



NATIONAL REPORT

NEW MEDIA AND ICT IN ULLL

Country: Finland

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University Lifelong Learning in the national context

University Lifelong Learning in Finland is a well-established and institutionalized activity, with an extensive network of University Continuing Education Centres and Open University. The development of these activities started in the beginning of the 1980's and was especially rapid in 1990's, when extra funding from the state was available. Even though the actual number of OU students and participants has been lower during the past few years, there is a tendency that these activities continue to develop further. One concrete reason for that is the university law, which include the so called "third task" into university's traditional tasks (research and higher education). This "third task" includes interaction and cooperation with the society and local community, which has traditionally been the role of continuing education centres.

The forms of university Lifelong Learning in Finland can be summarised as follows:

- Open university
 - open to all age groups, no entrance requirements;
- University of the Third Age
 - for retired people, part of the OU system;
- Continuing education
 - short courses and long programmes, open learning centres, including labour market training for unemployed university graduates and professionals



In addition, regional, national and international development projects and programmes provided for public and private organisations are also considered as LLL and are usually organised by CE centres within the universities.

Also older students (who are in some countries called as “non-traditional students”) are usually taken into account in LLL-strategies. In Finland these adult students are very “traditional”, because in the university degree programmes the majority (51% in year 2000) of the degree students are adults (aged 25 years or older). These students require special part-time study opportunities, because they usually are working as well during the studies.

There are several reasons for this. In Finland the university entrance age is significantly higher (19-25, and even higher in some cases) than in most other European countries. Students usually complete master’s degrees instead of leaving university at the bachelor level.

This growing number of mature students in the higher education system has been defined as “adultification” of higher education (Parjanen and Tuomi 2003). This trend has been very stable, for example in Åbo Akademi University in year 1997 36.5% of the undergraduates were over 25 years old, and in 2001 they were already more than 40%. In 2011 in University of Eastern Finland already 63 % of students were over 25 years old.

Some of the main LLL activities are described in the following.

Open University

All Finnish universities organise OU teaching. This has become a well-established and extensive activity. In most universities also University of the Third Age teaching is also organized by the OU.

Universities and polytechnics both offer open teaching leading to basic degrees. In the OU teaching is open to all irrespective of age and initial education and the students can complete modules and gain credits. When they have collected the required number of study credits in the OU, students can apply to transfer to a traditional university, becoming regular students and working for higher education degrees (the so-called “Open University channel”).

Majority (76%) of the OU students were women. OU is a good opportunity for lower educated to access University level education.

In 1996, regular weekly broadcasts of OU courses began on television. From the point of view of educational policy, the decision to do this was closely linked to the significant increase in the amount of OU teaching.



Continuing education centres

The 1980s saw the creation of a significant number of initiatives, both to facilitate adults' participation in training and to create a clearer administrative system for AE. One of the most important reforms was the establishment of the CE centres in universities.¹ In the early 1990s, the operations of the university CE centres expanded considerably. Funding was mainly directed at the training, or retraining, of unemployed university graduates, those under threat of unemployment and people coming from outside the labour market. This increased funding expanded the operations of the CE centres considerably and their activities remain at a high level today even though the level of funding, which was targeted during a period of high unemployment, has gradually decreased during the subsequent economic recovery. The same funding also contributed to the increase in the activities of the OU.

The university CE centres offer graduates a non-certificated opportunity to update and broaden their professional competence and skills. Moreover, these centres also offer courses on professional topics which complement the university degree system and promote professional development.

Short history of distance education and use of ICT in ULLL in Finland

Use of new media and ICT in Finnish university education has historically developed mainly because of Open University system. When it started to develop in the beginning of the 1980's, it became soon apparent that teaching in Open University has to be based on flexible learning opportunities.

