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STUDENT ENGAGEMENT IN GROUP WORK AND INDIVIDUAL WORK IN ONLINE DEGREE STUDIES

–Case study: TUAS IB Online



BACHELOR'S THESIS | ABSTRACT

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STUDENT ENGAGEMENT IN GROUP WORK AND INDIVIDUAL WORK IN ONLINE DEGREE STUDIES -CASE STUDY: IB ONLINE

The number of online degrees is rapidly growing. Thus, online education has the need for constant improvements. Turku University of Applied Sciences (TUAS) started the first fully online degree programme in International Business (IB) in the academic year of 2017/18. The objective of this research is to answer some of the pedagogical and technological questions after the first year by exploring student engagement in online studies with IB Online as a case study from a student perspective. The thesis examines mainly group and individual work and compares the differences in student engagement from technological and pedagogical point of view.

The literature review explored the framework of TPACK and 5-step model in the use of pedagogy and technology. In the exploratory research, a quantitative method was applied. The primary data was collected using the first IB Online census.

The results show the students' point of view after the first year of studies. The main findings of the research are: student engagement, teaching and study approaches, integration of technology and the connection of group and individual work. Based on the results, recommendations are made for future research to further develop online degree studies.

KEYWORDS:

TUAS, IB Online, Online degree studies, Student engagement, Pedagogy, Technology

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BBA	Bachelor of Business Administration
CK	Content Knowledge
COI	Community of Inquiry
GW	Group Work
HEI	Higher Education Institution
IB	International Business
ICC	Intercultural Communication
IT	Information Technology
IW	Individual Work
Innopeda®	Innovation Pedagogy
MBO	Marketing and Business Operations
OCL	Online Collaborative Learning
PINBOS17	The first International Business Online study group
PK	Pedagogical Knowledge
R&D	Research and Development
TK	Technology Knowledge
TPACK	Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge
TUAS	Turku University of Applied Sciences
VLE	Virtual Learning Environment

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Online education

In today's world, technology is developing rapidly, while changing many aspects of our lives. Smartphones, internet and social media have become part of everyday habits, and this rapid transformation of technology has affected education as well as other fields of business. The demand for higher education studies has increased in the past decades, due to the increasing world population. In developed countries, the percentage of people with higher education qualifications grew significantly. The rapid rise of internet had an impact on this field of business as well, and governments are looking for solutions with the use of information technology (IT) to make services more accessible. One common solution in higher education is to decrease the number of classroom teaching and to increase online teaching, with the aim to support self-directive studies outside of the classroom. (Bach, et al., 2006)

Online degree education is still at an early developmental stage. Integrating technology into education can solve various problems that occur in higher education, such as the high demand for it. This implementation method provides education to various types of people, irrespective of residency, age or family situation. The system provides freedom to the students, but still gives various possibilities to gain new skills and knowledge. (Puri, 2005) Distance education offers quality education similar to that provided to on-site students and combines it with new technological and pedagogical approaches to provide the new skills needed in today's world.

The duty of universities of applied sciences is to provide the working life with professionals with practical knowledge. The competences needed in the job market are focused on virtual knowledge in today's world where IT is taking a lead in every field of business. (Scheinin, 2016) Turku University of Applied Sciences started the first completely online English degree programme in International Business (IB) in the academic year of 2017/18.

1.2 Studying at TUAS

Turku University of Applied Sciences (TUAS) is a higher education institution (HEI) in Southwest Finland. TUAS has three different faculties; Arts Academy, Engineering and Business – which IB Online is a part of – and Health and Well-being (Turku AMK, 2018a). TUAS has over 8000 students, from which over 350 are foreign degree students (Turku AMK, 2018b). Studies combine theoretical and practical knowledge for future professionals, thus TUAS takes part in different projects and collaboration to foster the development of working life. The set goal is not only to produce competent professionals, but also to establish Southwest Finland as a region of cooperation and partnership and create success in international competition. These activities not only enable the development of the students, but also gives a chance for partners and staff for self-growth in their own field. (Turku AMK, 2018c)

The core philosophy embedded in teaching is innovation pedagogy (Innopeda®) which is a new approach developed at TUAS (Turku AMK, 2018b). Innopeda® was created by the pressure of the changing society and the needs of working life and it refers to an approach in teaching and studying. A successful innovation considers both relation to the economy and the society. The goal for Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences is to engage in applied research and development (R&D) and Innopeda® corresponds to the needs of working life while also focusing on R&D expertise. The set goal is that students are able to apply their knowledge during their studies, not only after employment. This way students not only become experts in their own field but also acquire innovation competences that are required in nowadays work environment (Penttilä, et al., 2013)

1.3 Studying in IB Online

TUAS provides a chance to acquire a Bachelor's degree fully online in English (studyinfo.fi, n.d.). International Business (IB) Online provides a new interactive way to become an expert in different areas of business depending on one's interest. IB Online offers an international environment for students with experts from different business areas applying various teaching methods. The pedagogical framework of IB Online is based on a balanced implementation of pedagogy, content and technology. (Turku AMK, 2018d)

The first IB Online student group started their studies in Autumn 2017. The group consisted of international, national and Open University students. The entire degree is completed online in three and a half years. The degree programme follows TUAS's hands-on learning approach. In IB Online, students are provided with various types of courses. These different courses not only offer different skills to the students, but they have to apply different study methods for effective learning.

Students have both individual and group work, and thus They have to manage collaboration with fellows 100% online. The curriculum (see Appendix 1) consists of basic, professional, optional studies, practical training and thesis. The overall structure of the degree programme is not entirely different compared to on-site studies; however, the implementation of the courses was adjusted to suit online studies. According to Harasim (2012), teachers have to apply new pedagogical approaches and look for new innovative ways of teaching in online environments.

1.4 Working as an IB Online assistant

I started working at TUAS in February 2017 as an intern, as a second year International Business student in the traditional on-site degree programme. Before that, I worked with IB Online marketing project as part of a course. Working for IB online programme gave me the possibility to apply my knowledge I gained throughout my studies into practice and acquire new skills. After my basic practical training, I was offered the possibility to continue as a Project Assistant for IB Online.

Being an IB student and a staff member at the same time has given me additional insight into both of my roles. As the project assistant, my main responsibilities include administrative tasks, internal and external communication, planning and organizing events, creating and implementing marketing actions and suggesting development ideas based on student feedback. As part of my work, I have been in regular contact with the IB Online students. With all the experience, it was clear that writing my thesis about IB Online would bring extra value to the skills and knowledge I have gained so far, as well as give the possibility to further develop online degree studies.

1.5 Objective of the thesis

There are many publications and research conducted by TUAS that examine online teaching and pedagogy from the teachers' point of view. However, there is a gap from the student point of view. It became clear that there is a need for deeper understanding and analysis of current student experiences and viewpoints to further develop IB Online as well as online degree studies in general. This thesis is based on my personal experience, literature in this field and my research into the first year of IB Online degree studies as experienced by the students.

The aim of this thesis is to examine in depth group work (GW) and individual work (IW) as the two main study and teaching approaches used by students and teachers. The goal is to find answers to the following questions, by conducting research to explore these areas:

- 1) How does student engagement differ in group work and individual work?
- 2) Do the students find the teaching approaches in GW and IW suitable?
- 3) Do the students find using different study methods essential at IB Online?
- 4) What tools the students find the most suitable for GW and IW?
 - i. Do students find tools provided by school for GW suitable?
 - ii. Do students mainly use tools provided by the school or others selected by the group?
 - iii. Who provides support for these tools?
 - iv. What tools do students use for individual work?
- 5) What is the ideal group size from the student view for GW?
- 6) Do students find GW and IW both essential in online studies?

1.6 The structure of the thesis

The following Chapter (2) explains the foundations of online education. The rapid development of technology created the need for changes in educators' way of teaching. The chapter explores new educational theories, student engagement, technology and pedagogy in an online context and the foundations of successful online degree studies.

In Chapter 3, the case studies are presented along with the applied teaching methods. This chapter is essential to understand the differences and similarities of group work and

individual work in order to have a valid analysis of the questionnaire and recommend suitable developments for IB Online.

In Chapter 4, the chosen research methodology is explained along with the data collection techniques. The chapter describes why the chosen technique was the most suitable for this research and the data collection method.

Chapter 5, the research analysis presents the results of the survey. The findings are discussed along with applied theories. This chapter shows some similarities and differences between the author's research and previous research and theories and presents new ideas.

In the conclusion, Chapter 6 the main findings are concluded along with suggestions for development ideas for IB Online as well as possible future research.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

This section explores various literature that contribute to the research. Theories provide a base for a deeper knowledge in the field of education, to effectively explore different schools of thought. Theories were applied to understand the core concepts in order to suggest suitable development ideas for IB Online.

2.1 Innovation pedagogy as an approach for online studying

TUAS continuously conducts research in the field of online education, with the goals to enable students the participation in innovation processes of future work irrespective of the degree programme (Kairisto-Mertanen, 2013). Thus, Innopeda® has to be applied at IB Online as well. Such practice brings benefits to the University students, working life and the society as well. The new study methods and approaches enable the students to apply their knowledge already while studying, build their professional networks and prepare for the needs of future organization. (Kairisto-Mertanen, 2013)

IB Online is unique in the area of Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA) studies, by providing the students with skills that can be beneficial in their professional lives. They gain knowledge and become confident with online tools used in working life during their studies. This brings added value to their degree and differentiates them from other BBA students. According to Innopeda®, learning cannot be separated from the surrounding world such as cultural aspect or changes in society. How we solve problems is greatly connected to activities we take part on a daily basis. This fact highlights the need for a suitable learning environment and pedagogical approaches. (Penttilä, et al., 2013)

A research (Varhelahti & Rännäli, 2016) explores the virtual needs of nowadays working life. Communication skills are changing rapidly due to the technological changes. The survey was conducted in Finland among professional working in national and international organizations; findings from their research state that the majority of the respondents wanted to improve negotiation skills, group interactions and conversational skills in virtual environments. (Varhelahti & Rännäli, 2016) Students in IB Online have various online collaboration. As a need of future professional life, students can acquire beneficial skills in virtual communication.

Both teaching approaches, group work and individual work involved some form of live online meetings. According to Joshi (2016), live online sessions create more student engagement and motivation. Most of the respondents of the research agreed that online meetings could be integrated into online courses. Previous feedback from PINBOS17 shows that students find the live session with teachers or coaches greatly useful (Szep, 2017).

