

NEW MODES OF MOBILITY:

Lessons Learned 2019-2022
Volume II



Troy B. Wiwczarowski
Dominik Winkler

Editors



Würzburg
International
Business
Press

Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union



Würzburg International Business Press
General Editors: Emin Akcaoglu & Rainer Wehner

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Edited by

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WIBP is a part of Würzburg International Business Forum
<http://wibf.fhws.de/>

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Editors: Troy B. Wiwczarowski & Dominik Winkler
Cover design: Sonja Zügner

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ISBN: 978-3-949864-05-6

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Würzburg International Business Press
c/o Verein für Betriebswirtschaftlichen Wissenstransfer der
Fakultät Wirtschaftswissenschaften an der Hochschule für
angewandte Wissenschaften Würzburg-Schweinfurt e.V.
(BWT/FBW e.V.)
Muenzstr. 12
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Acknowledgement

This book represents one of the intellectual outputs of the ERASMUS+ co-funded Strategic Partnership "New Modes of Mobility", in short "NewM", which was conducted in the period from September 2019 to August 2022. We want to take this opportunity to express our gratitude once again for the trust placed in us and the opportunities opened up.

This second volume contains seven articles written by fifteen academics from the partner universities involved in the project consortium. In addition to the FHWS - University of Applied Sciences Wuerzburg-Schweinfurt, these European universities include the University of Debrecen, the Fontys University of Applied Sciences, the Seinajoki University of Applied Sciences LTD, the University of Zielona Gora and the Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu. These contributions provide deep insights into the experiences we were able to make during the project. For this we are very grateful to all authors.

However, a sincere thank should not only go to the authors of this book, but also to all colleagues who have made many things possible within the framework of the partnership over a large period of time. Especially considering the challenging background of the CoVid-19 pandemic that broke out in 2020.

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Preface

New Modes of Mobility: Lessons Learned 2019-2022, Volume Two

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This e-book is a two volume collection of experiences and lessons learned over the course of the three years of the New Modes of Mobility project (NewM). This is the second of the two volumes. In 2019, a consortium of universities applied for and received Erasmus+ funding for a Strategic Partnership project (Project No. 2019-1-DE01-KA203-005053). The project was funded for three years (2019-2022). The coordinating institution was the University of Applied Sciences Würzburg-Schweinfurt (Germany), with project partners from the University of Debrecen (Hungary), Fontys University of Applied Sciences (The Netherlands), Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences LTD (Finland), University of Zielona Gora (Poland), and Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu (Romania).

A recent study by the Hungarian Erasmus National Agency, the Tempus Foundation (International Students in Hungarian Higher Education Institutions, Budapest, 2018. ISBN: 978-615-5319-55-6), highlighted the strengths and weaknesses of internationalisation activities at Hungarian universities. The study especially identified factors limiting the possibilities to improve and expand internationalisation activities, despite the best efforts of teaching staff and administrators at individual

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HEIs here. Similar studies have been published across EU Member States, and their results reflect in many ways those published in Hungary. Among these, we would recommend “Internationalisation of Higher Education in Europe and Germany: The State of Play.”, by Lucía, Ana & Salinas de Dosch, Ana Lucía. (2021). DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.22268.46727.; and the many contributions published in the academic journal *Internationalisation of Higher Education: Policy and Practice* (<https://www.handbook-internationalisation.com/>), which also includes special sections focussed on institutional policies and strategies, including the presentation and discussion of case studies in this focal area.

The present volume represents the contributions of the actors in the NewM project towards addressing similar issues as those found in the publications mentioned above. Here, the added benefit is the 20/20 hindsight our authors enjoyed in rediscovering and discussing the successes of the activities we engaged in over the course of this project. Equally important, there is also the improved vision gained through our experiences in NewM, which allows us now to also identify and dissect those areas and issues which will either still take great efforts to smoothen or overcome, or which indeed lay outside the scope of authority of those directly involved in this project. Thus, the internationalisation activities of the three year NewM project culminated in the findings presented and discussed in this volume. Not only are institutional issues the focus of the contributions here, but additionally those related to curriculum development, syllabus design, the related challenges of collaborative preparation and teaching of virtual courses, as well as the lessons learnt from the feedback provided by the students who participated in such courses.

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Virtual and Blended Mobility as a Tool for Developing International Competence in Higher Education

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International mobilities are an essential and integral part of higher education. They may serve as a tool for accumulating international competence among HE students, teachers and staff. In addition to physical mobilities, virtual and blended mobilities are becoming increasingly important in the variety of mobility activities available at a higher education institution. They bring inclusion as well as promote Internationalization at Home activities. The development of virtual and blended mobilities has been boosted by the fast development of digitalization. In this article, the processes of virtual and blended mobilities are discussed through a case study of Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences (Finland).

1.1 International competence and inclusion through virtual and blended mobility

In a globalized world, the skills of the workforce are a key determinant of the competitiveness of a country. The aim of higher education is to develop the skills of the students to meet the increasing demand of globalized working life (Voin & Gerard, 2013). The main task of higher education institutions is to educate students for working life, and it is therefore necessary to be able to predict what skills and competencies graduates will

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need. Due to not only the challenges - but also the opportunities - created by globalization, especially international skills and cultural knowledge have become essential in any workplace. Students and staff in higher education are offered various ways to develop their international skills and competence international mobility being the most often used method of internationalization. (Ala-Louko, 2017). However, it is important to offer internationalization opportunities for all students, teachers and staff in higher education and physical mobility is not always possible. Therefore, various tools have been developed as part of Internationalization at Home (IaH) activities.

Beelen and Jones (2015) redefined Internationalization at Home as the following:

Internationalization at Home is the purposeful integration of international and intercultural dimensions into the formal and informal curriculum for all students within domestic learning environments.

Basically, Internationalization at Home means experiencing and learning internationalization in one's own home university. IaH might include teaching in a foreign language, studying in a multicultural group, participating international events at the home campus or participating in virtual or blended mobility, to name a few examples. In virtual mobility, students and teachers study or teach in an institution outside their own country without physically leaving their home. In blended mobility, part of studies/traineeship/teaching is conducted online (in one's home country / or abroad) and part of the course of study will be conducted offline, in the form of physical mobility (abroad).

The European Commission has launched the new Erasmus+ programme for 2021-2027. One horizontal dimension is inclusion and diversity in higher education mobility. It challenges HEIs to make the access to student and staff mobility as easy as possible and include participants from different backgrounds. This means e.g., participants with fewer opportunities, such as students with physical, mental and health related conditions, students with children or students who work. In this regard, virtual and blended mobility can help to offer additional opportunities that might be more suitable for certain participants (European Commission, 2022).

In 2017, the Finnish Ministry of Education published policies

to promote internationalization in Finnish Higher Education and Research 2017–2025. According to the publication “Better Together for a Better World”:

International interaction and mobility to and from Finland will foster diversity in education and research. To ensure that this really takes place, each higher education institution will have a clear set of aims and supporting measures for internationalization. International activities will permeate each higher education institution. In addition, Finland’s higher education institutions will expand their international mobility arrangements and ensure that such periods at home and abroad (incl. exchange programmes) are planned and realistic and can therefore be incorporated in students’ studies and in the work of staff (The Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture 2017).

The policy challenges the universities and universities of applied sciences in Finland to further develop the exchange programmes or activities of internationalization at home to assure the internationalization opportunities for every student, teacher and staff member. Also, this supports the importance of the development and implementation of virtual and blended mobility now and in the coming years.

1.2 Case: Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences

Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences (SeAMK), located in Seinäjoki, Finland, is a multidisciplinary non-profit government dependent higher education institution (HEI) and a limited company in its organization form. SeAMK was established in 1992 and has about 5000 students. The learning process and the research, development and innovation (RDI) process are the core processes. Internationality is integrated into all of these processes. As stated in SeAMK’s strategy for the years 2020–2024, the mission of SeAMK is to increase know-how, competitiveness and welfare. The vision is to be an international institution of higher education with an entrepreneurial spirit – the best HEI for the student. The strategic goals for the coming years are strengthening the appeal among the students, standing out from other higher education institutes, growth in internationalization, digital leap in all operations and succeeding together with the region and other cooperation partners. (Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences, 2019)

SeAMK has also compiled an action plan for

internationalization 2019 - 2025 under the topic “International Growth”. The strategy and action plans of SeAMK aim at ensuring transparency, fairness, effectiveness and inclusion in every action of its internationalization in addition to the quantitative aims. SeAMK strategy for 2020-2024 strongly emphasizes the importance of internationalization and of multiplying capabilities through cooperation. Actively providing a wide variety of opportunities for the development of international competencies of the students and staff is thus naturally in the core of SeAMK strategy. International Learning Mobility, in all its forms, is integral to SeAMK objectives. One aim is to ensure that all students have a level of international competence irrespective of the degree programme and therefore all first and second cycle degree students should have diversified internationalisation options - Internationalisation at Home, Virtual Mobility, Blended Mobility, semester-long study or training period abroad or international double degree – a study-field-specific mixture of these. SeAMK also aims to diversify the mobility of teachers and staff, e.g. through virtual and blended mobility. (Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences, 2018).

Virtual and blended mobilities ensure an easier access and opportunities to students, teachers and staff with different backgrounds. This means participants with fewer opportunities, such as students, teachers or staff with physical, mental and health related conditions or students with children or students who work – target groups whose participation in longer physical mobilities are not always easy to organize. At SeAMK the processes of virtual and blended mobility are almost the same compared to the processes of the physical mobility. Skills and competence achieved during mobility periods are fully recognized in all forms of the mobility. SeAMK’s mobility processes are shortly described below.

Virtual or blended mobility of outgoing students at SeAMK

Opportunities to participate in virtual or physical mobilities are promoted regularly to SeAMK students in information sessions held by the coordinator of SeAMK International Education Services. Open calls are promoted also by study counsellors and heads of degree programmes. Student selection is made in degree programmes and the applications are filled with the help of the international coordinator. Course choices of the

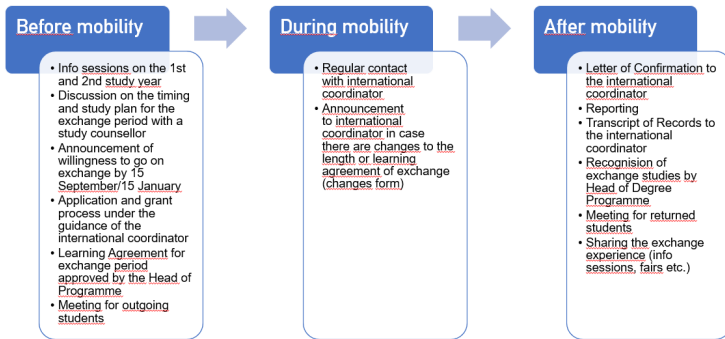


Figure 1.1 Process of SeAMK Outgoing Student mobility (physical, blended and virtual mobility)

participating students are approved by the heads of degree programme in order to confirm the credit recognition after the mobility period. Learning agreements and other mobility documents are used in virtual and blended mobilities, too.

During a virtual mobility period, students study according to their learning agreements and inform the international coordinator if there are any changes to the length or content of studies. In these cases, a Learning Agreement during the mobility – Changes to the original learning agreement – will be drawn up and accepted by the head of degree programme.

After the completion of the virtual or blended courses, the head of the degree programme makes the crediting of the courses at SeAMK based on the transcript of the records received from the receiving HEI. The credited study attainments are saved in the study attainment registry “Peppi” at SeAMK with the additional information remarks of the virtual implementation mode and the name of the host institution responsible for the course. The remarks clarify that the courses are organized by (a) foreign university/universities and are implemented and completed virtually. The process of outgoing student mobility at SeAMK is illustrated in Figure 1.

There were seven SeAMK outgoing students participating in virtual or blended mobility activities in 2020 and about 20 students in 2021. The numbers of blended mobility in particular are expected to increase in coming years. The first outgoing blended intensive mobilities / programmes are being implemented in the spring 2022.

