

Tuula Kukkonen ja Terhi Myller (ed.)

Learning Active Ageing Online



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Learning active ageing online

Tuula Kukkonen and Terhi Myller (ed.)

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Editors

Tuula Kukkonen, Karelia University of Applied
Sciences
Terhi Myller, Karelia University of Applied
Sciences

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PunaMusta Oy

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1 Introduction

Online provision of studies included in higher education has increased during the past two pandemic years. Courses previously implemented face-to-face were quickly transformed to hybrid and online implementations after the coronavirus restrictions entered into force in spring 2020. The digital leap in higher education was very rapid. Of course, online pedagogy has been discussed and lessons learned even before these forced changes.

At the same time, societal changes have also led people to act more and more in different sectors through remote and digital services. The increase in technology and digital devices extends to all areas of life. Learning also takes place in more diverse ways, such as at work, through informal networks and on the Internet, without forgetting formal education.

This publication discusses the development of the online implementation of the Karelia University of Applied Sciences' education on the basis of five years of experience. The articles in the publication discuss the development of online pedagogical thinking and the development path of the online implementation of the Master's Programme in Active Ageing from 2017 onwards. At that time, a process of investigating the prerequisites for increasing distance learning was launched, which led to the transformation of the programme to be fully implemented online from autumn 2018. The Bachelor's programme in Applied Gerontology launched in Karelia University of Applied Sciences at the beginning of 2022 is implemented as blended learning, in which the share of online studies is significant.

We have gone through a learning process that strives to keep track of practices found to be good in previous implementations, implemented in a new way online. And the process continues: both the general development of education and the development of online pedagogy offer both challenges and inspiring learning experiences also in the future.

When e-learning is considered in more detail, the following questions are addressed: How does e-learning ensure the student's learning and competence accumulation in a favourable manner, and what should be considered in e-learning from the perspectives of the student and the higher education institution. From a more detailed perspective, the questions presented focus on learning and the perceptions associated with it as well as on considering i.e. the questions of interaction. E-learning is highlighted in these questions as opportunities for action and ways to achieve competence. On the other hand, the questions also guide students to examine online studies openly and critically from different perspectives.

Joensuu, May 2022

Tuula Kukkonen & Terhi Myller

2 Learning online – Through interaction

Terhi Myller, Principal Lecturer, Karelia-ammattikorkeakoulu

This article is based on the contribution *Conceptions of learning and online learning environments among higher education social and health care students* (Myller & Vänskä 2019). The article focuses on learning conceptions of students in social services, social work and psychology at the higher-level education, together defined as social and health care fields. By utilizing previous research, the aim was to analyse, what kinds of learning conceptions students have and whether principles of connectivism can be identified within them, and how do the learning conceptions guide students' activities in practice, in online learning environments. In addition, the article utilised the authors' teacher practical training experiences.

Focus on collaborative learning

The development and management of the Master's Programme in Active Ageing and the Bachelor's Programme in Applied Gerontology have been an option to focus on online studies in order to respond to the strengthening of the competence needs of the changing society and future professionals.

When discussing online pedagogy, traditional learning theories, such as behavioural (Huitt & Hummel 2006), cognitive constructivist and socio-constructivist (see e.g. Siemens 2005) have been addressed. However, it has been decided to examine learning from a connectivist perspective, according to which technology and the internet create opportunities for learning and sharing information. The idea behind the connectivist approach is that learning is a broader process than the learner's personal process. (Siemens 2005; Goldie 2016.)

According to Goldin (2016, ref. Siemens 2005), learning based on conventional thinking can be defined as follows:

- diversity of opinions and views promotes learning,
- learning is a process in which different sources of information are combined,
- technical applications are important drivers of learning.
- the ability to know is more important than what we know now.
- we need contacts to promote learning,
- the ability to see connections is vital and
- making decisions is a learning process.

These descriptions of online pedagogy help teachers to consider students' learning and help them in their pedagogical choices. In addition, in conventional thinking, communality, interaction and the mindset that together we know more, encourage the development of practical practices. In essence, this is about attitude and understanding of learning and technology as a supporter and facilitator.

Learning contexts in transition

Higher education students in the social and health care sector often have prior education and experience in working life. Taking the competence of different students into account requires the development of study methods and recent organisational methods. Traditional learning contexts and styles are rupturing as online and collaborative learning is turning in. At the same time, study orientations are changing, and individual learner agency is becoming more and more emphasized. Student groups are becoming more heterogeneous and unbound, as studying is no longer limited into a classroom or some other physical context. Despite of the growing distance between students, collaborative groups and tasks are typically required. Virtual learning environments are defined as systems of social and technical aspects, where learners and teachers are involved (Khan 2000). These structural and functional changes and new learning requirements (Khan 2000) make the field of social and health care education an important focus of research.

Online learning environments are designed social and virtual spaces where presentation methods can vary from text to immersive 3D worlds. In the definitions described above, students are seen as active virtual space builders. It is important that virtual learning environments are not limited to distance learning: online learning environments can enrich classroom activities. At best, virtual learning environments combine various technologies and multiple pedagogical approaches and overlap with physical environments. (Myller & Vänkä 2019 ref. Khan 2000; Dillenbourg et al. 2002.)

“Higher education students in the social and health care sector often have prior education and experience in working life. Taking the competence of different students into account requires the development of study methods and recent organisational methods.”

Characteristics of e-learning

E-learning environments have been found to reduce the time and space challenges associated with studying, which is why e-learning environments are also referred to as learning at any time and anywhere. Learning that is not tied to time and space can be done entirely or partly online and partly face-to-face, in so-called hybrid or blended learning environments. Online studies may be guided or mentored by an instructor, but from the student’s perspective, self-direction is emphasised in learning. The online learning environment can include large discussion groups, small group discussions,



individual activities, group activities and interaction at different levels among and between students, teachers and mentors. The material can be presented in several ways, including videos, recordings, movies, links to Web sites that manage online learning environments, diagrams, statistics, and case examples. Interaction can be synchronous (real-time) or asynchronous (delayed). (Myller & Vänskä 2019 ref. O'Neil 2009.)

The teacher's role in online studies should be similar to that of a facilitator. The teacher should be available face-to-face in online breakout discussions or other online discussions. The participation of teachers would initially be more intensive, and this will decrease as students get inside the learning process. According to Goldie (2016), the "social presence" of facilitators in networks promotes student participation and autonomy. (Myller & Vänskä 2019.)

The importance of a learning culture and communal learning

In recent decades, major changes in the social and health care service system have been reflected in the need to change the learning environments of the social and health care sector, but nevertheless, there has been little research on learning processes and students' conceptions of learning. Holmström (2011), who studied the learning of social and health care students in Finland, points out that learning takes place in social interaction within the learning community and is guided by the organisation's learning culture. Holmström's study understands the learning culture as a learning event in which the student can participate in community activities. (See Myller & Vänskä 2019.)

Regardless of individual learning concepts, learning usually takes place in social environments. In the social and health care sector, social environments are particularly important contexts for learning, as practical work also takes place in interaction with clients. To support learning, social and health care students have internships throughout their studies. According to the teaching experiences gained during practical trainings of higher education students in the social and health care field, the students' conceptions of learning have features of constructivism and socio-constructivism. For example, many students want to study together and strive for a dialogical relationship. (Myller & Vänskä 2019.)

Adult students as online students

In particular, adult students favour e-learning and appreciate the freedom to study, which is not related to any particular place or time. Learning can take place anywhere, at any time, and technical software is used. The students have also emphasised that practical learning is an effective way of learning, which means that their own experiences can form the basis for learning, and this perspective also features constructivism. (Myller & Vänskä 2019.)

However, not all students experience learning as mentioned above, and many find traditional learning a good way to learn. It includes traditional lectures and instructor-led sessions. In online environments, these concepts of learning have slightly different perspectives. It appears that online environments are mostly seen as technical learning tools. For many students, it may be challenging to find, select and generate essential information and to share and deepen it with others in online environments. If a person is not committed to their online learning community, a high degree of responsibility and internal learning motivation are needed to maintain an individual study path. (Myller & Vänskä 2019.)

“At best, virtual learning environments combine various technologies and multiple pedagogical approaches and overlap with physical environments.”

