



Student engagement to online studying in higher education

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Tämän opinnäytetyön aiheena on digitaalisten oppimisympäristöjen kehittäminen opiskelijoiden sitouttamisen näkökulmasta. Tämän opinnäytetyön toimeksiantajana on Hollannissa sijaitseva Breda ammattikorkeakoulu. BUasilla on tavoitteena lisätä opintotarjontaan enemmän verkko kursseja, ja tämän opinnäytetyö tarkoitus on selvittää, kuinka sitä voitaisiin kehittää, jotta opiskelijat sitoutuisivat siihen paremmin. Opinnäytetyön tavoitteena on löytää niitä elementtejä, joilla verkko kursseja voitaisiin kehittää sitouttamisen näkökulmasta.

Teoria osuus muodostuu oppimisympäristöistä ja oppimisen kehityksestä, motivoinnista ja sitouttamisesta korkeakouluissa sekä digitaalisten opintojen eri osa alueista. Tietopohjassa käsiteltiin jo tiedossa olevia tietoja aiheista, jotta lukijan on helpompi ymmärtää tutkimuksen tuloksia. Lisäksi tuloksia voi vertailla tietopohjaan erojen ja yhtäläisyyksien huomaamiseksi.

Tutkimusaineiston hankintaan käytettiin kahta kvalitatiivista menetelmää. Pää menetelmänä oli puolistrukturoitu haastattelu, jonka tavoitteena oli kartoittaa opiskelijoiden ajatuksia ja toiveita verkko opinnoista sekä omia, hyviä ja huonoja, kokemuksia niistä. Havainnointia käytettiin tukevana menetelmänä haastatteluille. Havainnoinnin tarkoitus oli selvittää, onko haastattelijan tuntemisella etukäteen merkitystä, haastattelu tavan tai paikan valintaan. Lisäksi havainnoinnin avulla tutkittiin, onko haastattelijan tuntemisella etukäteen merkitystä vastausten syvällisyyteen tai ylipäättään haastatteluun osallistumiseen.

Saatujen tulosten ja johtopäätösten perusteella voidaan todeta, että vuorovaikutuksella ja opettajien motivoinnilla on suuri merkitys oppilaiden sitouttamiseen. Opiskelijat kokevat myös lähitapaamiset erittäin tärkeiksi, erityisesti aloittaessaan verkko-opinnot ensimmäistä kertaa. Lähitapaamiset koettiin myös hyvin sitouttavana elementtinä. Nämä tulokset ja johtopäätökset osoittavat eri elementtejä, jotka tulee huomioida verkko-opintoja suunnitellessa ja kehittäessä.

Asiasanat: Verkko-opinnot, kehitys, korkeakoulu, sitouttaminen,

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Year	2019	Pages	31
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The subject of this thesis is the development of digital learning environments from the point of view of student engagement. This thesis was commissioned by Breda University of Applied Sciences, in the Netherlands. The goal of Buas is to increase the number of online courses in the curriculum, and the purpose of this thesis was to find out how this could be achieved, so that students could become more committed to them. The aim of the thesis project is to find the elements that could be used to develop online courses.

The theoretical section consists of learning environments and development, motivation and engagement in higher education, as well as different areas of digital learning. The knowledge base discusses the information known about the topics to make it easier for the reader to understand the results of the study. In addition, the results may be compared to the knowledge base for differences and similarities.

Two qualitative methods were used to acquire the research data. The main method was a semi-structured interview aimed at mapping the students' own thoughts and hopes of networking studies and their experiences, whether positive or negative. The observations were used as a supportive method for the interviews. The purpose of the observation was to find out whether knowing the interviewer previously was significant in choosing the habit or venue of the interview. In addition, observation was used to investigate whether knowing the interviewer previously was important or not, in terms of the depth of the responses given or the desire to participate in the interview at all.

Based on the results obtained, it may be concluded that the interaction and motivation of teachers is of great importance for the engagement of students. Students also felt that face-to-face meetings are very important, especially when starting online studies for the first time. Face-to-face meetings were also viewed as a very engaging element. These results and conclusions show different elements that should be taken into account, when designing and developing online studies.

Keywords: Digital learning, development, higher education, engagement

Table of content

1	Introduction	6
1.1	Aim, purpose and research questions	6
1.2	Breda University of Applied sciences	7
2	Learning environments	7
2.1	Digital learning environments	8
2.2	Revolution of the education	9
3	Engagement and motivation in higher education	9
4	Different teaching methods	13
4.1	Blended learning	13
4.2	Online learning	13
4.3	Challenges in digital learning	14
5	Digital learning	15
5.1	Schedule and freedom	15
5.2	Communication and interaction	16
6	Methods	16
6.1	Interviewing	16
6.2	Observation	17
7	Results	18
7.1	Interaction	19
7.2	Timing of classroom instruction	20
7.3	Motivation	21
7.4	Learning environments	21
7.5	Platforms	22
7.6	Observation	23
8	Conclusions	24
9	References	27
10	Figures	29
11	Appendix	30

1 Introduction

Learning concepts and environments have changed, along with the digitalization of education. More and more, companies offer their employees, for whom work is not tied to space or time, the possibility to work remotely. Along with these changes in society and digitalization, schools have also started to change their curriculum to correspond with existing needs. Similarly, to being able to work anywhere and anytime, teaching and learning are no longer dependent on classrooms. Learning is also possible to accomplish remotely and from almost any location.

In this thesis, I examine digital learning environments and concepts to see how they have changed and how it may have affected students. The approach taken, was executed by interviewing students from different institutions of higher education. This method was used to find out how students have experienced digital learning and what they believe should be improved. To support the interviews, I made observations regarding the reactions of the students towards the interviews. I wanted to observe is there differences, between previously known and unknow interviewees, reactions and method choices,

1.1 Aim, purpose and research questions

The purpose of this thesis is to improve engagement with the digital learning environment. In this research, I have limited the subject to focus on the student's engagement. I want to assess how to get students engaged with online courses and what changes may be needed to secure it. Ultimately, the aim of this thesis is to develop an ideal online course from the point of view of engagement. To support this, four research questions were developed. Those research questions are: What motivates students to engage in digital learning?, How can teachers motivate students to engage?, How often students feel the need for face-to-face meetings? and How to avoid the challenges in digital learning?. (Figure 1).

