



HOW IS DISTANCE LEARNING WORKING FOR VET?

PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENTS
AND TEACHERS IN ALBANIA

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About 'Skills for Jobs' project

'Skills for Jobs' (S4J) is a project mandated by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and implemented in Albania by Swisscontact.

The S4J project addresses the main challenges of the Albanian Vocational Education and Training (VET) system by investing on ensuring systemic change, capacity development and empowerment of key actors.

The S4J project supports partner VET providers in Albania in terms of: establishing close relations between private sector companies and other partners, diversification and improvement of the VET offer, application of new ways of inclusive learning and quality, work-based learning in businesses and organizational development and institution empowerment.

Disclaimer: The views expressed are those of the consultants and do not necessarily represent the views of Swisscontact or Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC).

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List of abbreviations

VET – Vocational Education and Training
S4J – ‘Skills of Jobs’ Project
NAES – National Agency for Employment and Skills
MESY – Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth
MEF – Ministry of Economy and Finance
AQAPE – Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-university Education
NAVETQ – National Agency of Education, Vocational Training and Qualifications

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1. Executive Summary

Government of Albania in order to prevent the spread of COVID-19 decided to close all schools in the country, as in many other countries around the world, initially for a fortnight and then indeterminately. Initial guidelines issued by the Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth (MESY) required transfer of the entire system online, but comprehensive information regarding quality digital platforms is still missing. It is essential to prioritize on the specific needs of both teachers and students regarding internet access and availability of e-learning equipment. Despite challenges, all public and private educational institutions in cooperation with political actors and donors have reacted quickly to cope with this unusual situation.

The Assessment

This assessment considers 10¹ Vocational Education and Training (VET) schools collaborating with the “Skills for Jobs” (S4J) project, funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC). The primary objective of this assessment is to understand, evaluate and inform about the current situation in VET institutions under distance education conditions. The assessment, aiming to provide an overall picture of the situation, presents measures taken by VET schools for managing the education process. Once discussing the methodology, the assessment goes on with the presentation of the main findings of the surveys conducted with teachers and students and, concludes with recommendations for improving the situation of distance education for each of the parties involved in the process. The Annex 8.1 hereto, presents an in-depth analysis of the use of “MësoVET” platform, a platform supported by the “S4J” project.

Methodology and Data Gathering

The questionnaire was made available to all students and teachers. Data were collected via Google Forms, for teachers in the period 16 – 20 March, 2020 and for students in the period 25 – 28 March, 2020. Based on data gathered, 68% (n = 297) of the teachers and 38% (n = 2176) of the students provided answers. Data analysis was carried out using Statistical Package for Social Sciences IBM software and it is of a descriptive nature. The topic questions in both teacher and student surveys are of similar nature allowing for comparisons. Student survey is more extensive reflecting the changing dynamics of the situation with distance education. In addition to monitoring and documenting the process of distance education in VET, the data gathered provide a baseline to measure efficiency of methods and platforms selected and in use for distance education.

Findings

1. The vast majority, respectively, 82% (n = 242) of the teachers and 63.6% (n = 1393) of the students perform distance education through the WhatsApp application.
2. 77% (n= 229) of the teachers consider *WhatsApp* as an appropriate tool for the given situation, however, only 14% of the teachers using *WhatsApp* see it as the most efficient method.
3. 11% (n=31) of the teachers and 20% (n = 443) of the students have decided to use “MësoVET” platform alone or in combination with other digital platforms.
4. 15.4% of the teachers consider the use of digital platforms such as “MësoVET” and *Google Classroom* or *NetAcad*, as most efficient in carrying out *online* distance education, despite the fact that they might not be using them.

¹ 9 of the schools are partners of the S4J while 1 school is included in the assessment for comparison purposes.

5. Classes broadcasted on the public television channel, RTSH, are followed by only 149 students and 4 teachers.
6. 89% of the students use mobile phone devices to communicate and participate in distance classes; while a large portion complain about the process and the many hours they have to spend on mobile phones.
7. The main challenges identified by the teachers concerning distance teaching are absences of digitized teaching materials - 54% (n = 157); internet service for students - 27%; and appropriate electronic equipment and physical infrastructure for 22.4% of them.
8. Student key challenges for distance learning include difficulties in understanding teaching – 42% and following classes on their cellular devices.
9. Only 50% of the students have constant internet access, while 36% of them have limited access, and 14% do not have internet access.
10. Carrying out apprenticeship classes is particularly challenging for VET schools at a time of quarantine and social isolation. Half of the student respondents (n = 1088) indicate that they have their apprenticeship at home; 1/3 of them (n = 725) indicate practising skills through various projects and 20% (n = 435) state that apprenticeship classes are not carried out.
11. 53.8% of the teachers and 43% of the students are of the opinion that the distance education, via digital platforms, can be in future use when schools open up.
12. Both teachers and students, consider positively the role of the "Skills for Jobs" (S4J) project in supporting their schools and suggest that the project could increase its support by providing more digitized teaching materials for each subject, brief e-content, e-learning devices, internet access, online interaction opportunities, and video based teaching.

2. Introduction

As part of the measures to prevent the spread of global COVID-19 pandemic, on March 9, 2020 the Albanian government decided to close all educational institutions for a two-week period of time. On March 23rd; as the grave situation persisted, aiming to keep the spread of the virus under control, the government enforced mandatory corona lockdown/quarantine and social distancing restrictions for an undetermined period of time. Therefore, for the time being, the education system in Albania will remain closed until the end of the pandemic situation or pending government's decision to reopen all schools in the country. This situation of abrupt isolation in the house has affected, most of all, the main beneficiaries of the education system, pupils and students. Yet, at the same time it has challenged the leaders of education sector in Albania as well as pedagogical and management bodies. Given the circumstances, the establishment of virtual ecosystems enabling distance education has become a priority - the strategy proposed by the Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth to overcome the impossibility of physical attendance in educational institutions due to quarantine.

These developments have also affected the Vocational Education and Training (VET), which over the last decade has made qualitative progress that has brought forth an increase in the number of students attending vocational education.

The “Skills for Jobs” project strategically supports with capacity building 10 VET institutions. As a strategy to address the situation of vocational schools closure and as part of the efforts to promote online education, the project has extended and intensified its assistance to teachers and students of partner schools, and beyond, to use as a virtual teaching/learning environment, the “MësoVET” platform (www.mesovet.al), developed by the project and made functional during 2018.

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To continuously monitor the distance learning process, the “S4J” project has developed an assessment and monitoring framework based on surveys with students and teachers as well as on the ongoing documentation of the process. This report presents the main findings of a quick assessment of the situation based on the perceptions of teachers and students. The main goals of the report are:

- To inform the project and stakeholders about students and teachers’ perceptions concerning distance teaching/earning and based on the findings to undertake improvement measures;
- To evaluate project’s interventions in teaching ecosystem concerning digital teaching methods and teachers’ training on how to use such methods;
- To understand the extent to which different *online* teaching/learning platforms are used, the involvement of different parties in this process, the effectiveness of distance teaching/learning and ways to improve its implementation;
- To comprehend changes in students and teachers’ behaviour, limitations and difficulties as they are perceived by them and help with providing recommendations for solutions.

3. Management of Distance Learning in VET Schools

As per the MESY's instruction and order no. 826 of the National Agency for Employment and Skills (NAES), each vocational school has developed a work-plan for distance teaching/learning comprising defined tasks and organisation of the *online* distance teaching/learning by using digital communication technology. Internal orders of school management recommended the coordination of work by organizing groups on social communication platforms, using *WhatsApp*. The groups are created by the room-teachers who also determine the form of communication to enable further steps of the teaching program within formal teaching schedule.²

3.1. Reporting and Evaluation Process

The reporting process follows a vertical line starting with the subject-teacher who must report on the implementation progress of the plan for the subject he/she teaches. Reporting on the teaching process is a daily task and for each class, it is done by the class-teacher who reports in writing via e-mail to the school principal and deputy principal. The deputy principal drafts a daily summary report, which as per the instruction no. 9 (23.03.2020) is a unified format, and sends it to the NAES. Schools also are preparing reports concerning the quality of the teaching/learning process as a whole, containing detailed information on the implementation level of teaching plan, this report also goes to NAES.



Fig 1: Elements of distance education reporting in VET

Monitoring of the teaching/learning process is carried out mainly via e-mail exchanges. Teachers report in a previously agreed format. Also, there are available formats or platforms which enable the school management to participate in an *online* lesson.

Student's evaluation is performed through easily documented forms which include:

- ✓ assignments sent to *WhatsApp* or via e-mail;
- ✓ short-tests through the platform;
- ✓ multiple-choice quizzes;
- ✓ tests in *Google Forms*, etc.

National Agency of Education, Vocational Training and Qualifications³ (NAVETQ) and also the MESY in collaboration with the Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-university Education (AQAPE) have issued corresponding instructions for the *implementation of the subject program and the evaluation of the*

² Information in this section is based on data collected through partner schools of the "Skills for Jobs" project, and reflects the steps undertaken to create opportunities for distance learning process using digital technologies.

³ <http://www.akafp.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Udhezues-Mesimi-e-vleresimi-online-ne-AP-.pdf>

students during the period of teaching/learning in the home conditions⁴ requiring the evaluation be based on the records kept by the teachers for each student and the orientation towards the individual and differentiated assignments for the students or the evaluation with different portfolios or tests. The NAVETQ guideline recommends the use of “MësoVET” platform by the vocational schools. Even though to some extent the continuity of teaching/learning process and its recovery from the abrupt interruption it is being managed, there are problems related to achieving quality lessons, implementing vocational practice, ensuring the attendance by all students and evaluating their knowledge.

3.2. Platforms in Use for Distance Learning

WhatsApp: Since the beginning of this assessment, it was noticed the use of the *WhatsApp* communication platform to enable the distance teaching/learning process. It is widely used by teachers and school management to organize distance teaching/learning processes. This platform is being used in communicating about the topics, distribution and evaluation of students' assignments/tasks and also as a form of communication between the pedagogical staff and the management of the school.

MësoVET.al: the digital platform supported by the “Skills for Jobs” project, is one of the platforms recommended by NAES and NAVETQ for the development of distance teaching/learning and the use of it is increasing. The remaining topics that have not been taught yet as well as orientation programs for graduates have already been added to the platform. The platform is also being used to evaluate students through tests and quizzes. The collaboration of the teachers, both with each other and with the project, enabled the platform to become a quick and quality instrument for carrying out distance teaching/learning.

Other Platforms in use are those based on *Google* technology such as: *Classroom, Meet, Forms, etc.* The *NetAcad* platform is also used as part of CISCO network.

⁴ <https://arsimi.gov.al/udhezues-per-mesimin-ne-kushtet-e-shtepise-per-shkak-te-situates-se-krijuar-nga-perhapja-e-virusit-covid-19/>

4. Methodology: Surveys and Assessment

The main objective of this assessment is to monitor distance teaching/learning process in the VET partner institutions of the “Skills Project” project, which are widespread throughout the country. The goal remains the collection of accurate statistical data at the beginning of distance teaching/learning period. The data will then be used as a baseline, not only to analyse the current situation but also to conduct comparative analysis in the near future. This will help the process of establishing an ecosystem that continuously supports digital teaching/learning, given that the current social distancing situation most probably will continue but also because digital teaching/learning is a reality that cannot be overlooked.

In addition to the goals stated in the introduction to this assessment, both surveys provide opportunities for in-depth statistical processing of the information collected. The assessment aims to achieve the following analytical goals:

- ❖ To analyse the methods to be used for carrying out online teaching in VET;
- ❖ To comprehend the experience of teachers and students being engaged in distance teaching/learning;
- ❖ To group and analyse the platforms and digital devices used by teachers and students;
- ❖ To understand the challenges related to the implementation of apprenticeship program (crucial for VET) during distance teaching/learning period;
- ❖ To ascertain the challenges and suggestions provided in the surveys about distance teaching/learning.

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These are also the main points of the analysis in this assessment, which are believed to help both the “Skills for Jobs” project and VET policy-makers to undertake informed steps to further improve this challenging situation caused by the COVID-19 quarantine.

4.1. Survey Participation

All teachers (n = 434) and students (n = 5729) of 10 vocational schools with which the “Skills for Jobs” project collaborates, were invited to participate in the assessment. The schools involved in this assessment are geographically spread throughout the country and cover the most diverse educational directions and profiles taught in VET. The participating schools are located in Tirana - 2; in Shkodra - 1, in Berat - 2, in Lezha - 1, in Vlora - 2 and in Elbasan - 2. All schools operate on a 4-year study system and the studies are concluded with state Matura exams and other qualification exams, according to the direction.

Teacher Participation

In the survey participated about 68% (n = 294) of the total number of teachers in contributing schools. The number of participating teachers was representative for each school and matched well with the number of teachers per school in the population. The level of representation for each school varied from 31% (Kristo Isak) to 95% (Stiliano Bandilli).

Table 1: Survey participation by school and in relation to the total number of teachers

Teachers' Participation by School	Sample		Population *	
	No.	%	No.	%
1. "Gjergj Canco" Electro-Technical School, Tiranë	8	2.7	26	6.0
2. "Hamdi Bushati" Technological School, Shkodër	12	4.1	38	8.8
3. "Kolin Gjoka" Vocational School, Lezhë	21	7.1	25	5.8
4. "Kristo Isak" Vocational School, Berat	28	9.5	52	12.0
5. Tregtare School, Vlorë	30	10.2	49	11.3
6. "Salih Çeka" Vocational School, Elbasan	30	10.2	44	10.1
7. Technical Economic School, Tiranë	33	11.2	49	11.3
8. "Ali Myftiu" Secondary Vocational, Elbasan	34	11.6	47	10.8
9. Industrial School "Pavarësia", Vlorë	36	12.2	38	8.8
10. "Stiliano Bandilli" Vocational School, Berat ⁵	62	21.1	66	15.2
Total	294	100	434	100
* number of teachers does not include supporting staff				

Student Participation

A total of 38% of the students participated (n = 2176) in the survey. Given the large population and good participation but low percentage of students' responses and in order to ensure the most representative data from all schools, the data were statistically weighted taking into consideration the number and percentage of students for each school. The table below shows the number and percentage of students in the population and in the sample, before and after weighing.