2.2 Online learning and teaching theories

According to Harasim (2012), 21st century is referred as the Knowledge Age, and youth are described as the Net Generation. In this technology-driven world, it is essential to study the connection of learning theory and technology. Teachers have to respond to these changes and reflect on it by new teaching practices and pedagogical approaches. Adapting traditional practices to online environments will lead to failure. Harasim addresses the need of new learning and teaching theories and changing the way we think about these. (Harasim, 2012)

Over the years, we have included various communication technologies to our personal lives. However, it seems we fail to fully integrate these to our professional lives and explore all the possibilities. (Harasim, 2012) In an online degree programme, exploring these possibilities is crucial. Students have to overcome difficulties that arise from distance, different time zones or lack of physical meetings. Including and integrating these communication technologies can give a solution to these problems.

These technological and social changes challenge educators to change their previous practices and look for new innovative ways of teaching. A common tendency of teachers has been to integrate technology into traditional ways of teaching (Harasim, 2012). At TUAS, IB Online staff is constantly trying to develop the online degree programme and provide the same quality education as on-site. The theory suggested by Harasim (2012) for the 21st century, the Online Collaborative Learning (OCL), can offer a solution for these changes. The theory is based on previous approaches, but presents a new perspective of online pedagogy.

2.2.1 The five-stage framework for supporting the learning process

The five-stage framework provides a structured learning process to support the students at each stage to develop expertise in studying online. It not only shows how the participants can benefit from the development, but also gives information on what e-moderators have to provide at each stage. These stages and the process can be applied to every online course. When one stage is lacking, it can cause problems in the progress and harm student motivation. This framework helps the teachers to know how the participants are likely to act at each stage and how to successfully build the course in order to avoid pitfalls. (Salmon, 2004)

Based on this framework, teacher presence is essential in online studies. Figure 1 shows what stages the students should go through and what kind of technical and e-moderator support the students should receive.

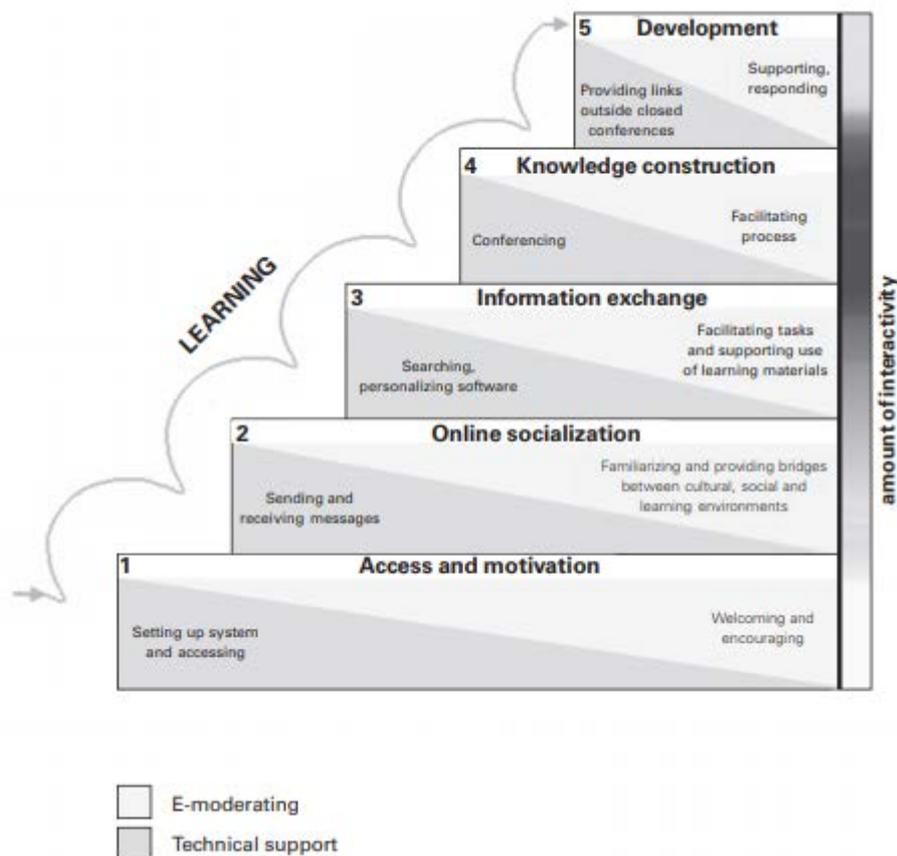


Figure 1 Model of teaching and learning online through online networking (Salmon, 2004)

Stage 1 is focusing on access and motivation. This stage includes the access to school systems – such as e-mail or Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) – and creating motivation and the sense of community. (Salmon, 2004) PINBOS17 started their studies with orientation days. This action is equivalent to stage 1. The following stages were reached throughout the first semester. IB Online staff payed close attention to the progress of the students. This framework can be applied to the whole degree programme. However, it can support the implementation of each course as well.

Even though students had started to establish their online identities and looking for ways to interact with each other during these three days, stage 2 – which focuses on the online socialization – became complete after the real start of the courses. Stage 3 and 4 – information exchange and knowledge construction – were progressing simultaneously. Students started to interact with each other for group work and for other purposes. The groups became more collaborative and interactive. Stage 4 evolved in different times depending on the group. Majority of the time students stepped into stage 5 – development – by the end of the course. This included self- and peer-evaluation and feedback from the teachers or coaches.

Online identity

“The expression of self-identity through introductions is important for building relationships and generating social presence in online learning communities” (Gunawerdana, 2014, p. 42).

Pre-course activities or orientation can help the students build trust among each other and express themselves better in online communities. Students have to be aware of what is expected from them in the virtual environments, such as level of self-disclosing. Some students might have problem with posting a picture for example, and these kind of expectations from the school may have to be open for negotiations. (Gunawerdana, 2014)

Elements of multilingual communication can increase the students’ comfort level. In school platforms, students are expected to follow academic language. It is essential to mention that at a stage where student build their presence in the online community, moderators have a crucial role. Teachers have to pay an active role in supervising the

power dynamics of the group and providing equal chances to all students. Frequent online presence can maintain a productive online community. (Gunawerdana, 2014)

The orientation played a crucial role in stage 1. According to Salmon, there is a connection between the students' technical access and skills and their motivation to be active online. At the beginning, students need regular access to the online environment, not only to learn how to find or read something, but to actively take part. Therefore, activities at this stage need to provide an interesting introduction to all the platforms. (Salmon, 2004)

Students received all the necessary information on how to access all the platforms and tools, such as Optima, Messi, SoleOPS and Office 365. These are the main platforms that are used in online studies. The course called ToolBox for the Online Learner, which was specifically designed for online students, aimed to teach all the technological knowledge – including school platforms and online tools – that students need for successful online studies. The course started with a kick-off at the orientation, where students received access and could activate their student accounts. Based on this knowledge, students had to perform small assignments connected to the orientation. After the orientation, the course continued with various themes connected to other courses. The students gained technical knowledge throughout the ToolBox course, which they could apply to delivering assignments for another course.

Another important part of stage 1 is the motivational factor and to build the online identity. According to a research by Jones & Peachey, is essential to have a well-designed introduction at stage 1 for effective socialization. The research also shows that face-to-face contact can play a crucial role in the socialization process and the creation of the community of learners. (Jones & Peachey, 2005) During the orientation, the students had the possibility to meet face-to-face and to create a common social media platform for the group. All the students were added to a Facebook and WhatsApp group for informal communication. The sense of belonging to a community was an important aspect when planning the orientation. Students could take part in extracurricular activities organized by their student tutors to engage more with their fellows.

2.2.2 Netiquette

Netiquette is a new phrase describing appropriate and inappropriate behaviors and attitudes in online environments (Barnes, 2012). Every group, just as in real life, decides on their own norms. It is crucial for the online class to follow the same rules, but also to set up together a way of working in their small groups. Connected to the five-stage model, it is important to mention the theory about socialization in online classrooms. Online socialization is an essential part of online studies. Just as in face-to-face teaching, students need to feel the belonging to a community. Connected to stage 2 (see in Figure 1 more detail), it is important to mention the online social norms.

According to Phillips's and Metzger's framework (1976, cited in Barnes, 2012), the similarity in each individual's goals influence the relationships. Conflicts can arise from differences in the groups members' interests. In these situations, the enforcement of the norms is essential. (Barnes, 2012) It is important at this point to mention the IB Online norms. On the Optima Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) platform, common rules are described by the teacher tutors, how students are expected to work and behave in the online community. The page contains essential information on time-management, communication and group work. (Optima IB Online, 2018a)

Another interesting fact mentioned by Barnes (2012), is the need of lurking. The study suggests that students need time to adapt to new groups. Lurking is an effective way for students to adjust to the new group dynamics for successful collaboration. It can include various activities, from examining, such as reading the messages, to taking part in the group discussions. (Barnes, 2012)

2.2.3 Student engagement and motivation

Studies explained by Klem & Connell (2004) show that students become more disengaged in their studies in the progress from elementary school to higher education. There is common agreement that engagement increases the success in school and there is a link between higher engagement and improved performance. However, engaging students in their studies challenges educators. (Klem & Connell, 2004) Thus, there is a need for solution how to support student engagement for better performance.

Dixson (2010) was exploring for the activities that create higher student engagement. The study showed that student engagement does not have a direct connection to specific activities. Students need multiple options and channels for communication and connection with fellows. Active students, who tend to be more engaged and motivated, have more interaction with fellows, than passive students do. Using the same channels for communication, based on the answers engagement has a connection with being active or passive, and not with the channels. (Dixson, 2010) The results show that students who engaged in their studies can list motivating activities, irrespective of the teaching or study method. Application of a theory to real life situations, group projects or discussions can all be engaging according to students.

Boton (2016) researched student engagement in online courses. The author approaches the question of motivation from two different sides. First, student engagement can be connected to the content of the course. Teaching meaningful content, that is applicable to real life situations, can higher the students' motivation. Secondly, collaborative working can also generate numerous positive effects. Creating a sense of belonging in students is essential in online classes. This can be reached with activities such as group work or discussions. (Boton, 2016)

See in Figure 2, various strategies to higher student engagement in online studies. Moore's interaction (1989, 1990) defines three forms of interaction: student-student, student-teacher and student-content. These are all critical aspects in one's engagement towards the studies. Meyer also describes other various techniques that can have a positive effect on engagement. (Meyer, 2014) At IB Online, many of these approaches are applied. Students have active collaboration with fellows as well as with the teachers. Live All Group Meetings give a possibility for frequent student-teacher interaction. The Small Group Meetings are great way to discuss and share knowledge with fellows and teachers.

