From blended to online: The story of a pre-service teacher training course on integrating information and communication technology into ELT

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The paper describes the process of designing a pre-service teacher training course on the use of information and communication technologies in ELT and shows how the transition to online education caused by the Covid-19 pandemic affected it. The course was originally designed as a blended one with a focus on exploiting ICT for effective skills development in face-to-face lessons and online home assignments. Due to the pandemic in 2020, it moved online, which created an unexpected opportunity for experimenting with ICT inclusion in fully online ELT and modifying the course accordingly. While the original focus on skills development was kept, new content areas, such as online assessment, gamification and interactions in online environments were added. The process described as well as the participating students' post-course reflections refined our understanding of online course design and ICT use and is hoped to provide guidelines for similar experiments in other teacher education contexts.

Keywords: blended teaching, Covid-19, ICT, online teaching, skills development, teacher education

1. Introduction

Integrating information and communication technologies (ICT) into foreign language teaching has been given considerable attention in most Hungarian pre-service teacher education programmes for the past decade, as it is generally assumed that technology use has the potential for facilitating language learning. Yet, a series of lesson observations made by teacher educators in the EFL teacher education programme at Eötvös Loránd University showed that student teachers often considered ICT a simple add-on to teaching and they used it primarily to entertain their learners – a problem called the 'theory vacuum problem' by Thornbury (2011) and observed by several researchers and teacher educators in a variety of teaching contexts (Graham et al., 2012). Based on these observations and the assumption that ICT inclusion in teacher education programmes, especially in subject-specific methodological courses supports student teachers' meaningful ICT use during and after their pre-service training (Dringó-Horváth & Gonda, 2018; Öveges & Csizér, 2018), a blended course was designed in 2019 at Eötvös Loránd University (Major & Szabó, 2021), the main aim of which was to develop student teachers' understanding of how pedagogically motivated ICT use can contribute to effective language practice with special emphasis on skills development.

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However, in March 2020, due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the resulting urge to move online, the blended course was turned into an online one from one day to another. Despite this abrupt change the course proved to be a useful one according to the participating students' end-semester feedback, but it became obvious that real online teaching offering meaningful learning experiences is different from emergency remote teaching (ERT) – a term proposed by Hodges et al. (2020) for courses offered online in response to a crisis - due to the lack of a careful design process responding to the specific circumstances of online teaching (Hodges et al., 2020; Rapanta et al., 2020). The blended course was, therefore, redesigned between June 2020 and February 2021, and it was advertised and taught as an online one in spring 2021. While its structure remained the same, its content was modified according to the perceived needs of EFL teachers teaching essentially online. This meant that the original emphasis on skills development was kept, and new topics, such as online assessment, gamification and interactions in online environments were added.

The main aim of this paper is to give an account of the process of designing and teaching the online course on the use of ICT in ELT. This was motivated by the realisation that though the transition to ERT at the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic posed challenges for teachers and teacher educators (Hodges et al., 2020; Kóris & Pál, 2021; Peters et al., 2020), it also led to plenty of new discoveries and created a huge pool of experience to draw on in the future (Darling-Hammond & Hyler, 2020; Ellis et al., 2020; Grek & Landri, 2021; Kidd & Murray, 2020; Peters et al., 2020). The online course is an example for one such 'forced' innovation, and its description will hopefully encourage teacher educators to experiment with their courses and to adopt an 'innovative stance' (Ellis et al., 2020, p. 569) regardless of the presence of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The other aim of the paper is to provide a small-scale evaluation of the course by presenting the participants' feedback and their reflections on their learning. It has to be noted, though, that these comprise the opinion of a small number of students; consequently, the conclusions drawn will be small in scope, even though the ideas that emerged gave useful insights into the students' experience.

To refer to the different tools and technologies explored in the course, the terms 'Information and Communication Technology' (ICT) and 'learning technologies' will be used interchangeably. This is based on the assumption that they are synonyms and both 'refer to any digital technology that can be used in the language classroom to support student learning' (Hockly, 2016, p. 5). The present paper, however, extends this definition to technologies used *in and outside* the language classroom as the tasks in the course are intended to model and enhance out-of-class language learning, too.

2. Background to the study

2. 1 The structure of pre-service English teacher education in Hungary

Full-time pre-service English teacher education programmes at the university where the course was designed prepare students to teach English in 12-grade public schools to learners aged 6 (grade 1) to 19 (grade 12). The programmes are of four different kinds. Three of them comprise 10, 11 or 12 semesters, each leading to a different degree in ELT: the 10- or 11-semester programmes are for prospective primary school teachers teaching in grades 1 to 8, and the 11-

or 12-semester programmes are for prospective secondary school teachers teaching in grades 5 to 12. The fourth programme is a 2-semester MA programme in English Language Instruction for students who will become teachers at language schools.

2.2 The place of ICT in ELT in the curriculum of full-time pre-service English teacher education programmes before 2020

At Eötvös Loránd University courses focusing on the methodology of English language teaching are offered from the 5th semester on the 10-, 11- or 12-semester programmes, and they are part of the 2-semester MA programme quite intensively in both semesters. However, before 2020, no methodology courses had ICT inclusion in their focus, though some ICT tools were occasionally used in some courses. The two learning management systems (LMSs), Canvas and Moodle, provided by the university were also quite commonly used, and even if many of their features were never exploited, students were familiar with them. In this period the only learning session with a direct focus on the use of ICT in ELT was one 45-minute lecture given as part of a methodology lecture series in the secondary and the MA in English Language Instruction programmes. Students studying to become primary school teachers did not have any opportunities to take a course on ICT use in ELT.