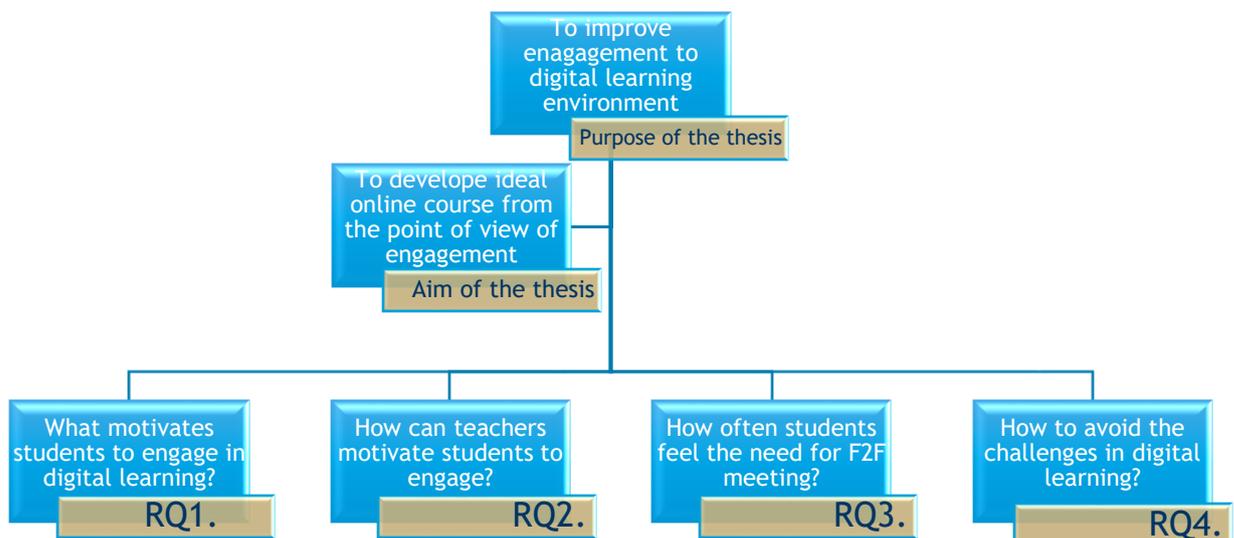


Figure 1. Aim, purpose and research questions.

1.2 Breda University of Applied sciences

This thesis is written for Breda University of Applied Sciences, BUas, to assist them in improving their approach to facilitating digital learning. The school is in the city of Breda, in the Netherlands. There are approximately 7000 students from over 100 countries studying at this international institute. In addition to this, BUas has roughly 800 staff members. BUas offers different programs in the fields of logistics, built environment, tourism, facility, hotel, media, games, leisure and events. (BUas n.d.).

BUas is in the process of relocating all academics to their new central campus. The aim of this relocation is to not only profit from more efficient operational aspects, but to also provide staff and students a more future proof learning environment, where students from different fields of study may interact and share knowledge and experiences. This also helps to make services more effective and efficient by offering only one library, a central service desk and a business square. This also means BUas must meet students' needs in a different manner, for example, by optimising the library service for thousands of students. The physical environment of the new BUas campus is expected to be completed by September 2019. (van Os & van Leeuwen, 2018.)

2 Learning environments

When discussing learning environments, it is important to understand how it is defined and understood. The learning environment, is easily remembered by traditional classrooms and lecture halls. Depending on the source, the definitions may vary, as the established meaning does not exist. The central meaning may be interpreted as an environment intended for learning. The concept of a learning environment is not new in itself, but its importance has changed over time, affecting the way in which teaching situations are visualized. Today, schools are progressing more and more according to the learner-centered approach, even though, the concept is not new and there are no well- established, unambiguous definitions. (Manninen et al. 2007,9-11.)

In the literature, the learning environment is usually defined as a place, space, community or operational custom, of which the purpose is to boost learning. The key point in the definition to be noted is, the learning environment is also perceived to be something else than a physical space or area. However, learning environments are always considered to have a physical and social dimension. (Manninen et al. 2007, 15-16.) Physical learning environment particularly means, school buildings and facilities, and more built environment and nature. (Staffans & Teräväinen 2011, 42.) The physical dimension also refers to physical attributes of the environment, such as furniture layout and lighting. The social dimension, on the other hand,

means interacting and grouping the role. (Manninen et al. 2007, 16.) In a virtual environment, you may expand your learning environment beyond school, as it allows you to be independent of time and place while studying. Therefore, distance learning is also possible. (Staffans & Teräväinen 2011, 42.)

Learning environments have also changed and developed throughout the years. Social changes and megatrends affecting working life, such as digitalization, also affects the educational world by modifying education and learning requirements. Currently, working life expects more social skills, for example, the ability to cooperate and to be flexible. (Sarala 1993, 112.) As a result of these changing expectations, schools are under pressure to change also, and to accommodate these changing expectations. Working life is increasingly adopting more open style office environments, and schools also need to make changes to their learning environments. (Toiviainen 1993, 71-72). Learning environments and teaching planning today use a more sociocultural-based learning concept, which senses that learning does not only take place in a traditional environment, such as a classroom, but society also plays a role. Today it is believed that learning is happening everywhere, regardless of whether it is the purpose of the situation or not. (Sattafans & teräväinen 2011 41-42).

2.1 Digital learning environments

In digital learning, time and place became meaningless and different kinds of environments enable interaction with others. Now you may study wherever and whenever, and it is truly flexible. On the other hand, the study schedule has returned, as without deadlines, the results are slower. The students have said themselves, in Mannisenmäki & Manninen`s research, in 2004, that they have found timetables are essential, for the rhythm of the learning process and for ensuring performance.

