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List of abbreviations

ECTS	<i>European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System</i>
EHEA	<i>European Higher Education Area</i>
EQF LLL	<i>European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning</i>
ESP	<i>English for Specific Purposes</i>
ESU	<i>European Students' Union</i>
EU	<i>European Union</i>
SDL	<i>Self-directed learning</i>

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1.Introduction

In addition to a mandate to foster student centered learning environments and more flexible academic paths for learners, contemporary educational systems in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) also call for an increase in the use of technology or technology-enhanced learning. This phenomenon can be attributed to the Bologna Process, which calls upon national and institutional stakeholders to better exploit “the potential benefits of digital technologies” (European Commission 2018: 74). According to the latter author, new technologies provide a “user experience”, which has “the capacity to deepen and accelerate learning” (European Commission 2018:74). Moreover, digital technologies may potentially “broaden access to higher education and lifelong learning” and make participation in education more flexible both in time and space (European Commission 2018: 74).

Yet, not only does information technology appear to play a role in the delivery of higher education provision, it can also be seen as a means to empowering learners “who are seeking greater autonomy and self regulation in their education” (Morales et al 2016: 1734). According to the latter authors, technology plays a highly significant role in “inducing the development and transmission of knowledge”, as well as contributing to the “emergence of new assessment tools that promote a blended learning style” (Morales et al 2016: 1734).

The electronic portfolio, henceforth ePortfolio, has been widely acknowledged as a flexible digital tool, which encourages students “to take ownership of their learning” and helps them to develop “reflective and critical thinking skills” (Morales et al 2016: 1735). Moreover, ePortfolio-mediated learning offers the potential to promote self-regulated learning as students “take an active role in the knowledge-generating process”, and may foster capabilities, such as “autonomy, self-management and creativity” (Morales et al 2016: 1735). EPortfolios also promote “the development of digital and collaborative competences, such as peer feedback” (Contreras-Higuera et al 2016: 86).

However, although the literature abounds with studies citing the beneficial potential of ePortfolios in teaching and learning, research has also been criticised for being “too unreflectively positive” (Wang 2017: 1453). Moreover, the reported benefits of ePortfolios are also not “without controversy” (Contreras-Higuera et al 2016: 86). For instance, the educational reality may present less than ideal conditions for realising the potential of ePortfolios (Yang et al 2016: 1278). In fact, as emphasised by the latter authors, “the

pedagogic affordances“ of ePortfolios and challenges encountered by students when implementing ePortfolios are “context-specific“ (2016: 1278). Yet, information on this very context is what teachers and institutions need “to formulate strategies that fully support students’ productive learning“ (Yang et al 2016: 1278).

Particularly for course designers and teachers, solid evidence identifying insufficient or missing course design practice is considered key to determining, implementing and testing new alternatives. In addition, in line with a student-centred learning philosophy, educational institutions need to listen to learners’ voices and incorporate their needs and feedback in the curriculum design or course re-development process. In other words, the latter process constitutes an evidence-based approach, which entails not only listening to learners’ assumptions and beliefs, but also systematically analysing the perceived limitations and challenges which may be encountered during the language learning experience (Aydin 2010: 195). Yet, even though the ePortfolio construct has become the focus of increased interest in recent years, systematic analyses of perceived challenges and limitations experienced during the language learning experience are scarce (Aydin 2010: 195). In fact, English-language literature investigating ePortfolio-mediated foreign language learning in a European Higher Education Area context is notably scarce. Thus, the current thesis aims to address this gap by reporting on the ePortfolio experience of part-time and full-time students’ in an Austrian higher education context.

The central aim of the current study is twofold: First it aims to investigate whether there are differing perceptions among part-time and full-time students relating to the effect of the design and the implementation of an ePortfolio for grammar learning on motivation and achievement of intended learning outcomes. Second, it seeks to listen to learners’ voices relating to perceived needs for improvement in the ePortfolio design and ePortfolio implementation to inform the institutional course re-development process. For this purpose a post-course evaluation will be conducted by means of a purpose-designed questionnaire survey. The sample consists of 450 management students attending an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) module at an Austrian university for applied sciences.

This diploma thesis is structured as follows: The literature review addresses three key areas of a Bologna-driven higher education landscape: student-centered learning, blended learning, and the use of ePortfolio to satisfy Bologna prerogatives for increasing the use of technology. First, the section on student-centered learning in higher education investigates the theory

underpinning student-centered learning and the paradigmatic role envisaged for the students in such an environment, before going on to discuss the drivers of educational outcomes and the steps necessary to place students at the centre of curricular design. Second, in section 2, taking the historical origins of blended learning as a point of departure, the literature survey seeks to deconstruct the components of blended learning, as well as establish clarity on the nature of what exactly can be blended. Moreover, this section also explores factors influencing the design and scheduling of blended learning courses, before concluding with lessons to be learned from empirical studies on blended learning in a foreign language- learning context. Third, the section on ePortfolio use in higher education seeks to investigate the defining features of an ePortfolio. This is followed by a focus on ePortfolios as a learning and assessment tool. The final subsection then turns to recent empirical studies to explore which variables influence ePortfolio implementation.

The methods chapter focuses on the study context, as well as the design, implementation and evaluation methods related to the ePortfolio-mediated grammar-learning component. The evaluation section first focuses on the rationale for the research and the research questions formulated, before going on to outline the study participants, the research approach, and describe the data collection procedure and rationale for the research instrument used for the study. Moreover, it discusses the methods employed to collect data, to design the questionnaire survey, to administer the questionnaire, and to analyse the survey data.

The results chapter first presents the descriptive results derived from the quantitative items of the questionnaire survey. Second, following a qualitatively driven thematic analysis of the same instrument, the ePortfolio design and implementation themes where students perceive room for improvement will be outlined. Before drawing final conclusions, the theoretical and practical implications of the results will be discussed and the limitations of the current study outlined.

2. Student-centered learning in higher education

As already outlined in the introduction to this thesis, it is clear that an adherence to the core elements of the Bologna process on both a European and national level will shape, inform and impact course design and procedures on an institutional level. In the following sections, the literature will be reviewed with a view to gaining theoretical insights into the following drivers of European tertiary education: student-centered learning, blended learning and ePortfolio use as a means to satisfy Bologna prerogatives for systematic application of technology across all educational cycles.

Principles underlying the Bologna process advocate a teaching and learning culture that is “student-centred” and “supported by transparent descriptions of learning outcomes and workload” (Yerevan 2015:2). Yet, although student-centered learning (SCL) is a commonly used term in higher education, how it is interpreted for teaching practice is “notoriously vague” (Todorovski et al 2015: 5). Following two Europe-wide projects led by the European Students’ Union (ESU), Attard et al (2010: 5) put forward a workable definition of SCL. First of all, SCL is viewed as a learning approach which is “broadly related to, and supported by, constructivist theories of learning”. They explain a constructivist view of learning as one which sees students as having responsibility for and being “active participants” in their own learning (2010: 5). Moreover, the same definition also explains what students should be learning. For instance, in contrast to traditional forms of education, where the acquisition of domain specific knowledge is at the heart of the learning experience, an SCL approach also involves “fostering transferable skills such as problem-solving, critical thinking and reflective thinking” (Attard et al 2010: 5). The above definition suggests that student-centred learning must be viewed in terms of specific and generic outcomes and a transparent calculation of the workload that is necessary for students to achieve such outcomes or output.

Moreover, besides being a pedagogical approach that focuses on designing courses which place the output of students at the centre of the learning experience, SCL also acknowledges that learning takes place “in communication with teachers” (Attard et al 2005: 5). In fact, teaching is seen as an “interaction between teacher and student.” Or, in other words, teaching is no longer viewed as a unidirectional paradigm, but is emphasised as a two-way process that recognises students as “co-producers of knowledge” and equally valid contributors to “the academic community curricula design with respect to learning outcomes” (Todorovski et al

2015: 4). Alternatively put, in an SCL environment “it is less about what the instructors know, but more about what the student brings to educational encounter” (Gunderman et al 2003:15). This sentiment is echoed by Andrews et al (2011:394), who argue that active learning can only take place when the instructor “stops lecturing” and the students “work on a question or task designed to help them understand a concept.” Moreover, in contrast to the more traditional content based approach, where students may assume a more passive role, active learning is also seen to have a positive impact on students’ achievement and motivation (Abeysekera et al 2015; Richardson et al 2012). A final point for course designers to consider when seeking to foster an SCL environment relates to the role to be assumed by the teacher. In such a setting, the teacher is no longer the instructor, who structures and adjusts learning activities according to individual or group needs, but a facilitator, who helps students to assume active responsibility for their own learning (Marsh 2012: 9). In summary, as suggested by Guerrero- Roldán & Noguera (2018: 36), “the teaching approach at European universities, has evolved from a teacher-centered approach, in which teachers define courses – involving teaching objectives – towards a student-centered approach focused on students’ learning outcomes.” Further concepts central to the SCL environment as prescribed by contemporary educational systems will be addressed in the following sections.

2.1. The quest for self-directed learners

Institutional commitment to a student-centred, competency-based environment entails a shift away from teacher-directed input towards learner autonomy and independent learning. In fact, as highlighted in Todorovski et al (2015:1), such a paradigm sees the students themselves in the “driving seat of their learning experience.” The latter authors explain that this involves students having a clear say in where their educational journey is going, by “ensuring their voices are heard in the decision-making and feedback mechanisms” (2015: 1). In other words, an SCL philosophy seems to envisage a showcase student, who is a “responsible” and “active” participant in “assuming more control and responsibility over the educational experience. Giving students more control over the learning process works to their advantage as more control is associated with a stronger sense of learner autonomy, which in turn fosters students’ intrinsic motivation for learning (Beckers et al 2018: 261). In summary, the conceptual literature suggests that an SCL setting is characterised by learners, who

working alongside educational providers, assume increased responsibility and accountability for achieving the learning outcomes that they have co-constructed.

Such a view of the ideal learner is by no means a recent one. In fact, the literature features a wide variety of denotational terms which connote a belief or paradigm of a community of learners willing and able to take on responsibility for their own learning experience, e.g. 'self-directed learning', 'autonomous learning', 'lifelong learning', 'self-regulated learning', 'learning motivation', 'self-efficacy', etc. For instance, as early as 1981, Holec coined the term "learner autonomy", which he defined as "the ability to take charge of one's own learning" (Holec 1981:3). According to the latter scholar, such ability also entails taking "the responsibility for all the decisions concerning all aspects of this learning" (1981:3). Yet for Holec, this ability is "not inborn". Rather it "must be acquired either by 'natural' means or (as most happens) by formal learning, i.e. in a systematic, deliberate way." In other words, what the pioneering Knowles described as "self-directedness" (1975:18), or what Holec refers to as 'autonomy' cannot just be viewed as a static learner attribute, but also as a dynamic process, which can be acquired in steps (Merriam & Bierema 2014:63). In their revised PPC (Person, Process, Context) model, which had been initially criticised for not considering the contextual dimension of self-directed learning (SDL), Hiemstra & Brockett (2012: 159), posit that "self-directed learning [is] most effective when the person, process and context are in balance." Thus, according to the latter authors, SDL comprises three elements: "an individual predisposition towards this type of learning, and comfort with autonomy in the learning process", a "teaching-learning process set up in such a way that encourages learners to take control of their own learning", and a "sociopolitical context and learning environment [which] support the climate for self-directed learning" (Brockett & Hiemstra 2012: 158). Yet, interestingly, the latter authors also emphasise that although self-directed learning entails a "dynamic interrelationship" of all three elements (which are seen to be of equal importance), in some situations one may play a more predominant role (Hiemstra & Brockett 2012: 158).

The view of self-directed learning as a dynamic process is strongly influenced by Knowle's (1975: 18) definition of SDL, which sees the latter as "a process in which individuals take the initiative, *with or without the help of others*, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes" [my emphasis]. Thus, Knowle's understanding of SDL suggests that becoming an autonomous

learner is a systematic process, which may often require external assistance. In other words, in addition to helping students acquire domain-specific knowledge, educators may need to support and guide students in acquiring SDL skills (Beckers et al 2018: 261).

Yet supporting students to acquire SDL skills also necessitates an understanding that students' willingness to engage in SDL may be influenced by a dynamic interplay of a number of variables that cannot always be controlled by the teacher. SDL is clearly a complex construct. For instance, besides being influenced by teacher-related variables, e.g. the role of the learning facilitator, the facilitation process, the teacher-student relationship, students' readiness for SDL may also be influenced by dimensions, such as student's readiness to learn, their willingness to take responsibility and the degree of motivation within students (Huang 2014: 257), or the educational culture in which the students have been socialised (Wang & Cranton 2014: 1013). In summary, the role an SDL educational philosophy envisages for students and teachers may pose a challenge not only for the learner who is used to a more teacher-directed environment, but also for the teacher who is not used to relinquishing control.

2.2. The drivers of educational outcomes

Having established in the previous section that students' learning outcomes constitute a core premise of a student-centered teaching approach, adherence to such an approach suggests that courses delivered to students will need to use the learning outcomes or competences that students are supposed to acquire as the point of departure for all course planning. Yet, despite being currently 'en vogue', an educational philosophy which propagates an outcome orientation is also seen to have several disadvantages. For instance, as critically observed by Richards & Burns (2012: 161f), this phenomenon is seen to be the result of "the twin doctrines of corporatist management and public accountability." In other words, the very learning outcomes formulated in higher education curricula are described to match the employability criteria propagated by business and industry. Moreover, higher education practice is guided by pressure to meet top-down EU or national economic imperatives, which endorse what business and industry dictate as the necessary knowledge, skills and competences for the university graduates of today and tomorrow (Brindley 1998:45).

Such a philosophy has several implications for educational practice. For instance, it may negatively impact student, teacher, and institutional autonomy to choose what constitutes learning. Moreover, the pressure on educators to transparently measure achievement of

learning outcomes may result in ‘teaching to the test’ and does not allow for adaptive teaching according to individual learner interests. In fact, as succinctly summarised by Wächter & Maiworm (2008), the main criticism of outcomes-based education is how the value of education is measured in terms of its national economic value, and how it has become a commodity subject to the laws of supply and demand (Wächter & Maiworm 2008: 15).

Regardless of the disadvantages outlined above, it appears that higher education institutions committed to implementing Bologna Processes have no choice but to endorse a view of education that has become “increasingly driven by considerations of economic accountability” (Brindley 1998:45). As a consequence, it seems logical that the top priority of higher education institutions must be to equip their students with the changing and dynamic nature of the specific knowledge and skills deemed appropriate for what they are studying, or for future employability (Barman & Konwar 2001:12). In terms of institutional operationalisation, this means that higher education institutions are tasked with formulating learning outcomes for modules and sub-modules which match employability criteria. In other words, such learning outcomes may be seen as a transparently comparable commodity, which enable future employers to determine the knowledge and skills of learners seeking access to the labour market. Moreover, tertiary education providers need to measure the achievement of such learning outcomes in a transparent and ‘accountable’ manner, which satisfies public scrutiny of the service it should be affording to the economy at large. In light of this economically driven educational landscape, the following section addresses the steps involved in designing curricula for an outcomes-based or competence-based educational programme.

2.3. Learning outcomes and competences

The first step to placing the student at the centre of the curricular design involves establishing the competences that students will acquire through the learning activities (Guerrero- Roldán & Noguera (2018: 37). This involves describing the competence, defining a means for measuring or assessing the competence, and a standard to judge competences (Barmann & Konwar 2011:12).

Yet, before embarking on the formulation of learning outcomes or competences, a clear conceptual understanding of the concepts of “learning outcomes”, “knowledge”, “skill” and “competence” seems necessary. This is particularly relevant for institutions striving to make their qualifications more understandable and comparable across different countries and

educational systems. In other words, institutions need to address the call of education ministers across the European Union (EU) to “link study credits with both learning outcomes and student workload and to include the attainment of learning outcomes in assessment procedures” (EU 2015: 7). The achievement of learning outcomes allows students to accumulate credit points, which can be easily compared to those of other students studying in systems that have also adopted the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS). The latter system is a tool of the European Higher Education Area for “making studies and courses more transparent”, and is viewed as an instrument which helps “to enhance the quality of higher education” (EU 2015: 6). Yet, not only does an ECTS system supposedly increase the quality of higher education, it also supports a student-centered learning approach as using credits makes it “easier [for students] to create and document flexible learning pathways”, thereby allowing them “greater autonomy and responsibility” in the educational process (EU 2015: 14).

Although the EU (2015: 22) acknowledges that the terms ‘learning outcomes’ and ‘competence’ are used with “different shades of meaning” and in somewhat “different frames of reference” across the EHEA, for the purpose of this thesis the terminology proposed by the EU and the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF LLL) will be adopted. The latter framework, agreed upon by the 39 countries participating in its implementation, presents descriptors outlining “the typical expectations of achievements and abilities” which are associated with qualifications that represent the end of the three-cycle system (bachelor, master, doctoral studies) (Cedefop 2018: 17).

Drawing on the 2008 recommendation document of the European Parliament and of the Council on the establishment of the (EQF LLL), the EU (2015) suggests the following definitions: “Competence” is defined as “the proven ability to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and/or methodological abilities, in work or study situations and in professional and personal development.” Moreover, competences can be “generic” or “subject-specific”. In other words, while the latter competences are competences related to a specific field of study, the former competences may be common to any degree course (EU 2015: 67). For instance, as explained by Guerrero- Roldán & Noguera (2018: 37), “the ability to communicate in a second language” or “the ability to plan and manage time” may be viewed as generic competences as many bachelor’s degrees will have these in common. The same authors explain that specific competences are “unique to each field” or “specific at course level” (2018: 37). For instance

in a mathematics class, one such specific competence could be “the ability to comprehend problems and abstract their essentials” (Guerrero- Roldán & Noguera 2018: 37).

According to the above definition, using knowledge, skills and abilities is a prerequisite for proving competence. Knowledge can be “theoretical and/or factual” (Cedefop 2018: 17). Moreover, skills are described either as “cognitive”, which involves the use of “logical, intuitive and creative thinking”, and “practical”, which entails “manual dexterity and the use of methods, materials, tools and instruments” (2018: 17). Moreover, the third component of competence refers to the ability of learners “to apply knowledge and skills autonomously and with responsibility” (2018: 17). This interpretation indicates that competence comprises a performance, which entails combining theoretical or factual knowledge with logical or hands-on skills in a manner that is self-directed and responsible according to the criteria established by third party academic or professional stakeholders.

Thus, it could be argued that from an educator’s perspective, fostering and assessing competences is the holy grail of the learning process and of an educational programme, while from a learner’s view, competence entails how one behaves and acts to put one’s knowledge, skills and abilities to use to satisfy the assessment criteria deemed relevant by educational or professional stakeholders. Moreover, as assessment criteria should reflect the achievement of the learning outcomes that supposedly match employability criteria, then, as very appropriately suggested by Barman & Konwar (2011: 9), competence can be viewed as “the capacity to accomplish ‘up to a standard’ the key occupational tasks that characterise a profession”.

Nonetheless, while competence seems to express a bundle of knowledge, skills and abilities to be demonstrated in any context, the use of the term ‘learning outcome’ seems to be semantically embedded within an educational context. For example, the EU (2015: 22) defines the latter construct as “the level of competence attained by the *student* and verified by *assessment* [my emphasis].” Moreover, learning outcomes are “statements of what a learner knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process, which are defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competence” (EU 2015: 22). In summary, possessing competence and/or ability will not suffice to successfully complete an educational cycle. On the contrary, it will be contingent on, or “proven” by “functional performance” (Strivens et al n.d. :5). This means that learning activities need to prepare students for the performance situation in which the assessment takes place. Moreover assessment must be designed in such

a way that allows the individual to ‘perform’ his or her knowledge, skills and competences to successfully achieve high level outcomes.

Establishing a clearer understanding of the sub-constructs of learning outcomes is key to student centered learning. This is because the course then needs to be organised in terms of the learning outcomes to be acquired by students as opposed to the content to be provided by teachers (Guerrero- Roldán & Noguera 2018: 37). In other words, when scheduling a course, or planning learning activities and assessment, everything the teacher does needs to be done with a view to helping students to achieve the learning outcomes. The term “Constructive Alignment”, was coined by Biggs & Tang (2007: 52) to encapsulate the two guiding tenets of learning and teaching: First, relevant teaching and learning activities support the learner in building or constructing his or her own knowledge (Biggs & Tang 2011: 95). Second teaching and learning activities are linked, or aligned, with the learning outcomes and assessment tasks (Biggs & Tang 2011: 95). Thus, as emphasised by Biggs, in a constructively aligned system all components of the teaching system, i.e. “intended learning outcomes, teaching and learning activities, assessment tasks and their grading support each other”, thereby “envelop[ing] the learner within a supportive learning system” (Biggs & Tang 2011: 109).

Although it has been revised, adapted and redefined by many scholars since its inception in 1956, the groundbreaking taxonomy created by Benjamin Bloom and his team of researchers is one of the most widely used models to link or align learning activities to intended learning outcomes (Guerrero- Roldán & Noguera 2018: 38). Rather than just teaching students to engage in rote learning and remember facts, Bloom et al’s (1956) teaching approach sought to promote higher-order thinking (HOTS) in education, such as analysing and evaluating. While the taxonomy’s levels include lower-order thinking skills (LOTS), e.g. understanding or recalling facts, HOTS require more complex and critical cognitive processes to analyse, synthesise and evaluate knowledge and skills, as well as apply these in new contexts. On a more practical note, Bloom’s taxonomy provides a useful framework of verbs that represent the different levels of learning that can help course designers formulate learning outcomes. In fact, the presence of these verbs in the learning outcome already indicates whether lower or higher order thinking is being aspired to. This in turn guides teaching and learning activities and materials as well as their mode of delivery. Moreover, these verbs can also be featured in the assessment phase, and help course designers to create assessment rubrics, which rather

than testing students' ability to reproduce any given content, enable students to demonstrate mastery of the outcomes specified (Guerrero- Roldán & Noguera 2018: 37).

While Bloom's taxonomy classifies thinking according to cognitive levels of complexity, Biggs & Collis (1982) *Structure of Observed Learning Outcomes* (SOLO) taxonomy accounts for the increasing structural complexity of learning outcomes as students move from surface to deep learning. As explained by Biggs & Tang (2011: 90), the SOLO classification incorporates the two key tenets of curricular aims, which are a) to increase students' knowledge and b) to deepen their understanding. According to this taxonomy, "pre-structural", "uni-structural", and "multistructural" are learning outcomes that aim to increase knowledge, while those outcomes that address higher level, more complex aspects of understanding are categorised as "relational" and "extended abstract" (Biggs & Tang 2011: 90). While the former aim is explained as a "quantitative" increase in knowledge as students' knowledge moves from "pre-structural", to "unistructural becoming increasingly multistructural", deeper or "qualitative" understanding occurs when the quantitative detail becomes "integrated into a structural pattern", and students can conceptually integrate components as part of a "coherent whole", or extend this coherent whole to "new and broader domains" (Biggs & Tang 2011: 89).

Although the five levels of the SOLO taxonomy categorise changing levels of student understanding, Biggs & Tang (2011: 90) emphasise that these levels cannot be viewed as mutually exclusive. On the contrary, they are viewed as a hierarchy, "where each partial construction becomes the foundation on which further learning is built" (Biggs & Tang 2011: 90). Thus, in contrast to Bloom's taxonomy, the SOLO model not only helps educators to define the cognitive operations to help their learners build upon systematically to move from quantitative to qualitative understanding, but can also be used as an assessment tool to evaluate whether students have not only increased their knowledge, but also deepened it.

3. Blended foreign language learning in higher education

Not only have higher education institutions in the EHEA committed to adopting an outcomes-based educational philosophy, but they have also pledged to making course delivery more flexible. With regard to the latter phenomenon, the term ‘blended learning’ is becoming an increasingly frequent feature in academic discourses across the European Higher Education Area. In fact, recent figures published in the recent Bologna Process Implementation Report (EC 2018) clearly attest to national commitment within the EHEA towards increasing the provision of blended learning on an institutional level. Yet, as emphasised by Goeman & Ubachs (2018), data presenting an accurate picture of the state of play relating to the adoption and delivery of blended teaching and learning are still to emerge. In fact, as the latter authors critically observe, one of the main factors contributing to insufficient systematic monitoring of the blended learning phenomenon is a lack of consensus on how it is interpreted, adopted and delivered (Goeman & Ubachs 2018: 305).