Many higher education students find it useful to share various ideas and discuss with other students. These also reflect the principles of conventional learning. However, guidance of learning processes is not unambiguous. The teacher and the student should have a connection where students can freely build their own learning processes and the teacher can support their developing ability to find and select information that is important to them. This means that teachers as facilitators also need to update their perceptions of learning and teaching, for example by understanding assessment in a new way. (Myller & Vänskä 2019.)

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3 Planning of the e-learning in Master's Programme in Active Ageing

Tuula Kukkonen, Principal Lecturer, Karelia University of Applied Sciences

Background

The Master's Degree Programme in Active Ageing was launched at Karelia University of Applied Sciences in 2015. The aim of the programme was to respond to the development challenges of an ageing society and strengthen the examination of ageing in a resource-oriented and future-oriented manner. Curriculum work was carried out together with working life partners. Active ageing and an age-friendly society were defined as the focus areas of education. From the beginning, extensive rehabilitation thinking was also a key focus area in education.

The first implementations of the programme, which began in autumn 2015 and autumn 2016, were blended learning implementations. The average number of face-to-face classes was two consecutive weekdays a month. Thesis guidance was also implemented face-to-face. In addition to face-to-face classes, independent and self-directed studies of students played a key role. The study period in the programme was two and a half years.

The number of applicants did not grow as intended in 2015 and 2016. In 2017, the number of applicants decreased slightly. The University of Applied Sciences analysed the situation in such a way that the blended learning is mainly attractive to students in the region where the university is located and in the neighbouring areas, leaving the applicant base relatively small. At the same time, it was assessed that the content and profile of the programme have national significance. It was decided that efforts would be made to

improve the national accessibility of education by increasing the share of online teaching in the implementation of the programme. In 2017, the programme was not launched, instead, resources were concentrated on increasing the share of online teaching.

The development process of education during the autumn term 2017

The objectives of the education development process were defined as

- 1) strengthening the significance of education (the aim was to respond to the development needs of an ageing society),
- 2) strengthening national student recruitment (it was estimated that this would require more opportunities for distance learning) and improving the marketing of the programme and
- 3) improving the effectiveness of education.

The stages of the development process were defined as follows:

Table 1. Development process for Master's degree programme in Active Ageing 2017

Task	Measures
Curriculum review and proposals for changes (August-September 2017)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - background analysis: student feedback, internal audit documents - course and curriculum analysis - working life cooperation (Siun sote, cooperation group, survey) - reflection on international cooperation in education - proposals for curriculum changes
Pedagogical development (Sept-October 2017)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - pedagogical foundation of education - pedagogically justified implementation solutions - strengthening virtual pedagogy - definition of the need for technical support in remote implementations - background analysis: student feedback, teacher observations and experiences, internal audit documents
Outlining implementation solutions (September - October 2017)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - cooperation with digital pedagogy support operators - reflection on which stage of studies and which study units have the best prerequisites for developing remote implementations - reflection on which parts and/or themes of the studies require contact teaching and how much - options for organising contact teaching: in Joensuu vs. elsewhere in Finland - opportunities for organising virtual solutions - cost impacts of increasing remote implementations
Piloting of the first study units (November-December 2017)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - cooperation with operators at the Open University of Applied Sciences - students who started in 2015 and 2016 lacking some courses from the first academic year - utilising piloting experiences in the development of education
Preparing a communication and marketing plan for education (November-December 2017)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - cooperation with student recruitment and marketing operators - description and development ideas of education communication as a whole - degree programme marketing plan (annual planning cycle) - special attention to nationwide recruitment - marketing plan for implementation starting in autumn 2018

The curriculum development process began with the analysis of courses in August 2017. At this stage, all study unit development ideas were considered, including ideas on the prerequisites for remote implementation of study units. The study unit analysis framework is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Study unit analysis framework

Name of the study unit
Teacher
Description and assessment of the study unit
Course objectives and content
Brief description of the implementation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - face-to-face / online implementation - tasks - pedagogical solutions
Opala feedback on the study unit
Other experiences and feedback on the study unit
Study unit development ideas
Role of the course in the curriculum (does the curriculum serve the objectives, scope, mandatory / optional)
Timing of the study unit during studies
Thoughts on objectives and content
Ideas on scope and implementation
Implementation of Master's degree programme in Active Ageing / joint implementation of Master's programmes in social and health care / joint implementation of Master's degree programmes in Karelia
Thoughts on the prerequisites, risks of remote implementation
Possible remote implementation, to what extent (%), justification
Opportunities for international implementation cooperation, implementation in English
Other remarks

All study units were analysed using this framework. The analysis was carried out by teachers who taught study units. In the analysis phase, the study units had gained experience of two implementations, while a third implementation was underway.

Opportunities for e-learning

The results of the course analysis were summarised, that is discussed in this article especially from the perspective of e-learning. At this stage, the starting point for developing education was that in the future, the programme would be implemented partly online and partly face-to-face. The following quotes are assessments of the prerequisites for online course implementations recorded in the course analysis.

The analysis considered it possible that some of the courses would be implemented fully online.

It is possible to implement it remotely / internationally.

100% remote implementation already available.

When discussing remote implementations, feedback from one student that this course could function as a remote implementation. To some extent, individual support (...) is required, but would also be provided remotely. Could be implemented 100% remotely.

It must be possible to implement it remotely.

Supporting grouping was considered challenging in remote implementation.

Remote implementation is possible. Challenge: does not support grouping, which has provided positive feedback.

In the analysis phase, courses were identified, and at least partial contact teaching was considered necessary in their implementation. This was justified, for example, by the fact that the course contains new things for the students and that the orientation and seminar of the course would be justified as contact teaching.

Partly remotely, but also requires contact, as for most students the content is new.

Can be implemented remotely, orientation in contact? Requires the development of peer learning online. Optimal remote implementation approx. 80%. Contact teaching should be reserved for the orientation and seminar of the course.

During the course, contact teaching must be maintained, and the current 3 face-to-face days work well.

Providing guidance and organising thesis seminars face-to-face were considered important. The students considered the possibilities of online guidance and participation as follows:

Providing remote guidance.

The possibility of participating in remote guidance also on site.

Functional equipment and guidance facilities are a prerequisite.

A new remote application from Moodlerooms could be enabled if it proves to work.

Note: scheduling guidance for online classes.

Possibility of thesis seminars online.

At this stage, consideration was given to opening thesis seminars online, for example for working life networks. The reasoning was close to the operating model of hybrid teaching introduced in the 2020s. This was thought to support national student recruitment.

Fully online programme

As the development process progressed, it was increasingly decided to consider the courses in which at least partial face-to-face classes were considered necessary in the course analysis. The needs of contact teaching were examined one course at a time and it was found that the needs of contact teaching could also be solved by means of online pedagogy.

As we progressed towards full online programme, particular attention was paid to supporting communal and peer learning. The students had given positive feedback on their implementation in blended learning. Sharing experiences, joint reflection and coffee breaks were important from the viewpoints of both learning and social interaction. It was considered important that communal and peer learning also be possible in fully online programme. The operating model launched in the multiform implementations, in which the students' small groups were active throughout their studies, was also retained in online implementations.

The idea of combining face-to-face classes and online teaching so that some students would participate in face-to-face classes and some in online teaching was abandoned. The aim was not to divide the student group into two groups, but to organise equal study conditions for all students.

Online implementations of study units were piloted at the Open University of Applied Sciences. The experiences of piloting encouraged the development of online implementations. (Lätti, Kukkonen, Suhonen & Arola 2017.)

The thesis was the most recent study unit in which face-to-face classes were still considered necessary. However, it was decided in the discussions that group guidance for the thesis could also be arranged online. Instead of online, the traditional thesis seminar was replaced by the publication of the thesis results by the student in the commissioner's work community. The students submit their feedback on the publication to the thesis supervisor and also distribute the results to all students in the degree programme in the online learning environment. This is considered to support peer learning and sharing the experiences and competence of advanced students with the entire student community.

“As we progressed towards full online programme, particular attention was paid to supporting communal and peer learning.”