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Table 2: Survey participation by school and in relation to the total number of students

STUDENTS	Sample (n)				POPULATION	
	Before weighting		After weighting			
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
1. “Gjergj Canco” Electro-Technical School, Tiranë	444	20.4	311	14.2	786	13.7
2. “Hamdi Bushati” Technological School, Shkodër	162	7.4	243	11.1	652	11.4
3. “Kolin Gjoka” Vocational School, Lezhë	235	10.8	212	9.7	532	9.3
4. “Kristo Isak” Vocational School, Berat	77	3.5	77	3.5	199	3.5
5. Tregtare School, Vlorë	80	3.7	120	5.5	322	5.6
6. “Salih Çeka” Vocational School, Elbasan	184	8.5	221	10.1	600	10.5
7. Technical Economic School, Tiranë	489	22.5	342	15.6	898	15.7
8. “Ali Myftiu” Secondary Vocational, Elbasan	216	9.9	302	13.8	792	13.8
9. Industrial School “Pavarësia”, Vlorë	202	9.3	222	10.1	589	10.3
10. “Stiliano Bandilli” Vocational School, Berat	87	4.0	139	6.4	359	6.3
TOTAL	2176	100	2189	100	5729	100

4.2. Survey Instruments

Aiming to compile this assessment report, two surveys were carried out: one with teachers and one with students. Both questionnaires were designed and administered via *Google Forms* platform.

⁵ "Stiliano Bandilli" school is not supported by S4J, in this assessment it is included for comparison purposes.

Teachers' survey was conducted on March 16-20, 2020 and then students' survey on March 25-28, 2020. Teacher questionnaire included 9 questions which required them to assess teaching during this period, including questions about the platforms they were using for carrying out the lessons as well as the forms and quality of the connection used for carrying out the lesson.

Student questionnaire includes 32 questions similar to the teachers' questions, asking them to evaluate the distance learning process during this period. Students were asked to rate the process in relation to the platform used, the devices they are using to attend the lesson, internet access, and a range of statements related to various aspects of the process, which were rated on a scale from 0 = completely disagree to 4 = completely agree. The data were processed with the SPSS statistical package. The whole analysis is descriptive in nature as the instrument itself was constructed in such a way as to attest the situation.

4.3. Ethical considerations

All research in support to this assessment, interviews and exchanges were conducted in accordance with ethical principles and in compliance with Swisscontact code of conduct. The information collected from the surveys and exchanges was used only for the purpose of this assessment and on behalf of the "S4J" project. All the interviewees were aware of the matter in question and shared information openly and without hesitation. The questionnaire begins with an introduction which explains the purpose of the survey and ensures both students and teachers about respecting their rights on collection, non-collection and confidentiality of the data or of personal information. None of the surveys collected identifiable data. Participants were informed about the use of the data and their protection. The researchers involved in the assessment did not have direct contact with either the students or the teachers of the schools involved in the survey. Additional information related to the teaching/learning progress was provided by the "S4J" project and the management of the participating schools.

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4.4. Assessment Limitations

Data provided in this assessment represent the opinions and experiences of the participants in the assessment. Furthermore, the selected sample represents only teachers and students in the partner schools of the S4J project. Despite the fact that the teacher sample is significant in relation to the population, the analysis by groups should be detailed according to the specific context of the school and the educational majors they teach. Students data were statistically weighed only for the number of students per school; however, in the meantime, there is a lot of variation between schools in terms of geographical location, educational directions and profiles taught in each school or diversity related to teachers, students, community, etc.

5. Survey Results and Analysis

5.1. Teacher Survey Results

Teachers who participated in the survey represent about **68%** of the total number of the teachers in 10 contributing schools. The vast majority of them, **86%**, think that distance education based on *online* technologies is the right solution for carrying on the education process when schools are closed. The proportion which opposes this (**11%**), is of the opinion that the most efficient method to make up for the lost teaching days is by having classes on weekends (Saturday & Sunday) when the schools reopen, while the rest thinks that it would be better to wait until the quarantine restriction is lifted and schools reopen.

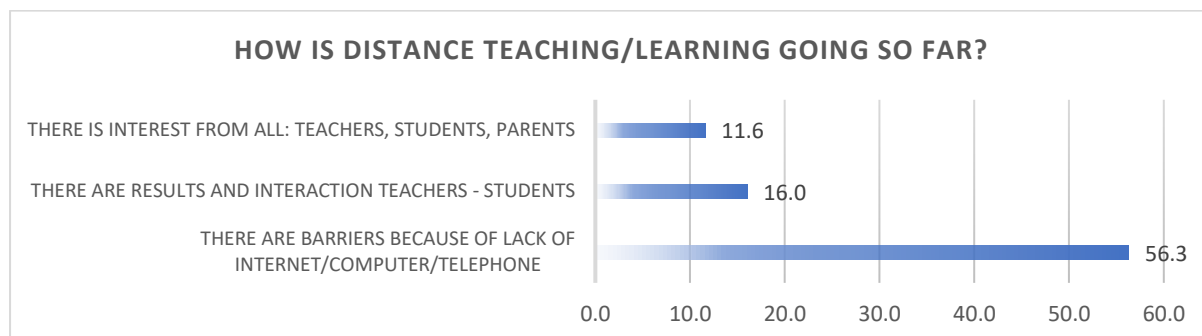


Fig 2: Teachers' outlook regarding distance teaching/learning

The main difficulty encountered by more than half of the teachers is the fact that the students do not have internet access and appropriate equipment for communication and distance education. Another portion of teachers indicates the interaction and the interest shown by all parties (**16%**) and the interest shown by both students and parents (**11%**). Given that the "S4J" project has equipped almost all the teachers with *laptops*, the lack of equipment for teachers does not appear to be a problem. On the other hand, teachers training on digital teaching skills has become a challenge.

Slightly more than 8 in every 10 teachers use the *WhatsApp* application and few of them use platforms such as MësoVET. The combination of the above platforms with *Google Classroom* is also seen from time to time. Teachers have chosen *WhatsApp* because it is the easiest method to use both for ordinary communication and to carry out the teaching load. In addition, the use of *WhatsApp* groups was emphasised in the initial instruction issued by the MESY. Teachers are convinced (77%) that *WhatsApp* is the right method to carry out distance education in this situation. This is followed by teaching/learning via the "MësoVET" platform and the alike (11%), followed by lessons broadcast in RTSH or other methods (14%).

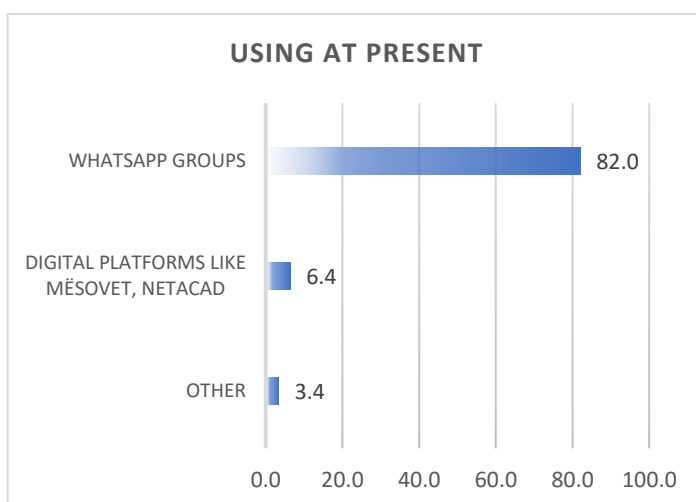


Fig 3: Application / platform in use by teachers

Teachers say that the selection of the right method is based on how easily the students can use it, in the belief that the selected method is the most efficient or because it is the method chosen by the school. A smaller proportion (4.1%) say they have selected the method they know best.

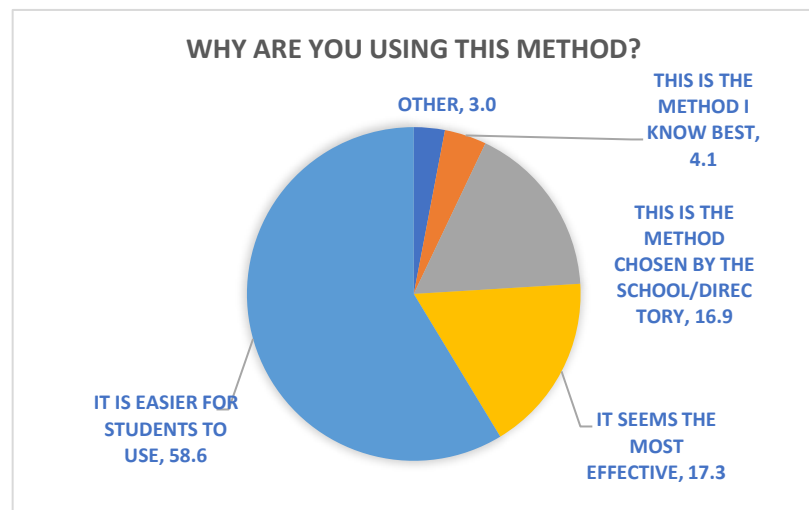


Fig. 4: Teachers' reasons for the selected method in use

The major challenge for more than a quarter of them, as shown in Fig. 5 below, remains the lack of internet access followed by difficulties in evaluation and monitoring and lack of digitized teaching materials. Further development of teachers' capacities does not appear to be a problem for the progress of the *online* teaching/learning - less than 0.3%

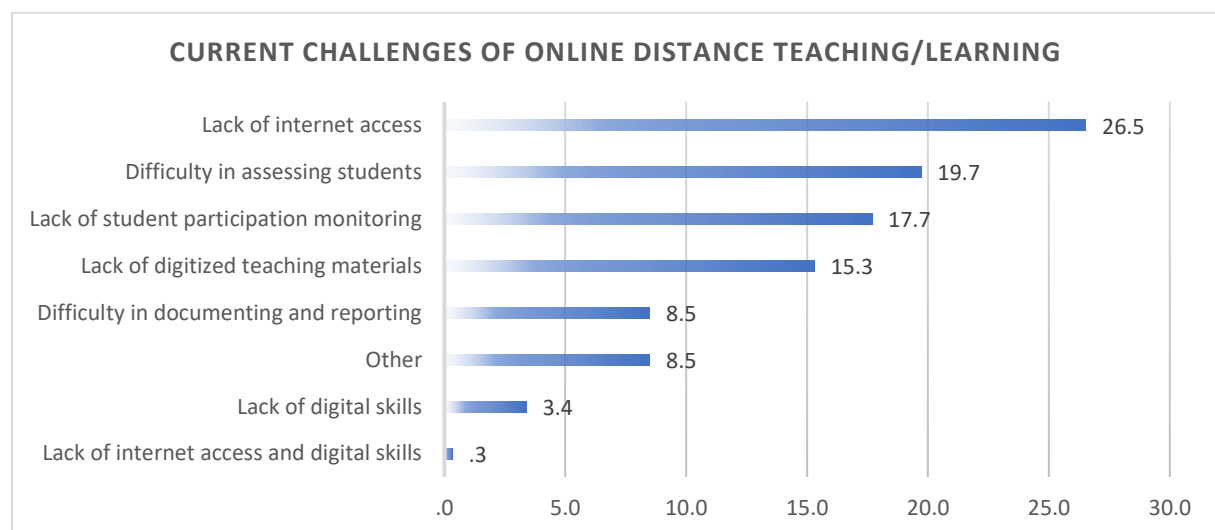


Fig. 5: Current teacher challenges regarding distance online teaching/learning

Teachers assess positively the role of the "S4J" project in supporting their schools, and when asked how the project could help, a significant part (15%) said that the project has done enough to support them. Some of them said: *"The project has done enough to make the "MësoVET"⁶ platform available"* and others think that *"At this point there is nothing else the project can offer, the MësoVET platform offers it all."* Other teachers, about one third, said the project can help with more digitized teaching

⁶ These quotes are extracted from meetings with teachers organized by "S4J" in the framework of the commitment to carry out education process in quarantine conditions.

materials and some others mentioned they need trainings for their professional develop on distance teaching/learning skills.

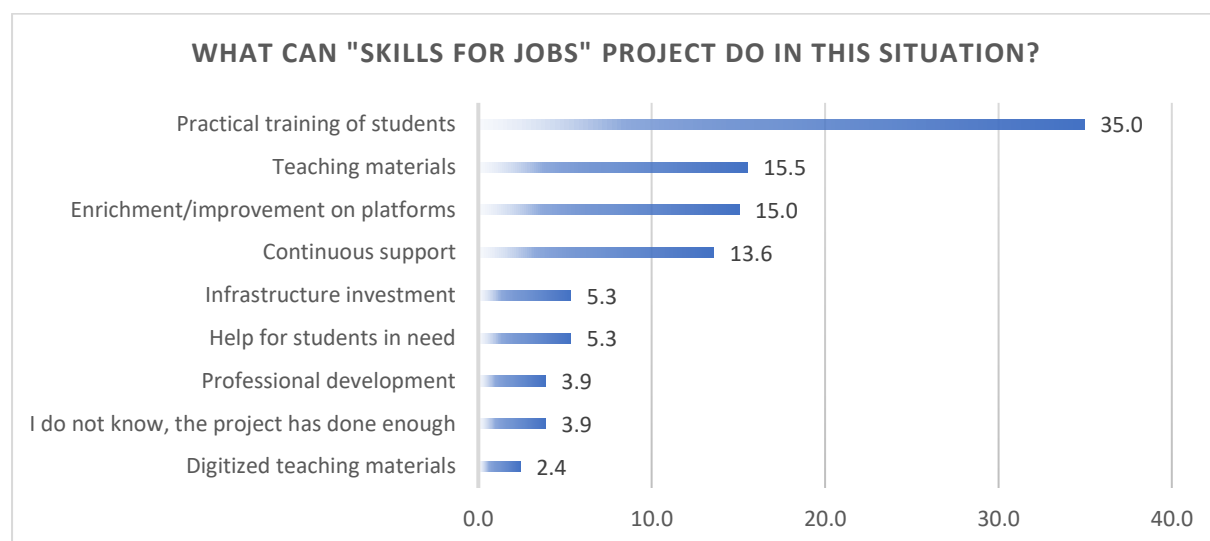


Fig. 6: Further contribution of the "S4J" project: teacher perceptions

This is a situation that needs further inquiry for the reason that in response to the previous question, teachers do not indicate they need to increase their capacities. When this need is presented as something that can be provided by the project, the number of people who express interest in further training increases.