An example of a student experience of virtual mobility is Ms Natalia Rask, a student of SeAMK English-taught Degree Programme in International Business. She participated in the Abroad@home virtual mobility programme in the fall semester 2020, and described her experience as follows:

I was supposed to do my exchange period in Belgium, but because of Covid-19, I wasn't able to go abroad physically. Luckily, I heard about the possibility to do my exchange virtually. I attended different course modules that were taught by different European universities. Each module had lecturers from two different universities and the lectures were held in Teams and Zoom. In addition to the lectures, we did group works and other projects with our virtual classmates. All in all, the virtual exchange was a good experience, and we were able to get insights of each countries' cultures and teaching methods, which was really nice! (Rask, 2021)

Virtual or blended mobility of incoming students at SeAMK

A virtual or blended study course, for which SeAMK teachers are responsible, is created in the SeAMK course registration system Peppi, with additional information concerning the implementation mode. All participating students are enrolled into a virtual or blended study course in the Peppi system. In order to be able to register a student at SeAMK for a course, every participating student who is a not SeAMK student is required to give their basic information through a webropol link. The required information includes: first and last names, gender, nationality, mother tongue, email, mobile phone number, passport/ ID card number, date of birth, home university, country, the name of the course, the starting and ending date of the course.

During the mobility itself, almost the same elements take place as in physical mobility, but in a virtual format. Orientation days and a closing ceremony are organized, and students study according to their learning agreements, and changes to learning agreements are made, if necessary.

After the completion of virtual or blended study course, all credits and grades are recorded into Peppi and Transcript of Records are sent to participating students and in some cases to the sending HEI as well. The process of SeAMK incoming students is illustrated in Figure 2.

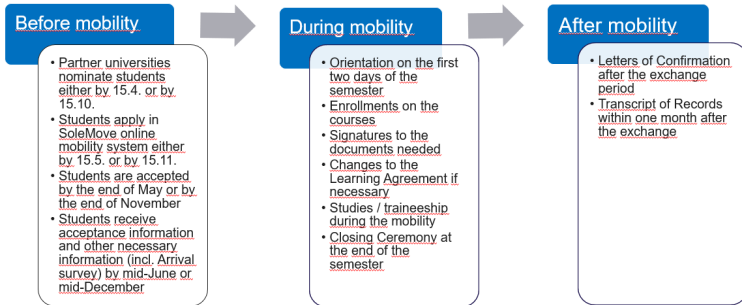


Figure 1.2 Process of SeAMK Incoming Students (physical, blended and virtual mobility)

There were 37 incoming students participating in virtual or blended mobility activities in 2020 and over 60 students in 2021. At SeAMK, the first incoming blended mobilities / programmes will be implemented in the academic year of 2022 – 2023.

Virtual or blended mobility in teacher and staff mobility at SeAMK

Teacher and staff mobilities have a vital role in the internationalization of Seinäjoki university of applied sciences. They are needed not only for achieving the strategic aims and the action plan for internationalization but also to bring real life opportunities to teachers and staff: international collaboration, personal professional development together with international colleagues and bringing new content to teaching and work. As in student mobilities, various types of mobility are important in teacher and staff mobilities in higher education institutions. In addition to physical mobilities, virtual and blended mobilities are essential ways of facilitating international interaction and collaboration for teachers and staff.

What is understood by virtual teacher mobility at SeAMK? It means e.g. that the teacher remains in one country and the students in another country or that two student groups and two teachers from two different countries are studying simultaneously through digital channels. In recent years, the fast development of digital tools has made it easier than ever before. As itself, NewM project and its “Abroad@Home” semester is an excellent example of a wide-scale virtual teaching mobility even

though the change from physical intensive courses to a virtual format happened very unpredictably due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In the framework of this project, six study courses (each 5 ECTS) were taught virtually for multicultural student groups from six participating countries successfully.

SeAMK increasingly encourages its teachers to implement mobilities and international teaching collaboration virtually. Physical teacher mobilities are significant now and will remain so in the future, but it is essential to supplement them with virtual mobilities. In addition to virtual teacher visits, the COVID-19 pandemic boosted the development of virtual staff mobilities strongly. Collaborative meetings, international project meetings and seminars, are more often organized virtually now and most surely also in the future. At SeAMK, it is seen that virtual teacher and staff mobilities are in an important role in the implementation of IaH activities, and they also bring inclusion. Virtual mobilities facilitate frequent exchanges (e.g. due to the lower costs) for more and more teachers and staff members (all are not able to travel for different reasons).

SeAMK International Week called “Digitalization and Sustainability in Higher Education and RDI” is an example of virtual teacher and staff mobility. The week was organized virtually in spring 2021, and it combined virtual teacher and staff mobility to the IaH activities of SeAMK. The event served as the first wide-scale experiment of virtual mobility at SeAMK. Approximately 200 participants from about 40 countries and from about 115 HEIs and organizations signed up and participated in different occasions of the week according to their personal wishes and schedules. During the virtual week, SeAMK organized approximately 15 keynote and other specialist presentations, almost 10 workshops and a large number of virtual teaching visits to courses as well as numerous virtual negotiation meetings.

Furthermore, in the case of the virtual international week, the processes of mobility mainly followed, with some minor exceptions, and the process of mobility is described in table 1. The experiences concerning the virtually organized international week were positive and encouraging resulting to the fact that the upcoming international week in 2022 will be organized in a hybrid mode in order to facilitate virtual participation. Some participant comments are available at <https://blogit.seamk.fi/en/blogs/greetings-from-our-partners/>

Before mobility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • including the mobility period in the working time plan / schedules • defining the subject, timing, goals and content of the mobility period • getting prepared for the international mobility period • communicating with the international mobility services of SeAMK and representatives of the host university / organization • working on necessary documents (Mobility Agreement, physical and blended mobility: grant documents, etc.) • physical and blended mobility: practical arrangements (e.g., travel, hotels, visas if needed)
During mobility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • activities during the mobility period: e.g., teaching, meetings, negotiations. • possible social program included in an international mobility visit, physical or virtual depending on the mobility type
After mobility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • taking care of the documents after mobility period • physical and blended mobility: grant related reporting • other (content) reporting and dissemination of information within the home institution and/or collaboration network, deepening / developing (future) cooperation

Table 1.1 Process of the teacher and staff mobilities (physical, virtual and blended)

The new Erasmus+ Programme 2021-2027 supports the development and implementation of Blended Mobility, which means that it includes both a virtual collaboration element and a short mobility period. The implementation of this type of cooperation requires plenty of prior planning and cooperation

between teachers, which may also be pursued with the support of projects and the funding they provide (e.g. Erasmus +). The COVID-19 pandemic has slowed down the implementation of blended mobilities, but in the longer run, they are seen as one of the important types of international mobility at SeAMK. The first experiments will take place in spring 2022.

At SeAMK, the processes of teacher and staff mobilities are quite similar, whether physical, virtual or blended mobility. In all mobility types, the international mobility period of teachers and staff can be divided into three stages: before, during and after the mobility period. Also, the phases of the mobility period are quite similar in cases of incoming or outgoing mobility from the perspective of the mobile individual. The needed actions in different phases of the mobility are illustrated in the table 1.

1.3 Conclusion and future plans

Green thinking, world-wide sustainability-driven goals, fast development of the digitalization and inclusion challenge international mobility activities in higher education institutions. However, they also encourage higher education institutions and their actors to seek opportunities for the development of varying ways of implementing internationalization, international mobilities and Internationalization at Home activities. Also, strategies and funding programmes guide higher education institutions to develop and maintain different forms of internationalization and different modes of mobility.

Now and in the coming years, it will be important to enable different ways of internationalization and international mobilities in order to provide access for students, teachers and staff members from different backgrounds to gain international competence as easily as possible. Hence, virtual and blended mobilities have and will have an important role in addition to physical mobilities. The implementation of virtual mobilities was boosted by the COVID-19 pandemic but most surely virtual and blended mobilities and their processes are further developed and invested by HEIs from now on, and they will consolidate their position as important tools for international interaction and collaboration and help to develop international competence in higher education.

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2

Strategic Planning for Joint Teaching Online

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Today, students find employment in countries that are no longer characterised by national or geographical borders. Accordingly, more and more universities have recently realised the need for institutions that prepare students to study as global citizens through the internationalisation of their study programmes. With the help of secondary sources, this paper aims to give an insight into the world of borderless joint teaching online, the essence of which is to strengthen the competitiveness of higher education by training professionals who can work at a high standard in both domestic and international workplaces.

2.1 Introduction

The topicality of this paper is relevant since, nowadays, one of the aims of universities is to enhance their competitiveness by shifting from traditional ways of instruction to online study programmes.

The recent global changes caused both by digitalisation and increasing global pandemic threats call the European Union higher education institutions to action to sustain the behaviour and expectations of the generations Y (1980-1995) and Z (1996-2015), which require fundamental changes in the study environment, study programmes and curriculums (Oganisjana et al., 2017; Perkuna and Licite, 2019).

Many universities join the ranks of higher education institutions offering joint online learning opportunities for national and international students worldwide. The challenge for them is how to prepare the different faculties to provide education in an online environment to motivate and satisfy the needs and learning styles of students living in other countries with the same learning outcomes as in face-to-face instruction. The instructors in this situation have a significant role because they have to help students overcome difficulties.

This chapter aims to provide an insight into the understanding of essential variables that can influence online students and feasible strategies to support and help learners persist during the courses. The different educational strategies, tools mentioned in this chapter also contribute to the development of material acquisition, focusing on strategies to help students and instructors overcome challenges in a computer-mediated environment. First, we conceptualise the meaning of strategic planning, then we present the different collaborative strategies of joint teaching online, interaction strategies focusing on the synchronous and asynchronous formats of communication. Finally, we write about the various strategies that can be used to manage online teaching activities.

2.2 Strategy, Strategic Versus Operational Planning

Before discussing several strategies used in joint online instruction, it is worth looking at the meaning of "strategy" and the difference between strategic and operational planning.

The term strategy comes from the Greek word "Stratos", which means army. Then the term appeared in business in the second half of the 20th century, as ever-intensifying competition between companies turned markets into battlegrounds. While in tactics, it is necessary to coordinate the actions of different types of weapons and teams, in the market, it is essential to coordinate the individual corporate functions, areas and action programs to achieve victory and success.

Thus, the strategy is a set of coordinated intentions and decisions in which the routes and steps necessary to achieve the given goal are defined. It is often observed in the literature that the concept of goals and strategies is separated when a strategy is defined as the means and methods of achieving the goals, i.e. the strategies include setting goals for the future of the organization and defining the means and methods to achieve the

goals.

The essence of a strategic plan is not just the totality of the ideas and expectations that exist in our heads but a jointly developed agenda that is accepted by everyone. The metaphor for strategic planning is the squirrel. It is symbolized by this little animal because it plans for the long term, reserves, and at the same time, moves and balances very quickly. This metaphor also expresses that the goal does not change only the plan.

As for strategic planning, you can ask four questions: "Where are we? Where are we going? What is going to get in our way? and finally, What do we need to do to get to where we want to go?"

The strategic planning process has a pyramid form. At the top of the pyramid, we find the vision, i.e. where you are going, and then you will get there by accomplishing a mission. You will have goals and objectives along the way that help you accomplish your mission, and then the strategy is how you are going to accomplish your goals, and the tactics are the individual pieces to your strategic plan. The most critical part of these four segments is the vision, i.e. where we are going. The future is uncertain, but the university as an organisation has the opportunity to create that future. So how you create your vision is not just words. A vision is super valuable to motivate you and inspire you to do more and contribute. So you have to know exactly where you are going, why you should go there.

2.3 Strategic Planning and Joint Teaching Online

Strategic planning usually involves management members, instructors, other employees, and students in a higher education setting. The teaching community plays a key role in planning, and their support is crucial. For this reason, the head of the institution not only chooses the most cost-effective strategy, as business managers do but must also consider the diverse range of other institutional constraints.

An important moment in the planning is the system of tools we want to use to achieve our pedagogical goals (see later). A device system is not just in the physical sense tools but also software, applications, and even the methods used.

A prerequisite for efficient joint online teaching is an excellent technical standard, and reliable tools are available to those on both sides of the teaching-learning process. The use of

digital devices also presupposes the existence of software. The question rightly arises as to which device and with which software and application it is worth involving in education. The answer is relatively simple. Always choose the tools that work best for you to achieve your pedagogical goals, i.e. the focus should not be on the use of tools but on whether the use of a particular tool has added value to the teaching-learning process. Choose a tool for a pedagogical method, but at the same time examine it and what new methods digital technology allows to be used.

It is essential to remember that it is not enough to look for technical support for your old methods. You also have to expand your methodological repertoire and find the right digital tool, software and application for new, innovative elements and working methods.

