



A reflection on the impact of an internationalisation experience via a digital platform: views, opinions and experiences of students and lecturers

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ABSTRACT

This small-scale study investigates how remote cooperative teaching, based on mutual enrichment across international Initial Teacher Education providers, supports active participation of students in international activities. According to literature, mutual enrichment is a key aspect in supporting active participation in collaborative work. The cooperative teaching practice among lecturers from both universities involved in this study created the ethos for role modelling mutual enrichment. Exploring new methods of achieving internationalisation goals by capitalising on digital opportunities has proved particularly important given the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on teaching and learning. Participants were year 3 student teachers on the undergraduate Master of Education (MEduc) programme at the School of Education, University of Glasgow and undergraduate and postgraduate students on the course 'Science of Education' at the Niccolo' Cusano University, Rome. Three sessions on the topic of Parental Engagement in Children's Education were delivered remotely to both cohorts of students by a multicultural and multilanguage teaching team from both universities. Students also engaged in collaborative formative assessment tasks in order to further stimulate collaboration and knowledge exchange. Qualitative data were collected through students' session feedback, focus groups and tutors' reflective journals. Results showed that language and communication barriers were strong, especially at the beginning of the workshops. They ranged from differences in verbal expressions of emotions to fear to be judged, and from anxiety to speak a foreign language to the need to be understood in order to complete the assessments. However, the resilience and inclusivity shown from both cohorts of students (with tutor support) enhanced the learning experience and enriched students' communication skills enabling them overcome language barriers.

Keywords: Internationalisation, Initial Teacher Education, language barriers, mutual enrichment, active participation

Introduction

This paper discusses a small-scale study designed to investigate how remote cooperative teaching, based on mutual enrichment across international Initial Teacher Education (ITE) providers, supports active participation of students in international activities. We begin by defining internationalisation and demonstrating its benefits as found in research literature.

According to Knight (2003), internationalisation of higher education (HE) is "the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of postsecondary Education" (p. 2) which relates to the role that education plays in society. Internationalisation can be considered a part of globalisation processes, where societies and economies require not only professional and academic competencies but also skills related to multilingual, social and intercultural aspects (Qiang, 2003). From an academic perspective, the objective of internationalisation is to enhance the quality of HE systems, to enhance students' learning experiences, and to foster a change process in institutions (Qiang, 2003). HE institutions can achieve internationalisation by organising a variety of activities under the umbrella of comprehensive internationalisation, which is itself composed of Internationalisation Abroad (IA), Internationalisation at Home (IaH), and Internationalisation at a Distance (IaD) implemented at home using digital technology (Mittelmeier, Rientes, Gunter, & Raghuram, 2021).

In regard to the positive impact of internationalisation on the UK and HE economy, figures for 2014-15 show that international students' (and their visitors') expenditure for on- and off-campus purchases generated £25.8 billion in gross output which represents £13.8 billion gross value added (GVA) to UK GDP (Universities UK, 2017). The Migration Advisory Committee (2018) reported that in 2015-16 international students in the UK brought substantial financial support indirectly to the export market and local economies. In HE, this results in an average fee income of around £10,000 to £38,000 per student per year (Playdon, 2022).

Literature suggests that institutional strategies for internationalisation should not only focus on the logic of capitalism and income generation, but also on benefits for society (Jones, Leask, Brandenburg, & de Wit, 2021). According to Jibeen and Khan (2015), it is

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also important to mention the improved academic quality of teaching and learning which has a positive impact on the employability of students. Chan and Dimmock (2008) argue that internationalisation could enhance the development and reinforcement of competencies such as international orientation, cross-cultural sensitivity, open mindedness, second language competence, flexibility of thinking, as well as respect and tolerance for others. One more benefit is the sharing of resources and expertise in academic research that could lead to more standardised research methods (Akinbode, Al Shuhumi, & Muhammed-Lawal, 2017). Kreber (2009) argues that internationalisation can also develop an ethical commitment which enables students to examine their implicit and explicit beliefs and develop a sense of responsibility and civic engagement.

