TARTU UNIVERSITY
FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

NARVA COLLEGE
STUDY PROGRAM "LANGUAGE TEACHER IN MULTILINGUAL SCHOOL"

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EFL STUDY PROGRAMME IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION: BLENDED LEARNING IN PREPARATION FOR NATIONAL EXAMINATIONS IN ENGLISH

Master's Thesis

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NARVA 2022

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09.05.2022

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PREFACE

Nowadays, the accelerating progress of technologies has led the society to the situation when work and study were both transitioned online. The period of distant learning, which was caused by pandemic circumstances, showed both teachers and learners not only the disadvantages, but also the conveniences of studying from home. More and more educators choose blending online and onsite learning methods to reach a sensible balance between in-class and out-of-class activities, achieve learning outcomes in the best possible ways and provide quality education regardless of skills and peculiarities of students. Blended learning relies on technology, which is much preferred by a younger generation as a more habitual and understandable way to exchange information. The most remarking feature of the blended learning approach is that it is a balanced combination of old and new teaching methods, which can be differently combined to meet the needs and expectations of students in the first place. Blended learning allows students to accomplish learning activities in convenient for them tempo and access learning materials regardless of their location, which makes instruction delivery more effective and the learning process less stressful. Every teaching method has its advantages and disadvantages, however, many researchers (Graham, Stein 2014; Sahin 2011; Handayani *et al* 2020; Khader 2016; Ibrahim, Nat 2019) still find that blended learning benefits outweigh the challenges and concerns of online-based teaching. The educational system nowadays is witnessing a gigantic leap of blended learning development as one of the most effective ways to raise the education quality to a higher level.

The present Master's thesis analyses the ways of blending online and onsite teaching, its effectiveness and challenges with the further aim to elaborate a study programme for IVVEC students of IT and Multimedia field for both face-to-face and distant teaching to prepare for the National Examination. The thesis also studies different ways of implementing blended learning models and is aimed to develop and elaborate a sample Moodle e-course to provide the methodological basis for IVVEC teachers working with IT and Mutlimedia specialities. The research also examines blended learning opportunities, for example, computer assisted learning, in combination with standard face-to-face learning to provide an effective and meaningful educational content for both teachers and learners of IVVEC.

The thesis consists of the following parts: the Introduction, Chapter I, Chapter II and the Conclusion. The Introduction provides an overview of current knowledge in the area of blended learning and highlights the advantages and disadvantages of this approach. Chapter I “Ways of Implementing Blended Learning” is aimed to research the ways blended learning can be implemented and integrated in the learning process and the main principles of developing an online course. Chapter II “Moodle Blended Learning Course for IT Specialities in VET schools” explores the effect of using designed and elaborated specially for IT students e-course in the preparation for the National Examination in the Moodle learning environment. The Conclusion summerises and reviews the research and provides general discussion on the hypothesis.

THE LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

VET Vocational Education and Training

EFL English as Foreign Lanuguage

IVVEC Ida-Viru Vocational Education Centre

SAMR Substitution, Augmentation, Modification and Redefinition

LMS Learning Management System

INTRODUCTION

What is 'Blended Learning'?

Despite the novelty of the phenomenon, the term "blended learning" has quite a long history. It appeared together with the Internet era in the 1990s and differs from the modern perception of the notion, since it suggests any combinations of live instruction, technologies, and pedagogies. Chew, Jones and Turner mentioned in their report in 2008 that "blended learning involves the combination of two fields of concern: education and educational technology" (Chew *et al* 2008: 1). The definition describes the concept as a unity of two-directed types of material delivery and introduces the blend as a mix of two different modes. At the time when this definition was formulated, computer-based learning was asynchronized, and suggested student's self-involvement and did not demand student's and teacher's co-presence.

However, the notion has changed significantly with the appearance of videoconferencing. Cambridge Dictionary defines blended learning quite generally as "a way of learning that combines traditional classroom lessons with lessons that use computer technology and may be given over the internet" (The Cambridge Dictionary 2021: para 2). Bryan and Volchenkova (2016: 28) uncover the notion of blended learning and describe it as "an integrated learning experience that is controlled and guided by the instructor whether in the form of face-to-face communication or his virtual presence". Graham and Stein (2014: 12) by contrast understand the notion of blended learning as "a combination of onsite (i.e. face-to-face) with online experiences to produce effective, efficient, and flexible learning". Thus, the modern concept of blended learning can be understood as any mix of face-to-face instruction and online-guided lessons with the possibility to use digital technologies in educational needs.

Being currently in high demand blended learning "is understood as a hybrid approach that combines learning at school with distance learning, including online learning" (European Commission 2020: 4). The main idea of the blended learning model is to provide the non-stop educational process without physical presence of both teachers and students in the same space. From the practical point of view it can be very beneficial when attending an educational institution is not possible for different reasons, or when other places are more appropriate for learning purposes.

Blended learning embodies the idea that students are not just passive receivers of educational content, but active participants of the learning process, which can be individualized according to students' needs and skills. Bryan and Volchenkova (2016: 24) emphasize that "the new technology had the potential not only to bridge space, but also to bridge time", meaning that students are given control over their learning process through material and individual pace of its acquiring. The approach develops both teachers' and students' digital competence, which is stated as one of the most essential ones in the National Curriculum for Upper Secondary Schools (Riigi Teataja 2021: para 4). Blended learning can be very beneficial in terms of multifaceted development of students' personality, because in-school sessions develop social skills, cooperation abilities and the sense of community while distance learning periods support and enhance personalized and autonomic studying, which is a very good combination of skills and abilities (European Commission 2020: 4).

Thus, there is no one and only definition of blended learning, and this notion is very diverse and multifaceted and can be interpreted by different teachers differently. No matter if blended learning is understood as a synchronized or asynchronized method, or in what combination online and onsite instruction should be, when teachers implement new technology and blend different ways of teaching, they "can not only adapt to the changing world, but also even increase (…) ability to both teach and learn" (Graham, Stein 2014: 18).

The Effectiveness of Blended Learning in Education

During the last years the development of technologies has been undergoing such significant changes, that it is hard to imagine people's lives without them. Being one of the most progressive and susceptible to changes spheres of the society, pedagogy and education adopted this tendency and use the youngsters' affection to digital devices to drive teaching and learning to a significantly higher level. Blended learning these days plays a vital role in education. What is more important, blended learning can be implied not only in vocational educational institutions, but also in secondary and higher secondary education. Since the problem of blended learning is highly topical nowadays and blended learning is being considered as the main educational approach of the 21st century, there were held a great many of various studies on effectiveness, as well as

challenges, of this type of learning (Handayani *et al* 2020; Graham, Stein 2014; Sahin 2011; Khader 2016; Ibrahim, Nat 2019 etc).

The popularity of blended learning as an educational method in various educational institutions and in vocational schools in particular has also been studied. According to Handayani *et al* (2020), countries that implement blended learning in vocational school are mostly Asian countries (38%), followed by Europe (31%) and the US (16%), which shows the growing interest of educators in blended learning. Graham and Stein (2014: 14) assume that blended courses enable teachers to successfully mix the best of face-to-face and online interaction in a balanced manner. Blended learning is a trend of modern society, which can provide both teacher and students with benefits from online and onsite teaching mixture, such as access and convenience, improved learning and decreased costs.

Many studies showed the effectiveness and positive influence of blended learning on results of the educational process. Sahin (2011: 98) confirms that blended learning "can significantly increase student's performance in vocational education", influence student's successfulness in educational process and develop their digital competences. He admits that the quantity of blended learning is growing, therefore teachers ought to reconsider their teaching methods and look in the direction of pedagogical approaches based on blended learning. A blended learning model is very flexible, and, with thorough consideration, elaboration and planning, can give positive results.

Khader (2016: 115) suggests that blended learning can be more efficient in comparison with traditional learning because the blended learning method "banished students' boredom through educational situation and provided them fun" which helps to break the learning routine and diversify and enrich lessons in terms of using different teaching techniques. Besides that, blended learning is a comparatively new approach in education, which involves using their favourite and habitual for them devices in stress-free atmosphere and hence makes lessons more pleasant, attractive and interactive.

Considering blended learning approach implementation it is really essential to be aware of the students' perception of this type of method in general. Having studied this aspect, Ibrahim and Nat (2019: 16) highlight such advantages of blended learning from the point of view of students as ease of use, familiarity with digital environment, flexibility

in terms of submitting homework, availability of study material at any time and quick feedback. Other benefits for students of blended learning were mentioned in another study conducted by Szadiewska and Kujawski (2017: 3941): time effectiveness, more efficient communication between students and educators, focus on students' needs and additional support from teachers. The data collected in the research of Masalela (2009: 72) show that blended learning is beneficial for students because it encourages them to learn different topics independently and develops their critical thinking skills. All these factors indicate the beneficial consequences of blended learning.

The research conducted by Ibrahim and Nat (2019: 15-17) also studies teachers' motivation in implementing blended learning. The study results show direct correlation between instructor's interaction with technology and motivation to apply a blended learning model in his/her teaching practice. Consequently, the more a teacher is inclined to use technologies in his/her teaching practice, the more motivated to integrate blended learning into the teaching process he/she is. The conclusion drawn from this finding can be as follows: using various types of technologies actively at the lesson increases the level of digital competence and consequently digital confidence of a teacher. Some other factors that influence teacher's motivation to implement blended learning are correct policy of an educational institution and teacher's attitudes and beliefs. On one hand, the technological readiness and advancement of an educational institution create favourable conditions for teachers to implement blended learning. On the other hand, a teacher with positive attitude towards blended learning and belief in success of this method is more inclined to implement blended learning in his/her work.

Finding of the research conducted by Alvarez (2020) demonstrate that teachers also find many advantages and positive influence of blended learning. Teachers admit that blended-based instruction has a very big potential in educational methodology, since it is flexible in terms of time, available for both teachers and students, promotes learning independence and makes the process of assessment easier and quicker.

Challenges of Blended Learning

Blended learning in school education along with multiple and undeniable benefits has a number of challenges and concerns. Firstly, distant learning is more suitable for adult learners rather than younger students, who can manage their time and efforts, have enough digital competence and be more conscientious in getting education. Secondly,

effective combination of face-to-face lessons with distance learning requires high level of digital competence and innovation from teachers and educational institutions and, unfortunately, it does not always reflect the reality. And finally, effective blended learning approach suggests a great degree of flexibility and significant changes in the whole educational system and school legislation (European Commission 2020: 5).

Szadiewska and Kujawski (2017: 3938) in their study discovered that the main drawbacks of blended learning from the point of view of students are the lack of solutions to tests and tasks and not enough materials being available, while other students found educational platforms interface user-unfriendly. Namyssova (2019: 28) argues that students involved in blended learning find it difficult to get clarification and explanation on how to complete tasks from teachers working online. Besides, some students are disappointed with the impossibility to consult with other students while working on tasks from home, and quite many participants of blended learning courses admit, that they lack real communication with the instructor. In another study conducted by Shand and Farrely (2016: 9) students admit that one more problem associated with blended learning is the necessity for self-discipline and time management when completing online activities.

Kaur (2013: 616) designates the main challenges that await students and teachers on the way of implementing a blended learning model. First of all, technical challenges, which suggest that all the participants of the learning process should have appropriate technical possibilities to be able to use offered learning tools. Other problem that both teachers and students can face is related with organisational challenges, which include monitoring and managing the progress of participants. Finally, instructional design challenges can arise on the way of choosing the best delivery medium to match the course objectives and learning outcomes (Kaur 2013: 616). In the course of researching negative effects of blended learning Chen and Lu (2013: 29) came to the conclusion that the main obstacle in blended learning can be different backgrounds, personal differences and perception peculiarities of students, which can lead to negative influence on the learning effect.

Not only students find some drawbacks in blended learning, teachers also express their negative attitude towards blended educational methods. In the data collected by Alvarez (2020: 116) teachers mention that with implementing blended learning model their

workload has increased drastically, because developing and designing online-based courses and tasks is very time-consuming and effort-intensive. Many teachers find preparation for lessons and developing teaching materials for online learning more difficult than for face-to-face lessons, consequently they perceive blended learning as extra work or even burden. Some educators revealed poor digital competences and lack of technical capability. Finally, it is also noted that technological infrastructure of some educational institutions does not promote blended learning implementation because they are simply not appropriately equipped for this (*ibid*: 116).

Based on the foregoing deductions it is concluded that blended learning is a many-faced modern educational tool and it has both advantages and disadvantages. There are many ways of blending online and face-to-face learning, with a bigger online or in-class share, with a synchronized or asynchronized teaching model. The most favourable balance depends on the teacher's attitude, teaching subject, learners' peculiarities or the learning circumstances. Thorough preliminary preparation and estimation of the learning objectives and outcomes can help to find the perfect blend for a particular course, which will definitely affect positively academic results.