Learning environments may be online, in the library, home, office or school, whatever feels good in the moment. Today, schools with this concept, emphasis is on interaction in every way and among all. The role of the teacher varies from expert to tutor as the information changes and the amount increases. (Kosunen et al. 2007,161; Maninen 2007, 53.) Nowadays, schools have started to invest more and more, in all of the school premises, not only in traditional classrooms. Nowadays it is considered important that students also have facilities for teamwork and quiet spaces for independent work. With digitalization, schools have also become more digital and almost all students have their own laptops to do all the schoolwork. This has led to situations where the facilities have to be designed so that there are electrical sockets for charging, and just a table and chair somewhere is not enough. (Altınay, Dagli & Altınay 2016, 3-5).

2.2 Revolution of the education

Before digitalization, some universities had tried distance teaching via telephones or written letters. However, the biggest difficulty with these approaches to distance learning was the lack of interaction between students and teachers. This led to the start of developing new and more effective teaching and learning styles to cope with the changing demands imposed by distance learning. In the end of the 1990`s, and the beginning of the 2000`s, computers and broadband networks became more common. This enabled the development of a new teaching method by utilizing digitalisation. The purpose of this development was to learn, from earlier mistakes in distance teaching and to create learning environments that were not dependent on time or place, but which effectively facilitated the interaction between students among each other and between students and teachers. (Kosunen, Jouttimäki, Nisula & Nurminen 2007, 173-174.) Digital learning has responded well to the challenge of change in society (Pirttimäki 2004, 72.)

As the demands of working life change, learning requirements also experience the pressure of change and appear to have the need to develop teaching and learning environments. However, there have been considerable contradictions in learning concepts over the years. These contradictions occur in Kauppi's article (1993, 71-72). According to his article, learning is seen to occur either in the classroom, with the "teacher-pupil" scenario, or in the everyday experience of understanding and experiences. Learning is seen as receiving information or practices in practice. At the same time, however, learning is perceived as commonplace learning situations where intuitions, emotions, and common sense are a significant part. Kauppi (1993, 72), also emphasizes the contradiction between individual learning and community learning. Generally, learning is perceived as an individual's experience, but community learning raises its head as learning concepts expand. (Kauppi 1993, 72-73.)

3 Engagement and motivation in higher education

Studying in the digital environment requires the ability to plan their own studies, enhance self-discipline and advance study skills, of which a minority of the students had before, but today the majority have already accumulated. (Kember 2007, 90). According to the study, the interaction between the teacher and students would have been the element that would have assisted in engaging and motivating the students for the achievement of study credits. This element remains to be one of the most important components of digital learning. (Kosunen et al. 2007, 175.)

Learner motivation may be divided into two categories. Those categories are extrinsic motivation and intrinsic motivation. Extrinsic motivation is derived from the responses of learners to forces beyond themselves. Extrinsically motivated people respond to reward, praise, good grades, money and so forth. Intrinsic motivation is derived from the learner's internal drive.

Intrinsically motivated people wish to learn for the sake of learning, just to know something new, and out of curiosity. It also suggests that educators should first seek to motivate learners intrinsically. This author further noted, that motivating learners extrinsically may undermine their ability and one must be intrinsically motivated. The very nature of distance learners suggests that to be more intrinsically motivated. (Berge, Zane & Clark 2005, 91.) Generally, limited and defective opportunities are a great motivation for studying as it has major importance for future careers. If the learner experiences that his future career may benefit, the motivation to learn new things will be higher. (Dooley, Linder & Dooley 2005, 78.)

Dooley speaks in his book (2005, 133) about human memory. He states that the human memory is designed so things that people do not consider important go into short-term memory, and if it is considered important, it moves into long-lasting memory. In his book, he mentions five questions that a person ponders and then makes a decision, whether he or she will put it into practice or not. If a learner feels that it makes sense and is relevant, it is more likely to be a long-term memory. (Dooley et al. 2005, 133.)

This may also be used in planning the lesson. As a teacher proceeds from the curriculum design stage to program implementation, the ultimate goal is to provide learning objects and authentic experiences that aid the learner to process and collect data such as: knowledge, skills, attitudes or ability, for use at a later time. (Dooley et al. 2005, 134-135.)

Once the instructor proceeds from the planning stages of instructional design to the delivery of the program, the ultimate goal is to provide learning objects and authentic experiences to aid the learner to process and collect information, such as, knowledge, skills, attitudes or ability, for use at a later time.

Motivation theory is not considered to be its own theory of instruction. Motivation theory does fit within the models of instruction that deals with conditions, strategies and goals. There are four major dimensions of motivation within instructional theory: interest, relevance, expectancy and satisfaction. Interest may be described as stimulating the learner's curiosity. Relevance is determined by whether the instruction satisfies the learners personal need or goals. Expectancy determines the learners perceived likelihood of success and feeling of learner control. Satisfaction is determined by how well the learner enjoyed the learning experience. (Dooley et al. 2005, 141-143.)

Dooley has summarised, in his book, Discrolls (1994), four components of motivation and corresponding strategies for each. They are described in the Figure 2. below.

Component of Motivation	Corresponding Strategies
Gaining and Sustaining ATTENTION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capture students' attention by using novel or unexpected approaches to instruction • Stimulate lasting curiosity with problems that invoke mystery • Maintain students' attention by varying the instructional presentation
Enhancing RELEVANCE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase the perception of utility by stating (or having learners determine) how instruction relates to personal goals • Provide opportunities for matching learners' motives and values with occasions for self-study, leadership, and cooperation • Increase familiarity by building on learners' prior knowledge
Building CONFIDENCE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a positive expectation for success by making clear instructional goals and objectives • Provide opportunities for students to successfully attain challenging goals • Provide learners with a reasonable degree of control over their own learning
Generating SATISFACTION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create natural consequences by providing learners with opportunities to use newly acquired skills • In the absence of natural consequences, use positive consequences such as verbal praise, real or symbolic rewards • Ensure equity by maintaining consistent standards and matching outcomes to expectations

Figure 2. Instructional strategies for stimulating motivation (Dooley et al. 2005, 143)

In distance education, for learners to become successful, the educator's role in maximizing learner engagement and interactions are necessary. Research has shown that learners' length of engagement in an asynchronously delivered course is positively related to that student's success in the course. (Dooley et al. 2005, 79.)