The main challenges to internationalisation are considered as resource and investment, workload, partnership management, cooperation and motivation (Jiang & Carpenter, 2014). In addition, in recent times, Covid-19 pandemic restrictions have represented a challenge for internationalisation, mainly based on students' mobility, with negative impact on the expectations of students' studying abroad post-pandemic (Mok, Xiong, Ke, & Cheung, 2021). Lastly, some consideration should be given to the impact that Brexit is having on students' mobility, on international members of staff and on collaborations in the UK HE sector (Rios, 2019; Broc, 2020). However, despite these challenges there have been some positive aspects. Covid 19 and the consequent reluctance of international students to travel required staff in universities to reflect on internationalisation differently by focusing on virtual and digital, rather than physical, contact. (Yıldırım, Bostancı, Yıldırım, & Erdoğan, 2021). IaH and IaD opportunities in HE, if implemented successfully with IA, could provide more positive learning experience for students. IaH and IaD experiences are based on the integration of wide variety of purposeful international and intercultural sessions in HE courses and programmes (Bhambra, Gebrial, & Nişancıoğlu, 2018), which focus on online experiences and Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) aimed to enhance students' intercultural competence skills (Appiah-Kubi & Annan, 2020). Exploring these aspects more fully demands further research and conceptualisation in HE institutions (Liu & Gao, 2022).

Evidence shows that one of the key points in planning for successful international activities is to integrate them into core teaching, research and scholarship of the institutions involved (Marinoni, 2019). Co-teaching models based on clear co-planning, co-instructing, and co-assessing are considered an effective instructional delivery method to provide instruction to diverse students (Brendle, Lock, & Piazza, 2017). It is possible to speculate that this is transferable also to a Remote Cooperative Teaching (RCT) model. In addition, to enhance learning it is important to promote active students' participation (Bergmark & Westman, 2018). However, it seems that students' active participation with online learning experiences can be variable and at times an issue (Nieuwoudt, 2018). Nevertheless, to encourage mutual exchange of information an active participatory type of learning process is necessary (Abdullah, Bakar, & Mahbob, 2012).

Furthermore, an important aspect of the internationalisation experience are the benefits of mutual enrichment. The concept of mutual enrichment can be defined as the extent to which experiences in one role improve the quality of the other (Greenhaus & Powell 2006). According to Hudzik (2020), a focus on developing a culture of mutual support and strategic inclusion of all partner universities and potentially developing a curriculum inclusive of dual-purpose resources and mutual enrichment are the best strategies.

Aim and research question

This study aims to respond to the need for further research on re-imagining the method in which internationalisation could be achieved not only via students' mobility but also via online opportunities. It wishes to create and reflect on IaH and IaD opportunities in ITE programmes via COIL. The research question was: How might remote cooperative teaching, based on mutual enrichment across international ITE institutions support the active participation of students in international activities?

Methodology

Universities involved

- University of Glasgow (UoG), School of Education (SoE) Scotland.
- University Niccolo' Cusano (UNC) Italy.

Participants

- 18 Year 3 undergraduate students studying at the UoG, School of Education on the Master of Education (MEduc) ITE programme.
- 12 undergraduate Italian student teachers and 4 postgraduate students attending the course 'Science of Education' at UNC Italy.

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Workshops: Key elements

The three key aspects considered in the workshops were:

Mutual enrichment: This was facilitated by the choice of the workshop topic 'parental engagement in children's education'. This was selected as a common ground for both countries due to the importance in the Scottish curriculum (Education Scotland, 2022) and the common experience for both countries of 'home-schooling' during the pandemic, where primary and secondary educators were relying on parental engagement to ensure children were receiving the correct support during lockdown (Bubb & Jones, 2020). By working on this common ground, students from both countries could share their knowledge and experience contributing actively to the mutual enrichment beyond any communication barriers.

Active participation: This was encouraged by the integration of the outcomes (PowerPoint presentation and reflection on the experience) in each university's assessment agenda to encourage students' active involvement in the sessions and in the completion of tasks (Cilliers, Schuwirth, Adendorff, Herman, & van der Vleuten 2010; Harlen, et al., 2002). Students considered the sessions essential to successfully complete their oral summative assessment for the Italian university and artefact-based formative assessment for the Scottish university.

Remote Cooperative Teaching (RCT): This was based on a multilingual and multicultural approach where tutors had to adapt their teaching strategies in a dynamic way to suit the language and uses of the two cohorts of students. In addition, tutors co-created all the resources with a balance of teaching strategies and pedagogical approaches from both countries.

