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## **SYSTEMIC AGENCY IN EDUCATION IN EXTRAORDINARY CIRCUMSTANCES: CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED BY LF NIŠ DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR DEVELOPING SYSTEMIC AGENCY IN LEGAL EDUCATION\*\***

**Abstract:** *Systemic Agency is the capacity of the system as a whole to respond to emerging issues by relying on the collective intelligence and joint action of all stakeholders involved in system processes. This paper explores the systemic agency of participants in legal education at the Law Faculty in Niš during the COVID-19 pandemic (2020-2022), when higher education fully resorted to online instruction. The first part of the paper outlines the conceptual framework of systemic agency. The second part briefly presents the initial institutional response and educational circumstances at the outset of the pandemic in Serbia. The third part examines the challenges encountered by LF Niš students and teachers, and observed benefits of e-learning, by analyzing the empirical research results of several surveys conducted at LF Niš in this period. Based on these insights, the author reviews the opportunities for improving the systemic agency of core stakeholders and the system as a whole for prospective e-learning purposes. Attempting to record the first teaching/learning experience at LF Niš fully conducted online, the author emphasizes the potentials of online/hybrid learning in legal education and promotes joint action in developing a more responsive, supportive and efficient systemic approach applicable in both regular and extraordinary circumstances.*

**Keywords:** *systemic agency, legal education, extraordinary circumstances, stakeholders' perspectives.*

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## 1. Introduction: The Conceptual framework of Systemic Agency

The *systems theory* is an interdisciplinary study of complex systems, their structure, components, processes, interactions, dynamics and impact factors (Chen, Stroup, 1993:448). It has generated the *systems approach*, aimed at analyzing the operation of a system<sup>1</sup> as a whole, multiple “systems of interest” and stakeholders’ perspectives, by applying different systems approach models<sup>2</sup> (Reynolds, Holwell, 2010:9). This approach is neither uniform nor prescriptive; it is a synergy of system-related processes: systemic thinking, philosophy, methodology, planning, design, management, interaction, intervention, integration and ultimate improvement, transformation or change in line with the stakeholders’ needs, interests and goals. As systems inevitably involve multiple stakeholders (founders, sponsors, policy/decision-makers, knowledge holders, administrators, practitioners, beneficiaries), the concept of *agency*<sup>3</sup> is the capacity of individuals and collective entities to exercise free will, make autonomous choices, take action to achieve a goal, produce an effect or introduce change (O’Leary, 2007:6; Harper, 2022). In education, *agency* is the capacity to identify values, goals and priorities, take purposeful and effective action to attain them, and take responsibility for one’s decisions, actions and growth (Education Hub, 2020). In theory, *agency* entails a correlation between three important dimensions: temporal, relational, and contextual; thus, it is viewed as a “temporally embedded process of social engagement, informed by the past (patterns of thought, structure, conduct, routine practices, identities and interactions), oriented towards the future (projection of future action), and contextualized in the present” (through practical-evaluative judgments on further action) in the given structural, material and cultural circumstances (Priestley, Biesta, Robinson, 2015:3-6).

In this context, *systemic agency* is “the capacity of a collective system to fulfill four functions: a) adaptation (to adapt to new situations and install effective processes); b) goal attainment (to set and strive for collective goals, goal-oriented strategies and actions, monitor and control goal attainment); c) social

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1 In etiology, *system* (Gr. σύστημα/*sústēma*; Lat. *systema*) is defined as a complex well-organized social structure involving a sum of system-related elements working together towards a common purpose (Harper, 2022).

2 In theory, *systems approaches* are classified into three types: a) *hard* (theoretical, formal, technical instruments); b) *soft* (system design, mapping, analysis, testing strategic options, interactive management), and c) *critical* (functional- interpretive analysis, methodologies, intervention) leading to systemic innovation or change (Reynolds, Holwell, 2010:9-11). In practice, they are often combined and integrated in generating viable solutions for complex issues.

3 *Agency* (Gr. *agein, agogos*; Lat. *agere, agentia*) means: active participation and effective performance; agility of an agent or agency providing services; set in motion, incite action; lead, guide, drive and move forward (Harper, 2022).

integration (to integrate different system dimensions via mutual trust, collaboration and supportive networks); and d) latency (transformative potential of developed knowledge, values and practice)” (Pfaff, Pförtner, Banaszak-Holl, Hu, Hower, 2022: 2). Thus, *systemic agency* may be defined as the capacity of multiple agents in the system to respond to complex, messy and ambiguous realities by relying on the collective wisdom, intelligence, expertise and joint action of all stakeholders involved in system processes.

The conceptual framework of systemic agency encompasses a range of intrinsic properties and processes: a) personal values, proactive mindset, agentic conduct: capacity and agility of stakeholders in specific contexts; self-determination (autonomy, will, decision-making), self-organization, self-regulation (awareness, conduct, control), self-efficacy; b) systemic thinking, research/inquiry into stakeholders’ perspectives; c) strategic planning and systemic design; knowledge/information management; infrastructure, resources; d) managing system complexity, perspectives, dynamics, challenges; e) active involvement, communication, collaboration in developmental/transformational processes, devising sustainable solution; integration, intervention, innovation; effective performance; f) self-assessment (reflection, quality control, corrective adjustment); systemic support to empower current/future action in the best interest of all stakeholders (Williams, Hof, 2016: 73-75). Its multidimensional structure is best illustrated in the Systemic Design Practice Wheel (Blomkamp, 2021)<sup>4</sup>, which presents a flexible participatory approach to addressing complex systems in the public sector for social innovation.

The agency framework includes different types and forms of agency, depending on the level of intervention (global, regional, local), the number of participants (collective<sup>5</sup>, multi-party, co-agency, individual/personal, proxy), the subject matter (professional, technical, relational), and stakeholders’ roles (e.g. school/institution/organisation; teacher, student, peer, parent, community agency) (OECD, 2019:4-8). In education, for example, it involves: a) the *collective agency* of competent public institutions (Ministry of Education and related authorities), *multi-party agency* of their departments, and *individual agency* of their representatives; b) the collective agency of the educational institution, multi-party

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4 See: Blomkamp, E.(2021). Systemic Design Practice Wheel; <https://emmablomkamp.com/practice>; it includes six principles (self-determination, purpose-driven action, complexity recognition, collaboration, equalizing power,adaptive learning) and four core elements: place (context, systems, interactions); people (self, team, organisation, community), processes (dialogue, preparation, navigation, completion) and practice (methods, tools) (Blomkamp, 2022:14-16).

5 *Collective agency* includes shared responsibility on a macro-scale (by society, competent authorities, departments, institutions, community), contributing to achievement of common goals and general welfare. (OECD, 2019:9).

agency of its management, departments, administrative, technical services and the teaching staff, students' organisations, professional associations, and individual agency of their representatives; c) individual *teacher agency*<sup>6</sup>; and e) individual *learner/student agency*<sup>7</sup>. (OECD, 2019:1, 8)

Relying on this conceptual framework, the author explores the complex, multifaceted and multidimensional systemic agency in legal education in the COVID-19 pandemic circumstances (2020-2022), by assessing the activities of relevant stakeholders (competent ministry, educational institution, teachers and students) involved in the continuous (two-year) online instruction at the Law Faculty, University of Niš (hereinafter: LF Niš). In this context, the paper presents and analyzes the results of five surveys conducted at the LF Niš which examined different aspects of online instruction from March 2020 to May 2022. The paper aims to gain insight into participants' perspectives, observe different problems encountered in the process, identify the benefits and opportunities, and propose some solutions for improving the systemic agency of individual agents and the system as a whole for prospective e-learning purposes.

## **2. The circumstances and institutional response at the outbreak of COVID-19 in Serbia**

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Serbian authorities declared the state of emergency in mid-March 2020.<sup>8</sup> The Ministry of Health (MH) instituted restrictive measures: lockdowns, curfew hours, travel bans, restrictions on freedom of movement and social contacts, protection measures (quarantine, distancing, mask-wearing, disinfection) (MH, 2020).<sup>9</sup> The Ministry of Education (ME) suspended traditional classes and instructed secondary and tertiary educational institutions to organize online instruction and ensure the operation of administrative and technical services. The Conference of the Universities of Serbia recommended that online instruction should be organized via available

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6 *Teacher agency* is the capacity to design environments that support learning, act purposefully and effectively, contribute to student/institutional growth, and direct their own professional development. (OECD, 2019:8).

7 *Student agency* is the capacity to make responsible choices, actively participate in shaping one's learning, develop autonomy and a growth mindset, i.e. to have a voice, choice and ownership of one's learning (OECD, 2019:2,5).

8 The Decision on declaring the State of Emergency was issued on 15. March 2020 by the President RS, President of the National Assembly and the Prime Minister (Odluka o proglašenju vanrednog stanja, *Sl.glasnik RS*, br. 29/2020).

9 The Ministry of Health declared the COVID-19 epidemic on 19 March 2020 and instituted restrictive measures (Ministarstvo zdravlja RS: Naredba o proglašenju epidemije zarazne bolesti COVID-19, *Sl.glasnik RS*, br. 37/2020).

Learning Management Systems/LMS (Google Classroom, Moodle) or Video Conferencing/VC platforms (Google Meet, Microsoft Teams, Skype), or via email, depending on available technical infrastructure and capacities (ME, 2020).<sup>10</sup>

At the LF Niš, online instruction was initially organized via Google Classroom.<sup>11</sup> LF teachers were provided tech support on using the platform from their home computers/laptops, instructed to create G-classrooms for each course, and given a week to flip the existing teaching material into online format, to design materials (in Word, PDF, PPT, audio/video format) and post them on a class-to-class basis. Teachers could use free VC tools (G-Meet, Microsoft Teams, Skype) and social communication apps (Viber, Facebook). Students were instructed to register in the G-classroom, regularly access and do the posted activities from home (LF Nis, 2020). It was the first time in the LF Niš history that the entire teaching/learning process was fully flipped online. This *ad hoc* approach was quite a challenge for the LF management, teachers and students alike. As the pandemic slightly subsided<sup>12</sup>, colloquia and exams were organized in smaller groups on the LF premises. The summer break was a chance to reflect, regroup and address the observed issues. In the next two years, restrictive measures were instituted on and off for safety reasons, but higher education remained online from March 2020 to May 2022.

In this context, relying on the major premise of the systems approach,<sup>13</sup> the paper explores the perceptions of key participants in online instruction at the LF Niš in the 2020-2022 period on stakeholders' agency in the extraordinary circumstances caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The paper provides insights into five surveys: 1) the SP/SA Students' Survey (2020); 2) the LF Students' Evaluation (2020-2022); 3) Tech Surveys in ELP/LE courses (2020-2022); 4) ELP/LE Course Evaluation Questionnaires (2020-2022), and 5) the LF Teachers' Survey (2022).

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10 Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development (2020): Ministarstvo prosvete, nauke i tehnološkog razvoja, *Dopis Konferencije univerziteta Srbije*, Beograd, 16.3.2020 (forwarded by email, 17.3. 2020).

11 The traditional instruction was suspended on 16.3. 2020 and online instruction was scheduled to start on 23.2.2020 (Pravni fakultet Niš (2020): *Izvodjenje nastave na daljinu*, Pravni fakultet, Univerzitet u Nišu, 17.3.2020).

12 The state of emergency was lifted by the Decision of the National Assembly RS on 6 May 2020. (Narodna skupština RS, Odluka o ukidanju vanrednog stanja, *Službeni glasnik RS*", br. 65/2020).