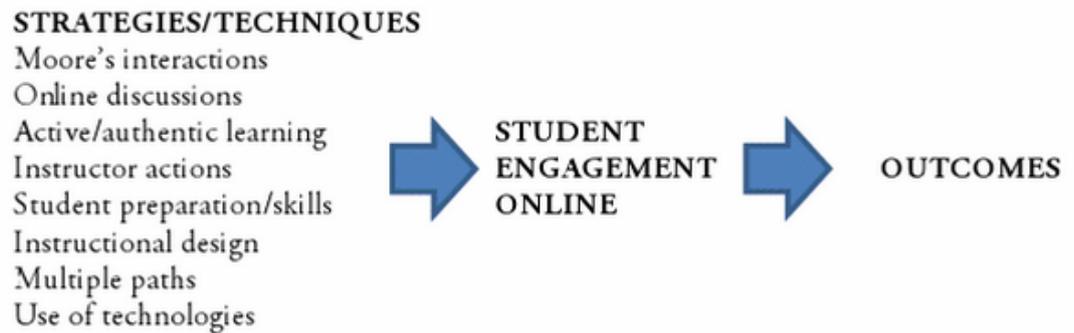


Figure 2 Strategies for student engagement online (Meyer, 2014)

2.3 Integration of technology

Integration of technology in education is one of the fastest growing economic and social sectors and equally essential for online studies. Nowadays the technological world offers the educators new possibilities to integrate multimedia applications into teaching. (McGreal & Elliott, 2008) If a concept is presented via various tools, students have the potential to have a better understanding than going through only one source of media (Vilardi & Rice, 2014).

The IB Online staff had to find a solution to integrate already existing tools to online studies as well as to come up with new ones. Students are provided with various tools by the school. Students receive the course content and course information via various tools and the main VLE platform Optima. Teachers offer various types of materials, such as books and articles available online, videos or pre-recorded lectures.

There was a need at IB Online to find suitable tools for online meetings that can replace face-to-face ones on campus. The main tools for this purpose are Skype for Business and Adobe Connect. The former is used for individual and small group meetings while the latter is for all group meetings. These two meeting tools enable interaction in online studies and real time collaboration.

2.3.1 Technology and IB Online

At IB Online, students acquire the essential skills for online tools during the orientation and the first semester. Applicants are not required having any previous knowledge on

these. However, Finland is a digitally advanced country. In 2016, already 85% of individuals were using internet on daily bases and 6% at least once a week (Statista, 2018a). By 2016, 92% of Finnish households had internet access (Statista, 2018b). As we can see from these statistics, Finnish people are familiar with internet and technology. Thus, applicants are more likely to have a general understanding and knowledge of this area even before starting their studies.

In general, higher education institutions are now transferring to a phase where the use of ICT is being encouraged. The second phase, where this infrastructure is applied to pedagogical approaches is still under development. (Collis & van der Wende, 2002) Technology and the integration of it to education created a new and innovative way of teaching that is accessible to different target groups. According to Ludlow and Duff (2009, cited in Susilo, 2014), internet has a more dramatic influence on education than any previous technological innovation, since it allows individuals of any age and from any place to access education.

PINBOS17 students heavily lean on technology due to the lack of physical contact. Optima is the main learning environment used for course materials. This is also the platform where students find IB Online related information regarding student life or studies. Office 365 provides the students with various tools for online collaboration. Student e-mail is used for all the formal internal communication, such as teacher-student contact. Students frequently use the outlook calendar to book meetings with their teachers or fellows. In Office 365, all the MS Word apps can be found. In the online versions of those, students can collaborate in real time. Students also use WhatsApp for communicating with the fellows. Even though it is an external tool, it is a great for informal communication between the students in online studies.

2.3.2 TPACK

Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) identifies the knowledge that is required by teachers to successfully integrate technology in their teaching. The seven components consist of three primary sections – Content, Pedagogy and Technology – and the intersections between the three primary forms. (TPACK ORG, 2017a) See Figure 3, how these three primary sections merges and create intersections from the forms. TPACK is more than knowing all the three concepts individually. This theory gives

an effective way for the teachers to integrate technology into teaching online. (TPACK ORG, 2017a)

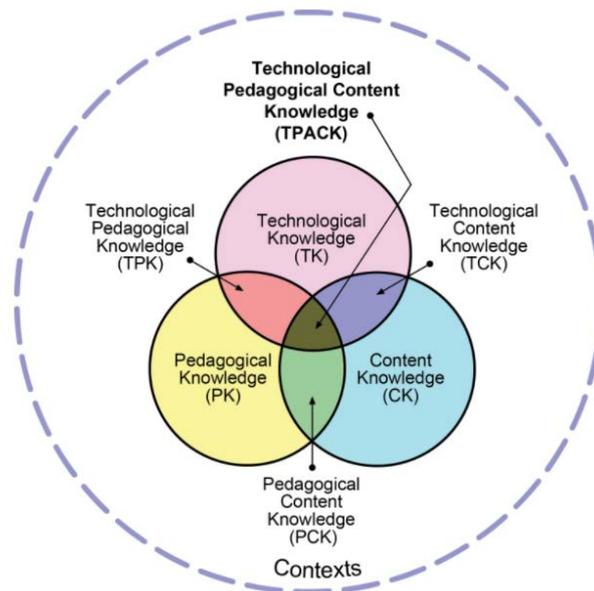


Figure 3 TPACK image (TPACK ORG, 2017b)

An online degree programme cannot operate successfully without the integration of technology. It is essential for educators to be able to identify how to use technology in a constructive way to teach various content. The TPACK framework offers various possibilities for research in education, professional development and use of technology. The framework build on Schulman’s idea of Pedagogical Content Knowledge. The development of TPACK is crucial for effective teaching with technology. (Koehler & Mishra, 2009)

Content Knowledge (CK)

CK is the teachers’ knowledge on the subject that has to be learned and taught. According to Shulman (1986), this knowledge includes concepts, theories, ideas, frameworks, established practices and approaches. The knowledge and the way to teach the content differs between fields. Teachers have to understand the fundamental principles in which they teach. A lack in this knowledge can cause the students to receive misleading information. (Koehler & Mishra, 2009) IB Online teachers are experts in their

own field of business with many years of experience. This provides them with an insight on which is the most effective way to teach the course content.

Pedagogical Knowledge (PK)

PK is the teachers' deep knowledge about the practices and methods of teaching and learning. This is a generic understanding of how the students learn, classroom management skills, planning and student assessment. A teacher with deep pedagogical knowledge understands how student acquire skills and how to generate positive attitude towards learning. (Koehler & Mishra, 2009) The IB Online Project Manager is an expert in online education and pedagogy. She was in frequent contact with all the teachers to ensure they apply the most suitable pedagogical approaches and they have all the necessary pedagogical knowledge to support the students.

Technology Knowledge (TK)

Defining TK is challenging due to the rapid technological developments. One definition can become outdated already when it is published. However, the essence of TK is to understand information technology broadly enough to effectively apply it at work. Acquiring TK enables a person to perform different tasks using various information technology. (Koehler & Mishra, 2009) IB Online teachers were provided with technological sessions before the online degree implementation, as well as support sessions throughout the first year of implementation. The aim was to familiarize themselves with all the online tools and learn how to effectively integrate them into their course. These sessions not only taught how one tool works, but for what pedagogical purpose it is the most suitable for and how it can be used for different approaches.

The TPACK framework offers new possibilities for educators in research, professional development and use of technology in education. TPACK offers a solution to go beyond traditional approaches and not only to consider technology as an add-on option, but also to fully integrate it into education. (Koehler & Mishra, 2009) IB Online represents a new approach, which considers technology as a compulsory base in online education that has to be integrated in every course, balanced with pedagogy and content.

3 CASE STUDIES

3.1 Marketing and Business Operations (MBO) group work

The marketing and business operations course was offered to PINBOS17 in 2017 Autumn semester, which was the first semester for the students. The course was worth ten credits and it was implemented from September until November. See Figure 4, the implementation plan consisted of mainly group assignments and group discussions. The course included some individual work as well, but in this thesis, I will examine the group work part of this course.

Week	Days	Theme	Reading	Deadline (Peer review, groups assignments and individual assignments)	Learning Method	All class/ In Group
35	1.9.	Intro to course/ and Group formation	Chapter 1	Live session the entire class (F2F)	LIVE Session (the whole class)	
36		Group discussions 1	Chapter 1	10.9 23:00	Skype recording	In group
36-37		The Marketing Environment	Chapter 3		Video/ individual/group/self studies	Independently
37		Group assignment 1 deadline		17.09	Video/ individual/group/self studies	
38	19-20 Sept	Consumer Behavior	Chapter 6	LIVE Session (small groups 3 groups per session)	Live Session (small group)	In group
38		Individual Assignment 1 deadline		24.9.	individual	
39		Group discussions 2	Chapter 6	01.10 23:00	Skype recording	In group
39	28 Sept	Intro to Entrepreneurship		LIVE Session (the whole class)	LIVE Session (the whole class)	All Class
40	3-4.Oct	Targeting, and Positioning	Chapter 5	LIVE Session (small groups 3 groups per session)	Live Session (small group)	In group
40		Group assignment 2 deadline		8.10.		In group
41		Group discussions 3	Chapter 5	15.10 23:00	Skype recording	In group
41		Product and Service Strategy	Chapter 10		Video/ individual/group/self studies	
42		Pricing Strategy	Chapter 12		Video/ individual/group/self studies	
42		Individual Assignment 2 deadline		22.10.	Video individual/group/self studies	
43		Group assignment 3 deadline		29.10.	Video/ individual/group/self studies	
12.2.		Group discussions 4	Chapter 12	29.10 23:00	Skype recording	In group
43		Intro to Distribution and Place				
44	31 Oct & 1Nov			LIVE Session (small groups 3 groups per session)	study group's Small group online meeting	
45		Intro to Place				
46		Intro Promotion		Deadline for Promotion assignment		In group
47		Marketing Communications		22.11.2017	LIVE Session (the whole class)	In group
48				Individual Assignment 3 deadline		

Figure 4 Implementation plan of MBO (Optima IB Online, 2018b)

Throughout the course, the students worked in the small groups, created during the orientation, based on the time availability of the students and student interests. They had to choose a product or a service to work with throughout the whole semester and complete the group assignments and group discussions with this group. There were all together four group assignments and four group discussions. The topic of the group discussion was connected to the theoretical part of course, while the group assignments applied the theory to the product or service the group had chosen. Students had weekly tasks to return for evaluation.