3. Course design: The blended course as the foundation for the online one

As it was explained earlier, a blended course on the use of ICT in ELT was designed in 2019 by two teacher educators (Major & Szabó, 2021) to fill in the niche posed by the apparent lack of sufficient ELT-specific ICT training in the pre-service teacher education programmes they were teaching for. After one month of being taught in a blended form, the course became a fully online one in March 2020. Though the online course was different from the blended one in several ways, it owes its design to the blended one, which will be overviewed in the following section.

3.1 Environment analysis

Environment analysis was carried out by identifying the most important factors inherent in the specific environment in which the course was designed. These were related to the students, the teachers and the teaching situation, all fundamentally affecting the design of the course (Nation & Macalister, 2010). Four such factors were identified, out of which the first two clearly indicated the need to introduce the course into the curriculum, while the third and the fourth ones created a framework for the course. The first such factor was the apparent lack of focus on pedagogically motivated ICT integration into ELT in the EFL teacher education programmes at Eötvös Loránd University. Even though students had courses on ICT use as part of their general pedagogy studies, subject-specific methodological training, found to be essential by research on the effective use of ICT (Öveges & Csizér, 2018), was missing from their programme. Therefore, it seemed quite likely that though technology is used in a variety of ways for recreational and other purposes by them, they are not prepared to use it for teaching and learning. This was confirmed by the second factor, which emerged from a series of lesson

observations by teacher educators who found that student teachers primarily considered ICT to be a tool to entertain their students in their lessons.

The third factor was the course designers' approach to teaching and learning, which, together with other contextual elements, determine to a large extent how ICT is integrated (Lim, 2002). This approach was, therefore, informed by the constructivist view of education and Vygotsky's sociocultural approach (1978), according to which teaching and learning are seen as a collaborative building process in which teachers and learners actively construct knowledge through discussions and social interactions. In this framework for effective learning to occur teachers should provide students with a range of opportunities to meaningfully engage with the learning tasks, thus encouraging their deep approach to learning (Biggs & Tang, 2011). From the perspective of the course design in focus, and, more specifically, from that of task design, this meant that in order for effective deep learning to happen, ICT use had to be embedded in collaborative and interactive tasks.

Finally, the fourth factor affecting the design of the course was the designer's approach to foreign language teaching. According to this, foreign language teaching aims to help students develop complex abilities to interact effectively and appropriately which requires them to develop their intercultural communicative competence involving their linguistic, pragmatic, discourse and strategic competence as well as their fluency and their ability to communicate effectively in cross-cultural situations (Fantini, 2020). Apart from that, they have to master language systems, such as vocabulary grammar and pronunciation, and have to develop their language skills (Hedge, 2000).

The complexity of language development and the diverse needs of the students meant that a narrower segment of language development had to be selected for modelling meaningful ICT use. It was, therefore, decided that the focus of the course will be narrowed down to the role of ICT in developing language skills. This was thought to fit into the existing framework of ELT methodology teaching in the EFL teacher education programmes at Eötvös Loránd University, which explores ELT from the perspective of skills development in the first semester of the methodology course. Though the course emphasizes an integrated development of skills, it also acknowledges that a direct focus on the improvement of one skill at a time might be beneficial, as it equips student teachers with a better understanding of the development of the individual language skills if, in the long run, an integrated skills approach is adopted and 'several skills are combined in one lesson […] to redress this artificial separation' (Thornbury, 2017, p. 258).

3.2 Students' needs

In order to identify what student teachers in a pre-service course on the use of ICT in ELT need, a variety of small-scale procedures were used. The *necessities*, or 'what the learner has to know to function effectively' (Nation & Macalister, 2010, p. 5), emerged from

- the relevant literature on important methodological guidelines for integrating ICT into ELT (Dudeney & Hockly, 2007; Hockly, 2016; McCarthy, 2016; Sharma & Barett, 2007)
- the course designers' familiarity with diverse tools which originated from various in-service courses on the purposeful integration of ICT as well as from their own search for tools,

- a constant exchange of information with colleagues experimenting with technology in different ELT and ELT methodology courses,
- websites and blogs on learning technologies, such as eModeration Station (https://www.emoderationskills.com/), Nick Peachy's videos (https://www.youtube.com/user/NikPeachey/videos), Nick's Learning Technology Blog (https://nikpeachey.blogspot.com/), and Russel Stannard's Teacher Training Videos (https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCKjOFIFE0q71IJ4GFx4brng).

The *lacks*, or 'what the learner knows and does not know already' and the *wants*, or 'what the learners think they need' (Nation and Macalister, 2010, p. 5) were collected in student teachers' lessons where the observation focused on what pedagogical knowledge underlies students' ICT use and which ICT tools they are familiar with, as well as in the post-lesson discussions in which the students were invited to reflect on their own technology use and their perceived gains from their studies on the use of ICT.

It has to be noted, though, that the course designers were aware of the heterogeneity of learning all groups due to the numerous individual differences between students in terms of their needs, familiarity with ICT tools, and attitudes to using technology (Benini & Murray, 2014). It was, therefore, expected that no matter how carefully the lacks and the wants are observed, the individual members of any groups studying about learning technologies will always represent a wide spectrum as far as their background and their resulting needs are concerned. In line with this, it was found that students' lacks and wants differ tremendously. It seemed that students who were enthusiastic about technology included more ICT tools in their lessons, which confirmed earlier findings that positive attitudes to technology lead to a more likely ICT integration (Benini & Murray, 2014; Liu, 2009; Sang et. al., 2010). Though the number of lesson observations did not allow for generalizing, it was still observable that the majority of the students felt they needed more training in order to become more confident when selecting the appropriate ICT tool for a specific language learning objective.