The above-mentioned studies reveal that researchers have been interested in the topic of blended learning, its benefits and challenges both for teachers and students, the ways of implementing it into the teaching process and perspectives it provides for education. However, the use of Moodle-based blended learning in vocational schools, and in particular, for preparation for the National Examination in English in Estonia, has not been studied yet. The present study hypothesises that the time constraints for National examination preparations in vocational schools can be overcome by developing and implementing a Moodle-based blended learning study programme with proper monitoring of out-of-class independent but well-guided practice: such programme improves students' readiness for the National examination in English.

CHAPTER I: WAYS OF IMPLEMENTING BLENDED LEARNING

The increasing development of technology has influenced significantly all spheres of life, and education is not a case of exception. Educational institutions have also been influenced to a different extent and in different aspects by the technological evolution. It has resulted in important changes in the educational policy, which in its turn has led to certain alterations in the whole learning and teaching processes. Despite the fact that blended or hybrid learning is not a new term in education, during the last years it is gaining a huge popularity and importance as a pedagogical approach of the future, due to innovativeness and variability, which this method can offer to both teachers and learners. Blended learning not only has multiple advantages and benefits compared to a fully face-to-face course, but it also can enrich and diversify onsite classes through adding interactive online material and resources providing extra practice and motivation. A number of reasons seem to militate in favour of a blended learning approach as a teaching model of the future. A flexible pedagogical approach enabling teachers to mix online and onsite classes in various combinations and pushing time and material availability boundaries - blended learning has confidently come to educational institutions to stay there forever.

1.1 National Curriculum, School Curriculum, and Syllabus

In order to explore the steps in designing an EFL study programme, also referred to as 'syllabus', the notions of a national and school curriculum, as well as a study programme should be defined and differentiated.

The National Curriculum establishes the national standards and goals for educational institutions, and it should be applied in all schools of a country regardless of their status and mission. Houang and Schmidt (2008: 2) see the main aim of a curriculum in providing "a basic outline of planned and sequenced educational opportunities" and describe it as "a structure imposed by authority for the purpose of bringing order to the conduct of schooling". A vocational institution curriculum is divided between the two curricula: the National Curriculum and a school one. A school curriculum is designed specifically for every individual educational organisation, should be strictly based on the National Curriculum principles and still be aimed to fulfill the objectives of a

concrete educational institution. “When the curriculum of a school is drafted, it shall be based on the national curriculum and the development plan of the school, taking account of the needs of the region, the wishes and intellectual and material capabilities of the employees of the school, the parents and students” (Riigiportaal 2019: para 4).

To differentiate the two notions, it is essential to introduce the definition of a syllabus, given by Breen (1984: 47). “a syllabus is a plan of what is to be achieved through our teaching and our students' learning". Thus, a syllabus provides a more detailed and better-considered view of how concrete goals are supposed to be achieved taking into account particular students and their needs, as well as an educational institution and its methodological possibilities. In other words, a syllabus, or study programme, is an adapted to the needs and skills of students and the objectives of the course national curricula with more precise learning outcomes.

1.2 The Main Principles of Elaborating a Study Programme

To elaborate a detailed and quality study programme it is essential to understand its purpose. Murphy (2018: 2) highlighted the main purpose of a study programme from the point of view of the best language acquisition:

- divide a language course into manageable blocks and provide a practical basis for them;
- provide teachers and learners with clear and understandable structure;
- provide both students and teachers with a direction of a course;
- give students an idea of the meaningfulness of the activities;
- guide the selection of materials, texts and exercises;
- ensure an aspect of constancy through the learning process;
- assess the progress of a student during a course by providing a basis for testing.

Due to complex theories of language learning, versatile teaching methods, recognition of students' learning peculiarities and development of blended learning, the concept of syllabus for second-language teaching has reached a new level of importance. The syllabus has become a tool helping cover a gap between the needs and aims of learners, achieve set goals and control the learning process. Advisability of a syllabus is determined by the need to provide pragmatic and pedagogical efficiency. Pragmatic efficiency means economy of time and money in the first place. Since learners have different skills, backgrounds and individual information perception types, syllabi can vary according to the practical implementation in any given situation. The pedagogical

efficiency means economy in the management of the learning process, because well-structured instruction suggests a more efficient way of learning (Yalden 1984: 14).

Some teachers can use the table of contents of a chosen course book as a quick template of an official syllabus, because of the lack of time or supporting documents. However, teachers should also understand that a course book is not the same as a study programme, and, thus, cannot automatically be used as a syllabus design. Course books are too generalized and unified to meet the objectives of a concrete course and the needs and skills of concrete students in a concrete school. Besides that, every syllabus should also include solid assessment criteria, which even the best-selling course books do not have, consequently course books cannot be used as an instant study programme (Murphy 2018: 2013).

According to Murphy (2018), every study programme at the pre-design stage should be based on three interrelated layers: approach (what pedagogical theory is put in the basis of a programme), design (what content is chosen to apply the approach) and procedure (what specific activities are used to support the design). Besides that, teachers should have in mind and take into consideration very important factors influencing the syllabus design, such as common trends, theories of SL acquisition, course objectives, wider educational context and learners' background, if they want to get a meaningful and ready-to-use study programme. Murphy also suggests his own assessment criteria of important design factors for contemplation during the syllabus design procedure, which includes rich experiences, diverse genres, abundant multimedia, independent learning etc. Five different types of syllabi, which peculiarities determine the design, potential and elaboration standards will furthermore be explored.

The grammatical or structural syllabus is a syllabus with the longest history, which is based on the grammar-translation method of teaching languages with the main focus on providing the skills of translation from one language to another. This type of a study programme is well-structured and clear and, despite some general criticism of this type of a syllabus, it still has its benefits. Baleghizadeh (2010: 112) highlights three main advantages of the grammatical syllabus. First, it helps both educators and learners to monitor students' progress. Secondly, learnt in rules, directives and comparatives with L1, a language has a more definite and understandable for students structure. And finally, knowing the grammatical structure of a language promotes production of more

accurate phrases. Murphy (2018: 9) also mentions that the programme is easy to introduce and implement, does not require high level of proficiency of L2 from a teacher, can be taught in L1 and does not require higher order thinking skills. The main criticism of the method lies in inability to connect translation skills with a real-life context, which does not "automatically lead to language acquisition" (Murphy 2018: 8), because the translation skills of students do not result in language proficiency. Sabbah (2018: 130-131) also emphasizes such disadvantages of the syllabus as overestimation of grammar in drilling, lack of social context in teaching and monotony of the teaching and learning process.

The notional-functional syllabus is focused on the semantic and communicative aspect of the language leaving a grammar constituent aside, because according to this type of syllabus, functions and notions are more important than forms. The syllabus represents the idea that a language is a tool for communication and includes the topics and concepts necessary to convey certain meanings (Sabbah 2018: 133). The syllabus has undeniable advantages in comparison with the grammatical one. First of all, it develops more realistic and authentic communication skills. Second, it provides tools for contextual understanding. Third, it demands more flexible teaching and adds socio-cultural component to the teaching process (Murphy 2018: 11). Despite the benefits of the syllabus, it faces some criticism and the main arguments against this type of a study programme are:

- a list of functions and notions does not directly lead to language acquisition;
- breaking a language into separate pieces does not reflect the concept of a language as a whole;
- a lack of protocols makes it difficult to assess and follow the progress (Murphy 2018: 11).

The lexical syllabus is a study programme based on teaching vocabulary derived from analysis of the most common lexis. Thus, the programme consists of the list of taught vocabulary, word forms, meanings, collocations, uses and central lexical patterns (Sabbah 2018). The syllabus focuses on unique properties of a word or a phrase and retreats from direct grammar teaching (Murphy 2018). The lexical syllabus is characterised by an important transfer of focus in the language teaching towards the value of vocabulary (Marie, Parana 1998). The lexical syllabus is a scientific design based on language teaching research. The focus of the syllabus is on the natural content and studying contextual words and phrases with the emphasis on their grammatical

qualities makes the study programme unique (Murphy 2018). Among other advantages of the lexical syllabus can be mentioned that "it is clear, unambiguous in the sense that everybody can recognize what a word, its phrases and patterns are" (Sabbah 2018: 132). However, the syllabus is criticized for abundant concentration on a single word, which can have several different meanings, which may complicate language acquisition and confuse learners.

The task-based syllabus is a learning-centered study programme based on a clear methodology and theory, which promotes language acquisition through giving students "freedom within the framework of the tasks for real communicative engagement in the tasks" (Murphy 2018: 15). The syllabus in question is organized and assessed in terms of tasks as tools to develop language skills for a communicative purpose. The task-based syllabus can be divided into three categories:

- procedural syllabus, which is based on the principle that "the learning of form is best carried out when attention is given to meaning" (Sabbah 2018: 136);
- process syllabus, which is derived from the skills and processes involved in language learning, and defined as "a plan for incorporating the negotiation process, and thereby, learning processes, into syllabus design" by Long and Crookes (1991: 15);
- skills-based syllabus, which emphasis is on a specific skill according to the learners' needs (Sabbah 2018: 136).

The task-based syllabus is based on a series of purposeful tasks that students have to perform, which are different from other standard classroom activities, because they are designed in "a way of bringing the real world into the classroom" (Irfani 2014: 25). The task-based syllabus has undeniable advantages. First, it takes into account learners' cognitive development. Secondly, it relies on learner autonomy, peculiarities and different levels of competence and motivation in any classroom (Murphy 2018). Finally, the programme provides students with an opportunity to overcome their communicative difficulties and develop their abilities to convey a message by means of the target language (Sabbah 2018). However, Murphy finds it doubtful that it is "really possible for the teacher/writer to be able to realize an appropriate set of tasks for every student need" and assumes that teachers devoted to grammar-based syllabi can feel skeptical towards the task-based syllabus "because of the lack of control over language usage and linguistic outcomes" (2018: 17-18).

The content-based syllabus is based on teaching of content rather than teaching the language itself separately from the content. Language acquisition occurs through the teaching techniques adjusted to the content material (Sabbah 2018). According to Murphy (2018), learners are taught real topics that match their cognitive capabilities and provided with a cognitive challenge, but what is more important is that a target language is not considered as the means to reach the goal, rather than the subject of study. "This type of learning expects the onset of natural motivation to use the language to accomplish the activity without ever having to focus on the language usage as an integral part of the learning" (Murphy 2018: 19). The content-based syllabus is closely related to the term 'immersion' and first was implied in the USA and Canada to provide the effective teaching and an integrative and quality education to non-native speakers, which demonstrated good results in acquiring both content and the target language (Irfani 2014). Murphy (2018) compares the content-based syllabus to teaching English for Specific Purposes, which is actively implied in Vocational Schools in Estonia. However, Rahimpour (2010) does not regard the content-based teaching as a language teaching syllabus. He stresses that the main goal of content-based language teaching is to provide students with some information in the taught language. "The subject matter is primary, and language learning occurs incidentally to the content learning" (Rahimpour 2010: 1662). One of the most common classwork and homework activities of the content-based syllabus is extensive reading of literature or other content material in the target language. The biggest advantages of this type of syllabi are that, on one hand, motivation coincides with meaningful goals and, on the other hand, both students and teachers are not focused on studying the target language, but use it naturally in the authentic environment. Despite its promising future, the content-based syllabus is criticised for the lack of focus on form and unsuitability for all age groups (Murphy 2018).

As it is seen from the above analysis of various types of syllabi, every study programme design has its advantages and drawbacks, potential, possibilities to imply and is affected by teaching context, cultural and social background and learning needs and objectives. There is no one and only syllabus that can fit all the teaching context. A good syllabus should serve the purpose it is designed for. The best way to elaborate a study programme is to exploit the strengths of all the above-mentioned syllabi and use an integrated version of syllabi to provide the most effective and purposeful teaching

results. It is essential that teachers can design a syllabus based on the preliminary analysis of students' needs and the requirements of the course they teach.

The choice of syllabus type and design can be affected by various factors. The first factor, which is very important to take into consideration, is the National Curriculum, which a study programme is guided by. A teacher should consider the learning outcomes and objectives of the National Curriculum to adapt the study programme to them and also proceed from available teaching recourses such as textbooks, workbooks etc. The goals and objectives of a course as well as learning outcomes define the choice of methodology and instructional material and their relationship applied to deliver the objectives (Krahnke 1987). Accountability and measurement should also be taken into account while pre-designing a study programme. A successful syllabus must include clear and understandable for all participants of the study process assessment criteria.

The second factor to determine the choice of a study programme is a teacher, with his/her individual and unique potential, experience, beliefs, qualifications etc. Teaching style and methods fully depend on teacher's pedagogical orientation and competencies, because "teachers tend to teach what they know" (Krahnke 1987: 79). Consequently, while developing a study programme, it is essential to proceed from teacher's level of qualifications and pedagogical preparation to cover grammar, linguistic or social aspects of the taught material.

The last but not the least, students and their expectations, needs, prior knowledge and personality types can also be the factor influencing the choice of a syllabus design (Irfani 2014). Ideally, the personal goals of students should coincide with the syllabus objectives, although it is not always the case, and the expectations of students can differ from those set by the programme. The best way to meet students' goals with the syllabus objectives is to provide a bigger amount of general functional, situational and skill content alongside with the specific and structural constituent of the syllabus (Krahnke 1987).