3.1.1 Pedagogical approaches

The course had two lecturers and three coaches. The semester was divided into two periods, and each period had its own lecturer. The lecturers held the All Group meetings and assessed the individual work.

A coach was assigned to each group, who evaluated the group activities during the whole semester. Two of the three coaches were the lecturers of the course. The small group meetings were held by the coaches of the groups. During these sessions, students received feedback on their performance and on previous assignments. However, the students also had a chance to ask for help with upcoming tasks. The coaches followed the development of the groups as well as the self-growth of individuals.

According to a study by Ross (1992), coaching can have a positive effect on student achievement. Teachers with higher level of personal teaching efficacy are more likely to consider coaching as a teaching method. Coaching also brings the possibility of negative feedback, which can lead to improvement of the course. These two facts show that coaching is most likely to be endorsed by high-efficacy teachers. (Ross, 1992) We have also received positive feedback on the coaching from the IB Online students. They had stated that coaching contributed to their group work and to the improvement of their skills.

Another educational approach that is important is the constructivist approach. This theory states that learning comes from various interaction among individuals, faculty and student peers. This approach encourages the students to not only gain new knowledge, but also restructure the existing ones. (Taft, et al., 2011) The small group work during the MBO course gave the possibility to students to interact with each other, exchange knowledge and share previous experiences.

3.1.2 Size of the small group

Research results by Taft, et al. showed (2011) that classes with more than 30 students could be delivered online; however, it may create a one-way faculty-to-student communication. A solution could be to break the class into smaller groups, thereby creating smaller class sizes. (Taft, et al., 2011) PINBOS17 consists of 42 students, rather a large group for an online class. Dividing them into smaller groups makes the studies more interactive and collaborative.

The small groups in the MBO course consisted of six students. According to theory (Taft, et al., 2011), this group size is considered to be a very small –one to ten students- group. In online education, larger groups can feel impersonal. The optimal group size for group work and discussion is defined to be between six to ten (Buckingham, 2003 cited in Taft, et al., 2011). The article also mentions that small and medium – less than 20 students – group size could generate higher satisfaction and social presence (Burruss et al., 2009 cited in Taft, et al., 2011). One objective of the research is to explore whether IB Online students find the group size of six members suitable for online group collaboration.

3.2 Intercultural Communication (ICC) individual culture project

The Intercultural Communication course, just as MBO, was offered to PINBOS17 in 2017 autumn. The course was worth five credits and it was running for eight weeks, starting after the autumn holiday until December. The implementation plan included various individual activities (see Figure 5 below), however, in this thesis I will examine the main project work students had to perform, the Individual Culture Project.

	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50
Online meetings	All group 26.10.2017 15:00-17:00			Small group 14.-15.11. 15:00-18:00		Small group 28.-29.11. 15:00-18:00	All group 7.12.2017 15:00-17:00	Final assessment
Assessment				0-2		0-2		0-4
Topic	Cultural identity	Working with Cultures	Communicating with cultures	Working in Intercultural Teams	Leading Intercultural teams	Culture in the media	Exploring Cultures	
Reflective journal	Your cultural identity		Your cultural communication preferences		Your experiences of cultures in teams		Development of cultural identity	
Assessment	0-2		0-2		0-2		0-2	0-8
Individual Culture Project		Choose an individual culture project topic	Collect data for individual culture project	Apply frameworks for individual culture project	Prepare culture project presentation	Submit report and presentation for pair review	Revise project based on feedback; submit for teacher	
Assessment		0-2 culture project plan		0-2 applying frameworks		0-2 report 0-2 presentation		0-8

Figure 5 Implementation plan of ICC (Optima IB Online, 2018c)

By the end of the course, students had to deliver a report and a presentation about a research they had conducted. The students had the freedom to choose a topic they were genuinely interested in. The aim of the research was to deepen understanding of a cultural area or to understand a cultural phenomenon that could benefit a business.

3.2.1 Pedagogical approaches

The ICC course had two lecturers. The course was taken by 40 students. According to Schellens and Valcke (2006, cited in Taft, et al., 2011), larger classes – more than 30 students – can be managed easier with team teaching. This course is an example how team teaching can be beneficial for students as well for staff.

The individual culture project was ongoing throughout the semester. Every week, along with other assignments, students had to take a new step in progressing with the project. If only looking at the main process and outcome, this project followed the objectivist educational model, since students learned individually, independent from others (Taft, et al., 2011). Students had to perform small tasks weekly, which they received feedback to. First developed by Garrison in 2000, the community of inquiry (COI) model states that the instructor's role in online communities is crucial for learning effectiveness.

Another study (Varhelahti & Rännäli, 2016) highlights the need of cultural and communication awareness in professional life. This course focused on various cultural phenomenon that provides the students with excellent cross-cultural communication skills. The individual culture project, which focused on the students own interests, gave them the possibility to apply these skills in their own studies, personal life as well as working life.

The course started and ended with an all group meeting via Adobe Connect. These live sessions gave a chance for the teachers to kick-off and conclude the course, share general information and to hold a lecture. The included two small group meetings as well, where the emphasize was on receiving feedback from the teacher, and not on group collaboration.

4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research design is essential for a successful research. It includes a plan about how to answer the research questions and how to meet the objectives. The source where you collect data from and how to analyze the data have to be included in this plan. (Saunders, et al., 2016) Kerlinger defines research as a “systematic, controlled, empirical and critical investigation of hypothetical propositions about the presumed relations among natural phenomena” (Krishnaswami & Satyaprasad, 2010, p. 3). Another explanation by Young defines research as "a scientific undertaking which, by means of logical and systematic techniques, aims to:

- (1) discover new facts or verify and test old facts,
- (2) analyze their sequences, interrelationships and casual explanations,
- (3) develop new scientific tools, concepts and theories which would facilitate reliable and valid study of human behavior” (Krishnaswami & Satyaprasad, 2010, p. 3).

This research is focuses on answering new challenges arising from a new pedagogical approach and the start of the first English taught completely online degree programme at TUAS. The objective of this thesis, based on the answers received to the research questions, is to recommend new development ideas and solutions in order to further develop the IB Online degree programme.

Research questions:

- 1) How does student engagement differ in group work and individual work?
- 2) Do the students find the teaching approaches in GW and IW suitable?
- 3) Do the students find using different study methods essential at IB Online?
- 4) What tools the students find the most suitable for GW and IW?
 - i. Do students find tools provided by school for GW suitable?
 - ii. Do students mainly use tools provided by the school or others selected by the group?
 - iii. Who provides support for these tools?
 - iv. What tools do students use for individual work?
- 5) What is the ideal group size from the student view for GW?
- 6) Do students find GW and IW both essential in online studies?

4.1 Research methodology

An exploratory research is flexible and adaptable to changes (Saunders, et al., 2016), which makes this approach suitable for the author's research. The objective of this research is to explore the students' point of view in online studies. Exploring this topic can generate new information that has to be answered through research questions.

The author used case studies to acquire more depth understanding in the online studies. "The case study strategy will be of particular interest to you if you wish to gain a rich understanding of the context of the research and the processes being enacted" (Morris and Wood, 1991 cited in Saunders, et al., 2016, p. 146). This phase was essential in the research process, in order to analyze the answers from the primary data effectively. The information about the case studies comes from the author's work experience as well as from the course workspaces in Optima VLE.

In this research, quantitative method was applied. This approach was suitable to collect data from all the members of the group in short amount of time, due to time and resource limitations. The aim of the research is to generate clear answers to certain problems and to suggest further development ideas. For these, the quantitative approach, which offers numerical data from many respondents, is the most suitable. After receiving the answers, the researcher can draw the inferences easily (Krishnaswami & Satyaprasad, 2010).

4.1.1 Data collection and Primary data

The data is the base for the analysis. Without actual data, no inferences can be drawn and no correct answers can be provided. The relevance and reliability of the data determines the quality of the analysis. (Krishnaswami & Satyaprasad, 2010) Thus, data collection is essential for a valid research.

"Primary sources are original sources from which the researcher directly collects data that have not been previously collected. Primary data are first-hand information collected through various methods such as observation, interviewing, mailing etc." (Krishnaswami & Satyaprasad, 2010) In this research, the primary data was collected from the PINBOS17 group. A questionnaire was sent out to the students. This survey was a combination of questions for the thesis and a questionnaire that is sent out every semester to the students for feedback.

PINBOS17 was chosen to be the most authentic to give constructive feedback and information after their experience of the first year of studies. "Occasionally, it may be possible to collect and analyze data from every possible case or group member; this is termed a census" (Saunders, et al., 2016, p. 210). In this case, the group was small enough that it was reasonable to include all members in the survey.

The author used Webropol survey to design the questionnaire and it was sent out to the IB Online students via e-mail. Originally, the students had one week to complete questionnaire. However, due to the lack in the number of respondents, the students were reminded about the survey and received extra three days to fill the questionnaire. The students were reminded via the WhatsApp class message group, which the author is a member of as well.

4.1.2 Research reliability and validity

Research credibility consists of two main areas: reliability and validity. The main question, when interpreting the findings, is how we know that our answers are correct. All we can do is to reduce the chance of getting the answers wrong. When reducing the possibility of getting the answers wrong, we have to pay attention to the two main areas mentioned above. (Saunders, et al., 2016)

Reliability can be measured by answering three simple questions:

- (1) "Will the measures yield the same results on other occasions?"
- (2) Will similar observations be reached by other observers?
- (3) Is there transparency in how sense was made from the raw data? " (Saunders, et al., 2016)

The students had over nine days to complete the questionnaire. Thus, they were able to find the most suitable time to fill it, when they had time and were relaxed. We could assume that at other times they would give similar answers. With giving more time for completing the survey, the author tried to exclude the possibility of the students filling it out in a rush with no concentrations and giving false answers.

The research was conducted via an anonymous online survey. This way, the threat of participant bias can be avoided. Even though the author and the respondents know each

other, students most likely gave honest answers, since they were aware it was not possible to identify the participants based on the answers.

Once the questionnaire was ready, it was sent to the author's supervisor for supervision and comments. To ensure content validity, some slight changes were made based on the suggestions. A pilot test was not run, due to the degree-specific nature of the questionnaire. Based on the contact between the respondents and the author, the questionnaire was considered easy to understand and students had no problem answering the questions. The research can be considered valid, since this target group is the most appropriate to evaluate IB Online at the moment.