3.3 Main course aims

The main course aims rest on the assumption that technology use should always be embedded into a sound pedagogy of ELT (Hockly, 2016; Kárpáti et al., 2015) which can be ensured by a systematic development of the three major teacher knowledge types, required for successful ICT inclusion. This is captured by the TPACK model (Mishra & Koehler, 2006) representing seven distinctive components in constant interaction with each other. Figure 1 shows the three major knowledge types - content knowledge (CK), pedagogical knowledge (PK) and technological knowledge (TK) – as partly overlapping circles, and their four intersections – pedagogical content knowledge (PCK), technological content knowledge (TCK), technological pedagogical knowledge (TPK) and technological pedagogical content knowledge (TPACK).
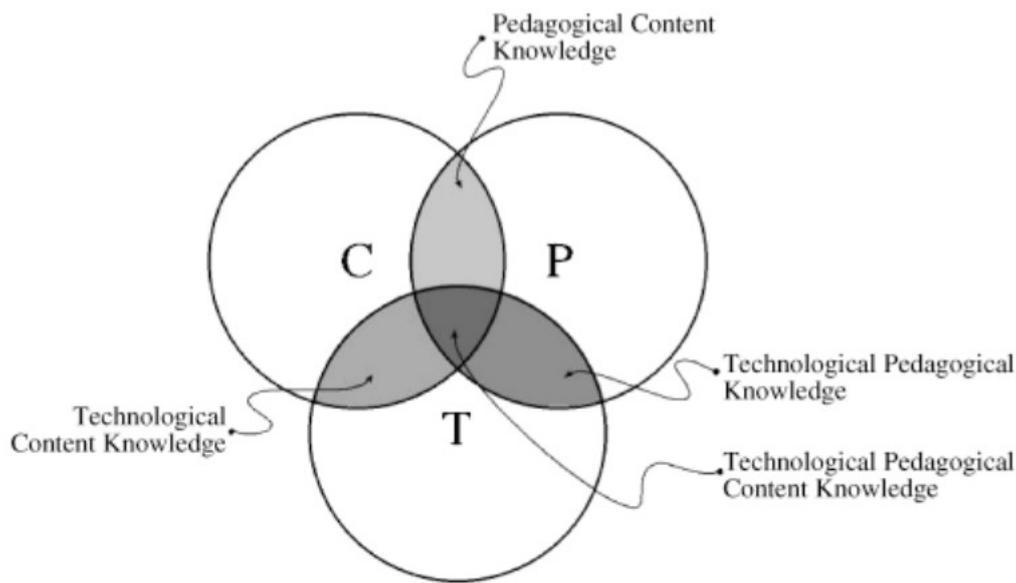
Figure 1 Teachers' technological pedagogical content knowledge (TPACK) (Mishra & Koehler, 2006, p. 1025)

In order for meaningful ICT integration to take place, it is essential to build teachers' technological pedagogical content knowledge (TPACK) made up of their knowledge of the content of the subject they teach (CK), their knowledge of pedagogy allowing them to apply instructional strategies that help learners learn best (PK), and their knowledge of technology involving hardwares and softwares (TK) (Mishra & Koehler, 2006).

In accordance with the TPACK model, the main aim of the course was

- to develop student teachers' technological pedagogical content knowledge so that they can select and use the appropriate learning technologies to facilitate the learning of specific content for their learners; namely, to help their learners develop their language skills.

The aim shows that the course was primarily concerned with developing the pedagogical skills required for effective ICT inclusion, and not merely with familiarizing students with the available tools. This was based on the understanding that ICT is in constant change, and new tools appear while old ones disappear regularly. What was seen as being of key importance in this context is to encourage students to be open to experimenting with any tools, to evaluate their efficacy and to use them meaningfully for language development purposes. This leads to the other main aim of the course, which, in accordance with the finding that an open mind and positive attitudes towards technology inclusion encourage effective technology use (Liu, 2009; Sang et. al., 2010), is the following:

- to develop student teachers' positive attitudes towards ICT inclusion as a result of experimenting with it in a safe environment so that they can autonomously develop their TPACK during their teaching career.

3.4 Course objectives and learning outcomes

Formulating the main course aims, analysing the situation and the student teachers' needs led to identifying the objectives and the learning outcomes of the course. The objectives referring to the specific changes the course intended to bring about and the learning outcomes showing what the students could do as a result of what they had learnt (Richards, 2017) were the following:
a) In order to achieve the main aims of the course, students will

- develop a critical view of when and why to use ICT for developing language skills
- learn about the available resources for ICT inclusion for developing language skills
- gain hands-on experience while experimenting with ICT and will reflect on the experience
- learn about ways of creating and evaluating teaching materials with a focus on language skills development using ICT

b) After completing the course students can

- make pedagogically informed decisions on when and why to use ICT tools for developing language skills
- use a wide range of ICT tools and different resources effectively for developing language skills
- plan and manage lessons using ICT
- create and evaluate their own teaching materials for language skills development using ICT

3.5 Content areas

The structure of the course reflected the course designers' intentions to exploit the possibilities of blended courses. On the one hand, the course aimed to familiarize the participants with various ways of using technology in the in-class sessions; on the other hand, it intended to engage the participants in reading and forum discussions related to the topic of the in-class sessions and designing their own tasks in the form of out-of-class assignments. Arranging the sessions this way had the additional aim of modelling the two learning environments (physical classroom and virtual classroom) and to ensure a link between them through the various tasks done in both, which is found to be an important feature of successful blended learning (Fekete, 2017). Therefore, the course was planned for 13 weeks with seven 90-minute contact sessions taught face-to face and six online modules, each requiring 90 minutes of online work from the course participants. The learning management system (LMS) used in the online modules was Canvas.