International sessions: Strategy

The teaching team comprised one Italian native speaker, one native English speaker, and one bilingual native Italian and English speaker, whose learning experience was in the Italian education system but whose main teaching experience was in the Scottish system. They all delivered and supported both cohorts of students in a cross-country approach based on both languages.

Sessions were discussed and adapted to the cultural norms of both countries. For example, the first session was presented in English to Scottish student teachers and followed a student-centred pedagogical approach expressed through active learning. The same session was translated into Italian and delivered concurrently, with a lecturing style for the Italian cohort of students.

The sessions were spread over three weeks allowing the time for connection, communication, and reflection within and beyond the synchronous sessions. All students from both countries had to contribute to the same outcome in respect of their own cultural and language diversity.

Session layouts

Session 1

Tutors delivered separately in two different Zoom meetings (one with Scottish and one with Italian students) a seminar focused on 'parental engagement' in two different languages: Italian and English.

Session 2

Both cohorts were invited to attend the same Zoom meeting, and tutors explained the task in both languages. Students were divided in groups made of five UoG and two UNC. Tutors asked students to work in their assigned groups in breakout rooms and evaluate a possible scenario aimed to develop a Scottish primary school improvement plan with a focus on the National Improvement Framework (Scottish Government, 2020) and parental engagement. During the breakout rooms, tutors made sure to bridge any communication and culture barriers between the two cohorts of students, by supporting and scaffolding the learning and promoting collaborative work.

The task supported the MEd year 3 course work for an artefact based formative assessment, the official assessment for that course. Italian students had to refer to the Scottish system and this international experience for their final summative oral exam. Students shared with their overseas peers their experience of both education systems, focusing on the same topic and finalising the PowerPoint presentation as the common goal. This generated collaboration opportunities beyond the seminars and students took the lead in organizing further meetings in between sessions using digital platforms of their own choice such as Facebook and WhatsApp.

Session 3

Each group presented their findings using an IT platform of their choice. Tutors finally presented a real parental engagement event, organised by the School of Education at UoG, which explored the implications and impact of parental engagement policies on pupils, families, and teachers.

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Ethics approval

Ethical approval was sought and granted by the UoG College of Social Sciences ethics committee. Eliciting student feedback is routine practice within the SoE, and ethical approval was requested to use this feedback as data to inform the focus group questions and to receive permission to carry out the research. The focus group was conducted online via the university IT platform Zoom. The researchers accept the limitations of such a small-scale study and do not seek to generalise but rather to offer points of discussion to inform further research on how to support internationalisation using IT platforms.

Ethical approval from UNC was sought and granted with a simpler process and by means of approval letter from the university managers and consent forms from participants.

Data collection

Remote cooperative teaching data were collected through tutors' reflective journals and discussed in the discussion session. Mutual enrichment and active participation data were collected through students' session feedback and focus groups.

Students' session feedback

Data were collected using Padlet and Zoom polls. The results of students' session feedback were thematically analysed and used to inform the focus groups prompting questions to further explain and detail opinions on sessions' structure, multilingual approach, language barriers, active participation and mutual enrichment. This approach is intended to be a flexible and creative way to use the constant comparative method of grounded theory. According to Hallberg (2006), concepts may be generated from the data and used to explore further, until so called theoretical saturation is achieved which means that new data does not add new information.

Focus groups

Two focus groups were organised, one for the Scottish students and the second for the Italian students. Focus groups suited the type of research because students were relaxed and willing to share honest opinions. Focus groups use more natural settings than surveys or structured interviews (Morgan & Krueger, 1993).

Scottish focus group: Four students from the study responded to the focus group call. It must be taken in consideration that all four participants were undergraduates, and all took part in the international sessions. This focus group was conducted in English and recorded via Zoom. The transcript was obtained by running the videos in Microsoft Stream and by removing any identifying data after transcripts were revised and finalised.

Italian focus group: Four students from the 'Science of Education' course at UNC responded to the focus group call. It must be taken in consideration that the focus group participants were at different stages of their in-service career as opposed to the Scottish focus group. No Italian undergraduate student who took part in the international sessions volunteered. This focus group was conducted in Italian and recorded via Zoom.

