

## **Communication Barriers: A Study of Eastern Mediterranean University Students' and Teachers' of Online Program and Courses**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This research study defines communication barriers in online program and courses by determining the perceptions of students and teachers at Eastern Mediterranean University. It aims to get the answers of question which is what sorts of problems students and teachers face while being involved in online courses and online program. Distance Education, in other words, online programs and online courses is the new challenge that universities face in the knowledge age in order to adapt to contemporary changes. Therefore; most of the universities try to improve their educational systems in relation to the demands of students by presenting alternatives depending on participants' interests and needs. Eastern Mediterranean University has started to implement distance education program and online courses to meet the demands of its students with the support of developing technologies and trends.

Communication is an essential concept in online context to define the effectiveness and quality of these systems in regards of having qualified communication among participants that provides mutual understanding in educational context for efficient outcomes. For having effective online system, defining the communication barriers is an important process. Therefore; multiple qualitative and quantitative research approaches under mixed approach are used to be aware of communication barriers in online context and make participants to revamp the system by eliminating the weaknesses of the existing system and adapting to new trends that teachers and students have experienced.

**Keywords:** Communication Barriers, Eastern Mediterranean University, Online Program Online Courses.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Redefinition of the economic order at the end of the cold war, technologies ranging from computers and telecommunication to biotechnology all have great impact on the civilization. Today, the World Wide Web heads to changes in views and perspectives. Using internet as a medium of communication in education requires different forms of communication as compares to traditional classroom based instruction. The changes shape communication to be receiver-based (Burch, 2001). Shifting of paradigms as a result of change also changes the nature of the higher education enterprise itself. Therefore, importance of knowledge as key factor, quality of life, the global nature of our society, ease of getting information technology are the elements of knowledge age. Rapid changes in information technology make universities to adapt digital generation with emerging competitive forces.

Knowledge age is characterized by challenge and change. Impact of technology takes human beings in competitive arena and necessitates adopting to the changes by increasing capacity to know and to do things. Universities, which are the knowledge-

intensive organizations, are the main institutions to find solutions to these challenges. Therefore they have fundamental roles to create atmosphere for communicating, exchanging, collaborating on learning process all around the world (Duderstadt, 1997).

With respect to these changes, competition increased among universities in a national or international marketplace (Duderstadt, 1997). The growth of distance education as means of creating international markets for educational institutions focus on generic and transferable skills in terms of providing how educational practices are internalized with globalization. Moreover, mass education becomes an essential tool for the global technological environment. The reflection of these is that, knowledge became a commodity with the development of new communication and transport network on international scale. Therefore, most of the universities face with challenges about the effects of globalization and developments of new form of communication, flexible system of access and they are forcing to adapt these changes in the sense of changing role of the universities (Armstrong, Namsoo, 2000).

Eastern Mediterranean University is one of the universities in a developing country, which has national and international students, and teachers in its capacity to provide current educational standards. With respect to these, it has started to open educational paradigms to be in global knowledge industry by providing online courses and program to the on campus and Turkey. Therefore it is necessary to consider the quality of existing online courses and program for revamping standards easily to extend education market as an innovative way. Study discusses the communication barriers that both students and teachers experience while being involved in online courses and program, qualitative and quantitative research methods are both used in the study.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Perreault, Waldman & Alexander (2002) discuss the ways of overcoming barriers to successful delivery of distance learning courses by addressing barriers and problems to be eliminated. By examining perceptions on the important problems in the development and delivery of distance learning courses among college of business, faculty members are defined by designed questionnaire. In this study, students who participate in distance-learning courses encounter several technology-related difficulties. Respondents clarify the existence of access, technical support and student to teacher communication problems. In addition to this, respondents reported that technology related problems depend on student and instructor level of technology competence. The common barrier that is reported by distance-learning students is the lack of face-to-face interaction with the professor and other students. On the other hand, e-mail becomes problematic because of expecting immediate feedback. In addition to this, support centers are considered main factor to enhance distance-learning courses. In the recommendation part of this article, it is seen that providing training, creating adaptation about learning and teaching styles of distance courses coupled with flexibility and increased opportunities in overcoming troubles in the delivery of online courses, involving access to resources in the process students' communicating with the instructor and with other students play a great role to foster qualified communication.

Barrett (2002) explains how to overcome transactional distance as a barrier to get effective communication over internet. Barrett indicates that making people feel vulnerable can limit the amount of barrier to effective communication. In the article, existence of cultural differences among university and students are defined as barrier. Therefore it is vital to create socio-emotional space between students and their postings by adapting disciplinary discourse and knowledge of online courses. Moreover, non-verbal forms of communication are discussed in this article that is needed to reduce distance between people. In this article, the late arrival of teaching materials, inability to respond to errors or omission in the teaching materials, delay in providing feedbacks, general lack of communication between students and peers and teachers resulting feelings of isolation are the indicated problems in distance learning and teaching courses.

Depending on Sharma, Maleyeff (2003), there are potential problems and solutions over the internet education. They categorize these problems into three as problem of judgment, the problem of distance and the problem of ethic that affect impacts of interpersonal relationships and ethics. In their study, the problem of distance refers to psychological barrier in internet education because individuals are less aware of how other communicators perceive them and there are negative aspects about internet education which are involvement, social skill needs and responding differently to the same messages by immersing more to the technology. In the solution of psychological distance, they suggest to incorporate face-to face time among students and teachers to prevent feelings of isolation by merging with pedagogical, student activities, and course design solutions. By considering internet as a potent medium for communication in the reflection of content and the delivery method, some of the problems can be minimized by focusing the students on their own learning processes, role-plays, technology evaluation workshops and self-organizing groups.