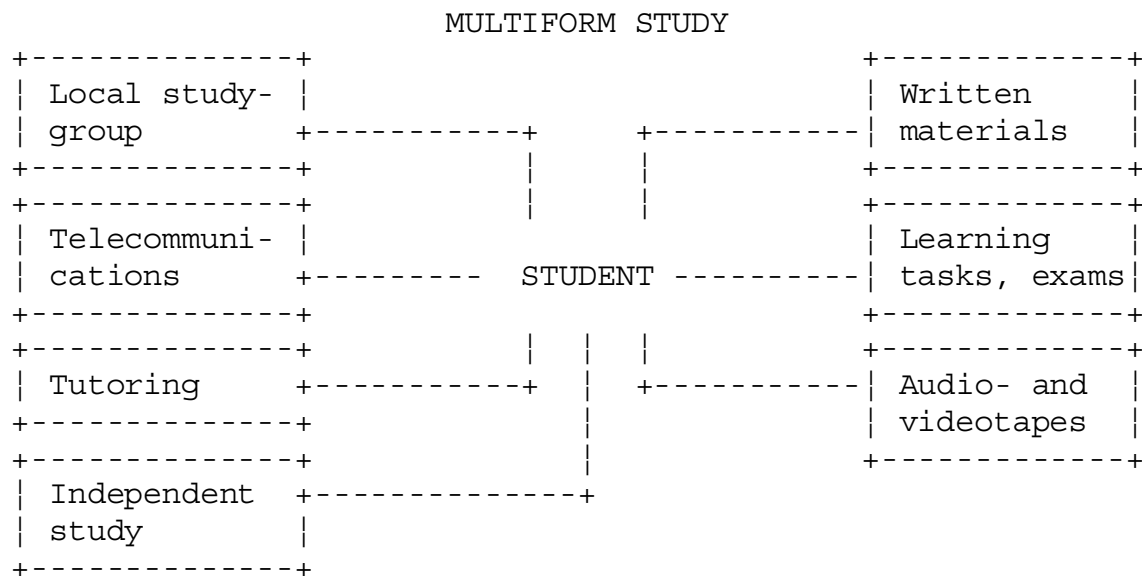
The general historical development process of distance education technologies can be seen in university sector as well. The four stages of distance education technologies (Immonen 2000) are described below; the fifth stage might be the wider use of mobile and portable communication technologies and Blended Learning in mid 2000.

- I: Correspondence studies (end of 1800's →)
- II: Media technology (1980's →)
 - Television, telephone, radio, audio- and videotapes...
- III: Modern telecommunication technology (1990's →)
 - Email, computer conferencing, video conferencing...
- IV: WWW, Internet (1995 →)

¹ A more detailed analysis and description of the Finnish system can be found in Osborne and Thomas (2003, 125 - 152).

Correspondence studies (sending study tasks and students essays by letter) has been used in some cases in the early experiments at the open university, when students received learning tasks by letter and returned them to teacher in a similar. However, exactly the same method is nowadays in general use, the only difference being that letter has been replaced by email.

As early as the beginning of the 1980s, a system called 'multiform studies' (*monimuoto-opetus*) was developed using a variety of study and teaching methods. This involved a combination of local study groups (usually organised by local workers' educational institutes or AE centres) with a tutor, distance study materials (books and audio- and videotapes) and lectures at a distance (using telephones, videoconferencing and later since mid 1980's computer mediated communication). This system enabled adults in all parts of the country to participate in OU studies and it also guaranteed flexible study programmes for adult learners.



Picture 1. Multiform study model in Open University in 1980's (Manninen 1991)

The most common information and communication technologies (ICT) in Higher Education in Finland have been (in the order of appearance):

- Telephone, video, audiocassette, television, radio
- Videoconferencing, audioconferencing, audiographics
- Computer based learning programmes, CD-Rom
- Internet-based communication tools (chat, e-mail, computer conferencing, groupware)
- WWW-based resources, interactive materials
- (WWW-based) learning platforms (WebCT, Moodle, FLE, Studium, etc.)
- *Virtual training organisation* (eg. Virtual Open University; include course- and student management services and tools)
- *Modern and new media* (3D technology, Second Life, Mobile technology, video streaming)

In the middle of 1990's started a local and national development project, which aim was to develop Virtual Open Universities in some Finnish Universities, and also a national network between them. Helsinki Virtual open university (www.avoin.helsinki.fi) and SUVI (Finnish open university, www.avoinyliopisto.fi) were established. In 1997, the Virtual Open University (*Suomen avoin virtuaaliyliopisto*) was established as a national umbrella organisation for virtual study opportunities. At the same time most individual OUs established their own virtual services. Virtual Open University at the University of Helsinki is one of the forerunners in this area. All Finnish universities had soon some virtual courses and, in the year 2000, over 3000 OU students participated in these Web-based courses. Even though this was only 4% of the total number of OU students, both the need and provision for Web-based courses have raised dramatically. Web-based courses were especially popular amongst middle-aged adults and those who are working in white-collar positions (Mannisenmäki and Manninen 2004).

In Continuing Education courses similar forms of delivery were used. Depending on the type of training (labour market training, self-initiated training, professional development or CE courses), the courses are long full-time studies, short one- or two-day expert seminars or mixed format programmes with face-to-face meetings and distance learning periods. Web-based services were also in common use ².

At University of Helsinki continuing education centre a self-made learning platform called Studium (www.studium.helsinki.fi) offered already in year 2000 web-based courses for professionals and postgraduates, and a similar open learning and career development service for unemployed job seekers and career changers with university degree (www.apaja.helsinki.fi) was opened in 2005. There were also many projects, which have created new learning environments for various groups (for example Learning Enterprise 2000 –environment to promote lifelong learning skills within small and medium sized enterprises.

