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Research Insights
Изследователски проникновения

A TEMPLATE FOR A DISTANCE LEARNING E-COURSE AT A BULGARIAN UNIVERSITY – THE EXPERIENCE OF ST. CYRIL AND ST. METHODIUS UNIVERSITY OF VELIKO TARNOVO

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Abstract. The high-quality e-course design is key to the success of distance instruction. Building on a brief overview of the scientific literature, the main elements in the design of an e-course are theoretically substantiated. The structure of a universal template for a quality distance instruction course has been discussed. The research results suggest that the teachers questioned have no experience with designing an e-course. Their attitude towards the utility of the template is hesitant. The percentage of those who wished to be trained to work with the template is high, which is in an inverse relationship with the assessment of utility, that is, the fewer teachers need additional training to work with the template, the more positively this impacts their opinion on the template's utility. The template is particularly beneficial for the start of the teacher's professional development, which considerably eases their workload and helps them make pedagogically sound decisions.

Keywords: template; quality distance learning e-course

The COVID-19 pandemic has necessitated online learning in colleges and universities across the globe, requiring instructors to adapt their instruction within a short period– regardless of whether they were prepared or not(Scherer et al 2021). In most cases, this difficult task was accomplished by the instructors with minimal support from the institution. To support the instructors' work in designing e-courses, as well as to unify the instruction setting of the students, some universities have proposed a template (or templates) that include some of the elements of the course (Konstantinidis 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic has necessitated an update of the regulatory framework for the implementation of distance instruction in Bulgaria. However, research on the elements of an e-course template is fragmented. There is still no review of the structure of distance instruction courses to meet national requirements.

The paper aims to explore the main components in the design of an e-course and discuss the structure of a universal template for a quality course for distance instruction, as well as find out what the instructors' attitude towards the proposed template to support their work in the development of quality e-course is.

1. Problem Relevance

The new Regulations[1] on national requirements for organising distance learning at universities (effective since 2021) necessitated changes to distance learning. Designing a quality e-learning course that meets national requirements is a complex process demanding a lot of time, work and expertise for instructors. We conducted an inquiry over the period of May-June 2022 among Veliko Tarnovo University instructors. It appeared that many of them face difficulties regarding the design and formation of a quality e-course, which as a result could lead to their non-participation in distance learning. That issue requires a scientifically proven decision aimed at supporting the instructors.

To resolve the issue, a model for a quality distance learning e-course was designed within the context of the Regulations on national requirements for organising distance learning at universities, effective as of September 1, 2021. The following tasks should be solved: looking into potential ways to assist instructors' work; building on global and national good practices in the area of e-learning, creating a template for a quality e-course for Veliko Tarnovo University; looking into instructors' attitude towards the proposed template for an e-course.

From the 2022 – 2023 academic year, the team at the Distance Learning Centre creates a template for each subject. The distance learning e-course template is designed using open-source instruction management system Moodle 3.11 tools that comprise the main components of a quality learning process (in compliance with the national requirements and criteria) with the idea that each new course should be created with this template. The instructor can fill, change, update, add and delete material in an editing mode. The aim: to assist instructors in planning and creating a quality (in compliance with the national requirements) e-learning course; to unify the courses to make sure students can adapt and find their way in the setting more easily; to facilitate data collection in preparing reports for the National Evaluation and Accreditation Agency.

2. Template of a Quality E-course – Overview of Scientific Literature

2.1. Theoretical Bases

The present research needs to substantiate theoretically the launch of a template for an e-course from the point of view of both instructors and students. Regarding students, Christine M. Bachman and Cindy Stewart (2011) in their publications propose Self-determination and Learner Motivation as a basis for designing an e-course; the theory stipulates that the level of self-

determination is associated with meeting three inborn psychological needs: autonomy (one's ability to be a source of their behaviour), competence (the need to achieve the results desired) and relatedness (one's desire to feel related to other people). Encouraging autonomy, competence and relatedness in teaching, irrespective of whether it is on-site or distant, is key to achieving the goals of education. A well-designed e-course should engage students, enabling them to have a choice and help them feel related and competent (Bachman, Stewart 2011). The course template, according to the authors quoted should provide conditions for:

– autonomy – to allow students choice, for example, a few subjects for discussion; a few assignments of which the students can decide which ones to work on; a variety of media documents. Giving the students a choice instils a sense of autonomy. Each professor should provide at least two choices (Bachman, Stewart 2011);

– competence – upon designing a course template, options for self-evaluation should be provided, receiving timely, encouraging feedback, a second test and receiving clearly formulated directions to help the students feel competent, thus feeling higher levels of inner motivation (Bachman, Stewart 2011);

– relatedness – the course template should lead to students' greater **commitment.** Well-structured discussions allow students to share points of view and work together towards achieving the same goal, respect different opinions, values and beliefs, and support one another. (Bachman, Stewart 2011).