Burch (2001) points out to the nature of communication in today's context by merging with the effective web components because of enhancing the online courses in universities. Burch emphasizes that nature of communication is changed from source based to the receiver based with the impact of internet in relation to educational goals by embodying the newest form of mass communication which relies on individual, person, person basis. On the other hand, concerning the barriers in two-way communication between the web site that individual, geography, language and culture are important to understand the dynamic of internet communication and its environment successfully.

Furthermore, Godschalk, Lacey (2001) did a study about learning at distance by conducting the interactions among participants and expected obstacles in distance education by applying survey via e-mails. Problems of availability, lack of recognition for development of instructional technology, problems in compensating faculty for course development, inadequate technical support, lack of student interest, unfamiliarity with technology are the expected future obstacles that are indicated in this study.

In addition to these, Bauman (2002) discusses the issue of solving personal problems in cyberspace. In the study, problems are solved by proactive strategy that is setting expectations before course begins. On the other hand, showing up in class on time, providing prompt feedback and respecting cultural, religious and gender differences are the important concepts to solve problems. Moreover the more appeared problems in distance education are caused by the reasons of unfamiliarity to the technology. Therefore as a suggestion in the study, both students and teachers should learn numerous behaviors in distance education as a new method of teaching and learning to prevent potential problems.

Meyer (2003) explains about the differences and problems in face-to-face discussions and threaded discussions where the main difference is timing, sharing needs of students related to the gestures, facial converted to meanings and feelings to reach critical thinking. In addition to this, Manuel (2001) indicates the tendency to isolate students from others, lack of discipline, need of substantial preparation, having difficulty to satisfy social skills as big part of effective communication, being poorly prepared for cognitive demands of a web-based learning environment are also discussed as problems in online courses. This study suggests to get immediate feedback, allowing students to have multiple, independent learning experiences by converting locus of control from teachers to the students.

Furthermore, Berge (2002) there are obstacles about distance training and education in corporate organizations. He points out that these barriers depend on the maturity of organization's level of capability in distance education and training through survey. The results of survey on the organizations members, respondents report that most of the organizations resist to changes at organizational structure, many instructors have lack of

knowledge and skills to design and teach distance education, participants in distance learning courses can feel isolated due to the lack of person-person contact and participants have lack of access with the fear of lackness in using technology. The results of this study point out to different stages and the greatest barriers are the lack of technical expertise and organizational change at the levels of organizational capabilities. In addition to this, social, economical, physical and learning barriers exist in workplace and in schools with regard to technology use and its use at a distance. Barriers in distance education also can be perceived as being situational, epistemological, physiological, psychological, technical, social, and cultural. According to this study, organizational changes, student support services, legal issues, social interaction, access, threatened by technology, student support services, lack of technical expertise/support are the barriers to distance education.

On the other hand, Berge (2003) makes clarification about barriers to e-learning based on post-secondary respondents' perceptions. In this study, lack of credibility and lack of money are considered as administrative structure barriers with lack of agreement. Feeling isolated due to lack of person-person contact and being uncomfortable are indicated as social interaction and quality term where lack of knowledge and skills are the term of expertise, support and infrastructure. Fear in using technology, accessing in equal standards are the barriers. Moreover post secondary respondents' perceptions rank the factor of barriers as time and faculty compensation, lack of expertise and support, organizational change, student support service, evaluation, social interaction and quality concerns, legal issues, access, threatened by technology and administrative structure. The results shows that there are differences from other results such as technological factors, social interactions which are ranked lowest in terms of barriers.

In addition to this, Berge (2001) make another study for higher education about obstacles by implementing same criteria. At this study same survey is used to determine perceptions on the barriers to distance education at community college, government and non-profit organizations. The results of the study show that, faculty compensation, time and cultural change are the highest ranked barriers and also technological expertise and support are examined as a barrier. In addition to this, organizational resistance to change, lack of shared vision for distance education, slow pace of implementation, difficulties keeping up with technological changes are also important barriers.

Berge (1998) defines barriers in online teaching and learning in post secondary institutions by pointing out both advantages of online education and its barriers by defining online teaching and learning. Responses about barriers are cultural, people's attitudes, technology, faceless teaching, increased time required for both online contacts and preparation materials and also as subset of these barriers the position of the person, the maturity of online program and the policies of the educational institution sanctioning the program are considered factors in this study. Survey is conducted to determine perceptions of teachers about online education where 36 teachers respond the survey. The barrier of technical area also indicates the lack of system reliability, lack of connectivity in online teaching era.

Moreover, Asirvatham (2000) discusses barrier as distance by concentrating on the system of synchronous learning. Asirvatham (2000) suggests the current trends such as intercompany chat rooms, white boards from their own locations, etc. that are used in distance education in order to overcome great distances by considering geography. In this article, video conferencing is also suggested to overcome geography barrier by providing high level availability and responsiveness in online courses which prevent the barriers of time in distance education.

In addition to this, Leach, Walker (2000) discuss the internet-based distance education in the sense of barriers, models and new research. They point out to the barriers by considering the importance of instructor feedback, instructor support and flexibility and feeling the need to learn and accept to share the responsibility for planning time wisely

**and searching out needed information or skills with establishing secure atmosphere. The student's level of experience with technology or familiarity or ease of use about tools is also main consideration of barriers in distance education.**

**Rovai, Barnum, (2003) point out to the online course effectiveness by analyzing student interactions and perceived learning by conducting nineteen online courses to 328 volunteer graduate students. In the study, students' self reports are used to clarify how they feel and how much they learn from online courses. They indicate that amount of interaction affect the online course effectiveness by using literature reflections on the instructor immediacy relies on the positively related to learning. In the research findings, technology is defined as achieving educational outcomes.**