Having all these factors in mind it is possible to elaborate a syllabus that best fulfills the criteria of a particular course. Thus, for example, the notional-functional syllabus could include skill-based activities and then be followed by content-based extensive reading tasks. Such a combination is logical and appropriate especially in language teaching

when various activities are combined for the sake of better and more versatile teaching results.

Regardless of what type of syllabus is being elaborated, it is essential to complete the preliminary work to estimate initial conditions. Different researchers suggest different models and sets of principles to be guided by while developing a study programme. Cronholm (2005) generated nine principles to consider when designing a study programme.

The first principle to observe is *vision*. It can be understood as creating a profile of the programme, and the key figures in it are the participants of the teaching process who can benefit from the programme, namely students, employers etc. If the requests of different parties of the teaching process vary essentially, it is important to find "balance between different requests in order to satisfy different needs" (Cronholm 2005: 3). The second principle to contemplate is *traceability*. When the vision is developed, it is necessary to define what parts the programme might consist of. Every part of the course "should contribute to fulfilling the vision and thereby motivate its existence" (Cronholm 2005: 3).

Another principle to consider is based on two concepts: *progression and integration.* Progression means "a gradual development from one state to another" (Collins 2021), in other words, the following course should be on a higher level than the previous one. Integration means that the course should be in line with other courses in the curriculum. The progression and integration principle involves the prior knowledge of students that can be applied to the following course. The next principle to consider is *manning and anchoring decisions*. The students' and teachers' opinion should be taken into consideration while designing a study programme, because programmes with a high support and acceptance from the participants of the teaching process have more chances to be successful and easier to implement. The fifth principle to rely on is *pedagogy*, which declares that the choice of the pedagogical approach and methodology should be conscious and based on initial conditions of the course. It is essential that the pedagogical approach would be not only comfortable and familiar to a teacher, but also the best from the strategic point of view. To achieve the best results and fulfill the goals, the choice should be guided by the programme level and students' needs (Cronholm 2005).

The next principle to consider is *mandatory and free choice of courses*. Since in different educational institution the curriculum can include both mandatory and free sources, it is essential to elaborate a study programme according to this aspect to make free choice courses more attractive and compulsory courses more enjoyable for students. The *implementation* principle involves concerns about implementing the ready programme. It can be risky on the one hand, because every syllabus needs testing and sometimes discrepancy between students' expectations and learning objectives can occur. However, on the other hand, a study programme can be corrected and polished during the teaching process (Cronholm 2005).

The principle of *evaluation* is aimed to assess the degree of viability of the study programme. According to Cronholm (2005), there are two main approaches with different measurements: formative and summative evaluation. While formative evaluation provides systematic feedback, summative evaluation is aimed to assess the study programme outcomes. The last principle to consider in designing a syllabus is *marketing*, which means that students and other participants of the teaching process should be fully aware of the study programme main concepts, which should be attractive to them and formulated in clear terms (Cronholm 2005).

According to Nunan (1988: 26), the main points of departure in designing a study prorgamme are specifications of content and basic elements of the programme, which are defined by learners' purpose, needs analysis and learning goals. He asserts that the starting point of a syllabus design should be "an analysis of the language, information about the learner, beliefs about the learning process itself, or a combination of these" (Nunan 1988: 26). To help design a study programme, he suggests a syllabus designer answering three key questions about linguistic elements to be taught, about learners' expectations from the course and finally about activities to stimulate and promote language acquisition.

A good syllabus should include all the necessary for effective language acquisition components, such as grammatical structures, themes, notions, activities, functions and tasks. Each of these constituents of the programme can be product or process oriented, depending on the beliefs about the nature of language and learners' needs. Needs analysis can be defined as techniques and procedures to collect information to be used

in the syllabus design. The data collected to design a syllabus should include the answer about the reasons why learners want to learn the target language and what resources are available for implementing the syllabus. Needs analysis can provide a syllabus designer with essential information, which helps clarify the selection of content, choice of methodology aimed to serve concrete learners, determine the proficiency level, but what is more important "to alert the teacher to areas of possible conflict" (Nunan 1988: 18). These possible areas of conflict can include learners' preferences in instruction, different perceptions about language learning and designed activities to implement the teaching content.

Various researchers, such as Nunan (1988), Romanowski (2017), Songhori (2007), Li (2014) investigated the approaches to needs analysis to meet the needs of learners in the process of designing a syllabus. They offer different models and techniques of needs analysis to obtain exact data on learners' expectations and perceptions of language learning. For example, the *Target Situation Analysis* mainly concentrates on students' needs at the end of a course. To obtain this information the linguistic features of the selected situation should be carefully analysed (Li 2014). The data collected and processed in the target situation include the following parameters:

- Purposive domain: explains the purpose which the target language is going to be used for at the end of the course;
- Setting: characterizes the physical and psychological environment where English is going to be used;
- Interaction: identifies relationship between learners and the people who they are going to practice the target language with;
- Instrumentality: specifies the tools which are going to be used to reach the goal;
- Dialect: states the dialects learners are going to perceive and produce;
- Communicative event: describes the types of activities;
- Communicative key: characterises the way how the learners are going to do the activities;
- Target level: identifies the level of linguistic proficiency at the end of the course (Songhori 2007).

Another approach to needs analysis is the *Present Situation Analysis*, which focuses on learner's present situation analysis and demonstrates the difference between the present and the target. The model is aimed to explore the language proficiency of learners at the moment a language course starts and evaluate their strengths and weaknesses through three main sources of information: the students, the academic institution and the assumed future employer of the students (Songhori 2007). The *Hutchinson and Waters' Model* explores target situation needs, which include the demand of the target situation,

the existing proficiency and learners' subjective needs, and learning needs, which suggest learners' motivation and available resources. The researchers compare a language course to a journey, where the starting point is the deficiency of knowledge and the destination is the needs of learners (Li 2014).

The *Pedagogic Needs Analysis* includes deficiency of knowledge analysis, strategy analysis or learning needs analysis, and means analysis. Deficiency analysis evaluates lacks and insufficiencies in learners' current language level. Data obtained from deficiency analysis can be put in the core of the language syllabus, because they reflect the gap between present and target knowledge and language skills. The data obtained from the strategy analysis showcase how the learners want to learn. Means analysis provides syllabus designers with the information about the cultural background and helps adapt the course to the cultural environment (Songhori 2007).

As it is seen from the information above, the needs analysis is a very laborious, time-consuming, yet obligatory step to obtain the essential information for designing a syllabus. No matter which needs analysis method to use, it is important to get thorough and detailed data to elaborate a syllabus, which best meets the needs of learners in the process of learning a second language. A syllabus designer should collect information about the environmental situation, personal information about learners, language information about learners, learners' lacks, learners' expectations from the course, language learning needs etc, within the framework of preliminary preparation of the syllabus design.

Before specifying the content and activities of a syllabus it is essential to define the objectives of the course, because the main role of objectives is to guide a syllabus designer in the selection of leading elements, provide a pedagogical focus for instructors and give learners clear understanding and meaning of what they can expect from a language course. However, to be able to serve its purpose, objectives should be formulated in a clear and precise manner. A well-stated objective should include three components: the performance component, which describes what learners are capable of doing, the conditions component, which defines the circumstances under which learners are supposed to perform, and the standards component, which demonstrates how well learners are to perform. Objectives are considered as an inseparable part of a syllabus, because they are indicators which help instructors understand that the goal is achieved

and make them be more realistic in assessment (Nunan 1988). Clear understanding of the course objectives by students makes the learning process more learner-centered and conscious.

The objectives of the course and needs analysis determine the selection of grammatical, functional and notional components for syllabi. The content of a syllabus should be scientifically-based and meet certain criteria and standards. The content of a study programme should be significant, realistic and useful for both teachers and learners, the tasks ought to be interesting, authentic, modern and encouraging, and the selection of materials must be influenced by a specific group and teacher's attitude and approach (Dippenaar 1993). Any content has to be provided in a certain sequence. The order of the content can depend on a particular vision of the learning process, for example, learning step by step from the easiest to more difficult grammar notions or from the familiar material to the new one. The grading criteria of the content are continuity, which means constant revision of important material with increasing level of difficulty, sequence, building new skills on the basis of previously acquired skills, and integration, relationships between other subject fields content. Grading of material is a cyclic process, influenced by a learner and a current situation, which helps students develop their knowledge and abilities (Dippenaar 1993). All in all, selection and grading of various content types must meet the above-mentioned criteria, be determined by the objectives and needs analysis and fit a particular learning-teaching situation.

Designing a study programme is a laborious and time-consuming task requiring careful research and preparatory work. An EFL study programme is based on the National curriculum in the first place and adopted to the school curricular objectives, time requirements and material availability. Thus, developing an EFL study programme is a complex act, where all vital aspects, such as the role of English in the community, correlation the aims of the programme with learners' needs, suitability of study material to implement the goals of the curriculum, etc should be carefully considered.

1.3 Designing a Blended Course

In a successful blended learning course the choice and implementation of learning tasks and assessment procedures should result from the expected learning outcomes and reflect the objectives of a course. Since every course has its own peculiarities, objectives, learning outcomes and other pedagogical aspects to be considered, there is

no single model of a blended course. Thus, before designing a blended learning course one should clearly understand the objectives and the learning outcomes of a course, the needs and possibilities of a targeted group, the features and challenges of a taught subject, because these factors determine the rhythm of the blend, course organisation and activities and assessment used in a course (Graham, Stein 2014).

Blended learning can range from full traditional instruction with elements of technologically-based tasks to full-time online learning forming various models studied by different researchers. Hannon and Macken (2014) identify three main models of blended learning. The blended presentation and interaction model suggests that activities-focused face-to-face sessions are blended with online resources, where short lecture resources are followed by face-to-face interaction. The blended block mode combines intensive face-to-face sessions and weekly online activities with online content. The predominantly online model of blended learning is a combination of short online lectures with online learning tasks, followed by online or face-to-face tutorials and proceeding with online or contact collaboration (Hannon, Macken 2014).

According to Staker and Horn (2012) all blended learning strategies can be classified into four main models: rotation, flex, self-blend and enriched-virtual models. The rotation model of blended learning is a blended course where "students rotate on a fixed schedule or at the teacher's discretion between learning modalities, at least one of which is online learning" (Staker, Horn 2012: 8). The rotation model is structured around time blocks where students work individually or in groups and are assisted by a teacher, who applies an interactive technology approach. Within the rotation model, four modifications are distinguished: station-rotation, lab-rotation, flipped-classroom, and individual-rotation models. The difference between station-rotation and lab-rotation models is that in the station-rotation model rotation occurs among stations, such as group work, full-class instruction, individual tutoring etc, and in the lab-rotation model students rotate among different learning locations, for example, classroom, learning laboratory etc. The flipped-classroom rotation model suggests that students rotate between face-to-face teacher-guided instruction and online delivery of content from home after school. The Flipped-classroom model enables students to receive control over their time, place and pace, because this type of blended learning allows students to pick the location where they practice material. The individual rotation model suggests

that students rotate on an individual schedule among learning modalities, at least one of which is organised online (Staker, Horn 2012).

The flex model of blended learning provides the delivery of content and instruction mainly on the Internet, where students move on an individual schedule through learning procedures. Face-to-face support is presented on a flexible basis through various activities. The implementation of face-to-face support and online practice can vary in combination of these modules. Some teachers supplement online learning with face-to-face support on the constant basis, while others practice in-class interaction marginally (*ibid*.).

The self-blend model, which is also referred to as "a la carte model" (Ibiloye 2021: 1), suggests that students can choose to have one or more courses totally online to combine it with their traditional studies. Students self-blend individual online courses in addition to face-to-face learning "to provide an integrated, augmented and interactive in-person learning experience" (*ibid*.). Online courses are asynchronous, which means that students can work on them remotely at their convenience. Finally, the last model of blended learning to consider is the enriched-virtual model, which allows students to complete the main part of coursework online, but still attend school for compulsory face-to-face lessons with a teacher. This model does not usually require everyday school attendance (Staker, Horn 2012).

Graham (2006) offers his own classification of blended learning models according to four different levels and three types. Different models of blending are developed under influence of different organisational levels, such as activity, course, programme and institution levels. The nature of the models can be determined by both learners and teachers. The difference between these types of models is that blending at the institutional and programme levels is often determined by learners, while at the course and activity levels teachers play a leading role in the process of blending. From the point of view of the purpose there are three different categories of blend. Each category blends different learning environments and focuses on different aspects. The enabling blends category focuses mainly on availability, flexibility and convenience, and consequently offers different opportunities for students to choose a blending mode. The enhancing blends category emphasises traditional educational institutional issues where the traditional face-to-face instruction is preferred yet enriched with online

practices. The transforming blends category is flexible and is aimed at changing traditional pedagogical principles, which allows students participate in construction their knowledge more actively (Graham 2006).