The e-course template proposed is intended predominantly to follow the national requirements of the regulations on national requirements for organising distance team teaching and learning of the National Evaluation and Accreditation Agency, and enable instructors to create a well-organised, theoretically based and high-quality course.

2.2. Distance Learning E-course – Core and Potential Benefits

In her publication Nadezhda Angelova notes that to assist instructors' work, especially if they do not have experience with distance learning and face difficulties regarding the course design, „it is possible to set up a library of e-course templates" (Angelova 2016, p. 127). Today universities use online-course templates which provide standardisation and quality of online courses and encourage students' quick commitment, comfort and success in distance learning (Scutelnicu et al. 2019, p. 275).

The e-course template[2] involves elements created in advance or partially designed that can be adapted and customised. The use of templates is a way to save time during the planning stage and introduce various course elements that otherwise can require many design resources to be created from scratch.

The potential benefits of introducing a template, described in scientific the literature are as follows:

– for the educational institution – providing a template for „best practices" cuts costs and efforts for the development of courses in the future (Bachman, Stewart 2011, p. 180);

– for the instructors – it does not matter if they have experience with distance learning, a template like this allows access to a high-quality course, focused on adequate material presentation, creative development of the students and adherence to the subject objectives and the university's mission. (Bachman, Stewart 2011, p. 180). Course templates can boost the creation of communities for online learning where a course's consistent structure can establish an expected and familiar space for the exchange of ideas between instructors and students (Scutelnicu et al 2019). Reduces the instructors' workload and cognitive efforts needed for the course design and development (Konstantinidis 2022, p. 347);

– for the students – online learning adds one more level of cognitive load when the student needs to master working skills for work with various interface formats in the individual courses of the syllabus. This load can be avoided provided the course components are presented consistently and designed clearly in an e-course template (Borgemenke et al., 2013). To boost the students' comfort level, all courses in a curriculum should have an identical look and perception (Dykman, Davis 2008). The identical look makes the setting easy to navigate and less confusing.

In a publication after an overview of the literature sources, Arthur J. Borgemenke, William C. Holt и Wade W. Fish (2013) describe step by step the process of designing an e-course template (Borgemenke et al. 2013, p. 20 – 22).

Step One: the functions that will be planned within the template frameworks are identified for each program. The aim is to build online courses which provide a standardised and familiar sensation to the students without downplaying the instructor's unique positive attributes.

Step Two: determining the components of a universal course template, for example, the course syllabus, the course's home page, as well as a single protocol harmonised with the instructors regarding the ways assignments are fed, procedures for participation in a discussion forum and communication methods between an instructor and student. It is recommended that the syllabus template should include information about contact with the instructor, course information (annotation), (aims, expected results, etc.), a course calendar or timetable, technological requirements and specific university procedures and policies (guidelines for work with students with special educational needs; academic honesty, etc.). The course home page usually features a welcome video, text or video guidelines for using the platform, information on the syllabus, a book of reviews, course annotation and technical support.

Step Three – course content and assignments to be evaluated. Usually, the learning content is posted through the respective module agenda links or the entire course. The students can view the learning content, aims and expected results, resources and assignment instructions at any time.

3. Elements of the Template for Distance Learning E-course at Veliko Tarnovo University

3.1. Theoretical Framework

The present study uses the work of Martin et al. (2021) and Konstantinidis (2022) regarding the essential elements of a quality e-course as a theoretical framework. The authors cited have established five categories of design standards and their corresponding elements. The five categories are: (a) ***overview*** – includes elements that provide general information about the course, as well as elements associated with the introduction of learners to the course.

According to the authors, items in this category are: course orientation, instructor contact information, and instructor expectations; (b) ***content presentation*** – in online learning, content can be presented in different modalities. Some of the components of content presentation include: providing a variety of instruction materials, dividing content into manageable segments, providing clear instructions, aligning course content and activities with aims, and adapting content for learners with disabilities. The digital material can feature textbook readings, instructor-created recorded video lectures, expert content in audio or video, web resources, animations or interactive games and simulations, and scientific articles; (c) ***interaction and communication*** are crucial in e-courses. Some of the strategies for improving interaction and communication involve: student interaction, building an instruction community, collaborative activities to support active instruction, and using technology to promote learner engagement and facilitate learning; (d) ***assessment and evaluation*** are crucial to the e-course to measure student learning results and determine the course overall efficiency; (e) ***learner support*** is essential to the success of online learners. Some of the strategies for providing support to the online learner include providing intuitive and consistent course navigation; media that can be accessed and viewed easily; details of minimum technological requirements and technological and institutional support services (Martin et al. 2021, p. 47 – 50).