2.4 A New Form of Teaching: Joint Teaching Online

This form of education not only focuses on the online context but also includes computer-based educational platforms and methods for sharing educational material and a wide range of instructional material, such as multimedia educational materials, games, simulations, and their application even on mobile platforms. Using all of this, the emphasis in online higher education is on collaborative learning (Campbell, 2004). Infocommunication technologies have transformed students' expectations. Heuer and King (2004) point out that although online education is similar to classical education in many respects, the former has its characteristics and highlights flexibility: it allows time to reflect on curricula anywhere, anytime, and, depending on the platform, students can use it anonymously. In their comparative study, Dabbagh and Nannaritland (2005) state that traditional education is tied to the presence of teachers and students, takes place in real-time, works under the teacher's control, and uses linear educational solutions. Taking advantage of new technological opportunities in the online teaching and learning environment, asynchronous and real-time communication will become informal and dynamic, with a wide range of pedagogical practices, active learning, and a student-centred pedagogical attitude (Keengwe and Kidd, 2010).

Joint teaching online is a mode of online teaching where there is possible academic cooperation between at least two

universities. Their students and faculties and these players are connected via different means of communication using distance learning technologies. According to the authors of the different modes of instruction, the closest terms to joint courses are blended learning, hybrid courses or flip teaching (Wallace and Young, 2010; Wang and Burton, 2010). The emphasis is on collaboration and cooperation between two or more university courses, and it adds new components to the teaching-learning process: students gain more independence and flexibility. At the same time, professors have more freedom and creativity.

In joint courses, professors use some elements of cooperative learning methods, which focus on structured group learning, maximising students' own and each other's learning potential. (Wang and Burton, 2010). There are several dissimilarities between blended learning, hybrid learning, flipped courses, and joint online teaching. The first difference is that in the case of joint teaching online, the participants, i.e. partner universities, professors and students, depend on each other. The success of the joint online courses and the satisfaction with the courses depend on each player. Such courses are unfeasible without cooperation. Such courses are special concerning the high level of interdisciplinary and international collaboration and cooperation. However, the proper use of technology is essential, but we also need continuous training to keep up with development. The question is whether instructors and students of the 21st century are prepared to face these challenges. One of the weaknesses that may occur during the strategic planning process is if some participants from different countries and cultures lag in the proper use of technology or if the universities cannot afford to acquire modern technological tools and software.

The essential aim of joint teaching online is that students and professors of various disciplines, countries, and cultures are brought together to provide the best education possible. This international playing field teaches the players, i.e. students, professors, university managers, a new way of thinking. Furthermore, students and professors have to respect the other players' culture and characteristics because they can realise that several perspectives and solutions to a problem might exist simultaneously. This intercultural exchange of thoughts and ideas adds value to joint teaching online and is considered one of the distinguishing marks.

Joint teaching online also aims to compel students to communicate with their international peers via various media devices. In this respect, the aim is to know and explore the other students' ways of thinking and points of view. This way of instruction develops students' intercultural communicative competence, which according to Byram (1997), is the ability of individuals to communicate and interact across cultural boundaries. Individuals with such skills know one, or preferably, more cultures and social identities and have the capacity to discover and relate to new people from other contexts" (Byram, 1997; Jaeger, 2001). The players in a joint teaching online course have to be motivated because the success of a course greatly depends on the willingness of students to participate. Students can be encouraged because they would like to get a better grade or know different cultures, improve their language skills or simply because they would like to get hands-on opinions of students of different nationalities on various topics discussed.

The number of joint online courses and programs has increased significantly recently. Nevertheless, the number of students taking an online course at least once has also increased. Due to the increased demand for online education and the interest of higher education institutions in developing diversified educational opportunities, this growth is expected to continue in the future (Allen and Seaman, 2008).

Effective strategic planning cannot be carried out without particular goals and awareness of the mission's benefits, obstacles, and challenges. We have collected the major goals, key strategic benefits, obstacles and challenges of joint teaching online.

2.5 Goals, Key Strategic Benefits, Obstacles and Challenges of Joint Teaching Online

The joint online courses of universities have the following objectives:

- developing international and intercultural competencies through the internationalization of the learning environment,
- ensuring equal opportunities for all students of the universities,
- preparation of students for globalization and its challenges,
- encouraging students to communicate in foreign languages,
- encouraging students to know foreign countries, cultures,

people, ways of thinking and promoting ethno-relativism,

- developing intercultural communication and relationship management skills,
- developing cooperation and teamwork ability with international students,
- promoting flexibility, resilience, openness; acceptance of differences,
- encouraging students to be aware of global problems and results in the field of reduction of prejudices, misunderstandings and ethnocentrism.

The potential benefits of joint teaching online:

- Lower unit cost. A well-designed and well-organized e-learning can save costs without reducing educational performance, while implementation costs pay for themselves quickly.
- General and customizable messages. Online teaching can deliver the same information to everyone in the same form but is also great for customizing the content and presentation of information to suit individual or group needs.
- Reliable and timely content. Most network content can be updated easily and quickly, so it doesn't lose its relevance for a long time.
- Continuous availability, regardless of geographical location.
- Community builder by communicating synchronously and asynchronously via the Web, allowing for more efficient collaboration.
- Scalable. Standard e-learning content can be delivered to a much larger audience with relatively little effort and can be further developed and expanded.
- Traceable. Students' current performance, needs, content utilization, and effectiveness can be measured at the individual, group, or course level. A well-thought-out joint teaching online strategy is needed to materialise the benefits presented above. Otherwise, universities will have a good chance of facing the obstacles presented below.

The barriers to joint teaching online cover two main areas: technological and organizational:

- Lack of money, time and support.
- Technological constraints (low bandwidth, network problems, and poor hardware).

- Lack of interoperability (the ability of different computerized products or systems to readily connect and exchange information with one another, in either implementation or access, without restriction).
- Difficult to measure learning outcomes.
- Lack of proper planning and organization.
- Student resistance to online learning.
- Students' low level of foreign language competencies (hinders understanding and the free flow of information via the different channels of communication).

Possible problems with teaching and collaborating in a joint online course may result from course planning. Problems may arise in class scheduling and curriculum design, and there might be a lack of materials used during the course and a lack of common interests and topics. Some of the instructors might volunteer to lead an online course; however, later, it turns out that he is not familiar with the methods, techniques, human and cultural issues of joint teaching online. All these might result in demotivation or unwillingness to cooperate. Also, problems related to intellectual property, copyright and ethics may arise. To avoid such problems, it is advisable to include these issues in the partnership agreement between the institutions, and we can prevent future litigation processes.

2.6 The Planning Process

The development and design of any online education involve five main processes: course content design, course development, implementation, evaluation, and review (Keengwe and Kidd, 2010).

The preparation part of joint online courses is a significant phase of the strategic planning process. The workload of the preparation and planning of courses can be shared between the partner institutions, but it might also be possible that only one partner takes the lion's share of the work. It is essential to put every work done by the different partner institutions in writing to avoid future disagreements. It is also possible that the partners accept the already existing curriculum on both sides and slightly adjust it to the virtual online teaching environment. The partners compiling the curriculum have to face the fact that the knowledge of students from different countries is often different in a particular subject. What may happen is that a specific curriculum works perfectly in one country but fails to bring the expected

results in others. Therefore it is very time-consuming to compile a so-called "one-fit-to-all" curriculum.

It is advisable to agree on a communication tool plan to encourage presence, build community, and help students acquire knowledge in the subject domain during the planning process.

According to Bates and Poole (2003), the following questions should be considered when selecting communication technologies for interaction and interactivity: 1. What kind of activities by the student would most facilitate learning of the subject? 2. What media or technology would best facilitate this interaction? 3. How can technology enable scarce teaching resources to be used and supported by less scarce resources to increase learner interaction?

There is another important issue, i.e. copyright and intellectual property rights, which also has to be considered well in advance before the launch of the joint online course. So an exact clarification and agreement of the instructors' roles and rights must be made during the planning process. It is also worth ensuring the accessibility to the various equipment and multimedia tools because it might be very annoying if it turns out during the course that students have limited access to the equipment or if they do not work properly.

During the strategic planning and teaching process, the partner institutions and the instructors of the joint online course are expected to consider and respect the institutional culture of the partners and accept the differences in teaching philosophies.

2.7 Collaborative Strategies

Concerning collaboration, Castells argues that the shape of interpersonal connections matters because technology enables the human social networks that push us to work more rapidly, in new settings, across more boundaries than ever before (Castells, 2004). The prerequisite of collaboration is a trust which makes students feel comfortable if they have to share their ideas on a topic. If students trust each other, they do not have to be afraid of being criticized. In the labour market of the 21st century, it is expected that employees acquire the skills of collaboration and be able to solve problems. Collaboration contributes to enhancing learning outcomes and diminishes the potential for student isolation, which may cause problems in an online learning environment (Palloff and Pratt, 2005). Collaboration

also supports creating a learning community that can extend and deepen students' experience by allowing them to share new ideas with a supportive group and receive critical and constructive feedback (Palloff and Pratt, 2007). According to Palloff and Pratt (2010), the following collaborative activities can be done during a joint online course: small-group assignments, research assignments asking students to seek out and present additional resource material to their peers, group work on case studies, simulations, asynchronous discussion of the reading and discussion questions, papers posted to the course site with mutual feedback provided.

2.8 Discussions, Team Projects and Peer Reviews

Stavredes (2011) suggests three strategies: discussion, team projects, and peer reviews to promote collaborative learning. Discussion is a fundamental part of joint teaching online. According to Brookfield and Preskill (2005), "discussions are ideal for exploring complex ideas and entertaining multiple perspectives" (p. 236). When students collaborate, they develop their ways of thinking and become critical and creative. Also, they learn how to tackle problems easily.

During discussions, students can notice that their viewpoints are different from their peers and learn how to reach a joint agreement if their opinions and views are just the opposite of the others.

During team projects, students can share knowledge of the world in a dynamic environment. If we encourage students to participate actively in team projects, they will have more interactions, and their interpersonal relationships with the other students will be stronger. Team projects are good opportunities for students to learn how to participate in projects and simulations.

Peer reviews are a very effective learning strategy that also involves collaboration with other students, but it is also expected from the participants to review other students' projects or assignments. This kind of feedback is beneficial for the student whose work is reviewed. However, the reviewer can also tell his opinion from another point of view.

2.9 Synchronous and Asynchronous Communication

We can meet two types of communication during joint teaching online: synchronous and asynchronous. Synchronous communication occurs simultaneously, unlike asynchronous, which happens at various times. In the case of asynchronous communication, the participants of the discourse (students and instructors) can interact with each other anytime, anywhere. The advantage of asynchronous communication is that students have more time to reflect on specific issues and subject matter and acquire the material in more depth than during synchronous communication. However, synchronous communication provides a more dynamic way of communication because the participants' interactions are immediate. Another benefit of synchronous communication is that students can ask questions, and a response will be given immediately.

2.10 Online Communication Tools and Applications

Creating a working environment for digital pedagogy also depends on software and applications. The appropriate software and applications may depend on the operating system or equipment used. Not all of them have versions running on all platforms, or there may be significant differences in their knowledge. Several communication tools can be used effectively during joint online courses.

Stavredes (2011) divides communication tools into two types:

- Synchronous communication tools: Chats or Instant messengers, VoIP, Web conferencing, Virtual worlds.
- Asynchronous communication tools: E-mail, Discussion forums, Blogs, Wikis, Social networking and Microblogs.

Chat or instant messaging is one of the best ways of generating discourses. It is synchronous and, so, place and time-dependent.

VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol) is a voice communication using the Internet, and it also belongs to the group of synchronous communication.

Web conferencing is a prevalent synchronous means of communication that enables the participants to make presentations, share documents, and make presentations. The advantage of Web conferencing is that it is live and a perfect

occasion for instructors to give lectures and students can interact.

Virtual worlds are simulated environments where students can collaborate with other students in a real-world context.

One of the most often used asynchronous means of communication is electronic mail. It does not depend on time and location, and instructors can provide regular feedback to students.

During discussion forums, students can interact asynchronously, reflect on different topics, and exchange thoughts and ideas.

Blogs are individual writings (online journals) and are a handy way to comment on the blog's writer's papers, providing a sense of involvement. Also, students can use blogs to publish their writings, and the other students can comment on them.

A wiki is a collection of linked pages. Students can manage information with linked pages and navigation menus. It also allows students to post comments and share ideas.

Social networking sites are also popular modes of communication with students. They allow learners to share information and collaborate with fellow students on different projects and research, develop contacts, and collaborate with others on course projects.

Microblogs are used to send short messages and call the attention of somebody to something.

2.11 Strategies for Managing Joint Teaching Online Activities

As for the joint teaching online environment, we can see that it is very different from the traditional setting. In a traditional environment, time is finite because most of the interaction happens during the course. However, in an online setting, time is infinite because the course is available anytime round the clock. As a result, the instructors have to set up different time management strategies. How instructors manage the online course has an impact on students' persistence.