5 RESEARCH ANALYSIS

The target group of this research was the first year IB Online group. The class has 42 students from which 36 were active in their studies at the time of the research. On the day when the link to the questionnaire closed, the author checked the student activity on Optima VLE. A student was considered active if he or she had logged in to Optima during those nine days when the questionnaire link was active –the link for the questionnaire was also available from Optima.

The students were asked 13 questions related to this thesis. Question one to four, 10 and 12 were compulsory and selection questions, with only one possible answer. Question five to nine were matrix – scale selection – questions. Question 11 and 13 were open-ended questions. (See the questionnaire in Appendix 2)

Altogether, 27 students answered the questionnaire, which means that 75% of the target group answered, based on the active response rate.

The majority of the respondents were female (see Table 1). This is a valid gender representation of the group, since 69% of the PINBOS17 students are females.

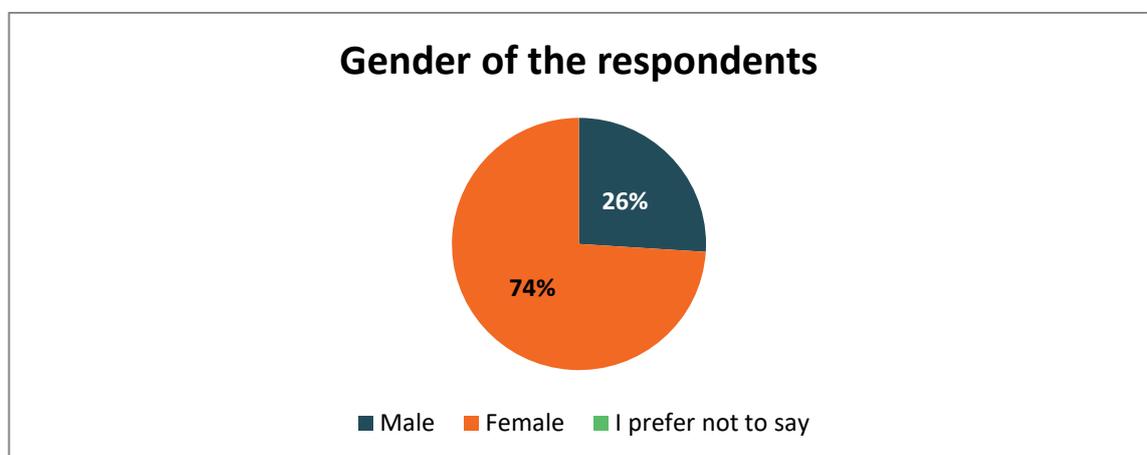


Table 1 Gender of the respondents

The respondents can be categorized into three different age groups. The majority is between the age of 20-29. Another great number of the respondents belongs to the age group of 30-39 (See Table 2 for more detail).

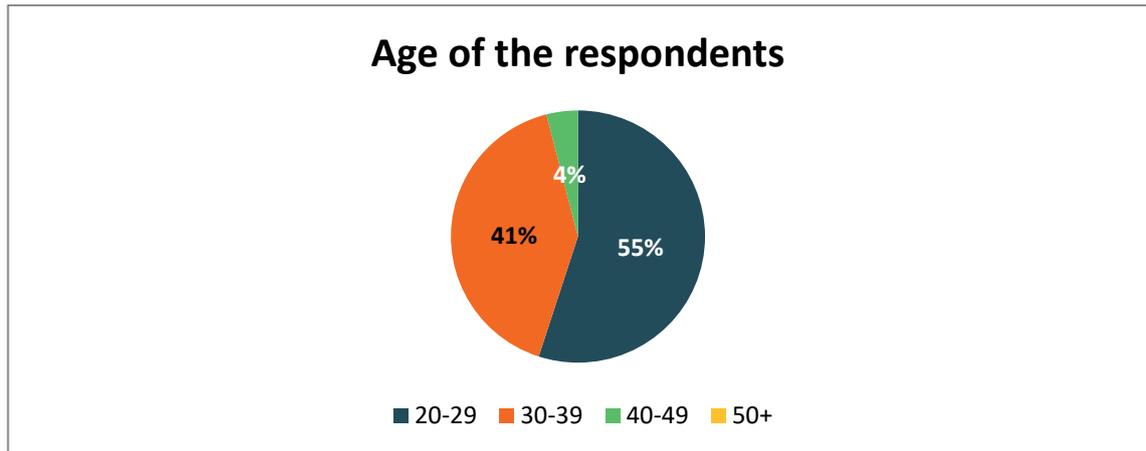


Table 2 Age of the respondents

Even though the degree programme is completely online, the majority of the students come from Turku or Finland. Based on previous research conducted for another thesis (Knudsen, 2017), the main motivational factors to apply for this degree programme were:

- (1) The degree is internationally recognized,
- (2) It allows students to work at the same time, and
- (3) Students can study from home.

These motivational factors show that IB programme is a great solution for local people, not only international ones. This is reinforced by the result of 18 of the respondents (67%) living currently in Turku, and only 3 respondents (11%) living abroad.

Reflecting on the second motivational factor, 14 respondents (52%) are working full-time and only 4 respondents (15%) are not working beside their studies. From the age and employment status, it is clear that IB Online consists of various types of students. TUAS not only concentrates on traditional students, but also offers education to people with different backgrounds. IB Online differentiates itself from other BBA studies with the integration of technology and online tools that prepares the students for their future professional lives. This added value can make the degree programme appealing to not only traditional students, but to a new target, to professionals who are seeking to improve their skills.

5.1 Student engagement in group work and in individual work

The questions onwards (in Chapter 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 5.4, 5.5 and 5.6) were asked in matrix – scale selection – questions from the respondents. The scale range was from one to five, where one represented strong disagreement and five strong agreement.

The questionnaire focused on exploring, how student engagement differs in group work and in individual work. The case studies presented in Chapter 3 showcase two different teaching and study methods. It is important to mention that these two courses were running around the same time in the autumn semester. Even though the courses were strongly built on one method, students experienced both ways of working at the same time. The spring semester 2018 was divided into two periods. In the first one, students had two courses that both followed group work approach. In the second half, students had courses that followed individual studies. Compared to the autumn semester 2017, when the course approaches were paired up –one GW and one IW-, this was a different method of dividing the courses. This difference gives a possibility for the students to decide which approach they prefer.

Respondents were asked both about their engagement towards their studies in GW and in IW in order to see whether, there is a difference. The answers about GW were more divided than about IW (see Table 3 below). Based on the answers, we could assume that students feel more engaged in individual studies than in group work. However, there are different explanations for this.

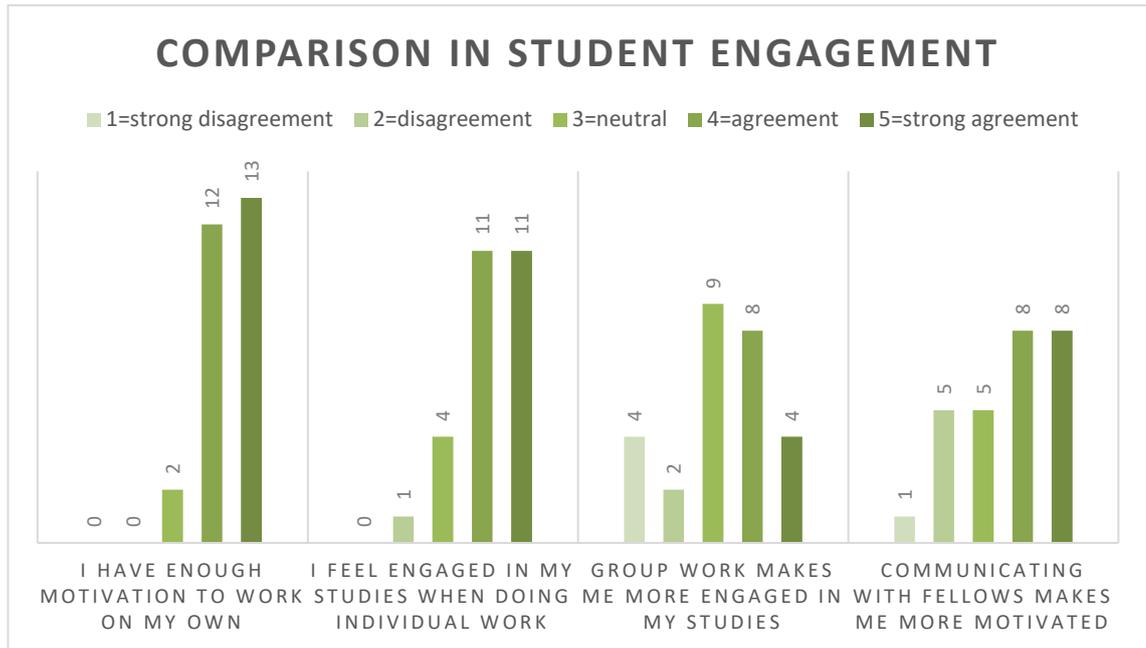


Table 3 Comparison in Student Engagement between GW and IW

13 respondents strongly agreed and 12 agreed (altogether 82% of the respondents), that they are motivated when they are working on their own. This can have a connection with the fact that 89% of the respondents reported that they have enough guidance on how to proceed alone in their studies. Teachers' presence is essential throughout the studies, and in each progress step students take (Salmon, 2004). Thus, we could assume that even in individual studies, clear information, instructions and feedback from the teachers have a motivational effect. 80% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they are engaged in their studies when doing individual work.

According to theory (Botton, 2016), students find group work and group discussion as a motivational factor in their studies. Additionally, active students tend to have more interaction with their fellows than passive students do (Dixson, 2010). Despite, 55% of the respondents strongly disagreed (4), disagreed (2) or were neutral (9) to the question, whether group work would make them more engaged in their studies. However, 60% of the students strongly agreed (8) or agreed (8), that communicating with their fellows makes them more motivated. Active students have more interaction with fellows, than passive students do. Since the questionnaire was filled by active students, it could explain the fact that group work is not particularly an engagement factor, but interaction with fellows can be a motivational factor.

5.2 Teaching approaches in group work and individual work

MBO and ICC followed two different approaches to teach the course content. One was strongly built on group work, while the other one had mainly individual work. Respondents were asked; whether they find the teaching approaches suitable for teaching the course contents (see in Table 4 more detail).