The transcript was obtained by running the videos in Microsoft Stream and by removing any identifying data after transcripts were revised and finalised.

Data analysis

Focus groups were recorded and transcripts thematically analysed in line with a deductive and inductive coding process (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The deductive analysis undertaken in this study used a pre-existing rubric with themes such as 'mutual enrichment', 'active participation', 'cooperative teaching' as the three key areas of the research question. The 'parental engagement' theme was added after analysis of the Italian sessions' feedback where it was considered a key aspect of this international activity. Thus, the fourth theme was generated by inductive analysis. The blend of these forms of analysis enables researchers to answer their questions and to respond to aspects of the data which were surprising and not to be ignored.

Data were analysed by using descriptive, in vivo and emotion coding (Saldaña, 2014). According to Saldaña, (2016) the coding process included:

1. Pre-coding to determine the general trending using the deductive lens explained above and teasing out possible new codes for the next step;
2. Descriptive and in vivo coding with a progressing informed recording. Each participant was coded singularly and would influence the re-coding of the other participants; and
3. Emotion coding. It is important to point out that for the Italian focus group the coding was analysed in Italian to avoid missing any emotive data lost in translation.

Finally, researchers conducted a re-coding individually and then shared final opinions with the intention to reduce bias.

Results

The thematic analysis results for the two focus groups highlighted twelve further inductive themes organised around the four key themes as shown in Figure 1.

Deductive key themes

- Mutual enrichment
- Active participation,
- Cooperative teaching

Inductive key theme

- Parental engagement

Inductive further themes

- Knowledge exchange,
- Peer support
- Professional development
- Networking
- Inclusivity language barriers
- Communication barriers
- Cultural barriers
- Feelings
- Task downside
- Task good point
- Task suggestions for future practice

Figure 1 shows a framework constructed around the four key elements which laid the foundation to the project. Students' active participation and tutors' cooperative teaching play a pivotal role in the process as the students are required to work collaboratively and tutors to facilitate this process to overcome language and communication barriers. This would lead to mutual enrichment, where students are supported and motivated to equally contribute to the tasks.

The topic 'parental engagement' is the only core area of the diagram that is interchangeable with any topic taught on the international workshops if it is chosen on a common ground and of interest to both universities' programmes. A further twelve elements surround the core of the framework and their link to the key areas has been identified through the thematic analysis.

Figure 2 shows the intensity of the twelve inductive themes which surround the core elements. There were four stronger inductive themes: knowledge exchange, professional development, language, and communication barriers. It could be argued that these stronger inductive themes played a critical role in the impact of learning which occurred within the sessions. Each theme has been represented based on the number of subthemes identified for both cohorts of students. Nevertheless, it is important to highlight, while the participants to the online sessions were mainly all undergraduate students, the focus groups were organised several months after the sessions and the undergraduate Italian students did not respond to the recruitment. Those who responded were in-service teachers attending the course 'Science of Education' as continuing professional development. Table 1 shows an example of the different subthemes obtained for one of the key themes. The subthemes are numerous, though not all are displayed in the table, however, are available on demand.

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Figure 1 Themes organised in a framework of analysis. The diagram has been created using the app diagram.net