Firstly, students need to be familiar with the course requirements and need opportunities to ask questions, and it is very time-consuming. Still, the above mentioned different

communication tools can help the smooth transfer of information from instructors to students and from students to instructors and improve communication effectiveness.

At the beginning of the course, you have to tell students what we expect from them. Students have to be familiar with the structure of the course, the course requirements and the expectations. You can use a time management worksheet that makes your teaching activities' organisation easy. Consider strategies for how you participate in discussions, how you monitor instructor-to-learner and learner-to-learner interactions. The point is that students have to be aware of the strategy you use during the joint online course. You have to allocate proper time and constantly monitor students' responses to discussions. As for assignments, it is advisable to give regular detailed feedback to students within two or three days. Feedback templates are also handy to decrease your time grading discussions and assignments.

Managing students' questions and issues is also a crucial element of strategical planning of joint teaching online. According to Stavredes (2011), several communication strategies can be used to organize individual communications, for example, question-and-answer threads, technical question discussions, and frequently asked question posts. The question-and-answer threads are very effective because even those students feel encouraged to ask questions who typically do not dare to ask. The advantage of a public discussion thread is that everybody can read everybody's questions, and the instructor replies, saving time if you do not have to answer the same questions several times. Many students might have questions concerning the technical equipment and tools. Therefore it is advisable to provide a technical discussion space where only technology-related issues are discussed. The frequently asked questions section in the online space is also a perfect idea and an excellent way to answer questions proactively.

2.12 Conclusion

This paper explored the significant features of the strategic planning of joint teaching online. We also addressed the goals, key strategic benefits, obstacles and challenges of this relatively new form of instruction. We conclude that the planning process cannot exist without the careful development of social and teaching presence online, which is feasible through different

collaborative strategies such as discussions, team projects, peer reviews. We looked at various communication tools, and applications instructors can use and what strategies are indispensable for managing online joint teaching activities. We can also conclude that before developing strategies for a joint online course, you have to carefully consider the types of interactions that you will use to build community, promote learning, and provide various tools to meet all students' needs. The more deliberate you are during the strategic planning process of joint online courses, the greater opportunity you will have to build a learning community that will assist students in staying motivated, persisting, and ultimately achieving the course's learning outcomes.

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3

Student Dropout - A Challenge in Virtual Mobility

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The New Modes of Mobility Project reflects an ERASMUS+ partnership between six European Higher Education Institutions that aimed to increase the adoption of virtual mobilities and to develop a framework for student internationalization and collaboration in a multicultural environment. Due to the wide spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Erasmus+ NewM Program had to be adapted in a new setting focused on engaging students in virtual mobilities. This chapter examines the phenomenon of student dropouts in a virtual mobility project, considering the challenges, causes, and opportunities for addressing this key issue.

3.1 Introduction

Mobility has long been recognized as an essential aspect of higher education since it promotes personal growth and employability, fosters diversity, and facilitates collaboration among international students (Buchem et al., 2018). Additionally, this cooperation extends to the relationship between the higher education institutions involved in the partnership and agreement. Erasmus+ is among the most well-

known programs fostering student and staff mobility. Nonetheless, the degrees of engaging in mobilities are quite different across European Union countries benefiting from this programme. To encourage student and staff mobility, virtual mobility was suggested as an opportunity to increase the internationalization level of higher education institutions (HEIs). As described by Buchem et al. (2018), virtual mobility “has a great potential to contribute to the internationalization, innovation and inclusion in higher education, and the main obstacles to mobility can be dramatically reduced by adding the virtual component.”

Virtual mobility became even more important during the pandemic context. Due to the expansion of the COVID-19 pandemic, the year 2020 presented extraordinary disruptions and problematic circumstances for practically all higher education institutions (Koris et al., 2021; Marinoni et al., 2020; Teräs et al., 2020). Even in virtual mobility, student dropout is a key element that needs to be discussed. To provide an understanding of the reasons why students choose to discontinue their studies in virtual mobility, this chapter describes the premises of student attrition in an Erasmus+ project (Abroad@home) and offers possible means to address this issue in other similar circumstances.

3.2 Understanding the Premises of Student Attrition

Student attrition occurs when a student drops out or withdraws from a program of study before the planned time of completion, whether deliberately or involuntarily (Zhang et al., 2016; Aldowah, Al-Samarraie, Alzahrani, & Alalwan, 2020). Student dropout is a concern for students and HEIs even in virtual mobility settings. From a student perspective, students who dropout may lose confidence and motivation to pursue virtual mobility opportunities in the future. Moreover, higher education institutions are negatively affected by this phenomenon due to possible repercussions on economic status and long-term planning of colleges and universities (Willging & Johnson, 2009; Delen, 2012; Tayebi, Gómez, & Delgado, 2021). To a larger extent, student attrition also has a negative impact on society “in terms of potentially reducing the pool of skills needed for further development” (Sittichai, 2012).

From a conceptualization perspective, the most prominent

theory that is widely accepted in this research field is Tinto's (1975) 'Theory of student departure'. According to this theory, there are two main essential variables that minimize student attrition, namely students' personal goal commitment and their institutional commitment. Students who participate, engage, and become integrated into the academic and social dimensions of their higher education experience will display higher levels of commitment to stay in the program and finish their studies.

To this effect, various researchers have proposed a wide range of factors that may lead to student attrition, such as demographic factors, prior educational background, academic performance, and financial background (Willging & Johnson, 2009; Mouton, Zhang, & Ertl, 2020; Tayebi, Gómez, & Delgado, 2021; Naseem, Chaudhary & Sharma, 2022). Institutional characteristics including infrastructure, resources, and student services have also been researched in connection to student attrition (Tayebi, Gómez, & Delgado, 2021). The reasons why students decide to discontinue their studies are essential guidelines for determining how university policies should be developed to handle the issue of student dropout (Mouton, Zhang, & Ertl, 2020).

Student attrition is a major issue for many HEIs throughout the world and this topic has been approached in various contexts, from subscription-based online learning environments (Coussement, Phan, De Caigny, Benoit, & Raes, 2020), to massive open online courses - MOOCs (Aldowah, Al-Samarraie, Alzahrani, & Alalwan, 2020). However, there is limited research available on the context of student dropout in an Erasmus+ virtual mobility project, during the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, this chapter aims to tackle this key problem by addressing the possible causes and perspectives for minimizing student attrition in future virtual mobilities projects.

3.3 Analysis of Student Dropout for Abroad@home - NewM Project

"New Modes of Mobility" (NewM) reflects an Erasmus+ European strategic partnership with six European Higher Education Institutions. NewM Project focused on developing mobility concepts using digital technologies that can be made available to all participants. The project focused on improving internationalization at home. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the NewM project suffered certain changes in the form of Abroad@home. Abroad@home offered an innovative approach

of a completely virtual semester abroad in which interested students could participate from home, have online classes, and collaborate with international students in a culturally diverse environment. The six participating universities in this NewM Abroad@home project were the following:

- University of Applied Sciences Würzburg-Schweinfurt, Germany - FHWS
- Fontys University of Applied Sciences, Netherlands - Fontys
- Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, Romania – ULBS
- Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences LTD, Finland - SeAMK
- University of Debrecen, Hungary - UNIDEB
- University of Zielona Gora, Poland - UZ

The six universities provided the following six modules:

- International Marketing
- Nailing It
- Marketing Research
- Strategic Management
- Speaking Europe
- Management Game

Students had the opportunity to enrol in any number of modules and receive a transcript of records for their participation in the Abroad@home virtual mobility for one semester. Students who chose to participate in all courses benefitted from an additional certificate for a complete virtual semester abroad.

	Initial Registra- tion	Overall Completion		Student Dropout	
	Frequency	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Abroad@home 1st implement.	38	29	76.3%	9	23.7%
Abroad@home 2nd implement.	48	18	37.5%	30	62.5%

Table 3.1 Overall outlook of enrolled students and student attrition for both sessions of Abroad@home implementation

The Abroad@home project included two implementations: the first project implementation was in the fall/winter semester of 2020-2021 academic year, and the second project

implementation was in the fall/winter semester of 2021-2022 academic year. Table 1 showcases an overview of the enrolled students and the dropout students for both sessions of this project.

First implementation of Abroad@home project – 2020-2021

Regarding the first implementation of the Abroad@home project, during the fall/winter semester of 2020-2021, tables 2 and 3 summarize the registration rates of students, as well as their completion and dropout rates.

In an effort to accommodate the implementation of the NewM Project under the conditions of the pandemic, the Abroad@home set-up included the recruitment of students from partner universities. As such, 9 students were recruited from FHWS, 12 students from Fontys, 6 students SeAMK, 7 students from ULBS, 1 student from UNIDEB, and 3 students from UZ, for a total of 38 enrolled students in this project aimed at providing a virtual mobility. Out of the total of 38 students, the highest level of completion rate was registered for Fontys students (showcasing a completion rate of 100%), followed by SeAMK and FHWS, with completion rates of 83.3% and 77.8%, respectively (Table 2). Additionally, only one student from UNIDEB enrolled in the Abroad@home project and completed one module.

University	Registration		Completion	
	Frequency	Percentage (of total of 38)	Frequency	Percentage (of total registrations / university)
ULBS	7	18.4%	3	42.9%
FHWS	9	23.7%	7	77.8%
Fontys	12	31.6%	12	100.0%
SeAMK	6	15.8%	5	83.3%
UNIDEB	1	2.6%	1	100.0%
UZ	3	7.9%	1	33.3%
Total	38	100%	29	-

Table 3.2 First implementation of Abroad@home project – Completion rates

Student attrition for the first implementation of the Abroad@home project registered an overall rate of 23.7%, or 9

students from the total of 38 students who enrolled for studying in a virtual mobility during this programme. The highest dropout rates were recorded for UZ and ULBS. Initially, 3 UZ students enrolled for *Abroad@home* modules, however 2 students dropped out, showcasing a 66.7% dropout rate. Similarly, 7 ULBS students expressed their interest in the virtual mobility semester, however 4 students dropped out, highlighting a 57.1% dropout rate among Romanian students.

University	Registration		Dropout	
	Frequency	Percentage (of total of 38)	Frequency	Percentage (of total registrations / university)
ULBS	7	18.4%	4	57.1%
FHWS	9	23.7%	2	22.2%
Fontys	12	31.6%	0	0.0%
SeAMK	6	15.8%	1	16.7%
UNIDEB	1	2.6%	0	0.0%
UZ	3	7.9%	2	66.7%
Total	38	100%	9	-

Table 3.3 First implementation of Abroad@home project – Dropout rates

Second implementation of Abroad@home project – 2021-2022

Tables 4 and 5 describe the registration rates of students, as well as their completion and dropout rates, for the second implementation of the *Abroad@home* initiative, which took place during the fall/winter semester of 2021-2022.

In terms of enrolment in the *Abroad@home* modules, there were 17 registered students from UNIDEB, 9 students from FHWS, 9 students from UZ, 8 students from SeAMK, and 5 students from ULBS, consisting of a total of 48 students. For the second instalment of this project, there were no registered students from Fontys. FHWS students had the highest completion percentage (66.7%) out of a total of 38 students, followed by SeAMK, UNIDEB, and UZ, which had completion rates of 62.5 percent, 35.3 percent, and 11.1 percent respectively (Table 4). Furthermore, none of the ULBS students completed any of the modules they initially enrolled for, citing conflicting schedules with university classes and job commitments.

University	Registration		Completion	
	Frequency	Percentage (of total of 48)	Frequency	Percentage (of total registrations / university)
ULBS	5	10.4%	0	0.0%
FHWS	9	18.8%	6	66.7%
Fontys	0	0.0%	-	-
SeAMK	8	16.7%	5	62.5%
UNIDEB	17	35.4%	6	35.3%
UZ	9	18.8%	1	11.1%
Total	48	100%	18	-

Table 3.4 Second implement. of Abroad@home – Completion rates

Student dropout for the second implementation of the Abroad@home initiative was 48 percent, or 30 students out of a total of 48 students who had initially expressed their intention to enrol for a semester in this virtual mobility programme. Similarly, to the first implementation, the highest dropout rates were registered at ULBS and UZ, namely 100% and 88.9%, respectively. The lowest dropout rate was observed for FHWS, as only three students dropped out (or 33.3%) out of the initial 9 enrolled students.