3.2. Main elements

Building on the theoretical framework and national regulations, the main components of the quality e-course template have been identified.

The template of an e-course comprises several parts:

A. Course information section. The course commences with information on institutional policy towards academic honesty which determines unfair academic behaviour (fraud), as well as information on sanctions and punishments in cases of proven fraudulent behaviour. The student is bound to view this information, mark it as read, and only after that continue their course activity. The information section features also: a course description, and a brief professional autobiography of the course author, a brief text/video address to the students.

B. the course introduction features: a brief course annotation; course timetable; contact with the course author (the instructor).

C. the main section features: a timetable of synchronous activities; a discussion forum; course content in the form of study materials in various media formats; study activities – an asynchronous workload which includes asynchronous teaching methods (cases, role play, discussion forums, etc.).

D. final section – features main conclusions from the course learning content.

E. bibliography – features main information sources and recommended and additional literature.

F. control section – features methods, criteria and procedures for receiving a mark. The students' evaluation is regarded as an integral part of the design of the e-course.

4. Analysis of the Results of the Empirical Research

4.1. Characteristics of the Empirical Research

As the theoretical overview has shown, the distance learning e-course template is not a new concept in scientific literature, which presupposes a structured approach to using setting tools (specifically Moodle version 3.11.) in support of teaching, learning and education communication.

The starting ***thesis*** of the present empirical research is that the template for distance learning designed and applied at Veliko Tarnovo University has the potential to improve the quality (postulated with the national requirements and criteria for quality of the National Evaluation and Accreditation Agency[3]) of e-courses. We must stress that in the present paper, the research focus is on studying the template potential from the perspective of the instructors at VTU. For the next studies (the end of the winter semester and the end of the 2022 – 2023 academic year we plan to study the template potential from the students' perspective as well.

The present empirical research aims to determine the instructors' attitude to the proposed template in assisting their work on developing a quality e-course.

The main question in this research is: if, and to what extent the distance learning e-course template helps assist instructors' work? During the research stage, this question was deconstructed into the following questions: what do instructors think about their workload in distance learning?

Whether instructors consider the quality of distance learning to be equal to on-site teaching and learning, and whether there is a link between their opinion and the extra specific distance learning workload?

Whether instructors consider the e-course template to be useful? How many instructors need extra training to work with the template and whether this will impact negatively the template's utility?

The organisation of the Empirical Research – the inquiry of VTU instructors was conducted over the period of September 19 – 24, 2022. The empirical data have been collected through MS Forms, and the link to it has been sent to all 144 instructors working in distance learning. 69, or approximately 48% of the instructors have been questioned online.

***The Research Tools**:* the empirical data, collected through a questionnaire for the instructors have been analysed using quantitative methods – through descriptive statistics, correlation and factor analysis of the respondents' answers.

4.2. Analysis of the Results from the Empirical Research

Figure 1 presents the percentage of instructors and educational units of the university. The major share of the instructors who participated in the inquiry is from the Faculty of Education (29%), and this is logical because in this faculty there are the most educational programs and students.

As seen in fig. 2. habilitated teachers (professors and associate professors) dominate, since only master's programs are offered in distance form at the university and this makes sense because this faculty has the greatest number of educational programs and learners.

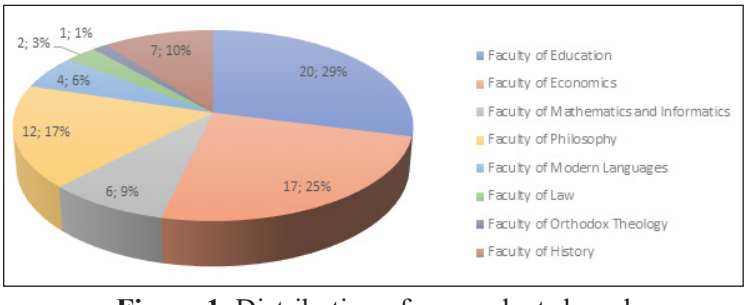

Figure 1. Distribution of respondents based on the university's educational units