13 Ch.W. Churchman (1968): "A systems approach begins when first you see the world through the eyes of another" (cited in Reynolds, Holwell, 2010:8).

### 3. Surveys on online instruction at the LF Nis, conducted in the period 2020-2022

#### 3.1. The LF Niš SP&SA Students' Survey (March-April 2020)

In May 2020, the Students' Parliament and the Students' Association (SP&SA) at LF Niš submitted a report on the Student' Survey on the quality of online instruction in the period from 23 March to 30 April 2020.<sup>14</sup> The respondents (N=384 LF students) were asked to evaluate the quality of online instruction at the outset of the pandemic and propose measures for reducing the negative effects in the forthcoming period. The results are summarily presented in *Table 1*.

*Table 1. SP&SA Students' Survey on online instruction at LF Niš (23 March-30 April 2020)*

LF	SP/SA survey on online classes (2020)	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Partially	Not satisfied	No response
	Total: N= 384 students	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)
1	<b>Regular online instruction</b>		344 (89.5%)		44 (10.5%)	
2	<b>Student satisfaction</b>	88 (22.9%)	199 (51.8%)		97 (25.3%)	
3	<b>Availability of teaching material</b>		249 (62.9%)	20 (5.1%)	89 (2.5%)	26 (9.6%)
4	<b>Teacher availability (for communication/consultation)</b>		322 (83.9%)		62 (16.1%)	
5	<b>Online exams, colloquia</b>		240 (62.5%)		86 (22.4%)	58 (15.1%)
6	<b>Additional review classes</b>		128 (33.3%)		256 (66.7%)	
7	<b>Teacher's engagement</b> on the scale 1 (poor) to 10 (excellent)		Average: 6.4	equivalent to 3.2 on the 1-5 scale		

*Source:* SP&SA LF Niš (2020). SP&SA Report: Analysis of Students Survey on online classes at LF Niš (23 March-30 April 2020), LF Niš Academic Council material, 5.5.2020, (summary prepared by the author, 2022)

*Table 1* shows that students were largely satisfied with the regular online instruction (89.5%) and the quality of online instruction (74.74% in total). They were quite satisfied with the materials availability (62.9%), commending the LF Niš for providing the flexible solution to buy books online and have them delivered by post. They were largely satisfied with teachers' availability for communication/consultation (83.9%), and felt there was no need for additional review classes (66.7%). They noted that no teacher organized a formal exam or online colloquium/test in that period, which seems to have been a good decision for 62.5% of students. The choice was likely due to the limited G-classroom capacity to ensure a reliable (cheat-free) summative assessment. They commended the teachers who used interactive methods, posted material/explanations, audio/video files or recorded lectures in G-classes, forwarded links and materials via email, assigned practical tasks/activities, progress tests/quizzes, and topics for essays/seminar papers envisaged as part of pre-exam activities. On the 1-10 scale, LF teachers were given an average grade of 6.4 (equivalent to 3.2 grade on

14 LF Niš (2020): SP &SA at LF Niš: Analysis of online instruction and proposed measures to reduce the negative consequences in HE at LF Nis, 5.5.2020 (LF Nis Academic Council material, forwarded by email, 23. 10. 2020).

the 1-5 scale).<sup>15</sup> In their narrative accounts, students largely supported online instruction but expressed clear preference for traditional classes. Their proposals for the forthcoming period indicate a range of concern:

- a. *health issues*: safety, observance of health measures in case of return to traditional classes;
- b. *economic and existential issues*: measures to alleviate the economic consequences of family loss of income or job; delay tuition payment or allow payment in installments;
- c. *educational issues*: record pre-exam points (G-class attendance, activity, assignments, papers); organize colloquia/tests on weekends; make a flexible plan for missed exam terms; ease the final exam workload by 20-30%, enable taking the final exam in several parts; extend the deadlines for master/doctoral paper submission, internships, etc. (SP&SA Survey, 2020).

### 3.2. LF Nis Self-Assessment Report (2020-2022)

*Table 2.* LF Niš Self-Assessment Report (2022): Students' Evaluation of the teaching process and staff (2019-2022)

	LF Niš: Students' Evaluation of the Teaching Process (online) per semester (2020-2022)	N=evaluated teachers	N=respondents	Quality of teaching: average (1-5 scale)	Quality of teaching staff: average (1-5)	TOTAL average
1	Autumn term 2019/2020 (traditional, offline)	27	371	4.15	4.40	4.27
2	Spring term 2019/2020 (March-June 2020)-online	28	194/ 247	<b>4.41</b>	<b>4.63</b>	<b>4.52</b>
3	Autumn term (Oct. 2020- Jan. 2021) - online	25	141/ 93	4.12	4.03	4.07
4	Spring term 2020/2021 (Feb.-May 2021) - online	26	174/ 206	4.43	4.73	4.58
5	Autumn semester (Oct. 2021-Jan. 2022) - online	27	147/ 219	4.52	4.71	4.61
6	Spring term 2021/2022 (Feb.-May 2022)-hybrid	22	41/ 62	4.89	4.93	<b>4.91</b>
	<b>Total</b>			<b>4.47</b>	<b>4.60</b>	<b>4.53</b>

Source: LF Nis Self-Assessment Report (2022), and LF Niš Quality Assessment Report, 1.12.2022 (prepared by the author, 2022)

The presented data illustrate fairly consistent average grades across autumn/spring terms. In the period March 2020-May 2020, the total averages indicate a slight increase in students' satisfaction in the first term (4.52) when compared to the average recorded in the SP&SA Survey (3.46), and a steady increase over the next four terms (4.52 to 4.91 on average). On the whole, the total average on the quality of online instruction in the entire period was 4.53. In the spring term (February-May) 2022, classes were organized in a hybrid format (synchronous online and traditional in-class environment), when students' satisfaction was 4.91 on average (LF Self-Assessment Report, 2022: 44-45). It may only be assumed that some students highly valued the chance to attend traditional classes,

15 As for the quality of instruction, it was 3.73; the total average (instruction and staff) was 3.46.

16 LF Niš (2022): LF Nis Self-Assessment Report, August 2022; and LF Niš Quality Assessment Report for 2021/2022, LF Niš, 1.12.2022 (LF Nis Academic Council material, forwarded by mail, 2.12.2022).

while others acknowledged the flexible opportunity to remain online, reduce family costs, and cope with health and existential issues by working from home.

The LF Self-Assessment Report (2022) offers some insight into the LF Niš collective agency: providing digital infrastructure (fast-speed Internet, computers/laptops, licenced software), technical support and teacher training for e-learning. It identifies major challenges (financial resources; insufficient student participation) and future opportunities(technology-based instruction; use of information-communication technologies in advancing scientific knowledge, professional development and lawyer skills) (LF SA Report, 2022:47-48, 85, 112).

The SP&SA Survey (2020) and the LF Self-Evaluation Report (2022) provide evidence on collective agency of LF Nis students' organizations and management in assessing students' views on the quality of online instruction throughout this period, but these marco-scale reports do not offer sufficient insight into the challenges encountered in the process and how they were addressed. To assess student and teacher agency on a micro scale, we may examine the results of student surveys conducted in three undergraduate English language courses: 1<sup>st</sup>-year *English for Legal Purposes* (ELP) and two elective *Legal English* courses (3<sup>rd</sup>-year LE1 and 4<sup>th</sup>-year LE2).

### 3.3. Students' Evaluation of ELP/LE online courses (2020-2022)

Once the teaching process was flipped online, there was a need to understand students' current situation and ensure adequate assistance in e-learning. For these purposes, the ELP/LE teacher devised Tech Surveys and Course Evaluation Questionnaires, which were distributed via G-Classroom; the results for each course were collected and processed in Google forms.

Table 3. Summary results of Student Tech Surveys in ELP/LE online courses (March 2020)

ELP, LE1, LE2 2020		21.3.-31.3.2020				ELP (42 responses)				LE1/LE2 (18)		Total: N=60				
1. Have you ever taken part in an online learning course?	ELP (n=42)	Yes	7	16.66%	No	35	83.34%			Y=10 / 16.66 %						
	LE1 (n=10)	Yes	2	20%	No	8	80%	Y=3 (16.66%)		N=50 / 83.34 %						
	LE2 (n=8)	Yes	1	12.5%	No	7	87.5%	N=15 (83.34%)								
2. What's your attitude towards online learning?		ELP (N=42)	LE1 (N=10)		LE2 (N=8)		Total (N=60) %		ELP/LE Average:							
a) I love learning online.		4	9.52%		/ / / /		4 6.68%									
b) This is a new learning experience I want to try.		26	63.61%		6 60%		7 87.5%		39 65%				71.68%			
c) This is a good option in the given circumstances.		8	19.51%		3 30%		1 12.5%		12 20%				+ 20% (91.68 %)			
d) I dislike it but have to meet exam requirements.		2	4.87%		1 10%		/ / 3 5%									
e) I hate learning online.		1	2.43 %		/ / / /		1 1.66%						6.66%			
f) No response		1	2.43%				1 1.66%						1.66%			
3. Evaluate your technical skills.		course	1-poor		2		3 good/ average		4 very good		5 excellent		Total: 4,5		Total: 3,4,5	
		ELP (N=42)	/		3 (7.15%)		9 (21.42%)		19 (45.23%)		11 (26.2%)		30 (71.42%)		39 (92.85%)	
		LE1+LE2 (N=18)	/		1 (5.55%)		3 (16.66%)		8 (44.45%)		6 (33.34%)		14 (77.79%)		17 (94.45%)	
Average:		(N=60)	/		4 (6.66%)		12 (20%)		27 (45%)		17 (28.33%)		44 (73.33%)		56 (93,33%)	

Source: Tech Surveys in ELP/LE online courses (21.3.-31.3.2020); summary prepared by the author

17 ELP/LE1/LE2 Tech Surveys were devised and distributed in March 2020, February 2021, and February 2022.



The summary results in *Table 3* show that most respondents (N=50; 83.34%) had no prior experience in e-learning while 16.66% (N=10) had some exposure. On average, **71.68%** had a positive attitude to e-learning, which was perceived as a new and challenging form of learning worth trying for current/prospective study purposes, while additional 20% perceived it as a safe, flexible and practical option in the pandemic circumstances (*91.68% in total*); very few students (6.66% in total) had a negative attitude. A total of **73.33%** of students reported having excellent and very good technical skills but, in their narrative accounts, students noted several problems:

- *teaching/learning process*: first-time e-learning experience; preference of traditional classes, concerns about effectiveness, ability to adapt, learn online, respond to tasks, prepare for tests/exam; safe learning environment; understanding, cooperation; enjoyable experience, good ultimate results;
- *learner/learning issues, material, assessment*: need for clarification/guidance, lack of live communication; technical/learning skills; material availability, assessment/grading; exam workload;
- *technical issues*: unstable Internet; lack of tech devices/equipment; need for detailed instructions on handling technology, frustration about assignment submission; video calls/oral communication; tech support by administrators as needed, etc. (ELP/LE Tech Survey, 2020).

This ELP/LE Tech Survey (2020) was a starting point for analysis and development of different aspects of online instruction. In 2021 and 2022, the ELP/LE teacher devised more elaborate Tech Surveys to gain insight into students' technical resources, digital competences and ability to handle digital tools. They included a range of indicators: a) *available technology*: Internet access/speed; technical devices: capacity/speed/performance; b) *digital competences*: digital literacy/basic computer skills; VC skills (Zoom/Skype); online search, data management; recording/editing audio/video files; educational games; collaborative projects; digital ethics; overall digital competences; c) *challenges* in G-Classroom, Zoom/Skype; and d) *suggestions* for improving the quality of online instruction. The summary results are presented in *Table 4*.