University	Registration		Dropout	
	Frequency	Percentage (of total of 48)	Frequency	Percentage (of total registrations / university)
ULBS	5	10.4%	5	100.0%
FHWS	9	18.8%	3	33.3%
Fontys	0	0.0%	-	-
SeAMK	8	16.7%	3	37.5%
UNIDEB	17	35.4%	11	64.7%
UZ	9	18.8%	8	88.9%
Total	48	100%	30	-

Table 3.5 Second implementation of Abroad@home – Dropout rates

Possible causes of student attrition for Abroad@home project

In exploring the possible causes of student attrition for the

examined virtual mobility project, the most prominent and noticeable factors that led to students discontinuing their module learning experience could be pinpointed to time, workload, group communication and collaboration, and administrative issues. Time and workload were essential elements that drove higher rates for student attrition. Most of the *Abroad@home* students took classes at their universities, but also enrolled in certain modules associated with this project. For a large proportion of students, it was difficult to manage the workload in both of these learning circumstances. Additionally, the module scheduling was also an issue due to conflicting aspects related to university classes or time zone incompatibility. In the beginning of the project, the opportunity to study in a virtual learning environment and have classes with teachers from various European universities provided key elements of differentiation. However, for certain students, their available time and workload increased the challenges associated with this online learning opportunity and the overall virtual mobility experience.

Regarding group collaboration, students were advised to work either by applying the premises of (a) synchronous collaboration, which implied that teammates could meet and work together at the same time; or (b) asynchronous collaboration, which implied that students within the same team could meet and work at different times, according to their available schedules. These aspects also proved to be difficult to manage for students in terms of workload and issues of communication among team members.

Another identified factor of student attrition involved administrative issues. Compared to the administrative premises of an Erasmus+ mobility, a virtual mobility did not incur any financial perspectives, implications or consequences associated with the dropout from a module. Thus, students could have easily discontinued their modules without any repercussions. This factor needs to be addressed in future perspectives, by gaining a firm and definite commitment from students enrolled in virtual mobilities.

Additionally, from an administrative perspective there were issues involved with credit recognition of the modules for a whole semester studying in a virtual mobility. Thus, most of the students who participated in the *Abroad@home* project, gained extra ECTSs on their transcript of records. However, due to

university-specific regulations, there was no possibility to recognize all 30 ECTS for a semester studying in a virtual mobility. For the first implementation of *Abroad@home*, only the students from Fontys University of Applied Sciences (Netherlands) had all of their 30 ECTS credits recognized for the whole semester that they participated in a virtual mobility. Thus, in their case, Fontys students had a completion rate of 100%.

Moreover, differences in the student registration systems have been a source of challenges. In some of the universities involved in the project, students enrolled in virtual mobility programs were registered as regular students, in others they were considered exchange students like those with an Erasmus agreement (even if they participated in only one module), and in other they were not enrolled in host university registration systems but received recognition of credits based on their participation in the project. Finally, partners managed to find the best solution for students, but some of them gave up during the registration process.

Although for the second implementation (fall/winter semester of 2021-2022 academic year) of the *Abroad@home* project, many of these challenges were solved, the COVID-19 pandemic had a more prominent impact on students' dropout rate. With the pandemic underway for over a year and a half, students had developed online fatigue due to virtual university classes. Moreover, in the fall/winter semester of 2021-2022 academic year, certain universities proceeded to hybrid university classes which had a negative impact on students continuing their *Abroad@home* virtual mobility. Thus, the student attrition in the virtual mobility was heavily impacted by the COVID-19 situation.

3.4 Managing Student Dropout in Virtual Mobilities

To tackle the issue of student dropout, several initiatives could be launched to address student attrition in virtual mobilities. As such, a key aspect would be to manage the scheduling of classes in an appropriate manner, by presenting the timetable in advance so that students who have jobs can organize their work schedule around the virtual mobility schedule. In relation to the scheduling of classes, another important element to consider is the overlapping of modules to prevent student attrition.

Moreover, to create a sense of student integration and commitment in a virtual mobility, the beginning of the virtual

mobility program could include an online ceremony and orientation module that would facilitate the opportunity to meet fellow students and teachers. This orientation module would provide cultural exchange benefits and would create a prospect for minimizing student attrition. According to available literature (Willging & Johnson, 2009; Mouton, Zhang, & Ertl, 2020; Tayebi et al., 2021; Naseem, Chaudhary & Sharma, 2022), social integration of students in a new academic setting occurs mostly through their interactions with teachers and other students and it has the potential to reduce student dropout rates.

Additionally, in the beginning of the program, enrolled students would benefit from a tutorial session in using the virtual mobility platforms. This tutorial session would provide technological capabilities to students and would familiarize them with new platforms, diminishing their feeling of being overwhelmed in new educational settings.

In terms of positive outlooks of the project's implementation, students appreciated the modular organization of teaching activities for each subject. In this modular organization of teaching experiences, students had the opportunity to fully engage with each subject in a compressed version of learning. Additionally, the modular organization of teaching activities provides a more manageable workload for students, decreasing the potential student attrition.

3.5 Conclusion

COVID-19 has dramatically changed the way students, educators, and management of higher education approach different options for mobilities within the Erasmus+ Programme. Even if physical mobility improves, more blended mobility initiatives are likely to be implemented, as virtual mobility reflects some of the advantages of physical mobility. Virtual exchange initiatives broaden students' academic experience while also strengthening their digital, linguistic, and intercultural skills.

Moreover, considering the positive progression of the COVID-19 pandemic, a blended mobility could provide a key solution meant to tackle the possible reasons for non-participation in Erasmus physical mobility. Additionally, a blended mobility could provide additional benefits associated with cultural exchanges and face-to-face interactions in learning experiences. As proposed by Tinto (1975) in the 'Theory of

student departure', integrating students in their academic and social education experiences would positively impact student retention rates.

Another factor that would increase the enrolment in blended mobilities is related to the financing of this type of mobility. For instance, at the start and at the end of a virtual mobility, students could travel to Erasmus+ universities for a face-to-face interaction. Financing short-term student mobilities to accommodate blended mobilities would develop deeper student motivation and would encompass the cultural experience and direct interaction with other learning experiences. Thus, there would be an increased number of Erasmus+ registrations for studying abroad, and, consequently, student retention would be amplified.

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4

Student Recruitment Issues for International Courses

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With the help of secondary sources, this article aims to give a more delicate insight into student recruitment issues for international courses while outlining the advantages and disadvantages deriving from these issues. The article mainly focuses on organising the collected information to assist further research. Discussing the effects of the presence of international students at universities is the key to creating a comfortable environment for both parties. In conclusion, by processing the gathered information, this article helps understand the current recruiting situation of international students.

4.1 Introduction

In our fast-changing world, where students are more willing to expose themselves to other cultures, universities face a rapidly increasing number of recruits from diverse cultural backgrounds, and in order to manage, they have to adapt to these new circumstances. Internationalisation and globalisation have influenced the field of education significantly over the years. Global competition for uniquely talented students seems to determine higher education institutions' agenda, creating advanced education strategies or lowering tuition fees in an attempt to attract these extraordinary recruits. However, universities' strategies to attract students are very different in the world. In Europe, governments play a crucial role, while across the Atlantic, universities are trying to create the perfect

conditions for international students without governmental support. The most common and frequently used method is employing agents, which is not without drawbacks. The present article offers further elaboration on this issue.

Nevertheless, students' parents usually do thorough research before applying for an institution; social networks and rankings can also significantly contribute to their final decision. Establishing an accepting and helpful atmosphere can easily be achieved by introducing events that give opportunities to learn about other cultures, encouraging interactions between students and improving their language skills, and could be an excellent benefit for the process of integration. Fluently speaking and effortlessly understanding English is indispensable today to effectively participate in classes.

4.2 Strategies

Higher education institutions are competing with each other all around the world. This competitive environment has influenced universities and colleges in many countries. They started to improve their resources to gain an international reputation, and they began to recruit more and more international students. Nevertheless, the rapid increase of international student numbers can cause different social problems if it goes beyond the institution's capacity, as it happened in South Korea from 2001 to 2007. After realising the various social problems, the government introduced new policies to control and regulate the quality management of international education. Establishing a long-term development plan for international education is advisable, and governmental policies should combine quantitative expansion and qualitative control (Bae, 2015). Universities and colleges also make various efforts towards internationalising their institutions, including making curricula more international, international faculty contacts, international collaborations, working with other institutions abroad (Burn, 2000). Universities use effective strategies to communicate with prospective international students and their parents all over the world on their websites. University websites should transmit cultural values and their educational mission. The content and design of their websites are essential in representing them worldwide. Websites should include both general and academic information about the institution. In addition, they should provide information about the application process, admission offices, enrolment requirements, grants, scholarships and loans.

In terms of system quality, all the necessary information and documents should be provided in the native language and at least in another language, usually English. Institutions should provide interactive functions on their websites as visitors regard the ease of information access as very important. Websites should emphasise the cultural values of the institutions. Well-organised, data-rich websites with easy navigation can improve institutions' reputations and increase the number of international students (Fritzler, 2015).

4.3 "Push" and "Pull" Factors

Competition for talent is likely to increase worldwide, so there is a need for collaboration on a global scale. Countries having a leading position in receiving international students are the Anglophone countries. Moreover, many non-Anglophone countries have also developed strategies to attract international students. These countries can encounter several challenges, including language barriers, less competitive job markets and education environment. Various factors influence international student mobility, for example, financial factors concerning costs and tuition fees and sociocultural factors like international rankings and reputation. The factors why students go to other countries and select programs are referred to as "push" and "pull" factors. They include political, social, cultural, economic and educational factors. A pull factor can be a high-quality academic system or lower tuition fees, whereas a push factor is, for example, an escape from political repression or better career prospects abroad. Non-Anglophone countries should use different pull factors, target neighbouring countries and utilise their competitive advantages to increase international student numbers (de Wit, Minaeva, & Wang, 2022). Push factors have two groups: personal and environmental. Research shows that family members, other students, friends, and professors are the most influential personal factors. Environmental factors include, for example, low quality of domestic higher education or the high availability of information of hosting regions.

Regarding national efforts in international student recruitment, there are two reasons: international students increase the quality of education, contributing to the further development of a knowledge society. Some countries have more advanced recruitment strategies, including offering foundation programs to prepare students academically or offering home-foreign double and joint degree programs abroad. There is no

clear distinction between recruiting and target recruitment countries as most countries are key recruitment countries for other nations, but at the same time, they are also recruiting countries themselves (Becker, & Kolster, 2012).

4.4 The Role of Social Media

Students can decide to study in another country for various reasons. Many countries' economies have developed over the years due to globalisation, so parents in these countries (like China or India) understand how important it is to provide an opportunity for their children to study at an international course in a foreign country. Parents like to research universities through different channels, and they respect international rankings. Thus, parents hope to offer their children better career prospects. Colleges and universities should also target parents with their promotional material in their native languages (Cooley, 2008). Social networks can also play an important role when students decide to study abroad. These social networks can be very diverse, but their growing popularity has helped international students share their experience. Social networks can refer to strong ties, including family members. It can also refer to weak ties that are less familiar, for example, international students who already study at a chosen university. Social networks can encourage students to study abroad explicitly or implicitly by sharing positive experience on social media. This way, international students can communicate what it means to be an international student. Very often, students contact people who study abroad before making their decisions. Consequently, social networks can help to make the decision to study abroad by exposing and exploring opportunities (Beech, 2015).

4.5 Policies around the World

The major recruiting English-speaking countries, like Canada, England, the USA and Australia, try to attract and retain talented international students through governmental policies and programmes. Greater policy coordination helps increase international students' numbers. However, it should cover different policy fields like immigration, education, finance, international relations, the labour market, family and health, quality assurance, and marketing. Government and non-government agencies should co-operate to create a favourable environment for international students. In some cases, institutions attract international students to make up for the

drop in domestic student enrolments. Although the major countries still lack greater coordination of their policies, there is a relatively continuous increase in international student numbers (Sá, & Sabzalieva, 2018). China also tries to increase the number of international students by making flagship universities more visible in the global educational field. Due to its endeavours, the number of international students doubled by 2018 and has become a significant competitor with other major recruiting countries, but it has not yet achieved a dominant position. The Chinese government has had a significant role in the process, and Chinese universities' ranking has increased significantly. Recruitment of international students can enhance the institutions' international reputation. Chinese universities' primary strategy has been to provide scholarships and programmes in English (Gao, & Liu, 2020). At smaller universities in smaller countries like Norway, recruiting international students is a way of expanding their scope of recruitment to larger neighbouring countries like Russia and this way, the universities can achieve higher scores on international rankings (Frølich et al., 2009). Universities emphasise excellence as the main attraction in recruiting a larger number of students (Frølich, & Stensaker, 2010). Besides achieving higher rankings on the international scale, there can be other reasons why universities try to recruit a larger number of international students. The reasons can be commercial: international students represent a revenue source for institutions. Another reason includes the creation of an international academic community to share international knowledge. If we investigate Turkish universities, they act as emerging competitors fighting for a higher share of international students. The primary motivations for universities to recruit international students include creating cultural diversity, which helps to enhance the quality. The government has also come to realise that they need to make some changes in their state scholarship programs and in government initiatives to have a positive effect on increasing the number of international students at Turkish universities. However, it is not always easy to achieve higher numbers of international students in a short time, but Turkey has also become a prime destination for international higher education (Gök, & Gümüş, 2018). Institutions aim to recruit a higher number of top international students to promote the institution's brand globally and be internationally recognised as a diverse institution. Commodification occurs as the international recruitment

environment becomes competitive. Institutions are under pressure due to commodification, and they should go beyond rankings and apply more individualised approaches to recruitment. Rankings are still significant to international students, but other factors also influence prospective international students. When there is a significant growth in international student numbers, institutions' infrastructure and support systems should keep pace with the increased demand (James-MacEachern, 2018). Strategic plans are mediating tools, and they help define coordination resource allocation that is important for international student recruitment. Strategic plans play an essential role in coordinating institutional goals and articulating the institution's strategic priorities. These strategic plans should be shaped based on national policies (James, & Derrick, 2020).

