

# MENTORme

Promoting social inclusion of people with fewer opportunities through the development of mentorship programme for HEIs students

**LEARNING APPROACHES**

December 2021

## CONTEXT

Grant agreement	2020-1-PL01-KA203-081667
Programme	Erasmus+
Key action	Cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices
Action	Strategic Partnerships
Project acronym	MENTORme
Project title	Promoting social inclusion of people with fewer opportunities through the development of mentorship programme for HEIs students
Project starting date	01/12/2020
Project duration	28 months
Project end date	31/03/2023

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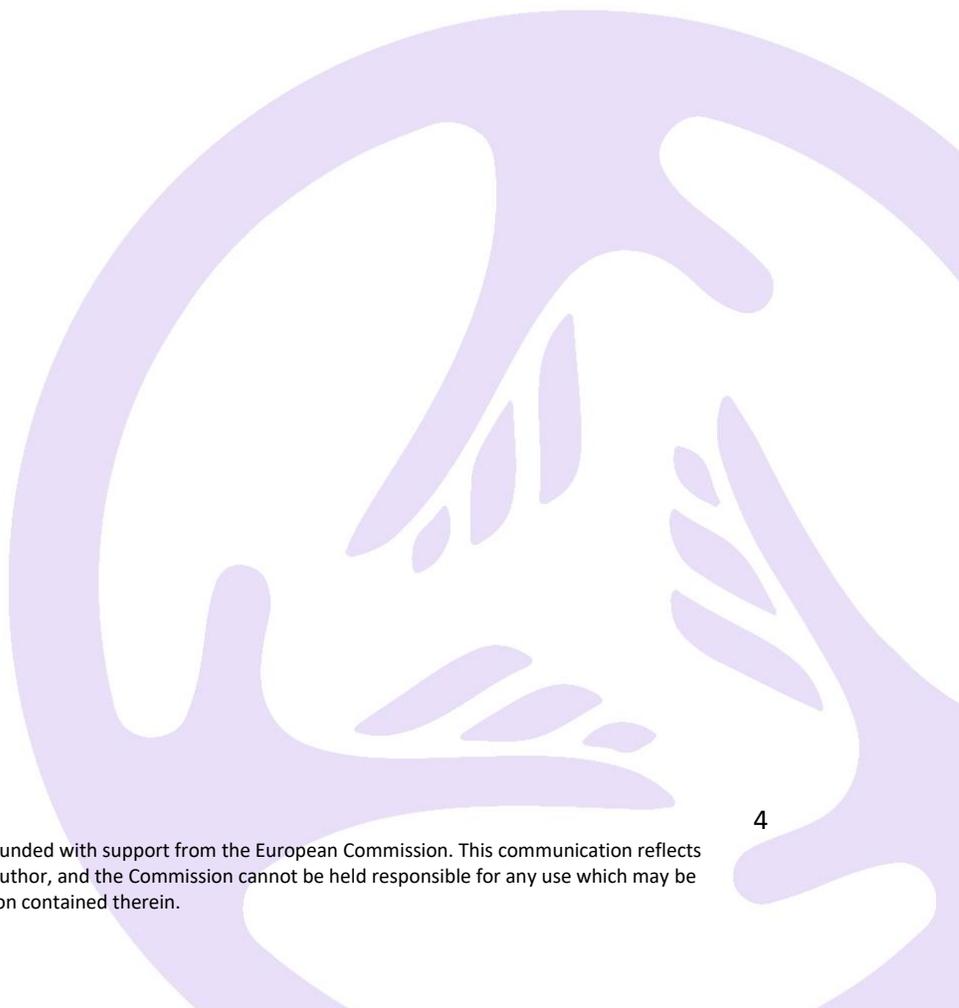
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## LEARNING APPROACHES

Following the IO2 tasks, the time has come for the preparation of the didactic material to be used in the training of higher education students. To facilitate the planning of the material, the following document has been prepared with information of selection of approaches towards learning.

