

# Designing a Blended Curriculum for Developing Strategic Thinking in Future Physical Education Professionals

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**Abstract.** In today's world of rapid digital tech development and educational changes, it's super important to train physical education leaders who can think strategically, be flexible managers, and do innovative stuff. The challenges posed by hybrid learning require new approaches to structuring educational programmes, including the integration of digital tools, project-based methods and cognitive-oriented strategies.

The study aims to develop and test a blended curriculum aimed at developing strategic thinking in future physical and sports education specialists, taking into account modern pedagogical and technological trends. During the study, an original blended curriculum model was developed, which includes both synchronous (face-to-face and distance) and asynchronous (independent) educational components integrated into the overall logic of strategic thinking formation. The training modules covered topics such as strategic planning in sports, management situation analysis, SWOT analysis, modelling the development of sports organisations, digital leadership, and project management.

The results obtained confirm the effectiveness of the proposed blended curriculum model as a means of developing strategic thinking in students of physical education and sports specialities. The combination of digital educational technologies with practice-oriented methods contributes to the development of both professional and managerial competencies necessary for future leaders in sports.

The key advantage of the blended approach is its flexibility, which allows the educational process to be adapted to different learning styles, individual student paces, and modern challenges of the educational environment (including distance and blended learning). The author's model can be recommended for implementation in pedagogical higher education institutions as part of the modernisation of curricula and improving the quality of training for a new generation of specialists.

**Keywords:** strategic thinking, blended learning, leadership in physical culture, sports education, digital transformation, professional training.

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## Introduction

In modern society, sports education plays an important role in shaping physically developed individuals and preparing effective leaders capable of managing sports organisations, introducing innovations and ensuring the sustainable development of physical culture and sports. Strategic thinking is one of the key competencies necessary for successfully implementing these tasks. The ability to analyse the environment, anticipate changes, formulate long-term goals and develop effective strategies to achieve them is becoming an essential prerequisite for the professional competence of a modern leader in the sports industry. In the context of globalisation, rapid development of digital technologies and constant social transformations, strategic thinking allows one to navigate a complex environment and make informed decisions that determine the competitiveness of sports organisations.

At the same time, an analysis of current practices in training specialists in the field of sports education reveals a number of problems, one of the most acute of which is the insufficient level of strategic planning skills among students, young coaches and novice specialists. The focus on developing specialised knowledge and technical skills without the proper development of analytical, predictive and managerial competencies limits the ability of future leaders to operate effectively in the dynamic and unpredictable environment of the sports sector. The lack of a systematic approach to forming strategic thinking in professional training means that young specialists are often unprepared to solve complex management tasks and develop innovative strategies for developing sports institutions and teams.

Given this, there is a need to develop modern educational programmes that integrate the development of strategic thinking into the training of sports education specialists. Blended learning deserves special attention as an innovative educational model that combines the advantages of traditional face-to-face classes with the possibilities of digital technologies to develop flexible and deep competencies in students. Developing a blended learning programme focused on developing strategic thinking in future leaders of sports education is a relevant and necessary step towards improving professional training and ensuring the high-quality development of the sports sector as a whole.

An analysis of contemporary scientific literature indicates a growing interest among scholars in the problem of professional training of future physical education teachers in the context of digitalisation, hybrid learning and innovative educational approaches.

V. Ovcharuk and co-authors [1] investigate the educational potential of sports and mass work at universities, emphasising the importance of fostering healthy lifestyle values among students—an essential component in the training of physical education teachers. I. Grygus [2] underscores the role of physical activity in the rehabilitation of patients with mild persistent bronchial asthma, illustrating its significance not only in education but also within medical and social contexts. Another study by I. Grygus and colleagues [3] explores the correction of posture disorders through sports and ballroom dancing, highlighting the necessity of an interdisciplinary approach in professional physical education training.

