

# **BORDER CHECK TRAINING IN FINLAND - COMPARISON OF E-LEARNING TOOLS FOR PRACTICAL AND LEGAL STUDIES**

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**Abstract.** *The paper discusses the possibilities and challenges in applying e-learning tools in border check training, comparing the training of legal issues and border check practices. The main research question of the paper is how e-learning is utilised in and compared with border guard training. In pedagogical discussion, one of the most popular strands in the e-learning context is the method called “flipped classroom”. In a flipped classroom, part of so-called blended learning, students study e-learning material before they start practicing their skills in simulated situations. We examine in which situations related to border checks flipped learning could be appropriate and beneficial and what sort of skills can best be learned through them. Practical skills are of course crucial, and after classroom learning in border guard training, working practice periods are obligatory for students. With the above-mentioned pedagogical concepts in mind, we first utilise content analysis based on the Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework, analysing how the online platform supports practical skills. Secondly, we bring the training period into conversation highlighting its importance as a learning method. The empirical material of the paper consists of educational documents, e-learning material used in border check and legal training as well as interviews and observation with trainers and teachers at the Finnish Border and Coast Guard Academy. The paper illustrates that e-learning tools are particularly useful in rehearsing to apply theoretical knowledge in practical situations. Still, the training period cannot be replaced with any methods. However, basing on the tentative analysis of empirical data before training period, flipped learning method seems to be very effective learning method.*

**Keywords:** *border guard training; Community of Inquiry; constructive alignment; e-learning; flipped learning, mixed method, training period, blended learning.*

## **Introduction**

This paper deals with the use of online education methods in border guard training. More specifically, it analyses the use of online learning in border check and legal training from the perspective of best practices for border guard training. Our study is informed by specific pedagogical concepts focused on e-learning.

According to the teacher's guide of the Finnish Border and Coast Guard Academy, teaching at the academy is based on *constructive alignment*, whereby all aspects of teaching should be aligned: objective, target group, implementation, learning method, assessment and feedback (Border and Coast Guard Academy, 2018). In constructive alignment, the target skills determine e.g. how the course contents are taught and how learning is assessed (Biggs & Tang, 2011). For example, in accordance with constructive alignment, practical border check issues should not be taught with lectures only, but teaching should aim at improving the practical border checking skills of the students and to assess students based on their practical activities. In border check training, the most important part is the obligatory internship period of six months, the significance of which is also emphasised in pedagogical studies (Vesterinen, 2002).

According to the pedagogical strategy of the Border and Coast Guard Academy, *blended learning* is applied in teaching; different study environments and methods are combined (Border and Coast Guard Academy, 2017). E-learning environments and methods are an essential part of blended learning. Often, blended learning is defined as learning where a part of the learning takes place within school premises and another part online, in which case the student may influence the time, place and/or pace of studying (Hew & Cheng, 2014).

*Flipped classroom* is a form of *blended learning* where students study online material before classes, in turn discussing what they learned online (Bergmann & Sams, 2014). This paper also discusses in which situations and for learning which skills flipped learning could be used in border check training.

The Finnish border guard studies consist of a six-month learning period at the Finnish Border and Coast Guard Academy, after which the students complete a six-month training period in their future workplaces while simultaneously conducting independent online studies. We analyse border guard training in the online environment from the perspectives of the above-mentioned pedagogical concepts. Considering the best practices of these debates, we focus on online environment from the teacher's perspective, with particular emphasis on the so-called teaching presence, part of the pedagogical Community of Inquiry framework (Garrison et al., 2010). In other words, we examine the role of the teacher in the online material vis-à-vis student engagement in independent learning, which is combined with practical exercises and an internship period.

Plenty of online material has been developed for border check training, such as online tests and serious games for practicing border check activities. The tools help to apply legal knowledge in practical situations. In border check training, online learning seems to be used for testing and rehearsing existing knowledge and the use of online resources is often voluntary. In legal training, in contrast, teaching relies strongly on online learning and the online resources provide new information not covered during lectures. The paper aims at analysing in which

situations e-learning is suitable for border guard training. More specific research questions include:

1. How flipped learning and blended learning is applied in the courses?
2. How constructively aligned are the tools in terms of e-learning?
3. How does teaching presence materialise in the courses?

The main empirical material consists of the contents in the online platform of the border guard course that began in January 2018. Furthermore, we have interviewed two trainers at the Border and Coast Guard Academy, which will also be taken into account in the analysis, along with educational documents of the academy. Together, this material provides a diversified view on online learning in border check training. The research project is in progress, and the results of this study will be later on complemented with student surveys and comparison with flipped learning experiences at the Finnish Emergency Services College.