Taking the aims and the objectives of the course into consideration, the following content areas were identified:

- ICT in language teaching - Competences, methods, tools
- developing listening skills with technology
- developing reading skills with technology
- developing speaking skills with technology
- developing writing skills with technology

- planning integrated skills lessons with technology

A deeper exploration of the content areas from the perspective of technology use was thought to be possible due to the students' familiarity with principles and methods of developing language skills, gained in their ELT methodology course preceding the course on ICT in ELT – an arrangement of courses found to be useful by Graham et al. (2012), too.

3.6 Materials: Resources and ICT tools

The resources which served as content materials containing information about ICT (Mishan, 2016; Reinders & White, 2010) and the ICT tools regarded as process materials allowing students to collaborate, interact and use their communicative abilities (Mishan, 2016; Reinders & White, 2010) were selected from a variety of sources as mentioned in 3.2. It was decided that the tools had to meet three interrelated criteria, which were the following:

- they can be used for the development of at least one of the four language skills
- they can be used for collaboration and interaction
- they can be used for a variety of tasks used at different points in a lesson or in home assignments (e.g.: Mentimeter can be used in warm-up task, association games and quizzes as well as for introducing a topic, brainstorming and cooperative writing).

The final list of ICT tools included Mentimeter, Padlet, Wordwall, LearningApps, Diigo, BubbleUs, Rewordify, and Puzzlemaker, each being appropriate for a wide range of tasks. Apart from these, the course incorporated various articles on teachers' experience in using technology and examples of good practices. However, to strengthen students' understanding that the range of ICT tools is in constant change, one of the final course tasks was to compile a summary table including all the tools explored along with the aims and the possible task types for which they can be used.

3.7 Requirements and assessment

Students were required to take part in at least five out of the six contact sessions and to do at least three out of the five online modules in order to receive a course grade. Furthermore, as a final assignment, they were required to plan a lesson with a focus on integrated skills development using technology and to evaluate the plan of a peer using a rubric of ten criteria.

3.8 Effects of the Covid-19 pandemic: Challenges and new directions

Following the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic the blended course started to be taught as an online one. The transition was not entirely smooth and posed a number of challenges on top of the technological ones, as was reported by studies done in other educational contexts (Hodges et al., 2020; Kidd & Murray, 2020; König et al., 2020; Scull et al., 2020; Tannert & Gröschner, 2021). The most important ones, such as feelings of demotivation, the difficulty to stay focused and to get meaningfully engaged in learning, seemed to be related to the lack of social presence in an online environment, identified as a basic condition for the effective communication of a learning group (Garrison et al., 1999). It was soon realized that the ERT mode of the course is a

somewhat clumsy replacement of the in-person mode, and it does not meet the needs of the course participants. At the same time, experiencing teaching during the ERT period helped to identify certain changes that were necessary for adapting the course to the needs of online teaching. These were the following:

- Digital competences, especially digital literacy and online safety, the importance of which had been acknowledged earlier, too (Dudeney et al., 2013; Redecker, 2017), gained new importance. Though these topics were included in the blended course, it was felt that with education and other activities going on constantly online, they became even more relevant.
- Questions of how to assess students in the online environment became vital (Ghanbari & Nowroozi, 2021; König et al., 2020). As all forms of assessment were to happen online, possibilities of oral and written online testing had to be explored and introduced.
- Students' participation was negatively affected by the online environment. As interactions in online lessons were found to be crucial due to their role in motivating and actively involving students (Castañeda-Trujillo & Jaime Osorio, 2021; Katz, 2021), a direct focus on them seemed to be important.
- Students gained first-hand experience with a wide range of ICT tools as they used them in most of their ELT methodology courses during ERT. It was, therefore, important to explore further tools.

Apart from the observations made by the tutors, the feedback taken after the completion of each online module and at the end of the course provided further guidelines for redesigning the course. On the whole, the feedback was positive, and the participants reported to have gained useful practical knowledge in planning and teaching skills-based lessons using ICT. Among the critical remarks, one made by several students proved to be of special interest, and was, therefore, adopted in the redesign process. According to this, the task descriptions in the online modules were too detailed for an audience who find their way around very easily on the Internet. As one of the students wrote:

(1) *We can discover how to use the tools, there is no need to specify every step in so many details. We do this very often.*

4. The online course on the use of ICT in ELT

Having drawn the conclusions from teaching the course in the ERT period in spring 2020, the course was advertised and taught as an online one in spring 2021. The course participants were 25 students studying on the 2-semester MA in English Language Instruction programme. All the participants were doing their English teaching practice in the same semester and tried out some of the tasks of the course with their own learners. This gave them immediate hands-on experience, which, according to previous research (Dringó-Horváth & Gonda, 2018; Sang et al., 2010), can strengthen future teachers' ICT skills.

4.1 Course objectives and learning outcomes

The main aims and the theoretical underpinnings as well as the structure of the course remained the same as in the blended one (see sections 3.3 and 3.4), but its objectives, the planned learning outcomes and the content were slightly modified. In accordance with the new needs of online teaching (see section 3.8), the following objectives and learning outcomes were added to the ones of the blended course:

a) In order to achieve the main aims of the course, students will

- gain experience in using gamification for enhancing their learners' motivation and assessing their knowledge
- learn about the available ICT tools and their application in online assessment
- learn about ways of encouraging active learner involvement in online lessons by adopting various interaction forms and tasks

b) After completing the course students can

- plan and teach gamified sequences of lessons to enhance their learners' motivation and to assess their knowledge
- use different tools for online assessment and create their own assessment tools
- plan lessons that facilitate the active involvement of learners by engaging them in various interactive tasks

4.2 Course content

The course objectives and the learning outcomes project the three new content areas added to the course, which are linked by two of the most often mentioned challenges of online teaching: enhancing students' motivation and to assess their knowledge(see section 3.8). These were the following:

- Gamification: teaching strategy and assessment strategy
- Digital technology for online assessment
- Active learning and interactions in online lessons

As a result of new content added, further changes needed to be made. The original introductory and final sessions were kept in the same form, but instead of devoting a separate session to the development of each skill, the two receptive and the two productive skills were studied in one session and some of the tasks were taken out to make the online modules less dense. Appendix A and B provide a summary of the new content in terms of weekly topics, tasks and materials in the contact sessions and the online modules.