**Pajo, Wallace (2001) discusses the major barriers as technology, distance education in future and intentions in education. The results of study indicate that different barriers are influential at different stages in the diffusion process. The web-based instruction is the promise of enhancing the learning experience of distance education students to maintain competitive advantages. Barriers are the teachers' attitudes, resistance to change, concerns of findings, training deficiencies, inadequate access, time constraints and lack of technical support that are underlined in the study. The most common and frequent barriers are related to time pressures, a perceived lack of training and skills, scarcity of organizational support, adoption and personal barriers are other kind of barriers in web-based instruction.**

**Depending on Cambre, Erdman, Hall (1996), the challenges of distance education is examined. They believe that lack of experience in both provider and participants' electronic mail could cause less satisfaction in distance learning experience. In addition to this, they believe that students' isolation can be raised while students cannot find opportunity to make their homework in the sense of collaborative and interactive ways. Therefore they suggest improving technological facilities in tele-course for both teachers and students for providing students to synthesize and apply what they had learned.**

**Galusha (1997) discusses the barriers of learning in distance education. In this study, loss of student motivation due to the lack of face-to-face contact, feedback, teacher contact, potentially prohibitive start up costs, student support and services, alienation and isolation by lack of experience and training, close scrutiny of the intrinsic problems, assessing student performance are examined as barriers in distance education.**

**Moreover, Howell (2001) indicates the elements of effective e-learning (distance education) in order to minimize side effects of online courses. Conducting project-based activities, Step-by-step tutorials, creating real connections to minimize the depressed and lonely effect by spending more time communicating on the internet, using sensory styles; visual, auditory and haptic (or kinesthetic) with selecting appropriate media. Piotrowski, Vodanovich (2000) discuss the reported barriers of internet based instruction as indicating shortcomings and obstacles. There are lack of privacy issues, poor, limited interactions, technological difficulties, software limitations, increased time commitment, limited faculty knowledge, training and support, isolation. In addition to these, there are five problem areas regarding web-based instruction which are credibility of Web information, computer network reliability, computer availability for students, differences in student technological skill, lack of ethical knowledge regarding use of Web information.**

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

**The research study is based on qualitative and quantitative research methods and strategies under mixed approach. Techniques of interview and questionnaire, naturalistic observation, field notes and self-reflection task about communication barriers in online courses and distance education program depending on the perceptions of students and teachers at Eastern Mediterranean University are used in order to gather multiple data.**

**Forty two students, over a hundred and nine teachers participate to the questionnaire and fifteen students and eight teachers are involved in interviews at this research study where teachers and students are involved in online courses and programs from different departments. In this research study, purposive sampling is used to choose the participants for interviews to catch the criteria on available time and place for participants. In addition to this, questionnaires are conducted in using random sampling because participants weren't known. Interviews, field notes and naturalistic observation are also conducted using purposive selected students and teachers in order to get their perceptions about communication barriers in online courses and programs at Eastern Mediterranean University. The research study aims to point out to the communication barriers of both students and teachers based on their nature of communication process in distance education. Therefore their experiences in web-based environments create different paradigms in educational area by having necessity of theoretical debates.**

As it is known communication takes place in every step of human life, but it seems different in online context because of technological impacts at this process. Therefore, examining research process by the essence of qualitative method is crucial in gathering deeper perception from participants with face-to-face contacts through interviews and also naturalistic observations. On the other hand, quantitative research method is important to gather data in reliable and valid ways by applying rank-scaling techniques in the questionnaire parallel to participants' preferences (Yin, 1994). These applications make participants special in order to maximize valid and reliable responses by feelings of subjects rather than objects in their responses as an active way (Cohen, Manion, Morrison, 2000). In the research study, mixed approach is used as data and methodological by conducting multiple methods to gather multiple data for qualitative and quantitative research design. Moreover getting the perceptions of both students and teachers also provide triangulation in order to have rich data, validity and reliability for the results of the research to define communication barriers in Eastern Mediterranean University Online System (Jick, 1983).

## **RESEARCH FINDINGS**

### **Understanding of Research Findings from Quantitative Data**

By the reflections upon both students and teachers for the questions of problems that they face in online context, their interactions among their friends and colleagues, negative and positive sides of online learning and teaching and their suggestions for the improvement of online education at EMU in terms of qualified communication, most of the teachers perceive communication as a way of chatting, engaging discussion boards and mailing where they underline that they have no communication barrier in online context. But they think that online courses and program have some difficulty because of dedicated staff, promotion, and grading, technological obstacles. On the other hand, teachers believe that initial contact with students, technological facilities, lack of student interest, attendance and lack of communication are the main problems of EMU online that they have consciousness about the importance of communication. They respond that their interactions with their students and colleagues by concerning that with the students there are good relationships but with their colleagues, there aren't efficient meetings to share thoughts. Teachers emphasize that the improvement of EMU online can be done by considering the issues such as training, increasing number of students with dedicated staff and following update technology. In addition to this, students underline through their responses to the open-ended questions that there should be solutions of technical problems and more interactions among their friends and teachers in order to be more satisfied.