Cleveland-Innes and Wilton (2018) describe the SAMR model, where the abbreviation stands for substitution, augmentation, modification and redefinition. Substitution in this context means that computer technology is used to substitute traditional learning tools, such as a pen and paper, with no functional difference. Augmentation suggests that technological devices supplement conventional teaching methods with a dimension not available for the traditional approach. The term modification indicates that technology with its new possibilities is used to modify the function of the lesson. Finally, redefinition in the context of this blended learning model focuses on using technology and its multifaceted technological possibilities as a totally new teaching and learning activity allowing students use devices to search the Internet for materials, to complete tasks with the help of applications and create group learning products. The SAMR model illustrates the idea that effective adding of technology to face-to-face teaching and learning can enhance engagement, improve motivation and significantly improve learning outcomes.

Like elaboration of a study programme, a blended course design starts with a preparatory stage that includes defining the objectives of the course and the learning outcomes, analysing students' needs and elaborating a detailed study programme, which determines what tools and activities are needed to imply to achieve the objectives. According to Cleveland-Innes and Wilton (2018), the main preparatory steps to fulfill the implementation of a meaningful blended learning course are as follows. First, a designer should focus on the pedagogy and identify the benefits of blended learning in the particular teaching situation. Second, technology should be chosen with great care and learning activities should be selected in accordance with the needs of a subject and students. Third, it is important to consider the curriculum and its learning outcomes. Finally, it is essential to elaborate "a detailed syllabus with documented learning outcomes, descriptions of technology devices, clear delivery methods, explicit engagement opportunities, and assignments aligned with learning outcomes" (Cleveland-Innes, Wilton 2018: 21).

The delivery of a blended learning course must be designed regarding the students participating in the course, their learning experience, acquisition peculiarities and their access to technology. To choose the most suitable for a specific teaching situation blend, it is recommended to stick to the following procedure. The blended learning design starts with defining learning objectives and outcomes to ensure that course content meets students' needs. Once the objectives are formulated, it is advised to construct a course schedule with assigned learning activities to promote students' time management skills development. The next recommended step is to create the syllabus, which should be in line with the learning objectives and the schedule and include the information about requirements and general activities throughout the course. Additionally, it is recommended to consider the choice of technology from the point of view of the level of students' and teacher's technical expertise, and to what extent it supports course objectives (Mcgee, Reis 2012).

Although students usually adjust to technological changes in society very quickly, preparing students for blended learning is one of teacher's responsibilities while designing a blended learning course. Cleveland-Innes and Wilton (2018) note that there are three presences through which teachers could help students adjust to blended learning: cognitive presence, social presence and teaching presence. Cognitive presence means that cognitive interaction between students and a teacher in digital space can sometime be difficult for some students due to their shyness, intimidation and reluctance to speak publically, and the role of a teacher in this aspect is to support, encourage and inspire confidence into students during discussions. Social presence suggests that "online learners need time to get comfortable communicating via text and to adjust to expressing emotion and communicating openly where no visual or other non-textual cues are available" (Cleveland-Innes, Wilton 2018: 24). Teaching presence uncovers the problem that many students still expect a more visible teacher presence during the course and find it difficult to fully take responsibility for their own learning outcomes.

Blended learning is not only the combination of online and on-site learning, because "just blending face-to-face learning with information technologies cannot provide effective teaching and efficient solutions for learning" (Hadjerrout 2008: 181). This is a completely new way of interpreting of the learning and teaching process,

and undoubtedly there are certain pedagogical principles to follow. Cleveland-Innes and Wilton (2018) suggest seven of them:

- Design for open communication and trust. This principle refers to open interaction between a teacher and students, where all concerns related to the course are discussed, the material is available, rules and norms are set and the learning environment is trustworthy.
- Design for critical reflection and discourse. The principle reflects the importance to teach students to think carefully and critically and share their ideas thoughtfully. It is essential that a teacher pushed students towards reflection about the course content and objectives.
- Create and sustain a sense of community. The principle supports the idea, that it is important for teachers to support the development of sense of community, encourage open communication among students and establish rules of group work and class interaction at the early stage of the course.
- Support purposeful inquiry. This principle refers to necessity to offer students inquiry-based learning, enriched with multiple and flexible ways to approach the problem, which leads to deep understanding and building knowledge through inquiry and evidence base.
- Ensure students sustain collaboration. The principle reflects the significance to prepare students for life in an interconnected world.
- Ensure that inquiry moves to resolution. The principle supports the idea that a teacher as a mediator with the help of systematic tasks moves students through the course towards the learning outcomes.
- Ensure assessment is congruent with intended learning outcomes. The principle leads to understanding that to be effective, assessment should strictly evaluate the learning outcomes. All three types of assessment (self-assessment, peer-assessment and teacher assessment) should measure students' learning progress throughout the course.

The quality of a blended learning course can be evaluated by the three E's criteria: effectiveness, engagement and efficiency. Effectiveness can be measured by students' achievements, or to be more exact, how well they can reach the learning outcomes of a course. Efficiency is characterised by time, effort and activity resources having been devoted to development and execution of the learning process. However, if a course does not engage students, the course cannot be considered as either effective or efficient. One of the ways to ensure students' engagement is to enlarge the variety of approaches and the amount of interaction between students and a teacher aimed to increase students' motivation (Graham, Stein 2014). Cleveland-Innes and Wilton (2018) argue that to evaluate the successfulness of a blended course it is possible with the help of the following indicators: risk-free climate, group collaboration, information exchange, connecting ideas, applying new ideas, setting curriculum and methods, shaping constructive exchange, emotional language, positive and negative emotions etc. Carmen (2002) asserts that a successful blended course involves the key

ingredients, such as live events (synchronous, instructor-led learning events), self-paced learning (experiences completed individually at students' own pace and time), collaboration (threaded discussions or online chats), assessment (self-assessment, peer-assessment and teacher assessment) and performance support materials (on-the-job reference materials, downloads, printable references, summaries, and job aids).

1.3 Technologies for Implementing Blended Learning

Blended learning as a combination of traditional face-to-face instruction with innovative online teaching demands very careful consideration of using educational technologies. However, one should clearly understand that simply introducing new technological equipment into the classroom does not refer to blended learning. Creating blended learning environment can be challenging for a number of reasons, including changing roles of students and a teacher in the teaching process, new forms of interaction and collaboration and an innovative concept of learning and teaching, in which technology plays a role of students' engagement support. To design a meaningful and impactful blended course it is essential to select relevant in-person and online activities on the one hand, and create a learner-centered community on the other hand, where the choice of educational technologies is a fundamental aspect.

Educational technologies are understood as technologies used in educational purposes, since this notion refers to both pedagogical theory and physical hardware. In more specific meaning educational technology can be defined as "the use of digital or electronic technologies and materials to support teaching and learning" (Power 2014: 4), which includes software, systems, services, environments, hardware and networks, that can be used as means of educational content delivery in forms of media, social activities or creation of interactive items.

Since the market of educational platforms is huge and constantly developing it is reasonable to classify them from the point of view of various features:

- Learning management systems incorporating learning objects and learner profiles;
- Social learning platforms adding functionality;
- Blended learning platforms;
- Instructional improvement systems;
- Online learning providers;
- Adaptive content providers and data platforms;
- Grade-level collections and tablet bundles;

- Federated identity and access management (Bailey *at al.* 2013).

To make the right choice of educational platforms for schools it is recommended to start with defining the role of digital content and to what extent teachers can master digital content, research the digital content market with great care and only then select the providers that best fit school and teachers' needs (*ibid*.). As to teachers themselves, to match a learning management system to blended learning course design, Cleveland-Innes and Wilton (2018) recommend them to make sure if they use the technologies to support learning strategies and ensure if they are prepared for all the challenges of blended learning. Onwards, various types of technologies for blended learning are explored.

Learning Management Systems can be considered as the technological foundation of blended learning. This is a software application used for delivering educational content and providing interaction and collaboration, which possesses rich administrative functions, such as registration, assessment and analysis. The most popular learning management systems are fully-functional services Blackboard[1], Desire2Learn[2], Moodle[3] and Canvas[4]. These LMS are usually used by schools, institutions, universities, and require technical support. Among other learning management systems there are also simpler web-based classroom management systems, for example Google Classroom[5] that can be used by individual teachers, which are limited in their functions. A learning management system is a complete and ready solution for online learning. However, these learning systems are sometimes criticised for promoting passive transmission of knowledge and lack of objective assessment possibilities. To minimise the drawback of learning management systems it is essential to plan blended courses with a great care and encourage discussions, chats, forums and group/pair projects. Another disadvantage of learning management systems is that they can enlarge students' and teachers' workload, so course designers should elaborate courses very carefully taking into account course volume and assigned tasks (Cleveland-Innes, Wilton 2018).

Web conferencing can be used as a part of blended learning to introduce some tutorials, seminars, lectures and other synchronous learning activities. Web conferencing can be

[1] www.blackboard.com
[2] www.d2l.com
[3] www.moodle.org
[4] www.canvaslms.com
[5] www.classroom.google.com

used in the individual tutoring format, as well as in a form of webinars with many participants. The teaching tools are multifaceted and various, for example sharing video and audio functions, voice and text chat, whiteboard and screen sharing options etc. The most popular web conferencing platforms are Adobe Connect[6], Blackboard Collaborate[7] and Zoom[8], which are offered with monthly, yearly or per-user subscriptions, that give its users more advanced features and, consequently, bigger possibilities for creating interesting educational content. There are also free alternative variants of web conferencing platforms, for example Skype[9] or BigBlueButton[10], which can also be used by private individual teachers. The main disadvantages of video conferencing are considered lack of accessibility, because in some areas the Internet connection can be poor, complexity, as for some learners the functions of web conferencing can initially seem complex, and capacity limitations for many tool and services. Despite these disadvantages, web conferencing can diversify learning routine and introduce a share of personal interaction and intimacy into blended learning (*ibid*.).

Digital textbooks have some advantages over printed books, such as lower price, accessibility and interactivity. They are available both through commercial publishers and can be purchased using online paying methods for a personal use, and through open-source websites. Digital texts have many possibilities to use them in the blended learning environment: they can be easily shared, updated and modified, supplemented with assignments, adapted for learners' needs and level etc. Despite the multiple advantages, digital books can be criticised for necessity of having extra devices for reading them (laptops or tablets), in addition, some students still favour texts in traditional paper format, yet digital textbooks provide multiple possibilities in blended learning.

A *blog* is an online writing tool, which can be used in blended learning for individual, reflective, extensive writing practice. A blog is a digital diary that can be used to develop and enhance students' writing skills, then shared across the class, which provides students with the possibility to write on a given topic, answer some questions, give feedback and receive it from their peers. One of the illustrative examples of

[6] www.adobe.com/products/adobeconnect.html
[7] www.blackboard.com
[8] www.zoom.us
[9] www.skype.com
[10] www.bigbluebutton.org

blogging platforms is Edublogs[11]. The platform is a website specifically designed for teachers, learners and researchers, and provides blog-users with multiple possibilities, such as invite students, approve or unapprove students' comments, control privacy options, organise students in groups and monitor students' progress.

There are many technologies, platforms and services that are not related to educational sphere, but nevertheless can also be used in educational purposes. For example, *simulation-based e-learning* provides great opportunities to develop practical skills in a virtual world. Learners can learn practical skills through simulation via real-world scenarios. *Electronic portfolios* are collections of documents created by students to demonstrate their learning progress over a course. E-portfolios can be integrated into learning management systems as additional source of educational material in any learning environment. *Social networks* can be used as an endless source of inspiration for teachers from creating students' network for learning-based communication to uploading learner-made videos to YouTube[12] as a part of a group project.

In conclusion, blended learning course design is a multi-staged, versatile and complex process demanding time-consuming preparation and serious consideration of what methods, approaches and tools to use to implement a blended learning course successfully. Blended learning course design includes such stages as defining learning outcomes and objectives, creating a detailed study programme, determining the form of blend and interactivity, integrating communication and collaboration activities, compiling the list of resources to support the course and developing an assessment plan, just to mention a few. Blended learning is a flexible learning tool allowing students to progress in their knowledge any time, any place, at any pace through online delivery with students' control and under teacher's guidance. Thus, a blended course can be powerful and effective support for students learning English especially with the intention to pass the National examination in English, and even if the preparation for the examination is complicated with the lack of time, it can be overcome by developing and implementing a Moodle-based blended learning study programme with proper monitoring of out-of-class independent but well-guided practice.

[11] www.edublogs.org
[12] www.youtube.com

CHAPTER II: MOODLE BLENDED LEARNING COURSE FOR IT SPECIALITIES IN VET SCHOOLS

2.1 Vocational Education and Training in Estonia

Vocational Education and Training (VET) in Estonia is aimed to foster the knowledge and skills, and provides the social readiness required for different professions. VET is regulated by the Vocational Educational Institutions Act, which is the basis of "the establishment, maintenance, transfer, reorganisation and closure of vocational educational institutions (hereinafter schools), the basis for the right to provide instruction, management, organisation of studies and financing, the functions of schools, the rights and obligations of members of schools, and administrative supervision over the activities of schools" (Vocational Educational Institutions Act: para 1).