4.3 Materials: Resources and ICT tools

The online course explored the same types of materials – resources as content materials and ICT tools as process materials (Mishan, 2016; Reinders & White, 2010) – as the blended one (see section 3.6), but new resources and tools were also added. These were online articles related to the new content areas and ICT tools judged to be unknown to the students who were already

familiar with the ones explored in several of their courses. The selection criteria for the ICT tools were the same as in the blended course (see section 3.6). However, on top of the sources mentioned in section 3.2, an extensive list of ICT tools compiled by Dringó-Horváth et al. (2020) was consulted, and new tools, such as BookCreator, Symbaloo and Flipgrid were selected, just to mention a few. These are listed in Appendix C along with the tasks and the aims for which they were used.

4.4 Requirements and assessment

Contrary to the blended course, students were only required to complete three of the online modules: the first and the last ones, plus one more of their choice. The final course assignment was the same as in the blended course (planning a lesson with a focus on integrated skills development using technology), but it was suggested that a gamified task and an explanation on how it fits in the sequence of lessons adopting gamification as a teaching strategy be included. The lesson plans were only evaluated by the course tutor according to the same set of criteria as in the blended course; peer-evaluation did not happen.

5. Students' perceptions of the online course

In order to explore and understand students' perceptions of the course and their learning in it process-focused descriptive course evaluation (Richards, 2017) was carried by looking into the following points:

- how much time was spent on the different modules
- how useful the tasks of the modules were for the students
- how useful the content of the course was for the students
- how much use students were able to make of the course content during their teaching practice
- how students evaluate their own learning gains from the course

The course was evaluated by collecting post-module feedback after each online module and post-course reflections at the end of the semester. The evaluation tool was an anonymous Google Forms questionnaire in both cases. In order to interpret the responses thematic analysis was carried out (Braun & Clarke, 2006) with a firm understanding that they only reflected the opinion of one group of students or only some of them. However, this was not considered a problem, as the aim was not to generalize, but to gain insights into different perspectives.

5.1 Questionnaire used for post-module feedback

The questionnaire for collecting feedback on the online modules had four questions – a closed-ended question and three open-ended questions. These were the following:

1) How much time did you altogether spend on doing the tasks of the module?

   a) 0-60 minutes

   b) 60-90 minutes

c) more than 90 minutes

2) Which task did you find useful? Why?

3) Which task was not useful for you? Why?

4) Do you have any suggestions, or ideas to share about the online module? If so, please share it here.

Question 1 was meant to find out whether the course designers' estimation of 60 to 90 minutes on the successful completion of a module was a realistic one. The other questions, Questions 2, 3 and 4, aimed to look into the individual views of the students regarding the usefulness of the tasks. Responses to these were arranged in groups based on similarity to see if there were common points made by several students which will need to be addressed in a further, in-depth inquiry. Responses that did not match any of the groups were considered to create individual groups in themselves as they were also thought to be insightful.

Knowing that written course feedback can easily result in quite low response rates, special care was taken to convince the course participants to fill in the questionnaires for post-module evaluation. This resulted in receiving feedback from all the 26 students on the first module, but a lower number of responses on the other modules, including the last one, the completion of which was a course requirement for all participants.

Table 1 The online modules and the number of feedback responses received on them

Topics of online modules	Number of students completing the module	Number of post-module feedback responses
Digital technology in language teaching - Competences, methods, tools (compulsory module) (Week 2, February)	26	26
Gamification: teaching strategy and assessment strategy (Week 4, February)	7	6
Digital technology for online assessment (Week 6, March)	12	10
Developing the receptive skills (listening and reading) with technology (Week 8, March)	6	6
Developing the productive skills (speaking and writing) with technology (Week 10, April)	3	3
Active learning and interactions in online lessons (compulsory module) (Week 12, April)	25	12

Table 1 lists the number of students completing the online modules and the number of feedback questionnaires returned. Some of the students completed more than the required three modules, of which one (*Digital technology for online assessment*) seemed to be especially popular. A

closer look at the table also reveals that the modules in the first part of the semester were chosen by more students (*Gamification: teaching strategy and assessment strategy* by 7 and *Digital technology for online assessment* by 12 students) than those in the second part (*Developing the receptive skills* by 6 and *Developing the receptive skills* by 3 students). A possible reason for this might be the usually lighter workload in all courses in February and March, and an increased workload, including thesis submission, in April and May. Another explanation might be that the topics in the first part of the semester might have felt more novel than the topics related to skills development in the second part.

The following sections will give an account of the students' responses. To illustrate the ideas that emerged, some excerpts from the responses will be quoted. These will not be edited but will appear in the same form as in the students' responses.

5.2 Findings of post-module feedback

5.2.1 Time spent on doing the tasks in the online modules

When designing the course, the aim was to compile a set of tasks that would take 60 to 90 minutes to complete in every online module. According to the feedback

- 1 module required more than 90 minutes (3 out of the 6 students reported this after the module *Gamification: teaching strategy and assessment strategy*),
- 3 modules required 60 to 90 minutes (7 out of the 10 students reported this after the module *Digital technology for online assessment*; 4 out of the 6 students reported this after the module *Developing the receptive skills (listening and reading) with digital technology*; 8 out of the 12 students reported this after the module *Active learning and interactions in online lessons*);
- 2 modules required less than 60 minutes (17 out of the 26 students reported this after the module *Digital technology in language teaching - Competences*, methods, tools; 2 of the 3 students reported it after the module *Developing the productive skills (speaking and writing) with digital technology*).