Moore (1989) has developed a model for describing interactions used to engage learners in distance education environment. This model has been updated and one more type was added (4). This model includes four types of interaction: (1) learner-learner; (2) learner to content;

(3) learner to instruction and (4) learner to technology. Moore (1989) has also stated that “educators need to organize programs to ensure maximum effectiveness of each type of interaction...”. A bit later Fulford and Zhang (1993) stated that “the critical predictor of satisfaction is the perception of overall or various interaction”.

Types of interactions with examples.

- learner-to-learner: online chat, threaded discussion, email, point-to-point video conference, audio calls...
- learner-to-content: online book, online instructional material, support materials, worksheets, case studies...
- learner-to-instructor: lectures, email, online editing and feedback, evaluation of learning, interactive tv, steaming video, voice over PowerPoint...
- learner-to-technology: online tutorials on how to use educational technology, seeking help online, downloading plug-ins, installing software, file management including uploading and downloading files, electronic libraries...

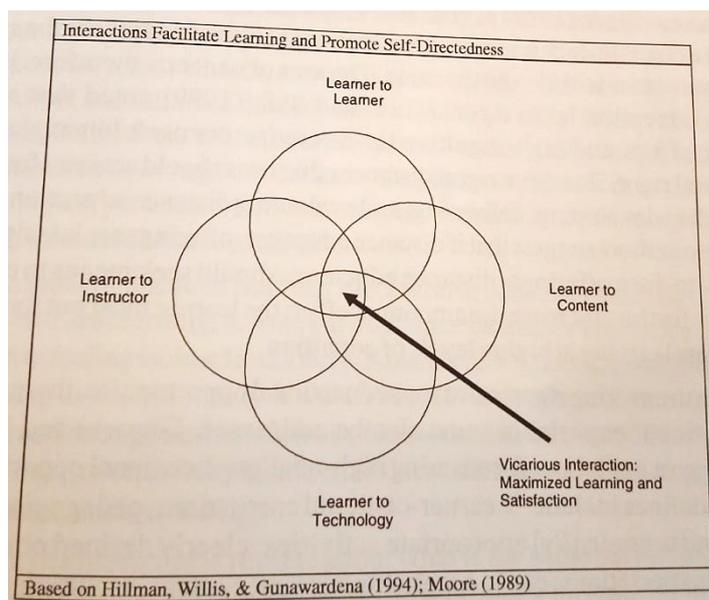


Figure 3. Depiction of various interaction and maximized learning and satisfaction resulting from four learner relationships (Dooley 2005, 81)

As seen in Figure 3. it shows the interplay among the interactions when overlapping of interactions occurs. To maximize learning and increase satisfaction in the distance education environment, all of these interactions should be included. Along with facilitating deeper and more meaningful learning, maximizing interactions also promotes self-directedness among learners. (Kemper 2007, 77-81.)

According to Dooleys book (2005, 83), the ideal learning environment includes face-to-face and real time interactions between and among educators and learners. Such synchronous

interactions however, are not necessary for successful learner outcomes, rigor, and/or quality, with respect to distance learning limitations. Learning synchronously face-to-face, include lack of convenience, loss of interpersonal interaction, and failure to develop real world skills.

Five limitations that Kinshuk (2003) has identified to learning asynchronously at a distance are listed below. By taking these into account, it is more likely the learners will successfully commit.

1. lack of match between course material and its expectation
2. lack of contextual discussion
3. lack of human teacher expression and explanation
4. lack of human interaction
5. lack of contextual understanding.

4 Different teaching methods

The description of traditional learning used in this thesis, is based on the model, of the European Youth Portal. The European Youth Portal (2013), describes in their website that traditional teaching is structured and formal, given in colleges and leads to a degree. This traditional learning style has been criticized for focusing too much on textbooks. (Manninen 2007, 53).

4.1 Blended learning

Blended learning is now offered as an approach to a different form of teaching. Blended learning and online learning may be very similar as both may include different teaching methods. The difference between the two methods is, in blended learning, face-to-face meetings are usually included, whereas, an online course may be completed fully online. Both may include face to face meetings, online communication and independent tasks. They may also include on-the-job training and project work. The courses may be designed so the needs of the course are fulfilled. Learning goals have been developed and systematised more effectively, for teaching design, learning environments, teaching content and learning. In this concept, the student is seen as a constantly evolving individual, who through various methods, develops his academic skills in a versatile way. (Ihalainen 2002, 154-156.)

4.2 Online learning

Online teaching is a teaching method that utilizes open web-based network learning environments. In a typical network learning environment, there are learning materials, instructions,

assignments, discussions, group work areas, and links to online resources. In addition to online learning, it may also include face-to-face meetings. Web-based teaching involves full-time process control and feedback. (Koli & Silander 2002, 88).

Performing a variety of learning tasks and adopting activating practices is often more challenging than listening to a lecture. (Pirttimäki 2004, 72). The online learning skills of the learners need to be consciously developed, for example, online learning requires retrieving information and processing skills. Today, these skills are the core competence of working life. The study focuses on retrieving, editing and using information and producing new knowledge. In addition, the student should be able to assess the reliability and usability of the information. These skills are best learned as part of other studies. (Koli & Silander 2002, 75- 79.)

4.3 Challenges in digital learning

Amid distance learning, the complication of study courses, was the lack of interaction and false assumption of student self-direction. The pedagogical assumption was the model of self-directed students, which means, the students read the study material, pondered his own reading and completed the tasks. He was not supposed to need interaction with the teacher, as feedback on the tasks guided them consciously, and the students had not assumed it to be meaningful. (Kosunen et al. 2007, 175.)

David Kember has also researched (2007) distance learning. Through his research, the same complications appeared as well as different ones. The complications are all related to the student's beliefs about teaching and learning. One of the complications was unclear assignments. The students are accustomed to being informed of what needs to be completed and how to execute the task. For this reason, reading the instructions themselves may confuse them. Also, the students are accustomed to being present in class, along with the teacher, hence they have effortless accessibility when questions arise and as a result, questions do not become complications. Another complication was, the students had been implanted with the notion that the school and examination system, is an educational process, where the teacher advises them which materials which pertain to the syllabus and examination area, and their responsibility was to absorb it the best they could as to be able to reproduce it in the examinations. Lastly, the students have no confidence in their own skills to study remotely. This was already a decreasing complication in 2007 as learning skills had already begun to be taught. According to David Kember, the main complication was prejudice and belief in distance learning. According to his research, students' perception and beliefs of teaching and learning influenced their success in their studies. Therefore, the best way to avoid these complications is to discuss distance learning and to teach the students self-guidance. Of course, this does not signify that complications do not occur, but minimally the prejudices would not

affect it. Figure 4 has four quadrants showing the compatibility between teaching and beliefs. (Kember, 2007, 90-97.)