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Despite the challenges during this time, more than half of the teachers are of the opinion that the *online* distance teaching/learning can be a method that might be applied even when schools reopen.

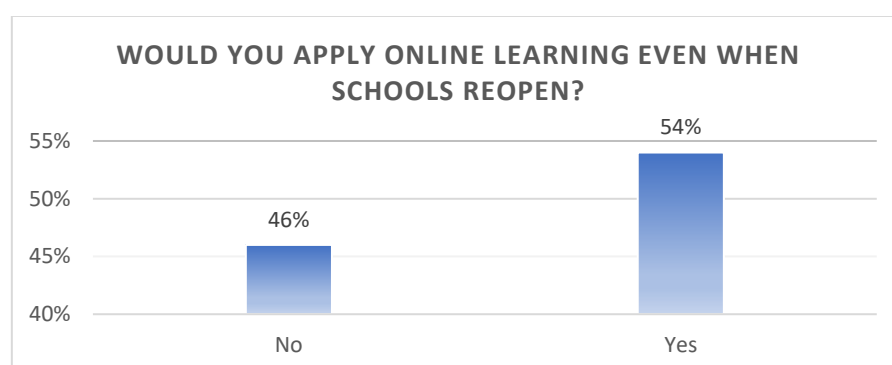


Fig. 7: Future use of distance education

5.2. Student Survey Results

Students' survey remained available online during the last week of March and the participation rate reached about **40%** of the total number of the students attending 10 participating vocational schools, a total of **2176** students. The following Fig. 8 presents the participants divided by school and grade

PARTICIPATION IN SURVEY BY SCHOOL AND GRADES IN NUMBERS

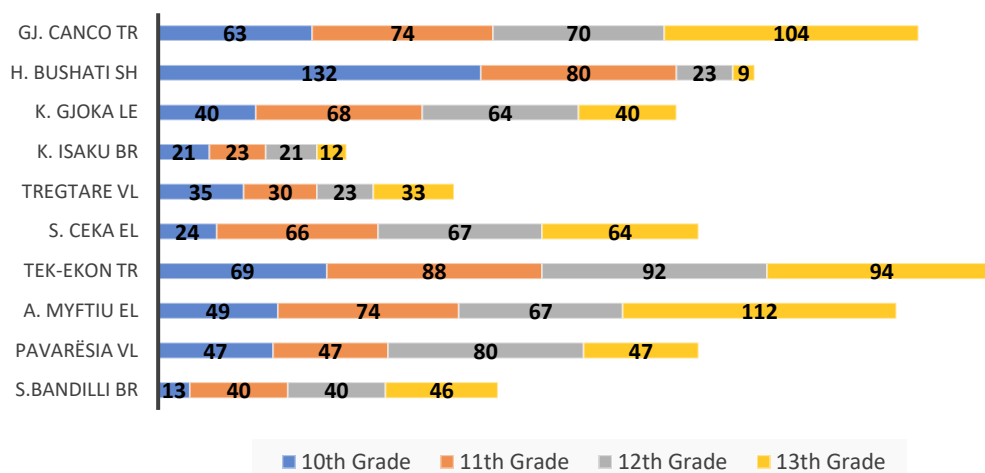


Fig. 8: Students' participation by school and school grade

Data on uninterrupted internet access correspond to national data on internet access in various cities, and show that half of the students have uninterrupted internet access. Meanwhile, the alarm bell is ringing about the fact that the other half either have occasional access to internet or have no access at all. 14% of the respondents do not have internet access. On the other hand, the concern deepens when 9 out of 10 students use their mobile phones for distance teaching/learning from home.

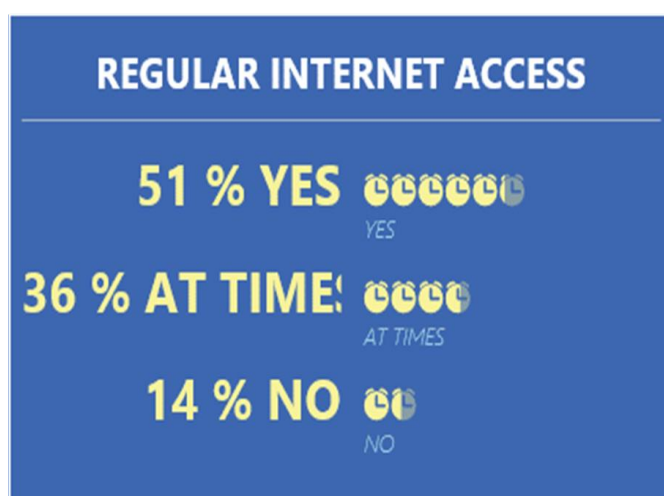


Fig. 9: Students' access to internet

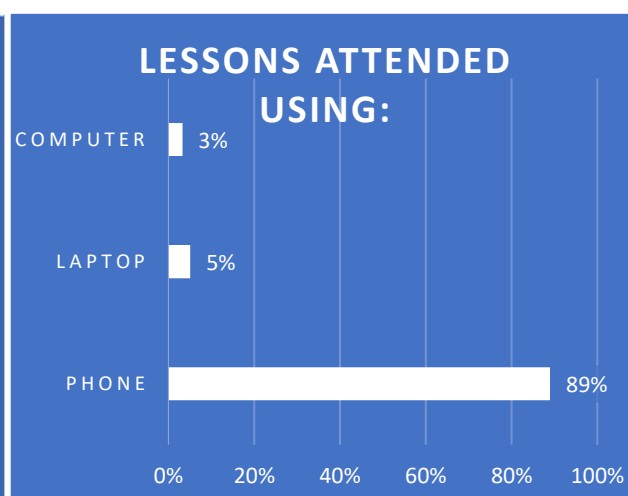


Fig. 9: Usage of electronic devices

Less than 10% of the students who participated in the survey managed to attend the *online* lessons assisted by a laptop. It is widely recognized that the success of digital education platforms begins with establishing necessary material basis to enable the attendance in lessons via such platforms. This is how digital teaching/learning could be implemented and not simply through exchanges via communication applications.

More than 6 out of 10 students point out that they are learning mainly via the *WhatsApp* communication application. Students were also asked about other platforms and lessons broadcast by RTSH television channel. The "MësoVET" platform dominates with 12% of the respondents using it,

followed by *Google Classroom*. A more in-depth analysis of the use of this platform is presented in the Annex 8.1 of this assessment. Very few students follow lessons broadcast by RTSH (3%), this may be related to the fact that RTSH does not offer specific programs for vocational education. Some of the students say they use a combination of platforms.

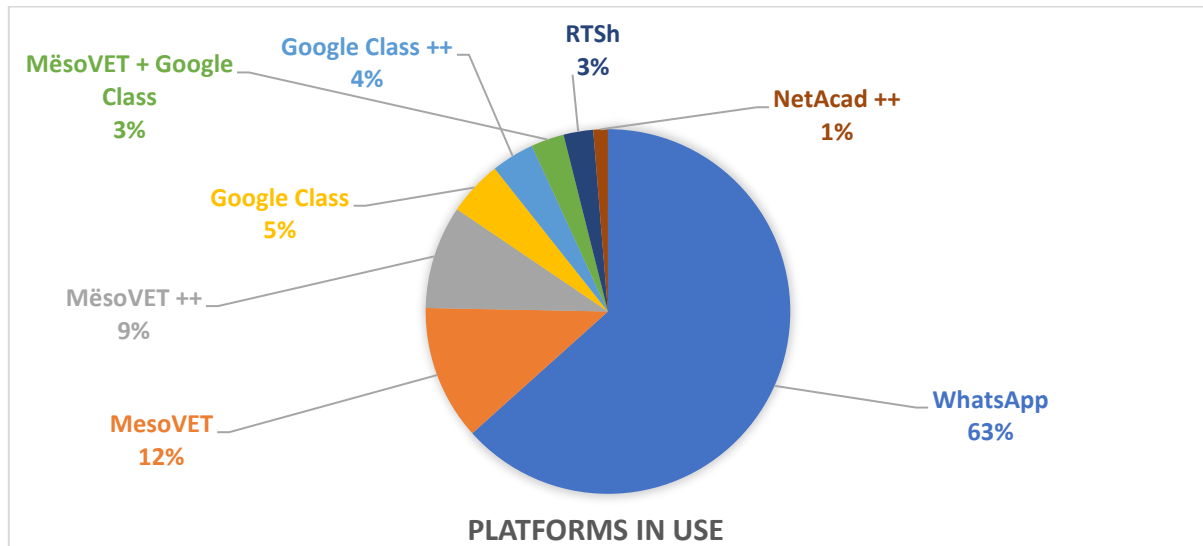


Fig. 10: Platforms in use by students

Unlike teachers, students were asked to give their opinions by indicating their approval or disapproval for 19 declarative statements. These statements were of a qualitative nature and required them to assess almost all aspects of the *online* distance teaching/learning process. Students were supposed to provide their rating by choosing only one of the answers according to the following scale, where “0” (zero) represents the lowest level of approval and “4” the highest level of approval: 0 = completely disagree; 1 = disagree; 2 = agree to some extent; 3 = agree; 4 = completely agree

In Fig. 12, students’ responses are ranked according to the positive weight they had on each question. It is clear that the students assess positively their engagement in discussions, teacher’s explanations, materials disseminated via *WhatsApp* and the language used in discussions, while the impact on learning of distance teaching/learning and its continuity in the future are assessed at lower levels.

STUDENTS OPINION REGARDING DISTANCE LEARNING EXPERIENCE

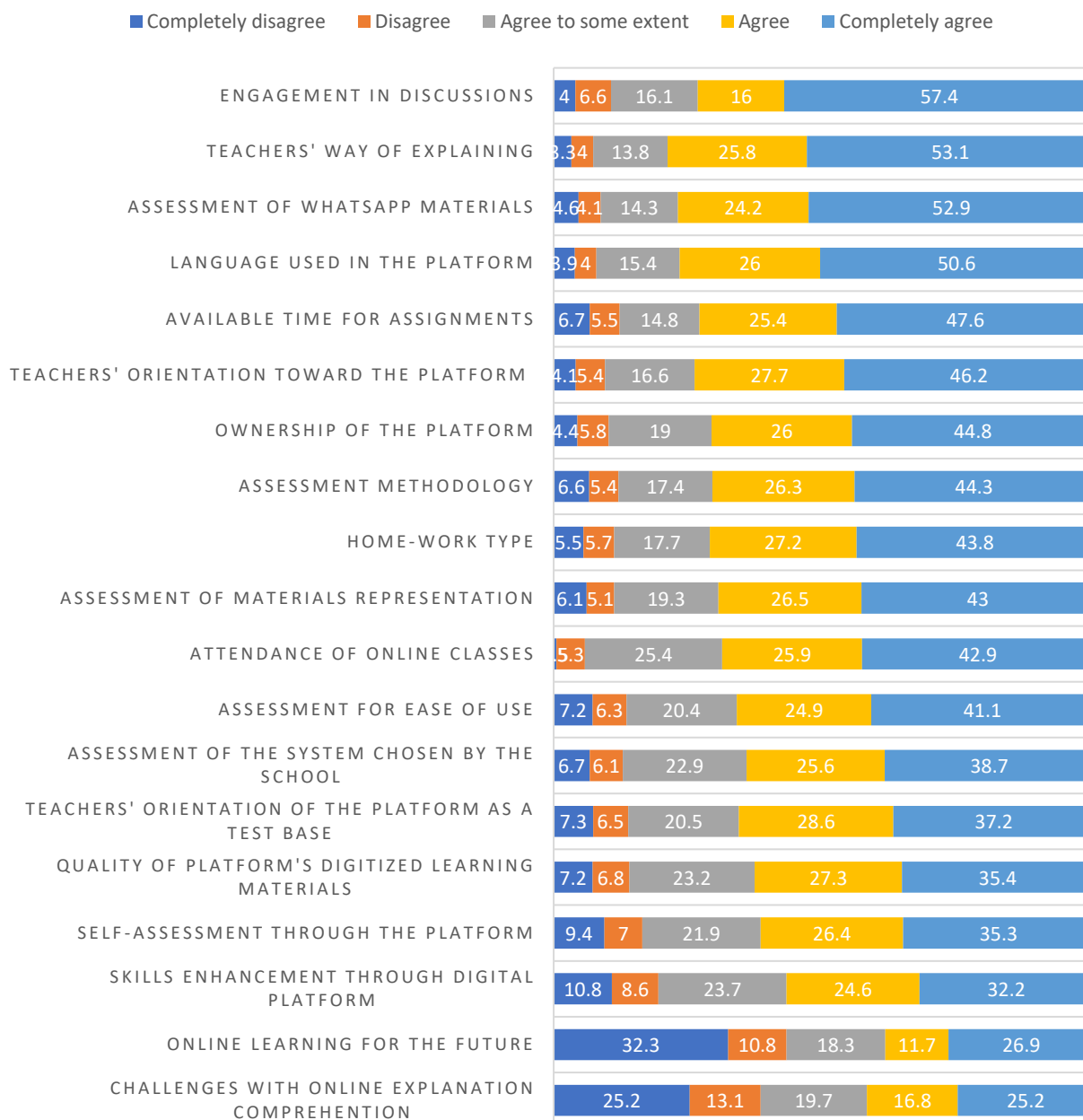


Fig. 11: Online Distance Learning: Student Assessment

It is worth mentioning that in general, students' assessments lean towards the high level of approval for most of the questions asked. It seems that the students have accepted the reality of learning from home and they are putting forth efforts to "normalize" the process. On the other hand, the *online* teacher's explanation on the topic remains a challenge for 60% of the students who participated in the survey.

