizzes and videos, and 60% found it easier to give feedback online. However, 80% of the students believed online learning failed to teach clinical, professional, and communication skills.

Sumia, Tayyaba and Sidra (2022:537-538) reported that online classes provided a practical, though non-traditional, way to maintain the learning process during the COVID-19 pandemic. Over 91% of students who participated in the study used Microsoft Teams for online learning, while 8% relied on Zoom, and the remaining 1% used other platforms. In addition, 360 out of 600 students (60%) stated that providing feedback was easier in online learning compared to traditional face-to-face instruction.

Moreover, Gonzalez *et al.* (2020) conducted a relevant study on the influence of COVID-19 confinement on students' performance in higher education. They carried out a field experiment with 458 students, dividing them into two groups. The first group (control) included students from the academic years 2017/2018 and 2018/2019. The second group (experimental) consisted of students from 2019/2020, whose face-to-face activities were disrupted due to the lockdown. The findings indicated that the COVID-19 lockdown had a notably positive impact on students' performance, leading them to adopt more consistent learning strategies, which enhanced their effectiveness.

Another study was conducted by Shanthi, Lim and Jamil (2021) to evaluate students' inclination to learn languages via open distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. This research investigated 1,175 MARA Technological University students' ability to cope with learning English through online distance learning (ODL) during the COVID-19 pandemic. Four key factors were examined: computer literacy skills, learning efficiency, readiness, and self-motivation. Participants rated their level of agreement using a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 represented strong disagreement and 5 represented strong agreement. The results revealed significant positive relationships between students' preference for learning English online and all four factors. Among these, computer literacy skills emerged as the strongest predictor influencing students' preference for ODL-based English courses. Overall, the findings highlight the critical role of computer literacy and other motivational and readiness factors in successful online language learning during the pandemic.

Dos Santos (2022) conducted a study on learners' motivation for online learning after the COVID-19 pandemic. This study aimed to examine students' preferences and experiences with online courses during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as their views on post-pandemic course management. Data were collected through three methods: virtual semi-structured one-on-one interviews, focus group discussions, and member-checking interview sessions. All 80 participants identified flexibility and convenience as the most valued aspects of their online foreign language courses. Non-traditional students, including returning adults and evening class learners, noted that traditional face-to-face courses had always limited their choices and learning preferences due to daytime work and family responsibilities.

The student-teacher relationship (STR) is widely linked to positive, wide-ranging outcomes, yet its quality appears to be challenged in online teaching, which has negatively affected the well-being of both students and teachers during COVID-19-related school closures. The study by Vargos & Carvalhais (2022) compared perceptions of STR quality and quality of life among 47 teachers (61.7% female) and 56 students (48.2% female) after three months of online teaching and again after three months of

classroom teaching. Participants self-reported on STR quality and quality of life at both points. Quality of life remained consistent across teaching formats. Teachers reported no change in STR quality, whereas students perceived greater conflict following classroom teaching. Higher closeness in STR correlated with better well-being, while greater conflict correlated with lower well-being, though different aspects of quality of life were affected at different times and for each group. The findings suggest that online teaching may feel less personal for students, with reduced conflict due to fewer social triggers; however, teachers could leverage STR to promote more positive outcomes for both themselves and their students, even in virtual settings (Vargos & Carvalhais, 2022).

Another study examined university students' perceptions of the benefits and drawbacks of learning a second language (L2) through electronic media, focusing on students from the Czech Republic (n = 114) and Poland (n = 121). Data were collected via an online questionnaire, which asked participants about their experiences with both print and digital media for L2 learning, as well as the perceived effects of these media on their language acquisition. Understanding students' evaluations is important, as it may influence their motivation to learn a foreign language. The findings indicate that students are aware of the limitations of digital media, which may result in dissatisfaction and frustration when they are required to use these tools excessively (Phikhart *et al.*, 2023).

The study by Topping *et al.* (2024) aimed to determine whether returning to face-to-face teaching after the pandemic was more effective than online teaching during the pandemic, using exam results as a measure. It analyzed two middle-year cohorts of a four-year undergraduate English as a Foreign Language program over consecutive years, involving 377 students (105 Methodology majors and 272 Translators), the majority of whom were female (83%). Cohort entry scores were checked to ensure comparability. Exams were held twice a year. Results showed that in one course, greater online instruction led to better performance on both exam sessions. In three other courses, more online instruction improved Winter exam results but produced similar outcomes in summer. Overall, online learning was slightly more effective than face-to-face teaching, offering insights for course designers and university administrators regarding the optimal balance between online and in-person instruction (Topping *et al.*, 2024).

