

Pursuant to Article 21 of the Statute of the Euro-Mediterranean University, the Senate adopted the guidelines at its 51st session on 15 January 2025.

Guidelines for the Implementation of Blended Learning at EMUNI

Introduction

Blended learning is a modern educational approach that combines physical on-site learning at the university with activities conducted in online learning environments, where teachers and students are spatially and, at times, temporally separated. This method bridges the traditional campus-based education with digital tools, allowing students to achieve or complement certain learning goals through online classrooms or other web-based settings. Thus, blended learning is characterised by a partial presence on campus while utilising online resources to fulfil educational objectives. (*Možina et al., 2022*). It leverages both synchronous (real-time) and asynchronous (self-paced) modalities to enable flexible, inclusive, and technology-driven education. This approach not only aligns with the demands of modern students but also enhances teaching quality, promotes academic integrity, and fosters continuous improvement.

At EMUNI University, blended learning emphasises the effective integration of technology and innovative pedagogy to create a student-centred educational experience. Drawing on the practices and experiences of Slovenian and international universities, these principles are tailored to EMUNI's unique context to support implementation strategies on process, pedagogy, and technology at institutional and programme levels.

1. Defining Blended Learning Modalities

Blended learning involves combining on-campus and online teaching to enrich the learning experience. EMUNI University adopts the following definitions to clarify its approach:

1.1 Synchronous Learning

This real-time, interactive mode includes live online sessions, virtual lectures, webinars, or discussions conducted through platforms like Zoom or MS Teams. It requires simultaneous participation from instructors and students, enabling rich interaction, immediate feedback, and collaborative activities.

1.2 Asynchronous Learning

This self-paced mode offers students the flexibility to engage with pre-recorded lectures, forums, or digital resources at their convenience. Examples include recorded e-lectures, assignments, and discussion boards accessible through learning management systems (LMS) like Moodle.

1.3 Balancing Modalities

An optimal blended course at EMUNI incorporates a balance between synchronous and asynchronous learning, using robust pedagogical planning to meet intended learning outcomes. For instance, theoretical concepts can be introduced asynchronously while synchronous sessions focus on applying concepts through discussions and group work.

2. Implementation of E-Learning Activities

EMUNI University promotes replacing or complementing traditional teaching methods with e-learning opportunities within a structured virtual environment that allows two-way communication. Specific examples include:

2.1 E-Lectures

Structure and Quality

E-lectures consist of at least one structured e-material (e.g., video, audio, or text), appropriate for independent learning, and equivalent in content to traditional lectures. They may include integrated media (hyperlinks, videos).

Knowledge Checks

Incorporate tools like quizzes for student self-assessment during or after the lecture. Facilitate discussions via synchronous (e.g., live chat) or asynchronous channels (discussion forums).

Real-Time and Recorded Options

Deliver e-lectures through live webinars and/or as pre-recorded video/audio resources.

As recommended by best practices:

- *Each e-lecture should consist of at least one well-structured e-material suitable for self-learning and equivalent in scope to traditional lectures.*
- *It is encouraged to include quick knowledge assessments, such as quizzes or discussions, to allow students to self-check their understanding and clarify doubts through available communication channels.*
- *Real-time e-lectures can be conducted as webinars with students attending online, while also offering recorded options to ensure access to content at any time.*

2.2 E-Exercises and E-Seminars

Active Engagement

E-exercises or seminars require activities equivalent to traditional formats, such as submitting essays, solving mathematical problems, or participating in chat room discussions.

Feedback

Provide timely and structured feedback on submitted assignments to maintain alignment with course objectives and the academic calendar.

Teachers are also encouraged to design activities that are engaging and reflect the learning goals. When determining the duration and workload, the e-exercise or seminar should substitute traditional activities effectively and create meaningful engagement. Instructors must provide feedback on submitted work promptly, supporting continuous learning and improvement.

3. Student-Centric Conditions for Implementation

Blended learning must ensure equitable access and support for all stakeholders involved in the process.