As the responses show 3 out of the 6 online modules took roughly as much time as it was estimated by the course designers. It needs to be emphasized again that this is based on a low number of responses, and for this reason any kind of conclusion is only valid for the responding students. Still, this suggested that the two modules requiring less than 60 minutes might be supplemented with further tasks when teaching the course again.

According to the responses, only one module (*Gamification: teaching strategy and assessment strategy)* required more than 90 minutes from the students. Considering that only 3 students out of the 6 responding ones in a group of 25 students thought so, this information needs to be handled with care, as it may not even describe tendencies within the group. At the same time, the responses to Question 1 indicate that more in-depth information will have to be collected to find out why students invest more or less time in the individual modules and whether this information can be used when reconsidering the tasks of the modules.

5.2.2 Usefulness of the tasks

The students were very positive about almost all the tasks in the online modules. No task was mentioned as being useless, and the ones requiring students to create their own teaching materials were especially appreciated.

Two tasks, creating a learning quest and designing a test on Redmenta, received comments that stand out from the rest:

> *(2) I really enjoyed creating the learning quest, I would have never thought about doing something like this on my own, and I'm glad I can do such things now. I'll try making one for my students as well.*

> *(3) I liked the Redmenta task a lot, it was useful to see its many features and it was a bit more of a creative task than what we usually have to do. Even though I had to go back to fix some issues, it was still fun to do.*

> *(4) Even though planning a test took quite a long time, I believe it was very useful. I can actually use it with my private student.*

While in the module *Gamification: teaching strategy and assessment strategy* no suggestions for change were made, the module *Digital technology for online assessment* elicited the following ones:

> *(5) It was well put together. Maybe a free choice of the testing platforms for the assignment could make it more interesting.*

> *(6) I would change Redmenta on another assessing tool which might be more universal and suitable for international students.*

Apart from the creative ones, one more task – reading about and discussing flipped classrooms - received very positive feedback. As the following student noted:

> *(7) The reading task [on the flipped classroom] was very informative. I had some ideas of what a flipped classroom was, but the readings helped to understand this concept better.*

In sum, the responses gave insights into a narrow segment of the course, namely the usefulness of the tasks in the online modules as perceived by the students. At the same time, they allowed to see that the students found the tasks useful, especially the ones which engaged them in creating their own teaching materials. The fact that some of the students mentioned that they would use the tasks with their own learners shows a willingness to experiment with ICT in real-life teaching situations, which according to previous studies (Dringó-Horváth & Gonda, 2018; Sang et al., 2010) might further strengthen their ICT skills. As for the content materials, readings about the flipped classroom emerged as being particularly interesting, which suggests that flipped classroom could be explored more in future courses.

5.3 Questionnaire used for post-course reflections

The final course evaluation questionnaire included five open-ended questions, which collected information on students' experience with ICT tools before the course, their ICT integration during the teaching practice and in the future, their opinion on the positive features of the course, and their suggestions for changing the course. The questions were the following:

1) In general, how much are you interested in the use of digital tools in ELT?

2) How much did you know about how to use digital tools in ELT before you took the course? Which were the tools you used then?

3) Which digital tools did you use with your students during your teaching practice? For what purpose did you use them? Did it work well for you and your purposes? Why? /Why not? Please describe the experience and be as specific as you can when answering these questions.

4) Which tools or activity types out of the ones we looked at together do you think you could use in the future? Why?

5) Please describe your feelings with which you are leaving the course: What are you taking away and what would you change?

The end-semester questionnaire was filled in by 25 students. In order to analyze the responses thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was carried out to see general tendencies and potential areas that will require further inquiry. These will be summarized in the following sections.

5.4 Findings of post-course reflections

5.4.1 Initial experience with ICT tools

Though the first session of the course included a 'fact-finding' activity in which students' initial familiarity with the use of ICT in ELT was elicited, it was thought to be useful to do this once again retrospectively, giving more time to everyone to reflect on what they brought to the course, especially in the light of what they learnt during it. The responses to Questions 1 and 2 showed that all students were interested in using ICT in ELT and the tools and the concepts explored in the course were new for them.

5.4.2 ICT integration during the teaching practice and in the future

The responses to Questions 3, 4 and 5 revealed that the majority of the students had used several ICT tools from the course during their teaching practice, which, according to previous studies, can help to consolidate their ICT skills (Dringó-Horváth & Gonda, 2018; Sang et al., 2010). The responses also showed that the most often used tools were Redmenta and Google forms for testing purposes and WordArt for creating a nice class atmosphere. It is interesting to note that while the learning quest task received very positive evaluation in the post-module feedback, no students reported to include it in their teaching (though two students said they had tried it with

their private students). This might be explained with the fact that planning a learning quest requires plenty of preparation, while WordArt can be used without any preparation.

As for which ICT tools from the course students intend to use in the future, the most common answers were Redmenta and Google forms due to their usefulness in online testing. This seems to be in accordance with teachers' general concern with online assessment since the beginning of ERT and online education (Ghanbari & Nowroozi, 2021; König et al., 2020). Apart from that, learning quests and video activities with LearningApps were mentioned as having huge potentials for enhancing learners' motivation, which seems to confirm that motivation is one of the most powerful reasons why teachers turn to ICT (Dudeney & Hockly, 2007; Richards, 2017). Finally, Wordsift, which can be used for analysing the language of a text, was listed by several students as a tool they would like to use in the future. The main reason given for this was its feature to visualize vocabulary in a transparent and attractive way.