The lack of clarity on the concept of blended learning, which may lead to distorted figures on its implementation, is by no means of a recent nature. In fact, for the last fifteen years a number of scholars have been drawing attention to the fact that blended learning is difficult to define and no uniform definition exists (Oliver & Trigwell 2005; MacDonald 2006; Sharma & Barrett 2007). A lack of direction as to what is being blended, how blending can be implemented and the purpose for blending may present a serious challenge for institutional stakeholders charged with designing a blended course. This latter phenomenon is particularly true for teachers unfamiliar with theoretical preparation and practical experience, which as Huang & Zhou (2005: 299) claim, applies to the majority of teachers in higher education.

A multitude of different labels have emerged in recent decades to describe the ever-increasing manifestation of the integration and use of digital learning in educational settings. For instance, such denotations range from “hybrid or mixed learning” (Stracke, 2007:57), to “e-learning” (Shepard 2005), or “flipped teaching and learning” (Bergman & Sams 2012; Khan 2011).

Yet, besides determining how to label its chosen ‘blended learning’ practice, its sustainable integration and delivery entails require “a thorough course and curriculum redesign”, as well as “multiple institutional reforms in terms of staff support, workload and training, leadership or policy development and strategies oriented as continuous improvement” (Gregory & Lodge

2015; Lim & Morris 2009, quoted in Goeman & Ubach 2018: 305). Moreover, as the latter scholars observe, it is important for curriculum developers or course designers to seek guidance from a “sound, validated set of guidelines for educational design”, which can be subsequently “adapted to their organisation” (Goeman & Ubach 2018: 306). In summary, it is of paramount importance that faculty responsible for the strategic adoption of blended learning establish a clearer understanding of this construct before implementing it across the study programmes in their own context.

Despite the apparent widespread use of ‘blended learning’ in higher education settings and the fact that the literature provides a wide variety of definitions for blended learning, most research does not examine the underlying constructs of the components being blended. Thus in the current chapter the literature will first be reviewed with a view to establishing a conceptual understanding of what is encapsulated by the term ‘blended’ and the terminology associated with the blended learning delivery. Second, models or classifications to inform an institutional design and implementation of a blended learning course will be investigated.

3.1. The origins of blended learning

The origins of blended learning are closely linked to the development of systems which enable learning without having to be physically present at an educational institution. In other words, a system is designed with the aim of literally and figuratively bridging the distance between teaching and learning. As pointed out by Alan Tait (2003:1), Professor of Distance Education and Development at the Open University, UK, although the technology and terminology describing this phenomenon have changed throughout the years, the core aspect of what was initiated as a correspondence course by Sir Isaac Pitman in England in 1844 has remained constant. The latter author highlights the fact that despite the physical separation of teacher and student, Pitman’s innovative correspondence course enabled the provision of three components: distribution of learning materials or direct teaching to students, providing feedback in a timely way on work undertaken by learners, and helping the learner and the institution to assess their understanding (Tait 2003:1). In other words, Pitman’s correspondence course enabled teaching, learning and assessment to bridge a physical distance. Tait concludes that although alternative labels to ‘correspondence course’ have emerged in the literature over time—ranging from “distance education” to “open and

distance learning“, or “flexible, web-based and e-learning“ — such terms continue to encapsulate the core premises of Pitman’s ideas relating to education provision (Tait 2003:1).

According to Tait (2003:1), such developments in technology and the latter’s role as a facilitator of the three components of teaching, learning and assessment are also of key importance. He (2003:1) emphasises that while the correspondence courses of the mid 1800s were facilitated by the developments of railway transport and uniform postage rates across nations, developments in personal computing in the 1980s, or the advent of the worldwide web in the 1990s replaced these as the key drivers of development of new models of teaching, learning and assessment (Bryan & Volchenkova 2016: 24).

Yet, what was traditionally known as the correspondence course has evolved even further in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In other words, teaching, learning and assessment delivery does not only take place by means of a correspondence or distance course, but may constitute a combination of distance learning and traditional classroom instruction. The complexity of such blends or combinations was first theoretically investigated in Bonk & Graham’s (2006) seminal work, *The Handbook of Blended Learning: Global Perspective, Local Designs*. In fact, several theoretical models since developed by these authors have established an academically sound framework for investigating the advantages of combining the distance context outlined above and the physical classroom. In the foreword of the latter publication, Moore (2006: xxiv) refers to an emerging view of blended learning as “a mutually respectful relationship between teaching at a distance and teaching in the classroom, where “each can do its proper work“ (Graham 2006: xxiv).

Yet, as also acknowledged by Moore (Bonk & Graham 2006: xxiv), this view is by no means a recent one. He claims that this phenomenon would appear to have its origins as far back as the 1920s, where it was implemented as “supervised correspondence study“ by an innovative high school principal in the US state of Michigan (2006: xxiv). Moore also states that already by the 1930s, acceptance and adoption of this model was evidenced by it being used by more than 100 public schools across the nation and it being the subject of a national conference held in Cleveland, Ohio in 1932 (Bonk & Graham 2006: xxiv).

In Europe, as Moore explains, an understanding that forms of teaching can also take place outside the traditional delivery medium of the classroom is encapsulated by the rapid

proliferation of the United Kingdom's Open University (OU) distance teaching model since its inception in 1969 (Bonk & Graham 2006: xxiv). The latter author posits that blended learning represents a fundamental component of the teaching system of the OU, and that such teaching encompasses "a dual responsibility" of "providing instruction by correspondence to distance learners" and "traveling to study centers and summer schools to meet these students in classrooms" (2006: xxiv).

The two examples outlined above would appear to point to the fact that already by the early 1990s a mode that could combine, integrate or blend two modes of teaching had firmly established itself in Anglo-American teaching practice in both the US and Europe. Such practice seemed to suggest a dual mode of instruction consisting of two components: First, the face-to-face teaching component means that learners and teachers are physically co-present in an environment where the bricks and mortar classroom is used as the place of delivery, and the instruction is mediated by the instructor. The second component of instruction encapsulates a mode where learners and teacher are spatially separated from each other, the place of delivery is *not* the traditional bricks and mortar classroom and instruction is mediated by some form of mechanical or electronic technology (Bonk & Graham 2006: xxv).

3.2. Unpacking the blended learning components

In the previous section, it has already been established that blended learning is regarded as education that includes *some* aspect of face-to-face (FTF) learning and online learning. Thus before elaborating on the reasons for such lack of clarity relating to the concept of 'blended', the literature will be consulted with a view to establishing a clearer understanding of what exactly is encapsulated by the terms FTF and online formats of delivery.

The FTF format is characterised as "traditional". In other words, as Nortvig et al (2018:47) emphasise, it is seen to constitute the mode with "the longest history of the three formats and in relation to which online and blended learning represent a modern or innovative intervention." Following a meta analysis of current literature with a view to comparing different online formats with on-campus/face-to-face formats, the latter authors conclude that theoretically FTF is unanimously understood to be an "instructional format that involves a physical classroom and the synchronous physical presence of all participants (i.e. teachers and students" (Nortvig et al 2018: 47).

In contrast, Nortvig et al (2018: 47) refer to online learning's most predominant feature as being "the absence of the physical classroom." They posit that the latter is replaced by "the use of web-based technologies offering opportunities for out-of-class learning independent of time, place and pace" (Nortvig et al 2018: 47). Such technologies could be "learning management systems (LMS)", or "virtual learning environments (VLE)", such as "Moodle" and "Blackboard", respectively (Pellas & Kazanidis 2014:447). Thus, the literature suggests that online learning is characterised by "distance" from the physical classroom, where technology serves to both mediate and support the learning experience. The idea of this distance from set times and places is essentially captured by Webster & Hackley' (1997: 1284) definition of "distance learning" as an approach that offers more flexible learning opportunities by "freeing learners from the constraints of time and place".

A closer analysis of the FTF and online constructs according to the literature above would appear to yield four underlying dimensions: place, persons participating in the teaching and learning setting, how instruction is directed or facilitated and the question of time. In other words, teaching and learning take place in-class or are not restricted to the walls of the classroom; the setting may or may not feature the physical presence of the teacher; the instructional driver of the learning environment may be characterised by either the teacher or technology; and learning may take place at the pace of an entire body of students while all participants are physically present, or may occur in a setting not restricted by time, place, path or pace.

The multi-dimensionality of the two constructs outlined above is formally evidenced by the number of different terms emerging in the literature to denote the bi-modality of course delivery. To address this issue, Friesen (2012) presents a taxonomy of opposite sets of forms, contexts and practices, which is illustrated in Table 3.1 below. The latter scholar posits that these labels can be used synonymously or interchangeably to tap into the constructs of FTF and online (Friesen 2012: 5).

Table 3. 1 Opposed Forms, Contexts and Practices in Blended Learning (Friesen 2012: 5)

Physical-Co-Presence⌘	Technical-Mediation⌘
• → Face-to-Face (F2F) (Graham, 2006; Stacey & Gerbic, 2009)¶ • → Oral communication (Garrison & Vaughan)¶ • → In-class instruction (Chase, 2012)¶ • → “place-of-the-classroom” (Friesen, 2011)¶ • → Bricks, mortar (Schulte, 2011)¶ • → “a supervised brick-and-mortar location away from home (Staker & Horn, 2012)⌘	• → Online (Graham, 2006; Stacey & Gerbic)¶ • → Written communication (Garrison & Vaughan, 2007)¶ • → Distributed learning (Graham, 2006)¶ • → “online delivery of content and instruction” (Staker & Horn, 2012)¶ • → “Space-of-the-screen” (Friesen, 2011)⌘

First, Friesen (2012:5) suggests using “physical co-presence” as an umbrella term to represent conceptually the construct of the ‘traditional’ classroom. Semantically, this term seems to evoke the idea of a context characterised by the spatial and temporal co-presence of the teacher and learner and the co-presence of learners within a physical environment. This paradigm also appears to come strongly to the fore in Graham’s (2006) and Stacey & Gerbic (2009) denotation of “Face-to-Face” (FTF), Schulte’s (2011) “bricks, mortar”, and Staker & Horn’s (2012) concept of “a supervised brick-and-mortar location away from home.” To highlight an opposite form and context to that of physical co-presence, Friesen presents the term “technical mediation”. This label seems to suggest that teaching and learning take place in a context that is mediated by technology instead of by the teacher. Or, put differently, a technological resource fills the distance that is created by the temporal or spatial separation of teachers and students (Casarotti et al 2002:37; Miller & Honeyman 1993: 68). Friesen’s “*space of the screen* [my emphasis]” and Graham’s and Stacey & Gerbic’s “Online” labels would also appear to encapsulate instructional mediation that takes place in a space which is distant from the traditional classroom.

However, it must also be considered that space serves to host some mode of interaction, which is perhaps what Friesen refers to as “practice” (2012: 5). For instance, a space featuring technology-mediated instruction may be seen as an alternative to a space characterised by teacher-driven instruction. Thus, the modality of the interaction may be facilitated by either the teacher or technology, meaning that either the former or latter become the facilitator or ‘enabler’ of the interaction. Thus, it could be argued that Chase’s (2012) denotation of “In-class *instruction* [my emphasis] or Staker & Horn’s (2012) concept of “a *supervised* brick-and-mortar location away from home [my emphasis]” may signal an understanding that the teacher is the lead driver in the delivery of content and instruction, while the “technical

mediation“ term coined by Friesen’s (2012) or Schulte’s notion of “clicks, virtual“ reinforce the idea of technology being the the key enabler in the instructional process.

Moreover, besides perhaps being the driver of the learning and teaching process, technical mediation can also be seen as a multidimensional form of the way teaching and learning happen or are experienced. This paradigm is addressed by Lee (2008: 3034), who states that the form the mediated interaction takes depends on “how many *people* are involved in the message construction and reception [my emphasis], or what kind of *modalities* are being used (e.g. text vs full motion video, etc)” [my emphasis]. Moreover, constant developments in technology over the last 15 years have resulted in changing constellations of people or technology, who or which may drive the interaction as well an ever-increasing range of interaction modalities. For instance, while what Graham (2006: 1) refers to as a ‘computer-mediated (or distributed) learning environment’ was once characterised by a written text-based modality of interaction, where the participants tended to be largely separated by time and space, technological innovations have blurred the bimodal view of interaction. For instance, contemporary technical mediation may involve video conferencing, where although participants are spatially separated, they are not separated by time.

It is clear that the labels outlined in Friesen’s taxonomy cannot be reduced to the bi-dimensional concepts of the place where the learning takes place, but also serve to yield underlying paradigms relating to the mode of delivery of content and instruction. Thus, it is suggested that course designers not only develop a keener awareness of such multi-dimensionality, but carefully reflect on the desired learning and teaching paradigms before the appropriation of terminology becomes formalised in a course design context.

3.3. The role of setting and technology

As discussed in the previous section, naming conventions of course delivery modes and the underlying practice they are understood to embody vary significantly in the higher education landscape. Graham, Woodfield & Buckley Harrison (2013: 4) emphasise that while higher education institutions seem to be able to draw a clear distinction between traditional face-to-face (F2F) and online course delivery, a distinct lack of clarity exists on what to call the mode of delivery in between these forms. Yet, not only does the labelling of the in-between forms appear problematic, but also the underlying practice associated with such forms are subject to various interpretation. In their spectrum of course delivery modalities in higher education,

Graham et al (2013: 5) address the very fluidity of what occurs when higher education institutions commit to changing a mode of delivery that was previously delivered either fully FTF or fully online.

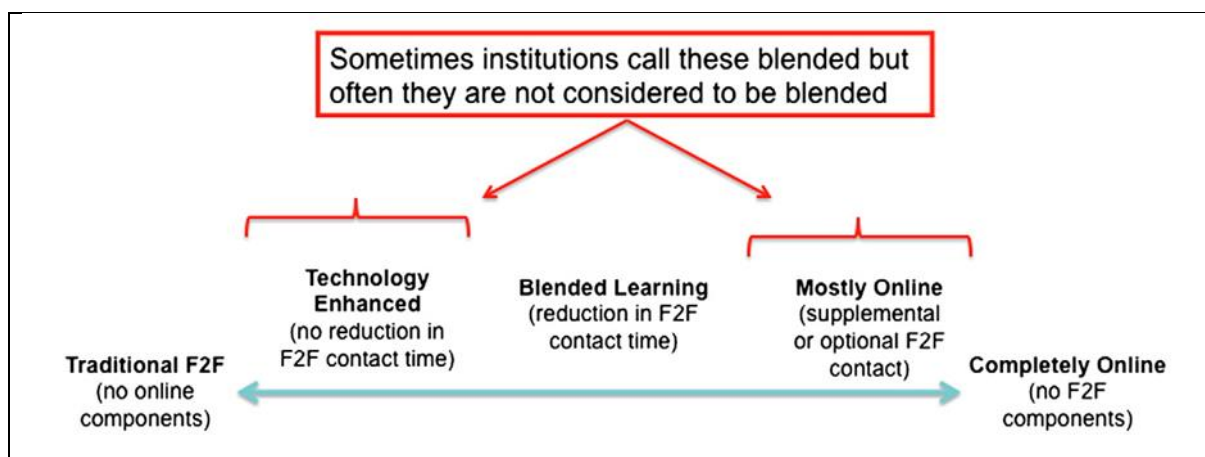


Figure 3. 1 Spectrum of course delivery modalities in higher education (Graham et al 2013: 5)

As clearly illustrated in Figure 3.1, a traditional FTF is seen by the authors to have no online components. On the opposite side of the spectrum, a completely online mode of delivery has no FTF components. According to Graham et al, three delivery options, which may be considered by institutions as constituting blended learning, lie between traditional FTF and completely online modes. According to the same authors, two of the three options cannot be called blended learning. First, the technology enhanced delivery mode presented in the model above implies that technology is used to enhance teaching and learning. However, the student time or workload dedicated to using this technology is not accounted for in the institutional scheduling of contact time. Second, the ‘mostly online’ delivery option outlined in Graham’s model entails supplemental or optional FTF contact, which also means that from a student perspective attending FTF sessions is not accounted for in the scheduling of contact time. Thus, Graham et al’s classification suggests that a course can only be called blended if it includes a mixture of FTF and online contact time that has been explicitly designated as such in the schedules of teachers and students.

While Graham’s blended learning model focuses on scheduled time for the use of technology, other authors appear to define blending across a continuum defined in terms of to what extent the technology is used. For instance Launer (2010:9) defines blended learning as “the combination of technology-supported self or distance study settings and face-to-face settings”. Thus, he seems to argue that while the face-to-face setting does not feature

technology support, any type of technology support already implies the onset of blended learning.

Launer's definition appears to find support in the European higher education context. Data presented in the EU-commissioned *2018 Bologna Implementation Report* shows that of degree programme delivery modes offered by Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) across the European Higher Education Area, the most commonly reported mode of course delivery is blended learning. This report features a definition of blended learning programmes as constituting "traditional, campus-based" programmes", which have "some components that are delivered online" (Gaebel & Zhang 2018: 59). Thus, it may be argued that in European education, adoption of blended learning encompasses a paradigmatic view of the FTF classroom, or campus as providing the setting or context for the lead mode of delivery, which is primarily teacher-directed.

The alternative to the FTF mode of delivery is an online mode of delivery. In a similar vein to Friesen's (2012) taxonomy, Gaebel et al's (2014) definition of online learning would appear to present the dimensions of online learning as opposite forms of FTF contexts and practices. For instance, they (2014:17) see online learning as "taking place primarily via the Internet", which implies learning is mediated by technology. Yet, learning with technology is also denoted by the term 'e-learning'. Thus, the question arises as to whether e-learning can only take place away from the FTF classroom. In one of the first attempts to report on the state of play of e-learning in European higher education institutions, Gaebel et al's (2014) provide clarity on several constructs often subject to varying degrees of interpretation. The 249 tertiary education institutions from 38 European systems, comprising EU and wider Europe, who had participated in the survey were provided with the following definitions: "E-learning" is defined as "a generic expression for all learning involving the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) to support both learning and teaching". Moreover, the same authors state that the term e-learning is "normally synonymous with ICT-based learning" (Gaebel et al 2014:17). Yet, the latter authors also state that "the use of different technologies and tools to support learning" can take place "in different contexts, including face-to-face settings and distance learning." When technology is used to support learning in a combination of FTF and distance learning settings, then e-learning is "usually called blended learning" (Gaebel et al 2014: 17).

On the basis of the latter definitions, it may be concluded that e-learning can also take place in the FTF classroom. Moreover, blended learning encapsulates a blend of FTF and distance learning settings, in which technology can play a supporting role in either setting.

3.4. Planning the balance of FTF and online time

However, besides adopting the premise that blended learning entails a reduction in FTF contact time and an enhanced use of technology, blended learning designers may need to make a firm decision as to how FTF contact time should be balanced with online components. This decision may have a significant impact on the scheduling plan of the teachers and learners involved in the blended learning experience. Thus, it seems advisable for course planners to make a strategic decision as to whether FTF or online is the lead mode of delivery.

In this respect, the Online Learning Consortium (OLC), a thinktank dedicated to fostering quality digital teaching and learning experiences in US higher education presents two options. Mayadas, Miller & Sener (2015) suggest distinguishing between a “blended (also called hybrid) classroom course” and a “blended (also called hybrid) online course”. The former mode is defined as a setting where “[o]nline activity is mixed with classroom meetings, replacing a significant percentage, but not all required face-to-face instructional activities” (Mayadas, Miller & Sener 2015). The latter mode describes a setting in which “[m]ost course activity is done online, but there are some required face-to-face instructional activities, such as lectures, discussions, labs, or other in-person learning activities. While the latter thinktank does not prescribe what “significant” means in quantitative terms, several other scholars suggest the use of quantitative descriptors to determine a scheduled balance between FTF and online components. For instance, Allen, Seaman and Garrett (2007: 5) propose a blended model that has between 30%-79% online. On a less prescriptivist note, Picciano (2009: 10), for example, suggests that institutions define independently which “portion of face-to-face time is replaced by online activity.

Planning blended courses can also entail determining for which learning and teaching purpose technology is being used. For instance, Smith & Kurthen (2007:457) propose classifying course delivery modes into four distinct categories: First, they define *web-enhanced* courses as those that “incorporate a minimal number of web-based elements, such as the syllabus and course announcements into an otherwise traditional FTF course” (2007: 457). Their definition would seem to concur with Graham et al’s notion of technology enhanced delivery. As a concrete

example from an implementation perspective, the authors suggest that the use of the Learning Management System (LMS) as a resource to display and access information would constitute web or technology enhancement (Smith & Kurthen 2007:457). Second, Smith & Kurthen see a *blended* course as one in which “the instructor adds, beyond an online syllabus and a few online documents, some significant online learning activities” (2007: 457). In this case, the same authors suggest assigning online quizzes or online discussions which account for a small percentage of the course grade. Yet, they also state that while such online activities do not replace scheduled FTF class meetings, they may account for up to 45% of course activities (2007: 457). This definition would appear to imply that although the learning is technically mediated, it is seen as supplemental self-study and may involve the allocation of points as an incentive to encourage students to engage in this form of self-study. Thus if this delivery mode were to be placed on Graham’s continuum, it would represent a more intense form of technology enhanced delivery, but would not qualify for the label of blended. Third, if online activities replace 45% to 80% of FTF meetings, then the course is hybrid (2007: 457). The fourth category is considered “fully online” if it entails classes, where e-learning activities constitute 80% or more of the contact time (2007: 457). In summary, if blended learning is to be appropriately implemented, it entails a meaningful blend of time allocation and learning activities.

3.5. Affordances of FTF and online learning environments

In addition to determining which blended learning components to deliver and how these will be delivered from an educator perspective, the dimensions of student-teacher interaction in live and virtual environments must also be addressed. Graham’s (2006) taxonomy of the four dimensions of interaction in FTF and distributed learning environments provides a useful framework for institutional planning relating to the relationship between delivery form and learning activities.

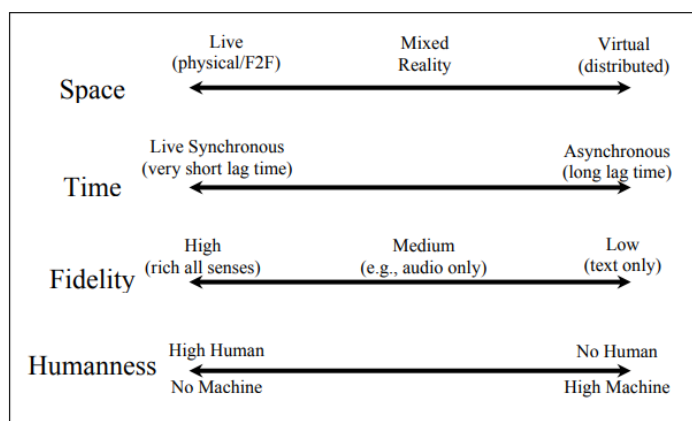


Figure 3. 2 Four dimensions of interaction in F2F and distributed learning environments (Graham 2006)

In the taxonomy illustrated in Figure 3.2., Graham (2006:5) posits that both “Live” and “Virtual” learning environments constitute a dimension of “space, time, fidelity and humanness”. These are represented from left to right on a continuum that shows the extent of interaction between the stakeholders of the learning environment. The spatial dimension ranges from “live, physical, FTF interaction” to “virtual or distributed” (2006: 5). The *time* dimension is represented as “live synchronous”, which implies a “very short lag time” of interaction, to “asynchronous (long lag time of interaction)” (2006: 5). According to Graham, *fidelity* measures the “richness of communication” and extends along a continuum ranging from “high (rich all senses)” to “low (text only)” (2006: 5). The fourth dimension *humanness* refers to “high human presence”, with no use of technology to “no human”, which involves a high degree of technology use (2006: 5). As explained by Graham, the FTF learning environment traditionally operated at the left hand side of each of these dimensions, or in other words, it “typically occurred in a teacher-directed environment with person-to-person interaction in a live synchronous, high-fidelity environment” (2006: 5).