Online learning can negatively affect students' mental health. Fatigue reduces concentration, memory, and cognitive function, lowering academic performance and increasing stress, while also affecting personal and social life. The main causes of screen fatigue include prolonged screen time, insufficient breaks, poor ergonomics, multitasking, content type, lack of sleep, inappropriate screen brightness, glare, eye strain, and limited physical interaction in online classes. In their study, Yosep, Sakti, Mardhiyah & Maulana (2024) used a quantitative-descriptive design with a total sample of 180 first-year nursing students participating in online learning. Data were collected using the Zoom Exhaustion & Fatigue Scale (ZEF Scale) and analyzed using univariate analysis to describe screen fatigue levels. The results showed that most students (42.8%) experienced moderate screen fatigue, 25% reported low levels, and 32.2% reported high levels, which indicates a considerable degree of screen fatigue. The findings highlight the need for lecturers and students to support each other's mental health during online

learning. Screen fatigue is a significant challenge faced by students during online learning, and this data provides universities with valuable insights to develop teaching methods that effectively reduce screen fatigue among students (Yosep, Sakti, Mardhiyah & Maulana, 2024).

3. Research Methodology

In this research, an online questionnaire was completed by 143 students of Greek as L2 and 5 online semi-structured interviews were conducted with students who were taught Greek as L2. The researchers combined qualitative and quantitative methods in order to triangulate the research findings.

3.1 Participants and Procedure

The selection of the research sample (Table 1) was carried out after consultation with several Greek teachers, in order to distribute the *questionnaire* to their students, who either live abroad (84.1%) or in Greece (15.9%). This research was carried out exclusively with adult participants. The research sample consisted of 143 students learning Greek as L2. The majority of students were women (79.3%), while male students represented 20% of the total. Most of the students (57.2%) were between 25 and 35 years old, and they held a Bachelor's degree (55.2%). Almost all the students who completed the questionnaire reported speaking different foreign languages (97.9%), and their proficiency level in Greek was A1 (43.4%), according to the C.E.F.R. Furthermore, the main reason they chose to learn Greek was because of their love for Greece and the Greek culture (43.4%). Other reasons included having Greek friends and relatives (34.5%), their interest in learning foreign languages (11%) and academic or professional activities in Greece (11.1%).

Table 1: Demographic data of the respondents to the online questionnaire

Gender	Male (20%)		Female (79.3%)			
Age	25-35 (57.2%)	36-45 (24.8%)	46-55 (15.9%)	56-65 (0.7%)	Over 65 (1.4%)	
Place of residence	Greece (15.9%)		Abroad (84.1%)			
Education	Elementary school (0.7%)	High school (15.2%)	BA (55.2%)	MA (24.8%)	PhD (4,1%)	
Knowledge of other foreign languages	Yes (97.9%)		No (2.1%)			
Level of Greek	A1 (43.4%)	A2 (23.4%)	B1 (22.1%)	B2 (6.2%)	C1 (3.4%)	C2 (1.4%)

The data collection for the *Online Interview* (Table 2) took place in May 2023. The students who participated in the interview were informed via email about the research, and they provided their informed consent. The interviews were conducted via the Zoom platform. All the interviews were recorded and then transcribed. The sample of the qualitative

research consisted of 5 students (3 women and 2 men), learning Greek through online courses. The age of the interviewees ranged from 35 to 38 years, while 3 out of 5 interviewees held a Master's degree. Although all the students came from different countries, most of them (3 out of 5) resided in Greece, and their language level in Greek was A1. It should be noticed that the students who took part in the interview process were labelled as S1 (Student 1), S2 (Student 2) and so on to maintain their anonymity. Their quotes were translated into English by the researchers.

Table 2: Interviewees' demographics

Demographics	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5
Gender	Female	Female	Female	Male	Male
Age	36	35	31	38	54
Place of origin	Ireland	Italy	Spain	Brazil	England
Place of residence	Greece	Italy	Greece	Greece	Brazil
Education	MA	BA	MA	PhD	MA
Language level in Greek	B2	B1	A1	A1	A1

3.2 Data Collection Tools

The data collection took place during the spring of 2023. To conduct the research, a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods was implemented through the use of a semi-structured online questionnaire and a semi-structured interview, respectively, to triangulate the results. Although they are different research techniques, they serve the same purpose and lead to a more comprehensive understanding during the process of data collection and analysis. In addition, they contribute to cross-referencing findings by providing well-documented conclusions, and as a result, the combination of these methods leads to a more complete and comprehensive understanding (Creswell *et al.*, 2018). Moreover, it was clarified at the beginning of both the questionnaire and the interview that the participants were informed about the exact purpose of the research, their anonymity was emphasized, and they were assured that the data collected would be used solely for the specific study.