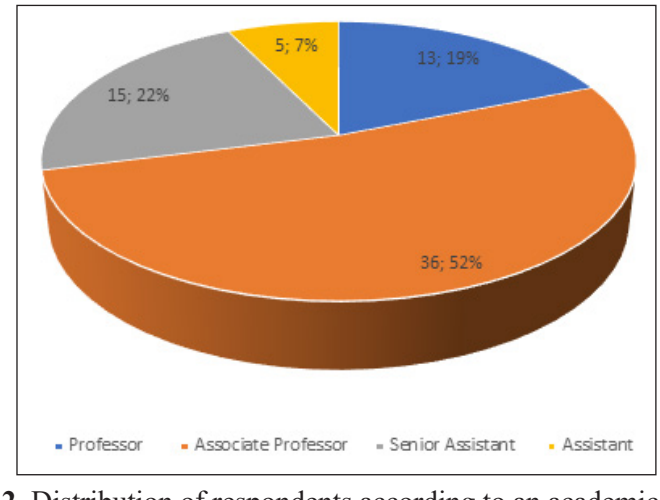

Figure 2. Distribution of respondents according to an academic position

Of interest to the research is the instructors' attitude to their workload in distance instruction. The results are presented in Fig. 3.

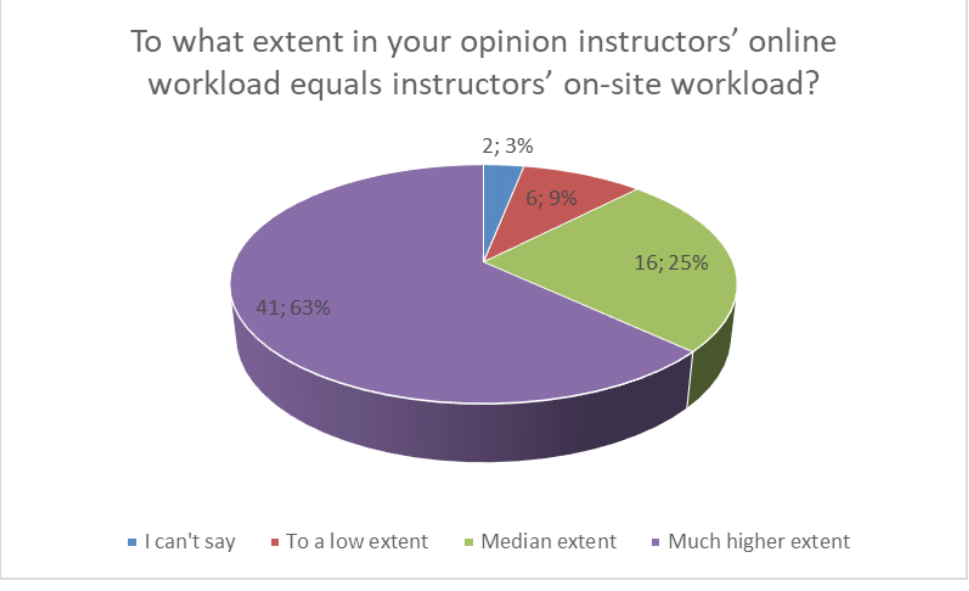

Figure 3. Results of the answers to the question „To what extent in your opinion instructors' online workload equals instructors' on-site workload?"

The results show that, in general, the instructors think that the teaching workload in distance instruction is much greater and takes up more work and time. The descriptive statistical characteristics obtained based on the inquiry suggest that the median values of the instructors' answers to the two questions $N_{med.}^{obs.}$ as well as the values of the mode $Mo^{obs.}$ and the median $Me^{obs.}$ do not differ considerably, table 1. And the asymmetry values $K_{as.}^{obs.}$ and the excess $K_{excess}^{obs.}$ have significant quantities, which does not confirm the hypothesis about a normal data distribution in the inquiry. The tests conducted for determining the types of results' distributions from the two questions do not confirm the perception of a zero hypothesis as a normal distribution of the instructors' answers, table 2.

The link between the results of the instructors' answers can be defined by correlational analysis, using correlation quotients. Correlation quotients between one or more pairs of groups of evaluation allow us to determine the statistical significance between them. One of the most important sections of the correlation analysis appears to be the correlation quotient. It measures the extent to which

Table 1. Descriptive statistical characteristics of the results obtained after an inquiry of instructors regarding the equality of forms of student education

Inquiry questions	Number of measurements N	Measurements' median value $N^{obs.}_{med.}$	Median $Me^{obs.}_{med.}$	manner $Mo_{med.}$	Frequency of quantity repetitiveness. $Fr^{obs.}_{med.}$	A minimum value of measured quantity. $Min^{obs.}_{val.}$	A maximum value of a measured quantity $Max^{obs.}_{val.}$	Dispersion quantity of deviation $Var^{obs.}_{\Delta}$	A median quadratic (standard) deviation. $St^{obs.}_{dev.}$	A standard error is the median meaning of a measured quantity $St^{obs.}_{error}$	Asymmetry quotient $K^{obs.}_{assim}$	Asymetry standard error $\Delta K^{obs.}_{assim}$	Excess data quotient $K^{obs.}_{excess}$	Excess data standard error $\Delta K^{obs.}_{excess}$
To what extent do you think distance learning equals on-site one in terms of quality?	64	3,843750	4,000000	4,000000	42	2,000000	5,000000	0,514881	0,717552	0,089694	**-0,82272**	0,299327	**1,173096**	0,590491
To what extent do you think instructors' workload in distance learning equals their workload in on-site learning?	65	4,476923	5,000000	5,000000	41	2,000000	5,000000	0,628365	0,792695	0,098322	**-1,47552**	0,297116	**1,536161**	0,586236