On the other hand, regarding the analysis of frequencies depending on students' preferences to the questionnaire by their experiences, most of the students prefer the option of strongly agree about the statements "I have excitement associated with learning new ways, new technology" and also most of the students agree on the

statements "Distance education can be effected by situational, social, cultural, psychological aspects", "I believe that distance education is not effective because of having many problems and difficulties", "People perceive different barriers depending upon their maturity and experiences in online context", "All participants need training before being active in distance education", "Most of the participants resist changing", "There is a difficulty keeping current with technological changes", "There should be meeting to express feelings easily", "Participants feel socially isolated because of having lack of person to person contact", "There is a lack of adequate technology enhanced classrooms/labs, etc., "There is lack of adequate students/participant access internet access", "I find a chance to feel sense of collaboration, interaction in online context", "Participants need basic interpersonal communication skills at distance education", "Miscommunication arises across culturally and linguistically diverse and technological obstacles", "Distance learning settings effect participants to be more productive", "I prefer to study in distance education because of immediate communication and being active learner", "There is a difficulty to analyze teachers' perspectives", "Instructors have various forms of office hours and methods of contacts for the students", "Delivering system effects communication process in online context", "There is lack of advising/counseling support for distance learning students/participants", "I can satisfy all my needs, expectations, interest in distance learning", "I felt in shame and embracement associated with sense of incompetent task", "I believe that positive feelings enhance the learning in online". In addition to this, students are undecided with the statement "There is lack of shared vision for the role of distance learning", "Interpretation of participants effect their ways of communication in online context", "I have excitement associated with learning that is significant in the absences from online context". In addition to this, most of the students disagree on the statements "There is lack of identified needs for distance learning course-program", "There is a lack of incentive and release time in distance education", "There is a threat to instructors' sense of competence and authority", "Rather than controlling technology, technology controls me in online learning process", "There is no chance to feel comfortable like sense of real environment through distance learning", "Participants have no mutual understanding because of language", "Understanding exercises that teachers send is difficult", "I couldn't adapt for change from traditional classroom context to online learning context", "I have no chance to express my expectations", "I felt anxiety which occurs in online environment". Furthermore, depending on the students' responses, in the statements "There is well structured organization to catch different units in the distance education", the choices are common between undecided and disagree and also in the statement "There is fear of technology in online learning process", the choices of agree and disagree are equal to each other. In the statement "I have no contact with my friends", the choices of agree and strongly disagree are in equal percentage and also in the statement "I have no chance to get immediate feedback", the choices of agree, undecided and disagree are in equal percentage. In addition to this, in the statement "In order to have effectiveness in online learning process, I need nonverbal cues and paralanguage", the choices of agree and undecided are in the equal percentages.

Furthermore, depending on t-test analysis, students are pleased to experience new ways and technologies where they need some communication skills that is done between the statements and gender. In addition to this, students underline the necessity of advising and support in their learning process by concerning the adequate participation to the internet in terms of getting shared vision. Moreover, students indicate the necessity of having technology enhanced classrooms and labs that students have the embracement on incompetent tasks and students reveal that some of the participants resist changing. In regards of the ANOVA analysis depending on the ages of students, the statements "Miscommunication arises across culturally and linguistically diverse and technological obstacles, "There is lack of advising/counseling support for distance learning", "There should be meeting to express feelings easily", "Participants feel socially isolated because of having lack of person to person contact", "Most of the participants resist changing" having the value of .033 and "I felt in shame and embracement associated with sense of incompetent tasks" can be considered as problems of students while they are involved in

online learning process and also depending on the Anova analysis, students represent that the statements "Participants have no mutual understanding because of language", "I believe that distance education is not effective because of having many problems and difficulties", "There is lack of identified need for distance learning course-programs", "Participants feel socially isolated because of having lack of person to person contact", "There is a lack of adequate technology enhanced classrooms/labs, etc., "I have no chance to express my expectations" are the indicators of existing problems in online courses and program in both pedagogical and organizational aspects where students have the belief on learning new things through technology and by the these positive feelings, their learning enhance. As compared to the findings of interviews, students indicate that they experience some kind of communication problems in terms of sharing thoughts, expectations by having needed to make meeting and contact with their friends as their social needs.

Through the reflection about statistical analysis from the questionnaire to the teachers, the analysis of frequencies depending on teachers' preferences by their experiences, most of the teachers prefer the range between agree and disagree. Most of the teachers are not really insisting on extreme options about likert scale like strongly. Therefore they choose agree and disagree more frequently depending on their experiences through online education. Majority of teachers strongly agree and agree on the statements of "Distance education can be affected by situational, social, cultural and psychological aspects", "People perceive different barriers depending upon their majority and experiences in online context", "There is a lack of identified need for distance teaching courses-program", "I find a chance to feel sense of collaboration and interaction", "All participants need training before being active in distance education", "There should be meetings to express feelings easily", "There is lack of adequate student/participant access", "Interpretation of participants affect their way of communication", "Participants need basic interpersonal communication skills at distance education", "I have excitement on learning-teaching of new ways and technologies", "Instructors have various office hours and methods of contacts for the students", "Delivering system affects communication process in online context", "I can satisfy all needs, expectations, interest in distance teaching", "I prefer to study distance education because of immediate communication and being facilitator". With light of these, the common points of the statements, teachers are concerned the way of communication. In order to be effective, they believe to importance of training and communication skills in online teaching. However, teachers expect to have meetings to share feelings easily and they think that there is no identified need for teaching online courses and program. Furthermore, there are some statements that teachers responds same frequency to the option of undecided, agree and disagree. The statements of "Interpretation of participants affects their ways of communication" show the common view on disagree and undecided where the statements "Miscommunication arises culturally and linguistically diverse and technological obstacles" makes the common frequency rate between strongly agree and disagree options.

Furthermore, in the statement "I have excitement on the learning-teaching of new ways and technologies", the frequency of agree and disagree are common. In addition to the summation of agree options in the statements of "Distance learning environment affect participating to be more productive" and in the statement of "In order to have effectives, I need nonverbal cues and paralanguage" are equal to undecided frequency option of those statements. In addition to these, at the statements of "In order to have effectives, I need nonverbal cues and paralanguage", Distance learning environment affect participating to be more productive" and "I have excitement associated with learning-teaching that is significant in the absences from online environment", teachers are mostly undecided according to other options.