3.2.1 The Online Questionnaire

The first research tool was a semi-structured online questionnaire, which was divided into five sections according to the research questions. The questionnaire included 34 questions, both closed-ended and open-ended (see Appendix). The first section contained questions about the respondents' demographics, the second focused on the use of technology, the third examined learning foreign languages through distance courses, the fourth addressed the difficulties in learning the Greek language and the fifth concerned the evaluation of distance courses, which will not be presented in this paper.

Both closed-ended and open-ended questions were used. Closed-ended questions were designed in the form of multiple-choice items, giving the advantage to the respondents to quickly complete a large number of questions, while increasing the comparability of the responses across different questions, both for respondents and the researcher (Babbie, 2011). Short-answer open-ended questions were used at the

beginning of the questionnaire, while longer open-ended questions were placed at the end to avoid tiring respondents, as these questions are related to the respondents' personal views on distance learning. The advantages of this method include the ability to distribute the questionnaire online to a large number of people, it is the most economical way to collect data, it is easy to construct and use, while the researcher cannot influence participants' answers (Babbie, 2020).

3.2.2 The Online Interview

After the students completed the questionnaires, 5 out of 143 participants stated that they were willing to participate in an interview. They were then invited to give a semi-structured online interview. More specifically, the interview questions were largely similar to those asked in the online questionnaire. However, the interviews focused on exploring participants' answers in greater depth, clarifying their responses to the questionnaire items and eliciting their experiences, thereby increasing the reliability of the questionnaire responses. Each interview lasted around 20-30 minutes, while it was conducted in a friendly and open atmosphere.

After the interviews were transcribed, the researchers proceeded with a thematic qualitative analysis of the data. In the next stage, the qualitative data were coded according to their meanings, so that there could be a better categorization of the information. Afterwards, a review of the themes was carried out, during which the researcher assigned names to each theme for the final analysis. In the last stage, the findings were presented according to the participants' responses to the researcher's questions. The researchers were actively involved by providing their interpretations and analyzing the findings in relation to relevant bibliographic sources (Babbie, 2011).

3.3 Research Results

The results from the questionnaire are presented in detail for each identified advantage of the distance education, and they are accompanied by corresponding extracts from the interviews, demonstrating that the answers to the questionnaires were cross-checked with those of the interviews.

3.3.1 Advantages of Distance Learning

After the collection and analysis of the research participants' answers to the online questionnaire, Table 3 clearly presents, in descending order, the distance education.

Regarding the advantages of distance learning, the first question examines the primary benefit of taking classes online (See Table 3). It becomes obvious that the majority of the research participants (47.6%) chose to learn Greek by attending online courses due to the flexibility these courses offer to them (also in Sadiku *et al.*, 2018:74). Students often do not have time to commute from their home to a classroom. However, online learning allows them to adjust their lessons according to their personal schedule. S1 stated that she chooses online courses, because she can stay at home, adding that this is a fun way to learn. S3 emphasized that she can adapt the lessons to her own timetable. S4 chose the

online courses, because his teacher offers only online courses, while S5 explained that there are no Greek teachers in his town.

Extract 1: *"The main reason I chose online courses is the possibility to attend classes anywhere. The primary benefit of taking classes online is that I take courses wherever I am and whenever I have time, depending on my work schedule and free time."* (S2)

The rapid growth of the Internet and the extensive adoption of mobile information and communication technologies have greatly transformed the social environment and the way people interact (Bylieva, Lobatyuk, & Rubtsova, 2017:226). This transformation has also influenced the education sector, with distance learning occupying an increasingly prominent role (Sokolova, 2018:1479).

The next question refers to the students' familiarity with the use of technology. The majority (46.2%) of respondents reported having a good level of technological knowledge. Specifically, S1 and S3 stated that they use social media on a daily basis. S1 also highlighted that technology forces people, both directly and indirectly, to become familiar with it. S2 mentioned that she is comfortable with technology, as she uses her laptop every day at work and holds an ECDL IT certificate.

Extract 2: *"I am very familiar with technology. I use the laptop every day for my job, and I have also passed the ECDL exam."* (S2)

Concerning the digital devices used by students in online courses, most of them answered that they use a laptop (55.9%). S1, S3 and S5 reported using their laptop, whereas S2 and S4 use their mobile phone.

Furthermore, 37.2% of the students stated that they are able to concentrate well during online courses.

Extract 3: *"[...] It is very easy [to concentrate], because I am alone in the room and I can concentrate very easily during online courses."* (S2)

Most of the students (43.4%) reported that they love Greece and Greek culture. S1 mentioned that she is learning Greek because she wants to conduct research at a Greek university. S2 and S5 explained that their love for Greece and Greek culture motivated them to learn the Greek language, as well as their desire to communicate with their Greek friends in their native language. According to Mogli and Magos (2023), it is important to note that for migrants and refugees, acquiring the language of the host country and becoming familiar with its culture is essential. S3 and S4 stated that they are learning Greek because they live in Greece and want to communicate with their friends in Greek.