Table 2. Tests for determining the types of distributions of the instructors' answers to the questions in terms of the equality of both forms of teaching students.

Inquiry questions	Number of measurements N	Value of the Kolmogorov Smirnov criterion	Level of significance of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov criterion	Level of significance of the Liliforse criterion	Level of criterion Shapiro Wilka-r	Level of criterion Shapiro Wilka-r
To what extent do you think distance learning equals on-site learning in terms of the quality of teaching?	65	0,367440	p < ,01	p < ,01	0,769697	0,000000
To what extent do you think instructors' workload in distance learning equals their workload in on-site teaching and learning?	65	0,376101	p < ,01	p < ,01	0,685871	0,000000

two groups of evaluation are mutually related, or to be precise, the extent of the proximity of relatedness. That is why the correlation analysis aims to identify the extent of relatedness or, also the so-called „relatedness phenomenon" between the evaluations obtained.

The correlation analysis can be applied when there are data collected in two different sets of results, where if the evaluations received from the instructors' inquiry of the one quantity is signified by X, and the other set with the other quantity by Y, it is assumed that the change of X always influences Y. To determine the extent of this influence are used intervals of the correlation dependence on the results obtained, which set the extent of relatedness in the evaluations, expressed through the correlation quotient. Its values by intervals are presented in table 3.

Table 3. Value of the correlation quotient and an evaluation of the dependence based on intervals between the instructors' results from the inquiry

№	Interval values of the correlation quotient, $Corr$	Evaluation of the correlation dependence
1	$-1 \le Corr \le -0.9$	Very strong, negative
2	$-0.9 \le Corr \le -0.7$	Strong, negative
3	$-0.7 \le Corr \le -0.5$	Good, negative
4	$-0.5 \le Corr \le -0.3$	Considerable, negative
5	$-0.3 \le Corr \le 0$	Weak, negative
6	$Corr = 0$	**No correlation**
7	$0.0 \le Corr \le 0.3$	Weak, positive
8	$0.3 \le Corr \le 0.5$	Considerable, positive
9	$0.5 \le Corr \le 0.7$	Good, positive
10	$0.7 \le Corr \le 0.9$	Strong, positive
11	$0.9 \le Corr \le 1$	Very strong, positive

The intervals of the correlation quotient, defined in table 3, allow determining the „strength" of the mutual influence on the results obtained from the inquiry „one from the other". The link between the objective results from the inquiry is expressed with the quotient of correlation, which is a quantitative indicator between the two quantities from -1 to 1.

The results of the correlation analysis in the value of the correlation quotient Corr=0.009026 indicate almost „no correlation“, table 3, table 4.1. And this is confirmed by the values of the factor analysis where the factor load of the answers placed in Factor 1 have the opposite sign, that is 0,719884 и -0,719884 (table 4.2).

Table 4.1. A correlation matrix of the answers to the instructors' questions from the inquiry regarding the equality of the forms of teaching

Inquiry questions	To what extent do you think distance learning equals on-site learning in terms of the quality of teaching?	To what extent do you think instructors' workload in distance learning equals their workload in on-site learning?
To what extent do you think distance learning equals on-site learning in terms of the quality of teaching?	1,000000	0,009026
To what extent do you think instructors' workload in distance learning equals their workload in on-site teaching and learning?	0,009026	1,000000

Table 4.2. Factor matrix of the instructors' answers to the questions from the inquiry regarding the equality of the forms of teaching

	Factor - 1
To what extent do you think distance learning equals on-site teaching and learning in terms of the quality of teaching?	0,719884
To what extent do you think instructors' workload in distance learning equals their workload in on-site teaching and learning?	-0,719884

That means that in the answers to the two questions, the latent factor in the instructors' evaluations works „antagonistically“ – positively in favour of the answers to the one question, and at the same time – negatively to the other.

The analysis ***suggests*** that the instructors' attitude to the potential of distance learning to ensure a high quality of education is not unequivocal. It is ambivalent, with quite a number of them considering the two forms equal (on-site and distance form). The analysis of the results shows that there is no link between the attitude towards the quality of distance learning and the extra specific workload in it.