Concerning the enrichment of the platform with digitized educational materials, the students highlighted the need to add learning materials for each subject. They also indicated that the learning materials should be short and suitable to read on mobile phones. More than half of the students

clearly state their need for educational materials with digital and interactive access. The rest of the requirements for the platforms are related to increasing the number of instructional videos which under these circumstances can replace practice. It should be noted that 1 in 4 students requests more space for *online* discussion, which via mobile phones is a challenge.

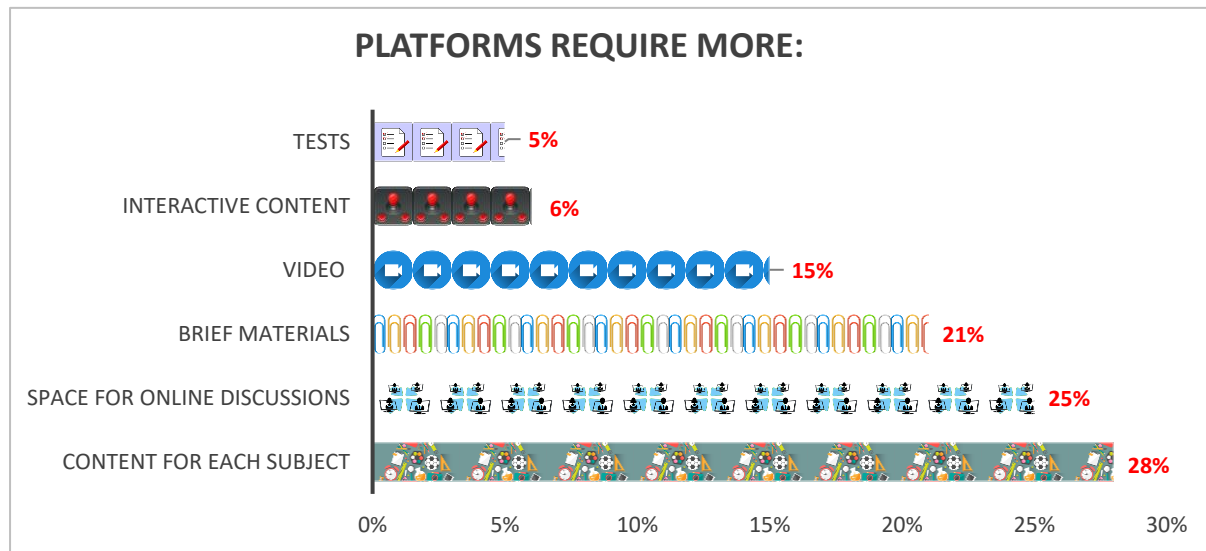
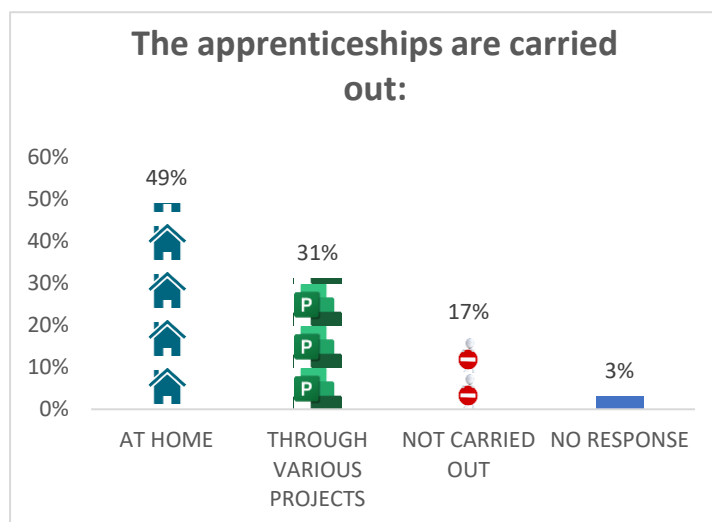


Fig. 12: Student expectations about distance learning platforms

To the open-ended question of how teachers are evaluating them, almost half of the students mention the use of questions to class and project-based assignments. The rest of the answers are divided between quizzes and group work.

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In the situation of distance learning and teaching, the silent challenge for VET is related to apprenticeships. Half of the students claim they are carrying out their vocational practice at home, while **almost 1/3** through various projects. 20% say they are not carrying out any professional practice. More than half of the students are satisfied with finding a solution for carrying out apprenticeships while 1/4 of them do not agree with the solution offered for carrying out apprenticeship

Fig. 13: Carrying out apprenticeship

To understand more about the implementation of vocational practice modules in the situation of the *online* distance learning, the question whether the vocational practice program is carried out was crisscrossed with students' educational directions. The educational directions which have the highest percentage of students stating they are not carrying out their vocational practice are (in descending

order): Food Technology 50%⁷; Social and Health Services (SHS) 35% (n = 12); Electrotechnics & Electronics 30% (n = 11), Electrotechnics (26% n = 65) and Mechanics 17% (n = 25). The following educational directions appear to cope better: Textile & Garments, Construction, Transport Vehicle Service (TVS), Installer of Thermo-Hydraulic Systems (ISTH). More detailed data for each educational direction can be found in the Annex 8.2 of this assessment.

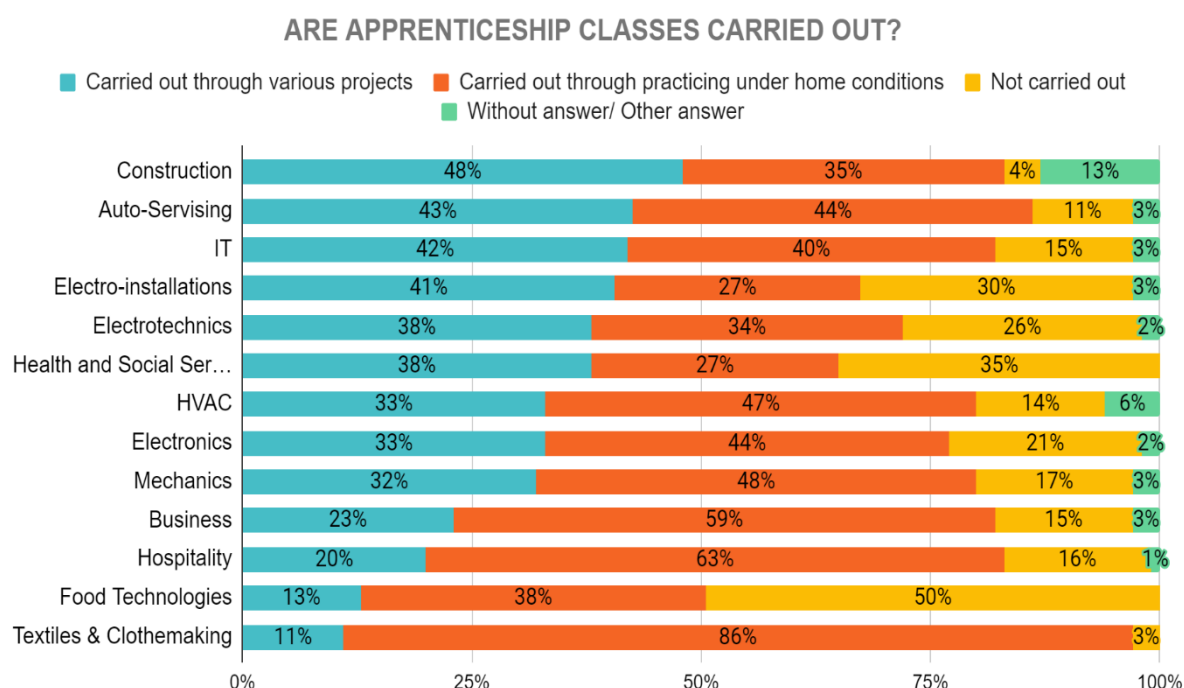


Fig. 14: Apprenticeship by school directions

Students of “Kolin Gjoka” school in Lezha make up the highest proportion of those reporting they are not carrying out vocational practice 35% (n=75), followed by the students of “Gjegji Canco” school in Tirana with 25% (n=77) and students of “Ali Myftiu” school in Elbasan with 18% (n=54). The lowest percentage is reported by the students of “Salih Çeka” school in Elbasan, where only 9% (n = 19) state they are not having any vocational practice⁸.

860 students participating in the survey chose to give their free opinions about distance learning. For this group, which represents almost **40%** of the students participating in the survey, the positivity to cope with the situation it is obvious. There were also valuable reviews which are included in the Annex 8.4. As it turns out from the qualitative questions, in most cases the students agree with the *online* teaching/learning, excluding the tests and the concern of the future graduates for the final exams. The main difficulty is related to the fact that *lessons cannot be taught/learned via mobile phones and not everything can be read on a mobile phone*. There are a number of comments emphasizing that this method is not working, as there are many others expressing appreciation for the arrangement of distance education while taking into consideration their opinions.

⁷ Number of students studying in this direction is limited and, 4 out of 8 indicate they have not carried out vocational practice.

⁸ Charts in Annex 8.2 provide detailed data.

5.3. Teacher and Student Perceptions in Comparison

56% of the teachers who participated in the survey deemed absence of regular internet access as the foremost difficulty to the progress of the *online* distance teaching/learning. On the other hand, it turns out that only **50%** of the students have internet access all the time, **36%** have occasional internet access and only **14%** of them have no access to the internet at all. **82%** of the teachers and **64%** of the students say they use *WhatsApp* for teaching/learning. **15.4%** of teachers assess the use of digital platforms such as "MësoVET" as an efficient method for the implementation of distance teaching/learning, while after combining the answers⁹ it appears that only **11%** (n = 31) of the teachers use this platform, this, in combination with other methods and platforms. Meanwhile, the percentage of students who use only "MësoVET" platform or in combination with other platforms is **20%** (n = 443).

Both teachers and students term absence of appropriate content as a key obstacle to implement online education, respectively **15.3%** and **14%**. While **70%** of the students agree with the methods used for assessing online learning (frontal questions, etc.), **20%** of the teachers have difficulties grading in this format. **39%** of the teachers and **54%** of the students agree that this form of *online* education should be used even after the quarantine restrictions are lifted.

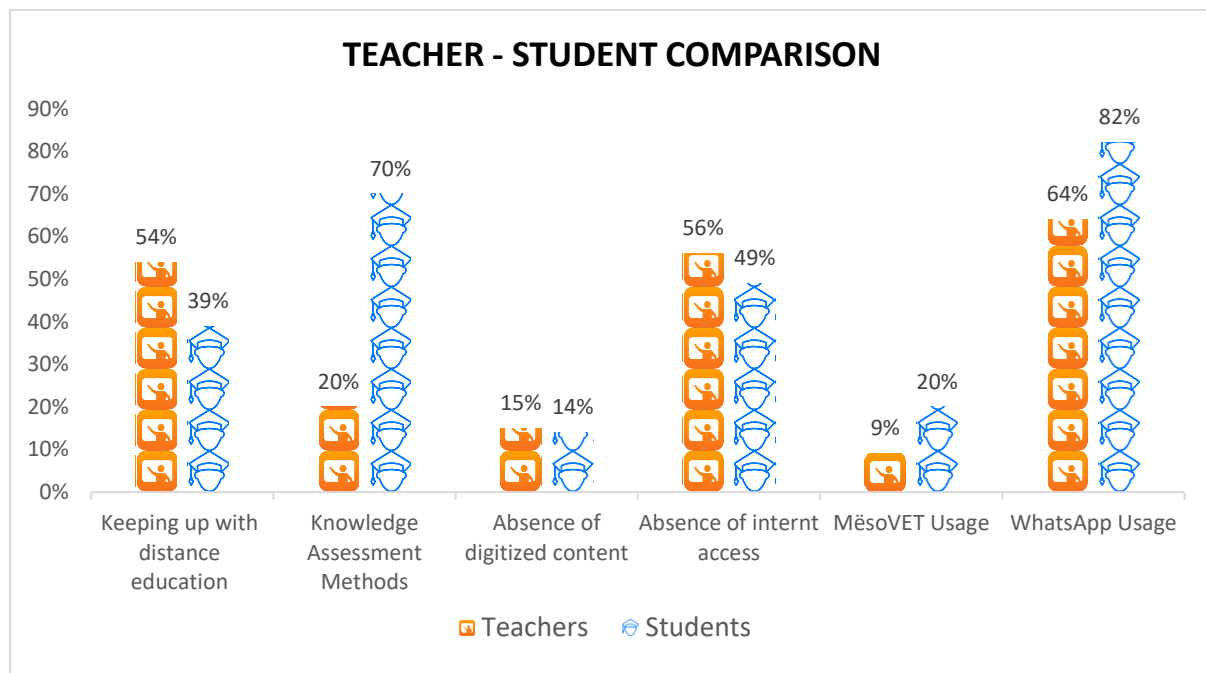


Fig. 15: Distant Learning: Student and Teacher Perceptions in Comparison

⁹ Teachers and students' responses were calculated by collecting the cases when the interviewees mentioned the use of the platform on its own or in combination with other methods and platforms.

6. Conclusions

Based on the data analysis of the two surveys, it can be concluded that:

- ❖ Students and teachers seem to have accepted passing over to distance education as the best solution for schooling in a situation of school closure and home isolation.
- ❖ The education process is mainly carried out using the *WhatsApp* application. Digital platforms such as "MësoVET" or *Google Classroom* in combination with *WhatsApp*, are also in limited use as shown in Fig. 11 or in the Annex 8.1 here to.
- ❖ S4J project interventions, both via "MësoVET" platform and by providing training and support to teachers, have had a positive impact and supported partner schools in coping with current situation.
- ❖ Extensive use of digital online education platforms requires more efforts and commitment from the parties engaged in this process, even after quarantine has been lifted.
- ❖ Distance learning online is feasible when all parties commit to the process, however, its efficiency would be higher if digital teaching and learning skills pre-existed.
- ❖ Student and teacher behaviour are changing adapting to the reality of education in "home" isolation.
- ❖ Lack of electronic equipment and constant internet access cripple the quality of the *online* distance teaching/learning and challenge the process of students' evaluation.
- ❖ The lack of e-learning content presents one of the key obstacles articulated by teachers in the process of using digital platforms for distance education.
- ❖ The necessity for immediate implementation of the *online* learning and distance education pointed out the need for digitalization in education and innovative interventions in VET or general education.