Online learning environment supporting learning

In multimodal education, each starting group had its own online learning environment that supported multimodal studies. In the transition to fully online education, an online learning environment shared by all students was established. This solution was also used to support communal learning and the sharing of competence and experiences not only within one's own group but also between different groups. Each year, new starting groups also establish their own workspaces in the shared online learning environment, as well as their own discussion forums and video workspaces for students' small groups.

The online implementation of the courses was planned in cooperation between teachers and online pedagogy support operators. The aim was that students would not have to learn new structures in each course. Instead, all study units are based on a uniform structure. A graph was also developed for describing the learning process in the course, which is utilised in all courses. The guidelines and visualised process descriptions were considered important: clear and thorough instructions are needed to support self-directed learning.

The online implementation of the courses includes online classes, work in small student teams and independent work. Online classes focus on issues where interaction and shared learning are important. The orientation lectures included in the course are recorded. Hence the online classes can be used to construct and share what has been learned, to discuss and to ask questions. The students can also return to the themes afterwards. Students who do not have access to each class can also take advantage of recordings. Experience has shown that the majority of students participate in online classes on a regular basis; in other words, they are clearly relevant from the perspective of communal learning and interaction.

Development of the number of applicants and student satisfaction

The first fully online programme was launched in autumn 2018. The number of applicants tripled compared to the previous year. The number of applicants continued to increase in the next two years.

Table 3. Applicants for Master's programme in Active Ageing 2015–2021 (Ministry of Education and Culture)

	Primary applicants	All applicants
2021	69	108
2020	72	120
2019	72	99
2018	57	75
2017	15	27
2016	27	36
2015	30	42

“The online implementation of the courses was planned in cooperation between teachers and online pedagogy support operators.”

During the education development process, it was anticipated that the transition to online teaching in its entirety could be seen at least temporarily as a drop-in student satisfaction. The development new approaches and taking over new tools were assumed to possibly have an effect on the student satisfaction. The transition to fully online teaching has definitely been a learning process, but there was no drop-in student satisfaction during the change process.

Table 4. Summary of results of student feedback surveys (so-called arrival survey) by theme 2015-2020

ARRIVAL SURVEY, OVERALL RESULT (SATISFACTION INDEX%)					
Master Programme in Active Ageing (2015-2020)					
	2015	2016	2018	2019	2020
Total result	91	90	92	93	93
Curriculum	94	94	92	92	92
Implementation of programme	86	87	87	89	94
Guidance of learning	91	85	95	92	88
Learning and development of competence needed in working life	96	95	97	97	95

Developing online implementation as a learning process

The development process of education can be considered as a learning process. The teacher team’s understanding of what courses or contents it is necessary to teach face-to-face changed clearly. In the joint discussion of the course analysis results, it was decided to consider whether the curriculum ultimately has anything to teach face-to-face. This conclusion was very far from the starting point of the process, where it was assured that not all teaching could be provided online.

In my view, the relevant factors in this process were the in-depth analysis of courses based on previous implementation experiences and the joint work process of the teacher team. The process generated new insights that we were unable to anticipate. In this respect, it was a genuine development process.

Implementing programme fully online since 2018 has, of course, also been a learning process. The online implementations of the courses and thesis guidance practices have been continuously developed. Changes in operating practices were documented in the curriculum update in 2021.

“The development process of education can be considered as a learning process.”

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4 Systematic development through learning design

Maarit Ignatius, Designer of Blended Pedagogy, Karelia University of Applied Sciences

Towards a fully online Master's degree programme

The persons responsible for developing and managing Master's degree programme in Active Ageing had decided to increase the selection of online courses and enable the provision of the entire degree online. As objectives and at the same time as justification for the online degree, they recorded increasing national attractiveness and the opportunity to offer more flexible studies to students struggling with work and other life situations.

Online teaching can be implemented in a variety of ways, including online, blended learning, hybrid and distance learning. The Master's programme in Active Ageing was decided to be provided fully online. This can include synchronic online classes, self-directed and/or group interactive online learning and guidance. Some of the online classes are synchronic, otherwise the studies are a-synchronous.

Learning design and reverse learning were selected as the tools for developing the implementations of the degree. Not in a pure form, but to the extent that systematic action was possible. These tools also provided many justifications for development work, both researched and based on practical experiences. Both tools have a positive impact on student-centered study planning.

Supporting students' agency in learning

In student-centered approach, the students and their agency are at the core in the development of e-learning education. The student-centered approach enables the students to develop their competence from their own perspectives which motivates them in studying.

The starting point was to map out the contents, operating models and implementation methods that had been identified in previous multi-modal implementations as elements that increase both learning and communality and well-being. They were also included in the new online implementations. These included: peer learning, collaborative learning, i.e. working in small groups, regular contacts at a certain time, guidance and development discussions in small groups.

A safe and identifiable learning and guidance process supports the consideration of basic psychological needs (self-motivation, ability and communality). The processes and self-motivation of the students were supported by phasing, including the monitoring of performance and guidance. Students were also able to proceed in several areas according to their own schedule or interest.

Supporting self-efficacy (ability), on the other hand, is key to increasing learning motivation. This was supported, among other things, by the fact that the students carried out self-assessments and participated in face-to-face online classes that had been proactively scheduled for all study implementations. These virtual face-to-face classes focus on both potential challenges related to the progress of studies and the completion of the learning assignment(s) and to strengthen the sense of community. Working in small groups in studies is mainly multiprofessional. This way, the students get recurring experiences of joint activities.

“In student-centered approach, the students and their agency are at the core in the development of e-learning education.”

Construction of e-learning courses

A uniform structure was created for all implementations, which reduces the cognitive strain of the individual. We think that the learning environment should be a tool, not a platform that increases the load and thus strains the memory with the wrong content. All the factors that we thought could have a harmful impact on orientation, communality and learning, and which we thought we could influence, were mitigated. One such measure was to compile support for e-learning into a separate entity, part of a single Moodle workspace that brings together various issues.

Master's Programme in Active Ageing

The online implementation of Master's programme in Active Ageing was compacted to a period of two years, and this required an analysis of the core subjects of various courses. It was even more crucial to recognise the core content of the studies. Teachers learned to make and edit video recordings which would be interesting and compact so that the students wouldn't lose interest but stay focused at all times.

The structure of the course implementations consists of an introduction, on average three thematic sections, feedback lessons and the study unit's completion section. The introduction includes a video presentation of the teacher and the course, a drawing of the learning outcomes, a learning process description, key content, a study schedule, including the dates of joint online meetings and assessment criteria. The online courses also include various channels for discussing, for example, the completion of learning assignments and the teacher's one-way communication channel and social interaction forum.

Online implementation develops teacher competence

The online implementations of courses and entire online qualifications have not only been implementation methods but have had a positive impact on teachers' own pedagogical competence development. The teacher's role as a supporter of learning and an instructor has been emphasised and is becoming even more important. Communication and its significance for the timeliness and clarity of instructions have increased. When this online degree was first implemented, there were no related directives (e.g. accessibility), so there have been many more issues to consider along the way. At the same time, every teacher of the Master's Programme has developed design skills for online implementations.

“In student-centered approach, the students and their agency are at the core in the development of e-learning education.”

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5 Students' experiences of e-learning

5.1 Peer learning and networking in online education

Tuula Kukkonen, Principal Lecturer, Karelia University of Applied Sciences

First students of a degree completed fully online

The Master's Programme in Active Ageing has been organised entirely online since autumn 2018. In addition to the general survey on student satisfaction (so-called income survey), the students' experiences of the online implementation of education in particular have been examined twice. The first survey, the results of which are described in this article, was conducted in November 2019. The second, broader survey was conducted in late 2021.

This article discusses the results of the 2019 survey. The survey was carried out in the Moodle workspace of the degree programme, where both students who started their studies in autumn 2018 and those who started in autumn 2019 operated at that stage. Thus, the respondents were studying the degree at the time of the survey, some in the third semester and some in the first semester.

Open questions were asked about the students' experiences of online studies and their views on the benefits of online implementation, both in general and from the perspective of their own work. Students were also asked if they would recommend this online programme to others. This article is based on the thematic discussion of the survey material according to the themes emerging from the material. The main focus is on students' responses so that the students' voice can be heard directly.