Moreover, Graham (2006: 1) sees a “computer-mediated (or distributed) learning environment” as one in which the participants tend to be largely separated by time and space, and as a setting traditionally characterised by “self-paced learning and learning materials interactions that typically occur in an asynchronous, low-fidelity (text only) environment” (2006:1). However, technological innovations have since challenged this view of interaction. For instance, contemporary technical mediation may involve video conferencing, where although participants are spatially separated, they are not separated by time. For instance, the phenomenon of ‘real-time’ interaction can also be observed in a real-time chat forum.

In a practical sense, the affordances of the physical classroom environment emphasise human interaction and foster a sense of community, connectedness and satisfaction (Conrad & Donaldson (2011: 19). In other words, a FTF setting facilitates what Graham (2006) refers to as 'humanness'. For instance, the inherent characteristics of this setting facilitate an environment, where both educators and peers can move between different groups of learners and support diverse needs with more personalised and immediate support as necessary (Nederveld & Berge 2015: 167; Marsh 2012: 4). Second, such an environment may be suitable for what Hattie & Timperley (2007) refer to as a "feed forward" process, which entails more teacher facilitation in helping students to determine where they are going. In other words, particularly at the beginning of a course, high-fidelity mediation of the learning contents and direction, as well as strategies on how to engage in independent learning are essential in helping students to "gradually assume more responsibility over their learning" (Beckers et al 2018: 261).

As discussed above, developments in technology have enormously impacted the alternative to the traditional classroom setting. For instance, an asynchronous online discussion (AOD), e.g. blogging, could be seen as constituting a form of learning that supports critical discussion outside of the physical classroom. As underscored by Loncar, Barrett & Liu (2014: 94), this learning form provides students with "the time and space to work with, explore, and critically discuss topics". Moreover, an asynchronous online environment provides a potentially "less stressful practice environment" as learners are not in the physical presence of teachers or peers (Marsh 2012: 4; Mondejar: 2013: 276), and. can work at their own pace, which is particularly beneficial for learners with different needs (Berényi & Deutsch 2018: 39).

Yet, several challenges associated with the asynchronous nature of online communication have also been identified. For instance, its potential for 'disconnectedness' has been addressed by several studies. For instance, the lack of teacher presence may present a challenge for learners unwilling or unable to demonstrate autonomy, self-regulation and independence correspond to a "limited capability" of student engagement in the learning experience due to having to "overcome challenges" that require "the persistence and determination, typically required of self-directed learners (Shea & Bidjerano 2012: 318). Moreover, for stakeholders in the online interaction a lack of non-verbal cues may lead to difficulties in understanding "the importance of information" and "interpretat[ing] the meaning of silence or non-reply by others" (Powell et al 2004: 9). As a consequence, social

presence may be adversely impacted. Social presence in its simplest form is defined as “a student's sense of being and belonging in a course and the ability to interact with other students and an instructor in an online course although physical contact is not available” (Picciano 2002:22). As this sense of belonging, or lack thereof, could also be applicable in a FTF setting, Swan & Shih (2005: 115) extend this definition to include the sense of belonging during technology-mediated communication, and define social presence as “the degree to which participants in computer-mediated communication feel affectively connected to one another” (Swan & Shih 2005: 115). Thus, social presence is key to building relationships, group cohesion and trust, all of which foster motivation and learning success (Powell 2004: 9). A lack of perceived social presence may hinder the building of relationships, group connectedness and trust, which may have an adverse impact on students’ satisfaction with online learning activities and possibly on the intended learning outcomes (Picciano 2002: 118).

3.6. Empirical studies in blending foreign language learning

According to Mondejar (2013: 479), blended learning systems provide “personalized learning experiences and support to learners, furnish them with increased access and flexibility of materials [and] foster learner autonomy.” Moreover he adds that in addition to developing language proficiency, blended learning fosters “collaboration and a sense of community among students, accommodate[s] a variety of student learning styles and personalities, and assist[s] learners with developing valuable technical skills” (2013:479). With regard to the latter argument, the significance of the rapid growth of ICT and of the ‘digital native’ phenomenon cannot be overestimated, even in the foreign language classroom (Al-Mahrooqi & Troudi (2014: 65). Thus foreign language teaching and learning also involves exploring ways in which technology can be best put to use to benefit today’s digital natives (Mahrooqi & Troudi (2014: 65).

The latter phenomenon has been widely reported on in empirical studies, particularly in terms of how ‘flipped learning’ or ‘flipped classroom’ settings influence students’ learning processes and academic performance. The Flipped Learning Network (FLN) (2014: n.d.) describes flipped learning as a “pedagogical approach”, which flips direct instruction from the “group learning space” to the “individual learning space”. Moreover, Hung (2015: 81) describes “flip teaching” as falling into the category of “enhancing blends”, or, in other words, the face-to-face experience is enhanced by means of technology. In his study conducted with English language learners in a Taiwanese higher education setting, Hung (2015) explored the links between

flipping the classroom and students' academic performance, their learning attitudes and participation levels. The results showed that students who had participated in the enhanced blend, conducted by means of a WebQuest active learning strategy, attained better learning outcomes, developed better attitudes towards learning and devoted more effort to the learning process than those in the control group (Hung 2015: 81).

Similar results have been reported from Indonesia. For instance, Ist'anah's (2017) investigated second-semester students' use of the learning management system for grammar learning, and found a positive correlation between the regularity of student engagement with the online learning materials and their end-of-semester achievement. Moreover, a qualitative analysis of students' language choice in their reflective journals indicated that the students felt that the online activities had helped them to better understand and practice the materials (Ist'anah's 2017:28).

The impact of digitalising language activities and dedicating scheduled online units to engage in these, as well as how these influenced summative assessment was also explored by Scida & Saury (2006). In contrast to Ist'anah's study, which was lacking a control group, the latter authors investigated how the blended course model versus the traditional FTF model impacted students' grades in elementary Spanish, Italian and Portuguese courses at a U.S. university, where 3 hours of weekly class time had been replaced by 2 hours of compulsory web-based grammar and vocabulary activities. Despite the fact that their results do not yield conclusive findings on the effect of the intervention on students' academic performance, the authors concluded that blended learning improves "student's perceptions of learning and the quality of classroom instruction" (2006: 528). Their findings derived from the comparison of the student evaluations of the blended course to those of the traditional FTF course indicated a stronger student perception of "greater mastery of form, structure, and vocabulary" in the experimental group, which subsequently influenced motivation to engage in the class and study the language (Scida & Saury 2006: 527). Moreover, Scida & Saury also conclude that the blended approach made FTF time more efficient for both learners and instructors alike as it could be dedicated to "more creative, flexible and meaningful uses of the language", instead of having to use time to deal with "ill-prepared students or students who continue to need further grammar explanations" (Scida & Saury 2006: 527). Thus, the above studies indicate that incorporating web-based activities in language learning can both enhance FTF instruction and boost learning motivation.

Integrating technology use into blended foreign language learning settings is also becoming an increasingly important focus of research in the European Higher Education context. For instance, Chenchen et al (2019) conducted a study among 50 second-year students in the French Engineering Institute (INSA Strasbourg) to examine how the use of a new interactive digital teaching tool (self-response system) for in-class activities affects academic performance in mastering EFL grammar. Their findings showed that the application of the SRS as an instructional method increased students' learning motivation, engagement and self-efficacy in learning English grammar. However, although the self-response system (SRS) enhanced student participation and engagement in the in-class activities, a comparison of pre-test and post-test results showed that the use of the SRS was not effective in improving students' grammar learning achievement (Chenchen et al 2019: 1188). The latter scholars suggest that this result could be attributed to the students' perception of having to expend too much effort to adapt to a new approach during a limited period of time (2019: 1188). Moreover, as acknowledged by the latter authors, other exogeneous factors, such as demographics may have influenced this result (2019: 1188).

The findings above are also supported by Müge's (2017) study, which reported on pre-service students' academic outcomes, alongside their perceptions of their learning experience in an English Language Teaching materials development course at a Turkish state university. Her findings revealed that students who had participated in a flipped classroom model did not show significantly higher academic performance than those in the non-flipped control group. However, although self-reported student perceptions indicated a mostly positive and satisfying learning experience, the students expressed concern relating to the heavy workload and time constraints involved in completing the course assignments (Müge 2017: 218). Müge's findings also underline the importance of a strong teacher presence for students to effectively engage in flipped learning activities. Her students' reflections on their instructors revealed that they expect the teacher to be actively present, "technologically proficient" and "contemporary" with regard to the ever-changing nature of technology and their impact on the learning environment (Müge 2017: 217). Moreover, according to Müge (2017: 220) a clear understanding of the flipped learning model may positively influence students' engagement with the learning activities. The latter scholar concludes that preparation and communication are the key to the success of the flipped classroom. Moreover, teachers need to be prepared

to dedicate time to addressing lack of engagement with activities and materials, and boost motivation by adding elements, such as gamification activities (2017:220).

Besides the use of technology in blended learning settings, the literature also reports on teacher and learner insecurity relating to the inherent learner self-directedness required from the online setting. For instance, Na-Wang, Chen & Zhang's (2019) study of 1603 students' perceptions of blended learning in a Chinese tertiary EFL context investigated students' perceptions relating to their motivation, the effectiveness of the learning environment, their engagement, learning autonomy and overall satisfaction level. While their results suggest that blended design can create an efficient EFL learning environment and gain positive learner perceptions, two significant findings emerged in relation to learner engagement and the role of the teacher. Their findings suggest a slightly negative correlation between student engagement and an online environment, which they attribute to the "innate defects" of online learning (2019: 17). Na-Wang, Chen & Zhang's (2019: 17) explain the latter defect as a culturally-driven rejection of online settings as learners are "face-to-face dependent" because this is all they know. Particularly such learners are often challenged by having to learn at their own pace (2019: 17). Their findings also suggest that the teacher needs to assume multiple roles in a blended learning environment, whereby the students surveyed in the latter study considered the guiding role to be the most important.

The conclusions drawn from the above study indicate that online learning activities require a stronger level of student-directedness than the traditional FTF approach, and teachers must be prepared to assume different roles to support learners who are more 'face-to-face dependent'. These findings are also confirmed by Stracke's (2007) results from a longitudinal study conducted with EFL learners in a German higher education setting. Stracke explored students' and teachers' experience of a blended learning model, which comprised learners' independent self-study phases using a computer and traditional FTF classroom learning. Her results confirmed that affording learners a choice in the activities they engage in helps learners to take responsibility for their own learning activities, and positively influences their perception of the learning experience. However, she also found that learners and instructors struggled to negotiate and adapt to the roles required by the different modes of delivery. Thus, it is important to acknowledge that teachers and learners need time "to adapt to and develop in the BLL environment" (Stracke 2007: 1).

The literature reviewed above indicates that while future higher education learning systems will definitely involve some sort of blend, no 'one-size fits all' solution can be offered as to how institutions blend. In fact, as highlighted by Bryan & Volchenkova (2016:28), addressing the rationale for blended learning and guidelines for blend design comprises a challenge that is "highly context dependent with a practically infinite number of solutions." Nonetheless, regardless of the blended model adopted, the findings from the literature suggest that although blended learning models may not automatically result in an improvement in academic performance in the short-term, pedagogical perserverance is necessary to help learners and teachers alike address challenges experienced in the online learning environment, and allow time for both learners and teachers to adapt to the blended learning setting, as well as the technology that is required.

4. ePortfolio use in higher education

As already established in the introduction to this thesis, the Bologna process tasks educational institutions with providing “flexible learning paths”, appropriate teaching and assessment methods” and practice that “exploit[s] the benefits of technology” (European Commission 2018: 74). Indeed, from an instructional perspective, not only does ePortfolio use apparently enhance the learning experience for learners, its adoption also addresses institutional calls for the inclusion of ICT within their curricula with the aim of enhancing the technology literacy skills of students. However, on a distinctly ominous note, the Commission’s paper also highlights the consequences if countries or higher education systems fail to adopt national or institutional policies on the integration of new technologies in teaching and learning. According to the European Commission (2018), failure to “jump on the train” may lead to graduates with skills that are not “fully relevant in the labour market”, “less opportunities in research” and “significant back-lag in innovation within higher education institutions and in the economy” (European Commission 2018: 74). It can thus be concluded that institutions must integrate innovative ICT into their teaching and learning practice to equip their students with the technology skills propagated by business and industry.

As electronic portfolios are being used more and more more to enhance traditional classroom-teaching and learning and satisfy institutional calls to increase the use of technology, the current section focuses on this pedagogical tool. Building on the defining features of an ePortfolio, the current chapter subsequently explores how it can be used as a learning and assessment tool. Following this, recent studies will be investigated with a view to determining which factors may influence the potential effectiveness of ePortfolio implementation.

4.1. Towards a definition of an ePortfolio

The literature attests to an upward trend in the presence of electronic portfolios in higher education landscapes. EPortfolios are apparently being categorised as a genre in their own right. For instance, Cambridge (2010: 8) refers to the ePortfolio as an “emerging genre” that constitutes “a type of composition” which “presents a theory, story, or map that articulates the relationships between the different material included and synthesizes their meaning” (Cambridge 2010: 136).

The literature also highlights several benefits of ePortfolio creation. For instance, in her survey on e-portfolio practice in UK higher education, Strivens (2007) concluded that ePortfolios help learners to develop an independent and autonomous way of thinking. This sentiment is echoed by Cambridge (2010: 2), who emphasises that the more the learner “takes charge of the format and process, the deeper the learning.” Chen & Penny Light (2010:19) add to the discussion, suggesting that deep learning, or what they refer to as “knowledge connection and integration” can only occur in an environment which allows learners take control of their own learning. Thus the literature seems to suggest that ePortfolios constitute a technology-enhanced learning space, which Abrami et al (2008) posit as enabling learners to think critically and become “active, independent, and self-regulated learners”.

While the literature provides a plethora of definitions of an ePortfolio, most definitions seem to concur on the fact that it constitutes a collection of student work, which in a more technical vein is referred to as ‘a collection of artifacts’. However, in contrast to the traditional portfolio, an ePortfolio includes a collection of ‘digital’ artifacts. Abrami & Barrett (2005:2) see an ePortfolio as an electronic tool that hosts content, describing it as “a digital container capable of storing visual and auditory content, including text, images, video, and sound.” Moreover, such a collection, or what Cooper & Love (2007:270) refer to as “an organised compilation”, should demonstrate “knowledge, skills, values and or achievements” and include “reflections or exegesis which articulate the relevance, credibility and meaning of the artifacts presented”.

4.2. ePortfolios as a learning and assessment tool

What has emerged from the theory above is a clear understanding that an ePortfolio represents a product, or the sum of the learner’s learning experience. Yet, attention must be drawn to the number of active learning processes that are also necessary for the collection and production of artifacts. For example, as emphasised by UK digital thinktank JISC (2008: 6), “behind any product, or presentation, lie rich and complex processes of planning, synthesising, sharing, discussing, reflecting, giving, receiving and responding to feedback.” The same authors refer to these processes as “e-portfolio-based learning”, arguing that “the process of learning can be as important as the end product.” (JISC 2008: 6). Thus, an ePortfolio represents not only the manifestation of a learning product, but also serves as a window to the dynamic learning processes which have led to its creation.

Yet ePortfolios cannot just be viewed from a learner perspective. For instance, Buyarski & Landis (2014: 51) report more and more faculty are viewing ePortfolios as a teaching approach which fosters “goal-commitment, academic achievement, curricular coherence, meaning-making and student development”. Moreover, from an instructional perspective, ePortfolios present a twofold opportunity due to their ability to “generate as well as document learning” (Basken 2008: 1). Thus for institutions that need to assess that their students are flexible and motivated self-directed learners, besides being a digital tool that enables learning as a process, the nature of an ePortfolio as an assessment product must also be considered when planning to integrate this tool in the classroom.

Figure 4.1 illustrates Baumgartner’s (2014) taxonomy of what he refers to as a “Reflection Portfolio” or “Educational Portfolio”. His model succinctly accounts for the view of an ePortfolio as serving both the learner’s personal learning needs and organisational needs.

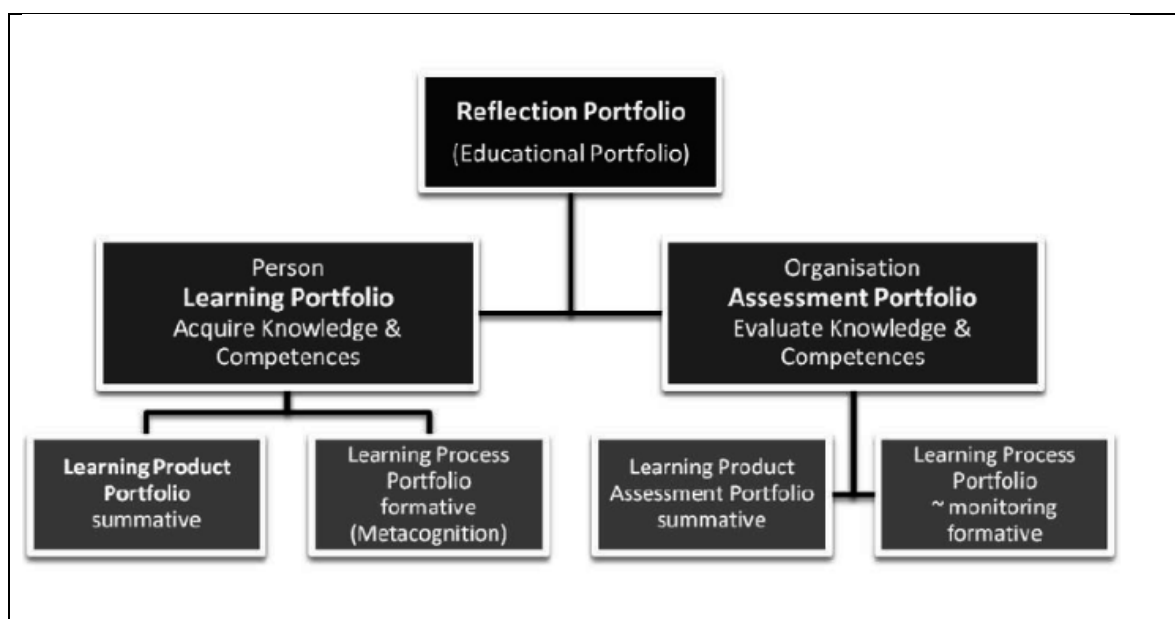


Figure 3. 3 Reflection Portfolio as Learning & Assessment Portfolio (Baumgartner 2014)

According to Baumgartner (2014), from the learner’s perspective, the purpose of the ePortfolio is to acquire knowledge and competences. It represents both a learning product, which is subject to summative assessment, and a learning process, which entails formative metacognition. Or, in other words, learners are involved in the assessment by means of self-assessment and peer assessment (Wang 2017: 1451). From an organisational or educator perspective, Baumgartner (2014) views the ePortfolio as an “Assessment portfolio”, the purpose of which is the evaluation of knowledge and competences. The evaluation includes

formative monitoring of the learning process and providing summative feedback on the ePortfolio as a learning product.

Several scholars also highlight the fact that portfolios facilitate a more authentic form of assessment than traditional summative testing methods. For instance, as early as 1994, Cohen (1994: 361) argues that portfolios are valuable for language assessment purposes as the emphasis is on the “convergent and repeated measures over time rather than on single measures at one point in time”. In a similar vein, Buyarski & Landis (2014: 50) argue that ePortfolios are “a natural fit for high impact practices” as the evaluation of student learning is grounded in “evidence representing a reflective, intentional timespan rather than arbitrary points in time” (Buyarski & Landis 2014: 50). Thus, in contrast to traditional summative assessment, ePortfolios assessment is beneficial for learners as it provides a holistic overview of how their learning has developed over a period time towards achieving the desired learning outcomes.

For the purpose of this thesis, an ePortfolio is understood as an educational portfolio for learning and assessment purposes. Moreover, Wang’s (2017: 1452) guidelines on the features of an assessed Portfolio also provide a useful point of departure for the design of an ePortfolio. As described in Table 4.1., an assessed ePortfolio is a set of work, which:

• → includes both student work and student reflection on that work →	→	→	¶
• → was produced at different instances over a longer period of time →	→	→	¶
• → includes some work produced outside of timed examination conditions →	→	→	¶
• → is kept and assessed in an electronic format (even if some or all work was not originally produced electronically) →	→	→	→

Table 4. 1 Components of an assessed ePortfolio (Wang 2017: 1452)

4.3. Factors influencing ePortfolio experience and implementation

The literature highlights a number of factors, which may have a negative influence on ePortfolio implementation. Morales et al (2015) succinctly place these into two categories: “exogenous factors”, which they see as including “technological innovation barriers, ignorance of the platform and the best way to use it, and lack of institutional support” (Morales et al 2015: 1738). Indeed, frustration with learning technology and lack of institutional technology-related support while implementing ePortfolios that results in demotivation and less engagement have been noted in several studies (e.g. Lin 2008: 198; Singh & Ritzhaupt 2006:64; O’Keefe & Donnelly 2013:6).

On the other hand, “endogenous factors” comprise “reluctance to change, lack of confidence, discouragement and negative beliefs, lack of interest from instructors and lack of motivation in students” (Morales et al 2015: 1738). Yet, the distinction between endogenous and exogenous factors is often blurred. For instance, as concluded by Beckers et al (2016: 40), following their seminal review of recent empirical studies to determine factors influencing the development of self-directed learning skills through the use of an ePortfolio, a lack of time to engage with the ePortfolio frequently features as an obstacle to the development of self-directed skills. Yet, as succinctly pointed out by the latter scholars, it is hard to ascertain from the study results whether students really face a lack of time, or only perceive this to be the case (2016: 40). In fact, the same argument could be valid for reports of time related to efforts expended to implement the ePortfolio. Yet, whatever the nature of these phenomena may be, challenges faced by learners in relation to time, efforts expended and technology during the ePortfolio implementation have been attested to by several studies (e.g. Wetzel & Strudler 2006: 101; Lopez-Fernandez & Rodriguez-Illera 2009: 11; Kabilan & Khan: 2012: 1014).

A lack of belief in the importance and value of ePortfolios tasks may also influence learners’ experiences when implementing an ePortfolio. In fact, following an international three-year collaborative project involving two Canadian universities and one British university, Tosh et al (2005: 3), concluded that there is still a lot of work to be done for ePortfolios to be accepted by students as “a useful and worthwhile activity” In their seminal longitudinal study, the latter scholars investigated how a Competency Portfolio project can help students to connect and apply their learning experiences in academic, workplace and community contexts, and demonstrate competency in a given area of study. According to Tosh et al (2005), the analysis of the qualitative data derived from survey and focus group comments yielded four themes, which need to be addressed to increase student engagement with the ePortfolio: “buy-in, motivation, assessment and the ePortfolio technology” (Tosh et al (2005: 3).

Yet, the four themes mentioned above cannot be neatly categorised into endogenous and exogenous factors. On the contrary, a complex and dynamic interplay of both dimensions influence the learning experience and learning outcome. For instance, ‘buying into’ the ePortfolio may be linked with beliefs, which as multidimensional constructs, are strongly linked with motivation. Motivation in turn influences the learning process (Pintrich 1999: 462). The latter scholar, an extremely influential educational psychologist, whose longitudinal studies have provided significant insight into motivation and self-regulated learning,

distinguishes between three types of motivational beliefs, and describes these as follows: First “self-efficacy” beliefs are “judgments of one's capabilities to do the academic task” (1999: 462). Second “task value beliefs” refer to one’s beliefs about “the importance of, interest in, and value of the task” (1999: 462). The third type refers to “goal orientations”, which may focus on “mastery and learning of the task, or be guided by assessment or other extrinsic reasons for doing the task, or relative ability in relation to social comparisons with other students” (Pintrich 1999: 462). Yet, while all variables of learners’ motivational belief may be beyond teacher control, the literature indicates that pedagogical guidance can play a significant role in influencing students to ‘buy-in’ to the multi-faceted dimensions of ePortfolio implementation.