### Introduction to learning approaches

Nowadays, thanks to the development of the latest ICT technologies, approaches to learning are not limited to traditional classroom or training room learning, but also include various forms using distance learning. This document presents different learning approaches and opportunities, including e-learning or blended-learning.

The area of digital education has also been identified as important by the European Commission **in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic**. As the European Commission argues the pandemic has demonstrated that having an education and training system which is fit for the digital age is essential. What is more, the pandemic has accelerated an existing trend towards online and hybrid learning. This shift has uncovered new and innovative ways for students and educators to organise their teaching and learning activities and to interact in a more personal and flexible manner online (European Commission, 2021).

In the field of **higher education**, the e-learning approach was also used before the pandemic. According to the European University Association research (Gaebel et al., 2014) practically all higher education institutions of the sample have started to embrace e-learning. Most of the surveyed institutions are using blended learning (91%), integrating e-learning into conventional teaching, but surprisingly 82% of institutions also indicate that they offer online learning courses. The results of recent studies show that digitally enhanced learning and teaching has been further embraced by higher education institutions across Europe. General acceptance has grown and institutions widely acknowledge the benefits it brings to the student experience, but also the challenges. In response to the Covid-19 pandemic practically all institutions managed to pivot to blended and online learning, which may not have been the case in 2014. But resources, while available, were in many regards insufficient for the sudden enhanced use. Generally, three-quarters of the respondents indicate that they had concrete plans to boost digital capacity beyond the crisis (Gaebel et al. 2021).

### Learning approaches – terms and classification

As there are many terms related to distance learning, it is worthwhile at the outset to provide a classification and to clarify the difference between the different approaches to learning. The broadest term we can think of is **distance education**, which means general term for any type of educational activity in which the participants are at a distance from each other, so they are separated in space. They may or may not be separated in time (asynchronous vs. synchronous) (Inacol, 2011). It is closely connected with

the term **distance learning**, when the learning taking place when teachers and students are separated by distance (Ishmael et al., 2020).

Distance learning can be divided into two approaches. The following classification (Figure 1) is based on possible approaches to learning process. According to Elena Gaevskya (2012) there can be distinguished two approaches to using the Internet for learning: pedagogical and technological. **The pedagogical approach** is based on creation of learning network by university or another educational agency and involving students in learning activities. It is connected with a range of different approaches to the use of information technology in teaching and includes the following phenomena: use of information technologies in F2F learning, blended learning, and online learning.

In **the technological approach** a student creates his/her own educational network and uses it for his/her cognitive purposes. The concept describes possibilities of inclusion of social and technological innovation in the learning practice, both for individual users and organizations, regardless of the time, place and pace of learning, for example: providing access to learning resources of depositories, educational hypermedia, participation in educational social networks work using software (including LMS, CMS) of universities or open learning communities (e.g. MOODLE), etc. The main thing is to give a user the opportunity to organize the complete learning process by technical means.