Flexible opportunity to study

Several respondents considered the online implementation of the programme necessary for their studies. If the online implementation had not been available, studying in this programme would not necessarily have been possible.

For me, the greatest benefit in implementing studies online is that I can participate in these studies in general. If the studies had had onsite days, I would probably not have applied for the degree programme, because travelling and staying overnight in another city alongside work is difficult and challenging.

If the programme had been implemented face-to-face, I would not have been able to apply for this programme due to the long distance.

The online implementation provides an opportunity to select education based on content interest, not location.

It would be very difficult, even impossible, for me to study in the traditional classroom implementation. Virtual studies support my coping as there is no commuting and the time that would have been spent commuting can be used for other purposes; my family also supports online studies. Online studies also make it possible to complete degrees and studies that would otherwise be challenging to participate in; studies that interest me may not be located near my place of residence.

This form of study gave me the opportunity to study at a university of applied sciences that specialises in what I want to study, even though the university of applied sciences is geographically far away.

In addition to spatial independence, the flexibility of scheduling is strongly highlighted. Master's degree students usually work full-time, and shift work is common especially in the social and health care sector. Reconciling studies and work is an important challenge in which success affects both coping at work and the smooth progress of studies. The responses reveal the possibility of studying when it is best suited to your own schedules. Recordings of online lessons also make it possible to keep up with studies when, for example, it is not possible to participate in an online lesson due to a work shift.

It saves you a lot of time when you don't have to travel to school for lessons, but you can manage your own time and calendar. I can study when it's most convenient for me.

Flexibility in terms of schedules has been a relief throughout the studies in terms of schedules. The recordings have enabled familiarising with instructions and materials when it is convenient for me.

Work and studying are easy to combine. It is great that the lectures can be viewed afterwards if you have not been able to participate synchronously.

In addition to reconciling studies and work, many Master's degree students need to reconcile their studies with family life. In other words, the factors affecting the schedules include studying, work, family and other possible issues, such as hobbies, responsibility for older parents, the management of positions of trust and other activities. The opportunity to study online also seems important for the everyday life of families.

Online studies have been excellent for my situation in life. I have a three-shift job, three small children and I live in a remote area.

The reconciliation of work, family and studies is considerably easier when it is possible to schedule studies. When studying in this situation in life, it is vital that studying is not tied to time and place. Face-to-face online classes are available at a certain time of the week, but fortunately participation in these has still been easy.

Peer learning and networking

In our earlier blended learning programme, the significance of peer learning appeared to be great. The students felt that they learned a lot from each other, from each other's experiences and from the practices of various organisations. The importance of peer learning - and peer support - is also emphasised in online implementation. The responses highlight the importance of both a multi-professional student group and students working in small groups. When students come from all over the country, they are able to share their experiences and knowledge of operating practices in various sectors. Peer work seems to be very significant both in terms of content and in terms of the study process and student well-being.

Working in small teams became very important to me – our group was very good, and there were enough people to make the conversation stimulating.

Working in a small group was rewarding and collaborative. It has made studying easier in many ways when peer support has been provided by members of your own group.

Through my small group work, I have been outside my comfort zone but also received peer support and new perspectives.

The discussions have brought many new points of view. A multi-professional group brings up a lot of new ways. In addition, students around Finland/the world bring their own local knowledge and local systems to the group.

“In addition to peer learning and peer support, networking was also highlighted. Sharing experiences nationally is interesting.”

In addition to peer learning and peer support, networking was also highlighted. Sharing experiences nationally is interesting. Multi-professional cooperation and learning together are also highlighted in the responses. The education supports networking outside one's own profession, organisation and sector.

The benefits of online programme also include the fact that more people are from other parts of Finland, which broadens national perspectives rather nicely – it is interesting to hear how things work elsewhere in Finland and how they are handled.

I have gained new friends, study friends and contacts with working life. Have received different views and experiences from different localities around Finland and also from abroad. Multi-professional cooperation has also been possible because of the other students' different educational backgrounds.

Learning in an online environment

Self-direction is an important part of learning and studying in all forms of education. The importance of self-direction is emphasised in online education. However, most students do not have experience of studying in Master's degree programmes, so it is difficult to assess to what extent the emphasis on self-direction is related to the nature of the Master's degree and the extent to which it is entirely related to the fact that it is carried out online.

The asset of studying is self-direction, which you learn over time as your studies progress.

Studying is independent and self-directed, and by choosing one's own favourite perspective, studies can be guided, for example, to suit one's own work or the thesis.

The responses highlighted positive experiences of online learning. The accessibility of online lesson recordings, content produced in the online learning environment and other materials throughout the studies is strongly highlighted.

Completing the degree programme in the development and management of age competence is easy online; lectures and other materials can also be found in Moodle for later use.

I am very familiar with online studies through my previous studies. The fluency of online studies is one of the reasons why I dared to apply for this programme at Karelia. The big plus is that you can also listen to lectures later and return to questions that require revision.

Experiences of online studies have mainly been very positive. The course platforms are clear and the studies are well staggered/sequenced. Following your own progress on the platform is easy. It's nice to have a lot of materials available online too, so you don't always have to book an information source from the library.

When comparing, for example, the previous blended learning and fully online implementation of this programme, the number of online hours of the entire student group

“The work of the students’ small groups increases the amount of interaction.”

of the online implementation can be observed to be somewhat lower than the number of local hours of blended learning. The work of the students’ small groups increases the amount of interaction. The survey revealed the importance of weekly online lesson from the perspective of supporting the study process. In the previous blended learning implementation, the entire student group met once a month onsite, and now there are meetings especially during the first year of study on a weekly basis.

Weekly online lectures have set the pace for studying and maintained momentum. Things are not forgotten, and the learning process is kept up and progresses. The experiences have mainly been positive.

E-learning has also emphasised the importance of information technology competence and updating it. Afterwards, it can be estimated that the pandemic period that started a few months after the survey had been conducted has required the capabilities that students have developed in their online studies in working life.

E-learning has been useful and taught me a lot. It is very useful.



Making use of what has been learned in working life

The focus areas and learning outcomes of the programme are defined in the curriculum. The key contents are based on analysing and anticipating the competence needs of working life. For this reason, the learned content and its usefulness are not directly related to the theme of this article, the experiences of fully online programme. Naturally, the ultimate purpose of online programme is to respond to the competence needs of working life, so students' experiences of the usefulness of learning are also discussed at the end of this article.

The responses indicate that even during the first semesters of the studies, the contents of the education have been applied to one's own work.

I have already discovered the practical benefits in my work. The topic of my thesis is also very developmental and necessary for the current service structure.

During the first year, I have already learned a lot I can apply in my own work. I've been able to apply it to my own unit.

As a whole, the Master's Programme in Active Ageing contains courses that I find very necessary in working life from the perspective of both my own work and the development of the work community.

I can see things more broadly and better justify my perspectives. I have been able to get to know some interesting topics. I've gained new friends.

The respondents also highlighted the significance of education for professional development. Professional development, on the other hand, benefits the development of one's own work and the organisation itself.

The studied topics support professional development. Many themes and tasks have provided concrete benefits for my own work.

I strongly feel that this programme will be beneficial for me and my professional development as well as for my organisation.

The students also feel that the education enables them to progress in their careers. The contents of the programme are expected to become increasingly important both as the number of older customers grows and as employees age.

I strongly believe that I can utilise the information I have received from the education in many areas of working life from both the customer and employee perspectives. The number of older customers is growing all the time, hence new and broader competences are needed in the organisation of services. Also the employees become older which raises the need to develop the work of immediate supervisor.

I believe that, in the future, this education could open up opportunities for employment in positions where I could use the competence I have gained during my studies.

Based on the results of this questionnaire, online programme has not only enabled flexible studies, peer learning and networking, but also the development of competence that meets the needs of working life in a manner typical of Master's degree programmes.

5.2 E-learning as a facilitator of flexible learning

Terhi Myller, Principal Lecturer, Karelia University of Applied Sciences

The Master's Programme in Active Ageing has been organised entirely online since 2018. The degree programme begins once a year in the autumn, and 45 students have started their studies each academic year. The implementation method of the programme has been designed so that online guidance lessons are organised as evening studies. Small multidisciplinary student groups are created. The principles of flipped learning and communal learning are applied as pedagogical choices.