The analysis relies on content analysis, which is an appropriate method for qualitatively comparing, contrasting and classifying issues, and it has also been used in the Community of Inquiry framework that serves as the analytical framework of the paper (Tiuraniemi, 2012). We have adopted a deductive approach to content analysis, i.e. our analysis is concept-driven, starting from the concepts in pedagogical discussion (Graneheim et al., 2017). Hence, we do not utilise the traditional quantitative methods of the CoI model nor do we analyse the online platform through a student survey. Instead, our interest lies in how the e-learning tools are constructed in light of teaching presence. The model maintains that a community is necessary for successful learning, in order for students to become reflective learners. We thus analyse qualitatively how the contents of the online material supports the aims of a Community of Inquiry in terms of teaching presence; how do teaching activities contribute to supporting students in the online environment? The actual method relies on systematically examining, classifying and contrasting the observed issues in the online material and interviews.

Teaching presence refers to the manners in which the teacher takes part in the online activities. The components of teaching presence include design and organisation, facilitating discourse and direct instruction (Garrison, 2017). Whereas design is the work that occurs before the course, organisation refers to the activities of the teacher during the course (ibid). The tasks may include setting curriculum, designing methods, establishing time parameters, utilizing medium effectively, establishing netiquette and making macro-level comments about course content (ibid). Facilitation and direct instruction, in turn, refer to the management of student discussion. Since the students are not supposed to discuss with each other online in the observed courses, only direct instruction is under consideration here in terms of how the teachers directly communicate with the students in the online platform. In terms of design and organisation, the model

analyses how the curriculum is established, how resources are identified; how expectations and goals are identified; how technological concerns are identified; how activities are structured; how time frames are set and how assessment processes and instruments are devised (ibid). This contributes to revealing how teaching presence is intended to materialise in the online environment.

### **Pedagogical concepts informing the present study**

E-learning is a popular topic in pedagogical discussion and we are not able to review all literature related to e-learning in this short paper. Instead, we focus on the main pedagogical studies that have inspired this paper. We concentrate on the teacher's perspective during an actual course rather than on the overall curriculum and course design. It is important to keep in mind that not all studies consider that e-learning is always positive and should be applied in all possible situations. Some authors argue that it should be always predetermined how and why e-learning should be used before starting to apply it in actual teaching (Kirkwood, 2009). For example, practical skills cannot be practiced only online, if we aim at constructive alignment. Constructive alignment pursues deeper learning among students, which means that students should receive feedback from their learning and their learning should be assessed based on the skills they should acquire, not necessarily based on what they can learn by heart (McCann, 2017). Constructive alignment may include both traditional lectures, which have a separate assessment method, and practical exercises, which are assessed based on performance (Wass, 2011; Vesterinen, 2002).

With constructive alignment as the usual framework, flipped learning is a popular concept in e-learning studies. Flipped learning can be considered a form of blended learning, where classroom teaching is combined with e-learning material. However, flipped learning may not be very easy to organise in large groups; it is hard to involve students in discussion in one single lecture room. Nevertheless, even in a study with a group of 80 students, the flipped approach was deemed positive since it actively engaged students to take responsibility for their own learning (Graham et al., 2017). Although flipped learning has been developed in the past fifteen years, it is to be noted that prior reading and interactive classrooms have been used for decades; technology has just made flipped learning easier (Ent, 2016). Flipped learning is part of blended learning, but it can also be considered complementary to blended learning, when teacher-centred studying is combined with student-centred learning (Zhang et al., 2016). Flipped learning has spurred positive experience particularly with case-oriented studying, where students watch online lectures before classroom activities (Slomanson, 2014).

Although all reviewed studies acknowledged the positive aspects of e-learning tools, none of them considered that e-learning tools would substitute contact teaching. Instead, in accordance with constructive alignment, learning methods should always be considered case-specifically. Blended learning, including flipped learning, provides tools to employ a variety of methods.

In order to study the effectiveness of blended and online learning, many studies relying on constructive alignment utilise the Community of Inquiry (CoI) model, which focuses on teaching presence, cognitive presence and social presence in classroom and online learning (Garrison et al., 2010). Social presence refers to the ability of the students to identify themselves with the community, communicate and develop interpersonal relationships; whereas cognitive presence refers to collaborative knowledge construction (Arbaugh et al., 2008). In the present paper, we will critically assess whether such presence is necessary in a digital learning environment. For example, some authors have questioned whether learning actually requires being in a social contact as the CoI model maintains (Cooper & Scriven, 2017).

### **Analysis of the online environment**

The online material used at the border guard courses is located in a single online platform, where all the material of the one-year course is found. Different topics have their own sections, such as border check and legal studies.