4.6 The EU

In the case of the European Union, universities need to define what international students mean. A distinction is often made between students coming from the European Union or outside the EU. In most cases, students coming from countries that are not member states of the EU pay higher tuition fees to universities. This view highlights the economic importance of education and considers universities as competitive providers of service, and students act as consumers. Not only do tuition fees represent the economic benefits of international students for universities, but postgraduates working as researchers also offer economic contributions in the long run. From this respect, international students can be seen as contributors to the university's international status. International students can enhance their opportunities to get higher salaries, increase their status and contribute to the welfare of their families and countries (Bolsmann, & Miller, 2008).

4.7 The Former Soviet Countries

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, former Soviet countries developed economically, and there were more and more students going to study abroad from these countries. Students from these countries often choose the UK for study purposes because of the high reputation of universities. Some of these countries have major government funding schemes for studying abroad. Universities like students from former Soviet countries partly because they actively contribute to university life's social and

cultural aspects and are keen on integrating and making friends with students from other countries. The social and cultural exchanges with international students offer all the students an insight into these countries' life and culture. Another advantage of international students is their academic approach. They like academic challenges, well-motivated and talented. International student recruitment agencies sometimes overlook the region of the former Soviet Union because they do not have enough knowledge about these countries. In the future, they would need to change their recruitment strategy concerning these countries as it represents a vast market of potential international students (Chankseliani, 2018). Universities use a mix of approaches to recruit from this region: recruitment via an agent, working with schools within the region, country visits, country-specific scholarships, alumni engagement and customer relationship management (Chankseliani, & Hessel, 2016).

4.8 Aiding Foreign Students

While international students can contribute to the image of universities as diverse and globally connected, at some universities, for example in Ireland, some other elements of internationalisation, such as creating a multicultural campus space or internationalising curricula, are still evolving. It is essential to encourage students to tolerate diversity and intercultural interaction well beyond the university (O'Connor, 2017). Universities should have the necessary resources to assist international students throughout their graduate programs. Universities should develop mentor programs where international students work as mentors for new students. It helps new students adapt and achieve academic success. There should be events that encourage interaction between international and domestic students. When international students join international courses in English, they should improve their English language skills if English is their second language. Fluency in English helps them understand lectures so they can achieve higher academic results (Arcuino, 2013).

4.9 Methods of Recruitment

International student recruitment is often assisted by the employment of agents. Despite its popularity, this type of recruitment can have some pitfalls. It derives from the fact that the agents' interests differ from the institutions' interests and goals. There is an information asymmetry between the two

parties. Some key issues that are likely to arise include accidental or intentional misinforming, unprofessional services, misconduct, document fraud, and leaking sensitive information. Institutions should use adequate procedures and monitoring practices to avoid unwanted behaviour. Government agencies and organisations should determine complete guidelines and frameworks in all countries concerned. The effectiveness of monitoring tools and incentives is doubtful, but reviewing the best practices can mitigate the risks (Nikula, & Kivistö, 2020). In countries like New Zealand and Australia, the government has introduced legislation that applies to education providers in the course of international student recruitment. One of the main goals of this legislation is to protect international students' interests. The development of education agent standard in the two countries represent more government control and protects international students who use education agents' services. Binding, detailed and written agent contracts are required for accountability. Education providers need to ensure that agents have access to the most up-to-date information. Agents' details are required to be disclosed on providers' websites and in a centralised database. There is some progress regarding the requirements in professional service and agent transparency. Stricter regulations for agents to protect international students' rights should be applied globally at all destinations and sending countries (Nikula, 2020). However, reliable agents can provide help through the whole process, including counselling, application, visa-processing services, arranging travel and accommodation and finding part-time employment for students. Agents can provide specific information which is more in-depth and academic-related. Agents can also apply persuasive marketing tactics, and professional sources of information can have a stronger influence on students (Pimpa, 2003). Agents have become integral to international student recruitment. They are free to prospective students, but universities pay commissions to them after successful recruitment. Agents' huge advantage is that they better understand the specific local environment from where international students come. As agents are paid on a commission basis, they are interested in influencing international students and directing them towards some universities (Beech, 2018). When students who have clear ideas about their destinations of studies use the services of agents, the commission greatly exceeds the investment made by the agent. Agents in Africa can prove as a useful source of local intelligence,

and they have access to areas that are hard to reach for international visitors. Using agents can guarantee market expansion even when there is strong competition, as they are motivated to maximise their commissions. Students appreciate agents' work, as they can talk face-to-face to them to provide information on various issues (Hulme, Thomson, Hulme, & Doughty, 2014). Commission rates range from 12 to 15 per cent of the tuition fee for the first year, but some universities pay even more. They also pay continuation commissions for students who go on from a pathway program to the first year. Some universities even pay bonuses on top of commissions for meeting some targets. Some agents receive payments from students also, which means a conflict of interest when the sources of income are not transparent. In lack of transparency, students' welfare and institutions' reputations can be damaged. There is no one-size-fits-all approach to the contractual governance of agents in various countries as there are different variables concerning international student recruitment (Raimo, Huang, & West, 2021). Institutions should take some effective measures to ensure transparency, integrity and accountability to protect themselves against the risks of unethical behaviour of agents for profit maximising purposes. Institutions should follow some steps, including assessing campus readiness, establishing institutional protocols and policies, developing a contract, vetting prospective agents, delivering training and monitoring agency performance. There are different types of agencies: some specialise in particular countries or academic programs, some offer multifaceted services. Some institutions use firms that provide agency management services. Such firms manage a network of international student recruitment agencies, and they serve as a coordinating intermediary between the institution and the agency. Institutions should pay attention to the signs of good practice of agencies. These include consistently positive student feedback and commitment to professional development (West, & Addington, 2014). One way to increase transparency is to have an agent database with member reviews of agencies. Time commitment is necessary to ensure positive results for stakeholders. The regulation of agents by an external certification body could guarantee good practices and standards (Kirsch, 2014). International student recruitment trade shows positively affect international student recruitment if universities are represented by professional and qualified staff. Research shows that exhibitors should use emotional marketing messages

and arguments. Thus, they can positively influence the confidence levels of prospective international students. In addition, they should engage in confidence and trust-building activities for visitors (Gottlieb, & Beatson, 2018).

4.10 Attracting Students

If universities want to attract a large number of participants for study abroad courses, they should identify the most probable segments of participating, including graduate students, general education students, community college students and students majoring in subject to be taught. The financial component represents an essential part of a study abroad program. The expenses consist of different parts: the program cost (such as transport, accommodation, meals), the tuition cost, passport application fees, visa, medical insurance and other on-site costs (such as souvenirs, shopping, personal travel) (Lukosius, & Festervand, 2013). There are some recommendations that universities can follow if they want to increase the number of international students. Firstly, it is essential to diversify recruitment targets. Secondly, providing pre-arrival support in the visa process helps students choose the given university. In addition, universities should choose some new approaches of recruitment methods, for example, video-sharing channels on social media. Alumni can play an important role in attracting prospective international students; thus, universities should engage their alumni networks in recruitment. Institutions can give advice to help students manage the financial costs of their studies (Schulmann, & Le, 2018). Universities need to be ready and flexible to change with the volatile market of international student education, and they should exploit its positive organisational effects. Institutions should develop their market orientation to be successful in the global market of higher education. This market orientation should be based on an integrated marketing strategy, which focuses on export competence and management commitment (Naidoo, 2010). Institutions with a greater market focus usually have a higher number of international students. Institutions should have an international marketing strategy. There is no universal recruitment tactic that is effective at every institution. Several different factors play a role in successful recruitment, including location, cost and reputation. Institutions with a well-developed and communicated marketing plan tend to have a higher number of international students. The marketing plan should be tailored

to the individual institution and its environment (Ross, Heaney, & Cooper, 2007). Research suggests there is a positive relationship between the market orientation of an institution and the innovativeness of international student recruitment. Market orientation is also in connection with organisational performance. Innovativeness plays a significant role in incremental international student recruitment improvements. With a strong learning orientation, institutions can achieve better organisational performance and innovativeness (Ross, & Grace, 2012). International student recruitment performance should be based on inter-functional orientation. Once institutions know the needs of international students and the external competitive environment and translate this knowledge into action, they can achieve strong market performance. The information provided to international students at various contact points should be consistent and supportive. Institutions have a competitive advantage if all personnel involved in international student recruitment have consistent and accurate information. The key to successful international student recruitment is the internal environment of the institution if there is sharing of information and collaboration across internal divisions without bureaucratic barriers (Ross, Grace, & Shao, 2013). International students are looking for high-quality courses that help them start their careers and improve their work prospects. They think that the education system is better in their destination countries than in their home countries. International student satisfaction is essential as satisfied students are more likely to recommend the institutions. Institutions should improve the on-campus experience of international students and implement programs that reduce some sociocultural challenges. In some cases, those who take part in international student education need some additional training, for example, intercultural training (Roy, Lu, & Loo, 2016). If international students attend courses, for example, in the health profession, institutions need to provide field placement for them as part of the program. International students can face challenges due to their English language proficiency and temporary resident status. Before students begin their placement, they need to be well prepared regarding their language proficiency, local knowledge professional and cultural expectations. Research suggests there are several challenges in providing placements for international students, including preparing students, providing support and training for educators and improving collaboration

between placement agencies and institutions (Ross, Ta, & Oliaro, 2020). The attraction of Chinese universities for international students is that students would like to experience the Chinese educational system, and they like the incorporation of bilingual textbooks and study materials. In Japan, the Ritsumeikan Asian Pacific University offered guaranteed admission and the possibility of multicultural education to attract more international students. Some colleges in France, Germany and Italy emphasised the speciality programs and employed international administrators, staff and professors. Most universities in Europe rely on their governments in order to recruit international students. Most Brazilian universities, especially in business programs, have a team or an advisor responsible for the university's internationalisation. The advantage of Canadian universities for international students is education and technical knowledge, and highly ethnic and diverse backgrounds. There are some aspects that emerging universities need to take into consideration if they want to recruit international students. First, they need to decide how they will fund the international student recruitment process. Next, they should create an international student relations office and team. Then they need to create tailored materials, advertisements, events and programs. Finally, they should develop a multicultural atmosphere by study materials and inviting international professors (Onk, & Joseph, 2017). In the Gulf States, international branch campuses have been established to ensure the global increase in higher education capacity. It has been more convenient and cheaper for students from the area to find an international program closer to their homes. Countries like Singapore, Malaysia, Qatar, Hong Kong and the UAE have set up international higher education hubs. International branch campuses mean that some educational facilities are also located in a country different from their parent institution. The branch bears the name of the parent institution; it has some permanent staff and offers courses in various fields. Some world-class universities have been attracted to set up branches in the region. The competition among international branch campuses is fierce, as they have to compete with each other regionally, but at the same time with the main home campuses of well-respected universities. If international branch campuses can develop high-quality education and research excellence in the region, they can increase the number of international students (Wilkins, & Huisman, 2011). Research suggests that international students

have different motivations when going to international branch campuses. The two main dimensions of pull factors are convenience and country-specific advantages. Other important pull factors include improved prospects in the regional labour market and familiarity with culture and lifestyle. Push factors include insufficient capacity in home country higher education, lack of choice, low quality and ineligibility to enter public higher education in home country (Wilkins, Balakrishnan, & Huisman, 2012). In the Middle East, the top country destinations for international students depend on social and geographical linkages and the country's academic reputation. Some destination countries with high international student numbers are the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Turkey. International students come from countries that are close to the destination country. In the Middle East, higher education policies of countries are based on various factors, including political, religious, cultural, economic and social contexts. Countries should decide on their international student market, and they should study the conditions of the target market from a different point of view: social, economic and academic (Arabkheradmand, Shabani, & Nikkhoo, 2014).