5.4.3 Positive features of the course

Students' opinion on the course was very positive. Based on the ideas that emerged from reflections, four groups were identified each representing a strength of the course. These are listed below and each one is illustrated with quotes from the students' reflections.

Boosting creativity

(8) *It was wonderful to have a class where we truly had to think and get creative while gaining very valuable skills for our teaching careers.*

(9) *The most important things I took away from the course are the understanding of endless creative possibilities of digital tools and a firm decision to implement them in my teaching practice.*

(10) *... when people are presented with the exact same task, they will still end up creating very different things, based on their perceptions, what they are already good at, what they are interested in, and other factors. When I looked through what my fellow students submitted to the various tasks, I was fascinated by how many different topics people picked, and how many ways they solved the same prompts.*

Encouraging learner autonomy

(11) *I like the idea of learner autonomy with the modules because we can do our homework on our own and learn as much as we can without attending the session.*

(12) *I was happy that I could choose what I do and do it independently when and how I want it.*

Balance of theory and practice

(13) *There is a nice balance between reading part and practical.*

(14) *I read about useful topics and practiced and created activities. The two were good together.*

Manageable workload

(15) It was great, manageable.

(16) Secondly, I am also taking away that sometimes less is more. When we looked at these ICT tools and sites there were so many different options when creating tasks[...] But overall, creating something simple yet engaging seems to be best solution in my opinion.

A closer look at the four strengths shows that they represent four kinds of experiences needed to motivate effective ICT inclusion (Dudeney & Hockly, 2007; Richards, 2017). No one reported dissatisfaction or a lack of learning gains from the course. While keeping in mind that any kind of conclusion drawn from this is very small in scope, it can still be said that the students felt they had benefitted from the course, felt motivated to take part and were able to identify the motivational factors contributing to a sense of success. This has the potential of enhancing their awareness of the conditions for successful ICT use and helping them form or strengthen positive attitudes towards technology use, which eventually leads to better use (Liu, 2009; Sang et. al., 2010).

5.4.4 Suggestions for change

Students' responses to Question 5 gave insights into how the course could be improved. Meanwhile, it has to be emphasized that there were very few suggestions made, and it was not possible to identify common points in them. It was, therefore, decided that the four ideas that emerged will be presented in the section below.

Requiring the completion of more online modules with fewer tasks

(17) I like to do the bare minimum, just like everybody else, but I think it would maybe be more beneficial if going forward there was smaller, weekly homework, so that students get a chance to work with every tool discussed for a bit and not just with one for a longer task.

Having more contact sessions and fewer online modules

(18) I felt a bit disconnected from it because of its bi-weekly nature.

Exploring learning management systems (LMSs) from the teacher's perspective

(19) … introduce one or more LMS systems; how it's used, and what are the benefits. For example, Moodle, Canvas, or MS Teams.

Putting more emphasis on collaborative tools

(20) The apps that allow collaboration and group activities, I think create a more productive learning environment. Google Jamboard is one of my favorite applications (and it was not mentioned)

As it can be seen, the first two points refer to the way the course was organized, and the requirements were set. The first suggestion (i.e., requiring the completion of more than one

module outside the first and the last one) is possible to implement. As a matter of fact, in the original plan of the blended course (Major & Szabó, 2021), the completion of every module was compulsory for all students. This was only changed so that students on the very intensive one-year MA course can cope while they are doing their teaching practice and writing their thesis.

The second suggestion (i.e., having weekly contact sessions) however, is more difficult to implement. On the one hand, this would leave too little time for the individual work done in the participants' own time and would deprive them of the opportunity to fully engage with the tasks. On the other hand, as it was mentioned in section 3.5, another reason for arranging the course in bi-weekly contact sessions and online modules was to model the dual nature of most 21st century learning environments where learning is going on in a physical and a virtual classroom (or in synchronous online meetings and asynchronous online tasks if courses are fully online). Giving less weight to the online modules and more to the contact session would mean distorting the balance between the two, which might hinder the success of learning.

The third idea (i.e., exploring LMSs from the teacher's perspective) seems to be a useful one, and will be considered when teaching the course next year. Finally, the fourth suggestion (i.e., including more collaborative tools and tasks in the course) reveals that despite the course designers' intention, collaboration and the use of collaborative tools may not have been emphasized sufficiently in the course. This will require revising course content and introducing new tasks when the course is taught next year.

6. Conclusions and practical implications

The present paper described the process of designing an online course on the use of ICT in ELT. Having outlined the context and the reasons leading to designing the course, the paper focused on the initial course design of the blended course and the results of the shift from blended and emergency remote teaching of the course to teaching it as a real online one in spring 2021. The most important results of this shift are reflected by the new topics added to the online course, such as *Gamification: teaching strategy and assessment strategy, Digital technology for online assessment* and *Active learning and interactions in online lessons,* and the related tasks. According to the reflections shared by the students in their process-focused descriptive course evaluation, the course is a useful one, as it boosts creativity, encourages learner autonomy, ensures the right balance between theory and practice and provides a manageable workload.

Looking at the main course aims, it seems that further research should be carried out to see whether the first aim (to develop student teachers' technological pedagogical content knowledge so that they can select and use the appropriate learning technologies to facilitate the learning of specific content for their learners; namely, to help their learners develop their language skills) and the first objective (to develop a critical view of when and why to use ICT for developing language skills) were reached, as the post-course reflections did not give evidence on how the knowledge gained in the course was implemented in real-life teaching situations. It would be, therefore, worth collecting more data on it, possibly, by observing students' ICT use.