The vocational training curriculum includes the national curriculum, which represents a pattern for providing upper secondary vocational training and is regulated by the Ministry of Education and Research, and the school curriculum, which is compiled for every vocation institution. The vocational training curriculum regulates the goals and tasks of studies, learning outcomes, requirements for receiving education, volumes of curricular modules, specific qualifications acquired during studies etc. The volume of vocational training is calculated on the basis of Estonian vocational education credit points. A credit point indicates the volume of student´s work for achieving a learning outcome in the curriculum. One credit point corresponds to 26 hours and a school year in vocational training is equivalent to 60 credit points.

The Software Developer curriculum in the Ida-Viru Vocational Education Centre (IVVEC) is designed for 4 years, and the English module is taught for the first two years and finishes with the National Examination in English. The volume of the English module is 15 credit points which is equal to 390 hours of studies on acquisition of skills and knowledge. Some of the learning outcomes of the course are as follows:

- Students use foreign language learning strategies and information sources to develop language skills, associate foreign language learning with lifelong learning;
- Students are aware of the international opportunities for further training and vacancies in the labor market; prepare application documents necessary for employment;

- Students read literature in English, watch movies and TV shows and listen to radio programs.

Despite the fact, that the volume of the course is big enough, the task to prepare for the National Examination and achieve all the above-mentioned learning outcomes can be quite challenging, having in mind time constraints and uneven age and language mastery level in groups. Thus the EFL study programme should be thoroughly designed to take into account all the circumstantial and content challenges, and the accompanying e-course in the Moodle learning environment should strictly meet the purposes of the course and needs of students. The share of the online teacher-guided learning should be flexible to provide a space for creativity both for teachers and learners.

2.2 Need in a New EFL Course for IT Speciality

The Ida-Viru Vocational Education Centre is a public Vocational Education and Training institution, which provides initial and additional vocational training and retraining for young people and adults. Vocational education can be obtained after basic school as vocational secondary education (takes 3-4 years) or as vocational skills only without general education (takes from 3 months to 2.5 years). In 2019/2020 school year in connection with growing interest in IT and Multimedia sphere, recruitment for a new speciality was opened, which implied not only obtaining a profession of a software developer, but also obtaining academic education with taking secondary leaving examinations and getting a secondary education certificate.

The aim of these changes was to improve the level of vocational education and to increase the competitiveness of IVVEC learners in the labour market. However, they entailed certain difficulties. Firstly, the educational programme for this speciality is still not elaborated in details and approved by the Ministry of Education and Research of Estonia, therefore the teachers working in these groups had to use the Tartu Vocational Education Center programme for the same speciality as a model and develop it by themselves to adapt to learning outcomes. Secondly, the educational programme resulting in taking the National Examinations in English demands new competences from the teachers working in these groups and hence imply certain difficulties for them.

The aim of the National Examination in English is to assess the acquisition of general competencies and learning outcomes of compulsory courses in the state upper

secondary schools and vocational institutions. The examination is based on the upper secondary school national curriculum and the European Framework for Language Learning and corresponds to the descriptions of the Council of Europe language proficiency levels B1 and B2.

To understand what skills are required for successful exam performance, it is important to analyse the exam tasks of the National Examination in English. The examination tests students on aqcuisition of all four main components of language skills: writing, listening, reading and speaking. Writing tasks are aimed to assess grammar, language stylistics and spelling competence of students and require such skills as ability to express opinion, give appraisal, comment on events, describe processes, offer solutions, compare and contrast, provide for and against arguments etc. All the above-mentioned skills are basic writing skills and require literacy, grammar command and constant practice. The listening part consists of multiple-choice tasks, matching tasks and filling in the gaps exercises and assesses the ability to understand the gist of the text, draw conclusions about the text, find selective information in the text and understand details. The reading part is aimed to estimate and check to what extent students are able to understand the main idea, draw conclusions about the text, understand not only important information, but also information presented indirectly and find connections within the text. All these skills require knowledge of vocabulary, the ability to derive meaning from the text, linguistic correctness and accuracy. The skills students need to demonstrate during the speaking part of the examination include general oral communication, oral presentation, conversation, opinion justification and support.

All the above-mentioned factors indicate the demand in creating a thoroughly developed study programme considering students' current habits and learning style, schedule and time management, students' needs and learning peculiarities, learning objectives and outcomes, preferable activities an assessment plan, to provide meaningful preparation for the National Examination. The fact, that some students may work part-time and occasionally miss face-to-face lessons, leads to the necessity to provide them with the possibility to cover the material independently within the blended learning paradigm. The problem of limited time for the National Examination preparation defines the urgency to plan the learning process with maximum efficiency. Derived from these considerations and circumstances there grew the need in a well-planned study programme accompanied by an e-course to fulfill the blended learning strategy.

2.3 Why Moodle?

Moodle (Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment) is a learning management system that is aimed to provide teachers with rich opportunities in creating an online learning environment with meaningful interaction and active collaboration with their students. The Moodle learning platform can be used for creating a supplementary e-course to support and enrich ongoing face-to-face learning sessions or it can be used to transfer almost all learning activities into the virtual space. The LMS is a powerful tool to elaborate and manage courses, change and adapt course content, upload course materials, track student attendance and completion progress, administer assignments, organise surveys, start forums, create tests and quizzes, and design many more useful and impactful learning activities.

The Moodle LMS is one of the most popular, recognisable and trusted educational platforms with 302mln users and 39mln courses designed in more than 240 countries all over the world. The Moodle e-platform offers multiple possibilities for delivering the material to students, such as assignments, wiki, chats, feedback, database, lessons, glossary, survey, workshop, interactive tasks, and forums. With all the above-described characteristics Moodle becomes the most suitable platform for implementation blended learning at VET schools to develop necessary skills for successful performance at the National Examination. Using the Moodle learning environment students develop their critical thinking and analytical skills, learn to collaborate with a teacher and each other, develop their digital competence, learn assessment and self-assessment skills, advance their time management skills and take the responsibility for their study progress. Besides that, the HARNO Moodle learning environment is assigned as the main platform for e-learning study organisation in IVVEC, which is registered in the procedure for organising and conducting e-learning and distance learning (Ida-Virumaa Kutsehariduskeskus 2022).

One of the purposes of a blended learning English course is to fulfill the needs of all students with uneven language competences. The aim of the e-course in the Moodle learning environment is to complement and accompany the study programme, thus providing independent though still guided opportunities for self-study and preparation for the National Examination. In other words, one of the ways for assisting learners to improve their language skills would be designing a blended study programme for IVVEC students of IT specialities.

2.4 A Moodle Blended English Course for IT Specialities in IVVEC

The course was purposefully designed to prepare the second year students of IT specialities of IVVEC for the National Examination. The needs analysis was held based on the previous work with the target group of students during the first year of studies. The main problems derived from the needs analysis are insufficient level of preparation in writing and speaking and students' poor knowledge of English grammar. The students participating in this course belong to two different groups: a Russian-speaking and an Estonian-speaking group. The course follows the requirements of the School Curriculum, which is consecutively based on the main principles of the National Curriculum. The general objective of the two-year English course according to the School Curriculum is that learners are able to communicate in English in everyday communication both orally and in writing as an independent language user and are ready to pass the National Examination in English (Ida-Virumaa Kutsehariduskeskus 2022).

The preparatory stage of the study programme design for the second year of language learning includes the expected learning outcomes analysis. The learning outcomes have become a starting point for the whole study programme, and the assessment tasks, topics division, compulsory and optional assignments, grammar topics distribution were organised around them. The syllabus is presented in the table form for a better visualisation and contains the following categories: volume of work, covered topics, content, vocabulary, examination practice and grammar topics. The study programme also includes the information about the course volume, which is 8 credit points or 208 academic hours, the ratio of contact lessons and independent work, 176 hours and 32 hours accordingly, and the assessment criteria of the course, which requires successful completion of three assessment tasks per each learning outcome and all the compulsory assignments. The students' results are graded at a 5-point scale. The analysis of the learning outcomes enabled to formulate the specific objectives of the second year English course, which are as follows:

- To help students achieve a good result in the National Examination;
- To train students in the skills and techniques they will need to perform well in the different parts of the exam;
- To help students improve the level of their English through a combination of language input and practice activities in the four skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing;
- To increase students' understanding of other cultures;

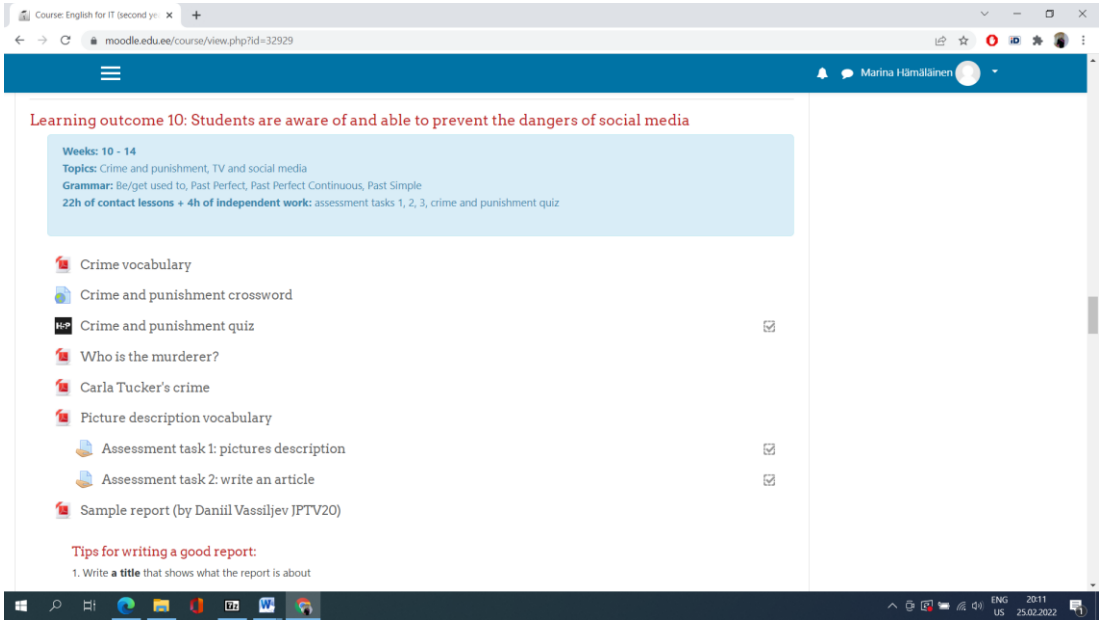
- To help students develop their study skills that will equip them for lifelong learning.

The next step in elaborating the study programme was dividing all the material into study blocks and vocabulary and grammar topics distribution so that they would support the acquisition of necessary skills for achieving a learning outcome. One of the most complicated and time-consuming stages of the study programme design was forming a schedule for the whole school year ahead with the number of contact and independent learning academic hours assigned for every study block completion. The assessment tasks are designed and aimed to estimate acquired language skills corresponding to a particular learning outcome. Since speaking and writing skills are identified as the weakest points of students, the assessments tasks are designed to support and develop these vitally important for successful performance at the National Examination competences (See Appendix 1).

The ready study programme has provided a basis for developing the LMS Moodle e-course for IT specialities of IVVEC. The electronic course was realised in the server www.moodle.edu.ee, which is assigned as a preferable way to organise distant learning or e-learning by the management of IVVEC. Moodle has a user-friendly interface with understandable and easy navigation and video tutorials. The learning material has been constructed using various sources, from the course book as the main source of material to various Internet learning platforms, including the assignments created by the author.

The background of the target group, their previous knowledge and skills have been taken into account in the preparation of the course. However, the course can be used in other groups as well. The study programme of the *English for IT (second year)* course is based on the National Curriculum and fully reflects the course objectives, learning outcomes and thematic content. The objectives and learning outcomes of the course are formulated in a comprehensible way and can be found both in the description of the Moodle course and in the study programme. The objectives are formulated according to the curriculum. The structure of the course is designed so that the division of the Moodle course is based on the learning outcomes (Chart 1). For each learning outcome, vocabulary, thematic and grammatical material, learning guides and assessment tasks are developed to help assess the achievement of the learning outcomes, thus supporting the achievement of the objectives of the course.