We can conclude (conclusion 1) that the instructors consider the workload in distance instruction to be much higher compared to that in full-time, and in their opinion, this does not result directly in a higher quality of education in distance instruction.

The instructors' motivation to participate in distance learning is crucial to the analysis. The results of the answers to the question „*What would encourage you to teach a subject in a distance-learning form as well?* " are presented in fig. 4.

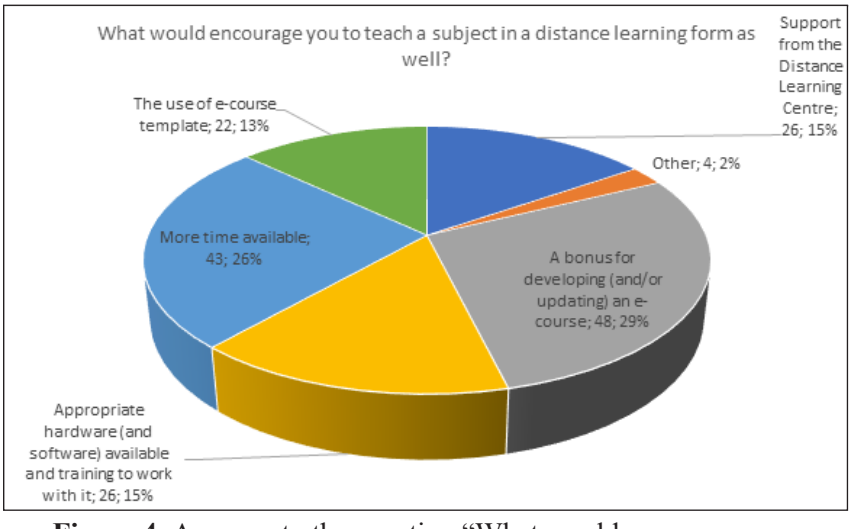

Figure 4. Answers to the question "What would encourage you to teach a subject in a distance-learning form as well?"

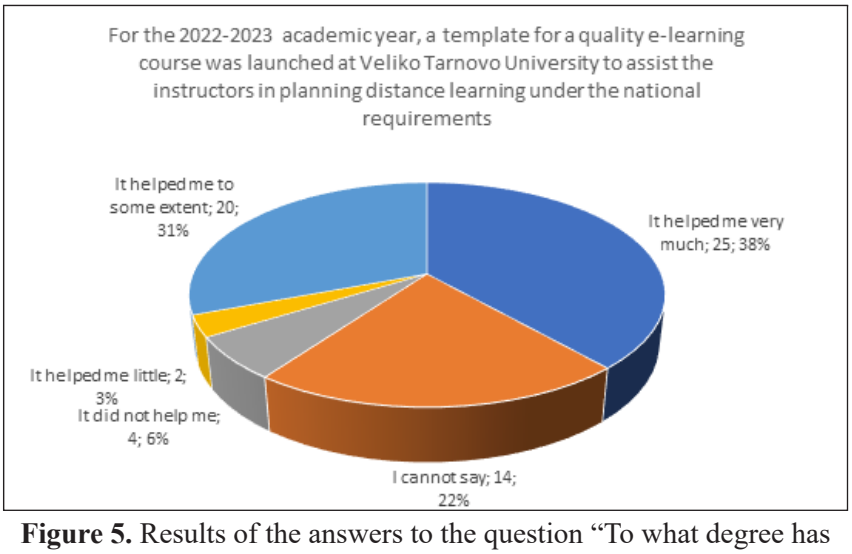

Figure 5. Results of the answers to the question "To what degree has the use of the template helped you create a quality distance instruction course"

The results suggest that the use of the template for a quality e-course will affect the desire to work remotely for only 13% of the instructors questioned. This result is not surprising, as the use of a template increases the instructors' workload, and taking into account conclusion 1, in general, they do not believe that it will directly result in better quality.

Of interest to the research is what the instructors think about establishing the instructors' attitude towards the template for a quality e-learning course. To begin with, to do this, the answers to the question „*To what degree has the use of the template helped you create a quality distance instruction course?"* is important. The results of the answers to the question are presented in fig. 5.

The results presented in fig. 5 - it is curious that for 22% of the instructors the template has not generated the expected interest which is why they have answered: „I cannot say".

We can draw the following conclusion (conclusion 2): the instructors' attitude towards the template utility is hesitant. This conclusion is logical, given conclusion 1, that is, according to the instructors, the increased workload in remote instruction does not directly result in better quality.