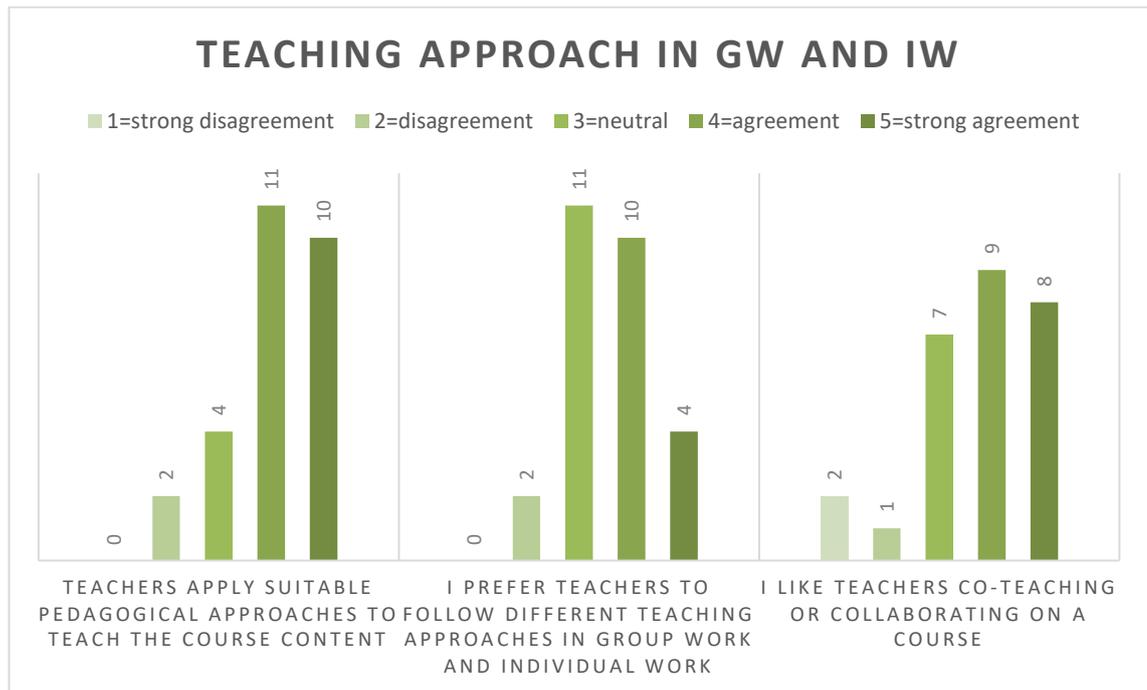


Table 4 Teaching approach in GW and IW

According to 21 of the respondents (78%), teachers apply suitable pedagogical approaches to teach the course contents. This not only includes GW or IW, but the type of the assignments, lectures or communication between student and lecturer. Based on the case studies, GW and IW generated different approaches in how to teach the content, but also in study methods or evaluation. See in Table 4, where 4 students strongly agreed and 10 agreed (altogether 52% of the respondents) to the question if they prefer teachers to follow different teaching approaches in GW and IW. Only 2 people (7%) disagreed, the rest was neutral. This shows that students find the teaching methods suitable.

Both of the case study courses applied co-teaching and teacher collaboration. MBO had two lecturers and three coaches, while ICC had two lecturers. 63% of the respondents

stated, that they like co-teaching and teacher collaboration. This is an essential feedback, since co-teaching is not as common in on-site teaching. This can be a beneficial information for the teachers when implementing a course.

5.3 Study methods at IB Online

It is important to clarify that one's success not only depends on the teaching approaches, but on the applied study methods. When starting their studies, PINBOS17 students were provided with information – via Optima VLE – on various teaching and study methods followed in this degree programme. They had the possibility to explore these on their own. This information can be essential for effective studies.

Table 5 shows that 52% (14) of the respondents strongly agrees and 37% (10) agreed to the question if they see the positive effect of having different study methods. This is a great majority of the respondents. Only 11% (3) stated that they are not familiar with the course types and methods. This concludes that not only students are familiar with the possible methods, but also they prefer to have different ones for effective studying.

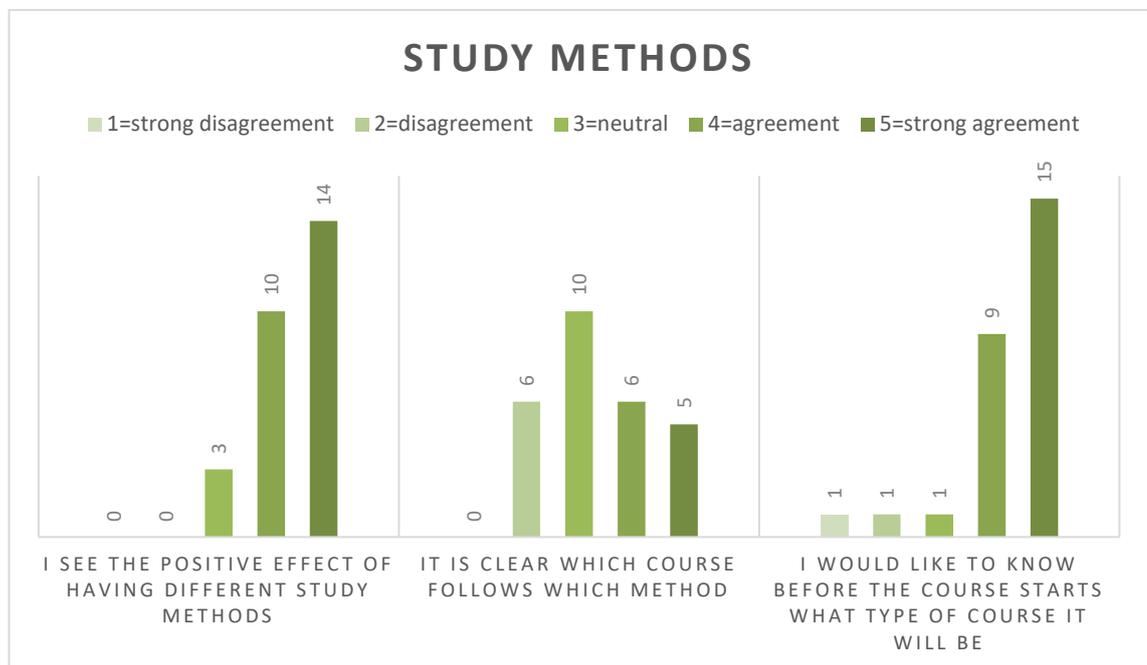


Table 5 Study methods at IB Online

11 students (41%) stated that it is clear which course follows which method. However, 88% of the respondents said that they would like to receive information before a course

starts about the applied method. This information is lacking at the moment, but with some effort, an extra value could be added to IB Online. The course types and the study methods have a clear connection. When knowing the course type, students can prepare beforehand with a strategy for the most effective outcome.

Combining the case studies representing the two main approaches, GW and IW, with the answers of the questionnaire, we can assume that students see the benefits of not only these two main approaches, but from their perspective the different ways of working as well.

5.4 Online tools in group work and in individual work

The main online tools used in IB Online were presented in the case studies and in the integration of technology. The most important ones in the studies of PINBOS17 are Skype for Business (4B), Adobe Connect, Office 365 and Optima. These tools provided by school are the internal ones. Students also have the possibility to choose external tools to work with, but the school is not obligated to provide support for those.

The integration of technology is crucial in online teaching. Teachers have to adapt to the social and technological changes with not only applying their pedagogical methods into online environments, but also developing new ideas and approaches (Harasim, 2012). 74% (20) of the respondents agreed, that IB Online teachers integrate technology effectively into their teaching. This includes materials, lectures, meetings and communication channels.

Another satisfactory feedback is that 81% of the respondents (22) felt that they receive enough guidance and support from teachers. According to Gunawerdana (2014), teacher's role is crucial in online studies. We can assume that the satisfaction of the students with the technology can have a connection with the clear information flow and appropriate guidance.

5.4.1 Suitability of internal tools for GW

The two main internal tools used for group work is Skype 4B and Office 365. Skype 4B is especially designed for business collaborations. The number of the participants is not limited, presentations can be shared easily and many of the tools are designed to hold

and lead meetings smoothly. (Skype, 2018) Office 365 is ideal for online collaboration. It offers various tools that make it possible to come across borders, create, share, and collaborate in real time. (Office 365, 2018) 26 students (96% of the respondents) said that Skype 4B is a suitable tool for small group meetings. Office 365 was also evaluated suitable by 96% (26) of the respondents. This result is a great feedback, since these are the two leading tools at IB Online for group work.

5.4.2 Internal or external tools for GW

The respondents were asked additional questions at the end of the questionnaire, which were only asked for the purpose of this thesis. Thus, these were not mandatory. 26 students (72% of the active students) answered the question related to internal and external tools for group work. The majority of the respondents stated that they used both internal and external tools for the MBO group work (see Table 6). Only a few students stated that they used only internal tools for GW.

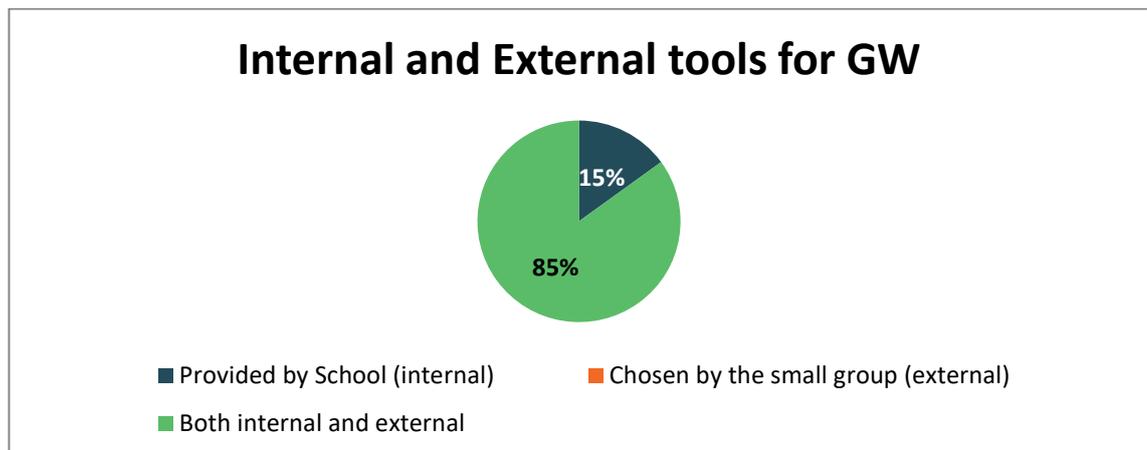


Table 6 Internal and External tools for GW

The following question was an open-ended question and 20 students (56% of the active students) answered this one. Respondents were asked to give examples of tools used by their small group. The majority of the students mentioned Skype 4B, different Office 365 tools and WhatsApp. In 2017 in Finland, 38% of the population used WhatsApp several times a day. Another 27% used WhatsApp at least once a week to once a day (Statista, 2018c). With this information, it is not surprising that this tool is among the most

used communication channels. According to Susilo (2014), WhatsApp has the potential for students to engage with each other.