7. Recommendations

Based on the process of monitoring and evaluation of distance education, the following recommendations were identified:

Policy-making:

- a. Online teaching must become an integral part of the current and future teacher training process;
- b. Distance education training provided to teachers in general education should be extended to VET teachers;
- c. Investment in capacity building for teaching via digital platforms enabling teachers to make use of such platforms now and in the future;
- d. Teaching materials and state Matura exams with relevant examples and videos in digital format, should be developed and made available to teachers and students;
- e. Investment should be made on digital infrastructure tailored for vocational schools to cope with online learning and distance education;
- f. Distance education should be supported through a guided and sustainable process of monitoring and evaluation to ensure improvements and access to all stakeholders;
- g. Immediate solutions for internet access and infrastructure limitations for a category of students and teachers;
- h. Concrete investment in digital platforms and digitized teaching materials in the Albanian language;
- i. Guiding students and teachers towards established and accessible digital platforms.

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“S4J” project:

- a. Strengthening of the “MësoVET” platform while improving user experience on-line;
- b. Development of e-learning and digitized content by engaging schools and establishing inter-school working groups to work on this process;
- c. Engagement of students in the preparation of educational materials for carrying out apprenticeships in home conditions;
- d. Training of the VET teachers for planning and delivering distance education by developing a digital training module for teachers on the methods of online and distant teaching;
- e. Enrichment of the “MësoVET” platform with digitized teaching content, focusing on items relevant to state Matura.

Partner schools

- a. Adaption of the curriculum for distance education delivery;
- b. Including trainings on digital teaching skills on the ongoing professional development plan for each teacher;
- c. Development of interactive digitized teaching content by teachers and uploading them on various platforms;
- d. Use of suitable student evaluation formats, such as: *Google Forms* etc.;
- e. Documentation of the process and development of measuring and reporting instruments for teaching/learning during such a situation;
- f. Set up communities of practise for sharing experiences and peer to peer mentoring.

Students / parents

- a. Higher level of engagement and cooperation with schools to increase student participation in online learning activities;
- b. Set up of learning groups around a single laptop to avoid mobile phone dependence;
- c. Development of feedback and suggestion mechanisms for improvements, coordinated by Student's Government and the Parent's Committee;
- d. Use and promotion of teaching/learning methods beyond *WhatsApp* and oriented towards platforms such as "MësoVET".



ANNEXES

8. Annexes

8.1. Study Case: “MësoVET” Digital Platform

Before engaging into a detailed statistical analysis of the data collected from students’ survey concerning the use of “MësoVET” digital platform, here is a synopsis about it. Since the inception phase, the “S4J” project has supported digital learning management platforms¹⁰, proven to be successful in combining face-to-face learning with *online* learning. Two such platforms have proved beneficial to VET and are still being used to support distance learning.

“MësoVet” platform has 3057 users, of which 138 teachers. The platform contains a total of 85 subjects, of which 69 are vocational and with virtual space for teaching materials, assignments and tests, for the educational directions of "ICT", "Tourism & Hospitality", "Economy", "Transport Vehicle Service", "Textile & Garments", "Mechanics", "Electrotechnics", "Hydro-technics" and "Forestry"¹¹. In addition, there are 5 instructional courses available on the platform, with information on how to use of the platform and for the professional development of the teachers. For each subject, may sign up both students (grouped by class) and teachers, each with defined rights and roles.

There are several categories of subjects on the platform:

- Subjects that have previously been on the platform and are now being enriched with revised materials;
- Subjects that are made available by teachers in support of virtual classes. Teachers themselves upload materials in advance or with the help of the staff;
- 13th grade subjects which contain materials on the topics of state Matura orientation program that have not been taught yet;
- Subjects with orientation materials for general Matura subjects;
- Vocational training courses (Guides and Culinary courses developed by Vocational Training Centre Vlorë).

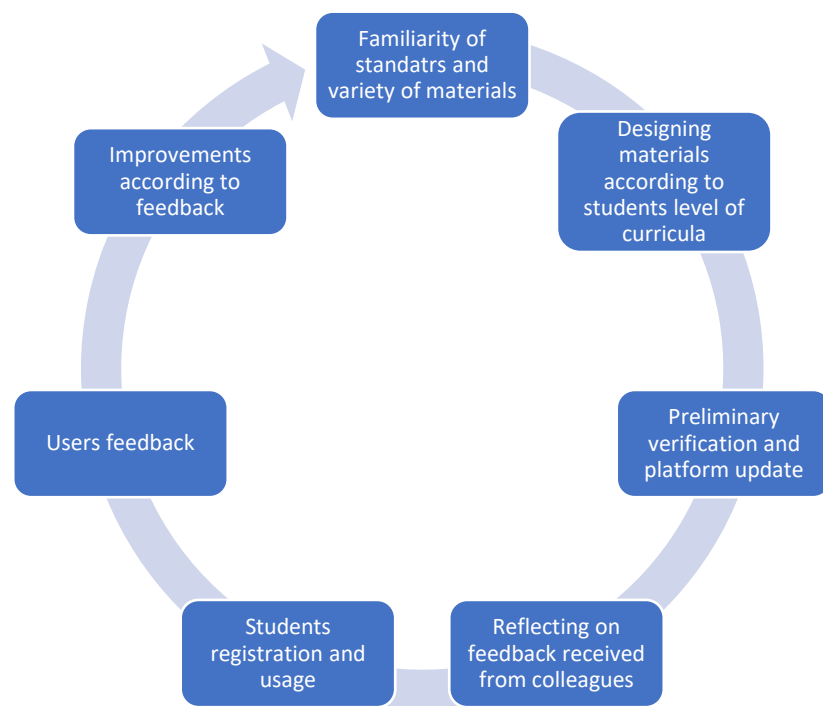
Materials for the 13th grade have been prepared under the coordination of the “S4J” project by supervising the steps of a quality assurance process, as in the fig. below. Using "MësoVET" platform has several advantages in comparison with social networks for quick communication, such as:

- ✓ Provides opportunities to organize various teaching materials (Word, PDF format, presentations, *quizzes*, videos related to *YouTube*, links from the Internet, etc.), attractively and enabling interaction;
- ✓ The materials are editable and can be enriched over time as needed, even year after year;

¹⁰ Learning management systems

¹¹ According to the data of March 29, 2020

- ✓ Tests can be put together with the key to solutions, so that the response to the results and their documentation is faster. This advantage is being used for quarterly tests and preparatory tests for theoretical exams;
- ✓ Each student or teacher has his/her own account and can check individual progress;
- ✓ Teachers can monitor students' activities on the platform and draft various reports, as needed;
- ✓ Virtual working groups can be created and have discussions in the *chat* / forum;
- ✓ The user can access the aforementioned activities any time.



To boost the quality of distance teaching/learning, attention is being paid to teachers' support and not only in the technical aspect of using the platform, but, most importantly, in the pedagogical aspect. To this end, it has been made available an *online* course on efficient distance teaching, based on worldwide experiences and examples of success. Also, *webinars* are organized every Saturday to exchange experiences.

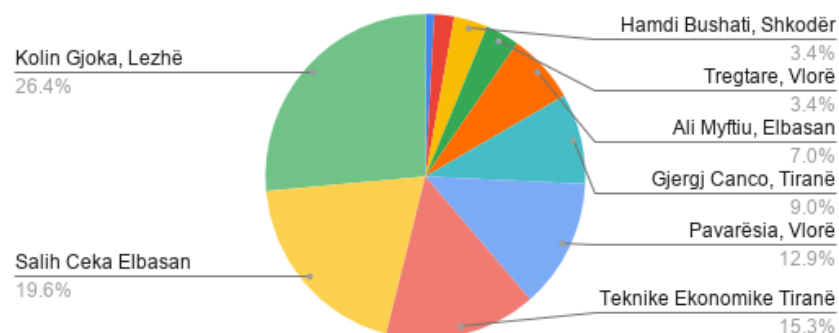
Here again, it seems that internet access is a major problem on enabling distance teaching/learning. The number of students who do not benefit from this service is limited. Unfortunately, there is no information on how they keep in touch with teachers or whether and /or how they are keeping up with learning process.

From the continuous data that the project collects for the membership and use of "MësoVET" platform by the VET students, it turns out that the vast majority of the students who use the platform are the students with the highest grades.

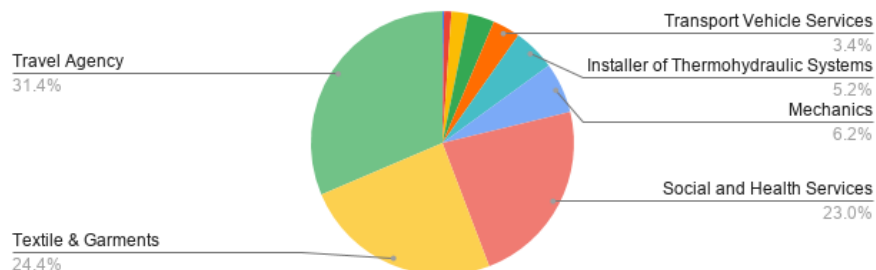
8.2. MësoVET Users Survey Results

About 20% (n = 443) of the students participating in the assessment stated they are using the "MësoVET" platform, by itself or in combination, for the *online* distance learning. Most of them are students of "Kolin Gjoka" school in Lezha (26.4%) and "Salih Çeka" school in Elbasan. The lowest number of users of this platform was in the two schools in Berat

School



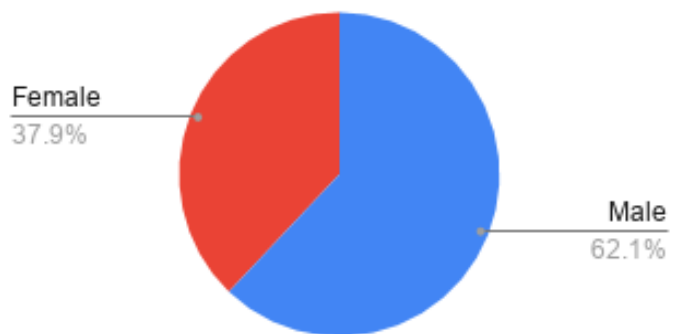
Educational Direction



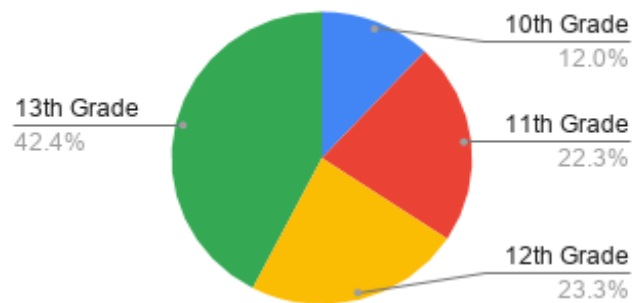
Almost 1/3 of MësoVET platform users (31.4%) are studying educational direction of "Travel Agency", followed by the students of "Textile & Garments" (24.4%), and "Social and Health Services" (23%); the other educational directions are attended in lower percentages: "Mechanics" (6.2%), "Installer of Thermohydraulic Systems" (5.2%), "Transport Vehicle Services" (3.4%), "Electrotechnics" (3.2%) and "Economy & Business" (2.1%).

In terms of gender, 62% of the students using the "MësoVET" digital platform are male and 38% are female. The majority of them, 42.4%, are in the 13th grade, students of 11th and 12th grade make up similar proportions, respectively 23.3% and 22.3%, and the lowest proportion is occupied by students of the 10th grade with 12%.

Gender

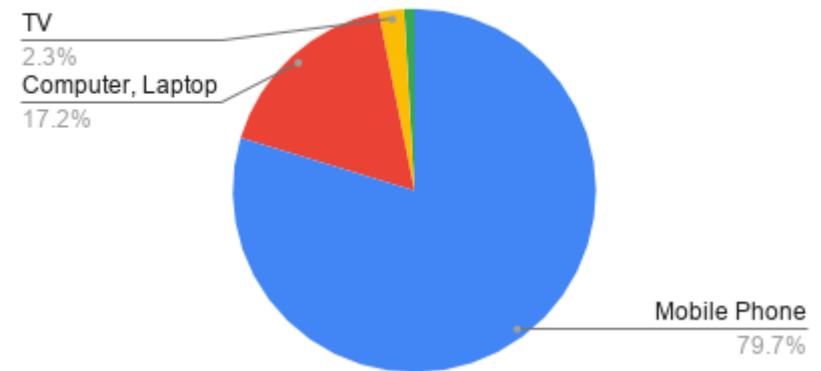


Class

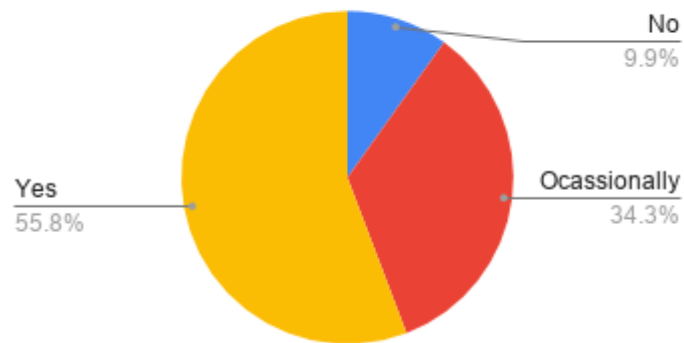


The vast majority of the users of “MësoVET” platform attend the lessons via mobile phone (79.7%); 17.2% via laptop or computer, and 2.3% on TV. 4 students, users of “MësoVET” say they do not have devices via which they can attend the *online* distance learning.