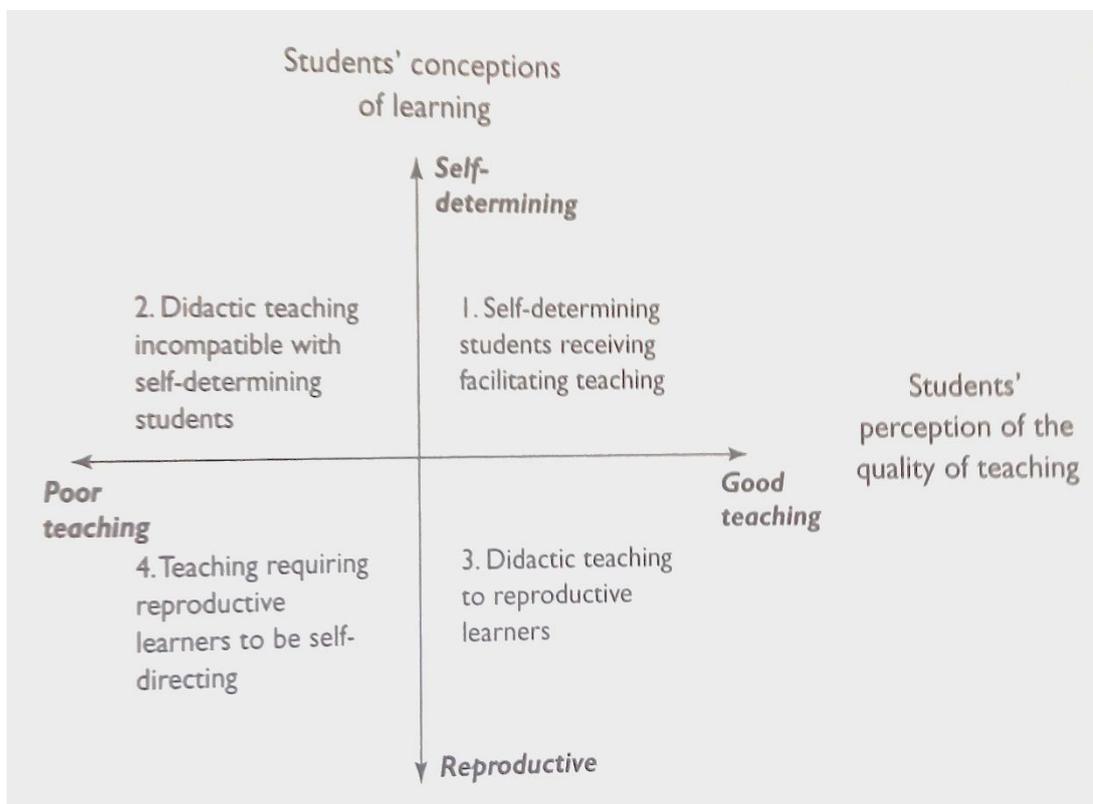


Figure 4. Compatibility between teaching and beliefs (Kember 2007, 97)

5 Digital learning

Digital learning consists of many areas that make studying more desirable or at least allows more freedom than traditional learning. The characteristics of these areas are described in more detail in the following subsections.

5.1 Schedule and freedom

Complete freedom in online courses is not viewed as practicable. Complete freedom would signify that students could begin and complete the courses at any given time, and they could complete it as fast or slow as they wish. Today, these kinds of courses are option in some schools, but they are not recommended to be the first step towards online learning. One consideration is administrative convenience. With due dates and completion dates set for each assignment it is easier to administer, tutor and assess more efficiently. Furthermore, it is questionable whether complete freedom over time is in the best interests of the students. (Kepler 2007 74-77.)

Online courses allow studying a wider range than traditional day study. Online courses may be performed for example, during maternity leave, for ones posted in a foreign country, along with their spouses, those employed with shift work, and together with others who are not

able to attend classroom lectures for one reason or another. Generally, online courses are attended by individuals who are already well educated, as online learning requires advanced learning and IT skills, of which most of us already own. (Kosunen et al. 2007, 162.)

5.2 Communication and interaction

The criteria in Finland`s primary education curriculum (2014, 17), states, that learning occurs with interaction with fellow students and the learning environment. It is desired to shape the learning environment in such way that it permits creative solutions and review of different perspectives, along with supporting learning that occurs outside of school (Perusopetuksen opetussuunnitelman perusteet 2014, 29.) Although the issue is the primary education curriculum, it has significantly affected the development of the learning environment during the last few years, and we visualize the same principles affecting all comparable development.

6 Methods

This research was conducted as a qualitative study. The main method for collecting the material was through interviewing with observation to support it. Qualitative methods have often been utilized for previous unknowns or one pinning for more knowledge through research. Through this method, existing theories are often not guided as much as in quantitative studies. Compared to quantitative studies, qualitative studies are less researched, but in spite of this, analytical material is often plentiful. (Ojasalo, Moilanen & Ritalahti 2014, 105-106.)

The purpose of qualitative research is often to focus precisely on a limited research subject and provide an abundance of information, in order to be able to understand better. This is called a discretionary sample. (Ojasalo et al. 2014, 105-106.)

6.1 Interviewing

I chose a semi-structured interview as the main method of research, as the purpose is to clarify the ideas and experiences of polytechnic students concerning the digital learning environment and online courses. The interview is a suitable method for emphasizing the importance of the individual and to get in-depth knowledge relatively expeditiously. As a data collection method, the interview allows for more comprehensive responses, as the interviewees may be asked questions where necessary and be asked to describe things in their own words. (Ojansalo et al. 2014, 106.)