Extract 4: *"I am learning Greek, because I speak Greek and I like the Greek culture, the history of Greece. I also have some Greek friends whom I visit sometimes during the holidays. I like to go to Greek islands [...] and I want to communicate in Greek."* (S2)

Almost half of the students (50.3%) answered that there is significant interaction between them and their teacher during the lesson, as they do various exercises and exchange opinions on different topics.

Extract 5: *"Yes, we talk, we do exercises together, I ask him questions. We interact throughout the lesson. The whole lesson is a dialogue."* (S4)

Table 3: Advantages of distance learning

Online courses biggest advantage	Flexibility (47.6%)	No Greek Language Schools (22.1%)	Saving time to commuting (18.6%)	Interactive way to learn Greek (11.7%)	
Familiarity with the use of technology	A lot (46.2%)	Enough (33.8%)	Too much (15.9%)	A little (4.2%)	
Using of digital devices during the online courses	Laptop (55.9%)	Mobile phone (24.1%)	Computer (15.2%)	Tablet (4.8%)	
Concentration during the online courses	Enough (37.2%)	A lot (36.6%)	A little (12.4%)	Not at all (7.6%)	Too much (6.2%)
Interaction between students and the teacher	A lot (50.3%)	Enough (35.2%)	A little (6.2%)	Not at all / Too much (4.1%)	

3.3.2 The Main Difficulties during Distance Learning

As shown in Table 4, the first question of this section relates to the difficulties students face in distance learning. Thirty-one percent (31%) of the 143 students answered that the fact that they are far away from the teacher and their classmates is the main difficulty they face during distance courses. S1 mentioned that she cannot understand some grammar points, while S2 stated that she has no other people to talk to. On the other hand, S3 and S4 reported that the biggest problem in online courses is poor internet connection and the reduced ability to correct spelling mistakes. S5 added that he finds it difficult to make time for the courses.

Extract 6: *"Often there are internet connection problems, technical problems... The other problem is that I have to take pictures of the written exercises and then I send them by email [to be corrected by my teacher]."* (S4)

The majority of the participants (39.1%) stated that they feel lonely because they cannot meet new people (see also Klisowska *et al.*, 2021:29). S2 explained that there is no one else in the class, and S1 added that there is no one to share her ideas with or talk to. On the other hand, S3 and S5 stated that they do not feel lonely at all during the lessons, while S4 admitted that he does not miss social interaction.

Extract 7: *"To be honest, yes. Sometimes [...] you need someone else in the class to share your ideas and talk to other people. [...] Sometimes I feel alone."* (S1)

The majority of the participants (54%) answered that they *rarely* have problems with understanding the content of a course, due to distance learning. More specifically, S2, S3 and S5 stated that they do not face any problems during their Greek distance courses. On the contrary, S1 said that she struggles to understand the declination of nouns and often makes mistakes during speaking exercises. Moreover, S4 noted that it becomes difficult to understand certain things only when the internet connection is poor.

Extract 8: *"English grammar is easier than Greek. The inflection of nouns in Greek does not exist in English. I can't quite figure out how to use it. [...] I often make mistakes when I speak."* (S1)

Forty per cent (40%) of the students stated that they do not browse the internet during lessons. S1 and S5 admitted that they often visit other websites, because they want to stay informed and check their emails. S2 and S3 mentioned that they rarely visit other websites during lessons, while S4 replied that he never does so.

Extract 9: *"To be honest, many times [I engage with various websites during the lesson]. When I'm on the computer, it's easy to look up another website and read something that's happening or see a message on my computer. [...] I can't be one hundred percent there when I'm a click away from what's going on in the world. I want to check my messages and see what's happening on Facebook and Instagram. Ok, I know it's bad, but it happens."* (S1)

The last question of this section refers to the feeling of fatigue due to the students' frequent exposure to the computer screen. Most of the students (49.7%) answered that they rarely get tired during the lessons. S1 was the only one who said that she often feels tired because she spends many hours in front of the computer. S2, S3 and S4 answered that they rarely feel tired, while S5 explained that he starts to feel tired towards the end of the lesson.

Most of the participants (42.8%) reported that it is quite easy for them to concentrate.