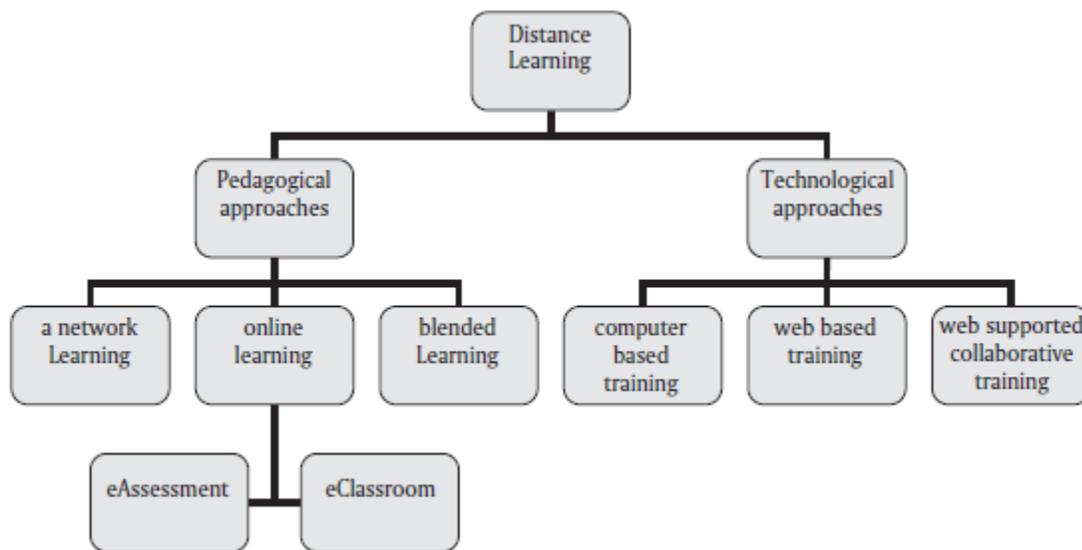


Figure 1. Distance Learning: Classification of Terms

Source: Gaevskya, E. (2012), Distance Learning: Classification of Approaches and Terms, E-mentor, 2(44), <http://www.e-mentor.edu.pl/artykul/index/numer/44/id/926>

## Online learning (e-learning)

In the following, we will focus on the area of online learning (e-learning).

The European Commission (2001) describes e-learning as the use of new multimedia technologies and the Internet to improve the quality of learning by facilitating access to resources and services as well as remote exchanges and collaboration. E-learning, according to OECD (2005), is defined as the use of information and communication technologies in diverse processes of education to support and enhance learning in institutions of higher education, and includes the usage of information and communication technology as a complement to traditional classrooms, online learning or mixing the two modes.

It is worth pointing out that the term **online learning (e-learning)** does not include printed-based correspondence education, broadcast television or radio, videocassettes, and stand-alone educational software programs that do not have a significant Internet-based instructional component. (U.S. Department of Education Office of Planning, Evaluation, and Policy Development Policy and Program Studies Service, 2010).

Figure 2 shows the different types of e-learning, which will be discussed in detail below.

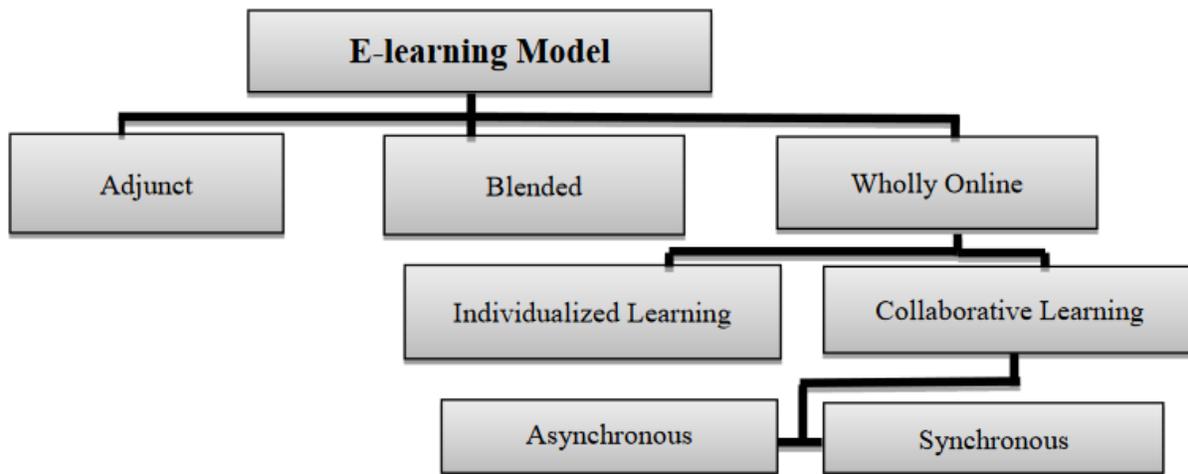


Figure 2. A model for using e-learning in education

Source: Arkorful, V., Abaidoo, N., (2015), The role of e-learning, advantages and disadvantages of its adoption in higher education. *International Journal of Instructional Technology and Distance Learning*, 12(1), 29-42; Adapted from Algahtani (2011)