For my research, the reason I chose a semi-structured interview instead of a structured one, is because it is possible to deviate from pre-planned questions. During the interview, the order and form of the questions may be changed, and questions may be added or omitted as

necessary. The semi-structured interview gives the interviewer the freedom to guide the conversation naturally in order to obtain the information that the interviewer would not have been able to anticipate in the planned form interview. (Ojansalo et al. 2014, 108.)

For interviewees, I chose eight students from Finland and the Netherlands who have attended online courses in different Universities of Applied Sciences. I wanted to have students from BUAs as well as different schools in Finland, because Finnish students have done many online courses and that way have lot of experience about it. All interviewees` were 3rd or 4th grade students. Interviews were conducted by phone, Skype, email or F2F. Interviews by email were more structured as no discussion was possible and the interviewee could not deviate from the subject.

The interviewees did not become familiar with the questions beforehand, except the email interview. Interviews via phone, Skype and F2F were longer and included more specific questions and more in-depth discussion about the subject than via email. I found the interviewees from my contacts and I contacted them by message. For interview requests, I informed interviewees briefly about the subject and purpose of the study. I also expressed that the responses will be treated confidentially so that the anonymity of the respondents is maintained throughout the study and afterwards. Interviews were conducted during March and April. Face to face interviews were conducted at the interviewee& home or school. The duration of the interviews were 20-50 minutes and all interviews were recorded with the permission of the interviewee. By recording the interviews, I was able to make certain I remembered all the important information despite writing it down. For the interviews, the questions (Appendix 1) were prepared in relation to the students experiences of online learning and online courses. The questions were formed based on research questions. The questions have been drafted so that there are a few questions for all interviewees and additional questions to be asked based on the answers. The analysis of the interview results began by reading the transcribed material and notes. The results were analyzed by combining the obtained responses with the help of a table to find similarities and differences between the interviewees answers. The analysis of the results obtained began by presenting and reflecting on the results, partly by the questions and partly by themes.

6.2 Observation

I used observation to support the interviews and the way the students approached the idea of being interviewed. I also observed the students during each interview. The purpose was to observe their participation in the interview, based on the choice of which interview method was requested, and whether there are differences between the known and unknown individuals, as far as, their choice of interview method and the depth of their answers.

The observation began by sending the invitation either by messaging or phone. The known individuals received their invitation by phone, as I personally had their phone numbers. In the event that the call was not answered, a WhatsApp message followed. To the unknown individuals, the invitation was sent by message, via email or social media. To the individuals who were local, the first suggestion was a F2F meeting. In the event that was not successful, we scheduled a phone/skype interview. The suggestion to the nonlocals was a video call, and if it was impossible to accomplish then a normal call was done. Only one of the interviewees requested to be interviewed via email. Under these circumstances, I had the opportunity to observe whether the interviewing method chosen, had any relation to knowing or not knowing who I was.

During the interview, I was able to observe the quality of the answers, as to how in depth and broadly they replied. The purpose was to clarify whether the quality of the answers had any affiliation with myself being known to the interviewee.

The results of the observation have been noted in an analytical chart, separating the answers by whether the interviewees were known or unknown. After this, I sorted out whether there any interview similarities could be found in the same categories. In addition, I researched the differences between the categorized answers.

7 Results

The persons selected for the study were 21-28 years old and all were in the final stages of their studies. The interviewees included three men and five women. Some of the interviewees work part-time, some full-time and some were unemployed. The sectors of the interviewees varied from social and health care to business and facility management. The interviewees are anonymous in this work as it is irrelevant to the outcome. Table 1., below, shows the backgrounds of the interviewees. The table includes the gender, grade, field of study and work situation.

Alias	Gender	Grade	Field of study	Work situation
Apple	Female	4 th	Business	Full-time
Choco	Male	4 th	Building engineer	Part-time
Sugar	Female	3 rd	Social- and healthcare	Part-time
Egg	Female	4 th	Business	Part-time
Milk	Male	4 th	Internet & SoMe and Games	Unemployed
Potato	Male	3 rd	Hotel / Facility	Unemployed
Broccoli	Female	4 th	Hotel / Facility	Unemployed
Orange	Female	3 rd	Business	Part-time

Table 1. Interviewees` basic info

While analysing the interviews, six different themes appeared. The themes include interaction, intervals of classroom instruction, motivation, learning environments, platforms and observation.

7.1 Interaction

Most of the online courses included some type of interaction with the teachers. The most experienced students had real time online lectures, in which the teacher is either shown on the video or shares his screen with the students. In some cases, these online lectures were recorded so students could watch when they had time. For some students this is essential in online courses.

“Online courses are often advertised for their flexibility, so yes, I think it is important that we can watch the lectures afterwards” -Apple (Referred 1.5.2019.)

Another issue that everyone emphasized was online studies are not suitable for all courses and must have precise instructions. Students felt that the same instructions are not suitable for online course and classroom course. In online course`s they have to be more specific and detailed. This was justified, by the fact, that teachers are less available, and it is often difficult to explain the problems through video.

“We tried to reach the teacher with messages, but the answers were often delayed and unclear. Problems are much harder to try to explain with a message” -Sugar.

The students also agreed that the most important thing in the live lectures was, the appearance of the teacher on screen. Observing the teacher on screen made the lecture more personal for the students and it also aided in focusing on the lecture.

“It is good to see the teacher on the screen, so it feels more personal, plus it makes it more interesting and easier to focus on it” -Coco

There were both positive and negative experiences with the use of microphones. Everybody thought they were superior to the chat, yet many of them were reluctant to use them as they were bashful. Students in one school expressed how the teacher had the option to place students into groups so that 4-5 students could speak via microphones and only the members of the group and the teacher were able to hear them. This felt to be easier and more comfortable than speaking while the entire class was listening.

“Speaking in little groups was nice because I don` t always dare or want to share all the dumb things for everyone through the microphone, somehow it feels different than in the classroom” -Milk

7.2 Timing of classroom instruction

The students all agreed that online studies are not suitable for all subjects. It is best suited, for example, to study languages or other so-called strictly instructed courses. Face-to-face meetings are not considered essential for studying these subjects, unlike, in versatile professional studies.