On the contrary, teachers strongly disagree and disagree to the statements of "I believe that distance education is not effective because of having many problems and difficulties", "There is no well structured organization to catch different units in distance education", "I have no chance to express my expectations", "Participants feel socially

**isolated because of having lack of person to person contact", "There is lack of adequate technology enhanced classrooms/labs, etc.", "There is lack of adequate instructor access", "There is threat to instructors' sense of competence and authority", "There is lack of shared vision for the roles of distance learning and teaching", "Most of participants resist changing", "I felt anxiety which occurs in online environment", "There is difficulty for keeping current technological changes", "There is fear of technology in online teaching", "There is no chance to feel the comfortable like sense of real environment through online teaching", "I have no contact with my colleagues and students", "I have no chance to get immediate feedback", "Participants have no mutual understanding because of language", "Students do not understand the exercises", "Rather than controlling technology, technology controls me", "I felt in shame and embracement associated with sense of incompetent task", "There is difficulty to evaluate participants", "There is lack of professional prestige at online teaching", "I have anxiety before accessing distance education", "I couldn't adapt for changing from traditional classroom context to online teaching context".** With the regards to these, it can be said that teachers believe on positive feelings on distance education at Eastern Mediterranean University from the questionnaire where teachers respond more detailed about indicated statements at the interview as representing different angles about their experienced problems. In addition to these, by considering the reflections of the teachers about the statements of mutual understanding due to the importance of using language, feeling isolated, having contacts with their colleagues, they don't seem to have problems in distance education to the questionnaire with the results of open-ended questions and interview findings, it can be seen that teachers have problems in both pedagogical and organizational aspects of distance education at Eastern Mediterranean University in the communication process among student-teacher, student-student, teacher-teacher, student-content, teacher-administrator.

With respect to the results of statistical evaluations which are t-test and ANOVA, the reflections of teachers in terms of their perceptions on communication barriers in distance education are identified as stressing the following statements. These statements are "I believe that distance education is not effective because of having many problems and difficulties, "Participants feel socially isolated because of having lack of person to person contact", "Miscommunication arises across culturally and linguistically diverse and technological obstacles", "Most participants resist changing", "I felt anxiety which occurs in online environment", "Rather than technology, technology controls me", "I felt in shame and embracement associated with sense of incompetent task", "There are lack of incentives and release time in distance education", "There is lack of adequate instructor access", " I have no chance to get immediate feedback", "Participants need basic interpersonal communication skills at distance education", "There is lack of adequate technology enhanced classrooms/labs, etc", "Participants have no mutual understanding because of language", "Distance education can be affected by situational, social, cultural and psychological aspects", "There is lack of identified need for distance teaching courses-programs", "There should be meeting to express feelings easily", "There is lack of adequate student/participant access", There is difficulty for keeping current technological changes".

In relation to these statements, it is indicated that teachers perceive that the situational, cultural, social and psychological aspects affect distance education and teachers think that distance education is not effective due to having some kinds of problems with technology.

Also teachers perceive that there are some psychological problems that participants don't feel comfortable, anxiety towards online environment and incompetent tasks. Teachers stress the problems of language and cultural aspects by concerning the mutual understanding and necessity of communication skills at distance education. In the light of these, teachers also have to satisfy their social needs in online context by getting immediate feedback, engaging meetings easily, more time with incentives and being out of feeling isolated.

### **Understanding of Research Findings from Qualitative Data**

By the reflection upon the findings, I can conclude that most of the students have different problems in their online learning process where they have some common problems that are internet, web page, getting feedback and lack of interactions with their friends, language, concerning to follow update technology, in need of more technological facility with training of online education. In addition to these, teachers have same problems of concerning the reorganization of institute, having more technological facilities, reaching outside the university with new vision.

Business 1 face with the barrier of face-to-face contact by stating that Business 1 has more expectations than the current system. Business 1 has consciousness that there is no real application of online learning but he thinks that online program is useful for students. Business 1 believes that interactions are held only by emails with teachers. He thinks that there is a need to improve online course and he has some uncomfortable feelings because of taking an online course for the first time. Business 1 expressed that there are negative and positive comments about online programs in designing the web pages and not being able to access into the program. According to Business 1, communication is just to send emails nothing more in online learning.

Banking 1 represents her experiences about online courses by thinking online is easier than classroom because of not attending class in order to save time. On the other hand, Banking 1 has some doubts about online context for accomplishing tasks, responsibility and the process of sending and receiving emails by using the technology. Banking 1 defines interactions among friends and teachers only for the purpose of designing web page in their meetings. Also Banking 1 thinks that the disadvantage of the online learning program is to get exam or quiz because one cannot have the chance to see actual paper.

Banking 1 faces the problem of logging web site to enter password and in addition to this she thinks that online system should be improved as normal courses to other students. Banking 1 is relaxed while accomplishing the responsibility of the task because of doing many activities at the same time. According to Banking 1, communication means that getting online like reading notes, taking exam, quizzes and it is a new way of conducting without seeing anybody. Banking 1 suggests all departments to offer online courses for the improvement of students as a new method of learning.

Computer 1 starts reflection in a criticizing way by saying that at every question that there are some problems when they look over all steps as concerning the perspective of information technology. On the other hand, Computer 1 responds to all questions by evaluating the system of online. Computer 1 thinks that online system is good because of getting many texts to read. He can't express about his feelings in online system because of taking it for the first time so he suggests getting chat groups in order to establish contact with other students in online rather than using emails as contacting teachers too.

Computer 1 thinks that main problem is to contact with teachers and get immediate feedback from them. Computer 1 thinks that in improving an online learning program, IT men has great role in revamping this system and he believes that useful links, graphs affects his understanding in online learning that he defines online context as a web page of course. Computer 1 reflects that there is no communication because of not having online community, new groups and chat program. Computer 1 thinks that there should be a development in online learning program by examining the experts' thoughts and having internet programming.