Table 4. ELP/LE Tech Surveys (2021,2022): Summary Results Tech Surveys in ELP/LE1/LE2 courses (2021, 2022)

ELP/LE1/LE2 Tech Survey (2021, 2022)		ELP 2021		N=34		14.2-5.3.2021		AVERAGE		Tech Survey (2021, 2022)	
Questions		ELP 2022		N=53		17.2-23.2022		Total: N= 104		ELP	
		LE1/LE2 (8) 2021		LE1/LE2 (9) 2022		14.2.2021; 18.2.2022				LE1+LE2	
1	Do you have regular Internet access? How fast is your Internet connection?	Y=103	99.02%	N=1	0.98%	Fast=54	51.92%	M=48	46.15%	Slow=4	1.93%
2	Which device do you use for online learning purposes? Do you share the device (s) ?	De=36	34.61%	La=7	64.42%	Tab=6	0.57%	Mob=76	73.07%		
		Y=7	6.73%	Occ=31	29.80%	N=66	63.41%				
		Scale 1(poor)-5 (excellent)									
3	On the scale 1-5, evaluate your device (s) [speed]	/	/	7	6.73%	30	28.84%	37	35.57%	30	28.84%
	device (s) [technical capacity]	/	/	1	0.96%	7	6.73%	27	25.96%	40	38.46%
	device (s) [overall performance]	2	1.92%	8	7.69%	24	23.07%	38	36.53%	32	30.76%
		Total: 0.85%		7%		35.8%		36.8%		29.5% = (66.3%)	
4	Evaluate your digital competences: [computer skills (Word, ppt, excel)]	/	/	5	4.8%	23	22.11%	45	43.26%	34	33.69%
	[video conferencing (Zoom, G-Meet, Skype)]	/	/	5	4.8%	24	23.07%	39	37.5%	37	35.57%
	digital competence [technical skills (online search, data management)]	/	/	4	3.84%	22	21.13%	27	25.96%	51	49.03%
	digital competence [technical skills (creating content online/offline)]	5	4.8%	13	12.5%	40	38.46%	34	32.69%	13	12.5%
	digital competence [recording and editing audio/video clips]	13	12.5%	27	25.96%	42	40.38%	6	5.8%	7	6.73%
	digital competence [playing (educational) games online]	1	0.96%	3	2.8%	29	27.83%	26	25%	41	39.42%
	digital competence [using collaboration tools/project work]	6	5.76%	16	15.38%	31	29.8%	33	31.73%	18	17.3%
	digital competence [technical skills (digital ethics (conduct online))]	1	0.96%	12	11.53%	31	29.8%	34	32.69%	27	25.96%
	digital competence [overall digital literacy and competences]	/	/	10	9.61%	37	35.57%	42	40.38%	17	16.34%
		Total: 2.7%		10.14%		29.8%		33.3%		26.17% = (59.5%)	
5	Evaluate to what extent you can handle [Google Classroom]	1	0.96%	2	1.92%	12	11.53%	34	32.69%	55	52.88%
	On the scale 1-5, evaluate to what extent you can handle [Zoom]	/	/	1	0.96%	16	15.38%	24	23.07%	63	60.57%
	Evaluate to what extent you can handle [Google Meet; Skype] LE1/LE2	6	5.76%	10	9.61%	24	23.07%	32	30.76%	30	28.84%
		Total: 0.48%		1.44%		13.45%		27.88%		56.72% = (84.6%)	

Source: ELP/LE1/LE2 Tech Surveys in ELP/LE1/LE2 courses (May 2021, May 2022), processed by the author

In terms of *technology*, the total average results show that almost all respondents (N=104; 99.02%) had a regular Internet access, but they were partially satisfied with Internet speed (fast-51.92%; medium-46.15%). Considering *technical devices*, the results shows that most students used mobile phones (73.07%) and laptops (64.42%) or desktop computers (34.61%). Considering their *technical capacity/performance*, most students reported having devices of very good and excellent capacities/performance (67.3%) and speed (64.41%), 66.3% in total, and being the sole device users (63.41%). However, the remaining 30-35% were disadvantaged by the lack of adequate devices, and 36.5% had to share the devices (constantly or occasionally) with other family members. Considering G-Classroom and VC platforms (Zoom/G-Meet/Skype), most students evaluated their ability to use them as very good/excellent (G-class 85.57%; Zoom 83.64%), **84.6%** in total. The LE1/LE2 students who used Skype/G-Meet for instruction/consultations were less satisfied (59.6%). In their narrative accounts, students noted ample *technical problems*: unstable/weak Internet/Wi-Fi connection, signal loss; unreliable devices, poor microphone and camera performances; disruptions in accessing Zoom/Skype; poor audio/video quality, lagging audio sound, background noise and microphonics, share-screening issues; device “bugging”; problems with assignment submission, document loading, inadequate G-classroom instructions, etc. (ELP/LE1/LE2 Tech Surveys 2021, 2022). These results indicate that these technical issues should be taken into account when designing e-learning policy and practice. Most technical issues may be resolved by institutions (ME, LF Nis. tech staff), which should be actively involved in assessing students’ technical resources, invest in digital infrastructure (high-speed Internet via academic network, devices, e-learning platforms), promote digital competences through training, ensure equal opportunities for all, provide regular tech support and prepare “digest” (step-by-step) instructions and troubleshooting checklists in advance.

As for the respondents' *digital competences*, the results are quite diverse. The largest number of students reported having very good/excellent computer skills (75.95% in total), conferencing skills (73,03%), online search/data management skills (74.99%), and educational gaming skills (64,42%). The results for other indicators in the very good/excellent grade range are lower: creating content (45.19% in total) recording/editing audio/video files (22.11%), collaborative project work (49.3%), digital ethics (58.65%), and digital skills (56.72%). The total average on students' digital competences in the very good/excellent grade range (59.5%) and the average and lower scores on productive skills<sup>18</sup> show the areas to be addressed. When observing the results per semester, we may notice a slight but steady increase (a shift towards higher scores) in most digital competences in 2022. (ELP/LE1/LE2 Tech Surveys 2021, 2022). It clearly illustrates the experiential learning process: learning by doing, gradual adjustment to e-learning, and steady development of digital skills. Yet, in order to promote teacher/students' digital competences, there is a need for stand-by tech staff support and ongoing hands-on training on underdeveloped skills, which should be provided on a regular (long-term) basis at the institutional level, either as credit-bearing elective computer-skill classes or extracurricular activities which may be recorded in students' diploma supplements or teachers' professional development files.

### *3.3.2. Students' Course Evaluation Questionnaires in ELP/LE courses (2020-2022)*

Course Evaluation Questionnaires are a regular end-term element of all ELP/LE courses. In the context of e-learning, indicators included: relevance of course contents, material, activities; G-class posts/videos/quizzes; course organization; classroom management; clarity/efficiency of instruction, Zoom/Skype communication; learning atmosphere; course/tests difficulty; teacher's availability for communication/consultations; and students' overall satisfaction with course/learning. For the purposes of this paper, *Table 5* presents the total average results of students' perception on ELP/LE instruction per term in the period March 2020-May 2022.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> In individual indicators, most of these productive skills are assessed as average (30-40% on average).

<sup>19</sup> Students' Course Evaluation Questionnaires in ELP/LE courses (2020-2022), June 2020, May 2021, May 2022.

Table 5. Summary results of Students' Course Evaluation of ELP/LE1/LE2 online courses (2020-2022)

LF Nis	Student Evaluation of online courses ELP, LE1/LE2-spring 2020, 2021, 2022	Course	G-class Total	N= resp.	%	Scale					% (5) per year	
						Date	1	2	3	4		5
1.	Spring 2019/2020 (March-June 2020)	ELP	50	15	30%	10-11.6.2020	/	1.2%	3%	21.8%	74%	78.1%
		LE1/LE2	15	11	73.3%	22.6.2020	/	/	/	17.8%	82.2%	
2.	Spring 2020/2021 (Feb.-May 2021)	ELP	50	18	36%	26-30.5.2021	1.5%	1%	7.1%	22.3%	68.2%	77.75%
		LE1/LE2	9	7	77.7%	24-25.5.2021				12.7%	87.3%	
3.	Spring 2021/2022 (Feb.-May 2022)-hybrid	ELP	60	21	35%	25-30.5.2021	/	/	1.72%	10.38%	87.9%	87.8%
		LE1/LE2	10	8	80%	24-25.5.2021	/	/	3.65%	8.65%	87.7%	
<b>Total Average:</b>			194	80	55.3%		0.25%	0.36%	2.57%	15.6%	81.21%	81.21%

Source: ELP/LE1/LE2 Course Evaluation Questionnaires on online instruction in 2020, 2021, 2022 (Google form), prepared by author

Table 5 shows that most students were highly satisfied with ELP/LE online instruction, but we may note that the percentages in column 5 differ in first-year ELP courses (including large student groups) and third/fourth-year elective LE1/LE2 courses (including small groups). The percentages in all LE1/LE2 groups are fairly consistent throughout the two-year period (82.2% to 87.7%), which clearly indicates that e-learning in smaller groups offers more opportunity for personalized and differentiated learning, troubleshooting technology-based frustration, addressing individual concerns or negative attitudes, and ensuring meaningful interaction among highly motivated students. In contrast, the percentages in the first-year ELP courses vary (from 68.2% to 87.9%) due to many challenges in managing large groups, facing different technical, social adaptation and learning issues in a new online context. Beside the technical issues recorded in the Tech Surveys, student's narrative accounts included *learner/learning issues*: preference of in-class dynamics; lack of live interaction, concentration, motivation; external distractions when working at home; multi-tasking (devices, tools, resources); adjustment to online communication rules, demoting competitive (first-come-first-served) mode, insufficient time for discussions; fatigue (being busy all the time, over an extended period) (ELP/LE1/LE2 Course Evaluation 2020, 2021, 2022). In spite of the best efforts, some issues cannot be fully controlled. Prior unstructured/underdeveloped learning system, learning habits and anxiety contribute to discontent which cannot be fixed in a short (two-hour) contact period. Managing the complexity of such instruction requires constant communication, collaboration and joint action of all participants, acting in good faith towards the same goals. These processes take time and a change of mindset. Notably, as shown in Table 5, after the initial hardship with technology and 'learning by doing', ELP students gradually adapted to the new environment, reported having fewer technology and other issues, and focused on learning. These results illustrate a high level of teacher and student agency, satisfaction with the teaching/learning process and results, and resilience of a system which rests on mutual respect, communication, collaboration and support.

### 3.4. LF Nis Teacher Survey (2022) on online instruction during the pandemic (2020-2022)

In order to provide a comprehensive insight into e-learning at LF Nis in the 2020-2022 period, we should include the perspectives of LF teaching staff. For this purpose, the author devised an elaborate LF Teachers' Survey (2022),<sup>20</sup> which examined several important issues: 1) *attitude to online instruction* and experience; 2) *digital competences* (digital literacy/ knowledge/skills/ethics); 3) *institutional support* (ME, LF, tech staff); 4) available *technology*: LMS (Google Classroom), VC platform (Zoom), other digital tools; 5) *online teaching experience* (learning atmosphere; student attendance/activity; teacher-student/student-student communication; formative/summative assessment; student/teacher satisfaction); 6) *students' problems in online instruction* (technical, social, learning, affective issues); 7) the *current situation* in digital transformation; and 8) needed *support* to improve the quality of online instruction. In the open-ended prompts, teachers could note their likes/dislike, encountered problems and solutions, observed students' likes and problems, and suggestions for improving student attendance/activity and overall quality of online instruction. For clarity, the problems and possible solutions are discussed after presenting the results of each part of the survey. The findings are valuable for assessing teachers' agency, their perceptions on students' agency, the collective agency of institutions (ME, LF Nis), observed benefits and future opportunities.