Of interest to the research are also the instructors' answers to the question „*Do you need training to work with the template?*". The results are presented in fig. 6.

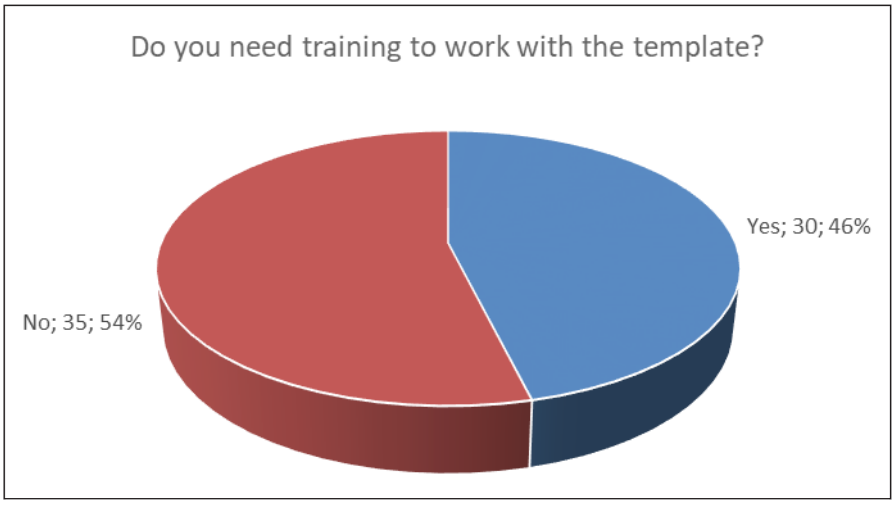

Figure 6. Results of the answers to the question
"Do you need training to work with the template?"

The results – 54% of the instructors answered negatively to the question *"Do you need training to work with the template?",* and 46% said they wished to work with the template, fig. 6.

Table 5. Descriptive statistical characteristics of the results of the inquiry conducted with the instructors regarding the need for training to work with the template in distance teaching

Inquiry questions	Number of measurements N	The median value of the measured quantity $N^{obs.}_{med.}$	Median of $Me^{obs.}_{med.}$	Mode $Mo_{med.}$	Frequency of quantity repetitiveness. $Fr^{obs.}_{med.}$	The minimum value of the measured quantity. $Min^{obs.}_{val.}$	The maximum value of the measured quantity. $Max^{obs.}_{val.}$	Dispersion of deviation value. $Var^{obs.}_{\Delta}$	Median quadratic (standard) deviation $St^{obs.}_{dev.}$	Standard error of the median indication of the measured quantity. $St^{obs.}_{error}$	Asymmetry quotient $K^{obs.}_{assim}$	Asymmetry standard error. $\Delta K^{obs.}_{assim}$	Excess data quotient. $K^{obs.}_{excess}$	Standard error of excess data $\Delta K^{obs.}_{excess}$
For the 2022-2023 academic year, a template for quality e-learning course was launched at Veliko Tarnovo University to assist the instructors in planning distance learning under the national requirements stipulated by the new regulations (effective from September 1, 2021)	65	3,5846	4,0000	5,00000	25	1,0000	5,0000	2,46538	1,57015	0,19475	**-0,7734**	0,29711	**-1,02515**	0,586236
Do you need training to work with the template?	65	101,461	101,000	101,000	35	101,0000	102,000	0,25240	0,50239	0,06231	0,15797	0,29711	**-2,03877**	0,586236

Table 6. Tests for determining the types of distributions of the instructors' answers regarding the need for work with the template in distance teaching

Inquiry questions	N number of measurements	Value of the Kolmogorov Smirnov criterion	Level of significance of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov criterion	Level of significance of the Lilliforse criterion	Level of criterion Shapiro Wilka-r	Level of criterion Shapiro Wilka-r
For the 2022-2023 academic year, a template for quality e-learning course was launched at Veliko Tarnovo University to assist the instructors in planning distance learning under the national requirements stipulated by the new regulations (effective from September 1, 2021)	65	0,296630	p < ,01	p < ,01	0,763130	0,000000
Do you need training to work with the template?	65	0,359328	p < ,01	p < ,01	0,634399	0,000000

Table 7.1. A correlation matrix of the instructors' answers to the inquiry questions regarding the need for training in work with the template in distance teaching

Inquiry questions	For the 2022-2023 academic year, a template for quality e-learning course was launched at Veliko Tarnovo University to assist the instructors in planning distance learning under the national requirements stipulated by the new regulations	Do you need training to work with the template?
For the 2022-2023 academic year, a template for quality e-learning course was launched at Veliko Tarnovo University to assist the instructors in planning distance learning under the national requirements stipulated by the new regulations	1,000000	-0,301899
Do you need training to work with the template?	-0,301899	1,000000