There have been discovered three distinct models of using e-learning in education including the adjunct, blended e-learning and online (Algahtani, 2011). The **adjunct e-learning** is the situation which e-learning is employed as an assistant in the traditional classroom providing relative independence to the learners or students (Algahtani, 2011). The **wholly online** is devoid of the traditional learning participation or classroom participation. In this form of usage, the e-learning is total so that there is maximum

independence of the learners or students (Algahtani, 2011). **The blended-learning** is an intermediate type, where the delivery of course materials and explanations is shared between traditional learning method and e-learning method in the classroom setting (Arkorful and Abaidoo, 2015).

E-learning can also be delivered synchronously or asynchronously. **Synchronous learning** is online learning in which the participants interact at the same time and in the same space. During **asynchronous learning** communication exchanges which occur in elapsed time between two or more people, for example: email, online discussion forums, message boards, blogs, podcasts, etc. (Inacol, 2011).

What is more, online distance learning can be also divided into different types according to time dependency and number of participants (Kaplan, Haenlein, 2016), as shown in figure 3. Thus, we can distinguish:

- MOOC - Massive Open Online Courses
- SMOC - Synchronous Massive Online Courses
- SPOC - Small Private Online Courses
- SSOC - Synchronous Small Online Courses

		Number of Participants	
		Unlimited	Limited
Time Dependency	Asynchronous	Distance Learning	MOOC (Massive Open Online Course)
		Traditional Learning	e.g., community college offering several time slots for the same fundamentals course, which gives quasi-asynchronous choice to a student
	Synchronous	Distance Learning	SMOC (Synchronous Massive Online Course)
		Traditional Learning	e.g., undergraduate lecture in amphitheater with stadium seating
			SPOC (Small Private Online Course)
			e.g., individual/ small-group language tutorials with a private teacher scheduled according to student availability
			SSOC (Synchronous Small Online Course)
			e.g., PhD course on a specific method or research topic

Figure 3. Classification of online distance learning applications

Source: Kaplan Andreas, Haenlein M. (2016) Higher Education and the Digital Revolution: About MOOCs, SPOCs, Social Media and the Cookie Monster, Business Horizons, 59(4), 441-450

## Types of e-learning content

Whatever type of e-learning is chosen, a variety of content can be used. In this part of the document there will be presented different types of e-learning content.

Type of e-learning content	Description	Examples
<b>Simple learning resources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Non-interactive resources – learners can only read or watch the content, but cannot perform any other action</li> </ul>	Documents, PowerPoint presentations, animated videos, video tutorials and audio files (podcasts).
<b>E-learning courses</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stand-alone interactive learning materials that correspond to one or more learning objectives by providing explanations, examples, interactivity, questions and feedback, glossaries, etc., in order to make learners self-sufficient in learning new concepts and skills.</li> <li>It can include one or more e-learning lessons, whose duration should be limited to a maximum of about 30 minutes of learning time.</li> <li>An e-learning lesson can have a linear sequence, where content is presented in</li> <li>A predefined order.</li> </ul>	Different types of media, including text, images, animations, audio and video.
<b>Simulations and games</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Highly interactive forms of e-learning. The term ‘simulation’ basically means creating a learning environment that simulates the real world, allowing the learner to learn by doing. Simulations are a specific form of web-based training that immerses the learner in a real-world situation and responds in a dynamic way to his/her behaviour.</li> <li>Learning games involve a competitive component, a challenging goal and a set of rules and constraints.</li> </ul>	Simulations, games
<b>Performance support tools</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Informal learning that supports learners in applying existing skills or knowledge. Its use is integrated into the learner’s work. It usually provides immediate answers to specific questions, thereby helping users to accomplish job tasks.</li> </ul>	Technical glossaries, checklists