A. Asfahani [4] analyses the training of future managers in educational organisations, emphasising the importance of an adaptive learning environment, which echoes the requirements for the training of physical education teachers. In their article, Y. Huang et al. [5] consider blended learning as a strategy for ensuring sustainability and equality in rural teachers' professional development, emphasising the potential of blended learning in resource-constrained environments. M. Samaniego et al. [6] provide a systematic review of the development of creative thinking in arts education, which may be useful in shaping a creative approach among physical education teachers.

D. Kurniawan and co-authors [7] investigated the effectiveness of a digital project-based blended learning model for developing critical thinking, which is extremely relevant in

modernising physical education specialists' training. Y. Gao [8] analyses online and offline platforms for teaching safety in physical education, demonstrating the advantages of digital solutions in ensuring a comprehensive educational process. L. Han [9] identifies current trends in the training of future physical education teachers, particularly digitalisation, interdisciplinarity and curricula flexibility.

Y. Lin, L. Hsia and G. Hwang [10] consider the formation of creative problem-solving strategies in the context of blended sports education, which is consistent with the need for the development of independence and innovative thinking in students. J. Zhang et al. [11] demonstrate the effectiveness of hybrid pedagogical models in physical education in a systematic review, emphasising the need to integrate the sports model of education into digital formats. The work of A. Protsenko and D. Harbar [12] substantiate the relevance of professional training of physical education teachers as a priority area of modern pedagogical science and practice.

A study devoted to online-offline blended learning in physical education [13] points to the importance of adapting educational models in the post-quarantine period. J. Zhang and co-authors [14] describe the successful implementation of blended learning programmes in higher education institutions that promote the scaling of professional development. Q. Zhou et al. [15] explore the possibilities of integrating political education into physical education, which opens up prospects for the formation of a broader civic position among students.

Thus, the analysed publications demonstrate a significant scientific interest in the problem of improving the training of physical education teachers, particularly through the introduction of blended learning technologies, the development of creativity and critical thinking, and the integration of socially significant components into the educational process. However, aspects of the practical implementation of comprehensive digital approaches in physical education, the adaptation of innovative methods, and the provision of pedagogical interaction in the context of distance and hybrid learning remain insufficiently developed.

*This article aims* to present a concept for developing a blended learning programme aimed at developing strategic thinking in future leaders of sports education.

*Objectives of the article:*

1. To substantiate the key requirements for strategic thinking in sports education.
2. To analyse the features of blended learning as a modern educational technology that combines traditional and digital learning formats.
3. To develop proposals for a blended learning programme that will provide a logical structure for the learning process and the distribution of learning modules.

## **Results**

Strategic thinking is one of the cognitive competencies necessary for effective management in today's complex, changing and highly competitive environment. In scientific literature, strategic thinking is defined as the ability of a subject to assess a situation in a broad context, analyse the external and internal environment, predict possible scenarios, make informed decisions focused on achieving long-term goals, and demonstrate flexibility when circumstances change. This competence is based on a combination of analytical, predictive, creative and managerial skills that enable not only an adequate response to existing challenges but also the active shaping of the desired future of an organisation or community.

The main components of strategic thinking include environmental analysis, forecasting, sound management decision-making and flexibility. Environmental analysis involves the systematic study of both external and internal factors affecting an organisation's activities, including economic, social, technological and political trends. Forecasting is the ability to assess the current state, predict likely scenarios for its development, and identify risks and

opportunities. Decision-making is a critical component of strategic thinking, as it requires leaders to choose between alternatives, considering long-term consequences. Flexibility, in turn, means adapting strategies and plans to changes in the environment without losing focus on strategic goals.

Strategic thinking is no less important in sports education than business or public administration. Leaders of sports organisations, coaches, and heads of physical education institutions must not only understand current trends in sports, but also be able to predict their development and adapt their programmes and organisational strategies to new conditions. Strategic thinking enables effective problem solving related to the management of sports institutions, the development of athlete training programmes, the introduction of innovations in the training process, the mobilisation of resources, brand development and interaction with stakeholders.