Extract 10: *"It's very easy, because I'm alone in the room and I concentrate very easily during the online courses."* (S2)

Table 4: The difficulties the students face during distance learning

Online courses main difficulties	Away from classmates/ teacher (31%)	Reduced feedback by teacher (27.6%)	Poor internet connection quality (21.4%)	Unfamiliarity with technology (1.4%)
Reasons of feeling lonely during the online courses	No meeting new people (39.1%)	No speaking exercises in pairs (24.6%)	Difficulty in discussing with classmates (20.3%)	No listening other opinions (15.9%)
Difficulty with understanding in the online courses	Rarely (54%)	Often (32%)	Many times (14%)	
Websites navigation during online courses	Rarely (40%)	Never (30.3%)	Often (21.4%)	Many times (8.2%)
Fatigue due to being in front of a PC screen	Rarely (49.7%)	Never (25.5%)	Often (15.9%)	Many times/Always (8.9%)
Students' concentration during online courses	A lot (42.8%)	Enough (37.2%)	A little/ Not at all (20%)	

3.3.3 Distance versus Face-to-face Learning

Most students indicated that their feelings or attitudes toward subjects remained unchanged during online learning, while 21% reported that, over time, they grew to enjoy the online learning experience (Sumia *et al.*, 2022). The last section of the questionnaire consists of a general assessment of the online courses by the students (Table 5). Most of the participants (43.4%) stated that they prefer enough online courses to face-to-face ones. S1 and S2 mentioned that they like online courses, although they pointed out both positive and negative aspects. S3 explained that both distance and face-to-face courses have advantages and disadvantages, but, overall, she enjoys online courses very much. S4 and S5 also stated that they like online courses.

Extract 11: *"I like them, because they allow me to learn a foreign language, wherever I am. They are very convenient and practical."* (S5)

The majority (77.9%) reported that they would recommend the online courses to other people who want to learn Greek. In particular, S2 and S5 said that they would suggest them, because they have several advantages, while S1 added that they are a fun way to learn, but emphasized that there are no other students to talk to or exchange opinions with. S3 and S4 argued that learning through online courses is beneficial, as classes can take place anywhere and commuting is not required.

Extract 12: *"You can learn well wherever you are [...], you learn from home and you don't have to move."* (S3)

The majority, 76.6% (92 out of 120 students), stated that both ways are equally effective. S1 mentioned that they are equally effective for someone who wants to learn a language and has a good teacher. S2 noted that the negative aspect of distance learning is the lack of physical proximity between the teacher and the students, while the positive aspect of face-to-face lessons is the interaction with the other students, which is why she prefers them to distance learning. S3 emphasized that in the online courses one can do interactive exercises, while in face-to-face courses one can see and hear others better, as the course does not depend on the internet connection. S4 stated that online courses can be adapted to the student's daily schedule. On the contrary, S5 prefers face-to-face courses, because of the greater interaction and because the teacher relies more on the student.

Extract 13: *"I think the quality of learning is the same, you learn the same [...], the difference is that online courses are more flexible for me, because of my daily life."* (S4)

The majority (51.7%) responded that the relationship between them and their teacher would be the same as in online courses. S1 and S5 mentioned that the relationship between them and their teacher would be better in face-to-face, as courses where there is greater interaction and a sense of reassurance and confidence, when the teacher is present. S2, S3 and S5 stated that their relationship with the teacher would remain the same, as they have no difficulties communicating with him/her.

Extract 14: *"The relationship with my teacher would be the same in face-to-face courses, because we would be discussing and interacting as we do in online classes."* (S3)

According to the research conducted at the Medical University of Rawalpindi (Sumia *et al.*, 2022:536), 62% of the students stated that their grades have not improved through online learning, whereas 20% reported that they have noticed an improvement in their grades due to the online courses. Most of them (57.2%) responded that their language level in Greek would be the same if they were attending face-to-face courses (e.g. S3). Furthermore, S4 explained that she might notice an improvement in her writing skills because of her teacher's supervision. However, S1, S2 and S5 stated that they probably have a better language level, due to the increased interaction in face-to-face lessons.

Extract 15: *"Maybe it was better than online classes, because in face-to-face classes there is more interaction. So, I would talk more often with my classmates."* (S2)

Table 5: Effectiveness of distance in comparison to face-to-face teaching

Online versus face-to-face courses preference	Enough (43.4%)	A lot (41.4%)	A little (15.1%)
Online versus face-to-face courses effectiveness	Online and face-to-face courses are the same (92/120)	Online courses are better (18/120)	Face-to-face are better (10/120)
Potential teacher-student relationship in face-to-face courses	Same compared to the online courses (51.7%)	Better compared to the online courses (44.8%)	Worse compared to the online courses (3.4%)
Potential language level in face-to-face courses	Same compared to the online courses (57.2%)	Better compared to the online courses (37.2%)	Worse compared to the online courses (5.5%)
Suggestion of online courses	Yes (77.9%)	No (22.1%)	

4. Discussion

RQ1. Which are the advantages of learning Greek at distance?