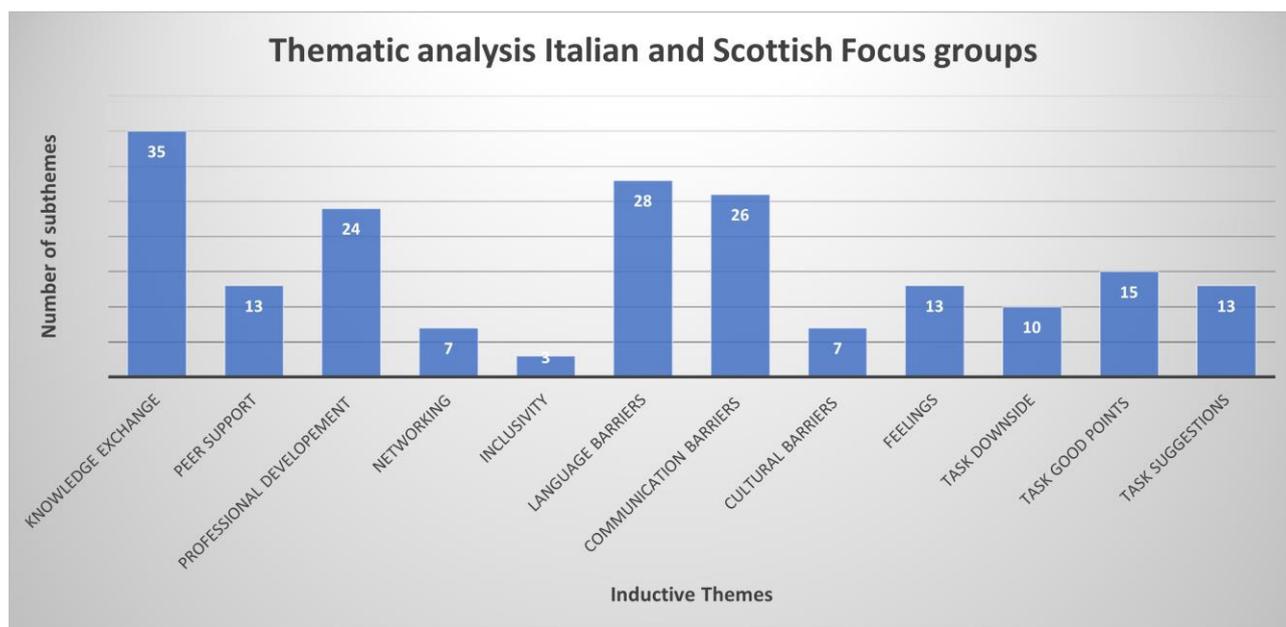


Figure 2 Number of subthemes identified for each of inductive themes.

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Table 1 Example of the subthemes highlighted for one of the main themes

Themes	Subthemes Italian focus group	Subthemes Scottish focus group
Knowledge exchange	Parental Engagement Comparison between Education Systems Additional Support Needs (ASN) Parental-Engagement Parental Engagement Through Play Covid-19 Pandemic Home Schooling Exchange Opportunity Raising Awareness Innovative ASN Playful Learning Health and Wellbeing Mutual enrichment skills Exchange of good practice Pedagogy Education Open Minds ERASMUS projects development Alternative to ERASMUS Personal Development	Globalisation of education Creative ideas for lessons Assessment contribution Day to day life Health and Wellbeing Diet Comparison between Education Systems Exchange Opportunity Exchange of good practice Pedagogy Education Open Minds Personal Development

Discussion

Preliminary remarks

It is important to note that, Italian and English language can express different emotions by using the same words or phrases. All Italian feedback started with an acknowledgement of gratitude “Sono grata” to their institute and tutors for the “opportunity to exchange knowledge with international peers which is considered as invaluable” experience, and their language is full of references to emotions. This is not to say that Scottish students were not grateful, but their feedback were more focused on the curiosity for a foreign education system and their proactive “wish to include” the overseas peers, with more action-based discussion than emotion feeling expression.

This strong difference in the verbal expressions of emotion is embedded in languages and is described as being made of two dimensions of valence and arousal (Citron, Gray, Critchley, Weekes, & Ferstl, 2014). Although it is known that affective states arise from cognitive interpretations of core neural sensations (Posner, Russell, & Peterson, 2005) and so they are universal, it is also clear that they are impacted by the environment and not only by the biological systems (Lim, 2016). This aspect has been taken into consideration when analysing the data.

Active participation and mutual enrichment

Language barriers

One of the key points discussed around the theme of active participation was based on language barriers which could also be considered connected to communication and cultural barriers (Kenesein & Stier, 2017).

Italian students had three main concerns about language barriers: to speak English, to be understood in English and to understand English, which could be linked to different issues such as meanings and uses of words, symbols, images, gestures, languages and dialects or accents (Abuarqoub, 2019). Although language analysis is not the main focus of this study, it is interesting to mention two main points. Italian students felt “inexperienced” in speaking the foreign language due to their lack of proficiency and felt

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“embarrassed” due to their “fear” of being misunderstood by their overseas peers. On the other hand, Scottish students mentioned that for them it was “hard to communicate” as their main barrier was to be understood in their native language without any idea of what it means to speak another language.