The rationale for key requirements for strategic thinking in sports education lies in the need to develop a systematic vision of the development of the sports sector in future leaders, the ability to assess the impact of various factors on organisational processes, critical thinking skills and the ability to make informed predictions about the results of management decisions. It is also important to develop skills for adapting strategies to changing conditions, an essential trait of an effective leader in the rapidly changing world of sport. Particular attention should be paid to developing creativity, openness to innovation and identifying new opportunities for developing sports organisations and projects. Thus, strategic thinking in sports education is a complex competence that combines analytical skills, innovative vision and a willingness to act in conditions of uncertainty.

Blended learning is a modern educational technology that integrates traditional face-to-face learning with elements of distance and e-learning, combining the best aspects of both approaches to achieve maximum educational effect. Its concept is based on creating a flexible, accessible and personalised educational space where students can interact in real and virtual environments, developing academic knowledge, independent learning skills, critical thinking and digital literacy.

A distinctive feature of blended learning is that it allows for the optimal combination of synchronous and asynchronous forms of educational interaction. During face-to-face classes, there is direct communication between the teacher and students, social skills are formed, practical tasks, discussions, role-playing games and other activities that promote the development of critical and strategic thinking are carried out. At the same time, the online component provides access to electronic resources, participation in interactive courses, testing, and individual projects at a pace convenient for the student, which increases the flexibility and individualisation of the learning process.

One of the key advantages of blended learning is its ability to adapt to the diverse needs of learners, considering their level of preparation, learning style, interests and abilities. Students gain more control over their learning, which stimulates the development of their independence, responsibility and motivation for continuous professional improvement. Teachers, in turn, can better monitor each participant's progress in the educational process using digital analytics tools and quickly adjust teaching strategies.

In blended learning, special attention is paid to active learning methods to develop analytical and strategic thinking, such as project work, case studies, situation modelling, debates and practical research. The technological component of blended learning ensures the integration of various online platforms, electronic libraries, simulators, and multimedia courses, significantly expanding the educational space and diversifying learning activities.

In the context of improving the quality of training for specialists in the field of sports, it is important to consider the educational and training potential realised in the sports and mass work of higher education institutions. As noted by V. Ovcharuk et al., universities play a key role

in shaping professional and strategic management competencies through innovative educational approaches, including blended learning [1].

In training future leaders in sports education, an understanding of the relationship between physical activity and health benefits plays an important role, forming the basis for strategic thinking in the management of health and rehabilitation programmes. Grygus I. emphasises that physical activity can be an effective tool in health restoration, which is valuable in developing practice-oriented elements of a blended course [2].

In addition, developing strategic thinking requires the ability to analyse the effectiveness of implementing various physical education and correction methods, in particular, considering aesthetic and social factors. I. Grygus et al. [3] argue that combining sports and dance techniques can significantly impact postural health, which should also be considered when developing the educational content of blended programmes for future professionals in the field.

The design of a blended course for developing strategic thinking in future leaders of sports education begins with a thorough analysis of the target audience. In this case, we are talking about students preparing to become coaches, managers of sports organisations and physical education teachers. These learners have common characteristics, including a desire for professional development, a desire to be competitive in the modern labour market, and a need to develop competencies such as leadership, strategic planning and effective decision-making in the changing environment of sports activities.

An important step is to clearly define the educational goals of the course and the expected learning outcomes. The main goal is to develop the ability of students to see the big picture in the sports field, predict possible scenarios, make informed strategic decisions, and adapt to changing external conditions. Learning outcomes should include the ability to analyse the market environment of the sports industry, develop strategic plans for sports organisations, apply analytical tools to assess risks and opportunities and work in teams to solve complex problems.

To achieve these goals, modern teaching methods encourage active student participation and the development of critical and strategic thinking. In particular, case studies are used to analyse real situations from sports practice, formulate own decisions and defend them in front of an audience. Project-based learning involves the creation of mini-projects or full-fledged strategic plans for developing sports organisations, making it possible to integrate theoretical knowledge into practical activities. Simulation exercises help to model management situations in sports structures and develop operational decision-making and teamwork skills. Group discussions contribute to the formation of argumentative communication skills and the ability to work with alternative views.