The main reason why students choose online courses is the flexibility and adaptability they provide, as they allow them to organize their schedule independently (Sokolova, 2018). A key feature, moreover, is the ability to attend courses, wherever they are, while maintaining regular contact with the Greek language. The above finding is also confirmed by Manzon (2022:180), who states that one of the advantages of distance learning is the fact that it allows learners to attend lessons from any place they choose. According to Manzon (2022), online education is considerably more cost-effective than traditional in-person learning, as it removes expenses related to transportation, fatigue, and, most significantly, physical classroom facilities. Additionally, most of the course materials and research resources are available online, so it is a paperless learning environment, which is more affordable and beneficial for the environment.

The main advantage of online courses is that they enable students to have lessons from home, without needing to commute and generally attend classes, wherever they are. Culdaz (2024) confirms that online platforms give students the opportunity to participate in classes without spatial or temporal restrictions. They also have opportunity to review as many times as they want the teaching material. The majority of the students who completed the questionnaire, as well as those who were interviewed by the researcher, stated that they would recommend online courses to someone who wants to learn Greek, as they offer flexibility and adaptability to the students' schedules.

According to the statements of Manzon (2022:180), the fact that students attend courses remotely offers them the possibility of not missing classes, since they can attend them anywhere. Also, they can choose the most suitable way of learning a language based on their own preferences and abilities. For example, some learners may learn better through auditory exercises, others within a group of students, while others may prefer private lessons due to the distraction caused by their classmates. Therefore, every student

has a different learning style, as some students thrive in a virtual classroom and others like the one-to-one instruction. Distance learning offers many options, and it can be personalized in many ways, creating the perfect learning environment suited to the needs of each student (Manzon, 2022).

Most of the students (46.2%) are familiar with technology, and they can manage digital tools such as computers and laptops. Sumia *et al.* (2022:537-538) found that both the students and the teachers are familiar with the technological tools, as demonstrated through the use of online platforms.

In addition, they do not have any difficulty concentrating during courses (42.8%). To maintain students' attention, course material should be delivered in short segments of 10 to 15 minutes, with brief pauses in between for direct interaction, encouraging participation through questions and answers (Sokolova, 2018).

Most of the participants answered that there is significant interaction between teachers and students in the distance courses. Hurlbut (2018) stated that a key advantage of the traditional classroom is the opportunity for interaction with teachers and peers. Informal conversations, group activities, and in-class exchanges foster social learning. While online learning can replicate some of these interactions through forums or virtual breakout rooms, it cannot fully replace the spontaneous, informal exchanges that occur in real settings such as classrooms, hallways, or break areas.

Distance education employs technology to provide teaching to learners who are physically distant from the instructor, while facilitating consistent and meaningful interaction between students and teachers (Owusu-Oware *et al.*, 2020). However, very often teachers have a basic level of technological competence, and they do not even have the necessary tools to conduct distance classes. To solve this problem, all the teachers offering online lessons need to invest in professional development and continuous training with the latest technology updates in order to conduct their lessons seamlessly (Manzon, 2022; Singh & Thurman, 2019).

Another significant factor is that online learning offers a variety of tools—such as videos, PDFs, and podcasts—that teachers can integrate into their lesson plans. Incorporating these digital resources alongside traditional textbooks enables educators to teach more effectively and interactively. Moreover, 52% of the students stated that online learning encourages creativity through activities such as quizzes, videos, and other interactive content (Culduz, 2024).

However, for many students, one of the biggest challenges of distance learning is the struggle with focusing on the screen for long periods (Yosep *et al.*, 2024). In other words, they are easily distracted by social media and other websites, and for that reason, the teachers must keep them motivated and focused during the lesson.

In addition, in small cities, students often face problems with internet connectivity, as there is not a consistent connection to it, due to the low speed (Manzon, 2022).

Apart from these, students who spend many hours in front of the screen may develop poor posture and other physical problems (Yosep *et al.*, 2024). To combat this problem, teachers should schedule regular short breaks so that students can refresh both their mind and their bodies (Manzon, 2022).

Distance learning offers important advantages for students of Greek, particularly in terms of flexibility, accessibility, and the ability to adapt to different learning styles. Despite challenges such as reduced spontaneous interaction or screen fatigue, it can be argued that with proper course design and teacher training, these issues can be effectively managed, making online education a valuable and inclusive option.

RQ2. Which are the main challenges that students who learn Greek by distance face?

On the other hand, the biggest challenge that students have to face in online courses is that they are far from the teacher and their classmates (31%). Additionally, Davis, Gough and Taylor (2019:256-263) reported that an important obstacle to distance learning is the lack of strong interpersonal relationships between students and teachers. The distance does not allow the development of closer relationships between teachers and learners. Some students, though, may view teachers as mere graders rather than as trusted teachers (Vargos & Carvalhais, 2022). Machado *et al.* (2019) stated that distance learning is defined by physical separation between teachers and students, and it is mediated by a type of technology as a tool for communication.