Computer 2 by taking online course at first time without having own decisions to take online courses, is not satisfied with EMU online where he likes to be an IT student. He thinks that online program of EMU needs to be upgraded. In addition to this, Computer 2 defines interactions with teachers and friends in the situation of sending and receiving emails and also meeting in class. But Computer 2 concentrates more on teacher attitudes

**about not sending message immediately and he thinks that there is no real online education at EMU with experiencing problem of getting late feedbacks. In addition to this, Computer 2 thinks that online learning program can be improved by changing fundamentals with going step by step as deeper way. Computer 2 believes that motivation is an important factor to affect his understanding in online learning. According to Computer 2, communication solely means communicating with teacher.**

**Computer 3 has positive attitudes about online learning. Computer 3 believes that his interaction with teacher and students are good by explaining the advantages of online courses which are encouraging students in online context rather than classroom. Computer 3 thinks that negative aspects depend on responsibility of students in order to attend classes and announcements as being active in online and also he thinks that the only negative aspect in online context is the language for communicating among students. Computer 3 believes that online learning can be improved by following new technology. He thinks that projects, interactions among partners and following comments of teachers are the factors in order to understand online learning. According to Computer 3, communication is very well enough which takes place between teachers by emails and he adds that there is necessity to offer online programs as being student far away from university in order to save time.**

**Business 2 who takes first time online course by the reasons of thinking that online course is easier than class in order to access it in their free time. Business 2 is satisfied with online learning program by feeling different from others and funny. Business 2 has good interactions with friend and teachers especially with teacher; he makes interactions with emails by considering online learning is better. He has a problem in accessing internet. Business 2 believes that EMU online program can be improved by instructors. He thinks that lecture notes need to be taken into consideration in online learning and its environment as a factor. According to Business 2, communication process in online means that is an open, understandable progress. He thinks that there is a need to develop online learning program in order to overcome the connection problems.**

**Business 3 who is taking online course for the first time is satisfied with being a student in online learning program. Business 3 feels that she is different and good by considering the possibility of speaking with friends through internet and also in classroom. Business 3 contacts with teachers by asking questions in classroom where she thinks that classroom is better than online learning. Business 3 says that there are no negative aspects and problems in online learning process. On the other hand, Business 3 has internet problems in online learning program and that can be improved by business and management factor. Business 3 thinks that well preparation of information and internet are the factors to understand online learning and its context. In addition to this, according to Business 3, communication means that lecture between student and teacher through technological facilities.**

**Business 4 who is an online student who has no information about online education where Business 4 is not much satisfied with being a student in online learning program because of having many difficulties from the internet. Business 4 mentions to get classroom learning by asking questions to the teacher. While reflecting their feelings, Business 4 doesn't prefer to be in an online learning process. Business 4 mentions no interactions with her friends and consults teachers in their office. She also indicates that classroom learning is better because of the problems in online learning. In the online learning, Business 4 refers communication problems like internet connection, internet speed. She defines communication process between teacher and students through emails. She finally indicates that there are internet problems that cause difficulties to communicate through the online learning program.**

**Business 5 is the student of business department who is in the fourth year in the EMU. She indicates that there is no reason to participate online learning, takes it as a free elective to fulfill the program and she is not satisfied to be student in online learning. She**

**also refers that there are communication problems like not communicating with teachers immediately, not interacting friends out of class meetings, not having face-to-face contact. She responds that online learning helps to save time at home. She indicates communication process that online learning is based on internet and class meeting to communicate with each other. Finally she adds that online learning is the new technology and should be improved.**

**Business 6** is another business department student and takes online course for the first time. He likes online courses but indicates that there are problems that he faces with like adaptation problems. He responds that online courses are prepared well by teachers through mixing alternative materials. He indicates that there are no interaction problems among the participants. Also he responds that perspectives towards online learning differ from person to person. Through the updating of the program, he suggests that online program can be improved in EMU and communication process occurs with by using technology. In addition to this, Computer 4 who is from School of Computer Studies and Information Technology thinks that online courses are difficult due to the reason not having teachers and adds that she is more successful in classroom context. Computer 4 adds that interaction takes place only between teacher and student where she thinks that in this interaction there can be web page chaos and accession problems. According to Computer 4, there are differences among classroom learning and online learning and she mentions that she couldn't learn along therefore online course is difficult for her. Moreover, she explains negative aspects of online system as quizzes and suggests for the university to do orientation about online courses and program.

**Business 7** who is from business department explains that program works well where it needs few changes and he thinks that students cannot meet each other where students find a chance to meet with teachers. He compares online learning and classroom learning in a way that classroom learning is more productive and he thinks that there is no real application of online courses. Business 7 thinks that there is no communication in online context.

Furthermore, **Business 8** who is from business administration underlines that there is no interaction with students and he states that classroom is good for him where Business 8 thinks that being in relax manner is the disadvantages of online learning. On the other hand, Business 8 suggests to the university to have qualified scientific knowledge, more internet access based on disciplined study. Computer 5 who is from civil; engineering thinks that online courses are personal rewarding for people where he hasn't been in problems due to be in online learning process. He suggests to the university to increase the capacity of online program by giving diploma and defining communication in online learning as chatting.

**Liberal** who is from architecture underlines that there should be more discipline in online system and mentions that system needs more advertisement where liberal has no interactions with his friends that is in touch with his teacher. Liberal compares online learning and classroom learning as a matter of self-confidence and mentions that most of the students have internet problem in online learning process. Liberal thinks that language problem affect his understanding in the online course and defines communication as fourth revolution. He also stresses that it cannot be defined much that he experienced from other online courses in different universities.

Through understanding of findings, one of the students thinks that communication is open, understandable in online learning program at EMU. In addition to this, it is obvious that online system of EMU is not performing well enough in its real sense in online learning process because only e learning is used without considering other necessary fundamentals. Therefore most of the students in interviews reflect that they have no consciousness about process of online because of not having training and information on online courses and about technology and concept of online.