"Skype for Business (communication, meetings: mostly suitable) - WhatsApp (communication, organisation - mostly suitable) - Office 365 tools: email, calendar, SharePoint etc. (communication, organisation, sharing - very suitable)" /Respondent/

Some of the respondents mentioned some other external tools, such as Trello or Doodle. However, these were not used by many of the groups. Thus, we can conclude that the top three tools for GW were:

- (1) Skype for Business – for meetings
- (2) Office 365 – for sharing and collaboration
- (3) WhatsApp – for communication

Overall, the top two tools applied by the small groups are provided by the school. The third one, which is an informal communication platform, is external and chosen by the small groups. The result shows that IB Online provides suitable tools for the students for online studies.

5.4.3 Support for the tools

Students can receive technical support for internal tools when needed. Additionally, they received focused help at the beginning of their studies by a course called ToolBox for the Online Learner. During this course, students acquired all the essential skills for the internal tools. Respondents were asked whether they would need more support similar to this one, and 17 of them (63%) disagreed. We could assume that students received enough support and guidance during the beginning of their studies. According to Salmon's five-stage framework (2004), a proper introduction to the studies and technology at stage 1 is essential for successful studies. It can be said, that PINBOS17 received all the essential information at the beginning and that is why they would not require more support.

Even though the majority of the tools used by the students are internal, there are some useful external tools in addition. 17 of the respondents (63%) stated that they receive support for these tools by their fellows or by their small group members. Another great number, 18 of the respondents (67%) disagreed that they would need support from the teachers for external tools.

From the answers it can be concluded, that the support system for internal tools is satisfactory. It is also clear, that active students are proactive in finding other suitable tools for their studies and they freely share those with others and provide help. According to the students, there is a good selection in tools provided by school, since the majority of the group activities are completed via these tools.

5.4.4 Internal or external tools for IW

26 students answered (72% of the active students) to the extra questions about the individual culture project. Students were asked, whether they used internal or external tools for this project. It is important to mention, that students were not restricted in which tool to use for the presentation. See from Table 7, the answers vary more than in the same question for GW. Quite a great number of the respondents stated, that they only used internal tools for this individual project work. In this questions, just as in the same question but about group work, the majority of the respondents said that they used both internal and external tools.

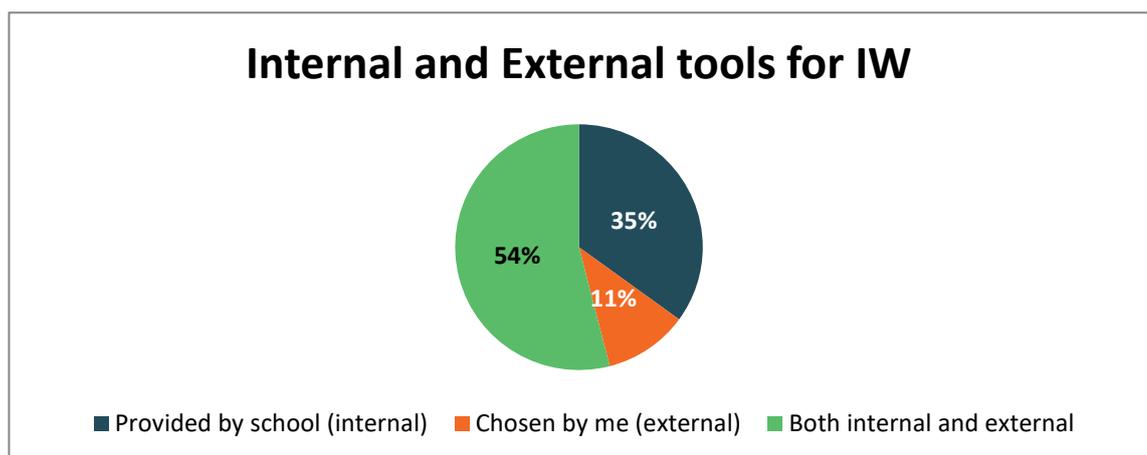


Table 7 Internal and External tools for IW

Students were asked an open-ended question, to share examples they used for this project and if they had found them suitable. 16 students responded to this question (44% of the active students). Many of the respondents mentioned internal tools related to the report part of the project work. The majority mentioned Office 365 tools, such as MS Word. Some of the students also emphasized the use of Optima, as for the instructions and feedback.

“I used MS Word to create my project and to make notes on varying aspects of the project. I used One Note to keep an eye on deadlines and to keep organised. I used the sources provided on Optima by the teacher.”/Respondent/

“I used mostly Word and Outlook for the individual culture project. I think they were suitable for the purpose.”/Respondent/

The tools mentioned for the presentation part of the project were a mixture of internal and external tool. Many students mentioned PowerPoint as a suitable tool for creating the presentation. However, there were external tools listed, such as Prezi or Sway.

“I used Skype for Business (to record), Sway to make my presentation and OneDrive to save my materials. I feel with O365, e-mail and Skype for Business I have everything needed to work effectively by myself.”/Respondent/

“Video editing program was my own choice (Lightworks) but some of the tools I learned via tips provided by the school. Like Screencast-o-Matic which allowed me to record my PP presentation.”/Respondent/

The variety of the tools listed was much wider than in the GW. To sum it up, for the report the majority of the students used internal tools. For creating the presentation and recording, both internal and external tools were used. The most popular ones were PowerPoint and Sway for the presentation and Scree-o-Matic and Skype FB for the recording. Even though Screen-o-Matic is an external tool, as we can see from one of the respondents above, recommendations were provided by the school.

5.5 Ideal size for small groups

According to Buckingham (2003, cited in Taft, et al., 2011), the ideal group size for group work and discussion is six to ten. The IB Online students were divided into small groups of six for the MBO group work. In the questionnaire, more than half of the respondents (59%) agreed, that the small group size should be five or smaller. Only 15% disagreed with the statement and 26% stayed neutral. Interestingly, even though the current group number is at the lower bar of the range created by Buckingham, the IB Online students would wish to have less members in a group. The students were working in the same small groups throughout the whole semester in every course. We could assume that for long-term and frequent collaboration, the ideal small group size should be five or smaller.

5.6 The connection between group work and individual work

The respondents were asked (see in Table 8 more detail) that could answer whether GW and IW support each other and whether they are both needed in online studies.

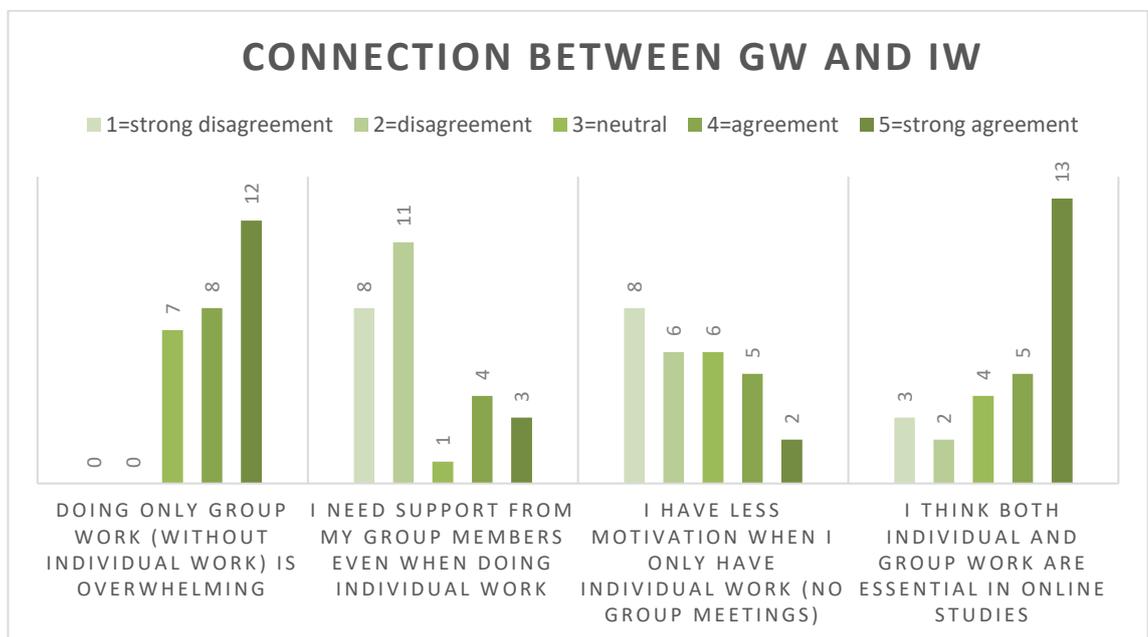


Table 8 Connection between GW and IW

14 students (52%) disagreed or strongly disagreed to the statement that they would have less motivation when only doing individual work. However, still 7 of them (26%) agreed with this statement, which means that some of the students can lose motivation when

they have less social contact. The majority of the respondents (71%) said that they do not need support from their group members when doing individual work. However, 26% of them still agreed to this statement. Overall we can see, that even though many of the students are confident to work on their own with no support from fellows, there is still a small percentage of students who need the social interaction frequently. Despite, still 19 of the respondents (71%) said that they receive support from their group members.

According to Dixson (2010), student engagement is more related to the fact of being active or passive, than the types of tasks students are provided with. This research was completed by active students, which can explain why they are confident working alone. Communicating with fellows can increase the motivation of the individuals. However, doing individual work can be supported by the fellows indirectly. As the majority stated, they receive support from the others. This can include not only support in the studies, but any other informal interaction the group has.

From another other perspective, 74% of the respondents said that it is overwhelming, when they have courses that all follow group work at the same time. Interesting to see, how more people stated that only individual work is manageable, but only group work is overwhelming. This could have less connection with motivation, but more with time-management. When previously discussed the demographics of the PINBOS17 students, we can see that the majority of them is working beside their studies. Group work can be time-consuming and it is clearly less flexible than individual work, which could explain why students need a blended approach of IW and GW.

The majority of the respondents (67%) thinks that both IW and GW are essential in online studies. As presented in the case studies (chapter 3), the two examples followed very different approaches. These provide the students with various skills that will be beneficial for their future professional lives.

6 CONCLUSION

6.1 Results of the research

The aim of this thesis was to better understand the student perspective in online degree education. IB Online was the first completely English online degree programme to start at TUAS, thus there was a need to gain valid information about student experiences and viewpoint.