The literature shows that ePortfolio outcomes are strongly linked with pedagogical guidance that fosters self-efficacy beliefs. For instance, using qualitative research methods, Buyarski & Landis (2014) investigated to what extent the written narrative components of an electronic personal development plan (ePDP) were aligned with higher or lower order thinking skills by faculty, who were assigning scores in the assessment outcomes rubrics. As was expected, the results of this study, derived from a sample of 47 first year students at a US university indicated a high frequency of rubric scores that aligned with the lower levels of Bloom’s taxonomy. Two main conclusions were drawn by the researchers: First, faculty need to develop clearer definitions of and agreement on the intended learning outcomes (Buyarski & Landis 2014: 58). Moreover, they suggest that “appropriate pedagogical strategies” could help students to demonstrate higher levels of learning. They suggest guiding students through a series of classroom activities, which are specifically designed to help students move from the levels of descriptive accounts of experience to application and analysis (2014: 58). The latter recommendations are also supported by Ash & Clayton (2009: 28), who argue that students need teacher support, structure and guidance to learn how to critically reflect, especially when they are outside the traditional classroom. Thus, teachers are charged with not only communicating the meaning of reflection as an “integrative, analytical, capacity-building process rather than as a superficial exercise in navel-gazing”. (Ash & Clayton 2009: 28), but also implementing specific learning activities to practice the art of reflective writing. Thus, through appropriate teacher guidance in this respect, learners self-efficacy beliefs may be boosted, which may have a positive influence on motivation to achieve the intended learning outcomes.

Moreover, as well as the support provided by the teacher to improve reflective skills, the literature suggests that the ePortfolio design needs to enable a reflective capability feature, which fosters formative assessment. As a case in point, Kwak & Jin (2018) examined Korean students' perceptions of using an e-speaking portfolio as an assessment and learning tool in a Basic English Speaking course. While their sample was relatively small, comprising 17 undergraduate students, their findings suggest that students perceived the recursive nature of the e-speaking portfolio, or in other words the five revised nature of initial oral drafts, as particularly beneficial. This essentially diagnostic characteristic of the ePortfolio was perceived as providing information to guide awareness of their current and target status. Moreover, besides offering functionality to conduct self-assessment, an ePortfolio must afford functionalities that facilitate self-directed learning (Welsh 2012: 75; Beckers et al 2016: 42). To support the fundamental paradigms of SDL, it is suggested that the ePortfolio design features capabilities which enable students to set their own goals, analyse tasks, and implement a constructed plan to direct their progress towards meeting goals (Beckers et al 2016: 42). Thus, the ePortfolio design features can play an important role in supporting students to believe in their capability to do the task, can boost interest to engage with the task and help them to orient themselves towards goal achievement.

In addition to the affordances provided by the ePortfolio design, the literature suggests that teacher scaffolding plays a key role in influencing students' self-directed learning and motivation during the ePortfolio implementation. For instance, in a mixed methods study conducted with Dutch VET students, Beckers et al (2018) aimed to find out whether using an ePortfolio featuring a self-coaching protocol, but limited teacher coaching influenced the development of SDL skills and motivation. Their findings suggest that the imbalance of teacher support and learner autonomy may impede self-directed learning. Beckers et al (2018: 285) concluded that students need more autonomy in choosing learning tasks, but more teacher support on the appropriateness of tasks selected as well as help with the acquisition of SDL skills. The importance of teacher support is also corroborated by Contreras-Higuera et al (2015), following a quantitatively-driven research conducted among 247 first-year education students in a Spanish context. Their findings indicate that the poor rating of the ePortfolio intervention may be attributed to "confusion in selecting materials and organizing the portfolio", as well as students' "lack of clarity on the purposes of the portfolio" (2015: 22). To pre-empt these issues, (Beckers et al 2018: 261) suggest adopting an adaptive coaching

approach, which entails helping students to “gradually assume more responsibility over their own learning”. Or, viewed from a different angle, progress in students’ self-directed learning is fostered by a gradual decrease in teacher advice and guidance. For this purpose, the latter authors suggest using Hattie & Timperley’s (2007) concepts of “feed up”, “feedback” and “feed forward”, which entails supporting students to answer the questions “Where am I going?”, “How am I going?” and “Where to next?”, respectively (Beckers et al 2018: 261). In other words, while the learning process is characterised by strong teacher direction at the beginning of the project, teacher support and guidance gradually fades over time, as learning becomes more student-directed (Beckers et al 2016: 279). The latter authors refer to such a process as “second-order scaffolding” and suggest that a high level of teacher guidance aiming at “task definition and cognition” is important at the beginning of the learning activity, while towards the end teacher coaching should aim to foster “strategy enactment and metacognition” (Beckers et al 2016: 279).

The importance of initially structuring guidance and then gradually delegating decision-making control to the learners is also supported by the findings of two studies in an Asian higher education EFL context. For example, Lo (2010) conducted a study with 101 Taiwanese students in an ESP class focusing on journalism to investigate the effect of ePortfolio implementation on learner autonomy. Her findings indicated that her alternating role between decision-maker and facilitator were essential to helping students practice autonomous learning (Lo 2010: 89). In her role as a decision-maker, Lo provided “structured” guidance to her students, which she described as providing a structured portfolio template, communicating how it should be produced, the number of entries as well the elements of each entry, as well as how the ePortfolio was to be assessed (Lo 2010: 84). Yet, students had full decision-making control over which articles they chose to read, which would be the basis for the vocabulary log and reflective component of the ePortfolio entry. In her role as a facilitator, she provided advice as needed, reminders, and assessed the first part of the portfolio to make sure their products were on track (Lo 2010: 84). However, besides providing insight into the importance and shifting nature of teacher support, Lo’s findings highlight the importance of helping students in an Asian context to develop a better understanding of what autonomous learning means. In other words, the traditional Asian view of learning and evaluation as an end product may result in a tendency for students to undervalue the contribution process-oriented learning can also make to fostering autonomous learning (Lo 2010: 90; Chau & Cheng 2010: 940). In light of this fact, it is suggested that ePortfolio assessment includes a

component, which not only includes self-assessment of the end product, but also what students have become aware of, or which new skills they have developed in the process of implementing their ePortfolios (Lo 2010: 90). Moreover, students' awareness of the importance and acknowledgement of acquiring process-oriented skills needs to be fostered (Lo 2010: 90).

The importance of the facilitative role of the teacher is also corroborated by the findings of a study conducted with software engineering students in a Vietnamese EFL setting. Nguyen & Ikeda (2015) concluded that ePortfolio-mediated learning positively affected students' self regulation and the ePortfolio system contributed to students' motivation and learning strategies. Yet, fundamental to the success of the project was the role played by the teacher in using the ePortfolio system "to communicate, evaluate, and encourage students over time", which significantly impacts the ePortfolio efficiency (Nguyen & Ikeda 2015: 207).

Context-specific factors may also affect the ePortfolio experience. This aspect comes strongly to the fore in the Gerbic, Lewis & Amin (2011) longitudinal study conducted with BEd students in New Zealand to build a picture of student perspectives on ePortfolio learning over three years. The conclusions drawn from the latter study indicated that both students and teachers alike may be challenged by a "culture of innovation and accepting ePortfolio implementation as evidence of student achievement" (Gerbic, Lewis & Amin 2011, quoted in Wang 2017: 1453). These findings are also supported by Contreras-Higuera et al (2015: 23), who suggest that teachers, who are novices in the application of ePortfolios may negatively influence their deployment. The latter authors conclude that teachers need more than one academic year of time to experiment with and adapt to ePortfolio use (2015: 23). Thus, as highlighted by (Orton-Johnson 2009: 837), it may take time for all stakeholders to establish a common ground and "reconfigure existing understandings and expectations of academic scholarship and reconstruct academic boundaries in new spaces."

Several conclusions have been drawn from the literature reviewed above. Although only a small number of studies has been reviewed, it has emerged that most of the recent empirical research on ePortfolio experience has been conducted in an Australasian or American context, and English language reports on ePortfolio experience in a European Higher Education context are distinctly scarce. However, should the findings be extrapolated to a European context, the literature indicates that ePortfolio-mediated learning is a complex process, which requires a number of personal, process and context-related factors. First, in terms of personal factors, it

is suggested that motivational beliefs of learners are essential for effective ePortfolio implementation. Moreover, independent engagement with ePortfolio implementation requires willingness to use the ePortfolio system, self-direction and self-regulation, which may be challenging for learners who are used to a teacher-directed environment. Yet, facilitative support by the teacher, which entails equipping learners with a clear sense of direction and advice when needed, can help learners to gradually develop self-directed learning skills, and become more autonomous in the process. Moreover, the ePortfolio design can also foster self-directed skills by enabling learners to identify and formulate their learning needs, as well as affording them comprehensive insight into their personal learning processes, which is key to planning, monitoring, evaluating and re-evaluating their task performance to achieve their personal goals (Kicken et al 2008: 455). Yet, most importantly, all ePortfolio stakeholders need to be aware that the development of an innovative ePortfolio culture is not a short-term process.

5. Design and Implementation of an ePortfolio at FHWien der WKW

Having established a theoretical framework for the contextual paradigms underlying the use of ePortfolios as an up-and-coming technological tool in higher education, the current chapter presents the institutional context, as well as the design and implementation of a blended ePortfolio project administered within an English for Specific Purposes module at the University of Applied Sciences for Management & Communication in Vienna, Austria.

5.1. Study context

In Austria, as is the case in many other European countries, the tertiary education landscape is comprised of two main types of higher education institutions: universities ('Universitäten') and universities of applied sciences ('Fachhochschulen'). The term 'Fachhochschule', or its commonly used abbreviation 'FH', saw its origins in Germany, where it was coined to denote a type of tertiary education specialising in professional fields such as business or engineering (Richter 2019: 7). In Austria, the first university of applied sciences (UAS) was launched in the winter semester of 1994. Since this time the UAS sector has seen rapid growth in terms of programme offerings and student numbers (Richter 2019:7).

What clearly sets universities of applied sciences apart from the traditional form of university is their practice-oriented focus. In fact, on an institutional level, Austrian UASs are obliged to design curricula in line with the main objectives and guiding principles as defined by the Federal Act on University of Applied Sciences Studies Act (FHStG) (University of Applied Sciences Studies Act – FHStG). Such guidelines and principles task the UAS sector with "[e]nsuring a practice-oriented education at university level" (FHStG: 4). Moreover universities of applied sciences are responsible for "[i]mparting the ability to solve problems in the respective profession according to the state of the art and the current and future practical requirements" and "[p]romoting [...] the professional flexibility of the graduates" (FHStG: 4). As a consequence, the curriculum of universities of applied sciences often includes compulsory internships or career-based practical training. Moreover, students are often required to undertake projects within real companies (Richter 2019: 8). Such mandates clearly show that universities of applied sciences are obliged by law to create a knowledge path conceived to be relevant for successful participation in current and future labour markets.

The Competence Center for Business English

The FHWien University of Applied Sciences of WKW is a private, but state-subsidised university based in Vienna, Austria. Since launching its first study programme in Tourism Management in 1994, the subsequent twenty five years have borne witness to a rapid growth in its course offerings and student body. Currently, the portfolio of FHWien der WKW (University of Applied Sciences for Management & Communication), or FHWien henceforth, includes 18 Bachelor's and Master's degree programmes in the fields of management and communication. catering to a student body of approximately 2,800 students. Moreover, the institutional Center for Academic Continuing Education offers an additional 19 study programmes, which include an International MBA in Management & Communications. While most of its Bachelor study programmes are delivered in a part-time and full-time study mode, all Master's degree programmes are offered on a part-time basis.

Besides its commitment to providing a practice-oriented education at university level, FHWien is also characterised by a clear position regarding foreign language learning and teaching. In line with a European educational landscape characterised by internationalisation, the curricula of FHWien study programmes feature a number of compulsory modules and sub-modules where English is the language of instruction. However, in contrast to an increasing trend in tertiary education where English is simply seen as a vehicle to facilitate the mastery of content knowledge, the FHWien clearly acknowledges what Unterberger (2014: 45) describes as "the importance of discipline-specific language teaching."

According to Unterberger (2014:45), the stance outlined above is made explicit by the extent to which English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses are embedded throughout institutional programmes. As Business English is a compulsory subject of most German-language Bachelor programmes, FHWien clearly confirms a position that language learning does not happen incidentally, but needs to be taught by trained language instructors as opposed to business content experts (2014.45). The foundation of the Competence Center for Business English (CCBE) at FHWien in 2016 further attests to an institutional commitment to promote explicit foreign language learning and teaching goals. CCBE currently consists of five members, including the current researcher. As a service line, the mandate of the Competence Center is to combine Business English teaching expertise and organizational resources, while fostering links with both FH-Wien departments and their respective study programmes. Moreover, CCBE is tasked with innovative and student-

centered curriculum development and course design, as well as teaching, learning and assessment quality assurance.

As regards language learning, CCBE's teaching and learning practice pursues a Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach, which sees the goal of language education as the ability to communicate in the target language. Bearing in mind the strong link between language and context, the goal of the competence center is to equip learners with English-language knowledge and skills, enabling them to participate successfully in academic courses where English is the medium of instruction, as well as the workplace, where English is the lingua franca.

In addition to considering curricula characterised by learning outcomes, practice-orientation and a clear policy on explicit language learning, the FHWien "eLearning-Strategie 2020" (henceforth the eLearning strategy document) plays a key role in informing the design and delivery of CCBE business English modules and sub-modules. The latter eLearning strategy document outlines three clear aims: technology use should support the development of student self-directed learning skills and their digital competence, while also allowing more flexibility relating to the time and space of course delivery (FHWien der WKW n.d.: 1). In a similar vein to other tertiary education providers across the EHEA sector, FHWien is committed to a teaching approach which fosters an increased use of E-Learning, defining the latter as "alle Initiativen zur Unterstützung von Lehr- und Lernprozessen durch angemessene Informations- und Kommunikationstechnologien" (FHWien der WKW n.d.: 1).

The eLearning Strategy Document also gives guidance on how information and communication technology or educational technology can be used to support eLearning. Three different pedagogical approaches, strategies or settings are outlined: "Anreicherung", "Blended Learning" or "Online" (FHWien der WKW n.d.: 1). In fact, the definitions supplied in the strategy paper for the latter three approaches clearly correspond to Graham's (2013:5) concepts of "technology-enhanced", "blended" and "online" learning, respectively. For instance, when adopting "Anreicherung" as an instructional approach, ICT is used to help students prepare for or follow up on learning delivered in the traditional face-to-face mode, learning is not accounted for in terms of timetabled course units, and learning is effected as unsupervised self-study (FHWien der WKW n.d.: 1). In contrast, the same document defines "Blended learning" as "das didaktisch sinnvolle Zusammenspiel von Präsenz- und Onlinephasen innerhalb eines (Teil-)Moduls." In other words, blended learning at FHWien is

guided by Garrison & Vaughan's (2008: 148) interpretation of blended learning as "the organic integration of thoughtfully selected and complementary face-to-face and online approaches and technologies." The strategy document explicitly states that in a blended model, online phases replace face-to-face time. Or alternatively put, online phases imply a reduction in face-to-face time, which is accounted for from a scheduling perspective and involves learning activities entailing teacher supervision and feedback (FHWien der WKW n.d.: 1). The strategy document refers to the third option as "Reine Online Lehre", which is a purely online mode of instructional delivery and does not consist of any face-to-face phases (FHWien der WKW n.d.: 1).

While all of the three delivery modes outlined above are acknowledged as viable options in the strategy document, it also explicitly states that a blended learning setting with a reduction of face-to-face contact time is seen as the optimal delivery mode to implement eLearning (FHWien der WKW n.d.: 2). Moreover, it also states that in the Curriculum 2020 (effective as of winter semester 2018), study programmes are tasked with implementing E-Learning in online phases which account for up to 25% of the allocated module or sub-module contact hours (FHWien der WKW n.d.: 2).

Course design drivers

In light of the institutional drivers described in the previous section, CCBE was tasked with designing an ESP Business English (sub)-module for the first and second semester curricula of several management and communication BA study programmes effective as of winter semester 2018. The aim of the (sub) module is to help students to develop Business English skills, vocabulary and grammar targeting B2+/C1 language proficiency. Moreover, CCBE aimed to align assessment and learning and teaching activities to the generic learning outcomes, or the so-called "common body of competence" valid for almost all of the BA management and communication study programmes offered at FHWien. Although the (sub) module was rolled out on a semester basis during the 2018/2019 academic year across a population of approximately 720 students enrolled in almost all BA management and communication study programmes, the participants or sample selected for the post-course evaluation comprised students enrolled in BA study programmes subsumed under the department of management. All study participants who attended an ESP Business English (sub)-module were in the first semester of their studies, i.e. winter semester 2018/2019.

The *Business English Fundamentals* course was designed as a 5 ECTS sub-module with 45 teaching units for students participating in both the Management & Entrepreneurship and Finance, Accounting & Taxation study programmes. Moreover a “lighter” version of the same course was designed for the Human Resources Management study programme, where the *Business English Fundamentals* sub-module was worth 3 ECTS with 30 teaching hours. In the Tourism & Hospitality Management study programme, *Business English Fundamentals* was designed as a 4-ECTS topic block for an integrative module to be delivered over 30 teaching units. In the real estate study programme *Business English 1* was designed as sub-module spanning 37 teaching units and worth 5 ECTS.

The (sub) modules, which ranged from 30 to 45 teaching units within a time frame spanning 10 to 15 weeks, were all delivered via Moodle, which is the institute-wide learning management system. In line with the FHWien E-Learning strategy paper, the face-to-face mode featured as the lead driver of course delivery, with up to 25% of the teaching units scheduled as online learning units.

Although the (sub) module name, the number of ECTS credits and teaching units, the course content and assessment components vary throughout the individual study programmes, the curricula of each course shared several generic competences. For instance, one shared competence related to students’ ability to accurately apply the most common grammatical forms of English found in business communication.

As completion of upper secondary school with a certificate such as the Austrian Matura or an equivalent leaving certificate is a pre-requisite for admission to the universities of applied sciences, it is assumed that first-semester students can demonstrate a B2 level of English proficiency according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. Yet, first semester language lecturers and students alike often report that this is not the case, and learners tend to demonstrate various levels of language proficiency. Particularly part-time students tend to self-report a lack of grammatical competence. Also of relevance for the current study is the fact that the design of further Business English (sub) modules in subsequent semesters is based on the premise that students have mastered B2 grammatical competence. In fact, a solid grammatical foundation is considered key to enable students to progress through their respective study programme as the focus of content becomes increasingly specific to the field of study.

While grammar instruction had also been embedded across the different study programmes in previous first-semester ESP curricula, the teaching method tended to comprise a ‘present, practice, produce’ approach with a prescribed grammar book. Moreover, grammar teaching and learning took place primarily in the traditional classroom and achievement of the learning outcomes was measured on the basis of students’ end-of-semester performance on the written test. Thus, the new Curriculum 2020 provided CCBE with an opportunity not only to rethink grammar related assessment and teaching and learning activities, but also how to better integrate online and face-to-face components to better meet individual learning needs.

As suggested in the literature, an ePortfolio enables self-directed, individualised learning. Thus, the following sections present the methods employed under my direction to design and implement an ePortfolio component according to the conceptual framework I had devised to facilitate individual grammar learning in the (sub) modules outlined above. Nevertheless, although I took the lead on the design and implementation of the ePortfolio project presented in this thesis, all project components and materials presented henceforth have been created based on the combined feedback and input of the Competence Center for Business English (CCBE) team of the University of Applied Sciences for Management & Communication.

5.2. ePortfolio design

Figure 5.1 below presents a visual map of the three components informing the design method. These are described as follows:

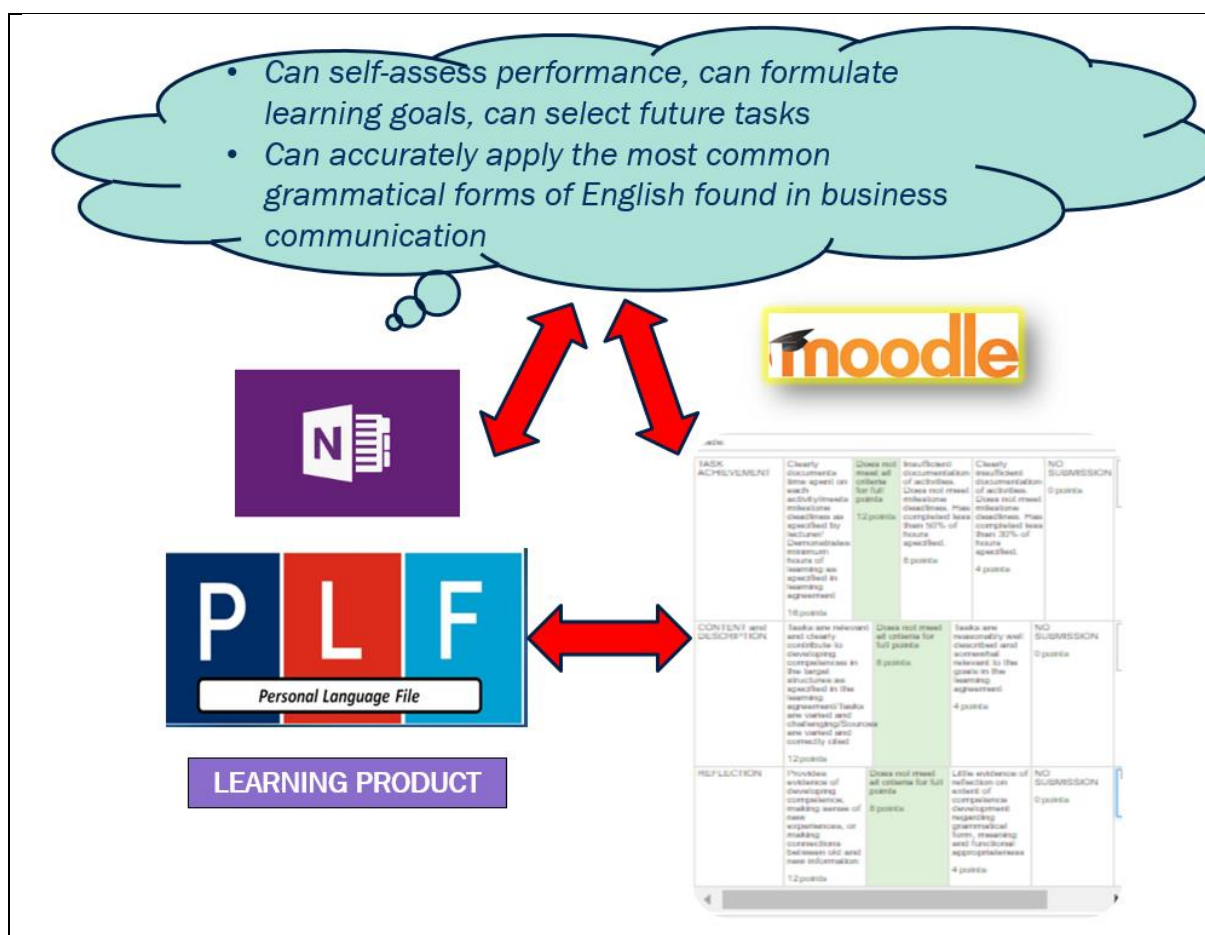


Figure 5. 1 Aligning outcomes, learning and assessment (CCBE 2018)

1. Formulating learning outcomes

Two learning outcomes relating to the grammar component of the (sub) modules were formulated. While the first learning outcome was formulated with a view to helping students acquire generic process-oriented competences, which are transferable skills applicable in multiple contexts, the second outcome described discipline-specific knowledge and skills with the learning product as the main focus. The learning outcomes were as follows:

- Can accurately apply the most common grammatical forms of English found in business communication.
- Can self-assess performance, can formulate learning goals, can select future tasks

2. Designing the Personal Language File

The next aspect to be addressed was how to create and facilitate a learning environment that would help students to work on their own needs at their own pace. It was felt that a digital portfolio would be an appropriate tool to support the development of the

competences outlined above, while also providing digital evidence of individual learning processes during the online phases of the course.

Drawing on Baumgartner's (2014) taxonomy of what he refers to "the reflection or educational" portfolio, CCBE's aim was to design a portfolio which would fulfill two goals: First, the portfolio design was intended to afford a personal learning space, facilitating the acquisition of knowledge and competences and foster both the learning product and process. On the other hand, from an instructional perspective, the portfolio was designed to facilitate formative and summative evaluation of the learning process and product, respectively.