Table 6 presents the results on LF teachers' *online teaching experience* before/ during the pandemic, *attitude to online learning*, and *digital competences*.

**Table 6.** LF Nis Teachers' Survey (2022): Summary results on *online teaching experience* and *digital competences* (2020-2022)

1	Teacher Evaluation of Online Instruction 2020-2022	13.11-4.12.2022	Total N= 22	LF (46)	F= 12 (54.5%)	M= 10 (45.5%)	FP= 11 (50%)	AP= 6 (27.3%)	Doc= 2 (9.1%)	TA+ L= 3 (13.6%)
2	Teaching experience	20-35 years= 6 (27.3%)	25-30 years= 3 (13.6%)	20-25 years= 2 (9.1%)	15-20 years= 4 (18.2%)	10-15 years= 5 (22.7%)	5-10 years= 1	0.5 years= 2 (9.1%)		
3	What type(s) of teaching/learning is (are) the strategic orientation of LF Nis?	Traditional (TF)	Hybrid (TF+ Online)	Online only (on LMS+LTD studies)	Practice-oriented (legal clinics, internship)	Other:				
		1 (4.5%)	21 (95.5%)	2 (9.1%)	11 (50%)					
4	What is your experience in online teaching, holding presentations, workshops, webinars online? a) before COVID-19 pandemic b) during COVID-19 pandemic	NO experience	Yes, online teaching lectures, presentations, workshops for students	Yes, online presentations/workshops in conferences + webinars for prof. development of legal professionals	Attended online courses/conferences but did not teach online classes					
			2 (9.09%)	5 (22.72%)= 5 (22.72%)	3 (13.63%)					
				15 (68.18%)= 9 (40.9%)	2 (9.09%)					
5	When (which semesters) did you teach online at LF Nis?	March - Jun/July 2020 (online)	October 2020 - January 2021 (online)	February - May 2021 (online)	October 2021 - January 2022 (online)	February - May 2022 (hybrid)				
		9	11	11	12	11				
		40.9%	50%	50%	54.5%	50%				
6	Evaluate your digital competences (dig. literacy, knowledge, skills, ethics)	1-poor	2-weak/below average	3-good/average	4-very good/above average	5-excellent				
	a) March 2020	1 (4.54%)	6 (27.27%)	14 (63.63%)	1 (4.54%)					
	b) May 2022	/	/	3 (13.63%)	14 (63.63%)	5 (22.72%)				
7	Evaluate your current level of digital competence	a) Digital literacy (basic comm. email, text processing)	b) practical dig. knowledge	c) digital skills/post/create content using dig. tools	d) digital ethics online conduct, use of contents	e) raise awareness in class about dig. competences	f) promote practice dig. competences in class			
		/	/	/	/	/				
		1 (4.54%)	4 (18.18%)	6 (27.27%)	12 (54.55%)	9 (40.9%)				
		1 (4.54%)	1 (4.54%)	4 (18.18%)	7 (31.81%)	13 (59.1%)				
		1 (4.54%)	1 (4.54%)	6 (27.27%)	10 (45.45%)	5 (22.72%)				
		3 (13.63%)	7 (31.81%)	31 (20.45%)	60 (46.98%)	33 (25%)				
		Total average:	3 (13.63%)	7 (31.81%)	31 (20.45%)	60 (46.98%)	33 (25%)			

Source: LF Nis Teachers' Survey on online instruction 2022-2022 (Google form, 13.11-4.12.2022), processed by the author

20 LF Nis Teacher Survey (2022) examining teachers' attitudes on online instruction during the COVID-19 pandemic (2020-2022) was prepared in a Google form and conducted from 13.11.2022 to 4.12.2022.

From the total number of teaching staff (N=46) currently employed at LF Niš, the LF Teachers' Survey (2022) was submitted by 22 respondents (N=22; 47.82%).<sup>21</sup> Before the pandemic, most teachers (N=12; 54.5%) had no prior online teaching experience, while 22.72% (N=5) had experience in conference presentations and webinars for legal practitioners. During the pandemic, they reported having online teaching experience with students (N=15; 68.18%), conference presentations (N=15; 68.18%), and webinars (N=9; 40.09%). These findings show teachers' agency in the educational process, scientific research and professional projects throughout the period. As for teachers' *attitudes to online instruction*, a vast majority (N=21; 95.5%) viewed hybrid instruction (a blend of traditional and e-learning) and practice-oriented instruction (N=11; 50%) as the LF Nis strategic orientation; two teachers (9.1%) considered that e-learning may be a good solution for master/doctoral studies, while one respondent (4.5%) was explicitly in favour of traditional instruction (Teachers' Survey, 2022).

The second part of *Table 6* presents the findings on the *teachers' digital competences* as a prerequisite for efficient agency in online instruction. At the outset of the pandemic (March 2020), 63.63% of respondents (N=14) reported having average digital competences while 27.27% noted they were below average. Two years later (May 2022), the teachers' digital competences seem to have improved as 63.63% (N=14) viewed their digital competences as very good, 22.72% (N=5) as excellent (**86.35%** in total), and 13.63% (N=3) as good/average. The findings show a significant rise on the experiential learning curve, which is at least a level higher than in the former period. In the teachers' self-assessment of *current individual digital competences* (in November 2022), the average sum of individual competences shows that a total of 71.96% of respondents evaluated their competences as very good and excellent, 20.45% as good/average, and 7.57% as below average and poor. Comparing the overall totals in May 2022 (86.35%) and in November 2022 (71.96%), we may note that the average totals are 7-15% lower per indicator, which may be explained by a lack of practice due to the return to in-class instruction. Individual indicators show significant progress in some digital skills and the need for further training in others.<sup>22</sup> In

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21 The research sample included 12 female (54.5%) and 10 male (45.5%) respondents, teaching staff of different academic ranks: 11 full professors (50%), 6 associate professors (27.3%), 2 assistant professors (9.1%), 2 teaching assistants and 1 lecturer (13.6%), a fairly balanced distribution of teaching experience: over 30 years (6=27.3%), 20-30 years (5=22.7%), 10-20 years (9=40.9%), 1-10 years (2=9.1%), as well as an even distribution of teaching staff per term of online instruction (N=11-12; 50-54.5% per term). (Teachers' Survey, 2022).

22 Considerable progress was recorded in digital literacy (81.22%), digital knowledge (72.73%); digital ethics (90.91%); promoting (72.72%) and practicing (63.63%) digital

their narrative accounts, teachers expressed the need for continuous training/workshops on using specific digital tools (68.2%) in order to ensure efficient use of digital technology (50%) (Teachers' Survey, 2022).

The next part of the survey examined the teachers' perceptions on *institutional support* for online instruction, provided by the competent Ministry of Education (ME), Law Faculty (LF) management, and LF Computer Centre tech staff, as important stakeholders in developing e-learning policy, providing digital infrastructure and resources, strategic planning, organization, management and delivery of effective online instruction. *Table 7* presents the evaluation results of their collective agency at the outset and during the COVID-19 pandemic (2020-2022). This part of the survey yielded the following total average results: ME agency (25.55%), LF Niš agency (55%), and LF tech support (86.36%) (Teacher Survey, 2022).

**Table 7.** LF Nis Teachers' Survey (2022): Institutional support for online instruction (2020-2022)

8-9	Institutional support in ensuring relevant conditions for online instruction before and during the COVID-19 pandemic a) by Ministries (ME,MEH) b) by Law Faculty (LF)	a) ME		b) LF	
		Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage
	Educational strategy, action plan for online learning	6	27.3%	9	40.9%
	Digital infrastructure (computers, laptops, fast Internet, tech support via UNI)	7	31.8%	20=1	95.44%
	Free fast-speed Internet connection, available to all Tr/Sts	6	27.3%	18	81.8%
	Licensed online platform for online learning (Zoom, Google Meet, etc)	8	36.4%	16=1	77.24%
	Online teacher edu courses for creating online learning environment	3	13.6%	12	54.5%
	Written instructions, recommendations for organizing online learning	11	50%	16	72.7%
	Supervision and control of online instruction, content, performance	1	4.54%	5	22.7%
	Other: I don't know/ Not sure/No use of ME	3	13.6%	2	9.08%
	Practical guidelines and examples for creating online classes/instruction	Total a) 25.55%		10	45.5%
	Continuous technical support	Total b)		17	77.3%
				17	86.36%
10	Technical support by LF Computer Center: What kind of tech support was provided by LF CC as preparation for online instruction and during online classes?	18	81.8%	19	86.4%
	Computers and other tech devices for online classes	20	90.9%	18	81.8%
	Workshops on using G-classroom, Zoom	21	95.5%	1	4.54%
	Clear written/oral instructions on using Zoom, G-Class	18	81.8%	Total: 86.36%	
	Clear written/oral instructions on creating, posting materials in G-Class				

Source: LF Nis Teachers' Survey on online instruction 2022-2022 (Google form, 13.11-4.12.2022), processed by the author.

In assessing the *collective ME agency*, the respondents assessed it as insufficient (25.55% in total), as it largely involved forwarding instructions and recommendations on online instruction (50%); other indicators were even lower: licenced LMS platforms and VC tools (36.4%); digital infrastructure (31.8%); fast-speed Internet via the academic network (27.3%); educational strategy and action plan (27.3%); training courses (13.6%); supervision (4.5%). The results clearly suggest that ME should take action to provide a systemic approach to e-learning in both ordinary and extraordinary circumstances.

The *LF Nis agency* was evaluated as good (50%) on average. Some indicators were assessed as excellent (digital infrastructure 95.44%; fast-speed Internet 81.8%) and very good (tech support 77.3%; LMS/VC platforms 77.24%; written instructions/guidelines 72.7%), while others were perceived as average (training courses 54.5%; practical guidelines/examples for creating/organizing

competences in class, while the use of digital tools for content creation was slightly lower (50%). Yet, the individual scores in the good/average column (ranging from 18.18% to 27.27%) show that there is plenty of room for improvement (Teacher Survey, 2022).

online instruction 45.5%; strategy and action plan 40.9%) or below average (supervision of e-learning and performance 22.7%). The average results indicate the indicators that should be addressed in order to ensure better institutional response and support.

On average, the *LF tech staff agency* was assessed as highly adequate (86.36%). Individual indicators show high teachers' satisfaction with provided technical support: clear written/oral instructions (95.5%) and workshops on using G-classroom/Zoom (90.9%); continuous technical support (86.4%); tech devices (computers/cameras), resources (content-creation instructions) and troubleshooting (81.8% each). In their narrative accounts, teachers commended the LF tech staff support and cooperation, and expressed the need for regular training on the use of digital tools for teaching/learning purposes (Teacher Survey, 2022).

The next part of the survey examined the LF teachers' satisfaction with the *available technology* used in online instruction: a web-based LMS (Google Classroom), VC platforms (Zoom/Google Meet/Skype) and other digital tools, which are presented in *Table 8*.