Other students stated that they receive limited or delayed feedback from their teacher (27.6%), which affects their course.

Regarding the feeling of loneliness and isolation during online courses (also in Klisowska *et al.*, 2021:29; Hurlbut, 2018), the students in both research tools answered mostly negatively. This answer contradicts what Manzon (2022:181) claims, arguing that in online courses, there is not much physical interaction between students and teachers. The rapid growth of the internet and the extensive adoption of mobile information and communication technologies have greatly transformed the social environment and the way people interact (Bylieva, Lobatyuk, & Rubtsova, 2017:226). This transformation has also influenced the education sector, with distance learning occupying an increasingly prominent role (Sokolova, 2018:1479).

In addition, students' simultaneous engagement with other websites during lessons is generally infrequent, according to those who responded to the questionnaire, while some of the interviewees stated that they sometimes engage with different websites while taking lessons (40%).

In other words, a major challenge of online courses for students is their distraction caused by social media and other online platforms (37.2%). For this reason, teachers must keep the attention of the students alive, making them focus on the lesson (*ibid.*), by adopting interactive methods and varied teaching techniques (Michou & Rousoulioti, 2025).

Today's young people are accustomed to clicking on online links whenever something interests them, seeking immediate access to more information. If a teacher fails to satisfy their curiosity, they are likely to turn their attention to digital devices and, via wireless connections, search for answers online. Most modern students actively use the Internet to obtain the information they need to successfully grasp course material, finding digital resources far more convenient and familiar than printed materials (Sokolova, 2018).

The following questions concern the feeling of boredom. In particular, the students, as they stated, rarely feel bored during the courses. There is a lot of interaction with their teachers throughout the course. The answers given by the interviewees coincide with the research results of Yosep *et al.* (2024), reporting that screen fatigue is a common issue for students in online learning, and this data offers universities important information to create teaching strategies that help minimize screen fatigue.

Staying in front of the computer screen for long hours is a difficulty that distance learning students have to face. This fact can lead to the appearance of health problems, such as eye strain and musculoskeletal discomfort. That is why it is necessary for students to have frequent breaks, so that they can distance themselves from the lesson for a few minutes and rest (Manzon, 2022:181; Yosep *et al.*, 2024).

To summarize, the greatest obstacle in learning Greek through distance education is the restricted interpersonal interaction with teachers and classmates. This lack of direct contact can reduce feedback, hinder relationship-building, and sometimes create a sense of detachment from the learning process. Although technology provides useful tools to mitigate these issues, no digital medium can yet fully replicate the immediacy and trust that develop in face-to-face communication.

RQ3. Is the distance learning of Greek so effective, as face-to-face courses?

The first and main question of this section concerns the students' preference for online courses. Based on the results of the questionnaires and interviews, most students answered that they quite like distance learning. According to research findings, the students surveyed reported far more negative than positive effects of distance learning. It was also found that distance learning provided no benefit at all for 26% of students who usually get 'good' grades in exams (Kubikova *et al.*, 2024). Moreover, Klisowska *et al.* (2021:31) stated that online learning, due to its numerous positive aspects, constitutes an excellent form of education. Despite that, it requires strong engagement on the part of teachers, who have to encourage and motivate students to expand their knowledge. There was also a discussion on the effectiveness of online and face-to-face courses. Students reported that both teaching methods have advantages and disadvantages. However, they are equally effective for someone who wants to learn a foreign language. A comparative analysis of perceived advantages and disadvantages of online L2 acquisition among university students documents the trade-offs learners see between online and in-person modes (i.e. flexibility vs. reduced social presence). It is also consistent with the idea that both can be effective depending on goals and context (Pikhart *et al.*, 2023).

In a comparative study on English as a Foreign Language with a substantial literature review, the authors noted that many prior studies found online learning at least as effective as face-to-face, while also highlighting distinct advantages and disadvantages of each (e.g. online supports flexibility, self-regulation; face-to-face supports social presence-interaction) (Topping *et al.*, 2024).

According to Sadiku, Adebo and Musa (2018:74), the educational effectiveness of distance courses is lower than face-to-face courses, because they cannot convey the same

level of interaction between students and teachers (Gherheş *et al.*, 2021). Sumia *et al.* (2022) indicated that their feelings or attitudes toward subjects remained unchanged during online learning, while 21% reported that, over time, they grew to enjoy the online learning experience.

To sum up, it can be concluded that online courses are an effective way to learn Greek as an L2. An important characteristic of students who attend distance courses is that they attend their lessons via their computer. A computer is undoubtedly part of their daily life and under this light, a computer remains the main tool for conducting their distance courses.