**Departments try to practice online course where there is little consciousness about online from students' perceptions. Moreover there is no well-equipped system about online to provide continuous interaction between students and online system. Therefore, students experience technological problem factors such as accessing, opening web to download pages, internet connection which these cause uncomfortable feelings and stress on them in following up announcements, quizzes and midterms.**

**Students think that online learning program is a great idea but it needs to be improved by considering new technologies, internet connections, upgrading programs, sharing experts' thoughts in providing immediate feedback to all participants. However they believe that teacher has a great role in responding to the messages from the students and have continuous contacts with them. Students also have adaptation problems because they are so relax and feeling different from others because they have a desire for face-to-face contact. Because of having difficulties in online learning, most of the Turkish students prefer to learn in classroom to have face-to-face contacts, are curious to know other students in online. On the other hand, foreign students prefer online learning to save time in their life. In addition to this, students have language problems in communicating with others and they have lack of knowledge about technology which I experience from participant observation. Moreover some of the students choose online course in order to fulfill program but foreign students have consciousness of the advantages of online learning program.**

**Students who are taking online courses think that useful links, language, examples, graphs, movies, chat groups, lecture notes, motivation and also teacher are the factors that affect their understanding in online learning through internet. From the reflection of participant observation, there seems to be language problems because foreign students use actively verbal reactions, cues but Turkish students use non-verbal reactions in order to express their feelings, experiences and it seems that students need to satisfy their social needs.**

**Moreover, one of the interviewee thinks that online application should be matched with the content and the field of the course. Moreover students recommend that EMU online system must be upgraded by considering different expert thoughts to reach the real standards such as changing the system by introducing chat groups, internet programming, online community and improving communication process thus overcoming difficulties and create advantages about online.**

**Most of the teachers who are teaching both online courses and other type of courses at Eastern Mediterranean University reflect their views about communication barriers in terms of experiencing problems in EMU-online program courses with the consciousness of knowing the merits and benefits of using technology and also online courses for both students and teachers. According to teachers' reflections, it is obvious that teachers have only student-teacher interaction and the institute provides student-teacher interactions, student-content interactions apart from having all kind of interactions that enhance qualified communication. Even though in the scope of this research study, the matter is to consider the quality of interactions among participants by concerning existing problems rather than concerning the quantity of interactions. Teachers chose to teach online course due to their interests, being in this field, getting offer from institute and removing clashes to extent the course for other departments. Therefore, most of the teachers are satisfied to be a teacher in online courses and program because they have different experience and believe its benefits. Some of the teachers are quiet satisfied because of the feeling of the language problems of students and technical problems in the system.**

**In addition to this, teachers think about online courses and program of Eastern Mediterranean University as without having face-to-face contacts creates different problems removing technical difficulties and employing more professional staff. One of the teacher underlines that s/he wants prompt changes to make the course dynamic. S/he emphasizes that there should be interactivity, enough laboratories and reaching**

**outside university. Another teacher mentions that they didn't achieve the main aim that is to market online courses and underlines the reorganization for the institute. Depending upon the interactions among students, most of the students use e-mail, announcement page, chat programs and telephone but in some cases, students' interactions seem as limited due to lack of using technology, missing feedback in terms of technical difficulties.**

**Teachers underlines that a few number of students have willingness to participate current interactions and students don't like discussion boards and one of the teacher makes the online course in mixed mode as making face to face contacts and office hours due to projects and s/he only uses chat once at time and thinks announcement page is main vehicle to keep in touch with students. Interactions among teachers take place as interacting with assistants by getting immediate feedback and teachers thinks that there is less communication even though no interaction among colleagues where they only interact when they have problem about courses and sharing, complaining about students' lack of interest and slow service of institute without making meetings. Most of the teachers think that online teaching has advantages on teaching lectures faster; getting more feedback through chat, e-mail, having ready materials, not being there all the time where some of the teachers underlines the disadvantage of face to face contact and think that face to face teaching is easier than online teaching.**

**Additionally, teachers represent the negative aspects of online courses and programs as grading system which is depending on only the final exam to pass and not having opportunity to integrate course, habits of students and their use of language, face to face problems that participants can not experience. One of the teachers don't believe that there are negative aspects of online courses and program but in the case of controlling students, teachers see difficultly such as taking own responsibility. Also one of the teachers' think that these depend on personality and s/he believes there are some students who get online courses or not to be in face to face contact with students.**

**On the other hand, one of the teachers underlines that due to limited number of students, s/he didn't see any negative aspects of online courses and program. Most of the teachers represent that they haven't experienced any problems unless the cases of preparing course because of teaching first time, applying quiz that none of the students attend, loading pictures, getting technical support, technical difficulties such as uploading to the server and the situation of students that are not used to online learning and have difficulty to adjust to the new system. Teachers believe that online courses and program of Eastern Mediterranean University can be improved by concerning the update technology in terms of computer labs hours, vastly improvement of networks, server, better organization with reorganization of institute, better communication, grading system and increasing the number of courses or improving existing courses with the increased number of staff, and making advertisement, training, general orientation about online teaching-learning, evaluations to see the efficiency and effectiveness of program. Teachers believe that the factors of multimedia in terms of hearing, seeing and observing, feedback and helps of teachers, exercises, quizzes, delivery of instruction, English language and well designed materials affect the students' understandings in online context. Teachers define their online teaching environment as comfortable with technology, preparation of web design, teaching design of companies in computer system, media type learning which is integrated with chats, discussion, providing summary of subject, articles, newspaper and discussion questions and quizzes. One of the teacher points out that s/he feels sometimes isolated because of not having frequent interactions with students.**

**Moreover, teachers define communication process in online context as using interaction tools such as chat, discussion boards without face to face contact where students don't participate in any interaction activities. Teacher underlines the importance of communication with these tools and one of the teacher makes suggestion on sharing and exchanging ideas and experiencing among participants for effective communication and other one suggests to work with professional staff in a professional institute. On the**

other hand, one of the teachers defines communication process in online context as there is only e-mail account and there isn't enough communication among students. One of the teachers suggests to the program by competing with different institutions. One of the teachers thinks that communication in terms of chatting is vital for interaction but they have lack of communication due to students' demonstration.