The summary results in *Table 8* show that most respondents used the recommended web-based platforms: *Google Classroom* as a learning management system/LMS (N=19; 86.42%) and *Zoom* as a VC tool (N=22; 100%), but most respondents (N=18; 81.11%) reported using other VC platforms for additional communication/consultation.<sup>23</sup> As for *other digital tools*, teachers reported using: Skype/G-Meet for group instruction or group/individual consultations (40.9%); YouTube videos (40.9%); online databases: Paragraph Lex, Hudoc (54.5%); posting links for research (59.1%) and practice (18.2%); and social networks: Facebook/Viber for communication (15.9%). These results demonstrate teachers' proactive approach to instruction and genuine efforts to facilitate learning and communication in the given circumstances.

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23 G-Meet, WebEx (N=5; 22.7% each); M-Teams (N=4; 18.2%); Skype (N=3; 13.6%); G-Hangouts (N=1; 4.5%)



**Table 8. LF Nis Teachers' Survey (2022): Evaluation of available technology for online instruction (2020-2022)**

		None= 3 (13.63%)	Google Classroom= 19 (86.42%)	Moodle= /	Other:		
11	<b>LMS Learning Management System</b> used in online instruction						
12	<b>Video Conferencing platform</b>	Zoom =22 (100%)   Skype=3 (13.6%)   G-Meet= 5(22.7%)	M-Teams= 4 (18.2%)   Webex= 5 (22.7%)	G-Hangouts=1 (4.5%)			
13	<b>Other digital tools, applications, software</b> used in online classes	Online databases (Paragraflex, Hudoc, etc)	12 54.5%	YouTube (video sharing)	9 40.9%		
		Online educational resources for self-study, practice, self-testing	4 18.2%	Social networks: Facebook; Viber	3 = 4 13.63% = 18.2%		
		Providing porting links for research, self study	13 59.1%	Other: None	1 4.54%		
		Skype: G-Meet: Hangouts for group/individual consultations' instruction	9 40.9%				
14	<b>Evaluate the LMS platform used in online instruction (G-classroom)</b>	Scale	1-poor	2-below average	3-average	4-above average	5-excellent
	a) User friendly, easy use	1(4.54%)	2(9.08%)	1(4.54%)	8(36.36%)	10(45.45%)	
	b) Clear practical instructions on use, creating material, etc.	1(4.54%)	3(13.63%)	2(9.08%)	7(31.81%)	9(40.9%)	
	c) Posting content (audio, video, HW)	1(4.54%)	1(4.54%)	1(4.54%)	7(31.81%)	12(54.54%)	
	d) Creating material, quizzes activities, surveys, etc	1(4.54%)	1(4.54%)	5(22.72%)	6(27.27%)	8(36.36%)	
	e) Discussion forum in platform	1(4.54%)	2(9.08%)	4(18.18%)	8(36.36%)	7(31.81%)	
	f) In-built written communication (stream, forum, HW submission)	1(4.54%)	4(18.18%)	1(4.54%)	7(31.81%)	9(40.9%)	
	g) In-built live communication	2(9.08%)	2(9.08%)	5(22.72%)	7(31.81%)	6(27.27%)	
	h) In-built collaborative work options (whiteboard/ jamboard)	3(13.63%)	3(13.63%)	5(22.72%)	7(31.81%)	4(18.18%)	
	i) In-built options for recording attendance access to G-class	3(13.63%)	2(9.08%)	5(22.72%)	7(31.81%)	3(27.27%)	
	j) In-built grading, evaluation, assessment, feedback options (points, progress %, final grade)	2(9.08%)	4(18.18%)	4(18.18%)	8(36.36%)	4(18.18%)	
		<b>Total:</b>	<b>7.5%</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>32.75%</b>	<b>33.7%</b>
15	<b>Evaluate the VC platform used in online instruction (Zoom)</b>	Scale	1-poor	2-below average	3-good/average	4-verygood/above average	5-excellent
	a) User friendly, easy use	/	1(4.54%)	1(4.54%)	5(22.72%)	15(68.18%)	
	b) Screen sharing for viewing content	/	1(4.54%)	3(13.63%)	4(18.18%)	14(63.63%)	
	c) Chat box: group messaging, quick surveys, etc	/	1(4.54%)	2(9.08%)	6(27.27%)	13(59.1%)	
	d) Private messaging in chat box	1(4.54%)	1(4.54%)	2(9.08%)	5(22.72%)	13(59.1%)	
	e) Audio mic quality	/	1(4.54%)	7(31.81%)	7(31.81%)	14(63.63%)	
	f) Video viewing options	/	1(4.54%)	7(31.81%)	7(31.81%)	14(63.63%)	
	g) Recording charts, live calls	/	2(9.08%)	7(31.81%)	6(27.27%)	13(59.1%)	
	h) In-built options for group work collaboration tools, breakout rooms	1(4.54%)	1(4.54%)	2(9.08%)	10(45.45%)	5(36.36%)	
	i) Break rooms for live group work	2(9.08%)	/	3(13.63%)	10(45.45%)	7(31.81%)	
	j) Inbuilt options for recording Sts attendance	2(9.08%)	4(18.18%)	1(4.54%)	8(36.36%)	7(31.81%)	
	k) Inbuilt options for assessing Sts activity, feedback, etc	2(9.08%)	3(13.63%)	4(18.18%)	7(31.81%)	6(27.27%)	
		<b>Total:</b>	<b>3.1%</b>	<b>4.85%</b>	<b>9.1%</b>	<b>31.4%</b>	<b>51.25%</b>

Source: LF Nis Teachers' Survey on online instruction 2022-2022 (Google form, 13.11-4.12.2022), processed by the author.

The evaluation of *Google Classroom* covered: a) a number of relevant *technical features* (a-e): user-friendly tool, clear instructions, creating content, creating content/quizzes, posting audio/video content and homework assignments; discussion forum; and b) *applicative functions* (f-j): in-built written and oral communication, collaboration tools, recording attendance/activity, grading points/percentages, assessment and feedback. The total averages per grade show that 33.7% of respondents were fully satisfied (excellent), 32.75% were fairly satisfied (very good) (66.45% in total), 15% were partially satisfied (good), while 18.5% in total were dissatisfied. The results on individual technical features and applicative functions show that teachers were highly satisfied with available technical features but fairly or partially satisfied with some applicative functions.<sup>24</sup> (Teacher Survey, 2022). While resorting to G-Classroom might have been a quick and handy gap-filler in the pandemic circumstances), the results indicate that this platform only partially met the educational needs and expectation. Thus, it may be worth considering the use of some more comprehensive LMS software,<sup>25</sup> which would include a wider range of educational functions (collaboration tools, peer content sharing; gradebook/diary,

24 They were highly satisfied with technical features: posting content (54.54%), ease of use (45.45%); instructions, written communication tools (40.9% each), and creating material (36.36%). They were quite satisfied with applicative functions: discussion forum, grading/assessment/feedback (36.36% each), collaboration tools, written/oral communication, recording attendance/activity (31.81% each), but significant percentages (18-23%) were also recorded in the average/below average columns (Teacher Survey, 2022).

25 See: Research.com (2022): 15 Best Free Learning Management Systems for 2023 (30 Nov. 2022);

attendance/activity recording; assessment tools, tests, course statistics; integration of other digital apps, assistive audio/video technology) to resolve many frustrating technical and learning issues reported by both students and teachers. Moreover, during the registration week (before starting a course), participants should get an intensive hands-on *orientation training* on using the LMS, try out the available functions through mini activities (tech survey, get-to-know activities, discussion forum chats, posting/sharing content, mini-assignment submissions, etc.). Thus, all participants will be prepared for using the LMS platform, aware of the requirements and expectations (conduct, attendance, activity), and it will eliminate frustration and set a positive learning atmosphere for prospective collaboration.

The evaluation of Zoom VC platform covered: a) *technical features* (a-g): user-friendly tool, screen sharing, chatbox, private messaging, audio/video sharing, recording chats/content; and b) *applicative functions* (h-k): collaboration tools, breakout rooms for group work, in-built options for recording students' attendance/activity, providing feedback. The total averages per grade show that the largest number of teachers (51.25%) evaluated it as excellent, 31.4% as very good (82.65% in total), 9.1% as good, and 8.25% in total as below average/poor. While teachers' were largely satisfied with Zoom as a tool for online video conferencing, instruction and communication (82.6%), individual indicators show lower results: teachers were satisfied with technical features (62.33%) but quite dissatisfied with applicative functions (35.8%)<sup>26</sup> (Teacher Survey, 2022). Notably, VC platforms (Skype/M-Teams/G-Meet/Zoom) were initially devised as digital tools for one-to-one or small-group communication rather than distance-learning tools for huge students groups; thus, their interfaces and in-built functions are limited in terms of active learning features, collaboration tools and assessment functions. Second, their use for educational purposes is often limited by specific EdTech industry requirements (pricing plans, institutional licence, number of participants, time limits for meetings, payment for premium versions, etc.), which are prevalent factors in choosing a VC platform. In order to ensure equal learning opportunities, the EdTech industry should keep upgrading the free VC tools by integrating additional functions (whiteboard, polling, graphic organizers, breakout rooms, etc.), or provide a more lenient pricing policy for using all-inclusive LMS platforms in underdeveloped and developing countries. Third, despite some drawbacks, LMS/VC tools have brought flexible opportunities for online instruction (con-

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26 Notably, the highest (excellent) grade was recorded on technical features (59.1% to 68.18%), amounting to a total average of 62.33%; the applicative functions were largely evaluated as very good (39.76% on average) and excellent (31.82% on average), amounting to a total average of 35.8% (Teacher Survey, 2022).

ferences, presentations, workshops, webinars, mentorship, live streaming) and huge benefits to institutions (speed, cost-effectiveness, management efficiency). Their use demonstrates the proactive approach of educational communities to promote e-learning in line with learner needs.

Next, the survey examined the teachers' satisfaction *with the online teaching experience* (in G-Classroom/Zoom), where teachers assessed several indicators: students' attendance and activity; teacher-student and student-student communication; learning atmosphere; forms and efficiency of formative and summative assessment; overall teacher and students' satisfaction; overall effectiveness of online instruction, and assessment tools. *Table 9* shows the results of their online teaching experience and forms of assessment in the 2020-2022 period.