Also a strong development has taken place in undergraduate programmes, and in 1999 University of Helsinki established a special unit to support the development process within faculties and departments.

At the national level Finland had earlier in 1990's a strong policy to develop towards an information and knowledge society. There was the national Virtual University project going on, which aim is to establish a common Virtual University in Finland, using the best teaching and learning resources from different universities. The project included extensive training programmes for university teachers.

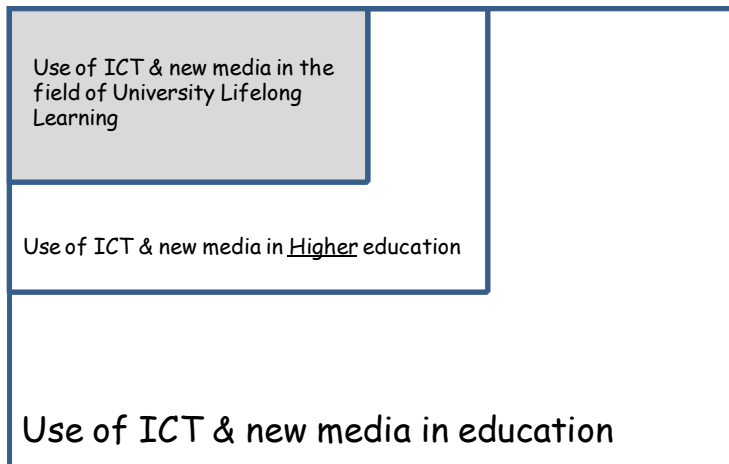
Several big development projects aimed to develop information services on learning opportunities, to encourage Lifelong Learning in practice. The national Opintoluotsi –project aimed to develop an Internet-based service, which provide all information on learning opportunities and courses in Finland (see <http://www.opintoluotsi.fi>). The transnational

² See for example www.studium.helsinki.fi

Cuber-project (see <http://www.cuber.net>) was a rather similar, but European level course information service.

Research of new media in ULLL

In order to analyze what research or practices are going on at the moment I will narrow down the focus a bit, as described in Picture 2. Use of ICT and new media in all educational contexts is a wide theme, since it covers all levels of educational system from pre-school to adult and higher education, as well as informal learning. This national report will focus on research and practices focusing on higher education, especially in the context of university Lifelong Learning (as defined earlier in this report).



Picture 2. Focus in the national report

It is sometimes difficult to make a difference between higher education in general and university LLL, because the same technology is often used both in undergraduate education and at Open University courses, and often research projects cover both fields.

One interesting fact is that practice (use of ICT and new media in education) is much more active in the field of university LLL, because there is a constant need for flexibility and distance learning offerings. On the contrary, undergraduate education in the “normal” university is still based mainly on face-to-face lectures and seminars, even though new methods and technology is becoming more common here is well.

On the research side the situation is different: research is mainly done in the faculties, because doctoral students and research projects mainly operate there. There are only a few research projects organized in the ULLL organizations, and if they are, they are more focused on development than on “serious” academic research. The main reason behind this “division of labour” is the fact that ULLL organizations are more focusing on open university and continuing education, and research is done more in the faculties.

In the field of ULLL there have been some serious research and development projects, where Action Research have been used to analyze and develop ICT-based learning environments. Main focus have usually been on web-based learning environments (Mannisenmäki & Manninen 2004; Matikainen & Manninen 2000; Manninen 2011; Manninen & al. 2007) and there have been a strong link to practice level at Open University and on continuing education.

More recently almost all doctoral dissertations in this field (for example Lakkala 2010; Mällinen 2007; Mäkelä 2010) have had the same focus in computer mediated communication (CMC) and collaborative learning in the web. I think it is fair to make a conclusion that web based learning is the main theme in Finnish research in this field.

In addition, there has been some research done on Blended Learning and in the use of video in distance education in university context.

Practices of new media in ULLL

The current trend at university level in Finland seems to be Blended Learning. However, it is understood in many different ways and the term itself is used in a fuzzy way. The origin of the term is based on the idea that pure e-Learning (learning mostly alone with technology) was “humanised” by adding human face-to-face interaction. Therefore blended learning means originally a teaching and learning situation, which is a blending of face-to-face and technology-based teaching.

In Finnish discussion BL is defined and understood in many different ways. Some of these “conceptions” are included in Whitelock & Jelfs (2003) list of three definitions of the term:

1. the integrated combination of traditional learning with web-based online approaches;
2. the combination of media and tools employed in an e-learning environment;
3. the combination of a number of pedagogical approaches, irrespective of learning technology use.