Table 7.2. A factor matrix of the instructors' answers to the questions regarding the need for training to work with the template in distance teaching

	Factor - 1
For the 2022-2023 academic year, a template for quality e-learning course was launched at Veliko Tarnovo University to assist the instructors in planning distance learning under the national requirements stipulated by the new regulations	0,796292
Do you need training to work with the template?	-0,796292

Descriptive statistical characteristics of the results of the inquiry conducted with the instructors regarding the need for training to work with the template in distance teaching suggest that the median value $N_{med.}^{obs.}$, as well as the values of the asymmetry quotient $K_{assim}^{obs.}$ and the excess $K_{excess}^{obs.}$ do not confirm the hypothesis of normal distribution of the inquiry results, table 5.

The hypothesis of a normal distribution of the results is not confirmed by the data published in the Tests for determining the types of distributions of the instructors' answers regarding the need for work with the template in distance teaching of students either, table 6. The correlation analysis in the answers to the questions allows us to determine, using the correlation quotients, whether there is a link between the instructors' evaluations in the answers, and most importantly, how strong it is. Or, more specifically, to determine a quantitative measure of the link, the mutual shift, the direction of the shift of the two groups of questions and answers. Thus, for example, determining the links between the variables interests us from the point of view of the impact of the respective cause-and-effect links between the answers to the two questions. For this purpose, the data published in table 7.1. indicate that the link between the two quantities of answers is expressed by a correlation quotient $Corr = -0,301899$, which is a 'significant, negative' link, table 1. The results of the correlation analysis are also confirmed by the factor analysis. The analysis of the results shows that the instructors' attitude towards the template utility is uncertain. The percentage of those who opt to be trained to work with the template is high, which suggests the opposite dependence in the evaluation of utility.

Conclusion 3: instructors that find the template useless say they need training. This conclusion is logical as the instructors cannot say how well the template can support their work if they are not familiar with it.

Providing quality distance learning using a template confirms previous research and results. There are good practices worldwide, described in the literature but universities in Bulgaria have little familiarity with them. Konstantinidis (2022) writes about one of the most widespread myths about online instruction, according to which an online course can be developed by simply uploading the texts, lectures and tests for the learners. Thus any additional time and effort are hardly needed to design and develop an online course, no special knowledge or skills are required from the instructors, they can instruct in an online setting, and there is no need for training or support, and no change or adaptation of instruction, the digital setting and the physical distance between instructors and students (Konstantinidis 2022, p. 346). We deem this misconception to be the reason for the inhomogeneous results of the present study. Generally speaking, the instructors questioned found the use of the template cumbersome (and not expected to relieve) their work. As the cited author Konstantinidis (2022) notes, only after debunking these misconceptions

can we recognize the benefits and challenges of creating a template. Designing and developing an online course is much more complex than simply uploading materials online; it requires a complete redesign of most of the key components of a traditional face-to-face course (Konstantinidis 2022, p. 346).

Conclusions and generalisations

As a result of the theoretical overview, a template of a quality e-course for distance instruction for the needs of Veliko Tarnovo University has been presented. The presented template significantly relieves the instructors' workload and helps them make pedagogically sound decisions. The teachers questioned have no experience in designing an e-course. The analysis of the empirical research ***shows*** that the instructors' attitude towards the potential of distance learning to provide quality teaching is not unequivocal. It is uncertain, a considerable number consider the two forms to be equal (distance and on-site learning). Instructors as a whole deem the workload of distance learning to be heavy but this in their opinion is not associated with the quality of distance learning, which explains their reservations about the template. The template is particularly useful for beginner instructors in their professional development, therefore the efforts should aim at clarifying the theory and practice of distance instruction. The template presented for the needs of distance instruction at the University of Veliko Tarnovo provides conditions for improving the quality (regulated by the national requirements and quality criteria of the NEAA) of electronic courses (the empirical study has proved the thesis).

NOTES

1. REGULATIONS ON THE NATIONAL REQUIREMENTS FOR THE ORGANISATION OF DISTANCE TEACHING AND LEARNING AT UNIVERSITIES, take effect from September 1, 2021. [in Bulgarian]
2. GREANY, K. (2021) Elearning Templates: 3 Best Free Design Templates to Save You Hours. [viewed 15 October 2022]. Available from: https://www.elucidat.com/blog/free-elearning-templates/
3. CRITERIA FOR EVALUATION OF DISTANCE TEACHING AND LEARNING, adopted by the Accreditation Council of the National Agency for Evaluation and Accreditation on March 9, 2017.

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