**Table 9. LF Nis Teachers' Survey (2022): Teachers' online teaching experience in online instruction and forms of assessment (2020-2022)**

		1-poor	2-below average	3-good/average	4-verygood/above average	5-excellent		
16	Evaluate your online teaching experience within each criterion (G-classroom + Zoom)	a) positive learning atmosphere	2 (9.08%)	2 (9.08%)	4 (18.18%)	7 (31.81%)	7 (31.81%)	
		b) student activity (efficiency)	1 (4.54%)	3 (13.63%)	6 (27.27%)	9 (40.9%)	3 (13.63%)	
		c) eff. student-teacher interaction	/	5 (22.72%)	5 (22.72%)	7 (31.81%)	5 (22.72%)	
		d) student-student interaction	2 (9.08%)	7 (31.81%)	7 (31.81%)	4 (18.18%)	2 (9.08%)	
		e) efficient formative assessment	3 (13.63%)	1 (4.54%)	6 (27.27%)	12 (54.54%)	/	
		f) efficient summative assessment (tests, quizzes, mini essays)	3 (13.63%)	5 (22.72%)	4 (18.18%)	9 (40.9%)	1 (4.54%)	
		g) overall Student satisfaction with online classes	1 (4.54%)	3 (13.63%)	7 (31.81%)	9 (40.9%)	2 (9.08%)	
		h) overall Teacher satisfaction	1 (4.54%)	3 (13.63%)	6 (27.27%)	9 (40.9%)	3 (13.63%)	
		i) overall efficiency and effectiveness of online instruction	1 (4.54%)	1 (4.54%)	9 (40.9%)	6 (27.27%)	5 (22.72%)	
		<b>Total average:</b>		<b>7.5%</b>	<b>15.5%</b>	<b>26.7%</b>	<b>36.3%</b>	<b>14%</b>
18	Did you use some of these forms of evaluation, assessment, grading in online classes?	Colloquium (written or oral examination)	5	22.7%	Assessment of individual/group presentations		10	45.5%
		Formal tests (knowledge, skills, etc)	1	4.54%	Assessment of individual responses within group discussions		9	40.9%
		Mini-progress tests, quizzes	4	18.2%	Oral feedback		12	54.54%
		Marking grading written assignments/mini essays	8	36.4%	Other: None		2	9.08%
		Marking grading seminar papers	6	27.3%	Other: role-play, mock trial, mootcourt simulations, group projects		1	4.54%

Source: LF Nis Teachers' Survey on online instruction 2022-2022 (Google form, 13.11-4.12.2022), processed by the author.

As for the LF teachers' *online teaching experience*, the total average per grade shows that 14% of LF teachers were highly satisfied, 36.3% were fairly satisfied (50.3% in total), 26.7% were partially satisfied, while 23% in total were dissatisfied. While half of the respondents (50.3%) reported being highly or fairly satisfied, the even distribution of percentages on individual factors indicates that there is plenty of room for improvement.<sup>27</sup> In their narrative accounts, most teachers (N=18; 82%) noted ample *problems and challenges*: a dismal feeling of speaking to an empty classroom, alienation; lack of direct teacher-student and student-student interaction; formal registration, fictitious attendance; "invisible" students behind dark screens; inadequate tools for recording attendance/activity; delayed response in G-classroom; low student

27 The highest scores in the very good column refer to: effective formative assessment (54.54%); student activity, summative assessment, overall students'/teacher's satisfaction (40.9% each); positive learning atmosphere and student-teacher interaction (31.81% each). The highest scores in the good column refer to: overall effectiveness of online instruction (40.9%) and student-student interaction (31.81%). In overall effectiveness alone, the largest number of teachers were fairly satisfied (N=6; 27.27%) or highly satisfied (N=5: 22.72%), 50% in total, while (N=9; 40.9%) were partially satisfied, and two teachers (9%) were dissatisfied (Teacher Survey, 2022).

attendance/activity, reluctant or no response when called upon; inadequate training for e-learning; initial adaptation difficulties and subsequent fatigue due to prolonged (two-year) online instruction; inefficiency of large-group instruction; lower motivation, concentration and engagement; insufficient time for practice/review due to a reduced number of contact hours; etc. (Teacher Survey, 2022).

Considering the *forms of assessment*, the largest number of teachers reported using: oral feedback (N=12; 54.55%), assessing presentations (N=10; 45.5%), individual responses in discussions (N=9; 40.9%), written assignments (N=8; 36.4%), seminar papers (N=6; 27.3), colloquia (N=5; 22.7%), progress tests/quizzes (N=4; 18.2%), group projects (N=1; 4.54%), and formal tests (N=1; 4.54%). In their narrative accounts, Lf teachers also reported using Zoom chat and G-class stream for recording attendance and G-class quizzes for progress checks, assigning points for all activities and calculating them towards pre-exam attendance and activity points. Thus, LF teachers largely resorted to formative assessment, recording students activity in G-classroom gradebook or keeping their own e-diaries, while summative assessment (formal tests) were organized offline.

LF teachers' narrative accounts on the perceived *benefits of online instruction* refer to: 1) *professional development*: new, valuable, experiential learning experience; 2) *technology-related value*: fast online communication, ease of access/use from home or elsewhere; content recording/posting/sharing, material accessibility/visibility; 3) *economic value*: health safety; time-saving, cost-effectiveness (travel/accommodation); 4) *learner/learning value*: contemporary, efficient, effective, flexible synchronous/asynchronous e-learning (at one's own time/pace/convenience); reviewing posted material, reference to web sources (databases, videos); better learner focus, less disturbance, more communication (Teacher Survey, 2022).

The next part of the survey examined the teachers' perception on *students' attendance, activity and problems encountered in online classes*, which are presented in Table 10. In the narrative accounts, they explained how they *addressed these problems* in online instruction.

**Table 10.** LF Nis Teachers' Survey (2022): Teachers' perception on students' attendance, activity, and problems in online instruction (2020-2022)

18 From the total number of students in course, estimate the % of students		0-20%	20-35%	35-50%	50-65%	65-80%	80-100%	% n/pt	Total - 50%	Total 50% +
who	a) registered in Google classroom	3 (13.63%)	3 (13.63%)	3 (13.63%)	2 (9.08%)	3 (13.63%)	6 (27.27%)	2 (9.08%)	40%	49.38%
	b) completed HW assignments posted in G-classroom	6 (27.27%)	3 (13.63%)	3 (13.63%)	5 (22.72%)	3 (13.63%)	/	2 (9.08%)	54.53%	36.33%
	<b>Total average:</b> 20.45% 13.63% 13.63% 15.9% 13.63% 13.63%									
	c) attended Zoom online classes	1 (4.54%)	2 (9.08%)	2 (9.08%)	6 (27.27%)	8 (36.36%)	1 (4.54%)	2 (9.08%)	22.7%	68.17%
d) actively participated in Zoom activities		6 (27.27%)	4 (18.18%)	2 (9.08%)	5 (22.72%)	3 (13.63%)	/	2 (9.08%)	54.53%	36.33%
	<b>Total average:</b> 15.9% 13.63% 9.08% 49.99% 22.7%									
19 In your experience, what problems did STUDENTS encounter in online classes?		1-No/very few 2-some/ below average 3-average 4-above average 5-most								
Evaluate to what extent were these problems present in your online classes (G-classroom + Zoom)	a) technical problems: devices, fast, stable Internet, mikes, cameras	4 (18.18%)	4 (18.18%)	6 (27.27%)	7 (31.81%)	3 (13.63%)	2 (9.08%)	4 (18.18%)	2 (9.08%)	
	b) inadequate preparation, training/ for online learning	3 (13.63%)	3 (13.63%)	8 (36.36%)	5 (22.72%)	3 (13.63%)	3 (13.63%)	3 (13.63%)	3 (13.63%)	
	c) inadequate form of instruction (only Zoom or Zoom + G-classroom)	5 (22.72%)	3 (13.63%)	6 (27.27%)	8 (36.36%)	3 (13.63%)	/	/	/	
	<b>Total:</b> 18.17% 36.36% 27.26% 16.66% 7.57%									
	d) learning issues: L's system, instructions, lack of prior knowledge	4 (18.18%)	2 (9.08%)	2 (9.08%)	9 (40.9%)	3 (13.63%)	4 (18.18%)	4 (18.18%)	5 (22.72%)	
	e) lack of motivation, concentration, commitment	1 (4.54%)	5 (22.72%)	2 (9.08%)	3 (13.63%)	9 (40.9%)	5 (22.72%)	5 (22.72%)	5 (22.72%)	
	f) inadequate STs activity in class	2 (9.08%)	4 (18.18%)	3 (13.63%)	7 (31.81%)	7 (31.81%)	6 (27.27%)	6 (27.27%)	6 (27.27%)	
	g) inadequate continuous evaluation, feedback, assessment, grading	4 (18.18%)	7 (31.81%)	3 (13.63%)	7 (31.81%)	7 (31.81%)	1 (4.54%)	1 (4.54%)	1 (4.54%)	
	h) inability/lack of opportunity/ no access to consultation hours	4 (18.18%)	4 (18.18%)	6 (27.27%)	5 (22.72%)	3 (13.63%)	3 (13.63%)	3 (13.63%)	3 (13.63%)	
	<b>Total:</b> 13.63% 20% 20.9% 27.72% 17.26%									
	i) social issues: long period of socila isolation, lockdown	1 (4.54%)	/	5 (22.72%)	5 (22.72%)	5 (22.72%)	11 (50%)	11 (50%)	11 (50%)	
	j) Privacy issues: public exposure, privacy protection, cameras off	2 (9.08%)	3 (13.63%)	3 (13.63%)	6 (27.27%)	6 (27.27%)	6 (27.27%)	6 (27.27%)	6 (27.27%)	
	<b>Total:</b> 6.81% 6.81% 6.81% 25% 25% 36.63% 36.63%									
k) affective issues: personal/family/ health, emotional/mental health	2 (9.08%)	4 (18.18%)	9 (40.9%)	3 (13.63%)	4 (18.18%)	4 (18.18%)	4 (18.18%)	4 (18.18%)		
l) complete disinterest in e-learning	6 (27.27%)	3 (13.63%)	4 (18.18%)	3 (13.63%)	4 (18.18%)	6 (27.27%)	6 (27.27%)	6 (27.27%)		
<b>Total:</b> 18.17% 15.9% 29.54% 13.63% 22.72%										
<b>Total average:</b>		14.2%	18.25%	18.25%	25.1%	20.75%	21.55%	21.55%		

Source: LF Nis Teachers' Survey on online instruction 2022-2022 (Google form, 13.11-4.12.2022), processed by the author.

The first part of *Table 10* shows the teachers' estimate on the percentage of students who registered in G-Classroom and completed assignments, and those who attended Zoom classes and actively participated in online activities. As for *G-Classroom registration*, the highest percentage was recorded in the 80-100% column (N=6; 27.27%); in other columns, they range from 9.08% to 13.63% (N=14). As for *G-assignment completion*, the highest percentages were recorded in two columns: 0-20% (N=6; 27.27%) and 50-60% (N=5; 22.72%); in other columns, they were distributed evenly (N=3; 13.63% each). If we sum up the percentages below and above 50% (as the formal minimum requirement for a pass grade), the total scores show a 41% : 50% ratio in G-classroom registration and a 54,5% : 36.3% ratio in task completion. As for Zoom attendance, the highest percentages were recorded in two columns: the 65-80% (N=8; 36.36%) and 50-65% (N=6; 27.27%); in other columns, they were much lower (N=6; 4.54 to 9.08%). As for Zoom activity, the highest percentages were recorded in two columns: 0-20% (N=6; 27.27%) and 50-65% (N=5; 22.72%); in other columns, they were distributed evenly (N=3; 13.63% each). If we sum up the percentages below and above 50%, the totals shows a 22,7% : 68.2% ratio in Zoom attendance and a 54,5% : 36.3% ratio in Zoom activity. The findings on students' attendance/activity indicate the prevalent student mindset, instruction-related habits and diverse attitudes to learning requirements. The ratios (below or above 50%) indicate students' tendency to formally meet the procedural requirements: G-classroom registration (50%) and Zoom attendance (68.2%), but the results in production activities are much lower: G-class assignment completion (36.3%) and Zoom activity (36.3%). This ultimately shows that at least half of students did not approach their duties with due diligence, and did not meet the pre-exam requirements. Thus, pro-

moting learner agency, partnership and collaboration in the learning process is essential for quality assurance.