One of the teachers defines communication process as being online but there is face to face contact in this process. Also teacher suggests having more online courses with multimedia options and having students who can use English language well. On the other hand, one of the teachers defines communication process in online context as having lack of communication between students and teachers and suggests having the more lab hours organizing orientation for both students and teachers about online teaching and learning process.

Using naturalistic observation and meetings with students and drinking something to observe their perceptions and expectations in a shared atmosphere is created. In addition to this, during the meetings I ask some questions about their communication processes and their general view on education for clarifying their responses to the interview questions and making them more comfortable to include more feelings and expectations in a flexible manner. Most of them criticize the system of education especially online learning program because facing many problems at Eastern Mediterranean University and also they mention that interactions among students are weak in online learning. They only focus on the interaction of teachers for following course requirements. In my point of view, Turkish students use actively non-verbal reactions like paralanguage, eye contact and gestures but foreign students use actively verbal cues and actions in order to deliver their conversation which can indicate the language problem through the online learning process. Most of the students have unconsciousness about online courses and they reflect themselves as being in uncertainty. As I observe that they need to satisfy their social needs because of having the need to be in contact with others rather than educational needs. Therefore students face with psychological problems because of not being able to contact with their peers and feeling different from others. Besides these, teachers that I observe while I was doing interviews feel themselves as in the uncertain position with online teaching and they believe that the reorganization of institute will enhance the online program and courses.

To sum up, both students and teachers complain that they have lack of communication among each other's due to the fact that there are not conscious of the online concept. All of them believe the beneficial of online courses and program for the sake of university and themselves due to using update technology and different education structure that is student-centered under constructivist principles. Students explain that they have communication problems because of technical difficulties which are network, computer labs, etc and language problem to understand lecture notes and also communicate with others by having the social needs because of feeling different from others. Moreover, teachers explain the problems of lack of students' interests to the chat sessions, adaptation to new system and use of technology and language of students. As a result both students and teachers suggest having to update technology, be involved in training and reorganization of the institute with professional staff under a new vision in order to share their experiences and thoughts in order to get benefit and compete with other universities.

## **CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION**

Regarding to research findings based on mixed approach, in EMU online program and courses, there is only student-teacher interaction by using e-mails where real online courses and program takes place student-student, teacher-student, teacher-teacher and student-faculty interactions. Students and teachers think that communication is weak because of not having any powerful internet connection, face-to-face contact as a result of the technological challenges. In addition to this, students have feelings as a being

different with a fear of technology. However, teachers underline necessity of conducting meetings to express their feelings. Because of the complex communication process, students experience adaptation problem such as being relax. Students need to have face-to-face contact to know other people. Accessing and internet connection create physical and psychological barriers for both students and teachers. In addition to this, language problems require semantic barrier within participants' communication process and technological factors are also the main barrier as technical barriers in communication process. It is the time to make comment that students and teachers need to be involved in training in their teaching-learning process.

The research findings and findings from literature review show that barriers are changing according to students' and teachers' perceptions. Reflection tasks for both students and teachers provide me to integrate the responses of participants through interviews that they underline same problems and thoughts with interviews. They point out to the problem of lack of communication with technical problems and the necessity of training, update technology to enhance their. Naturalistic observations help me to experience the interactions of students and teachers to the technology especially in their learning and teaching in online courses. I can say that students need to overcome language, adaptation problems by reflecting well-designed web pages. In addition to this, students need to satisfy their social needs because of the need to conduct with others and express their feelings in a common understanding. They reflect that they have psychological problems in the sense of feeling uncomfortable, stress and fear because of being under uncertainty with the cause of ineffective communication process. Lack of internet connection, unable to use technology and not having training about online courses and spending too much time regarding of online courses rather than time consuming are the problems of Turkish students that foreign students know the way of update contacting in online context by following new trends, comparing the other systems that the university has some lacknesses in technological aspects and organization structure in online system. Teachers also need to concern their teaching effectiveness in online context rather than giving all responsibilities to the students. On the other hand, online system lacks current application in the world such as videoconferencing, user-friendly web pages and powerful internet connection and facilities in order to create qualified communication among participants in terms of getting quality in whole system.

Depending on the gathered data from qualitative and quantitative research methods, it can be discussed that communication barriers are revealed from the perceptions of both students and teachers in EMU Online. These barriers are concerned as technological, physical, semantic, psychological barrier.

#### FURTHER RECOMMENDATIONS

The research study highlights a broader picture for existing problems in EMU online in terms of communication barriers. Therefore in the further studies, conducting how to resolve these barriers, having qualified communication process in online learning-teaching process is necessary.

For the future studies, handling the resolutions of these problems that are indicated and concentrating firstly on the psychological barriers in communication process and their solutions are vital in the communication process in online learning and teaching context. Overcoming psychological barriers and technical barriers provide to eliminate other communication barriers and lack of communication among participants. In addition to this, Eastern Mediterranean University should start to implement the power of virtual learning-teaching classroom rather than using classroom setting such as computer labs and internet access. In addition to this, concerning the training of both students and teachers in relation to online context is crucial. Therefore, empowering the importance of communication skills in online context for teachers regarding to their professional growth is an expected research focus for the future.

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