<b>Tests</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Tests help to assess learners’ progress, as well as the effectiveness of learning.</li> <li>▪ They also have the potential to increase learners’ engagement and to support the learning process through the provision of personalized feedback.</li> </ul>	Quizzes, assessments, knowledge checks
<b>Online facilitation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Social interaction components can be used to complement e-learning content with human and social dimensions.</li> <li>▪ <b>Tutoring</b> is provided by a tutor or facilitator to support learners in completing activities throughout the course.</li> <li>▪ <b>Coaching</b> is a task-oriented service to support the development of specific skills; it is normally provided by a subject matter expert over a short-term period.</li> <li>▪ <b>Mentoring</b> is a longer-time service to support future learners’ development. For example, it can support the transfer of acquired knowledge and skills to the job context.</li> </ul>	E-tutoring, e-coaching, e-mentoring
<b>Collaborative learning</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ These activities range from discussions and</li> <li>▪ knowledge sharing to working together on a common project or for a common objective.</li> </ul>	Chats, discussion forums, online discussions, collaborative project
<b>Webinars and virtual classrooms</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ These instructional methods are the most similar to traditional classroom training, as they are live events led by an instructor or a subject matter expert. An instructor teaches a group of learners remotely, and in real time, using a combination of materials.</li> </ul>	PowerPoint slides, audio or video materials, question-and-answer (Q&A) sessions, polls, quizzes and group work

Source: FAO, United Nations (2021). E-learning methodologies and good practices: A guide for designing and delivering e-learning solutions from the FAO elearning Academy, Second edition. Rome. <https://doi.org/10.4060/i2516e>

## Blended-learning

A specific type of e-learning is **blended learning (hybrid learning)**, where a student learns at least in part at a supervised brick-and-mortar location away from home and at least in part through online delivery

with some element of student control over time, place, path, and/or pace (Horn and Staker, 2011). Blended learning in formal education and training is the term used to describe when a school, educator or student takes more than one approach to the learning process. It can be a blend of school site and other physical environments (companies, training centres, distance learning, outdoor, cultural sites, etc.) or blending different digital and non-digital learning tools (EEA, 2021).

According to FAO (2021) there could be several approaches to blended learning:

Approach to blended learning	Description
<b>E-learning before a face-to-face event</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ An online pre-class event can be used to level the knowledge and skills of learners before the F2F (face to face) class begins.</li> <li>▪ E-learning before a face-to-face event forces learners to come prepared to the classroom; it enables the design of more efficient classroom activities that are tailored to the specific needs or interests of the participants; and it reduces the total time spent in the classroom, which in turn reduces costs.</li> <li>▪ Examples of e-learning activities:                         <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– an assignment - the trainer may review the results of the online session and adjust the programme for the face-to-face class by focusing on knowledge and skills gaps</li> <li>– preparatory readings and online discussions - from the discussion, the</li> <li>– trainer can recognize the critical areas for the face-to-face session.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>E-learning as follow-up to a face-to-face event</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Starting with a core classroom event, followed by online independent experiences</li> <li>▪ E-learning as follow-up to a face-to-face event can be used to develop communities of learners or to engage in further discussions on advanced topics of individual interest.</li> <li>▪ Examples of e-learning activities:                         <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– interaction with online resources</li> <li>– e-mentoring services for continuous reinforcement</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>E-learning before and after a face-to-face event</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The two approaches previously described can be combined, for example using online events to both introduce and conclude a blended learning programme.</li> </ul>

Source: FAO, United Nations (2021). E-learning methodologies and good practices: A guide for designing and delivering e-learning solutions from the FAO e-learning Academy, Second edition. Rome. <https://doi.org/10.4060/i2516e>