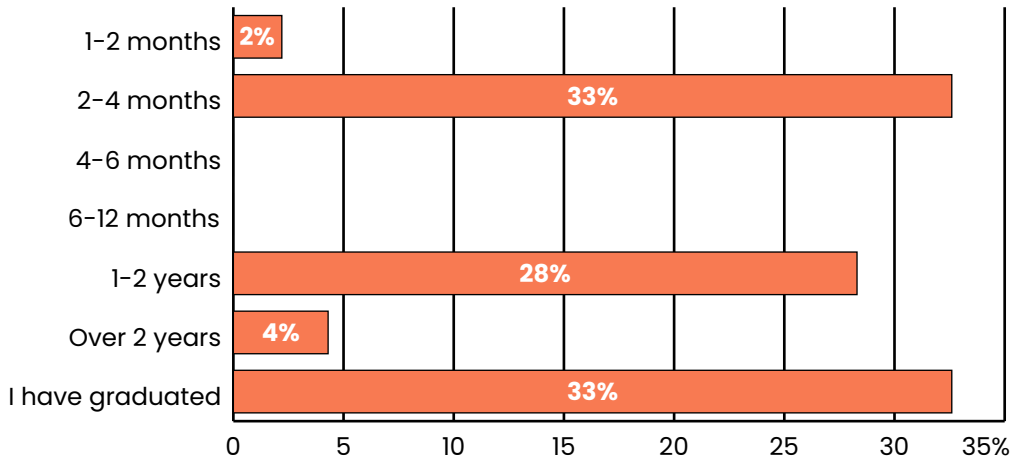
Survey for students and graduates of the Developing and Managing Age Competence degree programme

We surveyed the experiences of students and graduates of the Master's Programme in Active Ageing online studies and the preparedness for working life provided by online studies by means of a Webropol questionnaire in November 2021. Our aim was also to examine and make visible experiences related to the interactive nature of online studies. The questionnaire was targeted at students who started their studies in 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021 and at those who graduated from these studies. 46 people who were still studying or who had already graduated responded to the survey. It was also possible to respond to the survey anonymously. There were questions about 14 topics that included basic information on the initial situation, the importance of online implementation in applying for the degree programme, the practicality and functionality of online implementation in general, and the interactivity of online implementation. Learning and online studies were also asked about, as well as the development of competence through education in more general terms. In addition, the respondents were asked what kind of working life needs the competence produced by the education best meets and what development proposals the respondents would like to bring up.

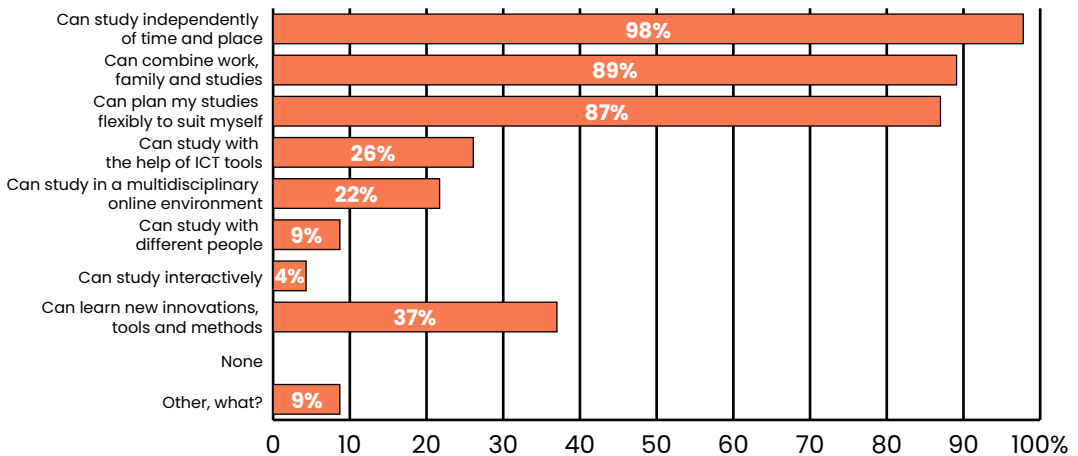
The preparation of the survey and the mapping of experiences related to online studies started from the observations that several students have highlighted the pros and cons of online studies. Meritorious theses have also been completed by pair work by students living in different parts of Finland, and online studies have not slowed down or prevented cooperation - on the contrary.

Online implementation plays an important role in applying for education

About one third of the respondents had already graduated, one third had studied for 1–2 years, and about one third were in the early stages of their studies, having studied for only a few months.



All respondents (n=46, 100%) reported that the online implementation was a factor when they chose to apply for the education. The three most important selection criteria for the online implementation were described with the following themes: Can study independently of time and place (98%), can combine work, family and studies (89%) and can plan studies flexibly to suit themselves (87%). Learning new innovations and tools and methods (37%) was also an important selection criterion for applying for online implementation. Multidisciplinary, facilitating access to materials, studying on the other side of Finland, avoiding travel and independence from the distance between home and educational institution were also mentioned as grounds for applying for education.



Experiences in the early stages of studies

The open question mapped the respondents' thoughts on online studies in the early stages of their studies. As a result, it was described that online studies have started well, but experiences of software confusion were also highlighted. For example, the following describes a perspective in which the studies have started well:

I was happy about the resource cutting measure that followed online learning. I was maybe a little surprised by the versatility of online studies, how extensively you can complete studies online.

At first, I had a lot to learn to understand Moodle, particularly using Colla was new to me. Karelia start was a great help.

There was a surprising amount of contact with other students, despite studying online. Videotaped lessons that we could watch when it was convenient for us was a great success.

The following quotations describe that after the initial problems, the ease of online learning was surprising:

At first, navigating in Moodle was confusing, but now that I've got the hang of it, it's a useful platform.

At first, I struggled, because there were so many new systems to learn. I managed, however, and now the learning platforms feel easy. At first you need guidance with all the platforms in order to get the hang of it, and it was.

After initial problems the "easiness" of studies (has been surprising).

The problems were mostly related to technical issue / lack of competence.

Being able to do group work online was a positive surprise.



Online interaction works well

We also asked the respondents for their views on the success of interaction with other students in online studies. 46 students or graduates answered the question. The scale used was 0–10, in which 0 corresponded to a situation in which interaction with other students was not felt to have succeeded at all, 5 to a situation in which interaction with others was felt to have succeeded to some extent, and 10 to a situation in which interaction with other students was already felt to have succeeded excellently. The average number of responses is 8. The lowest score is 4 and the highest score is 10.

In the next question, potential problems were identified if there were challenges in interaction with other students. 46% of the respondents reported that poor reception and connection problems have been the biggest obstacle to interaction. Failure of technical equipment was also reported (33.5%) as a factor that hampered interaction. Other reasons, such as the problems of coordinating common schedules (20%), different interaction styles (15%), keeping the camera off (13%) and lack of technical capabilities (7%) were also reported as factors that complicated interaction. Other reasons reported were lack of participation, irregular participation or cancellation of agreed meetings (13%). On the other hand, 35% of the respondents reported that there had been no difficulties in interaction.

In general, there were positive interactive factors in online studies that were found to be the organisation of flexible meetings with online connections, such as fast and short meetings (37%) and the improved interaction skills that were also needed in working life (28%). 13.5% of the respondents also reported that online learning has helped them to network and to listen to and hear people's expressions in more detail (11%).

"In general, there were positive interactive factors in online studies that were found to be the organisation of flexible meetings with online connections, such as fast and short meetings (37%) and the improved interaction skills that were also needed in working life (28%)."

Positive experiences of interaction with the teachers were highlighted, including the following:

It has worked well, many have taken part in the conversation during joint lessons. I've found it easy since the beginning. Just like talking side by side, in the same space.

Interaction between the teachers and students has been fluent, fast and effortless. Things have gone smoothly.

It felt natural, it was easier to ask questions than when sitting in a classroom.

All interactions have gone smoothly.

Has enabled the completion of assignments when it was convenient for me, if there were video recordings.

It was easy to contact the teachers via various communication tools.