Chart 1. *Material Division according to Learning Outcomes*

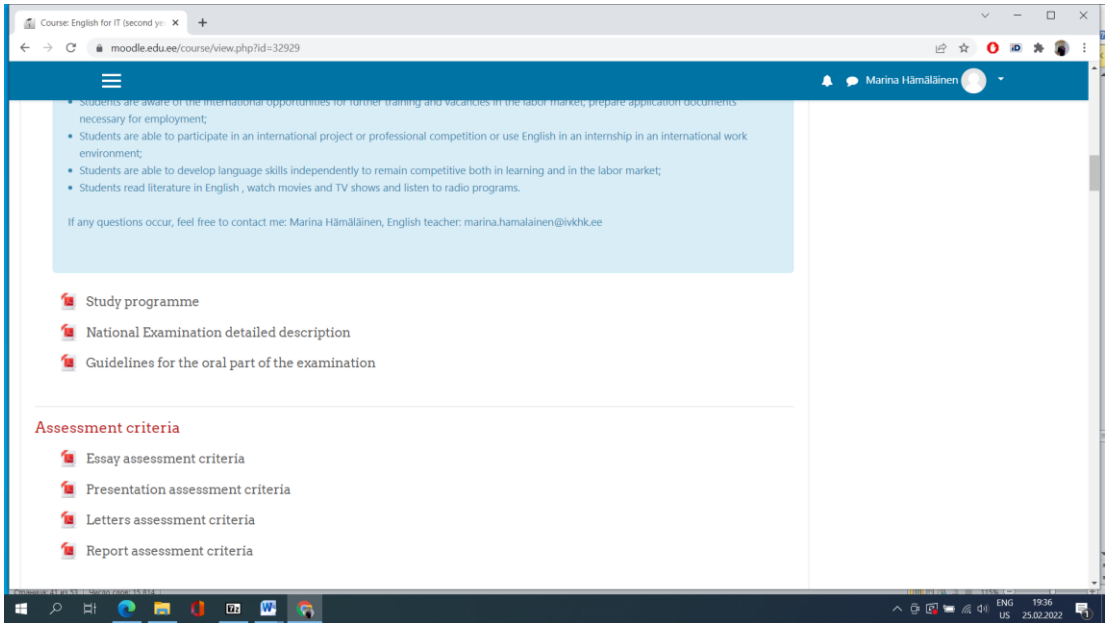


The e-course study programme fully meets the requirements of the IVVEC English language curriculum. *English for IT (second year)* is the second part of the full English course, which consists of two parts, and the prerequisite for participation in the course is the completion of the first part of this course - *English for IT (first year).* The corresponding information is reflected both in the description of the course and in the study programme. All learning activities are designed in line with the learning outcomes, as all assignments including assessment tasks were developed based on the learning outcomes to be achieved.

The structure of the course is user-friendly, and the students are informed in advance on assessment and feedback activities. The course has clear and comprehensible evaluation criteria for different tasks (essay, report, presentation, letter, etc.) and detailed instructions are devised for each task (Chart 2). The study programme of the course contains information on the time required to complete the assignments and learning activities. There is also information on what topics and assessment and additional tasks have to be completed in order to assess each learning outcome and how many hours of classroom and independent work are allocated for this purpose. The learning activities of the course support the development of learning skills in every way. Each section of the course contains tips for completing the task, samples of other students' works, video tutorials, and each part ends with a self-reflection on the material learned and the

objectives achieved. The course forms a unified whole and the structure of the course is clearly-designed.

Chart 2. *The Structure of the Moodle Course*



The course is divided into sections according to the learning outcomes that students should achieve. Each section contains topics, optional assignments, and three assessment tasks, so all elements of the course are intuitive to find. All the media sources used in the course are aimed at diversifying the learning process. The works of other authors used in compiling the study materials of the course are properly referenced. Thanks to LMS Moodle responsive design, which allows the content adjust to different screen sizes, the students can use it in any device, be it a smartphone, tablet or computer, which makes it possible to include some interactive Moodle assignments into the classwork.

Assessments tasks support and develop acquisition of the language skills necessary for successful performance in the National Examination, have step-by-step instructions, links to useful files, websites or videos and references to sample works (Chart 3). Thus, all students regardless of whether they attended the lesson where the requirements of an assessment task were explained or missed it, have clear understanding of how the task should be completed. Written and oral assessment tasks were adapted from the website of the Republic of Estonia Education and Youth Board www.harno.ee, where the

examination materials of previous years are collected, to provide maximum authenticity to the examination situation (Chart 4).

Chart 3. *Assessment Task 1 Essay*

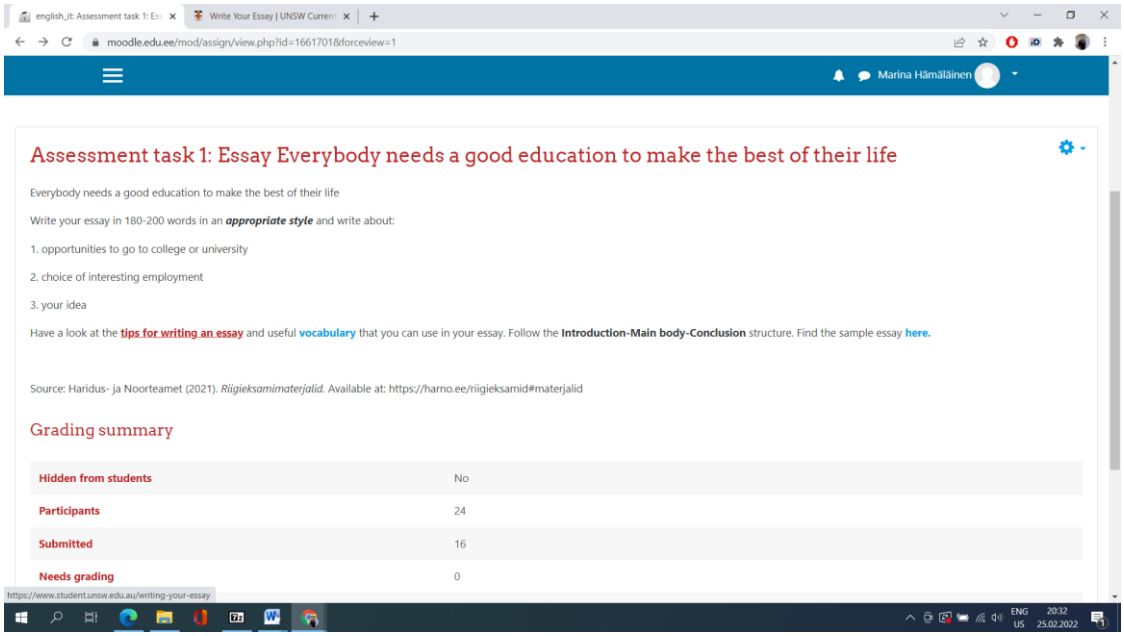
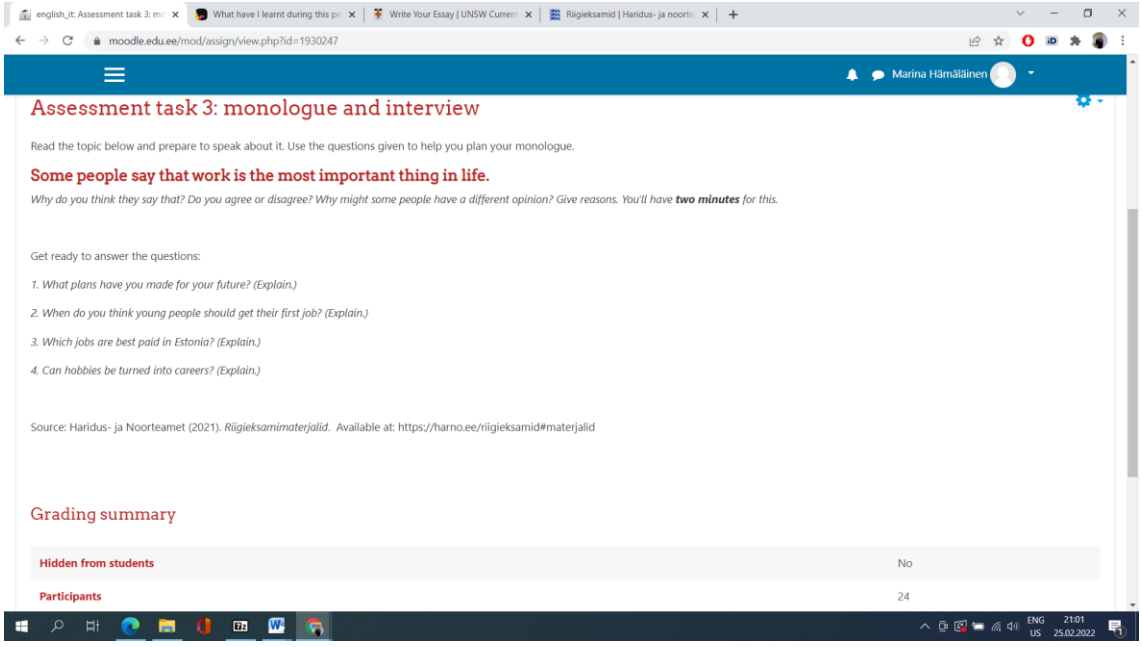
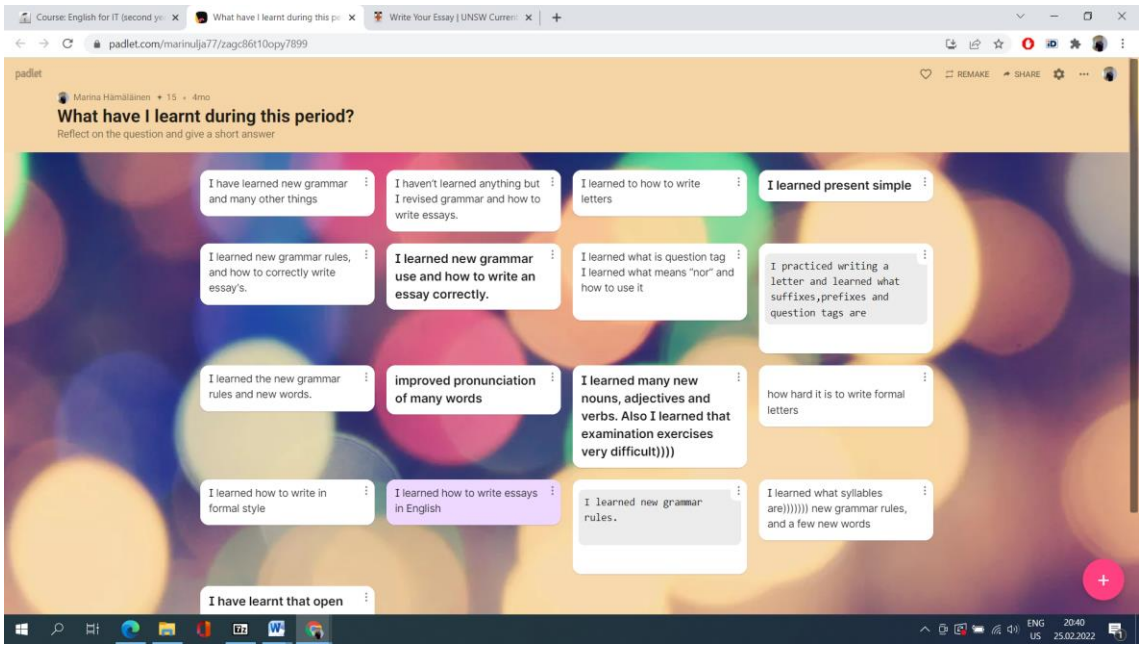


Chart 4. *Assessment Task 3 Monologue and Interview*



The course also provides students the time and place for reflection, since every study block finishes with the question What have I learnt during this period?, the answer to which they can anonymously post on the message board and also see their peers' answers (Chart 5). Reflection on students' own progress enables them to build skills in critical thinking that they can apply when they solve problems and learn on their own. The answers can be various, from "I have learnt new grammar rules" and "I have learnt how to write letters/essays" to "I have learnt that examination exercises are very difficult".