After a review of several Microsoft Office 365 suite of applications (Word, Excel, OneNote) that could be potentially used to host a digital one-stop space for students to individually store their work and share this with their respective teachers, OneNote was selected for several reasons: First, OneNote is part of the Microsoft Office 365 suite of apps available for free download to university stakeholders. Second, the fact that its notebook design allows students to organise and display their work on different pages was perceived to foster student self-directed learning and facilitate the generation of learning processes and documentation of learning products. Moreover, its virtually unbounded document window feature was considered to facilitate creativity as it enables users to click anywhere to include text, tables, pictures or drawings in both the OneNote desktop version and mobile app. An additional benefit offered by OneNote is that any changes to data are synchronised and saved automatically in the cloud, which also facilitates the sharing of large files with peers and teachers alike. In summary, OneNote was perceived to be a user-friendly tool, which could potentially optimise virtual collaboration between learners, peers and teachers.

Using OneNote, CCBE created a branded ePortfolio called the "Personal Language File", henceforth the "PLF." The PLF was designed with the aim of aligning teaching and learning activities with the specified learning outcomes. Moreover, a series of learning activities were prepared for learners to engage with their PLF ePortfolio. For all stakeholders involved in this project, the PLF denotation represented not only the electronic portfolio itself, but also included the learning activities associated with preparing the ePortfolio product for summative assessment. Thus both the technical features of the electronic portfolio and the learning activities will be presented below and henceforth referred to as the ePortfolio project design.

A sample ePortfolio was subsequently designed to give students guidance on how to set up their own virtual learning space (see Appendix 11.1). The sample notebook comprised three pages, each accessible by clicking on the tabs at the top of the individual ePortfolio. The first page, or notebook 'cover', showed the name and logo of the 'Personal Language File' (PLF), coined by CCBE to emphasise the aspect of learner autonomy and individualised learning tasks. The second page (Template for S.M.A.R.T. Language Goals), was specifically designed to help students manage the formulation of specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and timely learning goals and select future tasks. The third notebook page ("Template for Progress Tracker") comprised two sample entries, and was designed to provide students with guidance on how to document and reflect on their learning processes throughout the semester, which would form the basis for summative assessment at the end of the course.

3. Establishing assessment weighting and criteria

In addition to other continuous assessment components, which contributed 20% to students' overall course grade, project work on the Personal Language File accounted for 10% of students' overall course grade across all (sub)-modules. Moreover, grammar accuracy and application were also summatively assessed in the end-of-semester final written test, which made up 70% of the overall course grade. In the latter testing instrument, tasks involving proofreading and editing, sentence completion and email production tasks made up a quarter of the total points allocated. Thus, holistically viewed, student performance on the summative grammar tasks mentioned above was designed to comprise up to 35% of their numerical score for the (sub)module.

Bearing in mind the 10% to be allocated and the two learning outcomes outlined above, an assessment rubric was specifically designed to assess the Personal Language File project. This is illustrated in Table 5.1. below.

Table 5. 1 Assessment criteria and scores for ePortfolio performance (CCBE 2018)

Criteria	Level of Performance	Score
1. Organisation and documentation	Clearly documents time spent on each activity/meets milestone deadlines as specified by lecturer/ Demonstrates minimum hours of learning as specified in learning agreement	4
	Does not meet all criteria for full points	3
	Insufficient documentation of activities. Does not meet milestone deadlines. Has completed less than 50% of hours specified.	2
	Clearly insufficient documentation of activities. Does not meet milestone deadlines. Has completed less than 30% of hours specified.	1
	No submission	0
2. Achievement of language learning goals	Tasks are relevant and clearly contribute to developing competences in the target structures as specified in the learning agreement /Tasks are varied and challenging / Sources are varied and correctly cited	3
	Does not meet all criteria above	2
	Tasks are reasonably well described and somewhat relevant to the goals in the learning agreement	1
	No submission	0
3. Reflection ability	Provides evidence of developing competence, making sense of new experiences, or making connections between old and new information	3
	Does not meet all criteria for full points	2
	Little evidence of reflection on extent of competence development regarding grammatical form, meaning and functional appropriateness	1
	No submission	0

The rubric consisted of three key criteria: Quantitative achievement of learning goals, achievement of language learning goals and reflection ability. Each criterion measured five levels of performance. Moreover, this assessment criteria was embedded as a clickable grade rubric on the individual course Moodle page. It was envisaged that this design mode would enable quick and meaningful feedback for both students and teachers alike. More precisely, following the ePortfolio evaluation by the lecturer, students would receive verbal or numeric feedback on their performance via their personal Moodle gradebook.

5.3. ePortfolio implementation method

The ePortfolio project implementation consisted of several steps taken to provide support to both learners and teachers. These are outlined below.

Teaching support

As illustrated in Figure 5.2. below, an instructional mode, comprising 11 scheduled units (or around 10% of total teaching units) was designed by CCBE to inform the blending of both FTF and distance unit scheduling and learning activities. Moreover, it was envisaged that the model would also provide guidance to lecturers on their scaffolding role during the ePortfolio implementation.

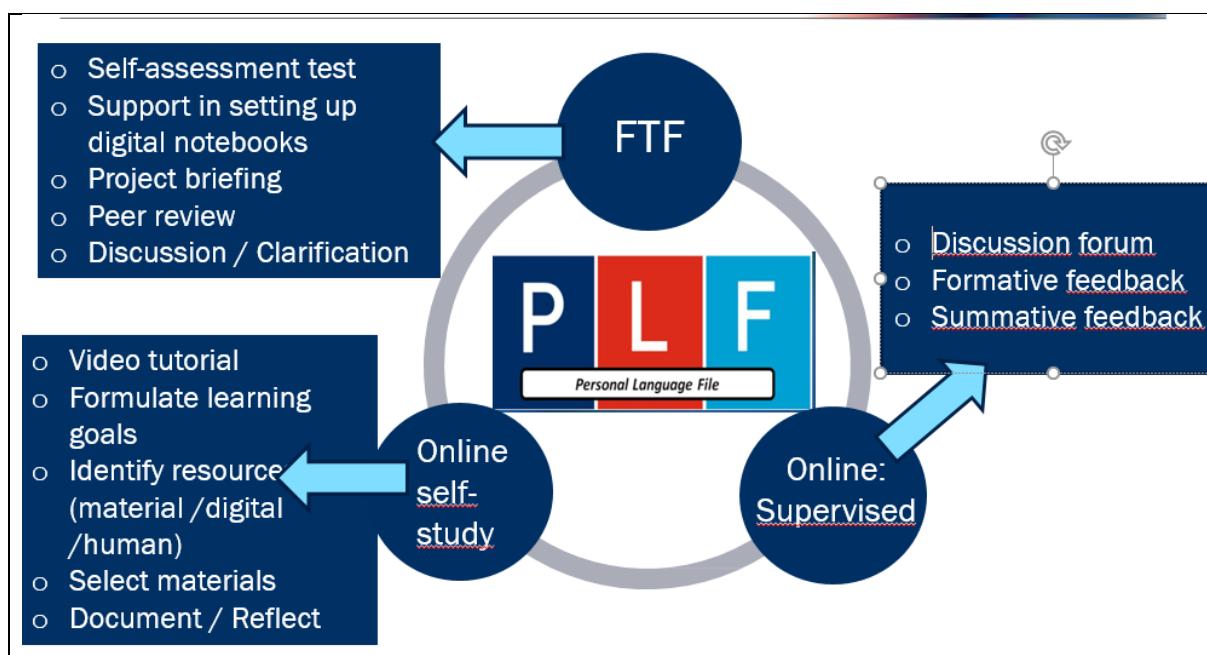


Figure 5. 2 EPortfolio Project Implementation (CCBE 2018)

CCBE set up a class portfolio for each group to connect students and teachers in one class in one virtual place. At the beginning of the semester, teachers received support in manually adding participants to their respective courses, thereby establishing a virtual collaborative community.

As the model shows, from an instructional perspective, FTF time, particularly at the beginning of the semester, is dedicated to helping students diagnose their learning needs, communicating the task, and providing both technical and task-related support. During the semester, FTF time is also dedicated to discussion, clarification and peer and lecturer feedback on the ePortfolio learning process. In the online unsupervised self-study phase students engage independently in the formulation of learning goals, identify the material, digital or human resources necessary to help them select appropriate materials to achieve their goals, and document and reflect on the learning process accordingly. In the supervised online phase, lecturers monitor the PLF Q&A forum, provide formative feedback in the middle of the semester and summative feedback at the end of the semester.

Learning support

Several levels of support were provided in the first half of the semester to help students to develop self-directed skills. A topic block devoted to the PLF project was set up on Moodle to scaffold the learning steps and materials required for this sub-component of the course (see Appendix 11.2.).

First, in order to help learners self-diagnose their strengths and weaknesses, a self-assessment test covering all B2 grammar constructs was administered via Moodle during the first FTF session. After viewing the results, students were requested to create a formal record of the B2 grammar items they felt they personally needed to work on by filling out the learning agreement (illustrated in Appendix 11.3) Students who felt that they had scored well on the self-assessment test were given the choice to work on C1 or C2 grammar constructs, or any other grammar items of their choice. The learning agreement also stated the number of hours that students should work on their PLF. As it had been decided that the self-directed grammar component would account for 10% of the course grade, the workload was calculated based on the allocated course ECTS credits. For instance, the Business English Fundamentals sub-module offered to full-time and part-time students in the Management & Entrepreneurship programme was worth 5 ECTS. Thus, assuming that one credit corresponds to 25 hours of work for the average student, it was calculated that the workload for the entire course amounted to 125 hours of work for the average student. This meant that students had to dedicate 12.5 hours to the selection of, documentation of and reflection on the specific grammar learning activities which would help them to achieve their self-formulated learning goals.

In the following FTF session, lecturers introduced the self-directed grammar learning project and provided in-class technical support to students in setting up their PLFs using OneNote. FTF support was also offered in helping students formulate their first SMART learning goal. A video tutorial was also designed by the CCBE team for students to view online at their own time and pace. The tutorial provided guidance on how to install OneNote, how to find the OneNote classroom set up for their specific group, and how to set up their own PLF using the template provided. Moreover, the video also demonstrated strategies to source form-focussed exercises online, or how to do consciousness-raising activities using authentic texts featuring a target grammar construct. In order to encourage learners to share their learning experience or seek guidance as necessary, a forum was set up on the course Moodle page. In addition, students were provided with a list of business text types which typically feature the target grammar structures (see Appendix 11.4).

Formative and summative assessment

The ePortfolio model developed by CCBE was designed to foster self-evaluation, peer evaluation and teacher evaluation. Self-assessment of performance constituted a two-step

process for students: the documentation of learning tasks and a short reflection on their experience with the learning tasks. Lecturer assessment comprised two steps: formative assessment was provided after the first eight weeks of the semester and summative assessment at the end of the semester. Both forms of assessment were guided by three criteria: task achievement, content, and reflection. Moreover, 6 FTF sessions were scheduled in the course of the semester, affording students an opportunity to receive peer feedback on their ePortfolios and discuss progress, problems or any other issues with the instructor. By the end of week 8 students were requested to evidence 5 hours of work in their Personal Language File. This work was then monitored by lecturers and students received formative feedback, encouraging them to make revisions as necessary before submitting the finished product at the end of the semester.

6. Personal Language File (PLF) evaluation

The following chapter presents the research study which was conducted by the current researcher to evaluate the implementation of the Personal Language File within the Business English (Fundamentals) modules for full-time and part-time management students at FHWien der WKW. Moreover, it also presents the research questions formulated, the study participants, the research approach, and describes the data collection procedure and rationale for the research instrument used for the study. In addition, the chapter outlines the methods employed to collect data, to design the questionnaire survey, and to both administer the questionnaire and analyse the survey data.

6.1. Study rationale and research questions

The FHWien der WKW for Management and Communication is driven by a strong quality assurance culture. Thus for CCBE, as course designers and teachers, identifying insufficient or missing course design practice is considered key to determining, implementing and testing new alternatives. Yet, as Wang & Jeffrey (2017: 1462) point out, it is the learners who provide the “frame of reference”, or the basis for evidence of perceived needs relating to instructional dimensions or facilitation of their learning processes. In fact, as highlighted by the literature, higher education institutions seeking to adhere to a student-centred learning paradigm will need to involve learners in the curriculum design process. Thus, the first purpose of the current study is to explore whether learner perceptions relating to the design and the implementation of an ePortfolio for grammar learning are influenced by study mode. Second, it aims to identify part-time and full-time students’ perceived needs for improvement in the ePortfolio design and ePortfolio implementation to inform the institutional course re-development process.

Drawing on the theoretical insight gained from the literature reviewed and the contextual factors outlined in the previous chapter, the current study is guided by the following research questions:

Research question 1: Are there differing perceptions among part-time and full-time students relating to the effect of the design and the implementation of the ePortfolio for grammar learning on motivation and achievement of intended learning outcomes?

Research question 2: Which part-time and full-time learner perceptions relating to the design and the implementation of the ePortfolio for grammar learning might play a role for the institutional course re-development process?

6.2. Study participants and research design

Although the (sub) module was rolled out in the course of the 2018/2019 academic year across a population of approximately 720 students enrolled in almost all BA management and communication study programmes, for the purpose of this research a cluster sampling approach was employed. Thus, the participants or sample selected for the following study comprised a total of 450 university students enrolled in courses entitled either *Business English Fundamentals* or *Business English* across five BA study programmes subsumed under the department of management. All study participants, who attended either of the latter ESP Business English (sub)-modules were in the first semester of their studies during the winter semester 2018/2019. The 450 management students were enrolled across 26 different courses, which were taught by 17 different lecturers consisting of 13 adjunct lecturers and 4 academic staff members (including myself). While the latter four CCBE staff members are employed by FHWien der WKW, the adjunct or external lecturers do not teach exclusively at FHWien der WKW, and the number of teaching units they teach per semester for FHWien der WKW is capped. However, all participating instructors have a formal higher education qualification in either foreign languages, business, law or post-primary teacher education as well as several years of experience in teaching adults in an Austrian higher-education context.

Figure 6.1. illustrates the total number of BA Management students participating in the study by study programme and study mode. As the Fachhochschul-Studiengesetz (FHStG) and Hochschul-Qualitätssicherungsgesetz (HS-QSG), the two most important laws providing the legal basis for universities of applied sciences and their study programmes, do not explicitly define or distinguish between 'part-time' and 'full-time' students, for the purpose of this study the distinction between the two study modes can be viewed in terms of how the provision of the academic programme is organised from an institutional perspective and scheduled from a student perspective. Part-time students enrol for study programmes which take place at times that are better suited to their working schedules, such as in the evenings or at weekends. Provision of full-time study programmes, on the other hand, is usually offered during the day from Monday to Friday.

Of the 450 students, 262 students or 58% of the study sample were enrolled in a full-time study mode, with 188 or 42% of the sample accounted for by part-time students. At FHWien

the Management & Entrepreneurship, Finance, Tax & Accounting, and Human Resources Management study programmes are delivered in both a full-time and part-time study mode and in the winter semester 2018 consisted of 186, 80 and 63 participants respectively. Real Estate Management is currently only offered as a part-time study programme and comprised 39 participants in winter semester 2019. By contrast, the Tourism & Hospitality Management study programme is delivered in a full-time mode only. 72 students of the latter study programme were enrolled for Business English 1 in winter semester 2018.

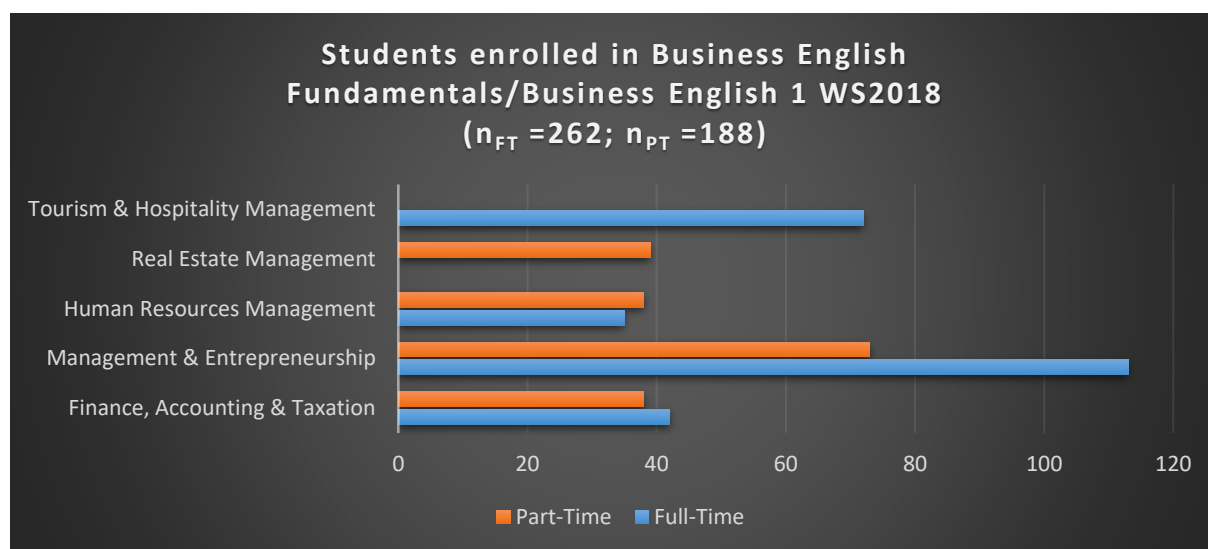


Figure 6. 1 Participants in Business English Fundamentals /Business English 1 (n= 450)

The design of the current study adopted a quantitatively-driven research approach. As the primary purpose of the research was to provide CCBE with a quantitative or numeric description of perceptions, attitudes or opinions relating to aspects of the EPortfolio project, the quantitative method of investigation was seen to present several advantages for the current research context. First, it was deemed to facilitate what Dörnyei (2007:14) refers to as a “systematic, rigorous, focused and tightly controlled” inquiry process. Second, it was felt that a quantitative approach would better lend itself to what Dörnyei (2007:14) refers to as “precise measurement”, which could facilitate the collection of “reliable and replicable data that is generalizable to other contexts.” Third, as also highlighted by Dörnyei (2007:14), the latter method is efficient in terms of time and financial resources as the research can be implemented quickly and cheaply, and the subsequent data analysis can be conducted using computer freeware (Dörnyei 2007:14).

Yet, it must also be acknowledged that quantitative methods have a rather limited exploratory capacity. Dörnyei (2007: 35) posits that as quantitative methods average out responses across the study population, the “subjective variety” of an individual experience remains unexplored.

In other words, quantitative methods are “not very sensitive in uncovering the reasons for particular observations or the dynamics underlying the examined situation or phenomenon” (Dörnyei 2001:35). Such shortcomings have led to a view of quantitative research, which Brannen (2005:7) succinctly describes as “overly simplistic, decontextualised, reductionist in terms of its generalizations, and failing to capture the meanings that actors attach to their lives and circumstances.” Thus, it may be concluded that while a quantitatively-driven approach may guide the research endeavour and facilitate the aim of gaining generalisable insight into a certain topic, it was felt that a qualitative approach could serve as a valid method to supplement, clarify or explain quantitative findings.

6.3. Data collection and research instrument

In light of the above, the next question facing the research team was to determine which data collection strategy would best facilitate both a quantitative and qualitative strategy of inquiry. In other words, choices had to be made relating to the sampling procedure, the best instrument to serve the research purpose, as well as addressing the limitations of quantitative research outlined above. It was subsequently decided to collect data by means of a questionnaire survey. This instrument was selected for several reasons: First, as Dörnyei (2007) points out, while the results of a questionnaire survey are “typically quantitative” in nature, this research instrument may also include some “open-ended questions that will require a qualitative analysis” (Dörnyei 2007: 101). Thus, although questionnaires may not be well suited for what the latter author refers to as “truly qualitative, exploratory research”, he acknowledges that some open-ended questions “can provide a far greater richness than fully quantitative data” and thereby help to “identify issues not previously anticipated” (Dörnyei 2007: 107).

Moreover, the researcher felt that an online questionnaire survey would be, as Dörnyei highlights, “inherently capable of collecting a large amount of information quickly in a cost – effective form that is “readily processible” (Dörnyei 2007: 102). In addition, it was hypothesised that the respondents would be willing participants in the filling in of questionnaires as the survey method could offer them anonymity (Dörnyei 2007: 115). However, most attractive from the researcher’s perspective was the fact that responses could be immediately coded for subsequent analysis (Dörnyei 2007: 121). In summary, although a questionnaire may result in what Dörnyei (2007: 115) describes as “rather superficial data”, for the aims of the current study it was considered to be the most appropriate instrument for

collecting data. Due to time and resource constraints, only the administration of a single research instrument over a short period of time was possible.

As the the term ‘questionnaire’ may be subject to different interpretations within the research community, for the purpose of the current study it is understood as a “written instrument that presents respondents with a series of questions or statements to which they are to react either by writing out their answers or selecting from among existing answers” (Brown 2001: 6). Thus, as highlighted by Dörnyei (2007), questionnaire items do not necessarily have to be formulated as questions, but may also comprise a series of statements intended to trigger a response from study participants (Dörnyei 2007: 102). The question items or statements formulated for the questionnaire survey will be presented in the following section.

6.4. Questionnaire design

In order to investigate students’ attitudes and perceptions relating to the tools used to digitalise language learning activities during the Business English Fundamentals or Business English 1 courses delivered during the winter semester 2018/2019., a 22-item questionnaire was designed by CCBE. Of these items, three questions were factual questions designed to measure demographic respondent characteristics that may influence perceptions relating to the course in general (study programme, study mode and gender). The remaining 19 questions investigated students’ perceptions of the digital tools used in the course. While two items explored students’ perceptions of self-study and in-class vocabulary learning activities using *Quizlet*, their experience with the licensed Upper Intermediate *MyEnglishLab* online learning activities (B2 language skills and systems) was measured by 3 items, and their perception of Moodle as an e-platform by one item. However, as the main focus of the questionnaire was to probe students’ attitudes and perceptions relating to the eportfolio project, 13 of the 19 questions relating to their experience with digital tools were specifically designed to investigate their experience with the *Personal Language File*.

For the purpose of the current evaluation, only the responses to 16 of these questionnaire items will be described and analysed. Due to the fact that the aim of my study was to investigate business students’s perceptions of the ePortfolio implementation, a significant part of the questionnaire items was comprised of attitudinal questions. Moreover, as the research approach adopted for this study was primarily of a quantitative nature, the majority of questions (14 items) was made up of ‘closed-ended’ items, which required the respondent

to choose one of the given alternatives rather than producing free writing (Dörnyei 20017: 105). Two open questions were designed to allow respondents to include more information, feelings or attitudes relating to the ePortfolio project. It was hypothesized that this approach would enable me to gain deeper insight into the study respondents' true feelings relating to the ePortfolio project and yield findings that had not been anticipated.

Table 6.1 below provides an overview of the 16 questions employed in my research project. In addition, the selected question type and response option for each question as well as the construct being probed by the respective question is illustrated.