I attend the online distance learning via



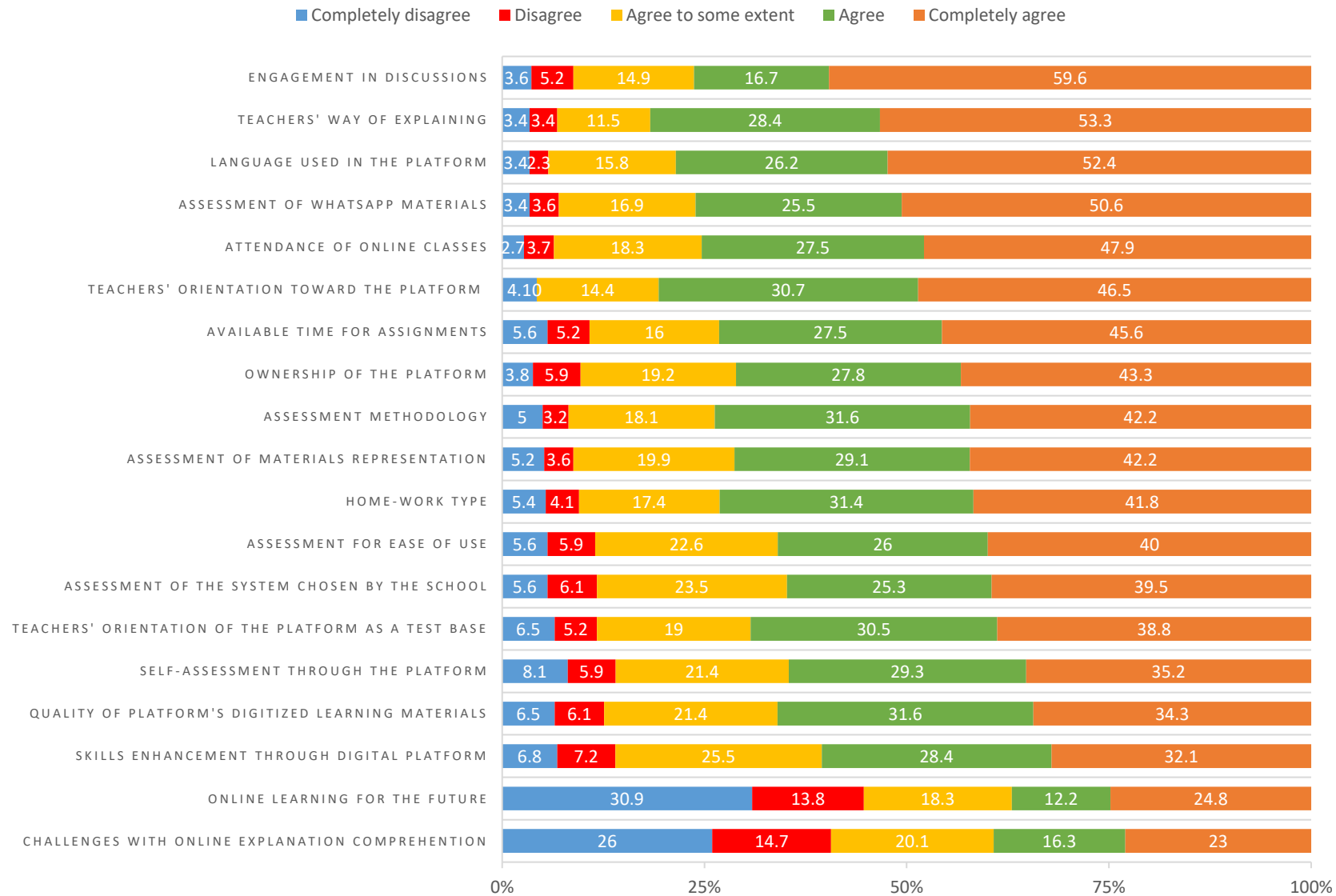
Internet Access



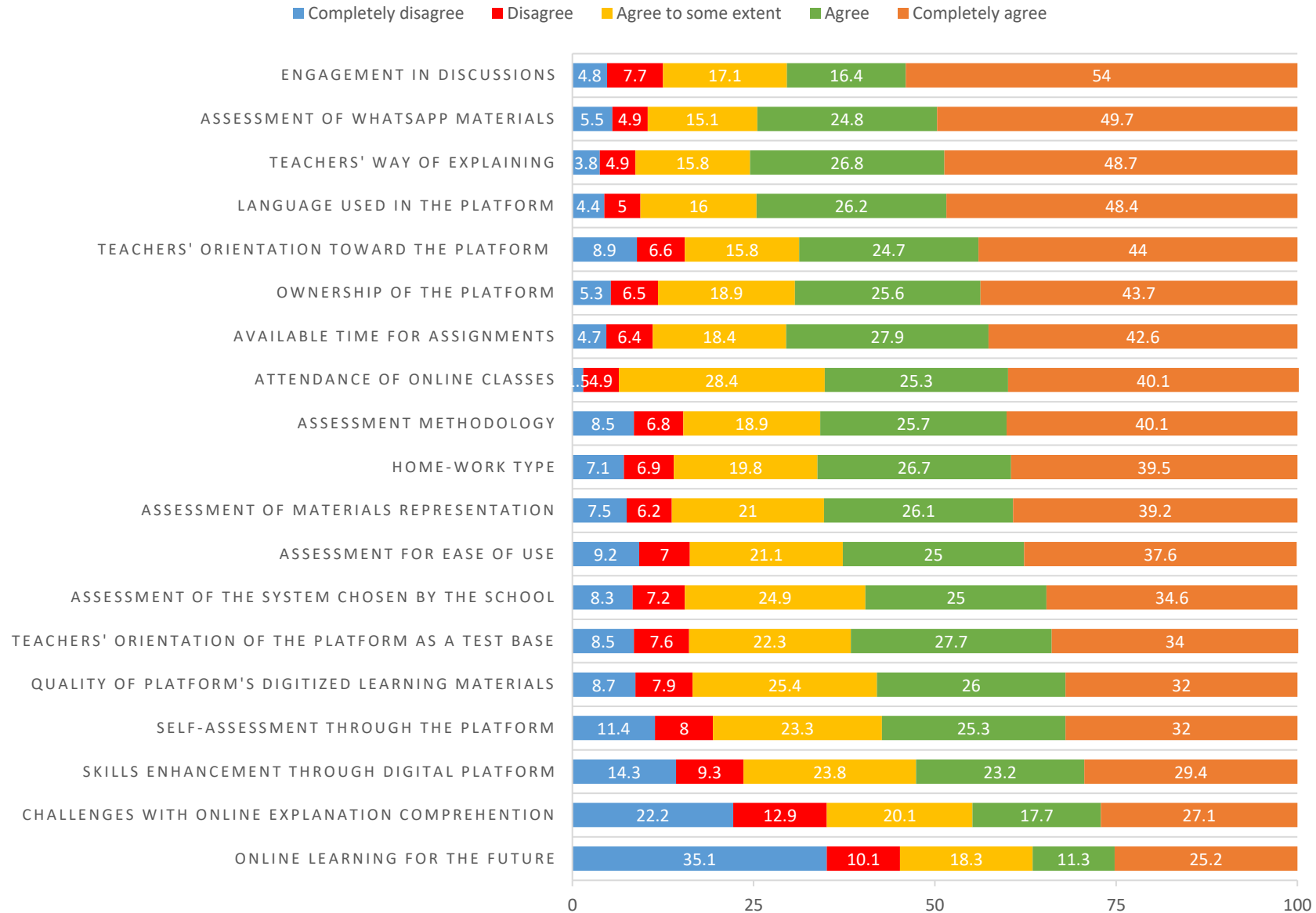
One of the most important elements for carrying out the *online* distance learning is, without a doubt, the internet access. More than half of the students, users of “MësoVET”, 55.8%, have access to internet all the time, as the rest of the students. 34% had occasional access and 9.9% had no internet access at all.

As noted earlier, students were asked to rate on a scale from 0 = “Completely Disagree” to 4 = “Completely Agree” some key aspects of the *online* distance learning that are closely related to the digital platform they are using for their learning. The data is initially presented in percentage for each question based on the scale in two separate graphs: one graph represents students using the “MësoVET” platform and other students using other platforms.

"MĚSOVET" PLATFORM USERS



USERS OF OTHER PLATFORMS

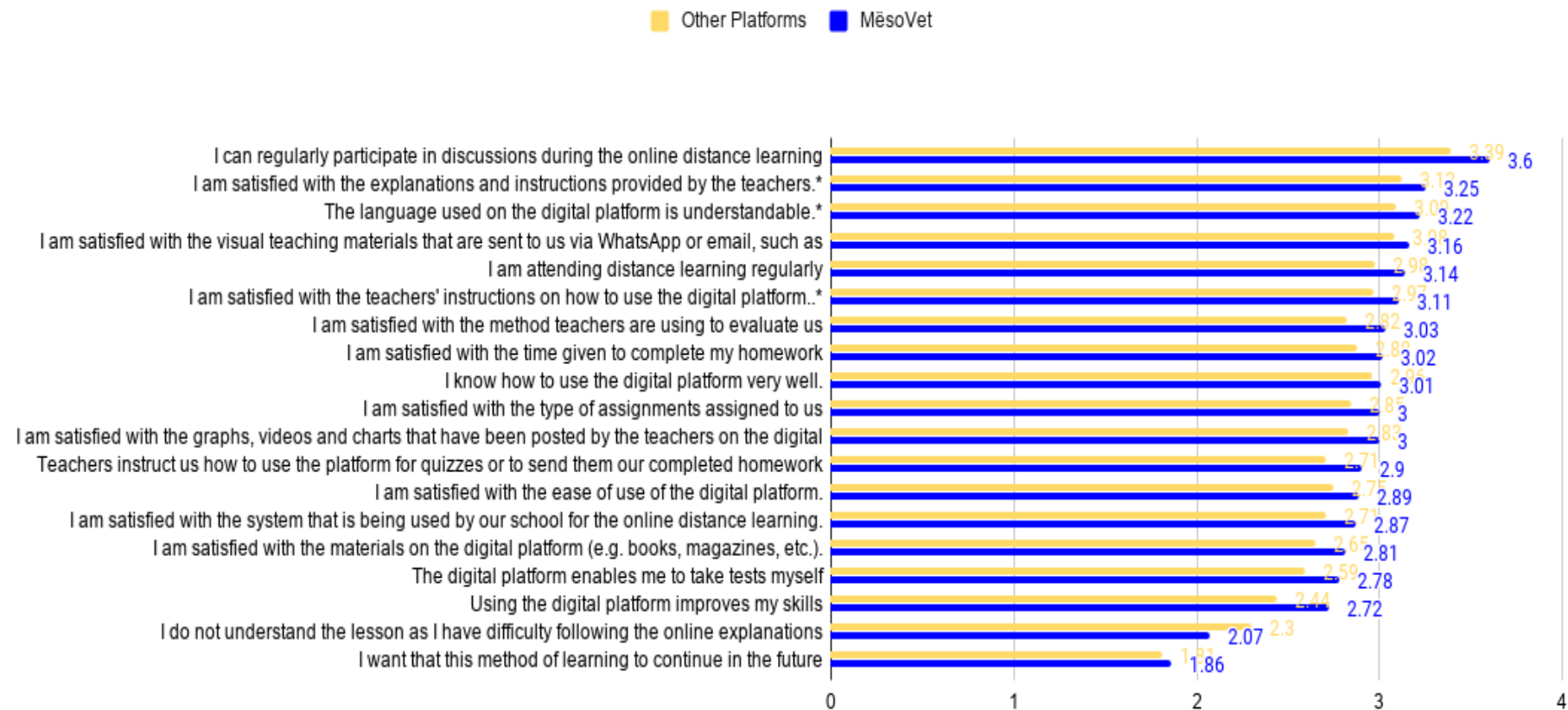


By comparing the two graphs, it appears that the students, users of the “MësoVET” platform, constantly and at the highest proportions indicate their maximum approval concerning each of the questions. Although the difference in percentage is small, what stands out are persistent differences between users and non-users of the digital learning platform "MësoVET". Students indicate their highest approval about:

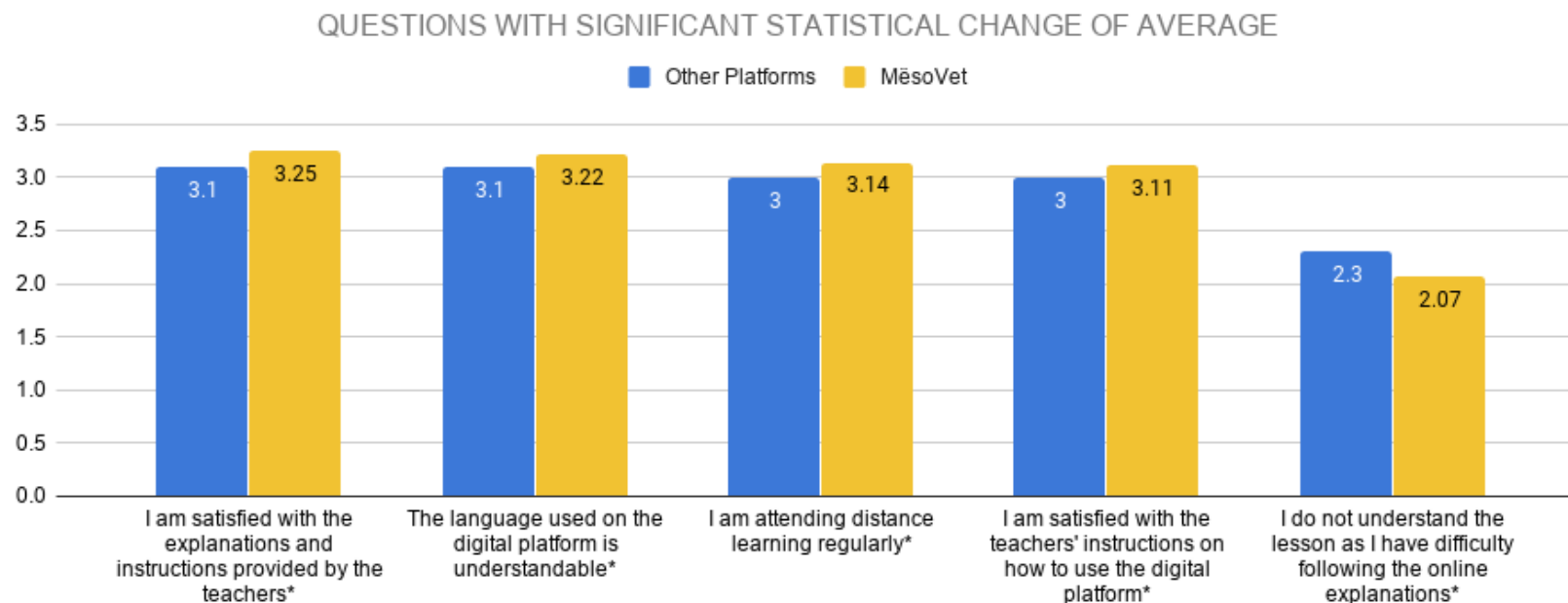
- participation in discussions: “MësoVET” - 59.6%; other platforms - 54%;
- explanation method used by teachers: “MësoVET” - 53.3%; other platforms - 48.7%;
- language used on the platform: “MësoVET” - 52.4%; other platforms - 48.4%.