The frequency of face-to-face meetings in strictly instructed courses was twofold, some expressed that once every two weeks was adequate, while others believed three times over the duration of the course was enough. Those who wanted meetings weekly, also said that some could be replaced with real classroom record. That means that the videos would be recorded in real classroom with real students, so there will be heard all questions students have asked. Students have said that those records are so much better, because only other students can have those questions, and that way everyone gets the answer. In the online live lecture’s students felt like the teacher only reads from the PowerPoint and go on very quickly. Students also had troubles in asking the teacher those questions, because the teacher sees the questions to late, or students forget what they wanted to ask, or they do not have the courage to ask. This was also one thing that students think very different than in classroom, all of them said that they do have the courage in classroom.

For other courses, students wished to meet every week either face-to-face or online. Students also felt it necessary to have at least three face-to-face meetings in school. In more demanding courses, students wish for more guidance and information and no irrelevant information. If there are only a few meetings and there is a lot to learn, the students hope the time will be utilized and the meeting will focus only on the topic and guidance.

"The meetings should be designed based on given task. The more difficult and more versatile assignment the bigger the need for meeting" - Broccali

7.3 Motivation

Students are mostly motivated by the degree, the will to learn new things and development for the future career. In addition, clear instructions and a focus on the topic motivates the students. *"There should never be any ambiguous assignment otherwise motivation will drop when you don't get it" - Choco*

We must have microphones in every class, so our teacher can ask at any time for example "Laura could you tell me what this means?" So we have to pay attention at all times. This motivates to listen and makes it feel more personal rather than just watching"- Apple

Students also provided teachers with tips to help them motivate their students. One of the tips that came from more than one student was, the teacher should firstly tell the students why the course is in the curriculum and what concrete benefits it may have in their future careers. Another tip, was to make lectures more personal, for example, by asking questions from a particular student. Below are students' comments:

Some students felt that they do not have the same kind of motivation for online courses, because they prefer going to school and studying traditionally in person.

"From my perspective, If I need to make the effort to go to school, I will be more motivated and involved with what I need to study. Online courses can be easily skipped."-Potato

Two of the interviewees` have dropped one course. They both have similar reasons caused by the overlapping of face-to-face meetings and work.

"I have dropped one course because during the enrolment they did not informed about the F2F meetings, so then they were at the same time" - Sugar 2019

7.4 Learning environments

Students were relatively satisfied with the schools studying facilities. Most students preferred to study in a library, at home or in a café, but some also preferred school facilities. Those

who preferred to go to school went there mainly to see their school friends at the same time. All schools had facilities for teamwork as well as independent study.

“I like to go to school to study because there you can see friends at the same time” - Sugar 2019

“I think our schools interior design was designed with the needs of the students in mind”- Apple 2019

Most of the interviewees favoured studying alone, but a few studied in a group or with their friends, while doing their own studies. Mostly, they did not favour group work because they are difficult to arrange and the way everyone works is different, as well as the goals.

“I like studying with others so we can brainstorm, in that way we may get some different perspectives”- Choco (Referred 28.4.2019.)

“I think group work is fine during the lecture but not during free time...”- Milk (Referred 28.4.2019.)

None of the students, who preferred studying outside the school, could not think of anything that would make them study at school. Nobody considered it a bad alternative, but it is usually easier and nicer to go somewhere else.

7.5 Platforms

As the students were from five different educational institutions, the online course, materials and lectures obviously had their own platforms. All students agreed that the schools own platform is fine, even though there are some problems from time to time. Mostly, the problems were technical, for example, someone’s microphone or the audio system did not work. Some students had also experienced something other than the school platform for courses, but none of them thought it was a good idea. Everyone favoured the idea, that all courses should be in the same platform, so it would be easier and more clear to utilize. Also, social media has been used in some courses, but none of the students recommended it for other courses. All things considered, students did not have strong opinions about the use of platforms, except, all courses should endorse one platform.

“In that course Facebook fit okay but I don` t think it should be used in other courses”- Meat

“We have used Facebook and WhatsApp for our team works in online courses, but I don` t think it should be part of any course. students can use it for team work if they want” - Egg

7.6 Observation

Revealed in the observations, it became apparent that the unknowns had an easier time ignoring the invitation to partake in the interview, for which reason, there may be a connection between participation and knowing the interviewer. The difference that arose, in the choice of the interview method, was the more personal contact during the interview. Not one of the unknowns chose a video or F2F interview, they preferred a phone call or email. On the other hand, the known individuals were primarily interested in a F2F or video interview, provided it was possible.

Interviewee	Known	Unknown
Selection of interview method	F2F (3), video call (1), call (1)	email(1), call(2),
Depth of answers	F2F: replied more broadly and the conversation was more relaxed, no differences between the calls: both went smoothly, proceeded casually and the answers were broad	via email: answers were more condensed but almost all were answered in a similar way
Participation in the interview	All whom were asked, participated	Two of the invitees did not reply

Table 2. Observation summary.

Table 2. above shows the itemized results of the observation. They have been split into three groups; selection of interview method, depth of answers and the participation in the interviews.

In Figure 5. below, the results of the observations of the choices between the methods of the interviewing process are noted. They have been split into two groups, knowns and unknowns.

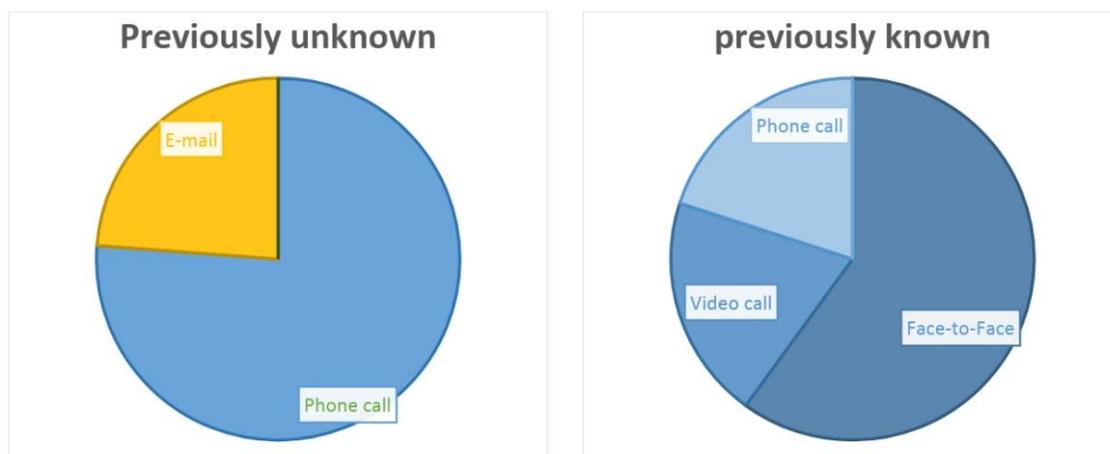


Figure 5. Choices between interview methods

The differences, in the results, between the knowns and unknowns, are not directly obvious. I believe the interest in the interview, as well as experiences, have affected the outcome. Broad, as well as short, surface answers were found in both categories.