Table 6. 1 Overview of questionnaire items, question type and construct(s) probed

	Question	Question type	Construct(s) probed
1.	Please specify your study program.	Factual / Closed (MC)	Study programme
2.	Please specify your mode of studying.	Factual / Closed (MC)	Mode of studying
3.	You are ...male/female	Factual / Closed (MC)	Gender
4.	I think that a university Business English course should include an explicit focus on grammar learning.	Attitudinal / Closed (Likert)	Curriculum value
5.	I think that grammar accuracy (correctness) is important for successful business communication.	Attitudinal / Closed (Likert)	Curriculum value
6.	I think it is better to learn grammar individually by means of a Personal Language File rather than using face-to-face class time to focus on grammar.	Attitudinal / Closed (Likert)	EPortfolio project design
7.	The in-class self-assessment test via the Moodle platform gave me clear guidance on areas of grammar where I needed improvement.	Attitudinal / Closed (Likert)	Pedagogical Guidance
8.	The tasks and purpose of the Personal Language File project were clearly communicated.	Attitudinal / Closed (Likert)	Pedagogical Guidance
9.	My lecturer's feedback on my PLF entries was helpful.	Attitudinal / Closed (Likert)	Pedagogical Guidance
10.	The in-class PLF checks (debriefings) where I could discuss my progress with my lecturer and peers were helpful.	Attitudinal / Closed (Likert)	EPortfolio project design
11.	The PLF project motivated me to improve my grammar.	Attitudinal / Closed (Likert)	EPortfolio project design
12.	I feel that working on my PLF has helped me to better understand the rules of grammar.	Attitudinal / Closed (Likert)	EPortfolio task value
13.	I feel that working on my PLF has helped me to apply the rules of grammar more appropriately.	Attitudinal / Closed (Likert)	EPortfolio task value
14.	Which online resources did you find most useful for your Personal Language File? Please specify.	Factual / Open (Clarification)	Types and number of resources used
15.	OneNote was a useful tool to work on my Personal Language File.	Attitudinal / Closed (Likert)	EPortfolio project design
16.	What can be done to make the PLF project better? Please add your comments here.	Attitudinal / Open (Short answer)	EPortfolio redesign dimensions

Questions 1, 2 and 3 constituted a closed-ended multiple choice response format, which, as Dörnyei (2007: 106) highlights, is very often used when asking about personal information. These items were designed to measure demographic respondent characteristics that may influence perceptions about working with the PLF (study programme, study mode and gender). Questions 4 – 13 & 15 were characterised by a closed-ended Likert scale format,

where respondents were required to indicate the extent to which they 'agree' or 'disagree' with a statement by clicking on or circling response options ranging from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'. Although the Likert scale traditionally includes a 'middle' or 'neutral' option, which acknowledges that respondents may not have an opinion, this option was deliberately omitted in the current questionnaire survey to allow the researcher to gauge a clear tendency of respondent agreement or disagreement. Thus, all closed-ended question items featured a four-option 'forced choice' or 'ipsative' response format with no option given that would facilitate 'central tendency bias.' As recommended by Dörnyei (2007: 105), each response item was assigned a number to facilitate subsequent analysis. The adapted Likert scale used in the survey was as follows: (1) - strongly agree; (2) – agree; (3) - tend to disagree; (4) - strongly disagree.

My first research aim was to investigate if there were differing perceptions among part-time and full-time students relating to the design and the implementation of the ePortfolio for grammar learning, the following questions, grouped around five themes, prioritised a quantitative approach, and were designed to enable quantitative analysis and comparison between the two study modes: For instance, items 4, & 5 probed students' perceptions relating to the value of including explicit grammar learning aims in a university curriculum. Items 6, 10 and 15 were conceived to measure opinions on the ePortfolio project design. Items 7, 8 & 9 investigated student satisfaction relating to pedagogical guidance during the ePortfolio project implementation. Questions 12 & 13 measured attitudes relating to the perceived ePortfolio outcome. Question 11 aimed to find out if students had been motivated by the PLF project. Question 14 was designed as an open-ended "clarification question" to investigate which resources students were using for their ePortfolio projects (Dörnyei 2007:107).

In order to find answers to my second research question, which aimed to explore which part-time and full-time learner perceptions relating to the design and the implementation of the ePortfolio for grammar learning might play a role for the institutional course re-development process, a qualitative approach was employed. Question 16 was thus designed as an open-ended exploratory question, and asked students to comment on what could be done to make the PLF project better.

6.5. Questionnaire administration and analysis

The questionnaire was administered as an online survey at the end of the WS2018/2019. An email was sent by the current researcher to the lecturers of the student sample requesting them to give students an opportunity to fill out the questionnaire in the last FTF session, or after the final written test. A link to the online survey was provided on each lecturer's Moodle page. In the same email, lecturers were also asked to emphasise that participation was voluntary and students' answers were anonymous.

After the survey had been administered, descriptive statistics were used to analyse the data. For this purpose, each quantitative response item was assigned a number for scoring purposes and the scores for each item summed up (Dörnyei 2007: 105). Moreover, as my research aim was to gain further insight on factors influencing students' perceptions relating to the ePortfolio project design and implementation, an inductive analysis approach was adopted to analyse the textual responses to the open-end item 16. First, after several readings to gain a more holistic understanding of students' perceptions, the emergent themes were assigned to two categories: ePortfolio design and ePortfolio implementation. Second, the emerging sub themes within these two categories were assigned a number and summed up according to how frequently these themes occurred.

7. Results

This chapter is structured as follows: The first section is devoted to addressing my first research question. For this purpose, the descriptive results of the quantitative analysis will be presented. Following an illustration of demographic information, the results of students' perceptions will be grouped around six themes: explicit grammar teaching and learning, the ePortfolio project design, pedagogical guidance value, achievement of intended learning outcomes, (online) resources used to implement the ePortfolio and motivation to improve grammar. The second section of this chapter aims to address my second research question. For this purpose, the results derived from the qualitative analysis of student comments relating to what needs to be improved in the ePortfolio project will be outlined according to two categories: ePortfolio design factors and ePortfolio implementation factors.

7.1. Quantitative analysis

Table 7.1. provides an overview of the total number of students participating in the course and the total number and percentage of responses broken down by study programme and study mode. Of the 450 students who participated in the Business English Fundamentals or Business English modules across the five management study programmes (Finance, Accounting & Taxation, Management & Entrepreneurship, Human Resources Management, Real Estate Management, and Tourism & Hospitality Management), a total of 168 students responded to the survey.

Table 7. 1 Descriptive statistics of students participating in (sub)module and study respondents. Response rate in total numbers and percent by study mode and study programme.

	Finance, Accounting & Taxation	Management & Entrepreneurship	Human Resources Management	Real Estate Management	Tourism & Hospitality Management
Total	80	186	73	39	72
Full-time	42	113	35	-	72
Part-time	38	73	38	39	-
Response Full-time	19 (45%)	47 (42%)	13 (37%)	-	33 (46%)
Response Part-Time	15 (39%)	29 (40%)	3 (8%)	9 (23%)	-

As is illustrated in Figure 7.1, just over 37% of the study sample, responded to the survey. 67%, or 112, of the 168 respondents were full-time students, while 33%, or 56, of the study participants were accounted for by part-time students.

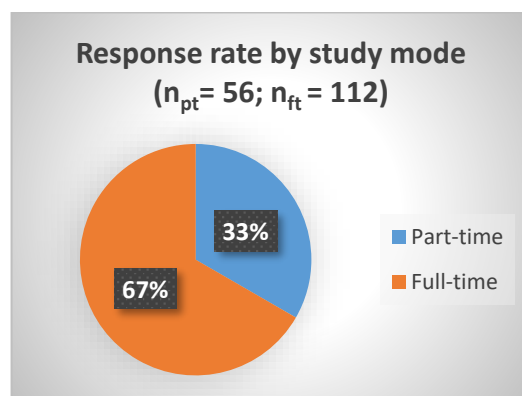


Figure 7. 1Response rate by study mode (in%)

Figure 7.2. shows the study respondents by study mode and gender. Of the 56 part-time respondents, 41% or 23 students were male, while 59%, or 33 students were female. Of the 112 full-time study mode respondents, 44% or 49 students were female, while 56%, or 63 study participants were male.

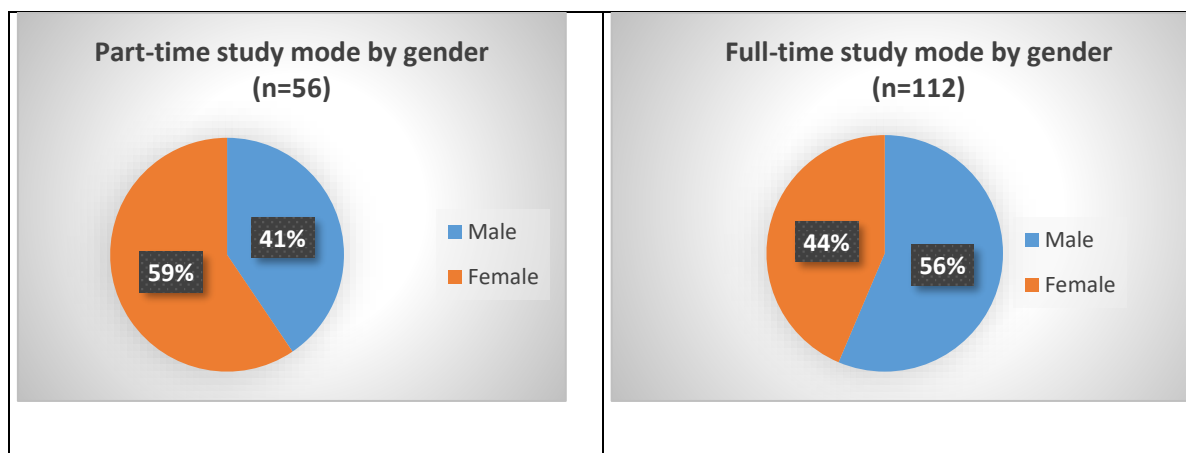


Figure 7. 2 Study respondents by study mode and gender (in %)

Students' perceptions of the value of explicit grammar learning

Figure 7.3. shows the results of items 4 and 5, which probed students' perceptions relating to the inclusion of an explicit focus on grammar learning in a university business English course, and grammar accuracy being important for successful business communication. With regard to including an explicit focus on grammar learning in a university business English course, although both groups thought that this focus should be included, a significant difference could be observed between the two study modes. While nearly 75% of full-time students either strongly agreed (12.5%) or agreed (59.8%) with this statement, a significantly lower degree of

agreement was self-reported by the part-time students, with just over 55% of part-time students either strongly agreeing (7.1%) or agreeing (48.2%). Regarding item 5, no difference in students' perceptions could be observed since around 90% of students in both study modes either strongly agreed or agreed that grammar accuracy is important for successful business communication.

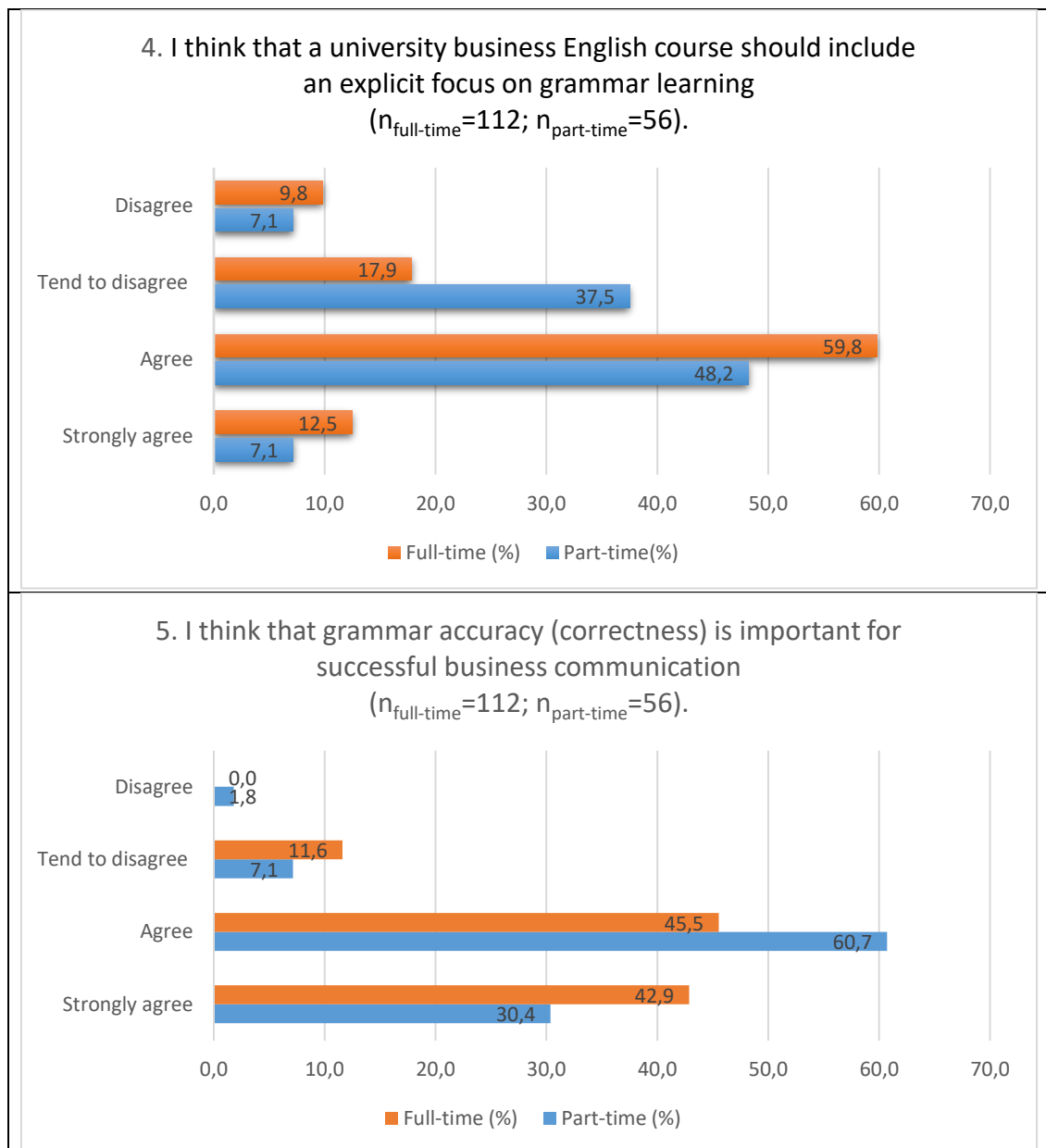


Figure 7. 3 Students' perceptions of the value of explicit grammar teaching (items 4-5) (n=168)

Students' perceptions of ePortfolio project design

Figure 7.4. shows the results of the responses to items 6, 10 and 15, which explored students' perceptions relating to the online activities, FTF learning activities and OneNote. design components.

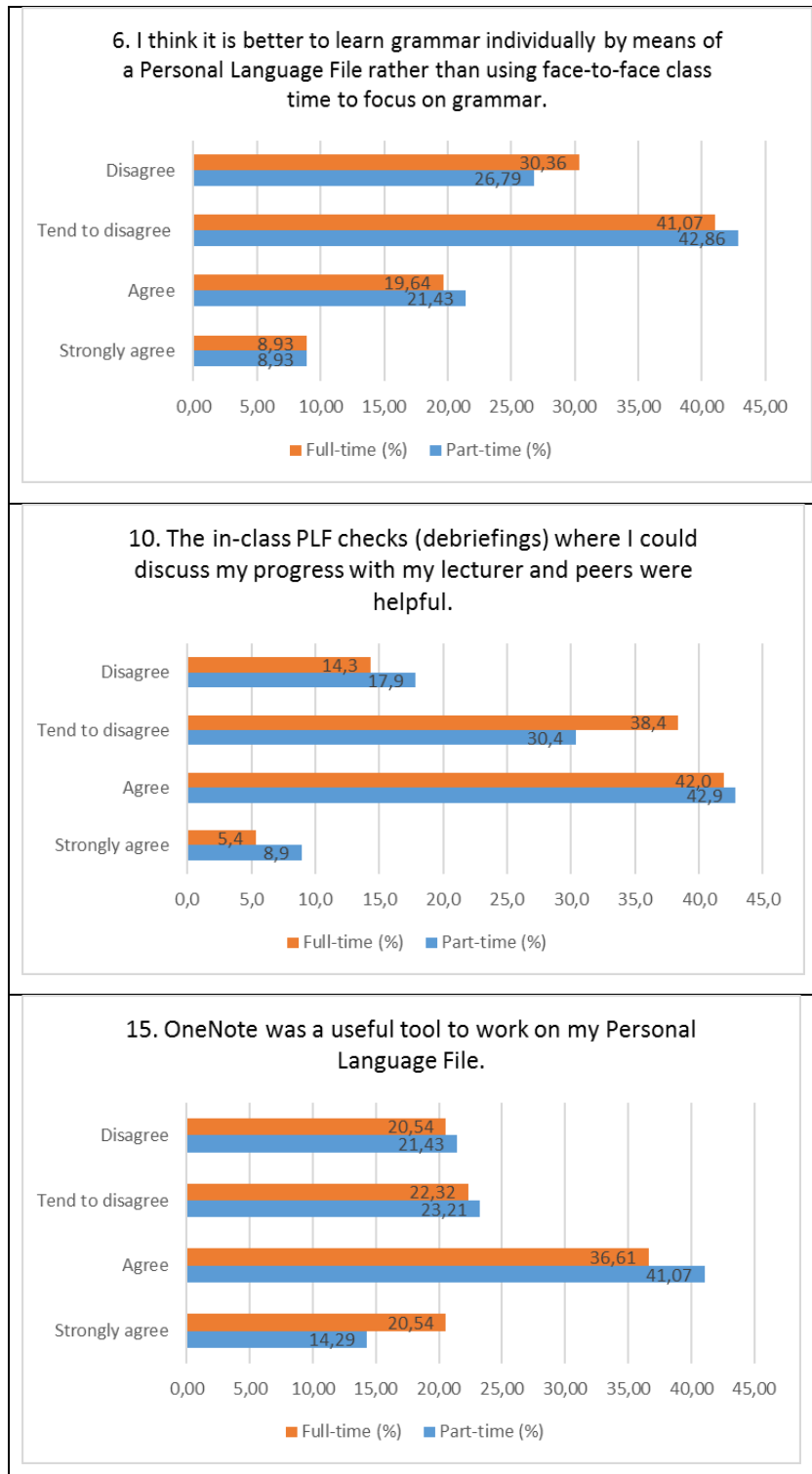


Figure 7. 4 Students' perceptions of ePortfolio project design (items 6, 10, 15) (n =1 68)

With regard to students' perceptions relating to the value of individual online grammar learning activities, a distinctly similar pattern could be identified in both study modes. Over two thirds of students in both study modes thought that it had not been better to learn grammar individually online by means of the electronic Personal Language File Portfolio instead of using FTF time for this purpose. However, regarding the perceived value of the FTF learning activities, contrasting patterns between the study modes were observed. While a slight majority of part-time students (52%) believed that the in-class learning activities had been helpful, the results for the full-time students' responses to this item indicated that 53% of full-time students self-reported either a tendency to disagree or disagreement with this statement. With regard to OneNote technology, no significant difference could be identified since a slight majority of both study modes self-reported either agreement, or strong agreement that OneNote had been a useful tool to work on the ePortfolio project, and a significant minority of both study modes perceived that OneNote had not been useful.

Students' perceptions of pedagogical guidance

Figure 7.5. shows the results of the responses to items 7, 8 and 9, which investigated learners' perceptions relating to three pedagogical guidance components. The results indicate a similar tendency in part-time and full-time students' perceptions relating to the value of pedagogical guidance as a consistently high trend of self-reported agreement relating to the perceived value of the in-class self-assessment test, communication of the tasks and purpose of the ePortfolio project, and lecturer feedback could be observed across both study modes. Over two thirds of both study modes perceived that the in-class self-assessment test had given them guidance on the areas of grammar where they needed improvement. Similarly, 70% of respondents in the part-time study mode and 67% of full-time students expressed either agreement or strong agreement that the tasks and purpose of the ePortfolio project had been clearly communicated by the teacher. Regarding the perceived value of their lecturers' feedback on the students' ePortfolio entries, the results show that a clear majority of part-time students (66%) and full-time students (62%) self-reported either agreement or strong agreement.

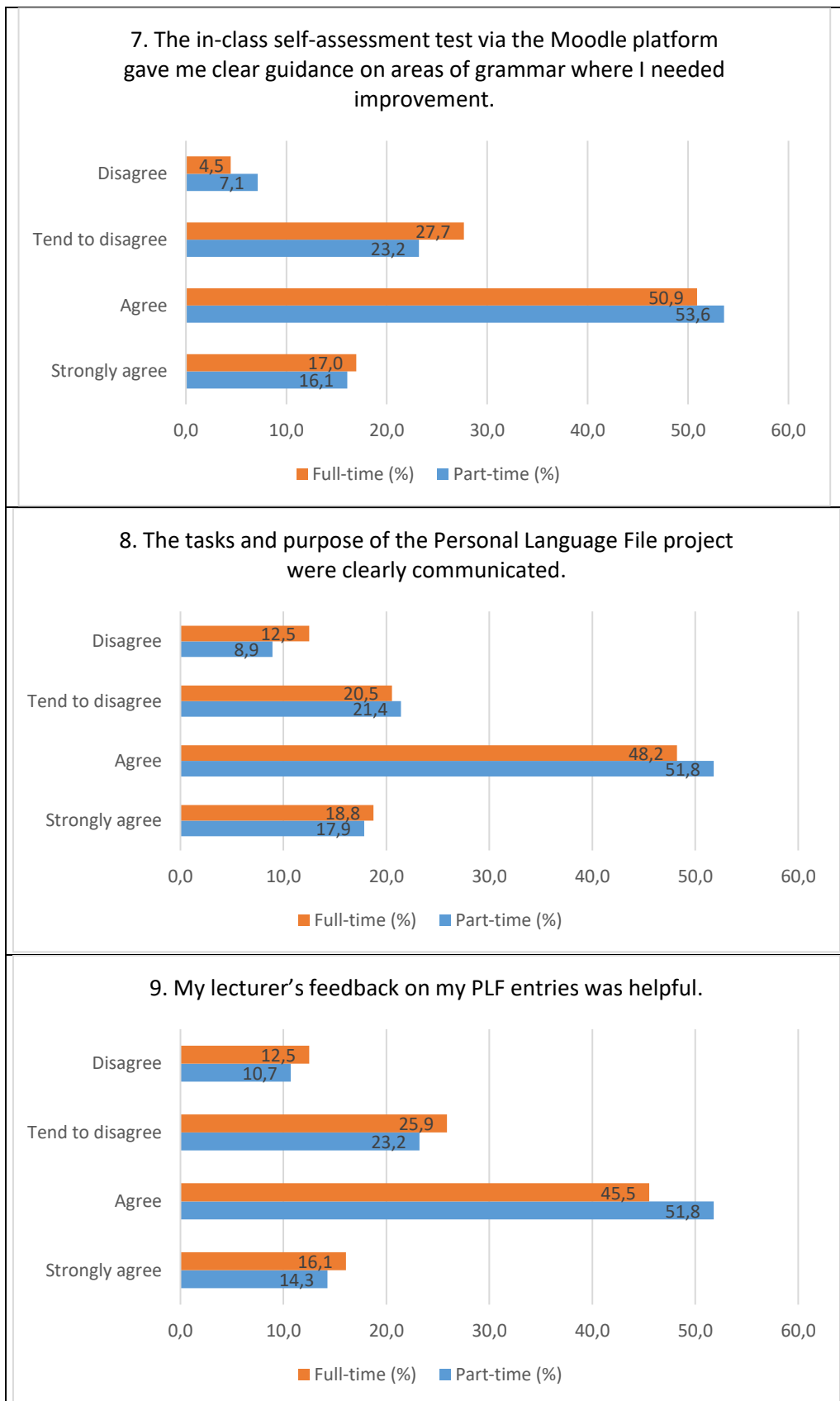


Figure 7. 5 Students' perceptions of pedagogical guidance (items 7-9) (n=168)

Student perceptions' of achieving intended learning outcomes

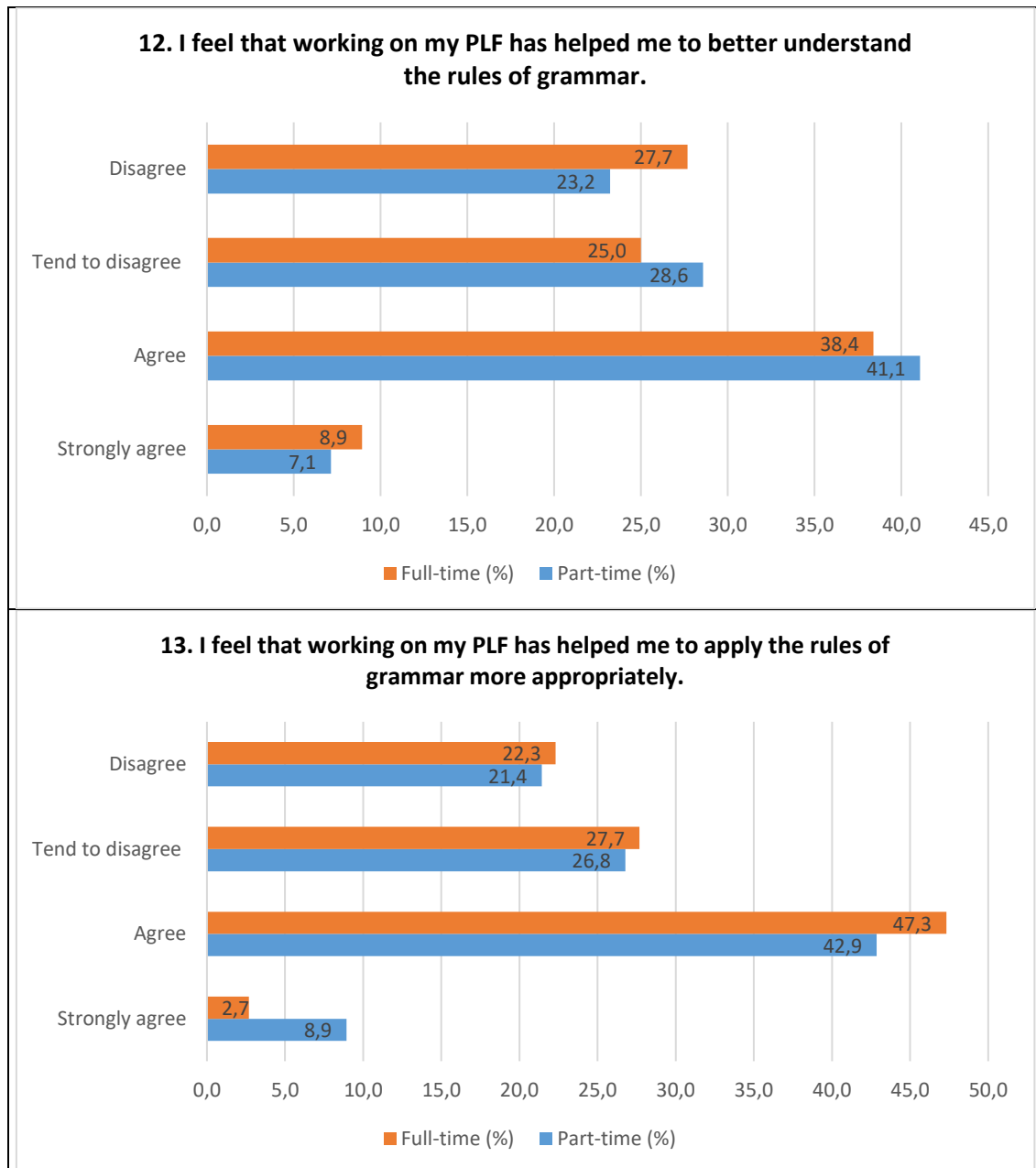


Figure 7. 6 Student perceptions of achieving intended learning outcomes (items 12&13) (n=168)

Figure 7.6. shows the results of the responses to items 12 and 13, which probed learners' perceptions relating to the achievement of intended learning outcomes. A similar pattern could be identified relating to students' perceptions on whether the ePortfolio project had helped them to better understand the rules of grammar. A slight majority of both study modes felt that working on the ePortfolio had not helped them to better understand grammar rules. However, the results yielded inconclusive findings relating to the respondents' perceived ability to apply the rules of grammar more appropriately after working on the electronic PLF. While a slight majority of part-time students (52%) agreed that working on

their PLF had helped them to apply the rules of grammar more appropriately, the results for the full-time students' responses to the last item in this category showed a clear divide in opinion, with 50% indicating either agreement or strong agreement and 50% tending to either disagree or disagree.