Communication works well. I think it's great that people who want to speak up in lessons can do so and those who don't want to are not forced to do it. It's easier (at least for me) to share my views in a small group, when you know the other students in your group.

Works. We are adults and therefore responsible for listening and joining in.

“Communication works well. I think it's great that people who want to speak up in lessons can do so and those who don't want to are not forced to do it. It's easier (at least for me) to share my views in a small group, when you know the other students in your group.”

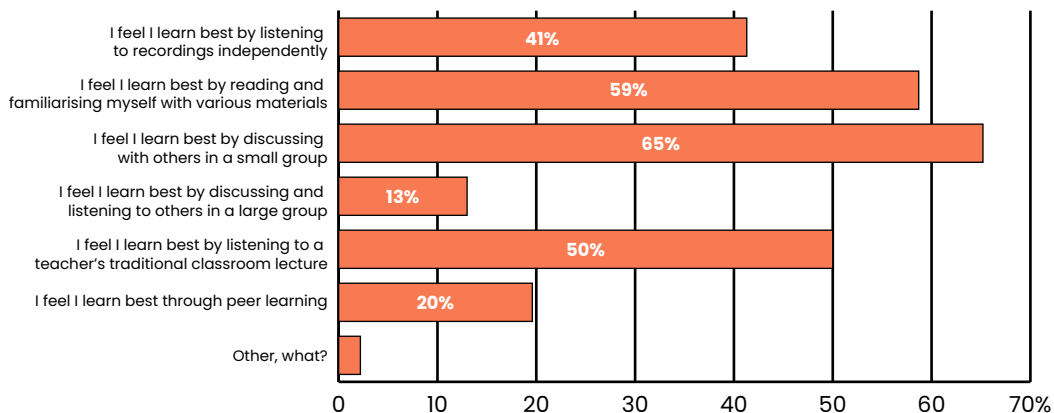
On the other hand, it was pointed out that if online teaching is recorded, there is a high threshold for making requests to speak, and the thorough processing of matters may also be light:

Online learning means that there is a higher threshold for asking questions. Especially when the lessons are taped.

Communication is free and there is plenty of opportunity for asking questions. Time is limited and some issues are left unclear because there isn't as much time to discuss things.

Various learning methods and development of competence through education

From the perspective of personal learning, taking different study opportunities and methods into account was emphasised in online studies. 59% of the respondents said that they learned best by reading and familiarising themselves with various materials. 65% of the respondents felt that they learned best by talking to other students in a small group. 50% of the respondents felt that they learned best from the teacher's traditional lectures. 41% felt that they learned best by listening to recordings. 20% said that they would learn best from peer learning, and 13% of the respondents would learn best in discussions in a large group. One respondent had indicated that the best way to learn was "Other", but this option had not been clarified verbally.



The respondents were generally asked to describe the development of competence through the Development and Management of Age Competence Master's degree programme on a scale of 0–10, where 0 = no development, 5 = development in competence to some extent compared to the situation before studies and 10 = development in competence by 100% compared to your competence before studies. The average of the responses was 8. The most important focus areas of competence development were described as competence gained through education in managing entities, expanding and deepening perspectives, acquiring information, managing research and development methods, deepening expertise in age competence and networking. The following are examples of open answers from these perspectives:

Contents, development of competence in research and development methods, and overall development in one's own field, deepening of one's own competence.

Networking, competence in development methods and, of course, mastering entities.

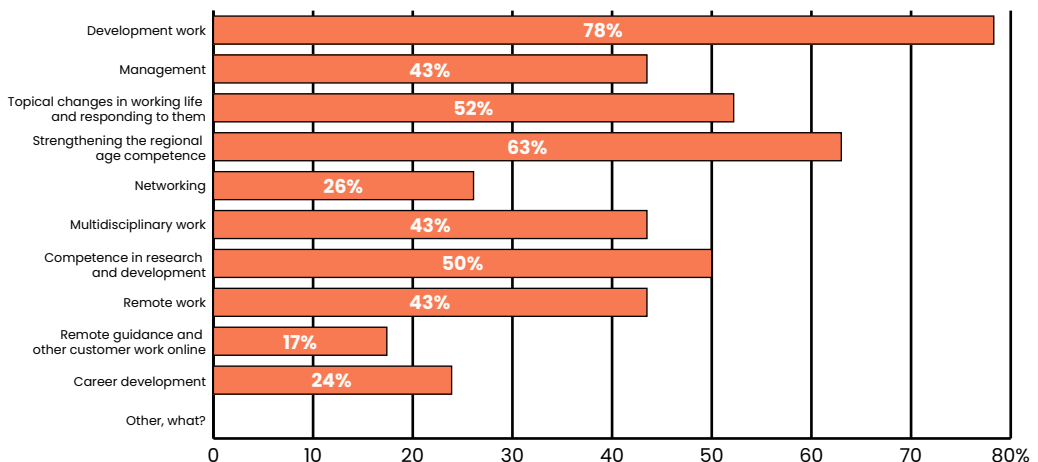
Increasing one's own expertise. Seeking and implementing various kinds of information has increased significantly.

Development process competence was the largest single point of development. I also liked English-language entities, which increased my language skills and networking.

In the development of my own competence, the most important thing for me in terms of supervisory work has been learning different management methods and learning about myself as an employee and supervisor. Many things related to well-being at work, work and its management and recruitment have also been learned during the making of my thesis.

“Development process competence was the largest single point of development. I also liked English-language entities, which increased my language skills and networking.”

In the following question, the respondents were able to choose between 3 and 5 options, which they felt the competence provided by the programme had responded to. 78% felt that the competence produced by the education best met the general development needs, 63% felt that the competence produced by the education corresponded to strengthening regional age competence, 52% felt that the education responded best to topical changes in working life, and 50% felt that the education responded best to the needs of research and development work. Management, multi-professional work and remote work were also considered important areas which the education could respond to (43% of the respondents felt this was the case). Other perspectives highlighted the importance of education for the competence and career development of remote guidance and customer work as well as networking.



Suggestions for development include, for example, increasing management studies, possible on-the-job training to be included in the studies, longer time periods for completing study units, more online lectures by teachers, a course on scientific writing at the beginning of studies, more support for the work of a small group, control of assignments by a tutor teacher and a student counsellor and a clearer online platform, Moodle Collaborate replaced by Teams. A few days of attendance were also hoped for.

In addition, graduates were asked how the education responded to the current working life needs during the COVID-19 pandemic. The following points were highlighted in the responses: online studies have been an easy way to study, and graduation before the coronavirus pandemic has taught the practices of the coronavirus pandemic, and online programme has also provided a lot of tools for one's own work as a supervisor in services for older people. The programme has made it possible to participate independent of location, and it has been possible to adapt the studies to suit personal schedules. The themes of the program have been suitable for the arrival of the health and social services reform – it is essential to highlight age competence in today's working life and society. New ideas have also emerged for regional development through education, as well as for societal and organisational development. The education has raised enthusiasm for self-development. The following quote summarises the importance of the online implementation of the Master's programme in Active Ageing.

I gained plenty of information and skills for my personal management work. If the degree programme had not been 100% online, I would not have been able to apply for it.

5.3 Experiences of the students in applied gerontology

Jonna Puustinen, Senior Lecturer of Age Competence, Karelia University of Applied Sciences
Terhi Myller, Principal Lecturer, Karelia University of Applied Sciences

Background of online pedagogy the Bachelor Programme in Applied Gerontology

The Bachelor Programme in Applied Gerontology was launched at Karelia University of Applied Sciences in January 2022. It is implemented as blended learning and mainly as online studies. In addition to online studies, three to five onsite study periods are organised at the Karelia Tikkarinne campus each semester. Both e-learning and face-to-face classes consist of independent and teamwork, guidance lessons, lectures, meetings with the entire group and seminars in Karelia's online learning environments. Karelia uses the Moodle online learning environment, which is used in most courses.

The aim of the courses in applied gerontology has been to pay attention to the uniform and clear structure of the study course-specific Moodle environments from the beginning. Moodle learning environments include a variety of materials, lecture recordings, assignments and other activities that support independent learning. The majority of online guidance and teamwork also take place in Moodle's Collaborate online workspace. The guidelines for high-quality online implementation by Karelia and the expertise of digital mentors have been utilised in the planning and implementation of online teaching.