Teachers, who try to build relationships not only with each of their students but with all of them, are seen by their students as allies in their educational journey. These teachers will likely show similar behaviour in distance learning. Students in online courses may feel that they do not have the necessary and appropriate help due to their physical distance from the classroom. Building relationships is not limited only to students and teachers, but also between students, since online platforms require a different approach to developing a sense of community. For example, in conventional classrooms, students can more easily participate in discussions with their classmates, as body language, but also face-to-face speaking, contributes to the development of discussion among them, which does not happen in the online virtual classroom. Through distance learning, body language is largely lost.

However, in traditional classrooms, students are able to receive support and build personal relationships with their teachers (Feng, Ioan & Li, 2021).

The students' answers are confirmed by the research conducted in 2020 at the Rawalpindi Medical University, with a total of 600 students participating. The results obtained were 87% (522 out of 600) of students answered that traditional (face-to-face) learning is more effective, compared to online learning. Regarding the time allocated for research, online classes resulted in less time dedicated to research, according to most of the students. When online classes began, one of the main difficulties was that most faculty members lacked IT knowledge, which caused significant psychological stress for both teachers and students. In addition, distance learning is considered a valuable solution for students in remote areas, with online platforms expected to eliminate the barriers to access caused by physical distance.

Many traditional classroom educators still view learning as a mechanical process, often due to time constraints, lack of support, or strict curriculum demands. In contrast, online learning enhances social interaction and student involvement by incorporating creative and artistic approaches within problem-based learning environments. Additionally, traditional classroom settings are often seen as limiting, rigid, and inconvenient. The rise of online education has opened up opportunities for students with demanding schedules and limited flexibility to pursue a high-quality education. No major differences in student performance were observed between those learning online and those in face-to-face settings, regardless of gender or academic standing. (Sumia, Tayyaba, Sidra:2022).

Probably distance learning of Greek can be as effective as face-to-face courses. While traditional classrooms provide stronger interpersonal interaction and immediate feedback, online learning offers flexibility, accessibility, and self-regulated study, which are equally important for language acquisition. Therefore, the effectiveness of the courses depends largely on the context, the teacher's involvement, and the learner's motivation, rather than on the delivery mode itself.

5. Conclusion

The scope of this research was to explore the advantages of online courses for learning Greek as L2, the obstacles that the students face during online classes and the effectiveness of the online versus face-to-face instruction. The results demonstrated that the main advantage of distance learning is the ability for students to stay home, avoid commuting, and adapt courses to their personal schedules. However, the main drawback is the limited interaction with teachers and peers, limiting the development of close relationships. In contrast, face-to-face classes allow for greater communication, use of non-verbal and kinaesthetic skills, and stronger relationships, enhancing the overall quality of teaching.

Overall, this research adds to the understanding of online versus face-to-face learning, offering insights that may inform teachers and institutions in designing more effective and balanced teaching approaches.

Nonetheless, some limitations should also be carefully observed when interpreting the results of this work. Firstly, all the participants were adults. However, it would be interesting to obtain the viewpoint of younger or adolescent learners and how they experience distance learning (Rousoulioti & Seferiadou, 2023).

Secondly, it would also be interesting to include students who were attending online courses specifically for exam preparation in Greek language certification programs. In this way, they could research whether distance learning could help students, not only in learning the Greek language without pressure, but also in preparing for exams.

Thirdly, this research was carried out on a relatively small number of Greek language learners participating in distance education worldwide. A larger number of participants could give more reliable results. Future studies could further investigate the effectiveness of distance learning across different age groups and proficiency levels. Research that would overcome the limitations of this study, aiming for more valid, representative and reliable findings, is strongly encouraged.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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Appendix: Questions of the questionnaire

The questionnaire and interview questions are organized into four thematic axes:

A. Student demographics

1. How old are you?
2. Where do you live?
3. Where are you from?
4. What is your educational level?
6. Do you speak other languages besides your mother tongue/first language?
9. What is your level of Greek according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages?
10. What is the main reason why you chose to learn Greek?

B. Advantages of distance learning

11. What is the biggest advantage of online classes?
12. How familiar are you with the use of technology?
13. What digital device do you use for your online classes?
14. Is it easy to concentrate during online classes?
15. Is there any interaction between you and your teacher during online classes?

C. Difficulties during distance learning

16. What is the biggest difficulty you face in online classes?
17. Do you feel lonely and isolated during online classes?
18. Do you have difficulty understanding certain things because of distance learning?
19. When you have online classes, how often do you browse other websites?
20. How often do you feel tired of being in front of the screen when you have online classes?
21. Is it easy for you to concentrate during online classes?
22. Do you have difficulties in understanding due to the online format?