The author examined two very different approaches: group work and individual work. As these approaches differ in many aspects and in the examined cases they were applied to different courses, it was essential to see the comparison or the connection between them. The main areas that were covered are: student engagement, teaching and study approaches, use of technology and the connection between group work and individual work.

The research revealed some interesting findings. The results showed that there is no major difference in student engagement in GW and IW and students said they feel motivated in both approaches. This could be explained by fact that the questionnaire was filled out by active students who seem to prefer a blend of study approaches. Even though the results did not show that group work would increase the motivation level, communicating with the fellows was listed as an engagement factor. We could assume that social interaction and the group spirit have to be increased and maintained for higher motivation and engagement.

It was a great reinforcement for selected pedagogical approaches that students found the teaching approaches suitable in IB Online. TUAS puts great effort in developing innovative pedagogical approaches, such as Innopeda®. Teachers were provided with training sessions that not only focused on technology but also on the pedagogical aspects of online teaching. As seen from the case studies, various approaches were applied in IB Online and students prefer to have different teaching approaches in their online degree studies.

Another aspect strongly connected to the teaching was study methods used by students in the first year of online degree studies. The majority stated that they see the positive effect of having different study approaches. The students stated they were familiar with

the approaches, information which they were provided with at the beginning of their studies. However, students said that they would like to know the course types and study methods before a course starts. This approach was not applied at IB Online yet, but it could add extra value to the students.

Another important finding was related to integration of technology. The majority of the PINBOS17 students agreed that teachers integrate technology effectively into online teaching, which is an essential aspect for the success of online degree studies. Students also found the main online tools suitable for their purposes. However, the use of internal and external tools in GW and IW differed. For group work, students use both internal and external tools. The top three mentioned were: Skype 4B, Office 365 and WhatsApp. On the other hand, the majority of the students use mostly internal tools for IW purposes. Despite that, some students mentioned that they received tips and instructions from teachers for external tools. Overall, the selection of the technology and online tools is satisfactory at IB Online. Teachers should continue to integrate all of these tools into their teaching and provide students with additional information and tips on useful external tools.

A surprising finding was that the students would like to have smaller small groups. This could arise from the fact that some of the students were not active this semester, which resulted in actually less than six people working together actively in the small groups. We could assume that even though by stating small groups should have five or less members, this might in fact mean five active members.

As seen from the results, the majority of the students found both GW and IW essential in online degree studies. Group work was found to be overwhelming on its own, since the majority of the PINBOS17 students are in full-time or part-time employment and GW includes a lot of collaboration, scheduling and other responsibilities. Therefore, a blended and balanced approach, which includes both GW and IW simultaneously applied in different courses, can help the students in their studies.

6.2 Recommendation for future research

One interesting aspect for further research would be to examine the differences between active and non-active students: What are the factors that activate students and how non-active students should be motivated. Interviewing some of the most active and some of

the non-active students could give an insight into the possible differences. It could be useful to compare their demographics, their purpose for choosing online degree studies, their social interaction among the group and their study methods and attitude. The research should also include how to motivate the non-active students, and how they could be supported with pedagogical approaches for teaching and studying.

Another aspect that could be explored is the time-management methods for online studies. Many of the online students have various other obligations, such as work or family. It would be interesting to see how the students could be better supported in balancing school and other activities. It would be beneficial if the research included an in-depth analysis about the full-time/part-time aspect of IB Online. This could cover when the students are available for online meetings, which time of the day/week they spend the most time for studying and how many hours can they dedicate to their studies.

The second group, PINBOS18 will start in the autumn 2018. It would be interesting to collect a similar feedback questionnaire from them after the first year and compare those results with these ones. The results from the comparison would clearly show the development of the online degree after the first year of implementation. This method could be applied to every academic year.

“Teaching in the Internet age means we must teach tomorrow’s skills today. “ /Jennifer Fleming/

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Appendix 1. Curriculum of PINBOS17

	BASIC STUDIES	
	Higher Education Studies and Working Life Skills	Compulsory
	Higher Education Studies and Working Life Skills	Compulsory
	Higher Education Studies and Working Life Skills	Compulsory
	Higher Education Studies and Working Life Skills	Compulsory
	Higher Education Studies and Working Life Skills	Compulsory
	Higher Education Studies and Working Life Skills	Compulsory
	Business Foundation Studies	Compulsory
	Marketing and Business Operations	Compulsory
	Business Mathematics	Compulsory
	Accounting and Finance	Compulsory
	Communication Studies	Compulsory
	Business English Communication, B2	Compulsory
	Tool Box for the Online Learner	Compulsory
	Svenska i arbetslivet, skriftlig kommunikation	Elective
	Svenska i arbetslivet, muntlig kommunikation	Elective
	Työyhteisöviestintä	Elective
	PROFESSIONAL STUDIES	
	Intercultural Communication for Global Work	Compulsory
	Organizational Behaviour	Compulsory
	Principles of Economics	Compulsory
	International Marketing	Compulsory
	Research Methods	Compulsory
	Human Resource Management	Compulsory
	Project Management	Compulsory
	Introduction to Law	Compulsory
	DIGITAL BUSINESS AND MARKETING	Compulsory
	Digital Marketing	Compulsory
	Digital Marketing Basics	Compulsory
	Content Marketing	Compulsory
	Brand Management	Compulsory
	Services Marketing	Compulsory
	B2B Marketing and Sales	Compulsory
	Digital Business	Compulsory
	Introduction to Digital Business	Compulsory
	Productization in Digital Business	Compulsory
	Logistics and Supply Chain Systems	Compulsory
	Contemporary Topics in Digital Business	Compulsory
	OPTIONAL STUDIES	
	Academic Writing	Optional
	Information Skills Online Course	Optional
	Presenting in English Using Online Tools	Optional
	Path to Excellence	Optional
	Path to Excellence 1	Optional
	Path to Excellence 2	Optional
	Path to Excellence 3	Optional

PRACTICAL TRAINING		
	Practical Training / DP in International Business	Compulsory
	Basic Practical Training	Compulsory
	Professional Practical Training	Compulsory
BACHELOR'S THESIS		
	Bachelor's Thesis: planning	Compulsory
	Bachelor's Thesis: implementation	Compulsory

Appendix 2. Questionnaire



IB Online studies '18 spring

Hello PINBOS17 students. In order to improve IB Online in the future, we would really appreciate if you could take a few minutes to complete the following questionnaire. These answers will be used in research and in Georgina Szep's thesis work to further develop IB Online studies. All the answers you provide will be kept in confidentiality and it will not be possible to identify individual answers.

1. I am... *

- Male
- Female
- I prefer not to say

2. I am ... years old. *

- 20-29
- 30-39

40-49

50+

3. I currently live in ... *

Turku

Elsewhere in Finland

in the EU

outside of EU

4. I am working ... beside my studies. *

Full-time

Part-time

Not working

Individual work

5. Please choose the statement that most accurately describes your opinion on a scale 1-5, where 1 refers to full disagreement and 5 refers to full agreement: 1=strongly disagree 2= disagree to some extent 3=neither agree nor disagree 4= agree to some extent 5=strongly agree *

1 2 3 4 5

I have enough guidance on how to proceed alone

I have enough motivation to work on my own

I feel engaged in my studies when doing individual work

I have less motivation when I only have individual work (no group meetings)

I need support from my group members even when doing individual work

Group work

6. Please choose the statement that most accurately describes your opinion on a scale 1-5, where 1 refers to full disagreement and 5 refers to full agreement: 1=strongly disagree 2= disagree to some extent 3=neither agree nor disagree 4= agree to some extent 5=strongly agree *

1 2 3 4 5

Doing only Group work (without individual work) is overwhelming

Group work makes me more engaged in my studies

Communicating with fellows makes me more motivated

I get support from my group members

The group size should be 5 or smaller

Teaching

7. Please choose the statement that most accurately describes your opinion on a scale 1-5, where 1 refers to full disagreement and 5 refers to full agreement: 1=strongly disagree 2= disagree to some extent 3=neither agree nor disagree 4= agree to some extent 5=strongly agree *

1 2 3 4 5

I receive enough support and guidance from teachers

Teachers integrate technology effectively in their teaching

Teachers apply suitable pedagogical approaches to teach the course content

I prefer teachers to follow different teaching approaches in group work and individual work

I like teachers co-teaching or collaborating on a course

Study methods

8. Please choose the statement that most accurately describes your opinion on a scale 1-5, where 1 refers to full disagreement and 5 refers to full agreement: 1=strongly disagree 2= disagree to some extent 3=neither agree nor disagree 4= agree to some extent 5=strongly agree *

1 2 3 4 5

I prefer to have different types of courses

I am familiar with the different course types

I see the positive effect of having different study methods

It is clear which course follows which method

I would like to know before the course starts what type of course it will be

I think both individual and group work are essential in online studies

Online tools

9. Please choose the statement that most accurately describes your opinion on a scale 1-5, where 1 refers to full disagreement and 5 refers to full agreement: 1=strongly disagree 2= disagree to some extent 3=neither agree nor disagree 4= agree to some extent 5=strongly agree *

1 2 3 4 5

Skype For Business is an effective tool for Small group meetings

Adobe Connect is an effective tool for All group meetings

Office 365 is an effective tool for online collaboration

Optima is an effective tool as a learning environment

Optima course layout used by teachers make courses more accessible

We use tools provided by school (internal) for group work (e.g.: Skype fb, e-mail)

I would need more support for internal tools given by the teachers (e.g.: Tool Box for online learner)

We use tools chosen by the group (external) for group work (e.g.: FB, WhatsApp)

I receive support for external tools from my group members

I would need more support for external tools from the teachers

Questions for the thesis

The following questions will be used only in Georgina Szep's thesis work. Thus, these are not compulsory questions. However, we kindly ask you to answer these questions to help to further develop IB Online and support Georgina's work.

10. 12.1.The tools I used for group work in the Marketing and Business Operations course are:

- Provided by School (internal)
- Chosen by the small group (external)
- Both internal and external

11. Please share maximum three examples, of what tools you used for group work in the Marketing and Business Operations course. How you used them, if they were in your opinion suitable for the purpose:

12. The tools I used for the individual culture project in the Intercultural Communication course are:

- Provided by school (internal)
- Chosen by me (external)
- Both internal and external

13. Please share maximum three examples, of what tools you used for the individual culture project in the Intercultural Communication course. How you used them, if they were in your opinion suitable for the purpose:
