

Virtual Exchange and its role in Global Competence Development

An abbreviated guide for
successful virtual exchange
projects



Virtual Exchange



Virtual Exchange (VE) may constitute a key component in students' global competence development because, as an inclusive and student-centered teaching format, it promises to provide sustainable global exposure accessible to all students. So, this guideline might answer questions you may have as to:

1. our understanding of Global Competence Development and Virtual Exchange as well as their relation / connection.
2. considerations in designing a VE.
3. advice on specific aspects of the VE planning process.

Overview

1. What do we understand as **Global Competence Development**?
2. **Virtual Exchange**: what it is and how it contributes to global competence development.
3. What are the **Objectives** of Virtual Exchange?
4. What are the **Considerations** in **Designing** Virtual Exchanges?
5. The role of **Learning Outcomes** in Virtual Exchanges.
6. **Assessment, Activities, and Content** in Virtual Exchanges.
7. Options pertaining to the **Structure and Duration** of Virtual Exchanges.
8. **Potential Partners** for a Virtual Exchange.

1 What do we understand as **Global Competence Development**?

Global competence development involves equipping students with the attitudes and skills necessary to navigate and succeed in an interconnected and diverse world. Furthermore, it encompasses systemic knowledge about how the world functions at inter-regional, international, or even global levels. This knowledge includes an understanding of shared problems and challenges, as well as possible approaches to address them. Global competence, which contains intercultural, global citizenship and linguistic & communicative dimensions, involves the capacity to integrate this knowledge to develop action plans. Moreover, it entails a shift in mindset at a broader social and political scale, beyond intercultural and communicative self-development.

2 What is **Virtual Exchange** and how does it contribute to global competence development?

VE is an instructional format that facilitates structured global competence development, dialogue, and interaction among participants from different countries. This creates an opportunity for students and lecturers to engage in online collaborative projects and activities with international partners irrespective of the specific subject matter.

Six key characteristics of VE that distinguish it from other online learning activities:

1. Technology-based interaction
2. Engagement with individuals from diverse cultures or countries
3. Integration into the curriculum
4. Facilitation and support by educators or experts
5. Emphasis on developing soft skills and intercultural competence
6. Student-centred, collaborative learning approach

3 What are the **Objectives** of Virtual Exchange?

As an instructional tool, teachers may implement a VE in any course or discipline. Usually, the objectives behind this decision are:

- to provide educators and students with diverse perspectives on their subjects, enhancing internationalization and understanding of the context-dependence of knowledge.
- to support global citizenship, by encouraging intercultural dialogue, promoting understanding and tolerance.
- to make global exposure more accessible to students who cannot benefit from physical mobility programmes.
- to strengthen academic partnerships through mutually beneficial collaborations in teaching and learning that can enhance the quality of inter-institutional collaborations, for example European University Alliances, double degrees, and joint degrees.
- to facilitate innovative learning and teaching practices by examining local issues comparatively and linking our understanding of them to global processes.

4 What are the **Considerations** in Designing Virtual Exchanges?

A successful VE requires a thoroughly planned program with structured activities and assessments. During the design phase, we encourage teachers to take the following aspects into consideration:

- Academic structure of involved parties (such as academic calendars, time zones, and institutional regulations)
- Duration & credit recognition of the VE
- Costs (development, hosting, study trips if planned, resource allocation for teaching team)
- Student selection (class size; eligibility)
- VE format (synchronous, asynchronous, embedded or stand-alone course, including a study trip or not)
- Technical infrastructure, tools and digital literacy of the students & lecturing team
- Course learning outcomes
- Course assessment, activities and content
- Evaluation
- Responsibilities within the teaching team
- Support structures for students

5 The role of **Learning Outcomes** in Virtual Exchanges.

Learning outcomes in VE are designed to integrate global and intercultural competence development alongside subject-specific knowledge, fostering skills essential for thriving in a connected world. Some examples of outcomes that align with global competence principles and might include:

- Developing soft skills such as communication, teamwork, leadership, and entrepreneurial abilities for diverse, global teams.
- Enhancing analytical and critical thinking to challenge cultural biases, stereotypes, and biased media representations.
- Promoting responsible digital literacy, enabling informed and respectful participation in interconnected digital spaces.
- Cultivating cultural awareness and harmonious interactions in multicultural societies.

Did you know?

VE is significantly more affordable than physical mobility. It eliminates the costs of travel and accommodation, making international collaboration accessible to underrepresented groups and reducing barriers to education for marginalized communities!

6 **Assessment, Activities, and Content** in Virtual Exchanges.

Just like with any other course, the VE should be designed following an approach that logically and consistently ties together learning outcomes with assessment, activities, and content of the VE. In brief, the steps should include:

- Defining the learning outcomes: How do I precisely phrase the VE-specific outcomes?
- Designing the assessments: How do I appropriately assess whether the learning outcomes are met?
- Creating activities: What activities equip my students with the knowledge and skills necessary to successfully complete the assessments?
- Choosing content: What input do my students need to complete the activities in a way that benefits their knowledge and skills development?

7 Options pertaining to the Structure and Duration of Virtual Exchanges.

There is no magic number when it comes to the perfect length of a VE. Instead, you should plan your learning outcomes and activities with the aim of cultivating interdisciplinary engagement and to introduce global exposure into the curriculum.

A variety of options may include:

- either standalone VE courses or as VE components that form part of larger courses. These programs might be as short as two weeks, while others run throughout a whole semester.
- a combination of asynchronous and synchronous activities and meetings,
- virtual activities leading to an in-person visit.

8 Potential Partners for a Virtual Exchange.

While each institution might have a partner strategy, 3 key insights to consider when selecting partners for VE, include:

- that partners complement each other in that each partner brings unique strengths to the collaboration such as disciplinary expertise, innovative teaching practices, global exposure in a particular region.
- that different cultural paradigms are represented, that is, differences in culture that impact disciplinary focus and learning.
- that partners consider building on strong existing relationships.

Who we are

The Swiss Global Competence Lab (SGCL) is a transdisciplinary innovation platform. A consortium of four institutional members (Zurich University of Applied Sciences, Bern University of Applied Sciences, The University of Applied Sciences and Arts of Southern Switzerland, and The University of Applied Sciences and Arts of Western Switzerland), SGCL connects experts from numerous backgrounds to promote cooperation and innovation in the internationalisation of higher education.

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