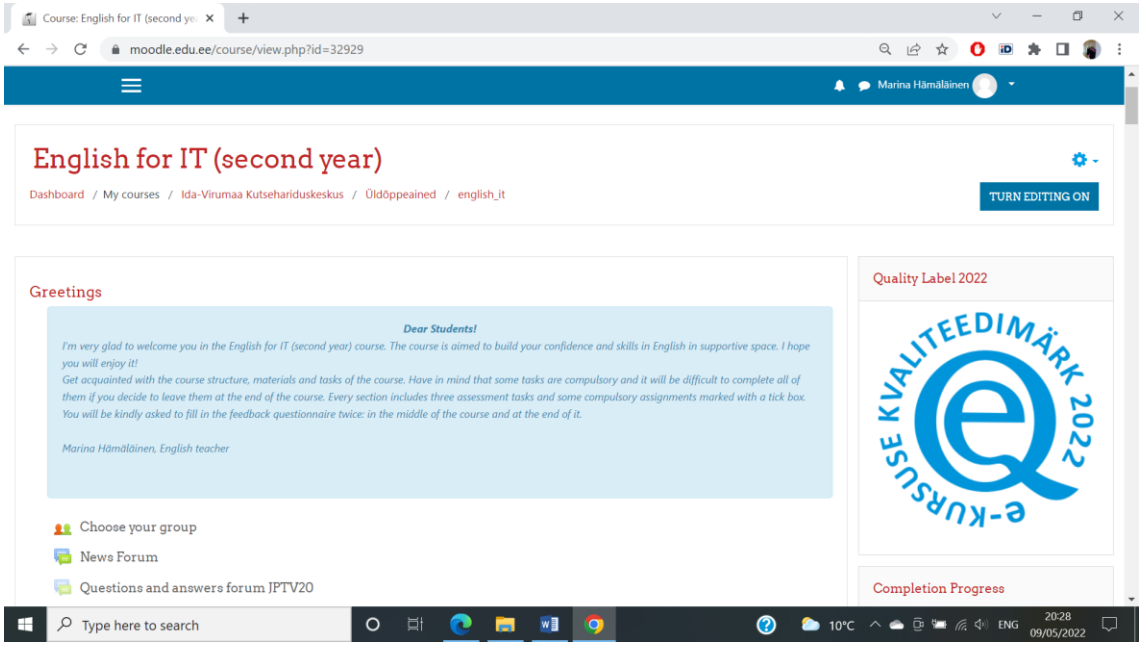
Chart 5. *Reflection Message Board*



In conclusion, the mid-course feedback questionnaire results showed students' positive attitude towards the blended course *English for IT*. The questionnaire was held in the middle of the course to reveal the possible difficulties and imperfections of the course and discover the students' opinion; 19 students anonymously answered 15 questions related to the course structure, material layout, difficulty level of assignments and work organisation. 68% of the students found the course structure easy and comprehensive, 73% of learners considered the course objectives clear and easy-achievable, 63% of the course participants think that the assignments are manifold and course-related and 68% of the students agreed that independent tasks reflected all the aspects of the covered material. Many students mentioned that the majority of the skills acquired during the course can be used in their future studies and admitted that the Moodle course supported

them on their way of preparation for the National Examination. In addition, the quality of the blended course was proved and officially recognised, since in April 2022 the course *English for IT* was awarded with the e-course Quality Label by the Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education and it was presented at the "Best e-course" seminar in Tallinn on May 20th 2022 (Chart 6).

***Chart 6**. E-course Quality Label*



2.5 Workload Analysis within the *English for IT* Course

The distribution of contact and independent learning hours enables students to additionally practice skills and knowledge learnt during the course and provides them with extra hours of independent contribution into knowledge building. Re-designing the course as blended instruction allows expanding attention to content and language beyond face-to-face sessions and prepares substantial amount of independent study time for students. The sufficient quantity of online resources to support the course for preparation for the National Examination in English has made it possible to combine online instruction or independent study with classroom-based delivery, thus having expanded the students' workload within the course (Table 1).

***Table 1.** Distribution of Contact and Independent Learning Hours*

In-class	Hours
Classroom practice	150
Teacher-centered grammar explanation	14
Group work	12

Out of class	Hours
Independent work (assessment tasks)	32
Video lessons	8
Vocabulary practice	8
Grammar practice	14
Tutorials	4

Since the blended course is aimed to improve results in the National Examination, engage students with authentic materials and promote active learning, the activities were adopted to develop competency and examination skills. For example, all the assessment tasks are either written or oral examination-like activities taken from the examination materials website and adjusted to students' needs. Students watch videos in English on content topics and complete pre-class worksheets, as well as study online tutorials to prepare for examination tasks. The active learning approach is followed for in-class sessions with many group work activities for problem solving or interaction supporting tasks. A number of asynchronous online assignments ensue after every topic. The vocabulary covered within every learning outcome is practiced with a number of interactive matching or multiple-choice tasks to ensure vocabulary acquisition. Grammar topics first introduced during in-class sessions and then practiced online with the help of websites which provide students with interactive practice material and online grammar tests with the possibility to check the answers. Analysing students' workload within the blended course, it is possible to deduce that they spend 66 academic hours in their independent engagement with materials and practical tasks, which is 34 academic hours or 16.3% more than those who study in accordance with a traditional face-to-face programme.

Additional workload for independent practice supports the development of students' writing skills and influences the progress in writing skills positively, since the more students practice in writing the better they understand the principles of written tasks organisation, academic writing rules and task completion nuances. The students of the English course practiced in writing tasks from September to March 2021/2022 and the average grades reflect the progress the students have made during the course. The analysis of the average grades has shown the positive progression in essay writing from the average grade of 4.04 in September 2021 to 4.33 in March 2022 and in letters writing from 3.91 in November 2021 to 4.55 in March 2022 (Table 2).

Table 2. *Written Tasks Average Grades*

Date	Essay	Average grade
20.09	Everybody needs good education to make the best of their life	4.04
09.11	If the Internet had never been invented	4.17
12.03	Estonian students must study fifteen subjects in Forms 10–12. Some people think that students should be able to choose only five subjects to concentrate on.	4.33
Date	**Letter**	**Average grade**
10.11	Write an opinion letter to the editor	3.91
14.01	Write a letter of enquiry to the admissions secretary	4.04
04.02	Write a job application letter	4.5
1.03	Write a letter of enquiry	4.55

2.6 The Analysis of the Results of the Trial Examination

To estimate the progress of the students after the *English for IT* course, a quantitative descriptive-comparative method of the study was used. To collect the data the Trial Examination was conducted on April 4th 2022 as a non-random procedure. The location of this study is IVVEC and the target population is the second year students who are taking the National Examination in English on May 3rd 2022. The Trial Examination is aimed to determine the readiness of students in facing the National Examination in English.

The sample group consisted of 21 students. The experimental group consisted of ten learners who had been preparing for the National Examination with the support of the blended course *English for IT* throughout the whole school year (Group 1). The control group did not participate in the blended course (Group 2) and served for comparison with the experimental group. However, the students of both groups were taught reading, speaking, writing and listening skills according to the same syllabus. In conducting this study, the researcher used the tasks of the National Examinations of 2013, 2014, 2017, 2018 and 2021 and combined them in a random order. For the purpose of making the results of the research valid, the structure and conditions of the Trial Examination were similar to those of the National Examination to the maximum. The examination consisted of five listening tasks, six reading tasks and one written task (Table 3). In the circumstances of routine school work according to its time-table with lessons and

breaks, it was complicated to provide appropriate conditions and reconstruct a speaking part of the examination. The rest parts of the examination strictly followed the structure of the National Examination. The participants were informed about how to complete different types of tasks and briefed on the requirements of the examination. To complete all the tasks the testees were given the time of 3 hours and 10 minutes (190 minutes). Their results were then checked based on the marking scale of the National Examination and the parametric analysis of the data was conducted.

Table 3. *Structure of the Trial Examination*

Parts of examination	**Types of tasks**	**Points**	**Time assigned**
Listening	Gap filling task	40 points	40 min
	Matching task		
	Multiple choice task		
	Multiple choice task		
	Gap filling task		
Reading	Multiple choice task	61 points	90 min
	Multiple choice task		
	Matching task		
	Open cloze task		
	Gapped text		
	Word formation task		
Writing	Formal report	16 points	60 min
3 parts	**12 tasks**	**117 points**	**190 min**

To count the degree of readiness of the students for the National Examination in English the maximum points of the Trial Examination was taken as the basis. The formula for calculating the degree of readiness is as follows:

$$x = \frac{number\ of\ points\ x\ 100}{117\ \text{points}}$$

The results received from the participants (e.g., Group 1 and Group 2) were compared to prove (or disprove) the hypothesis (Table 4). To avoid the subjectivity the written works were checked by two teachers.

Table 4. *Results of the Trial Examination*

Group	**Listening (max 40)**	**Reading (max 61)**	**Writing (max 16)**	**Result**
Group 2	27	25	6	50%
	36	22	8	56%

	13	13	6	27%
	11	17	8	31%
	13	16	4	28%
	38	51	16	90%
	22	44	6	62%
	29	32	11	62%
	19	20	14	45%
	24	49	8	69%
	33	32	13	67%
Group 2 average score	**24**	**29**	**9**	**53%**
Group 1	20	27	12	51%
	39	56	15	94%
	40	49	15	89%
	10	17	8	30%
	35	52	16	88%
	10	19	10	33%
	19	27	8	46%
	12	13	8	28%
	25	33	16	63%
	30	45	15	77%
Group 1 average score	**24**	**34**	**12**	**60%**

Listening

The listening part was designed for 40 minutes and could be assessed with maximum 40 points, consisted of five tasks, the first task being listened only once. The minimum result for the listening part is 10 points (Group 1), maximum one is 40 points (Group 1) and the average score is 24 points in both groups. The English study programme for IT specialities in IVVEC includes sufficient listening practice, as well as students can find many listening opportunities and practice their skills by means of many different sources (the Internet, films, videos, video games, songs etc). Thus, the results of the listening parts did not reveal any influence of the blended course on the students' progress.

Reading

The reading part of the Trial Examination consisted of six tasks, and the time assigned for them was 90 minutes with maximum of 61 points. The results of the students vary from 13 points (Groups 1 and 2) to 52 points (Group 1) and the average score in two groups are 34 and 29 points accordingly. The blended course *English for IT* provided students with sufficient additional reading practice in the form of vocabulary tasks,

interactive exercises and home reading assignments, which was supportive and helpful in terms of developing students' reading skills.

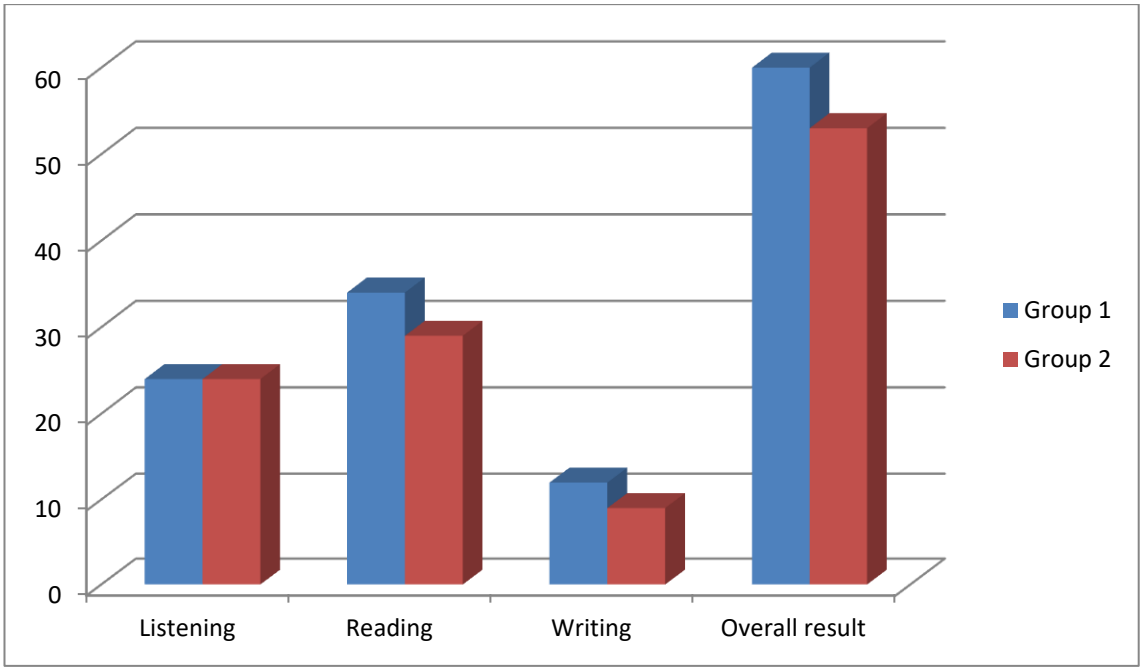
Writing

The written part of the Trial Examination consisted of only one formal report, however, this task is acknowledged by many students as one of the most difficult written assignments. The time allocated for completing the task was 60 minutes and it could bring the students 16 points maximum. The average score for reports is 12 points in Group 1 and 9 points in Group 2. Three students demonstrated excellent command of writing skills and received maximum points for the written task (two students from Group 1 and one student from Group 2). The students' works were assessed according to the marking scale for reports of the National Examination 2017 taking into account four such parameters as task completion, text organisation, vocabulary and grammar. A good report suggests that data discussed appropriately, text is clear and organised with clear focus and correct format, vocabulary is task-specific and accurate, grammatical structures and tenses are used correctly and punctuation is well managed (Haridus- ja Noorteamet 2021). The analysis of the reports showed that 25% of all students misunderstood the task and designed their works as letters (greetings and signing off, no subtitles, letter format etc). However, the percentage of the students who did not organise their reports correctly in different groups is uneven. Only 27% of students from Group 2 knew how to design a report following all the rules of academic writing, while 80% of students from Group 1 designed their works correctly. Since the blended course *English for IT* is specifically designed to provide students with sufficient writing practice, and the majority of assessment tasks are adapted from the National Examination, the students of Group 1 demonstrated better results in writing.

Overall result

The analysis of the results of the Trial Examination revealed that additional practice in reading and writing influences students' performance positively. Although the impact of the blended course on students' listening skills is unstated, the students of Group 1 demonstrated better overall results than the participants of Group 2, 60% and 53% accordingly (Chart 6). If to take the overall result of the control group as 100%, it is possible to conclude that the blended course *English for IT* has improved the examination results of the experimental group by 13%.