3.1 ICT Infrastructure

The success of blended learning depends heavily on the availability and reliability of infrastructure:

- Provision of ICT tools (hardware and software) for both staff and students.
- High-speed internet connectivity at all university premises.
- Accessibility features such as ADA-compliant resources, captions, and transcriptions.

3.2 Training and Technical Support

- Teachers receive regular pedagogical training, focusing on combining ICT tools with innovative teaching practices.
- 24/7 technical and administrative support must be available to both instructors and students for troubleshooting.
- Students are provided workshops to strengthen their digital literacy.

3.3 Academic Support

A blended model should offer:

- Flexible participation options for students balancing academic and personal commitments.
- A robust LMS with features for content, communication, and analytics to monitor learning engagement.

Special attention should be given to ensuring equal access to all online resources for all learners, whilst also providing consistent support.

4. Guidelines for Participation in Blended Study Programmes

4.1 Contact Hour Distribution

The online portion of blended learning (e-learning) is capped at 40% of the total contact hours as determined by programme structure. However, the exact proportion within a particular course can be decided by the course leader, based on the feasibility of achieving learning outcomes.

According to institutional guidelines:

- Contact hours in a virtual setup should not exceed 40% of the total number of hours listed in the course syllabus.
- Teachers retain the discretion to establish the specific proportion of e-learning hours for their course, based on how effectively the required learning outcomes can be met.

4.2 Conditions for Blended Learning Adoption

Implementation requires:

- Reliable infrastructure and equipment.
- Ongoing training for participants, technical and pedagogical support.
- Continuous monitoring of outcomes through institutional evaluation practices.

4.3 Security and Data Protection

- Apply GDPR-compliant protocols to ensure secure handling, storage, and transfer of student and staff data.
 - Strengthen cybersecurity through multi-factor authentication (MFA), encrypted communication tools, and secure access to data-sensitive platforms.
 - Provide regular training in cyber hygiene and safe online practices for staff and students.
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5. Innovative Pedagogical Approaches

Blended learning at EMUNI University aims to promote active participation and deep learning through the following:

5.1 Interactive Learning Opportunities

Encourage tools and frameworks such as:

- Active Learning Strategies: Case studies, group assignments, collaborative writing activities.
- Engagement Tools: Implement LMS-interactive features like polls, virtual whiteboards, and breakout group discussions.

5.2 Customised Learning

Adapt tools (e.g., gamification, tailored assignments) to meet diverse student learning needs. Create inclusive spaces for co-creation of learning materials and collaboration between instructors and students.

5.3 Diverse Assessments

Blend traditional and online assessments, offering project-based and formative feedback opportunities. Maintain integrity in tests through plagiarism checks and secure proctoring methods.

6. Academic Integrity

6.1 Training and Awareness

Deliver workshops to equip students with skills in proper citation, paraphrasing, and ethical digital behaviour. Provide automated access to plagiarism software like Turnitin.

6.2 Secure Assessments

Utilise platforms that integrate proctoring tools, lockdown browsers, and identity verification. Minimise reliance on high-stakes examinations by embracing diverse evaluation methods, such as multi-step projects or reflective assignments.

7. Quality Assurance and Continuous Improvement

To ensure sustainability and excellence in blended learning:

- Collect regular feedback from students and staff to assess technological effectiveness, engagement, and academic outcomes.
 - Evaluate quantitative metrics like student retention and performance.
 - Benchmark results with peer institutions to maintain leadership in adopting digitalisation trends in education.
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Conclusion

Through a robust framework of pedagogical innovation, infrastructure development, and policy alignment, EMUNI University aims to redefine higher education delivery with its blended learning model. By leveraging cutting-edge technology and teaching strategies, EMUNI will provide a flexible, inclusive, and impactful learning experience that meets the evolving needs of its students and faculty. This model ensures that traditional, in-person instruction is not only preserved but enriched, creating a holistic education paradigm.

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Prof. Dr. Rado Bohinc

President of the EMUNI University