However, what is interesting is the reaction of Scottish students to the above-described stimulus. They expressed admiration for Italian students’ ability to engage in a meaningful simple conversation in a foreign language, while they could not use more than a few words in Italian. They also took the proactive step to “try different communication strategies” enjoying the empowerment to be able to facilitate communication in an English as Additional Language (EAL) context which is going to be part of their future work as teachers. They reflected on their “resilience” and felt “encouraged” to explore this aspect “wishing for further international experiences”. Tutor reflections show that, although they had predicted that language barriers were going to be an issue, they were pleased that students from both sides showed great resilience and were able “to utilise their knowledge, skills and experiences within their course to facilitate and support the Italian students”. In addition, “While I was aware by experience that Italian students had a strong prejudice of being judged by English native speakers, I was also impressed by the inclusive ethos that Scottish students created, and Italian students nurtured during the sessions and beyond”. This resulted in a strong networking collaboration which students defined as something beyond the course work using the word “friendship” that they asserted could possibly impact on them even in the future years both professionally and personally.

Very interestingly, the action and reaction to the language barriers turned into a positive aspect for the active participation allowing students to take initiatives from both sides to facilitate communication and inclusivity. Students gained a strong self-awareness of their own barriers and for some it was a wakeup call to reflect on the studies completed so far on English language proficiency. Nevertheless, this experience “had woken up the wish to go abroad and undertake further studies even when the pressure of PhD has burnt out some of the enthusiasm”. This opportunity made some students aware of their ability to work collaboratively and effectively with international colleagues offering an “I can do it!” type of mindset and creating the wish to start networking with international colleagues in their work sector.

Furthermore, some of the participants highlighted the fact that ERASMUS could not be undertaken due to the pandemic or personal commitment barriers and that this activity has made a very good alternative to experience the language barriers and the wish to find the right way to overcome them. On reflection, tutors realised that for Scottish students this became a hands-on active learning opportunity to put into practice essential teaching skills they have been learning since Year 1 of their course. This was confirmed by the Scottish students focus group results, where it emerged that they had the chance to develop empathy when attending lessons delivered in both Italian and English language at the same time realising “how daunting it is to be exposed to another language”. The reaction to this stimulus was very positive, with student teachers researching and applying those teaching strategies they had learned in the past by trying them out to improve inclusivity and communication, such as changing tone, slowing down, repeating the same concept with words more familiar to their Italian peers, (Prozesky, 2000) which allowed them to experience a sense of globalisation of education and the consistent findings on research on inclusion. Tutors also reflected on the opportunity that the online seminar gave to students. The ERASMUM + annual report 2019 (European Commission, 2020) states that in Europe, only 3.7% of potential users participated in Erasmus projects. The Italian tutor reported further comments on the linguistic barrier and the fear of being in a foreign country are two of the main obstacles that discouraged these students from joining an Erasmus project. On the other hand, students also asserted that the international experience via online platform allowed them to see the opportunities and wealth beyond obstacles. This formula could be a chance for countries to spread the culture and knowledge of internationalisation and could be integrated to academic curriculum in order to facilitate the process of students exchange projects.

Inclusivity and knowledge exchange

For Italian students, the inclusivity shown by Scottish students had an impact on them not only professionally but also personally. They felt “encouraged” and incentivised to express themselves to achieve their own aims with satisfaction. Italian students expressed gratitude to the inclusive multicultural and multilingual approach which made them feel valued and encouraged them to engage actively in the task because they felt “they had something to contribute”. The task was not imposed in English only and this made them feel “valued and a family”, causing them to question their strong prejudice that those who are not proficient in English are “inferior” and “ignorant” and will be so judged by English native speakers. This is a prejudice which might prevent greater internationalisation (Collins & Clément, 2012) and apparently was reduced in this international activity.