In the border check course, the first issue that students need to learn is how to search information from different systems with their laptops. Most of the learning at the border check course takes place in the classrooms, and the material online is mainly for practicing the learned information with tests and revising the issues for the final exam. Furthermore, all the presentations of the contact teaching are available online. Since the students are supposed to have their laptops with them in the lecture hall, e-learning methods such as information search and exercises can also be utilised in the classroom. Furthermore, video material is watched during lectures and the links are provided together with the lecture slides. Online exercises are also available in the online platform to be completed outside classes, where the students are supposed to search information online or practice what was learned during the classes, e.g. by identifying passport images and measures to be taken.

In contrast to the border check course, in the legal course, there are no lecture-type classes in the first part but the lectures are substituted by online reading. Material from introductory legal studies is utilised, and there are often quizzes with multiple choice and true/false questions connected to readings. The first part of the course is completely organised online, but students are also supposed to study issues in small groups, which may contact the teacher through

video connection during predetermined times. Video lectures are available on fundamental and human rights issues with the best experts in the field, and similar multiple choice exercises are attached to the videos. In addition to the material drafted by legal experts, the teacher has also prepared lectures specific for border guard students, with pictures from legal databases and boxes and arrows indicating what is intended by which part, with quizzes in between. There is also a message board available in the online platform, and students can contact the teacher through an online chat when the teacher is available. However, this option is not utilised.

As outlined above, we have two different types of topics and two different types of learning methods. The first part of the practice-oriented border check course is organised in the form of traditional lectures and online homework, therefore complying with the blended learning framework. In contrast, legal issues are learned in a flipped manner; students study the issues independently either by reading or watching online lectures and thereafter study together in small groups with possible video contact with the teacher. In both courses, practice-oriented classes and exercises are started only once the first theoretical part of the course is completed. Analysed from the teacher presence perspective, we can observe that the teacher's online role in both courses is mainly related to organisation and design, and direct instruction is provided for individuals or small groups when they so request. In the border check course, students provide written answers that are checked later on in classroom.

In the two courses, the only interactive online resource is a discussion board at the legal studies platform, where students may present questions to the teacher, visible to all. The role of the teacher is thus directly instructing the students in case of inquiries, and even the possibility for small groups to have a video connection with the teacher is called “question hour”. In the border check course, feedback is only provided during lectures for written answers to a test.

Not all material is immediately available in the online platform but new activities are opened as the course progresses. This can also be considered a sign of teaching presence in the sense that the teacher holds responsibility for the organisation of the course. In the legal course, there was more material available already at the outset, since the students are expected to study independently. Even though social and cognitive presence of students is not apparent in the online environment, social presence is ensured with independent studies in small groups. Furthermore, the students study the same issues and live in the same premises for the first six months and social presence thus takes place “offline”.

When considered from the perspective of constructive alignment, the chosen methods seem to comply with the skills the students are supposed to acquire. In the legal course, students should learn the relevant legislation and therefore questions testing the ability to apply the legal information are reasonable with an

online multiple choice and true/false exam. Even in the second part of the legal course with practical classes, the evaluation is based on an online exam. In the border check course, in contrast, theoretical knowledge is assessed based on an exam, but there are proficiency tests for evaluating practical skills.

Blended learning, including flipped learning, seems to be utilised in border guard training, though in a larger scale. In the legal course, the course is flipped in the sense that first part of the course consists of independent online studies and the second part of practical classes. One could of course ask whether it would be more efficient to organise the theoretical and practical classes simultaneously and discuss each topic together as soon as the students have introduced themselves with the material online. In the border check course, online and classroom learning is blended throughout the duration, but instead of flipped learning, online material mainly tests what was learned during lectures (traditional homework type).

### **Border check training as an example of blended learning**

Two border check trainers at the Border and Coast Guard Academy were interviewed in 2016 as part of BODEGA project. The interviews were carried out with the interview guide for trainers designed in the BODEGA project as a basis.

Border checks at international border crossing point constitutes the key skill that all students learn and border guard basic training is based on. Skills important for students to learn include how to perform border check in practice, legislation, customer service and social skills, technical, language and problem-solving skills.

Different learning environments and methods are combined to train border check skills. Border guards work on the field individually and also in groups and thus in the training, group and self-directed work is combined. Practical border check skills are learned in small groups ensuring that trainers have time to give personal guidance. Sometimes half of the group performs the activities and half have a role of customers or other target of the action. This kind of method contributes to customer service and social skills; border guards-to-be learn to see the situations from travellers' perspective. At the beginning of the training, the focus is on personal skills, for example students perform e-learning courses by themselves. The training of tools that will be used on the field individually is self-directed, for example training of registers and document scanners.

Learning by doing is the basic method of border check training. Lectures are provided at the beginning of the training but used as little as possible in further training. E-learning courses go along with the other training. Thanks to e-learning online platform, real life cases chosen by the trainers have been included in training; the cases stimulate students' own thinking and applying knowledge into practice. All these are skills required from a border guard. When working with the

cases students also understand how various situations they may encounter in their future work.