Chart 6. *Results of the Trial Examination*



To summarise, the blended learning approach combines the best practices of classroom and online learning allowing teachers to present necessary information from both traditional and digital sources in a range of different ways designed to suit various learning styles and course objectives. A Moodle e-course is a multichannel and flexible teaching tool, which provides students with additional reading and writing practice and allows teachers to trace students' progress. The findings of the study revealed the direct correlation between the well-structured and objective-oriented blended course and the degree of readiness for the National Examination in English. The students who had been preparing for the examination with the support of the Moodle course performed generally better at the Trial Examination than their peers who had been studying traditionally, in reading and writing in particular. A Moodle blended course design can be adjusted to students' needs and peculiarities, teachers' plans and expectations, course learning outcomes and objectives, therefore it is as multifaceted as the teaching process itself.

CONCLUSION

Blended-based instruction has been used in the teaching process for tens of years already, although it only has acquired extreme popularity lately. The most important function of a blended learning course is to enable students to participate in the learning process non-stop in the circumstances where physical presence of teachers or students in the same space is impossible due to different reasons. Blended learning allows students to control their progress and be active participants of the learning process. Educators acknowledge that the blended learning approach has a number of benefits, such as flexibility of methodology, availability for both teachers and students, easier assessment, more efficient communication between teachers and students, critical thinking skills development, learning independence promotion etc. However, along with multiple advantages distant learning has also some thinking points: it is more suitable for adult learners rather than younger students, requires high level of digital competence and equipping and demands certain changes in the educational system. There are many ways of blending in-class and out-of-class learning, however the most favourable balance depends on teachers' pedagogical beliefs, teaching subject, learners' peculiarities, learning circumstances, course objectives and learning outcomes. All the mentioned advantages of a blended learning model makes it an ideal basis for preparing students for the National Examination in English.

Blended learning course design includes such stages as setting learning outcomes and objectives, elaborating a detailed study programme, deciding on the form of blend and interactivity, compiling the list of materials and other recourses, introducing an assessment plan etc. A study programme is a documental basis, which is aimed to divide a course into manageable blocks, provide teachers and students with a clear structure and the direction of a course, guide the selection of materials and estimate students' progress during a course. A study programme includes such important components, as grammatical structures, topics, notions, activities, functions and tasks, and their combination depends on learners' needs. Since blended learning is a mixture of face-to-face and online learning, many various models of blended learning exist depending on variations of online and onsite interaction, sequence of online and in-class sessions or percentage of independent and guided interaction, thus blended learning can be considered as a very flexible and adjustable approach. Blended learning course design is a multi-staged, versatile and time-consuming process demanding thorough preparation. Having all above-mentioned in mind, a blended course can be powerful and

effective assistance for students learning English, providing them with extra practice and extra knowledge, which is especially beneficial when the objective of the course is to prepare for the National examination in English.

The eight-month English course accompanied with the Moodle blended course *English for IT* created with the purpose to research the issue of blended learning and its influence on students' language skills progress has shown that extra practice and knowledge the blended course provides students with create a very favourable basis to develop students' language skills. The experimental group of the students of IVVEC, who participated in the experiment, demonstrated on average 13% higher results in the Trial Examination, hence, a better level of preparation for the National Examination in English than the students from the control group, especially in reading and writing. Alongside with all the advantages of the traditional mode of learning, the blended course creates more habitual digital environment for younger generation, adds some interactivity and bigger possibilities for collaboration. In the context of the preparation for the National Examination in English all these advantages can be of a great value for both teachers and students and provide a lot of options for extensive practice.

In conclusion, the findings of the study have shown that the hypothesis that the time constraints for National Examination preparations in vocational schools can be overcome by developing and implementing a Moodle-based blended learning study programme with proper monitoring of out-of-class independent but well-guided practice, which improves students' readiness for the National Examination, has been proved.

SUMMARY IN ESTONIAN

Tänapäeval on tehnoloogiate kiirenev areng viinud ühiskonna olukorrani, kus töö ja õppimine viidi üle veebi. Pandeemilistest oludest tingitud kaugõppeperiood näitas nii õpetajatele kui ka õppijatele kodus õppimise miinuste kõrval ka mugavusi. Üha enam pedagooge valib veebipõhise ja kohapealõppe meetodite ühendamise, et saavutada mõistlik tasakaal klassisisese ja -välise tegevuse vahel, saavutada õpitulemused parimal võimalikul viisil ning pakkuda kvaliteetset haridust sõltumata õpilaste oskustest ja eripäradest. Hübriidõpe tugineb tehnoloogiale, mida noorem põlvkond eelistab harjumuspärasema ja arusaadavama teabevahetuse viisina. Hübriidõppe lähenemisviisi kõige tähelepanuväärsem omadus on see, et see on tasakaalustatud kombinatsioon vanadest ja uutest õpetamismeetoditest, mida saab erinevalt kombineerida, et vastata eelkõige õpilaste vajadustele ja ootustele. Hübriidõpe võimaldab õpilastel sooritada õppetegevusi neile sobivas tempos ja pääseda juurde õppematerjalidele sõltumata nende asukohast, mis muudab juhendamise tõhusamaks ja õppeprotsessi pingevabamaks. Igal õpetamismeetodil on oma eelised ja puudused, kuid paljud teadlased (Graham, Stein 2014; Sahin 2011; Handyani jt 2020; Khader 2016; Ibrahim, Nat 2019) leiavad endiselt, et hübriidõppe eelised kaaluvad üles veebipõhise õppe väljakutsed ja mured. Tänapäeva haridussüsteem on tunnistajaks hübriidõppe arengu hiiglaslikule hüppele, mis on üks tõhusamaid viise hariduse kvaliteedi tõstmiseks kõrgemale tasemele.

Käesolevas magistritöös “Inglise keele teise keelena õppekava kutsehariduses: hübriidõpe ettevalmistusel inglise keele riiklikuks eksamiks” analüüsitakse veebi- ja kohapealõppe ühendamise viise, selle tõhusust ja väljakutseid eesmärgiga töötada välja õppekava Ida-Virumaa Kutsehariduskeskuse IT ja Multimeedia valdkonna üliõpilastele nii kontakt- kui kaugõppeks, et valmistuda riiklikuks eksamiks. Magistritöö uurib ka erinevaid hübriidõppe mudelite rakendamise viise ning on suunatud Moodle’i e-kursuse näidiskursuse väljatöötamisele, et anda metoodiline alus IT ja Mutlimedia erialadega töötavatele Ida-Virumaa Kutsehariduskeskuses õpetajatele. Magistritöös uuritakse ka hübriidõppe võimalusi, näiteks arvutipõhist õpet koos standardse näost-näkku õppega, et pakkuda tõhusat ja sisukat õppesisu nii õpetajatele kui ka õppijatele.

Magistritöö koosneb järgmistest osadest: sissejuhatus, I peatükk, II peatükk ja kokkuvõte. Sissejuhatus annab ülevaate praegustest teadmistest hübriidõppe valdkonnas ning toob välja selle lähenemisviisi eelised ja puudused. I peatükk “Hübriidõppe rakendamise viisid” on suunatud hübriidõppe rakendamise ja õppeprotsessi

integreerimise viiside ning veebikursuse väljatöötamise põhiprintsiipide uurimisele. II peatükk "Moodle'i hübriidõppekursus IT-erialadele kutsekoolides" uurib spetsiaalselt IT-õpilastele mõeldud ja välja töötatud e-kursuse kasutamise mõju riiklikuks eksamiks valmistumisel Moodle'i õpikeskkonnas. Kokkuvõttes esitatakse uuringu tulemused ja kommentaarid uuringu hüpoteesi.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Study programme for IT specialities of Ida-Viru Vocational Centre

Teacher: Marina Hämäläinen

Course description: This course is for the students of IT specialities of Ida-Viru Vocational Centre and is suitable for the students who wish to prepare for the National Examination in English. The lessons cover both examination skills and techniques and work on improving all aspects of the students' English: speaking, listening, reading, writing, grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary.

Course requirements: *English for IT (first year)* completed course

Course objectives:

- To help students achieve a good result in the National examination;
- To train students in the skills and techniques they will need to perform well in the different parts of the exam;
- To help students improve the level of their English through a combination of language input and practice activities in the four skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing;
- To increase students' understanding of other cultures;
- To help students develop their study skills that will equip them for lifelong learning.

Assessment criteria: Students have to complete three assessment tasks per each learning outcome with the result of more than 50% of achieved skills. Students are assessed in 5-point assessment scale.

grades	**percent**	**rating**	**definition**
5	90-100%	excellent	Extremely effective performance
4	75-89%	good	More than adequate for effective performance
3	50-74%	satisfactory	Adequate for effective performance

2	1-49%	unacceptable	Insufficient performance

Course volume: 8 ECTS (176 hours + 32 hours of independent work)

Learning outcomes:

1. Students use foreign language learning strategies and information sources to develop language skills, associate foreign language learning with lifelong learning
2. Students are aware of the impact of technology on human life
3. Students are aware and able to prevent the dangers of social media
4. Students are aware of the international opportunities for further training and vacancies in the labor market; prepares application documents necessary for employment
5. Students are able to participate in an international project or international professional competition or use English in an internship in an international work environment
6. Students are able to develop a foreign language in order to further develop independently acquired language skills in order to remain competitive both in learning and in the labor market
7. Students read literature in English , watch movies and TV shows and listen to radio programs

Unit/ volume	**Learning outcomes**	**Topics**	**Content**	**Vocabulary**	**Exam practice**	**Grammar**
Units 1-3 28h/ 5h of independent work **Weeks 1-5**	**LO 8:** Students use foreign language learning strategies and information sources to develop foreign language skills, associates foreign language learning with	Education and society	**Required:** AT1: essay Everybody need a good education to make the best of their life AT2: letter to the university manager AT3: monologue and interview **Optional:** Appearance	Appearance Education Phrasal verbs Word formation Affixes	Multiple choice Open cloze Word formation Key word transformation	Present Simple Present Continuous Past Simple Past Continuous Articles Question tags

	lifelong learning		quiz, Phrasal verbs quiz, Word formation homework			
Units 4-5 24h/ 4h of independent work **Weeks 6-10**	**LO 9:** Students are aware of the impact of technology on human life	Man-triggered disasters, stress, COVID-19 pandemic Entertainment The environment and technologies	**Required:** AT1: essay If the Internet had never been invented AT2: project Invention AT3: write a letter to the editor **Optional:** Idioms quiz, environmental phenomena quiz	Environment	Multiple choice Open cloze Word formation Key word transformation	Used to/would Degrees of comparison Future tenses
Unit 8 22h/ 4h of independent work **Weeks 10-14**	**LO 10:** Students are aware and able to prevent the dangers of social media	Crime and punishment TV	**Required:** AT1: pictures description AT2: write a letter to the editor AT3: report **Optional:** Crime and punishment quiz, crime vocabulary, who is the murderer?	Crime	Multiple choice Open cloze Word formation Key word transformation	Be/get used to Past Perfect Past Perfect Continuous Past Simple
Units 11, 15 24h/ 4h of independent work **Weeks 14-18**	**LO 11:** Students are aware of the international opportunities for further training and vacancies in the labour market; prepares	Work and job satisfaction Travel and ecotravel	**Required:** AT1: monologue and interview AT2: write an application letter AT3: report **Optional:** work and jobs quiz,	Work Travel Idioms	Multiple choice Open cloze Word formation Key word transformation	Relative clause Modals

	application documents necessary for employment		idioms connected with travel			
Units 10, 12, 13 26h/ 5h of independent work **Weeks 19-23**	**LO 12:** Students are able to participate in an international project or international professional competition or use English in an internship in an international work environment	Nature Changing values globalisation	**Required:** AT1: write a letter AT2: essay AT3: My dream job project **Optional:** verbs and adjectives with prepositions, noun+noun expressions	Animals Collective nouns Slang	Multiple choice Open cloze Word formation Key word transformation	Gerund and infinitive Conditionals Future in the past The passive
Units 6-7 24h/ 4h of independent work **Weeks 23-27**	**LO 13:** Students are able to develop a foreign language in order to further develop independently acquired language skills in order to remain competitive both in learning and in the labor market	Status and sport	**Required:** AT1: monologue and interview AT2: report AT3: write a letter of enquiery **Optional:** sport vocabulary	Clothes Sport	Multiple choice Open cloze Word formation Key word transformation	Conditionals Modals
Units 14, 16, 9 28h/ 6h of independent work **Weeks**	**LO 14:** Students read English literature and print	Food Family and friends Health and happiness	**Required:** AT1: new report AT2: review of a short story	Food Family and friends Health	Multiple choice Open cloze Word formation Key word	Modals Reported speech Causative

27-32	media, creates coherent and logical text on various topics, communicates spontaneously and fluently with a native English speaker		AT3: review of a film **Optional:** exam papers		transformation	

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