The integration of digital technologies is ensured by using interactive online platforms for organising asynchronous learning. Students can access e-courses, video lectures, interactive tests, discussion forums, and tools for collaborative project work. Platforms such as Moodle, Google Classroom, or specialised sports education platforms allow you to optimise the learning process, making it flexible and more accessible.

Assessment of student progress within the course is also based on a combination of different approaches. Formative assessment involves continuous monitoring of students' knowledge and skills through interim assignments, tests, reflective essays, participation in discussions and self-assessment of their achievements. This allows for the rapid identification of weaknesses and adjustment of the learning trajectory. Summative assessment is carried out through comprehensive final assignments, including the defence of strategic projects for developing a sports organisation developed by students and presentations of their strategic plans or action scenarios, allowing them to demonstrate the knowledge and skills they have acquired in realistic conditions.

Thus, a systematic approach to designing a blended course creates an educational environment that effectively combines traditional and innovative approaches, promoting the development of strategic thinking in future leaders of sports education.

The development of an effective blended learning programme for the development of strategic thinking in future leaders of sports education requires a logically structured learning process based on the gradual acquisition of knowledge and the formation of practical skills. The programme should be structured to ensure a smooth transition from the theoretical acquisition of the basics of strategic thinking to their practical application in professional activities in the field of sport (Fig. 1).

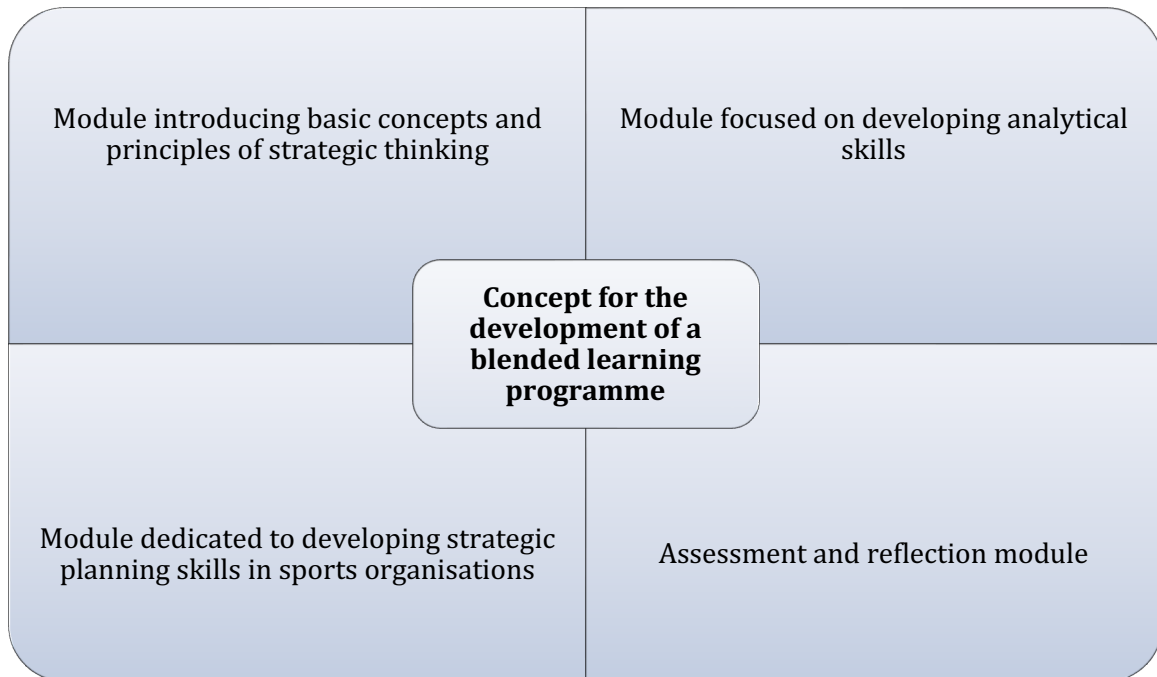


Fig. 1. Concept of a blended learning programme aimed at developing strategic thinking in future leaders of sports education

Source: created by the author.