4.11 Conclusion

In conclusion, there are several methods to attract students abroad, create an appreciating and helpful environment for them, and make governmental policies and universities' strategies align so that "pull" factors favour foreign recruitments. Agents are the most commonly used option. Though this method has its pitfalls, it was proven to be the most effective tool for universities to contact students abroad, create an advantageous image, and share details and information regarding courses, agendas, or principals. This article consists of secondary sources, organising them to help further research concerning recruitment.

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5

Student satisfaction in the quality assurance process when collaborating with six universities in a hybrid manner

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Collaboration with different universities and offering different modules to students from different universities in a hybrid manner also brings out new challenges for quality assurance processes. Central in this article is the question what is the role of the student satisfaction in the quality assurance process when collaborating with six universities in a hybrid manner.

5.1 Introduction

Students are the main customers of the programmes at any university; not adding their feedback in the vital process of quality assurance may lead to dissatisfaction. Consequently, bad reviews of the programmes not having a structural quality assurance process with student feedback embedded could ultimately result in not being accredited.

Moreover, the current system of semester evaluation has no direct connection to the quality assurance system of each participating university. Although the lecturers and the management receive an overview of the results, no overall conclusions are drawn, nor are KPIs identified and set.

Measuring student satisfaction through a semester evaluation can give lecturers and management an overview of whether the organization meets or exceeds the students' expectations.

From a marketing perspective, these results should also be shared with the customer, who are the students in this study. At Fontys, this is not structurally embedded in the process. To fulfil the requirements for quality assurance and make the current semester student evaluations connected to the current quality assurance process at all universities and feed the information back to the students, this article looks at the role of customer satisfaction from a student's perspective within the current quality assurance system. (Josso, 2021)

To find the gap between the expected and experienced quality of Fontys students, focus group meetings with students were held in 2021. To ensure representativeness, students are chosen based on an equal division over the curriculum. There will be 3 groups for the focus group comprising of a minimum of 4 members. The focus group were held online and have lasted for a maximum of 60 minutes.

5.2 Analysis

When analysing the answers given in the focus groups, it becomes clear that there is a lot of agreement between the students of the different programmes. Answers given in the focus groups were largely in line with each other.

When the students were asked to describe the quality culture within the organisation, they were generally struggling to answer the question. Some of it had to do with the students' inexperience; they were just a couple of months in the organisation, and other students recognised quality culture elements but struggled to describe this.

When asked about the kind of evaluations used in the organisations, almost all students partially answered this question. It is interesting to see that students connect the evaluations used in the organisation to the quality culture in the previous question.

When asked about the level of detail of the surveys used, the students gave different answers. About half of the students prefer a shorter questionnaire since they feel that too many questions are posed, and it takes too long to answer all the questions. The other half would like to see more detailed questions for them to answer so that they can explain their answer. For example, student 210212 answered as follows:

I will say I prefer a bit less questions, like more detailed, because sometimes even I get bored when I do this survey. Like, sometimes I find them just too long, to be honest. So I would prefer them, like more detailed, but shorter ones.

Some even went further to suggest what would attract their attention and keep them focused:

210208: I would prefer Instagram. Since I use the page, the Instagram page of folders to get most of my information. And most of them use think that the Instagram. Communication is very cool. And what is very nice is that you're able to take over the Instagram account from photos for one day, as a student. So if you publish the results today and say what, what needs to be improved and how to communicate that, that would be really cool.

It was clear that there was an issue with how communication flows at Fontys. There is, however no general agreement on whether the communication process itself (both for courses and results of different surveys).

210205: Not in every project, of course, is completely clear what is needed at the end of the semester. Sometimes it's very unclear. And it's also depending on what, which provides your app, the one wants it, in the middle of the project, the other ones at the end of the project, it's sometimes very difficult to know exactly what people want, and therefore we have a lot of communication between the students in order to find out who is doing what and what is the best what is it that the lecturer wants from you, and especially difficult to know what it what do I have to do in order to get a very good grade. That is difficult. Most of the time during the module during the semester it becomes more clear of what is expected. However, it's, It's hard to know, in the beginning. This is especially valid for all the project work that we do.

Students speak comparatively about their previous studies elsewhere, and communication at Fontys organised. The discrepancies are not mentioned as bad; however, there is a clear understanding of what communication can do to improve both quality process and study results. The link to the quality process with the communication flows was also clearly stipulated:

210201: I can, I can start with something positive, I think, to

get in that direction as well, again, I for myself, I'm very satisfied, let's say or on a scale from one to five, I would say it's a solid four. With when I put it in, in relation with study the studies that have done before, I think that many, let's say standard phrases, that you get told when going to school or university, like, we're always there for you, we're always listening to what you want to say. And we always are willing to improve that, despite the fact that there might be a lack of communication sometimes, and not everything can be lived 100% all the time. For myself, I have the feeling that this is very positive. In the IB programmes, especially with my student coach and the lectures that I had so far apart from the first semester with the project, everybody was open to feedback when I felt like it would be good to give them some, and the overall quality of the courses and being interconnected with the with the project was Yeah, I'm satisfied with that, say like that.

When the students were asked about the communication about the survey's it got a bit complicated. Since the different study programmes communicate differently about the results, the answers ranged from no communication to communication to a specific group. As one respondent simply puts it:

We should work on communication issues and communicate more effectively.

When they were asked how they would prefer to receive the information, the answers differed per programme again. Nevertheless, one common denominator was clear, not in an e-mail but preferably in communication methods were also some of the backgrounds of the results and the follow up could be explained. Or in the words of student 210203:

I think it would be great if we, I don't know, it could be just like kind of a newsletter where it just like stated, this is the feedback that we received from you, this is what we would like to adapt, or this is something that we cannot change because of this reason. So it was also great to see why some changes can be adapted. And also to see the progress and process like how changes can be implemented.

When the students were asked about their expectations on the study programmes we got quite similar answers from the students of all programmes. They indicate that they tried to prepare themselves well before they started. In general, students indicate that their study programmes are mainly in line with

what they expected upfront from the programmes.

When asking more detailed questions on the expectations of a semester or module, the answers are again quite similar. But now, the students indicate that they are unsure of their expectations about the semester or module. Student 210204 explains this as follows:

I never did, because we were the first ones. So it was always a bit; we'll see. So, yeah, but it always worked out. In the end, we always understood eventually, even if it's two weeks before the end.

The questions on how students would like to measure the quality of their programmes were met with mixed responses. Analysis of the focus group data shows that the students are in the now and here. They point to the current measurement tools of surveys and the DPC in particular. But interesting enough, a number of students also mention dialogue sessions with students, which is not laid down in any policy documents or practised at any programmes, except for the informal pizza meetings. Student 210206 summatively gave the following answer on this:

I would ask the student members of the DPC to more extensively discuss with students and maybe do a survey or so with all students in the programmes to go more in-depth in the quality expectations of the students. Right now, we talk always with the people that we know. And it would be very beneficial if we talk with more students than only the ones that we know dialogue privately, it's always better to discuss quality than a normal survey, so maybe you serve together with dialogue sessions with more students. And, yeah, get, get everybody who is interested involved in these sessions. So not only the class representatives but everybody who is interested. That would be more beneficial than an open semester survey that not everybody fills in or only to people who are angry or happy.

The understanding that students' voices need to be heard is vividly presented here. Both communication and involvement in quality processes seem to attract the most attention. Interviews and focus groups' results presented here show some discrepancies in how some items are defined. There is the expectation that student voices are heard and that this feedback is seen back in improved education quality. The next chapter discusses in detail the interpretation of the data presented in this

chapter. The discussion is based on the findings from the three sources of data: documents, interviews and focus groups.

Especially when talking about the Total Quality of Education, management is supposed to be committed to supporting the quality assurance process. It is not possible to conclude that management is not supportive of the quality assurance process. However, the fact is that information is not structurally provided to everybody who needs this. This is, of course, is a management task. So structurally, there should be more focus in the organisation on everybody's participation in the quality assurance process by providing all relevant information to everybody in need. Dahlgaard et al. (1995) posit that management commitment is key to the achievement of quality. The lack of structural feedback may signal weak feedback systems typically created by management and education providers. Though laid down in the documents, empirical data contradicts the application of the system.

When looking at the focus on the student's participation in the quality assurance process, one sees student participation in the quality assurance process. In that case, all programmes have a departmental participation council with lecturers and students, just as the Dutch law prescribes. Also, from the document review, we found a student chapter in each of the four self-evaluation reports. Also, students help filling out the different surveys on behalf of the organisation and the Dutch government. The participation in filling out the surveys is declining, however. Challenges to the maintenance of the system were also raised, such as dwindling numbers of survey fillers and the voluntary nature of the surveys.

Data analysis shows that student's participation in the quality assurance process from the focus groups that lecturers and students would like to see things change. Especially when looking into Total Quality of education, there should be everybody's participation and a focus on customer and employee and a focus on the facts. This notion was supported by Schneider and White (2004), who assert that there is more to customer satisfaction. To achieve the quality that satisfies both the customers and the service providers, wide-ranging participation is needed (Hill et al., 2007). It is fair to conclude from the interviews and focus groups that everybody participates in all programmes. Also, in the focus groups, students indicated that they would like to see a different kind of question to focus more

on the customer. So the focus on the facts according to the total quality of education should also be that both lecturers and students need quality assurance. Williams (2016) noted that doing different things may lead to nobody's satisfaction. Looking at the data analysis, student groups depict discrepancies in the direction to achieve total quality in education.

5.3 Conclusions

First, the management and programmes teams need to focus more on the quality of education, especially the communication around this. Analysis shows there is attention for quality, but differences are found in what is essential and who communicates what. Concerning the total quality of education, this should not happen. Especially looking at focussing on the facts, there is no alignment in what facts must be measured. Then what is measured should be sufficiently communicated or be available to the different stakeholders.

Secondly, the wish in the organisation is to change the way the semester evaluations are executed and used. When the organisation agrees on what facts need to be measured, there could be changes. Noteworthy is also to start with measuring the expectations of the customers, in this case, the students. The request from focus groups was to have shorter questionnaires with more room for explanation.

Thirdly the communication needs to improve. It is evident from the focus groups analysis that there are differences in communication in the organisation. This should be structurally embedded in the entire organisation. It needs to be upfront clear who will receive the results and what will be communicated to whom. So next to the what of communication - also the process of what is determined. (Josso, 2021)

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6

New Modes of Mobility: Bicycle Project and Nailing It

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This is a description of the two interdisciplinary and internationally conducted modules called 'Bicycle Project' and 'Nailing It'. These modules were implemented in the area of EFL and Communications at the Department of Economics and Business Administration of the University of Applied Sciences Würzburg-Schweinfurt, Germany (UAS FHWS), together with our partners at the University of Applied Sciences, Seinäjoki, Finland (SeAMK).

6.1 Introduction

In the following, we are going to give a brief outline of the structure and content of both modules and its impact on teacher and student collaboration on an international level, considering the overall intention of creating a truly intercultural experience for our students (Internationalisation at Home).

6.2 Bicycle Project

Project background:

The project idea originated in 2017, when Claudia Lopes Victorio and Dominik Winkler tried to integrate an intercultural experience into the Media Management degree programme. The ESP and business English lecturer, together with the Erasmus+ project coordinator, implemented this idea for the first time in the Public Relations class in 2018, and the "Bicycle Project"

became the basis for the Erasmus+ project "New Modes of Mobility".