Cooperative teaching and proactive tutors

Further gratitude was expressed for tutors’ cooperative teaching approach. This aspect was evaluated from the tutors’ and students’ point of view. The cooperative teaching was planned in advance and tutors had to consider not only the direct translation of content from English to Italian, but they also had to maintain the individuality of both education systems while setting out common ground for the students. In addition, it was discussed how to carefully embed the assigned task in both universities’ assessment approaches to promote mutual enrichment and active participation (Hudzik, 2020). It was decided to allow Italian students to talk about this experience in their course summative oral assessment as part of the conversation they must have with the exam board. On the other hand, Scottish students could integrate Italian students’ ideas in their formative artefact-based assessment, enriching it with health and wellbeing elements embedded from what they learned about the Italian Mediterranean diet. This resulted in a very strong impact on students’ active participation. They felt the energy and effort tutors put into the planning stage and stated that “tutors promoted multilanguage and, multicultural teaching which has supported active

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participation and is Inestimable fortune". Tutors commented that this dual assessment approach "is something that would recommend in doing again next time on a larger scale"

It is worthwhile to mention a very interesting and unexpected outcome based on the different assessment agenda of the two universities involved. The Italian education system is more based on a didactic approach (Mariotti et al., 2019), where instructions are passed from tutor to student in a lecturing style (Banning, 2005). The Scottish education system has moved away from didactic to embrace a social constructivist approach where learning occurs through interactions with the environment, and knowledge creation is an active process where learners are directly involved in constructing meanings based on their experiences as opposite to receiving instructions (Perkins, 1991). Italian students appreciated the student-centred teaching strategies embraced by the Scottish education system and they wished to have more creative assessment in their own courses. Surprisingly, on the other hand, Scottish students asked for less freedom and wished to have more structure in their task. They stated that with more guidance they felt they could have got more out of this experience and even suggested that a reflective oral assignment could be integrated into their courses. Common ground was agreed with more initial structure and check points during the live sessions which would allow students to spend some time on task-free knowledge exchange activities. This decision is supported by students' feedback which defined the task-free time as fundamental to building relationships by finding common ground between the two cohorts of students which "was fundamental to make this experience unique".

Tutors' role modelling had a positive impact on Italian students' feelings and anxiety to speak a foreign language (Zheng & Cheng 2018). On the other hand, it also encouraged Scottish students to further develop their communication and language skills (Han, Tanriöver & Sahan, 2016). For example, the simultaneous translation during the live sessions showed that even tutors can make mistakes when speaking a foreign language, reassuring students that it is just normal. On reflection, tutors commented "Not having the students in front of me was an issue, we have all had to adapt to the online delivery. However, I was unsure if this would be an issue with the Italian students understanding my accent. The Glaswegian accent can be strong, so it was paramount that when I was giving instructions I spoke slowly with no jargon and always asked if everyone understood what was being asked". This resulted in Scottish students applying the same effort in the Zoom break out rooms, where they nurtured their Italian colleagues, whose voice was heard, and their contribution fully embedded in the final outcomes. Tutors asserted "I feel that both sets of students really developed their communication skills and as the weeks went on, their confidence grew within the groups". Tutors worked as direct support in each breakout room with simultaneous translation. This was perceived as an essential tool to allow students to break the language and communication barriers and encourage them to take this collaboration beyond sessions.

Task topic choice: Parental engagement

The task topic was also considered very important. The parental engagement issue was relevant to both cohort of students not only because of the similarities and interesting differences it had in both countries during home schooling and the pandemic (Thorell et al., 2021), but also for the general impact that it has on child development (El Nokali, Bachman, & Votruba-Drzal, 2010). Interestingly, Italian students were more focused on the topic than the task itself while Scottish students were more interested in task completion and their overseas peers' health and wellbeing. They genuinely demonstrated curiosity for Italian lifestyle while Italian students were very impressed by the Scottish education effort to involve parents under all aspects: policies (Scottish Government, 2020), theories and practice. Italian students mentioned that all the extracurricular activities organised in Scotland might be very difficult in Italy, where the school day ends by lunch time, pupils go back home with several subjects' homework every day and parents should supervise their completion, leaving very little time for any other after school parental engagement.

Interestingly, Italian students took several ideas from the formative PowerPoint task back to their schools to promote innovative "didactic units" for parental engagement. An Italian participant asserted she took all the artefact task ideas produced by every group to set up a possible grant proposal for her school and a possible ERASMUS+ project. This shows an aspect of mutual enrichment which went far beyond any expectations and certainly is a very interesting outcome.