(Online) resources used for ePortfolio implementation?

This question was designed as an open item and aimed to gain insight into which kind of resources and information students are using to implement the ePortfolio project and if they are using one or multiple sources. Figures 7.7 and 7.8, respectively, illustrate the most useful (online) resources named by part-time and full-time students, respectively. Of the 56 part-time students surveyed, 50 students responded to this question indicating that they had used at least one or several resources. The total number of resources named by respondents of the part-time study mode amounted to 57. As regards the full-time students, 97 of the 112 full-time students responded to this question, naming at least one or several resources. The total number of resources specified by the latter group amounted to 110. The average number of resources showed a similar tendency between part-time and full-time students, with the average number of resources used amounting to 1.14 and 1.13, respectively.

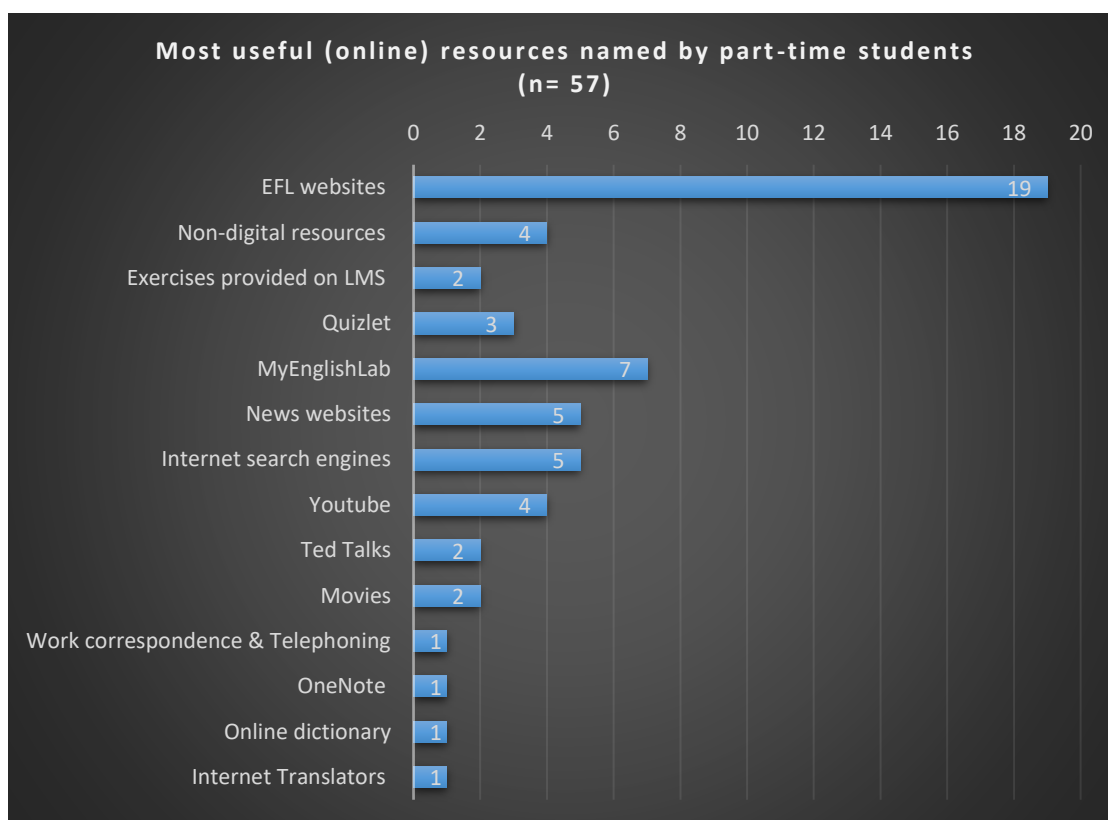


Figure 7. 7 Most useful (online) resource(s) named by part-time students (n=57)

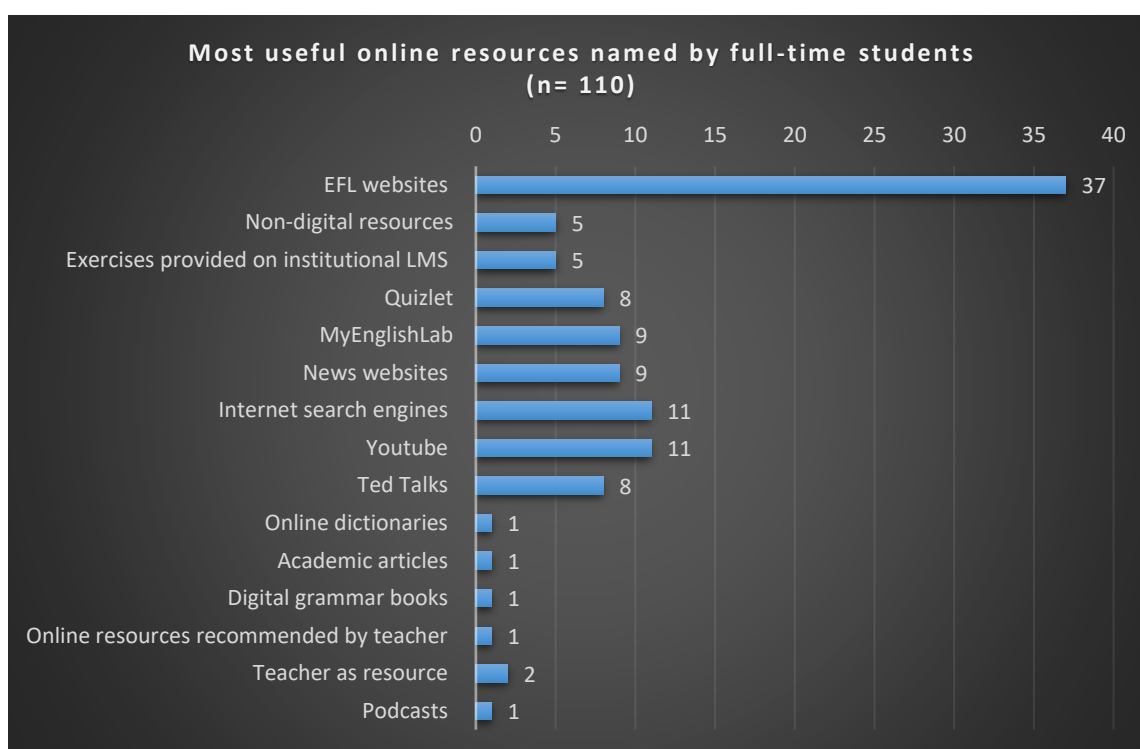


Figure 7. 8 Most useful (online) resources named by full-time students (n=110)

The results of this item indicate that EFL websites were the most frequently named resource used by both part-time and full-time students for their PLF project, making up 34% and 33% respectively of the resources specified by the respondents to this question. While Internet search engines and Youtube were the second most frequently-named resources specified by full-time (both accounting for 10% of the resources used), MyEnglishLab was the second most frequently named resource used by part-time students (accounting for 12% of the resources named). News websites and Internet search engines accounted for five of the 57 resources indicated by part-time students, both making up their third most-frequently named resource, while MyEnglishLab and news websites were the third most-frequently named resources by full-time students, both accounting for 9 of the 110 resources named. Quizlet and Tedtalks both made up fourth place, accounting for 8 of the 110 resources specified by full-time students. For part-time students Non-digital resources and Youtube tied as the fourth most-frequently used resources.

Student motivation to engage in ePortfolio-mediated grammar learning

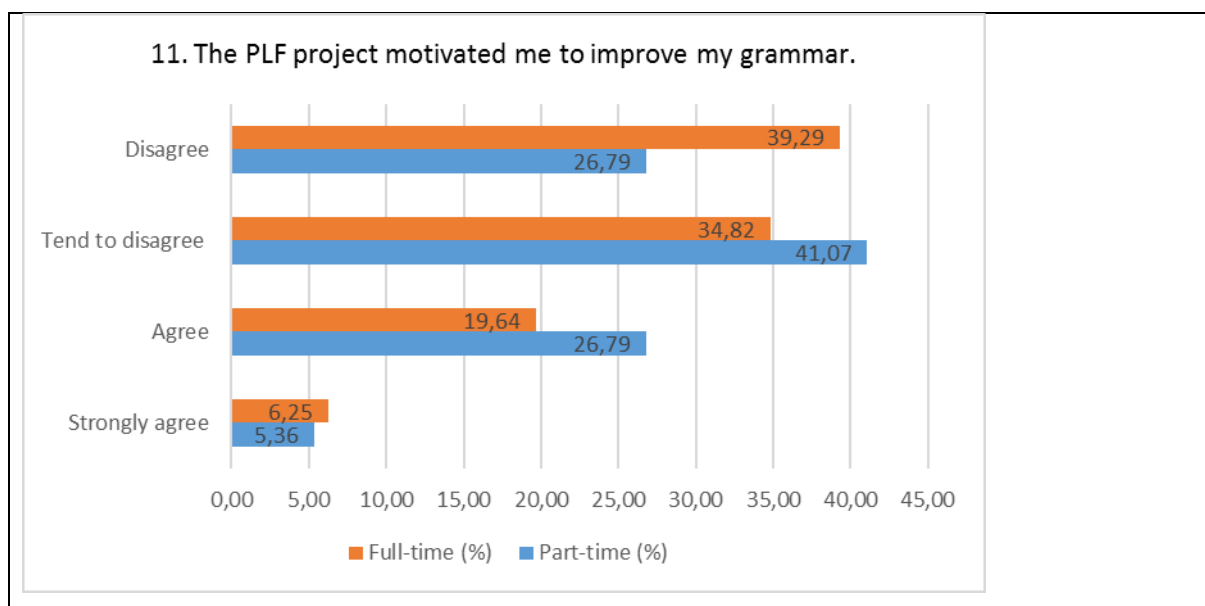


Figure 7. 9 Students' motivation to engage in ePortfolio-mediated grammar learning (item 11) (n=168)

Contrary to the initial assumption that the ePortfolio project would motivate both study modes to improve their grammar, the results, illustrated in Figure 4.9, showed a similar tendency for both study modes in the opposite direction. 68% of part-time students and almost three quarters of full-time students (74%) either tended to disagree or disagreed with the statement that the PLF project had motivated them to improve their grammar.

7.2. Qualitative analysis

Of the 168 questionnaire respondents, a total of 100 students entered a response to the open question "What can be done to make the PLF project better?" mentioning at least one or several themes. In the part-time study mode, 32 of 56 students (or 57% of the survey participants) responded to this question, naming 37 themes in total. 68 of 112 (61%) of full-time students responded to this question, mentioning a total of 108 themes. The emergent themes were subsequently summarized into sub-themes and subsumed within two categories: ePortfolio design features and ePortfolio implementation features.

The ePortfolio project design was the category, where both full-time and part-time students perceived the strongest need for improvement. Of the 108 themes mentioned by full-time students, 60% referred to a perceived need for improvement in the ePortfolio design category, whereby the part-time students' perceived need for improvement in the same category was significantly higher, with 28 (or 76%) of the 37 themes mentioned addressing ePortfolio design aspects. Themes related to perceived need for improvement in the ePortfolio implementation

accounted for 40% of the total themes named by full-time students and just under a quarter of the themes mentioned by part-time students. The sub-themes identified within the two categories above will be described in more detail in the following sub-sections.

7.2.1. Perceived need for improvement in the ePortfolio project design

Table 7. 2. illustrates students' perceived need for improvement in the ePortfolio project design broken down by themes and study mode.

Table 7. 2 Themes for improvement in ePortfolio project design

Themes mentioned relating to perceived need for improvement in ePortfolio design factors	Number of full-time participants mentioning this (n= 65)	Number of part-time participants mentioning this (n=28)
Learning activities for FTF vs DL setting	15	1
Control vs choice	11	5
Domain - documentation imbalance	10	6
OneNote	9	3
Belief in project usefulness	7	2
Deadline management	6	3
Time, effort - output imbalance	6	7
Non-digital output	1	-

While only six of 65 full-time students mentioned this, for the part-time students the most frequently mentioned theme, named by 7 of 20 respondents was a perceived imbalance between the time and effort expended and the output. The following response from a part-time student captures this sentiment:

It's a lot of work to find resources that suit to improve you[sic] grammar. Half of the time for my PLF went into research, which for me didn't help me improve my grammar skills. I'd have liked it better if there's a cloud with a LOT of grammar exercises for each tense to choose from and do those so the factor of research can be left away.

Although this theme was mentioned only once within the part-time study mode, for full-time students, the most frequently mentioned theme referred to their perceptions of the setting in which learning activities should take place.

If grammar is so important, we should learn about it in face-to-face classes and not alone at home.

It makes no sense to teach yourself grammar at home instead of doing it in class.

I would prefer more classes in school, rather than doing the PLF.

6 of 28 part-time respondents and 10 of 65 full-time respondents perceived that too much time had been expended on documenting the ePortfolio tasks, which resulted in a perceived

domain-documentation imbalance, i.e. a perceived imbalance between the time spent to acquire grammar competence and the time spent documenting the ePortfolio tasks.

I needed nearly more time to fill in the form than to train (full-time student).

I did not have any fun with doing my PLF, it ended up taking many more hours than 10 due to the fact of writing everything down (part-time student).

Another frequently mentioned theme for both part-time and full-time respondents entailed a perceived wish for a better balance between lecturer control and student choice, e.g. relating to documentation requirements, deadlines imposed, and choice of what to include in the ePortfolio, e.g.:

In my opinion it's quite unnecessary to inform my lecturer what kind of exercise you were doing (Full-time student).

Since it is a portfolio for ourself, maybe it'd be better to finish the PLF without any deadlines (Full-time student).

Also watching Netflix and other series and reading books in English help to improve grammar, but there is no real way to add those to the PLF or check if that was done well (Part-time student).

Other themes frequently mentioned related to deadline or time management issues. The following comments capture this sentiment:

Smaller goals in between (part-time student).

In my opinion it was a good opportunity to learn grammar, but the milestones are too big. All students just work on the plf one day before the deadline. I think milestones with 1 or 2 hours would be better, so you have to check regularly the results. so maybe 5 milestones instead of 2. otherwise no one will learn anything (full-time student).

Other comments underscored perceived problems relating to self-management. For instance:

I think for some students it would make sense to add more "in-between deadlines" like the "Complete 5 hours until ..." so we would be forced not to procrastinate all the work until the end.

With regard to OneNote functionality, the following comment from a part-time student indicates a perceived need for more choice on the technology to be used:

to have the possibility to do the PLF in Word, [as] OneNote is more suitable for a desktop PC and rather not for a laptop > laptop is too slow and the formatting of the tables is annoying.

7.2.2. Perceived need for improvement in the ePortfolio implementation

Table 7. 3. illustrates students' perceived need for improvement in the ePortfolio implementation broken down by themes and study mode.

Table 7. 3 Themes for improvement in ePortfolio implementation

Themes mentioned relating to perceived need for improvement in ePortfolio implementation	Number of full-time participants mentioning this (n= 43)	Number of part-time participants mentioning this (n=9)
Personal lack of time	3	2
Material resources for learning	14	4
Learning activities direction	14	3
Feedback	5	-
Task Facilitation	7	-

The most frequently emerging theme for both full-time and part-time students was the perception that the project would be more efficient if the teacher were to supply material resources. This sentiment is summed up by one part-time student, who wrote:

Looking for appropriate exercises was very hard, exhausting and very time consuming. Therefore I would have appreciated it if we had gotten exercises from our teacher.

Themes related to students' perceptions of who should direct the learning experience were among the most frequently mentioned themes by full-time students and among the second most frequently mentioned theme by part-time students. These perceptions are illustrated by the following comments:

It would be better if we would go through all grammar rules in class and then get about 3-5 exercises homework and we will correct it together the following lesson (full-time student).

I think the teacher should not teach with technology. I think the most helpful and understandable tool for learning grammar is still in class.

5 of 68 full-time students also mentioned a perceived need for improvement in task facilitation and feedback.

Communicate it more often, make the instructions more clear.

Make sure the lecturers actually know what the PLF is and that they communicate this properly with the students.

What also emerged from the student responses to this item was that while the latter themes comprised a perceived need of full-time students, in responses supplied by part-time students these two themes were not addressed at all.

8. Discussion

My first research question aimed to investigate whether a difference could be observed between part-time and full-time students' perceptions relating to the effect of the design and the implementation of the ePortfolio on motivation and achievement of intended learning outcomes. The results of the quantitative analysis showed similar tendencies in the perceptions of part-time and full-time students. The results also indicate that while the majority of both part-time and full-time students think that a) an explicit focus on grammar learning is important, b) think that grammar accuracy is important for successful business communication, c) were satisfied with the pedagogical guidance and the technology choice during the ePortfolio implementation, the ePortfolio project did not motivate them to improve their grammar, and was for the most part perceived as not having helped them to achieve the intended learning outcomes. Moreover, regarding the resources selected to implement the ePortfolio project, the results showed a clear tendency of using EFL resources as a single resource type across both study modes.

My second research question was designed to explore which part-time and full-time learner perceptions relating to the design and the implementation of the ePortfolio for grammar learning might play a role for the institutional course re-development process. The results of the qualitative analysis have yielded several findings, which not only afford insight into which factors may have affected students' motivation and perception of not having achieved the intended learning goals, but also indicate a slight difference between the two study modes relating to perceived issues experienced. These will be discussed below.

The literature has provided convincing evidence that, particularly for students starting off their academic career, teacher scaffolding plays a key role in influencing their self-directed learning and motivation during ePortfolio implementation. The quantitative results of the current study indicate that a significant majority of part-time and full-time students perceived as useful the high degree of FTF teacher direction in helping them to diagnose their learning needs, and understand the nature and purpose of the ePortfolio task at the beginning of the semester, which was gradually adapted to adopting a more facilitative role as a formative feedback giver in the middle of the semester. As already noted in previous studies (e.g. Hattie & Timperley 2007; Contreras-Higuera 2015; Beckers et al 2016), these findings reinforce the importance of student-centered pedagogical guidance during ePortfolio deployment.

Another strongly emerging theme supported by findings in both the quantitative and qualitative data was that both study modes have clear beliefs as to what should happen in the FTF learning environment, and what should happen online. The results of the quantitative analysis, which showed that over 70% of both study modes disagree with learning grammar individually online, indicate that students perceive the FTF environment as a preferable setting to learn grammar. In particular, the qualitative analysis of the full-time student narratives indicates a perception that the importance of learning activities is strongly linked with teacher direction in a FTF environment. In line Na-Wang, Chen & Zhang's (2019) report on their Asian students, the current findings suggest that the Austrian learners in this sample may also be FTF-dependent, which means that not only do they believe that important learning must be teacher mediated, but a lack of teacher presence may affect their motivation to work independently.

Yet, the current findings also suggest that perceptions of what should happen in the FTF and online setting may also be influenced by a lack of student and teacher 'buy in' to the learner/teacher roles and types of learning required by the flipped approach. Regarding the communication of the tasks and purpose of the personal language file, the quantitative and qualitative data yield contradictory results. While the quantitative results show over two thirds of both study modes self-reporting agreement that the tasks and purpose of the Personal Language File project had been clearly communicated, students' comments would appear to suggest that they still lack understanding of the paradigms of flipped learning. For instance the narratives of the qualitative data show several incidences of comments pointing to a student assumption that learning content is first presented by the teacher and then practiced by the learner. These findings are consistent with reports from previous studies (e.g. Stracke 2007; Orton-Johnson 2008; Contreras-Higuera et al 2015; Müge 2017; Chenchen 2019); and indicate that a lack of understanding of the flipped method may have affected students' motivation to adapt to this new approach and engage with the project. Moreover, while the extent to which the individual lecturers communicated the flipped method within their respective groups could not be ascertained in the current study, several comments derived from the qualitative analysis of full-time students indicated inconsistent lecturer understanding and communication of the task and purpose of the PLF. Such lack of understanding and unclear communication may have contributed to students' lack of motivation to engage in self-directed grammar learning. Thus, in line with findings relating to

the influence of teacher task facilitation on student 'buy-in' (Nguyen & Ikeda 2015; Gerbic Lewis & Amin 2011; Contreras-Higuera et al 2015), the findings of this study also provide supporting evidence of this phenomenon. As a consequence, the issue of how to foster more consistent teacher facilitation across all management courses and study programmes warrants explicit attention in the course redesign process.