The second part of *Table 10* presents LF teachers' perception on *students' problems* in online classes. For clarity, individual indicators are classified into four problem types which may have affected their performance: a) *technical issues* (a-c): laptops, mobile phones, cameras, mikes, Internet/Wi-Fi connection; b) *learning issues* (d-h): understanding; motivation, concentration, commitment; activity; assessment; consultations); c) *social issues* (i-j): social isolation, alienation; public exposure, privacy protection; and d) *affective issues* (k-l): personal/family problems, psychological/mental health issues, temper/emotions/feelings.

As for *technical issues*, most respondents assessed that students' technology-related problems below average (30.3%) or average (27.26%), while 18.1% noticed no/very few problems; some teachers assessed students' technical problems as fairly or highly prominent (24.23% in total). The individual indicators (about 50% each)<sup>28</sup> show that there is room for improvement. These results may confirm the findings in ELP/LE Tech Surveys (2020-2022), where 30-35% of students reported having issues with technical devices, handling LMS/VC tools and underdeveloped digital skills for production activities. In their narrative accounts, LF teachers noted how they addressed the technical issues: tech staff support (trouble-shooting); managing students use of G-classroom/Zoom; using available options (chat/forum), posting additional instructions, guidelines, clarification, checklists, etc. (Teacher Survey, 2022).

As for *learning issues*, most respondents observed that students' had average learning problems in: a) *understanding* instructions, the subject matter and (under)developed learning system (N=9; 40.9%), but others saw it as a fairly/highly prominent issue (N=7; 31.81% in total); and b) *access to consultations* (N=6; 27.26%), but others saw it as a fairly or highly prominent issue (N=8; 36.35% in total). The next three issues were perceived as fairly prominent: a) *lack of motivation, concentration, commitment* (N=9; 40.9%), but some teachers (N=5; 22.72%) viewed it as highly prominent (63.62% in total); b) *inadequate student activity* (N=7; 31.81%), but others (N=6; 27.27%) saw it as highly prominent (59.08% in total); c) *inadequate forms of continuous evaluation, assessment, feedback, grading* (N=7; 31.81%) and one teacher (4.54%) saw it as a highly prominent issue (36.35% in total); some teachers saw it as average issue (N=3; 13.63%) but others saw it as a less serious issue (N=7; 31.81%) or

28 As for individual indicators, LF teachers viewed these issues as average, fairly or highly prominent: technical devices 54.52% (N=7; 31.81%; N=5; 22.71% in total); inadequate prior training for e-learning 50% (N=3; 13.63%; N=8; 36.36% in total); and LMS/VC online learning platforms 50% (N=8; 36.36%; N=3; 13.63%).

no issue (N=4; 18.18%). The totals (in bold) on fairly or highly prominent issues indicate the areas that should be given more consideration. In their narrative accounts, LF teachers noted how they *addressed the observed learning issues*: encouraging students' participation, questions, discussions; calling upon individual students (cameras off), checking on their presence, active involvement; setting up individual/group tasks, allocating points for each activity; using Zoom breakout rooms for group discussions, Zoom chat/G-class discussion forum for quick opinion polls, clarification, checks, written responses; posting instructions on technical/educational issues; providing written feedback on assignments, clarification, oral feedback in Zoom; using online resources for research, self-study, practice; optional content-related educational games and fun activities; etc. (Teacher Survey, 2022).

As for *social issues*, most teachers assessed them as highly prominent (38.63%) and fairly prominent issues (25%), **63.63%** in total, while others viewed them as average (22.72%) or less significant issues (13.62%). In individual indicators, the total average percentages (on fairly or highly prominent issues) are even higher.<sup>29</sup> In their accounts on addressing these issues, teachers reported being flexible about the use of cameras (to ensure home privacy), showing empathy (as needed), and using Zoom breakout rooms for group discussions.

As for *affective issues*, the total percentages per grade show diverse responses: fairly or highly prominent (36.35% in total), average (29.54%) and no/below average (34% in total). Individual indicators<sup>30</sup> show even distribution of percentages on students' affective problems, and their fifty-fifty perception of students' attitude to e-learning: some students liked, attended and actively participated in it while others disliked, avoided and failed to participate. In the narrative accounts, teachers shared their views on what students liked most about online instruction: 1) *technological versatility*: diverse tech devi-

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29 As for individual indicators, most respondents viewed them as highly prominent issues: a) *social isolation*, alienation, lack of human relations (N=11; 50%), but an equal number of teachers viewed it as a fairly prominent or an average issue (N=5; 27.72% each), amounting to 95.44% in total; b) *public exposure*, lack of privacy in online environment were largely viewed as highly or fairly prominent issue (N=6; 27.27% each) and average issues (N=5; 22.72%), amounting to 77.26% in total (Teacher Survey, 2022).

30 As for individual indicators, most teachers assessed personal/family problems, students' feelings and mental health issues as an average problem (N=9; 40.9%), but other teachers saw it as a fairly or highly prominent issue (N=7; 31.81% in total), or no/below average problem (N=6; 27.26% in total). Considering *students' attitude* (interest or disinterest), most teachers observed it as a highly prominent issue (N=6; 27.27%) and fairly prominent issue (N=3; 13.63%), amounting to 40.9% in total, while other teachers perceived it as an average problem (N=4; 18.18%), or no/below average problem (N=9; 40.9% in total) (Teacher Survey, 2022).

ces/resources; communication speed; recording/reviewing teaching material; 2) *flexibility, accessibility and convenience*: synchronous and asynchronous e-learning from home, accessible to students from other towns; students' attendance and activity at will and convenience (G-Classroom); revisiting/reviewing posted or recorded materials; 3) *time-saving, cost-effectiveness* (travel, accommodation costs); 4) students' greater *focus* in online classes, openness for any activity bringing pre-exam points, better visibility of material presented in digital format (Teacher Survey, 2022). All these findings illustrates LF teachers' considerable awareness of students' likes/dislikes and recognition of ample *technical, social, learning and affective* problems, which they attempted to address, ease or resolve by taking appropriate action (as previously noted).

The last part of the survey examined teachers' perceptions on the *current state of affairs* (November 2022) at LF Nis, which includes a range of indicators: a) digital infrastructure for online instruction; b) technical support for digitalization; c) digital competences of teachers and students; d) digital ethics of teachers and students; and e) the attained level of digital transformation. It also includes teachers' opinions on how to *improve the quality of online instruction* for prospective educational purposes. The results are presented in *Table 11*.

The total average results per grade show that the largest number of teachers assessed the *current state of affairs* as very good (48.7%), while 16.9% viewed it as excellent (**65.6%** in total); 31.9% viewed it as good/average, and 2.6% (in total) as unsatisfactory. Individual indicators, largely assessed as good/very good,<sup>31</sup> show that there is room for improvement.

*Table 11. LF Nis Teachers' Survey (2022): Teachers' perception on the Current state of affairs at LF Nis in digital learning, digital transformation (2022) and how to improve online learning for future educational purposes*

		1-poor	2 below average	3-average	4-above average	5 excellent
20	Evaluate the current situation at LF Nis related to digital learning, digitalization, digital transformation					
	a) digital infrastructure for digitalization of teach process	/	/	8 (36.36%)	13 (59.1%)	1 (4.54%)
	b) technical support for digitalization of teach process	/	/	2 (9.08%)	13 (59.1%)	7 (31.81%)
	c) attained level of digital transformation	2 (9.08%)	1 (4.54%)	9 (40.9%)	9 (40.9%)	1 (4.54%)
	d) digital competences of Ts for online teaching	/	/	9 (40.9%)	11 (50%)	2 (9.08%)
	e) digital competences of STs for active online learning	/	/	8 (36.36%)	10 (45.45%)	4 (18.18%)
	f) digital ethics\conduct values of Ts	/	/	6 (27.27%)	11 (50%)	5 (22.72%)
	f) digital ethics\conduct values of STs	/	1 (4.54%)	7 (31.81%)	8 (36.36%)	6 (27.27%)
<b>Total average:</b>		<b>1.3%</b>	<b>1.3%</b>	<b>31.9%</b>	<b>48.7%</b>	<b>16.8%</b>
21	How to ensure/improve overall quality of online instruction in the future? What support would be useful?					
	Strengthen the digital infrastructure	13	59.1%	Reorganize the process, include online instruction in traditional classes	14	63.6%
	Ensure equal ST access to fast-speed, stable Internet	13	59.1%	Raise STs' awareness about formal/informal online learning	13	59.1%
	Financial resources for improving online teaching/learning	12	54.5%	Introducing innovative technologies in legal edu (VR, AI)	11	50%
	Change the mindset of Ts/ St, attitudes, conduct	12	54.5%	New forms of learning (virtual exchanges, collaborative projects)	10	45.4%
	Continuous education of Ts/ Sts on using digital learning tools	15	68.2%	Ensure efficient effective application/practical use of dig tech in TL	11	50%
	Introduce clear assessment standards for pre-exam activities	9	40.9%	Use well-developed/licensed LMS software (with full scale E-diary)	15	68.2%
Clear criteria for online TL assessment, efficiency control	11	50%	Other: Nothing	1	4.54%	

source: LF Nis Teachers' Survey on online instruction 2022-2022 (Google form, 13.11-4.12.2022), processed by the author.

31 They were as follows: a) *digital learning infrastructure*: very good (N=13; 59.1%) and good (N=8; 36.4%); b) *technical support for digital learning*: very good (N=13; 59.1%) and excellent (N=7; 31.81%); c) level of *digital transformation*: good or very good (N=9; 40.9% each); d) *teachers' digital skills*: very good (N=11; 50%) and good (N=9; 40.9%); *students' digital skills*: very good (N=10; 45.45%) and good (N=9; 36.36%); d) *teachers' digital ethics*: very good (N=11; 50%); good (N=6; 27.27%) and excellent (N=5; 22.72%); *students' digital ethics*: very good (N=8; 36.36%); good (N=7; 31.81%) and excellent (N=6; 27.27%) (Teacher Survey, 2022).



The second part of *Table 11* presents LF teacher's perceptions on *how the quality of online instruction may be improved* for prospective purposes. The respondents assessed a range of indicators reflecting the needs/wants and prospective action on observed challenges: a) *technical issues*: strengthening the digital infrastructure (N=13; 59.1%); assess to fast-speed Internet for all via academic network (N=13; 59.1%); technology: licenced LMS with a full-scale e-Diary (N=14; 63.5%); b) *financial issues*: financial resources and institutional support (ME, LF) for e-learning (N=12; 54.5%); c) *learner/learning issues*: continuous training (N=15; 68.2%); effective use of LMS and a full-scale e-Diary (N=15; 68.2%); reorganize the traditional teaching/learning process and introduce hybrid learning mode (N=14; 63.6%); promote formal/informal learning opportunities<sup>32</sup> (N=13; 59.1%); change of mindset, attitudes, conduct (N=54.5%); clear criteria for assessing the quality of e-learning (N=11; 50%); ensure efficient application of digital technology as a tool for enhancing the quality of e-learning (N=11; 50%); introduce innovative technologies (AI, VR) in legal education (N=11; 50%), forms of learning: virtual exchanges, collaboration projects (N=10; 44.5%), and clear learning standards/outcomes in devising online activities (N=9; 40.9%). LF teachers' narrative accounts include proposals to ensure quality instruction, enhance student activity, preclude negative attitudes; change the teaching/learning paradigm; provide teacher/student training, ongoing use of digital learning; free Internet in all classrooms; technical innovations as learning incentives; digital tools for safe/reliable online testing; instruction in smaller/manageable groups (up to 30 students) for better control of attendance/activity; clear grading system for each activity; etc. Notably, while most teachers (95.5 %) viewed hybrid instruction as the strategic orientation of LF Nis, a few teachers were skeptical about the institutional willingness to introduce a form of online/hybrid instruction in the future due to the prevalent reluctance to change the traditional mindset, common practices and innovate the teaching/learning process (Teacher Survey, 2022).