Students using “MësoVET” have higher *online* attendance (47.9%) compared to 40% of the students using other platforms. These students have less difficulty in terms of understanding the *online* teaching (23%) versus 27.1% of the students using other platforms. Also, 32.1% of them believe that “MësoVET” has a positive impact on their learning compared to 29% of those using other platforms. Slightly different opinions were noticed in regards to the *online* learning in the future, such as the type of assignments, and so on.

The solid difference in all responses is most clearly highlighted by the comparison of the average values between the students using the “MësoVET” platform and the students using other platforms.



Graph below shows the outcomes of 19 questions asked to users and nonusers of the “MësoVET” platform. Th comparison of the averages clearly reveals the steady difference between the two groups. To further analyse these slight but steady differences, for the vast majority of the cases was performed an independent “t” test. The analysis shows that the differences were statistically significant for 5 of the questions presented in the graph below



All five dimensions with differences are statistically significant given the impact they might have on the use of the *online* learning. Students who use “MësoVET” are more satisfied with explanations of the teachers, think that the language used on the platform is understandable, are more systematic attendees of the *online* distance learning, are more satisfied with the instructions provided by teachers on how to use the platform and, manage to better understand the *online* distance explanations (this question has the same measurement scale but it points in the opposite direction)

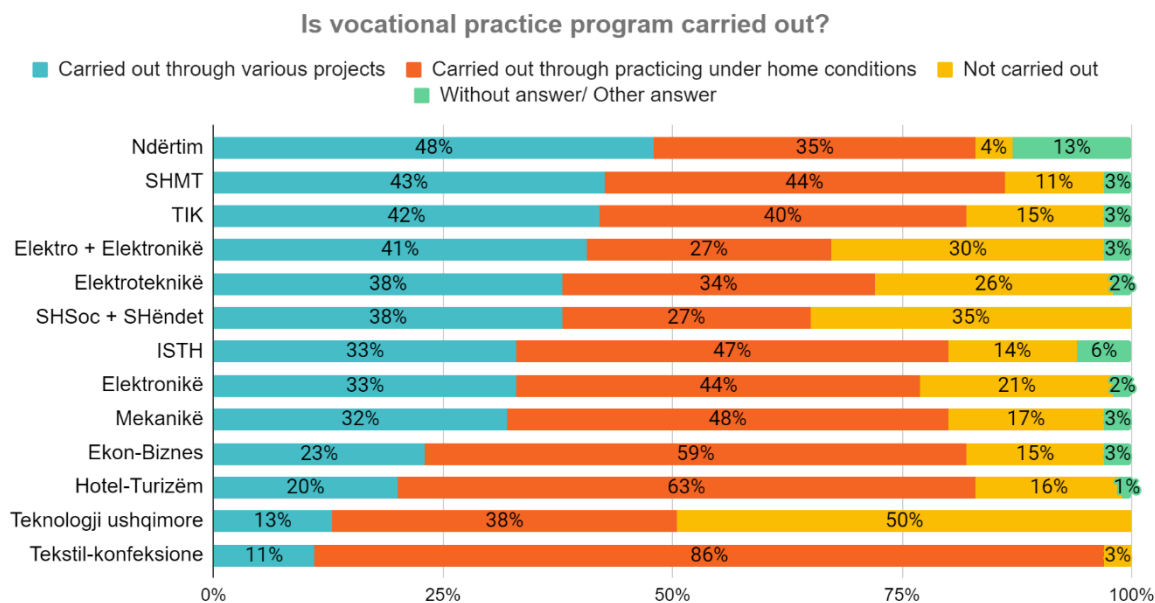
8.3. Statistical Analysis on Apprenticeship Process

Vocational practice hours by educational direction

Is vocational practice program carried out?	Carried out through various projects	Carried out through practicing under home conditions	Not carried out	Without answer/ Other answer	Total
Economy-Business	114	284	71	17	486
	23.5%	58.4%	14.6%	3.5%	100.0%
Electrical	16	21	10	1	48
	33.3%	43.8%	20.8%	2.1%	100.0%
Electronics	95	85	65	6	251
	37.8%	33.9%	25.9%	2.4%	100.0%
Electrotechnics (integrated with Electronics)	15	10	11	1	37
	40.5%	27.0%	29.7%	2.7%	100.0%
Tourism & Hospitality	96	292	76	5	469
	20.5%	62.3%	16.2%	1.1%	100.0%
Installer of Thermohydraulic Panels	30	42	13	5	90
	33.3%	46.7%	14.4%	5.6%	100.0%
Mechanics	48	72	25	4	149
	32.2%	48.3%	16.8%	2.7%	100.0%
Construction	10	8	1	3	22
	45.5%	36.4%	4.5%	13.6%	100.0%
Social and Health Services	13	9	12	0	34
	38.2%	26.5%	35.3%	0.0%	100.0%
Transport Vehicle Services	95	97	24	6	222
	42.8%	43.7%	10.8%	2.7%	100.0%
Information and Communication Technology	132	126	48	9	315
	41.9%	40.0%	15.2%	2.9%	100.0%
Food Technology	1	3	4	0	8
	12.5%	37.5%	50.0%	0.0%	100.0%

Textile & Garments	4	29	1	0	34
	11.8%	85.3%	2.9%	0.0%	100.0%
Without answer	5	17	5	0	27
	18.5%	63.0%	18.5%	0.0%	100.0%

Vocational practice hours by school



8.4. The Content of the Questionnaires Used for the Survey

Student Questionnaire

Students' opinions on the *online* distance learning while schools are closed

Dear students: The following questionnaire is designed for the purpose of a study on the needs and expectations of the students in current situation demanding the education process be carried out online. Carefully read the questions and choose the one of the most appropriate answer, in your opinion.

Your personal data shall not be disclosed. Take care of yourself and don't get out during this time!

1. I am a student of _____ indicate the school

2. Educational Direction _____

3. Profile _____

4. Gender

- Female
- Male

5. Grade

- Grade 10
- Grade 11
- Grade 12
- Grade 13

6. What digital or distance learning platform are you currently using:

- Lessons broadcast by RTSH
- WhatsApp
- MësoVET
- Google Classroom
- Digital platforms such as NetAcad
- A combination of: WhatsApp and MësoVET
- Other

7. I participate in the online distance learning using:

- Computer
- TV
- Laptop
- Mobile phone
- Do not have necessary devices to attend the online learning

- Other

8. I have access to internet all the time

- Yes
- No
- Occasionally

Your opinions concerning the online distance learning

Below you will find several statements about distance learning that you are currently participating in. For each statement give your opinion on to what extent you agree with each statement, by choosing only one option.

0 = completely disagree

1 = do not agree

2 = somehow agree

3 = agree

4 = completely agree.

Carefully choose the option that best describes your opinion about each statement!

1. I am attending distance learning regularly.
2. I am satisfied with the system that is being used by our school for the online distance learning.
3. I can regularly participate in discussions during the online distance learning.
4. I do not understand the lesson as I have difficulty following the online explanations.
5. I am satisfied with the explanations and instructions provided by the teachers.
6. I am satisfied with the visual teaching materials that are sent to us via WhatsApp or email, such as videos, photos, etc.
7. I am satisfied with the ease of use of the digital platform.
8. I am satisfied with the materials on the digital platform (e.g. books, magazines, etc.).
9. I am satisfied with the teachers' instructions on how to use the digital platform.
10. I am satisfied with the time given to complete my homework.
11. I am satisfied with the type of assignments assigned to us.
12. I am satisfied with the method teachers are using to evaluate us.
13. I want that this method of learning to continue in the future.
14. Teachers instruct us how to use the platform for quizzes or to send them our completed homework.
15. The language used on the digital platform is understandable.
16. The digital platform enables me to take tests myself.
17. Using the digital platform improves my skills.
18. I am satisfied with the graphs, videos and charts that have been posted by the teachers on the digital platform.
19. I know how to use the digital platform very well.
20. I think that the digital platform we are using should have:
 - more teaching materials for all the subjects

- full materials for all the subjects
- more videos
- shorter materials
- more interactive materials
- more tests
- more opportunities for online group discussions
- other

29. Hours of vocational practice under distance learning circumstances:

- Are carried out through various projects
- Are carried out by practicing in home conditions
- Are not carried out
- Other

30. To what extent do you agree with the statement: “I am satisfied with the way the vocational practice hours are being carried out under the circumstances of the online distance learning”

- 0 = completely disagree
- 1 = do not agree
- 2 = somehow agree
- 3 = agree
- 4 = completely agree

31. For the subjects I am taking, teachers use different evaluation methods such as:

- quizzes
- question to class (frontal question)
- project assignments
- group work
- other

32. Here below, you can write your opinions about the online distance learning.

Thank you for your cooperation!

Teacher Questionnaire

A short questionnaire on distance teaching/learning while the schools are closed

The closure of schools all over Albania to prevent the spread of Covid-19, led to the replacement of classroom teaching with the online alternatives. The "Skills for Jobs" project, through this short questionnaire, aims to identify methods through which distance teaching is being carried on in Vocational Education and Training schools, to understand the challenges faced by teachers and students, and to contribute to improving this process.

To fill in the questionnaire takes only 5 minutes of your time. All data is confidential and the respondents remain anonymous.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation and time!

Please write down the name of the school in which you are teaching

1. Do you think that distance teaching/learning based on the online technologies is the right solution in such a situation when schools have to remain closed?

- Yes
- No

2. If you choose "no", other options would be:

- To wait until the school reopens
- To make up for the lost teaching days by having classes on Saturday & Sunday when the school reopens
- Other

40

3. Choose between the following options to assess how the distance teaching/learning is currently working:

- Students are not very active
- Interaction teacher-student is hard to achieve
- There are difficulties on the process given that not all the students have access to internet and computer/ mobile phone
- It is giving results, there is interaction between teachers and students
- All actors, teachers, students and parents are interested
- It is used because that's an "order from authorities"
- Not all teachers have proper training for online teaching
- Not all teachers have internet and computer/ mobile phone
- Other

4. Which of the methods used to carry out distance teaching/learning seems the right one to you, for the time being?

- WhatsApp group teaching
- Lessons on TV
- Teaching via digital platforms, for example: MësoVET, NetAcad, etc.
- Other

5. Which method are you currently using?

- WhatsApp groups
- Lessons on RTSH, recommended by the Ministry
- Digital platforms such as MësoVET, NetAcad
- Other

6. Why are you using this method?

- It seems most efficient
- It is the easiest for students to use
- It is the decision of the school/ school management
- It is the method I know best
- Other

7. Is the same method used by all school teachers?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

8. What are the current challenges of the online distance teaching/learning?

- Lack of internet
- Lack of monitoring student's participation
- Difficulties related to students' evaluation
- Difficulties in documenting and reporting
- Lack of digital skills
- Lack of digitized teaching materials
- Other

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9. Would you use the online teaching/learning in the future when schools reopen?

- Yes
- No

10. What can be improved for carrying out distance learning?

- Student capacities
- Teacher capacities
- Physical infrastructure
- Digitized materials
- Other

11. How can the "Skills for Jobs" project help to improve the quality of distance teaching/learning?

Thank you for your cooperation!