Mapping student experiences of online studies

In April 2022, we analysed the students' experiences related to the multimodal implementation. The implementation of the electronic Webropol questionnaire took place in the first semester, after the students had studied in the programme for about 3.5 months. Among other things, the students were asked about the significance of online studies for applying to Programme in Applied Gerontology, and the positive factors, challenges and development proposals related to online studies and related interaction.

The questions were mainly multiple-choice questions, but it was also possible to provide open text answers to them. 17 students out of 24 responded to the survey. Slightly more than half of the students are from the North Karelia region, but the group also includes students living elsewhere in Finland.

The significance of online studies for applying for the Bachelor's Programme in Applied Gerontology

Based on the results, the fact that the blended learning studies were conducted partly as online studies was a factor for most of the respondents ($n = 14$, 82.3%) when applying for the Bachelor's Programme in Applied Gerontology. Two respondents could not say whether the online implementation had been significant, and for one student it had no significance for applying for the programme. If the student had indicated that the opportunity to study online was important for applying for the programme, they were asked to provide three to five of the most important selection criteria. Students ($n = 16$) reported several admission criteria ($N = 51$), of which the three most frequent were: "I can study independently of time and place" ($n = 12$, 75%), "I can combine work, family and studies" ($n = 12$, 75%) and "I can plan my studies flexibly to suit myself" ($n = 12$, 75%). The less often selected criteria included opportunities for studying with different people ($n = 4$, 25%), opportunities for learning new innovations and tools and methods ($n = 4$, 25%), opportunities for interactive ($n = 2$, 13%) and multidisciplinary ($n = 2$, 13%) learning, and opportunities for studying using information technology tools ($n = 1$, 6%). In addition, it was significant for the students to have a possibility to study in the programme of their interest without having to change their place of residence.

Success of online interaction and its challenges in online learning

On a scale of 0 to 10, the students ($n = 17$) estimated that the interaction related to online studies with other students had been satisfactory on average, with an average of 6.8 (range 2 to 10). If students had experienced challenges in online interaction, they were asked to state three to five of the most important challenges given. Students ($n = 16$) reported different challenges related to online interaction related to online studies ($n = 38$). One student had not experienced challenges in online interaction. The greatest challenge was reported to be the challenges of setting a common working target (e.g. different interests and timetable reasons) ($n = 11$, 65%). The next most common responses were the lack of functionality of technical devices and applications ($n = 9$, 53%) and connection failures, such as poor reception ($n = 9$, 53%). Six students (35%) also reported that the challenge to interaction has been that either themselves or student colleagues have not had sufficient technical skills for online studies. The open responses also considered that not all students necessarily value online interaction, such as close interaction, and that the lack of non-verbal interaction may challenge the realisation of online interaction.



Positive factors of online interaction in online studies

Students were also asked to report three positive factors related to online interaction on the pre-provided response options. Of the responses given by the students ($n = 17$) ($n = 38$), the most respondents were the alternative to flexible meetings enabled by the online implementation that could be held even at short notice ($n = 12$, 71%). The open text responses also highlighted this ease of organising meetings. For a large part of the students, the fact that online interaction has enabled versatile discussion and exchange of ideas ($n = 10$, 59%) and online guidance and interaction have promoted studies ($n = 7$, 41%) has also been positive. The students have also felt that online learning and interaction are encouraging ($n = 4$, 24%), that online interaction situations are confidential ($n = 3$, 18%) and that they develop interaction skills ($n = 3$, 18%). Two students (12%) reported that online studies and online interaction also promoted networking.

Learning through e-learning

Students were asked to indicate the three to five most suitable response options that best described their learning through online learning. The students ($n = 17$) selected a variety of perspectives in their responses ($n = 56$). Clearly, the majority of students ($n = 14$, 82%) reported that they learned by doing assignments and making notes from the Moodle online learning environment materials. The responses also emphasised the options for independent reading and familiarisation with various materials ($n = 9$, 58%) and independent listening to recordings ($n = 8$, 47%). One open answer opened the positive side of listening to recordings: it enables learning on the go, for example during jogging, which was a functional learning method for the respondent. Many also felt that they learned by discussing and listening to the entire group ($n = 7$, 41%) or within the team ($n = 7$, 41%). A small number of students also reported that they would best learn through traditional lecture type teaching ($n = 4$, 24%), by preparing for guidance classes in advance, where they could ask questions about the issues that were not discussed ($n = 4$, 24%) and the study unit where progress was made according to the exact schedule of the implementation ($n = 2$, 12%).

First impressions and development ideas of online studies in the Bachelor's Programme in Applied Gerontology

In the open text responses, the students (n = 15) described the first impressions and development ideas related to online studies in applied gerontology education. In many responses, online studies were described as having been easy, and they have been good, functional and surprisingly versatile. Fully independent online course assignments, such as Moodle surveys and tests, as well as online courses included in course assignments, such as Oppiportti online courses, have been considered motivating for learning – they have even been enjoyed. Teamwork, on the other hand, has provided both successes and challenges. Online team work has enabled the students to get to know other students well, and interaction in teams has supported learning. However, some students also felt that they need face-to-face contact and the related interaction. In addition, some students feel that there are many team tasks and it is sometimes challenging to agree on schedules. Teams also work best when they are consistent and the students get to know their team members.

Online lectures implemented as part of online studies have also been found interesting and to support learning well. Lectures and online guidance lessons have been found most rewarding when they progress calmly and sufficient time has been reserved for thinking, discussion and questions. It is hoped that attention will also be paid to peaceful progress and predictability in the future. Active discussion and team tasks during guidance hours have been found to support active learning and increase interaction between students. It is good that you do not just need to listen and get to participate and do.

As a challenge, it has been pointed out that especially when IT skills are poorer, the introduction of different new systems has taken a lot of time at the beginning of the studies. One response stated that they wished they could get support in very basic matters, such as sharing files. Clear instructions for the use of different applications used in teaching are also desired. As development proposals related to online learning environments, further clarification of Moodle learning environments is also highlighted so that the contents of large materials are arranged in smaller sections and assignments, their submission and other schedules are presented as clearly as possible – so that the whole can be easily understood. However, the responses also state that online studies have been successfully integrated at the beginning of the studies, and IT skills will certainly develop further as the studies progress. In addition, the students have noticed that computer use and other IT skills have developed enormously after a few months of studying – partly without noticing.

From the perspective of combining studies and other life, the current way of implementing online studies divides opinions. The programme has served some of the respondents well, giving them flexibility and freedom to do things. Online studies enable the scheduling of studies to a large extent independently, and the studies have been successful. In addition, online studies save time, as the student doesn't need to move from one place to another when studying at home is possible. Some find it difficult to schedule studies and personal

“In many responses, online studies were described as having been easy, and they have been good, functional and surprisingly versatile.”

“As a challenge, it has been pointed out that especially when IT skills are poorer, the introduction of different new systems has taken a lot of time at the beginning of the studies.”

life around scheduled online guidance and meetings. More lecture recordings, which can be studied independently and flexibly regardless of the schedule, were requested alongside scheduled online guidance. However, it was pointed out that recording real-time lectures has been found to have a detrimental effect on the dialogue taking place during the class. One response sums up the whole concept of e-learning thus: “It’s great when you can study at home and in a good team! Despite all the challenges, I would not prefer face-to-face learning.”

6 Teachers' views on master's programme conducted online

Tuula Kukkonen, Principal Lecturer, Karelia University of Applied Sciences

Teacher survey

The students' experiences in the online implementation of the Master's Programme in Active Ageing were examined in 2021. In addition, the aim was to examine the teachers' views on the significance of online implementation.

In the questionnaire targeted at teachers, particular interests included the significance of online implementation for applying for education and the realisation of interaction in online education. Teachers' experiences of online pedagogical competence and its development needs were also examined.

The questionnaire was sent to eight teachers of the degree programme. Some teachers guide theses and some both teach in courses and guide theses. Some teachers have worked in the degree programme for several years, and others have started their work in education during the current academic year. The survey was carried out as a Webropol questionnaire, the link of which was sent to the teachers by e-mail. The survey did not ask for the respondents' personal data, and the survey was anonymised in Webropol, which means the report data does not include information on the respondents' email addresses, for example. The Principal Lecturer responsible for the implementation of the survey did not respond to the survey.