#### **4. Conclusion: Opportunities for developing systemic agency in legal education**

Relying on the presented empirical research results from five surveys on the quality of online instruction at the Law Faculty in Niš during the COVID-19 pandemic (2020-2022), we have explored the systemic agency and different stakeholders' perspectives (at macro and micro level) on e-learning in extraor-

<sup>32</sup> For example: MOOCs/massive open online courses, OERs/open educational resources, databases (EU-Lex, Hudoc), professional training networks, learning ecosystems (EJTN, E-justice), etc.

dinary circumstances. The ample problems, challenges, benefits and opportunities observed in the surveys are food for thought in the forthcoming period. Generally, we may conclude that legal education in online environment at LF Nis has survived the test of adverse times. While each stakeholder (ME, LF Niš, tech staff, students, teachers) contributed to some extent, the results show that the largest burden was placed on the core participants: home institution, IT staff, teachers and students, who largely had to cope with the quandary on their own, by relying on well-established interactions, practices, resilience, resourcefulness and enthusiasm. This valuable e-learning experience should be used as a learning tool for devising viable solutions for further intervention and innovation. In that context, we may briefly review the agency of each stakeholder and outline future opportunities in developing a systemic approach to sustainable digital learning.

*Collective ME Agency* was viewed as insufficient (25.5%) and critically assessed for the lack of systemic policy, strategic action plan for online instruction in emergency situations, lack of proactive approach, prior needs assessment, insufficient investment, financial/material support, and digital infrastructure (high-speed Internet for students via academic network, more reliable LMS/VC platforms) to ensure equal opportunities for all students. Instead of forwarding general instructions/guidelines and leaving HE institutions, teachers and students to cope with e-learning by relying on their own resources and resourcefulness (Teachers Survey 2022), ME should lead, guide and manage the digital transformation by involving all stakeholders. The ample problems experienced by students/teachers have to be accounted for in designing e-learning policy, strategy, action plan, and practice, where no student will be left behind or disadvantaged for lack of resources. After a two-year period of e-learning, Serbia still has not adopted either national e-learning standards or a digital learning strategy and action plan.<sup>33</sup> To get started, ME may refer to valuable online resource and good practices<sup>34</sup> both for inspiration and practical guidance in developing quality e-learning strategy, designating goals and assessment standards, specifying stakeholder's responsibilities, inform and support their joint action by observing and incorporating efficient practices in

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33 The current National Strategy for development of education by 2030 (Strategija razvoja obrazovanja i vaspitanja u Republici Srbiji do 2030, *Službeni glasnik RS*, br.63/2021) declaratively refers to digitalization of HE, investments in digital infrastructure, promoting digital competences, internationalization of distance-learning study programs, but there are no specific goals fostering quality, relevance, accessibility and equity in e-learning.

34 See: the UNESCO Remote Learning Strategy Toolkit (2020); EU Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027 (2020); NSQ/National Standards for Quality Online Courses, Programs and Teaching (2022).

quality e-learning elsewhere, engaging and supporting them in implementing, monitoring and assessing the process.

*Collective agency of LF Nis* was assessed in positive but average terms (55%). While LF Niš provided relevant digital infrastructure and tech support for e-learning from LF premises, survey results show the need for regular investment in digital infrastructure, devices, equipment, effective digital tools, ongoing teacher/student training on digital tools/skills, and regular technical, administrative and other support. The LMS/VC platforms were positively assessed in Students' Tech Surveys (G-Classroom 85.57%; Zoom 83.65%) and Teachers' Survey (G-C 66.45%; Zoom 82.45%) but the technology-related problems indicate that it may be high time to consider using a more elaborate e-learning platform available via protected academic network (e.g. open-source Moodle) which would integrate a wider range of technical and applicative functions for course design, implementation and assessment. The LF *tech staff agency* was assessed as highly adequate (86.36%), but surveys indicate the need for ongoing training for both students and teachers and troubleshooting support in order to avoid possible technical pitfalls. The current situation at the LF Nis in terms of digitalization and digital transformation was assessed as slightly above average (65.6%). Given the fact that 95.5% of the surveyed LF Nis teachers perceived hybrid/blended learning as a strategic orientation of the LF Nis, and that student largely supported (89.5% SP&SA Survey 2020; 71.68% ELP/LE Tech Surveys 2021-2022) and positively assessed the quality of online instruction (74.74% SP&SA Survey 2020; 81.21% ELP/LE Course Evaluation), these results may be a good starting point for promoting the potentials of properly designed, structured and implemented online/hybrid instruction. In that context, there is a need for a transparent institutional e-learning strategy, action plan and standards,<sup>35</sup> which may be easily implemented, monitored and assessed, as well as for practical teacher/student guidance for effective e-learning.

*Students' agency* was largely assessed as average (50%), particularly in terms of inadequate student activity (59.08%), lack of motivation and commitment (63.62%). The ratios (below or above 50%) on G-classroom/Zoom registration/attendance vs. task completion/activity show students' tendency to formally meet the procedural requirements (G-classroom registration 50% and Zoom attendance 68.2%), but not complete their assignments and actively participate in the process (assignment completion 36.3% and activity 36.3%). Student's

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35 See: NSQ (2022a) benchmarks on different aspects of online programs, courses and teaching; NFT&L (2022): National Resource Hub (Ireland), containing resources for developing enabling policies, ethical learning technologies, practical teacher/students guides on digital learning, practice toolkits, open source courses, etc.

attitude to e-learning was largely assessed as average (50%) (Teacher Survey, 2022) but ELP/LE course evaluation results show that e-learning is much more effective in smaller student groups, which is an important consideration for its future integration in legal education. As for students' digital competences, survey results are similar: 65% (ELP/LE Tech Surveys) and 63.4% (Teachers' Survey). Ample technology-related problems (digital infrastructure, devices, handling LMS/VC tools) indicate the need for further intervention to ensure that no student will be left behind or disadvantaged by lack of resources. As e-learning largely rests on agility, self-determination, self-regulation, self-assessment and resilience of each learner, it is essential to raise awareness about students' essential role in the interactive and collaborative educational process as active partners who share responsibility for their own learning, and to promote e-learning opportunities for research, education, professional development, participation in community activities, professional learning networks, and full immersion in e-learning opportunities that promote life-long learning and internationalization of learning.

*Teachers' agency* was fully recognized and positively assessed in all students' surveys (80.53% on average). The survey results and narrative accounts provide evidence of teachers' proactive approach to resolving observed problems and assisting students to the best of their abilities. Although they assessed their digital competences as above average (71.96%), LF teachers expressed the need for further training in digital skills and tools. Moreover, only 50.3% reported being highly/fairly satisfied with quality of online instruction (Teacher Survey 2022), and expressed the need for more supportive technology (all-inclusive LMS platform fully equipped with all technical and applicative functions). In order to improve the situation, it is necessary to promote awareness about the good practices<sup>36</sup>, new learning technologies (AI, VR) and life-long learning opportunities (professional networks, multi-institutional collaborative projects, community projects, virtual exchanges, open source courses, etc.). Another opportunity would be to promote pilot online/blended learning projects (e-learning courses in lawyer skills, transferable skills, academic writing, technology-supported practice) at undergraduate and graduate level, which may eventually become part of the elective courses or extracurricular activities. It would provide a chance to interested students and teachers to keep developing their digital competences in specific legal contexts and promote the institution as an active agent in developing new forms of legal education.

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36 See: NSQ (2022b).NSQ Online teaching resources for instructional design (courses, guidelines, webinars videos).

In conclusion, we may note that the first e-learning experience at LF Nis during the pandemic has contributed to developing the participants' digital competences, enhancing the digitalization and digital transformation processes, and raising awareness about huge potentials of e-learning in legal education. Although the results indicate that there is a lot of work for all stakeholder in the process, the valuable lessons may help us reflect, mend the shortcomings, plan and prepare for future online practices. Instead of resorting to *ad hoc* approaches, the stakeholders' action should be based on the systems approach, which may lead to devising viable solutions in line with the stakeholders' needs, interests and goals. The provided insights into the key shareholders' collective and individual agency may also raise the stakeholders' awareness about their essential role in developing the educational system, promote their systemic agency in legal education, improve the quality of instruction for current and prospective academic, scientific and professional purposes, and ultimately ensure a sustainable system-based response applicable in both ordinary and extraordinary circumstances.

There is no use staying stuck in the rut, or keep lagging behind the educational technology developments. We need to push beyond traditional mindsets, hurdles and boundaries, and take advantage of the immeasurable e-learning opportunities. This first e-learning experience should be upgraded through education and ongoing innovative practice. In conjunction with traditional learning formats (interactive lectures/practice hours, legal clinics, internship, international exchanges, moot court competitions) which are already present in the LF Niš educational structure, flexible learner/learning-centered and practice-oriented online/blended learning opportunities may hold the key to prospective development of quality legal education, scientific research and professional development.

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**PROAKTIVNO DELOVANJE INSTITUCIJA I AKTERA OBRAZOVNOG  
SISTEMA U VANREDNIM OKOLNOSTIMA: ISKUSTVA STUDENATA I  
NASTAVNIKA PRAVNOG FAKULTETA U NIŠU TOKOM PANDEMIJE  
COVID-19 I MOGUĆNOSTI UNAPREĐENJA PROAKTIVNOG  
SISTEMSKOG PRISTUPA U OBRAZOVANJU PRAVNIKA**

**Rezime**

*Systemic Agency (proaktivno delovanje institucija sistema i ključnih aktera) predstavlja kapacitet sistema u celini da odgovori na izazove savremenog društva oslanjajući se na kolektivnu inteligenciju i zajedničko delovanje svih aktera uključenih u sistemske procese. Ovaj rad istražuje sistemsko delovanje učesnika u pravnom obrazovanju na Pravnom fakultetu u Nišu. tokom pandemije COVID-19 (2020-2022), kada je visoko obrazovanje u potpunosti prešlo na onlajn nastavu. U prvom delu rada se predstavlja konceptualni okvir sistemskog delovanja. Drugi deo ukratko predstavlja izazove sa kojima se sistem visokoškolskog pravnog obrazovanja suočio na početku COVID-19 pandemije, kao i institucionalni odgovor Pravnog fakulteta u Niš na početku pandemije. Treći deo predstavlja probleme i izazove sa kojima su se suočili nastavnici i studenti u online nastavnom procesu, kroz prikaz i analizu rezultata nekoliko empirijskih istraživanja (anketa) o iskustvima sa online nastave sprovedenih na LF Niš u ovom periodu. Na osnovu predstavljenih rezultata, autor razmatra mogućnosti za unapređenje proaktivnog sistemskog delovanja ključnih aktera i sistema u celini za buduće potrebe online/hibridnog učenja. U nastojanju da zabeleži prvo iskustvo online nastave na LF Niš, autor ukazuje na potencijale online/hibridnog učenja u pravnom obrazovanju i neophodnost zajedničkog delovanja svih aktera u procesu unapređenja sistemskog pristupa koji bi svim akterima pružio adekvatnu podšku kako u redovnim tako i u vanrednim okolnostima.*

**Ključne reči:** *sistemski pristup, obrazovanje pravnika, ključni akteri, vanredne okolnosti.*