8.5. Statistical Data in Graphs and Tables

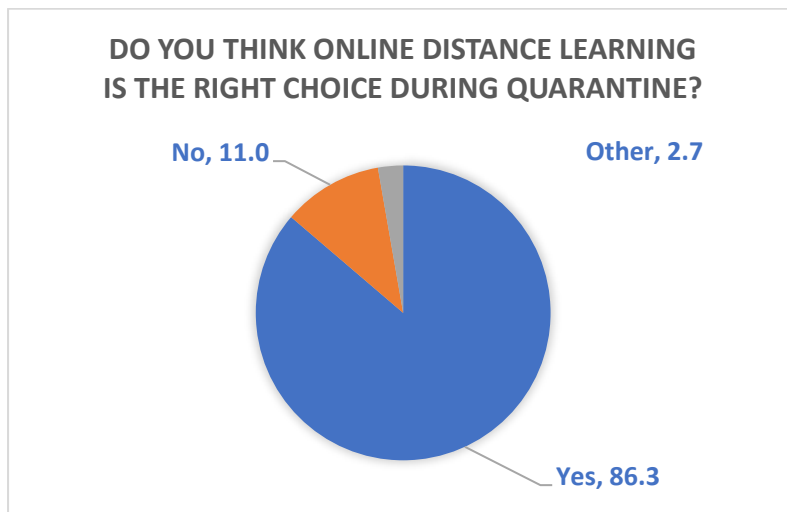


Fig. 16: Teachers' opinions on the selection of distance teaching/ learning method

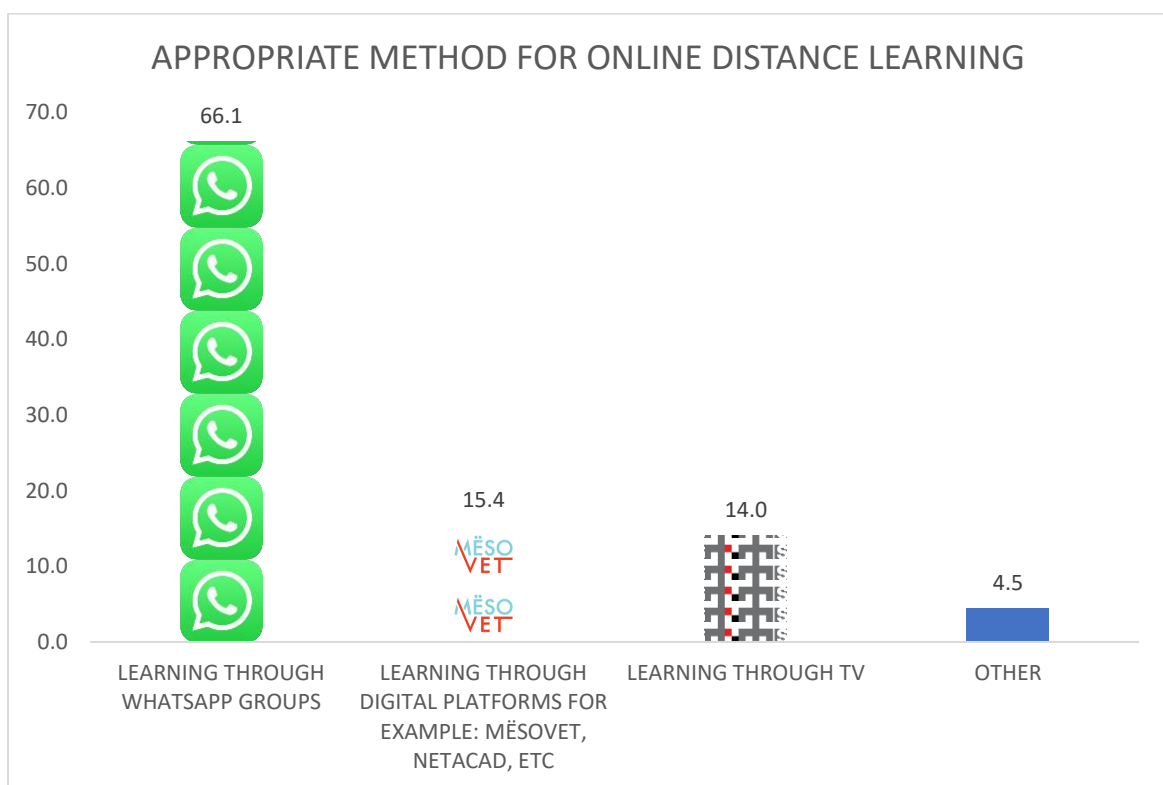


Fig. 17: The appropriate method for the online teaching/learning, as perceived by teachers

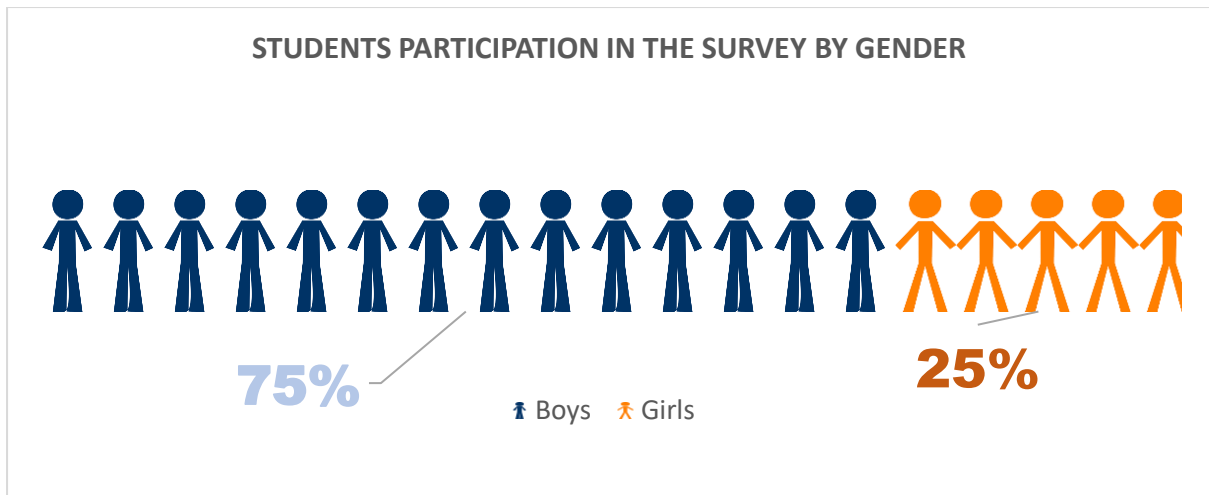


Fig. 18: Students' participation in the survey by gender

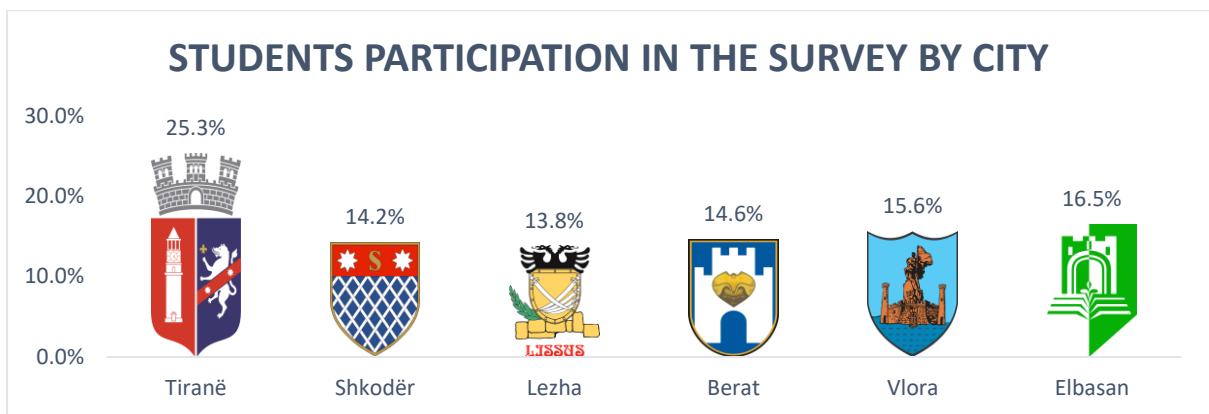


Fig. 19: Students' participation in the survey by city

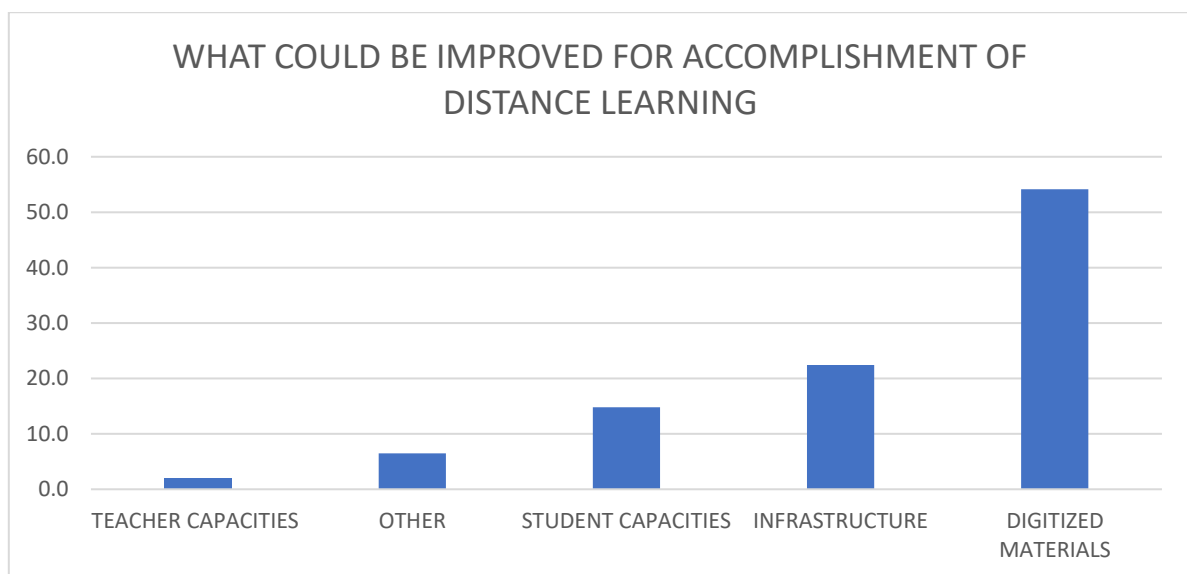


Fig. 20: Teachers' opinions about the improvement of distance learning

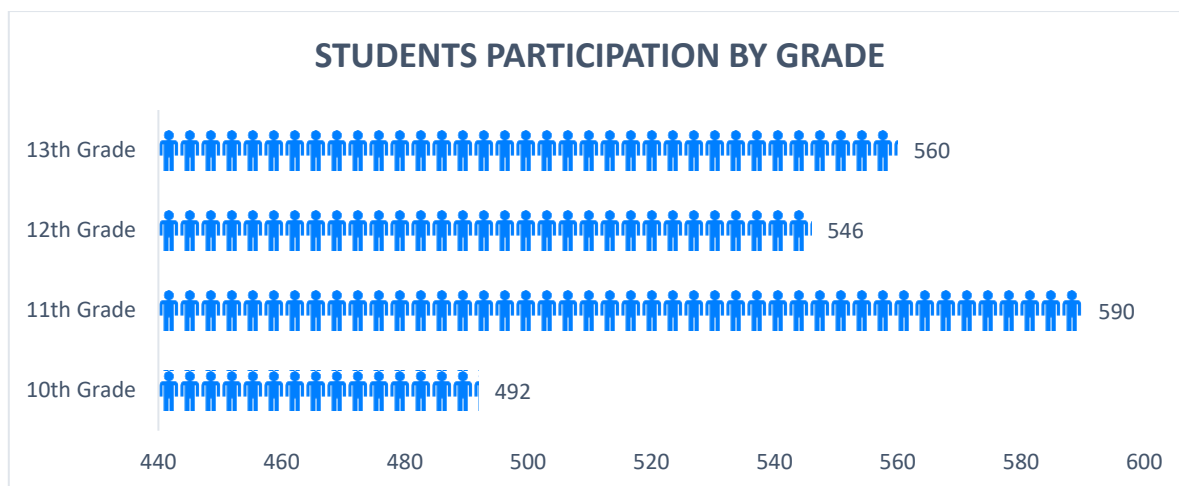


Fig. 21: Students' participation by grade

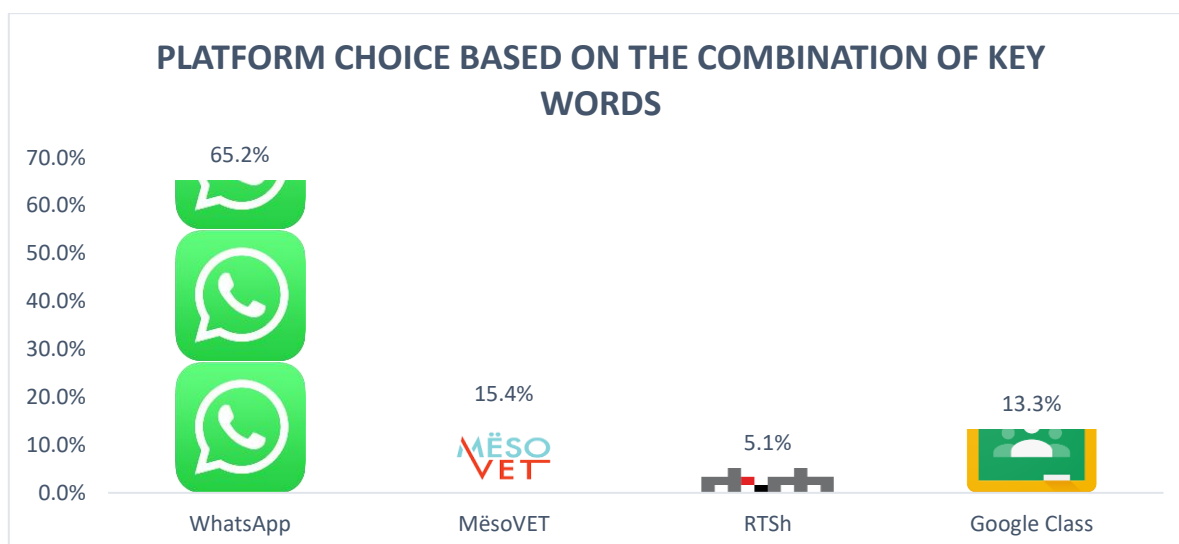


Fig. 22: Students' platform of choice based on the combination of key words

Table 3: Evaluation methods in use by teachers - as stated by students

EVALUATION METHODS USED BY TEACHERS	%	No
Project assignments	24.4%	535
Questions to class	23.7%	520
Quizzes	8.9%	196
Questions to class, project assignments	8.3%	181
Group work	8.2%	179
Quizzes, project assignments	4.6%	101
Quizzes, questions to class, project assignments	4.2%	91
Quizzes, questions to class, project assignments, group work	3.8%	83
Quizzes, questions to class	2.8%	61
Questions to class, project assignments, group work	2.3%	50
Project assignments, group work	1.7%	37
Questions to class, group work	1.7%	36
Quizzes, questions to class, group work	0.7%	14
Quizzes, group work	0.6%	12
Quizzes, project assignments, group work	0.5%	11
Without answer, in combination	3.7%	81