In principle BL is a rational perspective on the current situation, where the gap that previously existed between traditional, web-based, virtual, and distance learning has disappeared. Nowadays almost all teaching is supported by use of modern ICT.

The most common technological tools used in ULLL in Finland at the moment are web based learning environments (most often Moodle) and videoconferencing (ACP or similar). In the faculties in undergraduate courses the situation is a bit different, because there face-to-face teaching settings are more common, and therefore also presentation technology (like PowerPoint, Smartboard) are used.

Distance teaching technology like videoconferencing is popular especially in university of Eastern Finland, which operates in 3 campuses. There is therefore a real need for synchronous course delivery methods. This is also reflected in the current course offerings on educational use of ICT and New media (University of Eastern Finland, Teaching development unit), where the number of courses offered in various technologies is shown below:

Table 1. Course offerings in ICT in UEF

Number of courses available (Spring 2012)	Theme
7	Adobe Connect – videoconferencing
6	Smartboard
6	Social media
3	Second Life
2	Wiki
1	Powerpoint
1	Designing web based courses

In a small scale survey made for Dialogue project case study university teachers at UEF were asked to describe, what kind of ICT and new media they use in teaching. The following table summarize the themes in order of frequency, and how many of the respondents (n = 41) have mentioned the tool.

Table 2. Use of ICT in UEF

What kind of ICT-tools are used?	f	% of respondents
Moodle	33	82,5
e-mail	17	42,5
websites in general	11	27,5
Videoconferencing, ACP	11	27,5
MS Office, Libre Office	6	15
Wiki	5	12,5
dataprojector	4	10
Media, webcam, Youtube	4	10
telephone	3	7,5
Facebook	3	7,5
Skype	3	7,5
Smartboard	3	7,5
blogs	2	5
Oodi (study information system)	2	5



Gps	1	2,5
CAL-programs	1	2,5

The top 4 tools are no surprise. Moodle is the official learning platform in UEF, email is self evident as well as websites. Video-mediated lectures and ACP are encouraged by the university, because the university is located in three different campuses. Only a few teachers use more innovative ICT tools.

Policy and funding priorities

There is no 'regulation' from state concerning the use of ICT in university education, because universities have rather independent role and freedom of teaching. The regulation coming from university departments and faculties guarantee and maintain the scientific quality of open university programmes, but does not go into details in pedagogical methods.

Regulation by the Ministry of Education is done by financial means, when specific development projects are financed. Since the active development period in 1990's there haven't been any specific funding or programmes especially targeting the use of ICT in ULLL.

The main documents are policy documents and statements, which set the guidelines and objectives for ICT development (for example: Education, training and research in information society, national strategy for 2000-2004). Since that strategy no specific programmes have been organized in the field of University education. Use of ICT in education is nowadays a general theme focusing mainly on the school level.

For example, in the newest development plan (<http://www.minedu.fi/export/sites/default/OPM/Julkaisut/2008/liitteet/opm11.pdf>) development of use of ICT in universities is mentioned only in the connection of development of teacher education, where the focus is on the idea that school education gets better, when future teachers develop their skills in use of ICT in education.

Current means of Dialogue

The following table is a summary of the means that promote dialogue between research and practice in Finland in the field of ICT in ULLL. Many of these are common to faculty level and undergraduate education. The table is based on two dimensions, (1) whether the mean is systematic, ie. continuous and long lasting or (2) occasional, taking place seldom or available only in specific times, and whether the mean is mainly based on (3) one way information delivery or (4) real dialogue, where both practitioners and researchers learn from each other.

Table 3. Major means of dialogue between research and practice

	Information delivery	Dialogue
Systematic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expert centers as help point • Research information dissemination channel 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To give people mixed roles • Development projects (develop something concrete together) • Continuing education projects • Specific networks • Discussion forums (online or face-to-face) • Developmental evaluation method • Funding programmes where networks are required
Occasional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seminars with speakers (usually researchers) about topics as Second Life • To give research topics to researchers and students • Development days of teaching staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • seminars where practitioners and researchers can meet and discuss

Perhaps the most common means of dialogue are seminars, where information is exchanged quite effectively, but usually from researchers to practitioners. The following face-to-face or online seminars are the main “Dialogue seminars” related to ULLL and ICT in Finland:

Annual Second life conference: <http://toisessamaailmassa.fi/>

* universities and universities of applied sciences

Annual Interactive Technology in Education conference: <http://www.itk.fi/2012/>

* main national event, covers all levels of educational system

Social media in education: <http://sometu.ning.com/>

* web community + face-to-face seminars, covers all post-16 levels

ICT in education Facebook community: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/237930856866/>

* covers all levels of education

Blended learning seminar: <http://blogs.helsinki.fi/sulop2012/>

* annual, main university level conference on BL in Finland



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