## Advantages and disadvantages of e-learning

Like any other method of education, e-learning has numerous benefits as well as significant drawbacks. According to Arkorful and Abaidoo (2015) there are plenty of advantages and disadvantages of e-learning. Among the advantages the authors mention:

- **flexibility** - every student has the opportunity of choosing the place and time that suits him/her
- **access to information** - e-learning enhances the efficacy of knowledge and qualifications via ease of access to a huge amount of information.
- **establishing relationships between students** – e-learning is able to provide opportunities for relations between learners by the use of discussion forums. Through this, e-learning helps eliminate barriers that have the potential of hindering participation including the fear of talking to other learners. E-learning motivates students to interact with other, as well as exchange and respect different point of views. E-learning eases communication and also improves the relationships that sustain learning.
- **lower costs** - e-learning is cost effective in the sense that there is no need for the students or learners to travel. It is also cost effective in the sense that it offers opportunities for learning for maximum number of learners with no need for many buildings.
- **individual differences between students** - e-learning always takes into consideration the individual learners differences. Some learners, for instance prefer to concentrate on certain parts of the course, while others are prepared to review the entire course.
- **shortage of academic staff** - e-learning helps compensate for scarcities of academic staff, including instructors or teachers as well as facilitators, lab technicians etc.
- **self-study** - the use of e-Learning allows self-pacing. For instance the asynchronous way permits each student to study at his or her own pace and speed whether slow or quick.

On the other hand, it is also worth being aware of the disadvantages associated with e-learning (Arkorful and Abaidoo, 2015):

- **lack of direct interaction** - e-learning as a method of education makes the learners undergo contemplation, remoteness, as well as lack of interaction or relation. It therefore requires a very strong motivation and time management skills in order to reduce such effects.
- **potentially less effective compared to traditional teaching methods** - with respect to clarifications, explanations, and interpretations, the e-learning method may be less effective than traditional methods of learning. The learning process is much easier face-to-face with instructors or teachers.

- **communication skills** - when it comes to improvement of learner’s communication skills, e-learning may have a negative effect. Though learners might have an excellent academic knowledge, they may not possess the needed skills to deliver their acquired knowledge to others.
- **cheating** - since tests and assessments in e-learning are frequently supervised by proxy, it may be difficult, if not impossible, to control or regulate activities such as cheating.
- **plagiarism** - e-learning may also be subject to piracy, plagiarism, cheating, inadequate selection skills, and inappropriate use of copy and paste.
- **socialization skills** - e-learning may negatively impact socialization skills and limit the role of instructors as directors of the educational process.
- **only for certain disciplines** - not all disciplines can effectively use e-learning in education. For instance, scientific fields that require hands-on practical experiences may be more difficult to study through e-learning. Researchers have argued that e-learning is more appropriate in social science and humanities than the fields such as medical science and engineering where there is the need to develop practical skills.
- **technical issues** - e-learning may also lead to congestion or heavy use of some websites.

## Learning approaches in ‘MENTORme’ project

In the ‘MENTORme’ project the consortium decided to choose primarily an **e-learning approach**, where most activities will be delivered online in an **asynchronous way**. This means that users will decide themselves when to use specific materials and exercises. This approach was considered to be the most appropriate in the context of the project objectives, as one of the project's aim is to strengthen HEIs interaction with society through the development of an online tool for establishing of mentoring relationships.

The training materials available to users of the ‘MENTORme’ portal will have the following forms:

- PowerPoint presentations,
- documents, diagrams, graphics,
- exercises,
- video and audio files (podcasts),
- links to additional resources,
- quizzes, assessments.

Our aim is for the training materials to take a variety of forms. Thanks to this, training can be more attractive for participants and encourage them to further develop their competences.

On the other hand, some of the activities of the MMM project will be carried out in the form of **face to face meetings**. For example 7-day training activity will be prepared for teaching the Civic Engagement Training Programme. The participants (students and academic staff) will also pilot test and provide feedback for the Portal, Tool, the Mentoring Guide.

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