Another theme emerging from the qualitative data indicates that students across both study modes do not perceive the process-oriented tasks (in this case locating and selecting learning material and documenting their work) as contributing to their achievement of the intended learning outcomes. In fact, several students mentioned how these activities take away from time that they could have spent on doing the domain-specific grammar tasks. These findings suggest that, in line with findings from Lo (2010) and Chau & Cheng (2010), the student sample in the Austrian UAS context may tend to view learning and evaluation as an end product, and undervalue how process-oriented learning can foster autonomous learning and contribute to the acquisition of transferable skills and competences that are not discipline specific. Moreover, a belief that this type of learning is not useful may negatively influence students' motivation to engage in the ePortfolio task. However, as also noted in studies by Contreras-Higuera (2015) and Wray (2007), comments from both Austrian study modes indicated a strong perception that the time and efforts spent looking for resources had not resulted in locating satisfactory resources. Yet, although this request was notably lacking from the self-reports of full-time students, the comments of part-time students indicated a strong need for more teacher guidance on or provision of resources. In line with findings by Beckers et al (2016), these findings contribute to the paradigm that students' need more autonomy in choosing learning tasks, but more teacher support on the appropriateness of tasks selected.

Moreover, consistent with findings noted from previous studies (e.g. Wetzel & Strudler 2006; Lopez-Fernandez & Rodriguez-Illera 2009; Kabilan & Khan: 2012; Beckers et al 2016; Müge 2017), the qualitative analysis revealed that a significant amount of full-time learners self-reported a lack of time to complete the activities and problems meeting deadlines. Yet, as highlighted by Beckers (2016: 40), whether this perceived issue may be due to a personal inability to take responsibility for achieving task objectives, or may be a result of unrealistic institutional demands, is difficult to ascertain. Nonetheless, whatever the reason for the perceived issue, adherence to a student-centered learning paradigm means that course

designers and teachers need to explicitly address and discuss students' concerns relating to workload and deadlines. Thus, it is recommended that more consistent teacher communication of the workload involved and guidance on learning strategies to meet course deadlines are an integral part of FTF teacher facilitation of the tasks and purpose of this project at the very beginning of the semester.

The qualitative findings also suggest that a perceived imbalance between institutionally-imposed structure and learner agency may have influenced the motivation of students across both study modes to engage in the ePortfolio task. Moreover, the findings indicate that students' perceptions of lack of choice regarding the activities to include in their ePortfolios was strongly linked to an inability to physically document evidence of their learning activities and to restrictions imposed by their individual teachers. For instance, several students mentioned that they would have liked to use *Netflix* or a novel as a learning source, but could not as the current ePortfolio design did not allow for the formal documentation of such activities, or was not allowed by their teacher. These findings provide yet another example of inconsistent teacher communication across the participating groups, which may have negatively impacted students' need for autonomy on their choice of which genres to use as a resource to achieve their learning goals. This finding highlights the need for all instructional stakeholders to establish a common understanding of and pre-course agreement on which resources can be used, or, alternatively, unanimous consensus that no restrictions apply in this respect.

While more rigorous exploration was beyond the scope of the current study, two interesting findings have emerged that warrant follow up research. First, although the current research only provides a descriptive account of the (online) resources that students are using to implement their ePortfolio, the results revealed that around a third of the respondents of both study modes perceived online EFL resources as the most useful resource. Moreover, the results also showed a clear tendency to use only one type of resource. As the selection of appropriate digital resources is becoming an increasingly important component of curricula designed to prepare Generations Y and Z for the workplace needs of today and tomorrow, the rationale for and benefits of using EFL sites for self-directed learning activities in ESP courses, particularly for more advanced language learners, need a more solid research foundation. For instance, a more systematic analysis of the types of and the extent to which online resources

are being used for self-directed learning, and an exploration of the relationship between resources used and summative achievement would be particularly beneficial to contribute to the body of knowledge on enhancing language learning with technology.

Moreover, also of interest from a curriculum design perspective, are the findings of the quantitative analysis that a significant majority of learners from both study modes perceive explicit language learning aims as an important component of a business English course, and believe that grammar accuracy is positively linked with success in business communication. Yet, in line with the Bologna-driven prerogatives for internationalisation, higher education programmes designers are increasingly offering content courses, which are delivered in English. Thus, they may question the feasibility of embedding explicit language learning aims within their curricula, as they may believe in what Wilkinson (2011: 11) refers to as “incidental language improvement.” Such improvement is envisaged to happen due to the “ongoing exposure of students to English” in such programmes (Unterberger 2014: 51). According to the latter author, research on this phenomenon is distinctly lacking (2014: 51). Thus, in light of the lack of empirical research investigating this phenomenon, the current findings are highly relevant for curriculum designers as they represent the voices of students on their desired educational path and experience. In an Austrian context these findings suggest that, in addition to the delivery of discipline content where the language of instruction may be either German or English, there is still a need to include explicit language learning aims within the curricula of both the full-time and part-time study modes of business and management programmes.

8.1. Practical implications

In line with my central research aim, several limitations and challenges encountered by learners during the ePortfolio-mediated language learning experience have been identified above. Taking these into consideration for the WS 2019 course re-development process, the following strategies have been adopted with a view to increasing students’ motivation to engage in self-directed grammar learning and helping them to achieve both the generic and domain-specific learning outcomes outlined in Chapter 5 of this thesis.

While the total number of teaching units (11 of 45 teaching units) dedicated to an explicit focus on grammar forms and use remained unchanged compared to the previous year, the first measure aimed to create a better balance between the FTF, supervised online and

unsupervised self-study phases from a course scheduling perspective as well as to better align syllabus learning activities to the inherent affordances of the three delivery forms. First, to boost students' 'buy-in' of the project, the first FTF session was re-designed to not only communicate the tasks and purpose of the grammar project, but also to discuss the benefits and challenges of flipped learning, as well as the learning processes and strategies necessary to construct and work towards the end product. Moreover, compared to the previous year's blend, which had been designed as a purely technology-enhanced model, (i.e. where students' supervised and unsupervised online self-study on the project had not been accounted for in the scheduled course units), three distance learning units were explicitly scheduled for taking the grammar self-assessment test, setting grammar learning goals and engaging in self-directed grammar learning activities in the first third of the semester.

Yet, while the latter measure also acknowledged and addressed students' perceived lack of time to work on their ePortfolio, in line with FHWien institutional requirements, explicitly scheduled distance learning activities necessitate formal evidence of learning activities from the learner and formal evidence of online teaching input from the teacher. Thus, from a learner perspective, the syllabus specified that evidence of learning activities engaged in within the three-unit distance learning session would count towards their attendance record, and would also entail online lecturer feedback before the next FTF session. This measure was envisaged not only to provide an additional incentive for students to engage in the self-directed activities, while also supporting institutional requirements for teacher accountability relating to distance learning activities, but also to enable students to get more timely feedback and support from their lecturers.

Second, to address students' need for more teacher guidance on which resources to use while still enabling them personal choice on the grammar aspects to be worked on, a CCBE Gram Moodle course was designed by the CCBE team. This course includes a wide range of different B2/C1 grammar activities, also designed by CCBE, which aim to develop students' awareness of grammar form and use in diverse business texts. It is intended that this Moodle resource will be particularly beneficial for those students who lack self-efficacy beliefs in their ability to choose suitable resources and seek lecturer endorsement of 'appropriate' resources, and may subsequently boost student motivation to engage more actively in self-directed grammar learning.

Third, in order to address students' perceived imbalance between structure and agency and the perceived inefficient use of time needed to physically document evidence of learning tasks, CCBE decided that a) students no longer need to explicitly document the activities they have been working on, and b) lecturers no longer need to check the exact nature of the activities learners have been engaging in. Instead, students' portfolios include a redesigned reflection activity, which includes the following guided prompts:

1. *I have worked on;*
2. *I have gained valuable insight on by, and feel that I would be able to explain the following grammar forms and use:, as well as share tips on the following learning strategies with my peers in the next face-to-face class:;*
3. *In the next face-to-face session, I really need help with*

It was envisaged that the above prompts would not only help students to better self-assess increases in domain-specific knowledge, give them more structure on what they needed to do to prepare for the follow-up FTF session and help them to reflect on generic learning strategies that they could use to overcome gaps in their knowledge, but also give their teachers quicker, earlier and clearer 'at-a-glance' guidance on which areas of grammar need more explicit attention and allocated time in the subsequent 6 FTF sessions allocated for discussion and feedback on learning progress and learner needs.

As discussed above, although student 'buy in' to learning is a multidimensional construct, it is strongly correlated with lecturer task facilitation. In other words, the perceived effectiveness and success of a project is inextricably linked with how it is facilitated by the teacher. Thus, it is clear that CCBE needs to not only provide more information and training to externals on flipped learning as a teaching approach, but also provide clearer guidance on their role during the semester and the importance of timely feedback on supervised online learning activities. Thus, it is suggested that clearer communication of the teaching approach and purpose of the task will allow students to gain a clearer understanding of their self-directed role in the learning process and help preempt motivational issues. Moreover, as the quantitative results of the survey indicated that full-time students did not perceive as helpful the in-class FTF time where they could discuss their progress with their lecturers and peers, an alternative to the 'show and tell' approach could be teacher facilitation of groupwork, where students peer

teach what they have been working on. This may boost learner motivation to engage with ePortfolio-mediated activities prior to class.

8.2. Limitations of study

Due to time and resource constraints, this study lacked a control group. Thus, it is difficult to ascertain if the described lack of motivation and perception that the intended learning outcomes had not been achieved can be attributed to the ePortfolio project. However, the concurrent exploratory design of the questionnaire enabled data to be collected, which provide supporting evidence that motivation and students' perceived achievement of learning outcomes could be linked with ePortfolio design and implementation factors. It is also acknowledged that this quantitatively-driven study has been carried out by means of a questionnaire survey, which was purpose designed for use in a specific institutional and academic-discipline context and is not intended for broader application.

9. Conclusion

The current study has explored whether learner perceptions relating to the implementation of an ePortfolio for foreign language grammar learning are influenced by study mode. Moreover, it has sought to identify dimensions where learners perceive a need for improvement in the ePortfolio design and implementation. The study investigated the perceptions of 56 part-time and 112 full-time management students attending an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) (sub-)module at an Austrian university for applied sciences. Perceptions relating to the value of grammar learning, ePortfolio design factors, pedagogical guidance, achievement of intended learning outcomes, the resources used for ePortfolio implementation, and the effect of the ePortfolio project on students' motivation were compared across the two study modes. While the results from the quantitative analysis do not show significantly divergent tendencies in the perceptions of full-time and part-time students, the findings derived from the qualitative analysis provide supporting evidence that both study modes encountered several challenges while implementing their ePortfolios. While full-time students were challenged by an online environment requiring self direction and self-management and perceived a need for a higher degree of teacher task facilitation and feedback, they would like more autonomy relating to the choice of activities and documentation requirements. By contrast, the most important issues for part-time students was a perceived imbalance between the time and effort invested in the ePortfolio implementation and the achievement of the intended learning outcomes.

The findings of the current study provided important insight for the institutional course re-design process to be effective as of the winter semester 2019/2020. They have underlined the fact that teaching in a blended learning setting involves significantly more than supporting students to develop domain-specific knowledge and skills. For instance, especially for first-semester full-time students, the findings have reinforced the importance of pedagogically clear and consistent guidelines on the ePortfolio task purpose and requirements, as well as pedagogical support on process-oriented learning strategies. In line with previous findings in this respect, the results of the current study also indicate that effective teacher facilitation is essential to help students appreciate how the ePortfolio process contributes to their academic, professional and personal development. This belief in its importance may subsequently increase their motivation to actively engage with it and help them to achieve the learning outcomes that satisfy both their personal needs and institutional assessment

requirements. The current study has thus reinforced that the 'buy-in' of all stakeholders involved in the facilitation and implementation of blended learning activities is key to the effectiveness and successful achievement of intended learning outcomes. In the course of this study, it has become increasingly clear that course designers cannot assume automatic lecturer 'buy-in' of flipped blended learning. Thus, institutions need to invest more time and resources in helping lecturers to understand the benefits of a flipped approach and cultivate among all teacher stakeholders a shared belief in the value of ePortfolios to foster self-directed learning. Moreover, what has also come to light in the course of this thesis, is a keener awareness of how we as teachers often assume that learners in third-level education should automatically be able to engage in self-directed learning activities. Moreover, our students should also demonstrate these in a technology-mediated online environments, which may be for many of them a completely unfamiliar mode of delivery. Thus, more pedagogical focus needs to be placed on how these challenges may hinder students from increasing their knowledge and deepening their understanding. For us as teachers, this means that, particularly for first-semester students, teaching input should not just be limited to helping students acquire domain-specific competences, but also needs to include support on developing strategies and activities to counter a perceived lack of self-direction. Last, and most importantly, for course designers it is essential to realise that for students and lecturers alike, adapting to new teaching approaches and environments is a longer-term process, which requires ongoing institutional support and professional development.

Drawing on existing research findings which attest to the potential of ePortfolios to enhance students' self-directed learning and self-management skills, as well as to satisfy institutional requirements to integrate technology into teaching and learning practice, further research reporting on ePortfolios use in an ESP context is needed from educational institutions within the European Higher Education Area. Moreover, not only the ESP field, but also the academic domains of tertiary level business and management would enormously benefit from research into how ePortfolios can be used to integrate content and foreign language learning, and foster interdisciplinary domain-specific and generic learning throughout an entire academic programme.

Although the findings here are derived from a relatively small-scale study conducted in an ESP for management students in an Austrian university of applied sciences context, they add to findings on the potential of embedding ePortfolios in a European higher education foreign

language learning context. More specifically, they contribute knowledge to how institutionally-driven ePortfolio design and implementation methods may influence part-time and full-time students' learning, and provide further insight into the factors that should be considered when deploying an ePortfolio-mediated grammar model in an ESP course for management students.

10. References

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11. Appendices

11.1 ePortfolio template

WELCOME TO YOUR PLF
TEMPLATE FOR - S.M.A.R.T. LANGUA...
TEMPLATE FOR - PROGRESS TRACKER

WELCOME TO YOUR PLF



As discussed in your **Business English** class, keeping track of your language activity progress is a vital part of your course. Please use **this** resource to do the following:

- **Define the language goals for your PLF** (i.e. which language items you will work on and to what extent)
- **Work towards your language goal milestones** by recording input and time resources (e.g. Quiz URLs and screenshots, time spent), and by describing and reflecting on progress made
- **Monitor your progress** regularly to make sure you achieve your language goals

WELCOME TO YOUR PLF
TEMPLATE FOR - S.M.A.R.T. LANGUA...
TEMPLATE FOR - PROGRESS TRACKER

COPY THIS TABLE TO _YOUR_ SECTION "S.M.A.R.T. LANGUAGE GOALS"

Use the table below to specify:

- which **language items** you will work on and for how long (refer to your **learning agreement**)
- **how much should be completed by when** (refer to **deadlines**)
 - Progress needs to be reported on in class by these dates
- the **due dates** i.e. the final date when the work for each item needs to be completed (100%)

LANGUAGE ITEM	TIME 2b SPENT	COMMENTS	WHAT 2b COMPLETED BY	FINAL DUE DATE
e.g. Past tenses	e.g. 4 hours	e.g.: • Pearson Englishlab • Communication and • Monitor Business exercises • Talk to others about exact resources	e.g. Do 6 hours by 12 December	e.g. 23 January

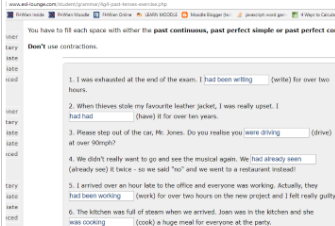
WELCOME TO YOUR PLF
TEMPLATE FOR - S.M.A.R.T. LANGUA...
TEMPLATE FOR - PROGRESS TRACKER

COPY THIS TO _YOUR_ SECTION "PROGRESS TRACKER"

Mittwoch, 23. Mai 2018 16:29

YOU SHOULD CREATE AND MAINTAIN A SEPARATE TABLE FOR EACH LANGUAGE ITEM FROM YOUR GOALS.

Please make sure to fill in all details relevant for the activity - Feel free to use the examples below as templates for your own logs.

PAST TENSES	Time spent	URL + Screenshot(s)	Exercise description	Reflection/Lessons Learned/Next Steps
Past tenses exercise	5 minutes	http://www.esl-lounge.com/student/grammar/464-past-tenses-exercise.php 	• Typical gap fill exercise with past tenses • Sentences not connected to each other (little context)	• Think that I only scored quite well on this exercise because the gaps are in decontextualised exercises which limit the range of potential answers. Will try to search for an exercise with more past tenses in context.

ePortfolio template for PLF (CCBE 2018)

11.2. Moodle learning activities

PERSONAL LANGUAGE FILE (PLF)

1 Complete the **grammar self-assessment test** (in class)

2 Fill in, sign and upload the **learning agreement**

 [PLF - LEARNING AGREEMENT](#)

 [Upload your PLF Learning Agreement here](#)

3 Watch the **instructional video** and follow the instructions



 [Link to my OneNote Classroom](#)

 [PLF - Written instructions](#)

 [Authentic texts featuring target language structures: Share your experience here](#)

 [Personal Language File - Useful Resources](#)

 [FINDING BUSINESS TEXTS FOR YOUR PLF](#)

 [DL_PLF: FINAL GRADE for your PLF - Max 40 pts/10%](#)

ePortfolio learning activities (CCBE 2018)

11.3. Learning Agreement

Learning Agreement

The results of the self-assessment test show that I need to develop competence in grammatical form and meaning, as well as functional appropriateness in the following **B2 language structures**:

- ☐ Adjectives and adverbs
- ☐ Present forms, active, all
- ☐ Past/Present perfect forms, active, all
- ☐ Future forms, active, all
- ☐ Passive forms, all
- ☐ Mixed conditionals + wish
- ☐ Reported speech
- ☐ Modals
- ☐ Relative clauses
- ☐ Questions and negations

If I have demonstrated clear mastery of all language structures above (>90%), I will work on developing competence in grammatical form and meaning, as well as functional appropriateness in the following **C1 language structures**:

- ☐ Present forms, all, active and passive
- ☐ Past/Present perfect forms, all, active and passive
- ☐ Futures forms, all, active and passive
- ☐ Passives, reporting structures/have or get something done
- ☐ Inversion with negative adverbials
- ☐ Mixed conditionals in past, present and future
- ☐ Modals in the past
- ☐ Narrative tenses for experience, incl. passive
- ☐ Phrasal verbs, especially splitting
- ☐ Punctuation
- ☐ Other (please specify)

Study Program _____

Semester _____

My Personal Language File (documenting a minimum of 12.5 hours) will be completed by: _____

Student signature _____ Date _____

Lecturer signature _____ Date _____

NOTE: The activity tracking methodology and delivery milestones during the course will be specified by your lecturer. Time spent working on the PLF should correspond to 10% of the ECTS allocated to this course (ask your lecturer for more details).

Learning agreement (CCBE 2018)

11.4. Text types for consciousness raising activities

INVESTIGATIVE LANGUAGE WORK FOR PLF

Contributed by John Nakielski

PAST TENSES:

Stories, (Auto)biographies, Corporate histories, etc

PRESENT TENSES:

Corporate reports, Current industry trends, News articles, Job applications, Personal routines, Proverbs, Jokes etc

ADJECTIVES and ADVERBS:

Film/programme/book reviews, Real estate descriptions, Tourist information, Obituaries, Financial trend descriptions etc

FUTURE FORMS:

Product development, Business predictions, Corporate strategies, Manager diaries, Personal plans etc

PASSIVE FORMS:

Process / procedure descriptions, Court case summaries, Company reports, Business correspondence, Newspaper headlines etc

CONDITIONALS + WISH:

Personal regrets, Causes and Effects, Analysis of business/science/health developments etc

REPORTED SPEECH:

News stories and reports, Interview summaries, Court case summaries etc

MODALS:

Technical instructions, Logical deductions, Expectations, Requests, Rules and Regulations, Advice for newcomers (tourists, new employees), Dilemma situations etc

RELATIVE CLAUSES:

Stories, Logical arguments, News stories and reports etc

QUESTIONS and NEGATIONS:

Magazine interviews, FAQs on various web-sites etc

INVERSIONS:

Political speeches or statements, Letters of complaint etc

PHRASAL VERBS:

Informal magazine articles (e.g. on personal relationships), TV/radio interviews etc

PUNCTUATION:

Academic essays, Changes in meaning etc

11.5. Post-course questionnaire survey question items

1. Please specify your study program.
2. Please specify your mode of studying.
3. You are male/female.
4. I think that a university Business English course should include an explicit focus on grammar learning.
5. I think that grammar accuracy (correctness) is important for successful business communication.
6. I think it is better to learn grammar individually by means of a Personal Language File rather than using face-to-face class time to focus on grammar.
7. The in-class self-assessment test via the Moodle platform gave me clear guidance on areas of grammar where I needed improvement.
8. The tasks and purpose of the Personal Language File project were clearly communicated.
9. My lecturer's feedback on my PLF entries was helpful.
10. The in-class PLF checks (debriefings) where I could discuss my progress with my lecturer and peers were helpful.
11. The PLF project motivated me to improve my grammar.
12. I feel that working on my PLF has helped me to better understand the rules of grammar.
13. I feel that working on my PLF has helped me to apply the rules of grammar more appropriately.
14. Which online resources did you find most useful for your Personal Language File? Please specify.
15. OneNote was a useful tool to work on my Personal Language File.
16. What can be done to make the PLF project better? Please add your comments here.

11.6. Abstract-English

In line with a student-centered paradigm, ePortfolios are seen as digital tools offering potential for students to be more active in the knowledge-generating process, as well as helping them to hone autonomy, self-management and creativity. Yet, although ePortfolios have been investigated and intensively reported on in recent years, research has also been criticised for being “too unreflectively positive” (Wang 2017: 1453), and tending to overlook the context-specific challenges that students may encounter when implementing ePortfolios (Yang et al 2016: 1278). Particularly for course designers and teachers, solid evidence of insufficient practice voiced by the learners themselves is paramount to formulating, implementing and testing new strategies. The present thesis thus investigates part-time and full-time students’ experience of an ePortfolio-mediated grammar learning component in a first-semester English for Specific Purposes (ESP) course. A purpose-designed survey explored the perceptions of 168 management students at an Austrian university of applied sciences relating to how the design and implementation of the ePortfolio influenced their learning. The results of the study suggest that particularly full-time students are challenged by the changing roles brought about the blended learning environment and need a higher degree of teacher guidance to develop self-directed learning (SDL) skills.

11.7 Abstract -German

Gemäß dem studenten_innenfokussierten Paradigma werden elektronische Portfolios als digitale Werkzeuge betrachtet, die ein enormes Potential für Lernende bergen, eine aktive Rolle im wissensgenerierenden Prozess einzunehmen. Im Besonderen fördern sie Fähigkeiten in Bezug auf Autonomie, Selbst-Management und Kreativität. Obwohl ePortfolios bereits umfassend erforscht wurden und davon in detailliertem Maße berichtet wurde, ist dieser Forschung die Kritik entgegenzubringen, in ihrer Darstellung unreflektiert positiv zu sein (Wang 2017). Mit der Einführung von ePortfolios ist die Tendenz spürbar, kontextspezifische Herausforderungen, mit denen Lernende konfrontiert werden, zu übersehen (Yang et al 2016). Besonders für Kursentwickler_innen und Lehrende ist aus Sicht der Studierenden ein fundierter Nachweis über die unzureichende Praxiserprobung von allergrößter Bedeutung. Nur auf Basis dieser Forschungsgrundlage ist es möglich, neue Strategien zu bilden, einzuführen und auszutesten. Die vorliegende Diplomarbeit thematisiert die Wahrnehmung der StudentInnen in Hinblick auf das ePortfolio-Design und dessen Einführung. Die Studie wurde an einer österreichischen Fachhochschule im Rahmen eines ESP Moduls mit 168 Managementstudierenden durchgeführt. Es wird erläutert, wie diese Studierenden das Design und die Einführung eines ePortfolios für das Lernen von grammatischen Systemen aufnehmen. Die Ergebnisse deuten darauf hin, dass besonders Vollzeitstudierende aufgrund ihrer veränderten Rolle im neuen Blended Learning Setting einer Herausforderung gegenüberstehen. Daraus kann abgeleitet werden, dass mehr Coaching durch Lehrende benötigt wird, um das selbstgesteuerte Lernen zu unterstützen.