However, the second main course aim (to develop student teachers' positive attitudes towards ICT inclusion as a result of experimenting with it in a safe environment so that they can autonomously develop their TPACK during their teaching career) seems to have been achieved. This is suggested by the post-module and post-course feedback that revealed that the students

had found the experience of experimenting with technology rewarding and left the course with positive feelings, which are important steps towards forming positive attitudes. Observing students' ICT inclusion during their teaching practice to see how open they are to using technology would give more insights into this, too

Finally, it follows from the suggestions above that in the future it would be useful to supplement the process-focused course evaluation with a product-focused one, involving follow-up observations of students' ICT inclusion in their lessons. Meanwhile, from the course designers' perspective, the process of designing and redesigning the course, even if due to the abrupt changes brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic, was a valuable learning experience. It was also a great reminder that ICT use, though guided by genuine curiosity in the present case, requires educators to constantly, if not on a daily basis, follow the rapidly changing technologies and to select the ones that can best benefit learning. It is hoped that the present paper gives guidelines to similar experiments and encourages good practices of online teaching even after the Covid-19 pandemic is over.

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Appendices

Appendix A: The online course - Summary of course content: topics and tasks

Topic for Weeks 1 and 2	
Digital technology in language teaching - Competences, methods, tools	
Week 1 – Contact session Tasks: Getting to know each other better with WordArt (https://wordart.com/) Reviewing ICT tools and their applications with Wordwall (https://wordwall.net/) Reflecting on a framework for digital competences (Redecker, 2017)	*Week 2* – Online module Tasks: Testing one's digital skills with an online tests (Cambridge Assessment English, 2018) Forum discussion and reflection about the test and one's own test results
Topic for Weeks 3 and 4	
Gamification: teaching strategy and assessment strategy	
Week 3 – Contact session Tasks: Reviewing initial knowledge about gamification Analysing learning quests (Cameron-Jarvis, 2020) Brainstorming and creating a list of topics and tasks in a learning quest	*Week 4* – Online module Tasks: Reading about gamification (Cameron-Jarvis, 2020; Kolb, 2015; Waterford.org, 2019) Forum discussion about pros and cons of gamification Designing a learning quest
Topic for Weeks 5 and 6	
Digital technology for online assessment	
Week 5 – Contact session Tasks: Reviewing aims, principles and methods of assessment Analysing and trying out Redmenta (https://redmenta.com/) and Google forms for assessment (https://docs.google.com/forms/u/0/; British Council, 2021)	*Week 6* – Online module Tasks: Reading about formative and summative assessment online (Fleming, 2020; Miller, 2020) Forum discussion about ways of formative and summative assessment online Designing a test on Redmenta (https://redmenta.com/)

Topic for Weeks 7 and 8	
Developing the receptive skills (listening and reading) with digital technology	
Week 7 – Contact session Tasks: Introducing the concept of the flipped classroom and the need for sound listening skills (Harrison, 2013) Using a video task for developing listening skills on LearningApps (https://learningapps.org) Looking at ways of storing and filing online reading materials with Symbaloo (https://www.symbaloo.com/) Looking at ways of working with the language of texts using Wordsift (https://wordsift.org/)	*Week 8* – Online module Tasks: Reading about the flipped classroom (Harrison, 2013; Gonzalez, 2014) Forum discussion about the advantages and problems of managing flipped classrooms Designing a video task on LearningApps (https://learningapps.org) Analysing the language of a text with Wordsift (https://wordsift.org/)
Topic for Weeks 9 and 10	
Developing the productive skills (speaking and writing) with digital technology	
Week 9 – Contact session Tasks: Reflecting on developing writing skills online (National Writing Project, 2010; Reading Rockets, 2013) Exploring and trying our Book Creator (https://bookcreator.com/) for developing writing skills Getting familiar with Flipgrid (https://flipgrid.com/) for developing speaking skills	*Week 10* – Online module Tasks: Forum discussion about developing writing skills online Making a short recording on Flipgrid (https://flipgrid.com/) Planning a speaking activity based on the use of an online mindmap - Bubbl.Us (https://bubbl.us/) or MindMeister (https://www.mindmeister.com/)
Topic for Weeks 11 and 12	
Active learning and interactions in online lessons	
Week 11 – Contact session Tasks: Evaluating tips to handle problems related to learner motivation and participation in online lessons based on a collection by an EFL teacher and mentor (J. Tóth, 2020)	*Week 12* – Online module Tasks: Reading about tips to maintain attention in online lessons (Dharmaraj, 2020; Stanley, 2019) Forum discussion and reflection on useful

Collecting digital tools and tasks that can encourage active participation Looking at features of a well-planned lesson	tips Planning an online lesson with interactive tasks
Topic for Week 13 **What is left out: Final steps and finishing the course**	
Week 13 – Contact session Tasks: Question-answer session on the course What's next? Discussing future plans	---

Appendix B: References to materials in the online course

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Appendix C: ICT tools not yet part of the blended course, but added to the online course

Name of tools	Aim for which it was used
WordArt (https://wordart.com/)	Breaking the ice Getting to know each other better (week 1)
Redmenta (https://redmenta.com/)	Assessing students' knowledge (week 5 and 6)
Google forms (https://docs.google.com/forms/u/0/)	Assessing students' knowledge (week 5 and 6)
Symbaloo (https://www.symbaloo.com/)	Storing online readings when developing reading skills (week 7)
Wordsift (https://wordsift.org/)	Activating students' passive vocabulary and learning new vocabulary as a follow-up to developing reading skills (week 7 and 8)
Book Creator (https://bookcreator.com/)	Creating online books when developing reading and writing skills (week 9)
MindMeister (https://www.mindmeister.com/)	Eliciting initial knowledge, generating and summarizing ideas when

	developing any of the four skills (week 9 and 10)
Flipgrid (https://flipgrid.com/)	Developing speaking skills (week 9 and 10)