Videos as part of e-learning courses bring the benefit of rehearsing multiple skills at the same time. For example, a foreign traveller asks a question on the video and the student has to answer and react correctly to the question. In a flipped learning, videos have a typical role of introducing basics of the content to be learned (e.g. Slomanson, 2014) but as shown by the border check training, videos are useful to test and improve multiple skills at the same time.

In the e-learning courses trainers may provide feedback for the students via the e-learning platform. Furthermore, the e-learning courses are addressed later in the face-to-face training with the trainer. The social presence regarded as important for learning in the CoI framework (e.g. Garrison et al., 2009) is thus brought to the training not only in online environment but on top of that. The content of the e-learning course is aligned to other training with the help of trainers.

Videos are not only part of e-learning but in use also when customer service and cultural communication skills are trained. An ideal situation can be demonstrated with the help of videos. Written material ranging from legislation to other learning material also constitutes an essential part of the learning. However, because of fast development on the field, it is not possible to write a book on how to perform border checks. The use of such textbook in the training could also hinder students and border guards' own thinking, one key skill for a border guard.

Borders (sea, air, land) are different in the sense that the skills required from border guards working at different Finnish border crossing points are not equal. Therefore on-the-job training at the workplace-to-be is crucial. As part of the border guard basic training, border guards have on-the-job training phase when they go for practical training to the same workplace they will be working after graduation.

Performance assessment methods in use are, inter alia, (theory) exams, tasks related to e-learning courses and proficiency tests. Tests organised via e-learning platform may include real-life cases when students have to combine knowledge and skills they have learned. For example, refusal of entry and document inspection skills are trained and assessed by proficiency tests, in line with constructive alignment framework.

Based on the trainer interviews, we can conclude that in border check training blended learning is applied by using different methods, learning and social environments. All courses and methods have the intended learning outcomes plus other skills are learned at the same time. Using e-learning methods in the training contribute to the changing operational environment. More and more



technical tools are utilised in border check work. When part of the training is online, border guards learn how to operate in that environment.

### **Conclusion**

We have demonstrated in this paper that e-learning tools are widely used in border guard training in different manners. Legal training relies mostly on online material, consisting of writings from legal experts and video lectures made in the governmental Human Rights Centre as well as material and exercises prepared by the teacher. There is an online test at the end of the course, and the materials are also organised on the basis of what is asked in the exam. The title of the material for the first exam states that this will be asked in the exam, sometimes added with the note that certain material will not be asked in the exam, but students can acquaint themselves with them if they so wish. Although it was emphasised in the first lecture that issues are not learned because of the exam but because the border guards need to know the issues at work, learning is very exam-oriented. The exercises also state that similar questions will be asked in the final exam. What can be considered positive is that the exam is online and it requires application of the learned issues, not just learning by heart. Furthermore, having border guard - specific issues as the first material in the course introduces the students in why these issues are important in their work. Since it is a question of a large group of students, having a multiple-choice online exam is probably the optimal solution.

In contrast, the border check course is brought forward with contact teaching and online tools only complement the lectures. The lecture slides are saved in the online platform and quizzes are also available. There is an exam in the end of the course, and the learning is thus exam-oriented, but the contents are more practical and students know they will start practicing what they learned in the second part of the course. The same is true also for the legal course, but the practice is less “practical”, and there is an online exam also for the second part of the legal course. Teaching presence thus materialised mainly in terms of design and organisation, with the potential of direct instruction if need be.

Both courses make use of blended learning and the legal one could also be considered a type of flipped learning, where theoretical issues are studied independently online before contact learning. This suggests that flipped learning could be more suitable for theoretical issues, while blended learning is a natural part of any modern course. In accordance with constructive alignment, if the target is to achieve “knowledge”, flipped learning could be more appropriate. Instead, if one should learn “skills”, blended learning may be more suitable if there is no theoretical information to be learned before such skills.

To conclude, e-learning tools seem to be particularly suitable for theoretical (such as legal) courses, whereas practice-oriented courses may utilise online tools

to complement classroom activities. An ideal environment for e-learning is a course, where learning takes place through reading, watching videos and rehearsing with exercises that test the ability to apply knowledge. In contrast, practice-oriented courses are more justified to be organised at least partly in classroom. For example, the border check course is less suitable to be organised completely online, but the online environment is useful in storing lecture material as well as for online exercises where students can practice what was learned during the lectures. Overall, flipped learning could be useful in organising courses partly online and partly in classroom so that students would have an idea of what is going to be discussed in the class. However, further research is needed to determine in which situations and which contents could be flipped in order to ensure that all skills are properly learned before training period at the field and work of border guards.

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