At the initial stage, it is advisable to include a module introducing the basic concepts and principles of strategic thinking, where students will learn the fundamental theories of strategic analysis, the basics of forecasting, scenario modelling and informed decision-making. This stage should be carried out mainly in the form of online lectures, interactive webinars and independent work with digital resources, allowing students to master the theoretical material at their own pace. This will be followed by a module focused on developing analytical skills, including practical work with cases from the sports sector, analysis of real-life situations and the development of strategic options. A blended format will ensure offline seminars and workshops for in-depth group work, which will help develop critical thinking, argumentation and communication skills.

The next stage of the programme will focus on developing strategic planning skills in sports organisations. It plans to create team projects in which students will develop their development strategies for sports clubs, federations or physical education institutions. Much of this work can be done through online collaboration tools such as virtual whiteboards, project management platforms and video conferencing for group consultations.

A separate module of the programme should focus on developing flexible thinking and the ability to adapt to change. It could include simulation games, training in decision-making in crises, and analysis of unpredictable situations in sports, where students will be required to react quickly and reorient themselves strategically.

The final stage of the training programme should be an assessment and reflection module. It will include defending strategic projects before a commission or a wide audience, strategic presentations, and discussing the experience gained. In addition, an important component of this stage is a reflective analysis of one's learning trajectory, which can be implemented through writing essays or participating in reflective group sessions.

The structure of the blended programme should be flexible and adaptable to the individual needs of students, their learning pace and different levels of prior knowledge. It should ensure a balance between independent work and interactive forms of learning that encourage interaction and collaboration. The logical sequence of modules, the gradual increase in the complexity of tasks and the holistic combination of offline and online activities will contribute to the effective development of strategic thinking and professional competencies of future leaders in sports education.

The development and implementation of a blended learning programme for the development of strategic thinking in future sports education leaders should lead to several important results aimed at students' personal and professional development. One of the main expected outcomes is the formation of strategic thinking skills in students, which will manifest in the ability to see the big picture of a sports organisation's development, analyse the influence of external and internal factors, predict possible scenarios and make informed decisions in complex situations. Mastering strategic thinking will enable students to solve current problems and actively influence the long-term development strategy of sports projects and organisations.

Another important aspect is the development of skills in applying analytical tools in sports. Through practical work with case studies, simulations, projects and digital platforms, students will learn to effectively collect, process and interpret data relating to individual athletes and organisational processes in sports in general. This will give them a competitive advantage in their professional careers, as modern sports management is increasingly based on data and analytics.

In addition, the programme is expected to significantly strengthen students' leadership qualities in a sporting environment. Through participation in team projects, group discussions and decision-making training, they can develop effective communication and team management skills, conflict resolution skills, and the ability to inspire others to achieve common goals. All this will contribute to forming active, proactive and responsible leaders ready to work in the dynamic and demanding environment of the sports industry.

Implementing the proposed programme will improve the overall quality of training for the sports industry, focusing on innovation, strategic thinking and professionalism. Graduates who complete this programme will be able to work effectively within existing structures and act as a driving force for change aimed at modernising and developing sports education and sports in general.

### **Conclusions**

Integrating blended learning into sports education is an important step towards developing strategic thinking in future leaders in this field, as it combines the advantages of traditional and innovative teaching methods. The blended format, which combines traditional teaching methods (lectures, seminars, practical classes) with modern digital tools (online courses, webinars, virtual simulations), provides students with the most flexible and accessible learning experience that can be easily adapted to different conditions and needs of the learning process. This approach is particularly important in sports education, where conditions change rapidly, and the ability to adapt and plan strategically is the foundation of a successful career.

Blended learning creates opportunities for wider student outreach, allowing them to independently regulate the time and place of learning. This is especially useful for future coaches, managers and physical education teachers, as it allows them to combine learning with practical activities and other professional duties. In addition, using digital tools enables

innovative teaching methods, such as virtual simulations of sports situations, online games, and platforms for analysis and knowledge sharing, promoting critical thinking and creative abilities.

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