All in all, the observation sample was rather small, only eight students, thus these results cannot be out rightly generalized and claimed to be correct.

8 Conclusions

In this thesis, I wanted to develop digital learning engagement, from the student's point of view. Based on the results, of the interview, it can be stated, the teacher has an interest in student's motivation and commitment. Students also need more personal contact from teachers during the online course. Interaction is also seen as a very important part, especially between the teacher and the student. According to the results, the most important things are, clear instructions, face-to-face meetings and interaction. The interviews show, as seen in chapter 7.4, that all students were satisfied with the learning environment at school, although, most did study elsewhere. From this, it may be concluded, that when the school has facilities for both independent and group study, there is no need to change that concept, at the moment.

As shown in chapter 7.2, students felt that face-to-face meetings were very important, especially, in the most challenging courses. Also, all students thought, that when starting the first online courses they need to include some face-to-face meetings. They felt that it would be too big of a change to go straight into fully online courses. The general opinion is, if the students receive clear instructions and the topics are not too complicated, three meetings are ideal for the course.

Based on the results of this thesis, I would suggest to BUAs, they should begin discussing online courses positively. This will make it easier for students to internalize and gradually warm up to the idea. If the change is said to be big, but more information is not relayed, it may cause unnecessary fear in the students.

A very important issue brought out in the interviews was, clear instructions should be given in the beginning of the course, of which would be, of great assistance to the students. Also, the three ideal meetings (see figure 6.) that have emerged would be a good base for the course. In addition, live or recorded online lectures may be added to the course, if needed. Considering the students' starting position, this would certainly be an important part of student engagement.

I would advise teachers to consider the importance of the course, in regards to, the future of the students, thus the teacher may inspire and motivate the students. Teachers should also pay special attention to the assignments of the task so they do not include any interpretation confusion. Taking these things into consideration, we can develop an invigorating online course to which the students may engage.

From the student's perspective, three ideal face-to-face meetings for online courses are described in Figure 6.



Figure 6. Three idea face-to-face meeting

Work evaluation

In this theses Chapter 2 generally deals with learning environments and the revolution of learning. Chapter 3 focuses on the engagement and motivation of students. The rest of the knowledge base deals with Digital Studies and its different parts. The information base was aimed at presenting already made information to make it easier for the reader to understand the results. In addition, the base may be used to while comparing the results.

There were eight interviewees, in this thesis, so the sample is very small. Although the interviewees had been selected from five different Universities of Applied Sciences, the results could not be directly generalized to all higher education schools. As students also experience things differently and all of them have their own needs, in the culture of learning. However, the results give a good direction to what kind of online courses students want and what they have experienced to be good and important. The differences, in the results, of the interview, also revealed differences in the study field. Particularly strong negative opinions were found by the student studying in the field of games, while for example, a student in business economics was much more positive about online courses.

Another method used in the thesis was observation. Observation was deliberately just a small supporting part of the research. However, the results suggest that it is easier for students to refuse, at the request of strangers, but no generalization can be made.

An accurate description of the entire research process indicates the reliability of the research. The report gives a detailed account of the choices made and the implementation of the various methods. Recording the interviews, verified that the answers were direct quotes and not written according to one's own memory. The ethics and privacy of the research were taken into account by expressing the purpose of the thesis and the use of the information carefully. The recordings and transcripts accumulated, in the data collection, were also properly destroyed upon completion of the thesis. While analyzing the results, students were informed of basic data, but the fields of education, for example, were left so general that students could not be identified.

The purpose of this study was to find out how students could be better involved in online courses. The study partially responded to this, because, to the extent of the matter, everything did not come to light here. This thesis progressed relatively well, with emphasis in late spring, and completed on time, in May. The most challenging part of this writing was scripting a knowledge base. The most challenging part of this thesis, at first, was finding the interviewees, but in the end, it was really successful. The easiest part was writing the results. The majority of time was mostly spent on writing a knowledge base, transcribing interviews and analyzing both methods.

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Van Os & van Leeuwen Agust-September 2018

10 Figures

Figure 1: Aim, purpose and research questions.....	6
Figure 2: Instructional strategies for stimulating motivation.....	11
Figure 3. Depiction of various interaction and maximized learning and satisfaction resulting from four learner relationships.....	12
Figure 4. Compatibility between teaching and beliefs.....	15
Figure 5. Choices between interview methods.....	23
Figure 6. Three idea face-to-face meeting.....	25

Tables

Table 1: Interviewees` basic info.....	19
Table 2: Observation summary	Virhe. Kirjanmerkkiä ei ole määritetty.

11 Appendix

Appendix 1: Semi-structured interview base	31
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Appendix 1: Semi-structured interview base

Age

Gender

Employment: Full-time/part-time/unemployed

Studies:

- What is your opinion of traditional courses?
- Have you completed any online courses?
 - o No, why?
 - o Yes
 - Did you enjoy the online courses? Why?
 - What platforms were used? How was it implemented?
 - What kind of interaction was included? (between students/lecturer)
 - How did you communicate? (Did it include any F2F meetings? How many/often?)
 - How about skype?
 - Would you have needed/wanted more meetings? How many/often?
 - How do you enjoy studying? On your own or in guided group?
 - Where do you like to study? Why?
 - What makes you motivated or gives you motivation to complete the course?
 - How could the teachers motivate you?
 - Would you rather study traditionally than online? Scheduling
 - Have you dropped out of any courses, either online or traditional courses? How many and why?

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