Mutual enrichment through knowledge exchange

Mutual enrichment is a strong recurring theme embedded in students' understanding of knowledge exchange and globalisation of education where diversity is defined by students as a "common heritage". At this point, the topic of parental engagement changed from being the focus of the discussion, to being the medium through which students compared the two education systems and reflected on the similarities and differences. Participants reinforced the idea that knowledge exchange was an "essential key point of the success and unique aspect of these international seminars". Active participation is now considered an action of learning not only for the task or the assessment, but for professional development in a lifelong learning attitude (Pratton & Hales, 2015). The possibility to have this exchange between peers connected them and allowed the generation of several types of feelings. This is more evident for Italian students; however, as previously highlighted, it may be due to the high impact of affective norms of their language compared to English (Montefinese, Ambrosini, Fairfield, & Mammarella, 2014). Italian participants mentioned that the experience was wonderful as a feeling of wonder for learning and very positive because fulfilled expectations. They also used the word 'dibattito' (debate) with reference to their constructive conversation with overseas peers, which implies criticality and deep reflection (Llano, 2015). Both cohorts expressed the wish to further participate in similar experiences which are also extremely "enjoyable". Scottish students were worried they may not have been sufficiently inclusive while at the same time, Italian students were grateful for the inclusion showed. There was a reciprocal wish to engage in further networking with both peers as well as tutors. Scottish students asserted they would certainly contact tutors if they knew they had connection abroad to ask for

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connectivity and networking. More importantly, both cohorts of students considered their overseas peers as friends whom they could now contact when going abroad for leisure or professional development.

Conclusions

The data analysed so far, have given an initial answer to the research question. The tutors' cooperative teaching based on multilanguage, multicultural approach and on the co-development of assessment tasks embedded in both universities' assessment agenda encouraged students to actively participate in the sessions. The careful choice of topic which was relevant for both countries pushed the mutual enrichment and collaboration with an implication of networking which went far beyond the purpose of the planned sessions and could be considered a good alternative to ERASMUS programmes when travelling is restricted. Although the topic of parental engagement featured in the sessions, it should be highlighted that this could change to any other topic emerging from common grounds between participants institutions. However, the areas of mutual enrichment, cooperative teaching, and active participation must remain the same for a successful outcome.

The outcomes supported the Scottish students to further develop their professional skills which will play a key role in their professional career as teachers due to the multicultural classrooms in Scottish schools. Italian students on the other hand felt empowered to try further international experience due to their awareness of being able to successfully contribute by communicating in a different language.

Further analysis of data is ongoing, and the researchers are now conducting a larger scale study as a follow-up project to enhance the ecological validity of this pilot study.

Recommendations

1. The multilanguage feature of the teaching team was essential throughout this project. For example, it allowed the researchers to pick up the different affective states of the two languages which was noticeable within the focus group data. Furthermore, the delivery of the session with a multilanguage approach allowed English native speakers to experience the daunting effect of struggling to understand a foreign language. At the same time, it also allowed the Italian students to feel more important, creating a sense of community that could further foster the active participation. We would recommend keeping this in mind in future research projects.
2. The language barriers were different for the two cohorts of students. Italian students were worried about both understanding English and being understood in English. On the other hand, English native speakers were only worried about being understood in English without the urgency to be able to speak another language. We would recommend further studies on the opportunity to embed IaH and IaD in HE courses where possible to further enhance students' language and communication skills as a preliminary stage to an IA opportunity.
3. We would recommend HE institutions invest in strong connectivity and reliable Wi-Fi as well as verifying the international requirements on the usage of IT platforms to facilitate internationalisation and avoid disappointments and further issues.
4. We would recommend tutors to take any opportunity to enhance their confidence in delivering online courses and/or components of courses in a hybrid approach, in order to facilitate future COIL opportunities as a medium for of IaH and IaD.

Limitations

Digital technology was a great support; however, it was pointed out that a face-to-face experience would have significantly enriched learning in both cohorts of students. Due to the sample size being small, ideally, we would require a larger sample size at the same stage within their degree.

While the participants in the sessions were undergraduate students from UoG and undergraduate as well as postgraduate students from UNC, the focus groups were organised several months after the sessions and the undergraduate Italian students did not respond to the focus group call. Those who responded were postgraduate participants only.

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