The survey link was sent to teachers by email on 4 April 2022, and teachers were reminded of the survey by email on 11 April 2022. The deadline for responding was 19 April 2022. Six replies to the questionnaire were received. Naturally, due to the number of

responses, statistical analyses and general conclusions cannot be drawn from the survey results. However, when six teachers from the target group of eight teachers responded to the survey, the results produce information that is considered relevant.

The importance of the online implementation on applying for the degree programme

One of the objectives of developing the online implementation for the degree programme was to enable students to study regardless of their place of residence. Teachers were asked how they felt this had been realised. According to the respondents to the survey, **online implementation has a great impact on the students' enrolment** in this particular programme. On a scale of 0 (not at all) to 10 (very much), the average response was 7.8 and the median was 10.0.

In the opinion of all teachers who responded to the survey, the online implementation affects the selection of the education, as it is possible to study independently of time and place. Other justifications for the selection of online programme were considered to be the following, in order of priority:

- possibility of combining work, family and studies,
- the possibility of planning studies to be flexible and suitable for yourself,
- the opportunity to learn new innovations, tools and methods, and
- the opportunity to study in a multidisciplinary online environment.

Interaction in online education

Student feedback on the significance of interaction and peer learning received during the previous blended learning implementation has guided the development of online implementation. There has been a desire to preserve these good experiences also in online implementation.

“In the opinion of all teachers who responded to the survey, the online implementation affects the selection of the education, as it is possible to study independently of time and place.”

In the teachers' view, **interaction between students has also been successfully facilitated in online studies.** On a scale of 0 (not at all successful) to 10 (very successful), the average and median of the responses were 7.0.

The most important of the positive factors influencing student interaction was that online connections have enabled flexible meetings. According to the respondents, networking and the development of interaction skills have been important factors in education: The online implementation was considered to support the students' networking and improve their interaction skills, which are also needed in working life. According to the respondents, online learning has been encouraging.

The most important challenges related to interaction between students were technical issues (there have been disruptions or technical equipment and applications have not worked) or the camera has not been turned on.

The responses also mentioned that setting a common goal for work has been challenging. The students' different interaction styles were also seen as a challenge in interaction between the students.

In the respondents' view, the lack of technical capabilities has had little impact on the interaction between students. According to the responses, students who have applied for this programme mainly seem to have sufficient skills for online studies.

Interaction between students and teachers was described as smooth and functional.

Occurs almost entirely online. Despite, or due to this, interaction is immediate, active and functional. Students take opportunities to speak online and also in writing with the help of a chat etc. The students have described interaction with teachers as encouraging.

On the other hand, it was mentioned that the same students often speak, and most students remain passive. Interaction in small groups was described as fair.

Teachers were asked what means they have used to support interaction (both between students and between students and teachers) in online education. The most important measures supporting interaction were



- organising time for interaction during online lessons and
- encouraging interaction during online lessons.

Other means of supporting interaction were the following, in order of priority:

- use of the chat tool in online lessons,
- supporting the activities of small groups of students, for example by linking small group assignments to teaching,
- integration of small group work into online lesson activities,
- making use of the Moodle workspace forum of the course and
- short polls conducted during online lessons.

Learning methods in online education

Discussions with other students in small groups were clearly considered the most important learning methods in online education. All respondents chose this as an important learning method.

Peer learning from others was mentioned as the second most important learning method. This may be related to working in small groups or other opportunities for peer learning, such as peer learning in online classes or informal communication.

Other learning methods considered important included reading and familiarisation with various materials as well as independent learning using recordings.

The idea of flipped classroom was also highlighted in the survey.

At regular guidance classes, which are based on the expanding of subjects studied in advance and the competence acquired through it, as well as the exchange of ideas.

Which working life competence needs are met in the studies

Respondents were also asked what kind of working life needs the competence produced by this online programme best meets. **The respondents selected topical changes in working life and responding to them as the most important theme.**

The following competence needs were ranked second:

- remote work,
- remote guidance and other client work online and
- development work

The other competence areas of working life produced by the programme were as follows, in order of importance:

- leadership
- multiprofessional work
- career development and
- competence in research and development work.

Development ideas for the online implementation of the programme

The teachers were asked to suggest ideas for improving the programme. The development ideas included

- an online pedagogical plan in the curriculum at the course level,
- consistent student information practices (e.g. start-up messages, login instructions) for all study units and
- making short online recordings to support independent study by students.

Teachers' online pedagogical competence

The respondents considered their own competence as teachers of online education to be good: on a scale of 0 (low) to 10 (very good), the average of the responses was 7.3 and the median was 7.0.

The respondents' online pedagogical competence had improved when working as teachers of an online education programme. On a scale of 0 (not at all) to 10 (very much), the average response was 7.7 and the median was 7.5. The development of competence was described as deepening of competence: more online pedagogical methods are now in use.

I have learned to implement the online pedagogical method used in the programme and have adopted the good online pedagogical practices that have been in use for a long time as part of my own competence. At the same time, I have taken over / studied various online pedagogical methods and applications on my own initiative to develop my competence and the online teaching I have implemented.

Facilitating the interaction of students was also mentioned from the perspective of developing one's own online pedagogical competence:

Interactive operating methods have become an essential part of guidance. When planning my lessons, I strive for versatile student engagement in interaction.

Giving time for joint discussion, getting to know each other, etc.

The development of technical online teaching skills was also highlighted.

As competence development needs, the respondents highlighted information technology issues, strengthening streaming skills, making wider use of Moodle's opportunities and dividing the students into smaller groups in an online teaching situation. It was also

“The respondents' online pedagogical competence had improved when working as teachers of an online education programme.”

mentioned that online pedagogy applications, knowledge and skills need to be kept up to date, so that online teaching could be developed to be as versatile and rich as possible.

The integrity of online pedagogy requires continuous joint development

One respondent sums up their experience of fully online programme as follows:

Education that is fully implemented online is meaningful and also clarifies the teacher's work when there is no need to work between local/remote hybrid implementations. The programme is a functional entity that is facilitated by well-thought-out and consistent practices throughout the education period and continuous development as the requirements and online pedagogy opportunities continue to evolve.

The response highlights the continuous development of online pedagogy practices and the importance of their uniformity. This requires teachers to work together and formulate views; the traditional development of their own study unit is no longer sufficient, and more work is needed on common operating methods.

Based on the survey, it seems that teaching in a fully online programme has become a moderately smooth part of the work of a university of applied sciences teacher. New operating methods and tools have been implemented, and competence development needs are still being identified.



7 Online learning makes a difference

Based on both students' experiences and teachers' views, it seems that the online implementation of education has increased equal opportunities to develop competence regardless of the place of residence, work and family situation. The responses of students and graduates even highlight the fact that studying would not have been possible without the possibility of online studies. This is particularly relevant in areas with long distances. The online implementation has also made it possible to apply for both Master's Programme in Active Ageing and Bachelor's Programme in Applied Gerontology from all over Finland. This, on the other hand, is important for peer learning among students living in different areas.

Knowing that the ageing of the population is the fastest in sparsely populated areas, the online implementation has made it possible to strengthen the competence of social welfare and health care professionals operating in these areas. In this way, online implementation can be considered to have an impact on the development of age-friendliness and services for older people nationally.

Utilising the opportunities offered by digitalisation in the development of services for older people and in strengthening inclusion requires professionals in the field to be able to act online and apply remote solutions. Online education has contributed to strengthening these capabilities. When considering the customer perspective and future services and solutions, education must be a pioneer and also an active player in the development and application of new skills development solutions, pedagogical thinking and implementation solutions.



The online provision of higher education courses has increased during the pandemic years. The digitisation of higher education was very rapid. Now learning takes place in more diverse ways than ever before.

The articles in this publication discuss the development path of online implementation of the Master's Programme in Active Ageing in Karelia UAS from 2017 onwards. How does e-learning ensure that students learn and acquire skills in a favourable way? What should be taken into account in e-learning from the perspective of the student and the teaching organisation?

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