Bicycle Project – BMM – Public Relations

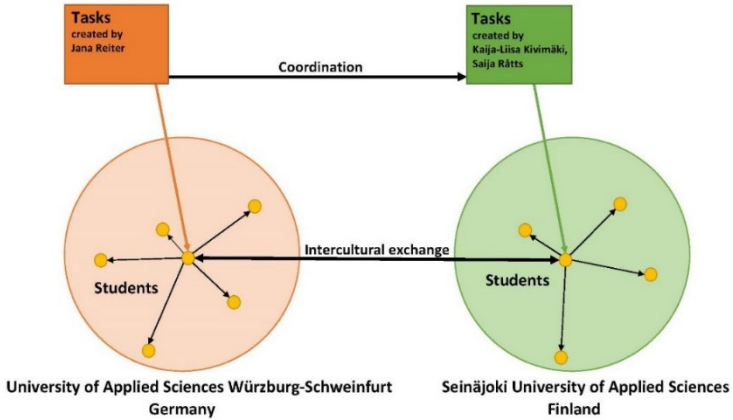


Figure 6.1 Bicycle Project – FHWS and SeAMK

Promotion of the 21st century skills

This project strongly promotes the so-called "21st-century-skills". These are competencies based on the OECD Learning Compass "Future Projects Education and Skills 2030". According to the "Higher Education Reform Digitisation", this includes four areas of competence:

- handling of media, technologies, information and data
- virtual and personal communication and collaboration against the background of diversity
- creative problem-solving, the ability to innovate, analytical and critical thinking
- flexibility, tolerance of ambiguity, self-motivation and independent work.

Project goal and project participants:

The project aims to acquire competences for the working world of today and tomorrow and offers a range of tools to promote professional and pedagogical competences in adult education. Students of the Media Management programme at the

University of Applied Sciences Würzburg-Schweinfurt participate digitally in this project together with two student groups from the Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences in Finland.

Project coordinators

In 2018, the project was coordinated by Claudia Lopes Victorio (FHWS), Kaija-Liisa Kivimäki (SeAMK) and Saija Rätts (SeAMK). In 2019, 2020 and 2021, Jana Reiter (FHWS) and the above mentioned Finnish lecturers coordinated the project.

Project procedure in 2021/22

Phase 1: At the beginning of the winter semester 2021/2022, German students were divided into groups of six. Since not many German students know about the Finnish way of life, their first task was to do some research on the Nordic country. After collecting some information, they created a product suitable for the Finnish market. To see how successful their imaginary products would be, they contacted Finnish students by email and enquired about the Finnish market. Finnish students replied to the emails clarifying all questions. The most exciting part of the first phase was when the German and Finnish students met in virtual meetings. German students hosted the meetings where they discussed whether and to which extent their products were suitable for the Finnish market. The virtual meetings were recorded to be evaluated later.

Phase 2: For the second group of Finnish students, media management students created PR presentations in a video form. This phase was a challenge for many students. Due to the Corona restrictions, not all students were able to work with the FHWS equipment. However, despite the difficult conditions, the students welcomed the creative work, as it was the only opportunity to record a video during that semester. Before Christmas, the German students sent links to the presentations to the Finnish students. In the first week of the marketing class in January, Finnish students watched the PR presentations and prepared feedback based on specific criteria.

In the middle of January, all participants of the second project phase met in a virtual meeting, at which the first phase of the project was introduced. The final group meetings were moderated by Finnish students. Finnish students gave detailed feedback on the PR presentations of their colleagues. Also this

time, the virtual meeting were recorded to be evaluated later. At the end of the second phase, the German students were very pleased to receive feedback on their main assignment, the video presentation.

Project evaluation

According to the feedback received, all students benefited from the international exchange and were able to reflect on and evaluate their own work. Through the competences acquired in the Bicycle Project, the students are now able to actively and independently participate in intercultural projects in the future.

Here are some examples of the feedback collected in Moodle.

- “I especially liked the meeting with the Finns because we could really use our English and meet new people.”
- “The meeting with the Finnish students studying marketing was the best part of the project. It was super cool to talk to them and meet people from another country. Also, it was fun to shoot the product video.”
- “The meeting with the Finnish students was very enriching. It was nice to work with people internationally. We were lucky that our Finnish fellow students spoke good English.”
- “The cooperation with the Finnish students was fun. The practical part with the product videos was also interesting for our studies.”
- “It was also very nice to talk to other students from other countries. Since we didn’t know the Finnish students beforehand, we had to make some small talk to get to know them better. Unlike what I was expecting, the small talk felt natural and not forced. This experience showed me how important the English language is to communicate. English is not the native language of either the Finns or us Germans, but we were still able to communicate well and do some small talk.”

How can we improve this project in the future?

1. Stay focused on the main goal – share the purpose of the project with all participants.
2. Improve project planning – make sure all project team members know their exact roles in the project.
3. Offer face-to-face meetings in Finland or Germany.

Conclusion - Bicycle Project

Four semesters of the Bicycle Project brought a new way of teaching to the university classroom. The last project conducted in 2021/2022 was facilitated exclusively virtually via Zoom. There are advantages as well as disadvantages of virtual facilitation. These include limited length of interaction, limited relationship-building opportunities and limited opportunities for one-to-one communication so all project coordinators hope that future projects can be also conducted in person. In this way, the intercultural experience can motivate students to go abroad independently to acquire more intercultural competences and self-confidence.

6.3 NewM ‘Nailing IT’:

General description of the module

This communications class was conducted in the Fall Semester 2020 and 2021. It was offered as a 5CP elective for students of Business Studies of several European partner institutions and held online via conference tools, like Microsoft Teams and Zoom.

General Objectives

Students develop an idea into a product and present it to an international audience; with this they practise:

- Online communication skills – students organize themselves in teams via conference and messenger tools in order to share ideas and summarized information on their tasks and given topics
- Ideation and innovation skills – by researching and using brainstorming and specific conceptualization techniques students were able to experience and practise creating innovative ideas in a chosen area.
- Teamwork skills – throughout the course, participants worked in their same groups of 3-5 students
- Feedback skills – students practised giving feedback by assessing each other’s performance throughout and particularly regarding the final product presentation
- Online presentation skills – students practised summarizing their ideas and visualising and delivering a professional presentation to their peers and professional evaluators.

Target group:

Business students from partner universities (Hungary, Germany, Finland, The Netherlands, Poland and Romania)

Number of students 10-30 (min.-max.)

Pre-requisites: English level B1-B2

Technical pre-requisites: Basic IT skills, laptop or desktop computer, access to webcam and microphone, internet connection, access to SeAMK's Moodle

Learning outcomes

The intended learning outcomes (ILOs) cover basic 21st century language learning skills, in particular the students are able to improve their online communication skills, with a focus on presentation skills. Moreover, by supporting collaboration among students and encouraging students to work in mixed teams, they strengthen online teamwork skills and professional feedback skills. Also, when looking at the tasks students are motivated to obtain knowledge and understanding of how to develop an idea into an appealing product.

Moreover, participants can gain experience and understanding of the similarities and differences between home and partner institution. Casting a look into the professional future of these students, the whole structure of the class should also lead to increased opportunities for networking across Europe.

Course materials:

Students were able to access the following types of material via the SeAMK module platform Moodle:

- A study guide especially developed and designed for the module.
- Presentation slides introducing theoretical topics
- Links to online reading material for an in-depth approach to the given topics
- Task descriptions
- Assessment grids

Implementation and conduct:

The scheduled teacher-led online sessions involved interactive activities in groups: lecturers created an international online

environment facilitating online team collaboration and supporting advanced use of modern technology.

With this class it became mandatory for the participants to show autonomous teamwork of which the students were responsible for setting up and keeping documentation about.

Teacher Role:

Teachers of both institutions (SeAMK and FHWS) collaborated throughout the entire module's endurance. This comprised the initial course development, the implementation and the final evaluation of student's performance. The first and the last sessions were held together. Summarising, the main roles were:

- Pedagogical online designer
- Moderator and facilitator
- Study administrator and counsellor
- Evaluator

Conclusion - NewM 'Nailing IT'

By completing this module, students experience working in international teams in order to process and finalise the assigned tasks. The accomplishing of these tasks require autonomous coordination, problem-solving and self-assessment.

What is more, the distinctive characteristic of this way of learning and teaching are its multidisciplinary study tasks and simulation of virtual mobility.

The overall goals of this module are to develop internationalisation at home, transversal skills and digital competencies.

7

Blended Learning Projects carried out by the University of Zielona Góra and the University of Applied Science, Würzburg-Schweinfurt - case studies

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The article describes the research and teaching projects implemented in the form of blended teaching, which have been carried out for students of the University of Zielona Góra and the University of Applied Science, Würzburg-Schweinfurt, for more than 25 years. The methodology of preparation and the case studies of projects which were carried out in different years, with the participation of different business partners from Poland and Germany, is presented.

7.1 Introduction

Since 1996, the University of Zielona Góra (UZ), in co-operation with the University of Applied Science Würzburg-Schweinfurt (FHWS) has, annually, been implementing international research and didactic projects with the participation of international groups of students and companies from Poland and Germany. The main aim of these projects is their practical dimension and the possibility for students to acquire new knowledge about products and markets and thus strengthen their competence in the implementation of inter-cultural tasks in

English. For this purpose, project topics are prepared, together with representatives of industry, mainly from Poland and Germany. Projects are implemented within the framework of the International Project Management and usually include:

- market research and the search for new customers,
- introducing new products to EU markets,
- planning the transfer of technology,
- analysis of the competition,
- development of the concept of building new sales channels,
- searching for new suppliers,
- planning the creation of a branch of an enterprise in a selected EU country.

The topics, scope and schedule of the project are prepared in the winter semester by the academic staff of both universities, namely, Prof. Dr. Manfred Kiesel, Prof. Dr. Reiner Wehner, Prof. Dr. Hab. Eng. Sławomir Kłos and Prof. Dr. Hab. Eng. Justyna Patalas-Maliszewska. A key aspect of these classes is the extensive practical experience of the teaching staff who prepare classes and many projects implemented in co-operation with industry. The staff involved in the preparation, supervision and implementation of the project must meet the following requirements:

- good knowledge of project management methodology,
- extensive experience in the implementation of international projects,
- extensive experience in conducting classes in English,
- extensive experience in co-operation with industry,
- mobility and experience in conducting international workshops or conferences.

The main goal of the project is to gain knowledge, competence and skills for students in the field of:

- international project management methodologies,
- learning about new products, technologies and services,
- performing tasks in international teams,
- knowledge of the market, the economy and the specifics of different countries, namely, those mainly in the EU,
- practical use and improvement of language competences,
- learning about intercultural differences, such as the specifics of Bavaria or the Lubuski region.

International groups of students from all over the world (from e.g., Poland, Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, Denmark, the USA, Taiwan, and Ukraine) study at UZ and FHWS. Both universities have been participating in joint projects for more than 25 years. The main benefit for both universities, involved in the project, is the internationalisation of the teaching process.

7.2 Methodology for implementing the international project

The duration of the project is one semester and for many years it has covered the summer semester only. The scientific and teaching staff, responsible for implementing the project, have devoted the entire winter semester to searching for an industrial partner and preparing the current project topic. On the industrial side, mainly small or medium-sized manufacturing companies are most interested in participating in the project. They want to enter the international market and are looking for personnel in the field of customer service, sales, logistics and technology. The project involves some 30 to 60 students, divided into groups of between 6-8 individuals. Students from UZ are mostly representatives of Management and Production Engineering, while FHWS is represented by international Management students. Such a selection of students allows teams to be formed in which both technical competence and competence in the field of sales and business economics are represented.

The project commences at the beginning of the semester, usually in March; this entails the students travelling from UZ to FHWS for a period of 3 to 5 days. During the first phase of the stay at FHWS, a series of lectures by professors and industry partners is conducted; these include:

- presentation of partner universities,
- an in-depth introduction to the issues of project management,
- presentation of the partner company,
- presentation of the scope of the project.

In the next stage of the study visit, students are divided into mixed international groups. The groups are selected at random in order to ensure their international character, i.e. the maximum dispersion of students of the same nationality in different groups. Usually, participants in the project are assigned, according to a selected random key, such as by birth

date and are then counted down to the indicated number of groups; depending on the number of project participants, they count down from 6 to 8. This stage also includes the selection of group leaders, the definition of the general and specific objectives of the project for each group, the definition of responsibilities for the members of each group, the preparation of contracts with individual groups and the conditions for evaluating the results of the project at the end of the semester. Students prepare scopes and timetables for the implementation of projects and determine the methods of communication they will use during its implementation. Often, in addition to the operational groups that perform specific project tasks, an additional group is created to monitor the progress of the project. Representatives of this group are responsible for analysing the course of the project, in terms of the implementation of the scope, its schedule, managing changes in the project and identifying key problems. In order to analyse the progress of the project, the monitoring group prepares a survey to examine the views of the project participants on key issues and the effectiveness of the implementation of tasks and communication in the working groups.

The last stage of the study is a visit to the company of an industrial partner and a site inspection of the processes and knowledge of the company's products. During this visit, students who already know the scope of tasks to be implemented in the project, can ask questions both of company management and of employees that directly refer to the tasks implemented. Of course, the situation is somewhat different if the location of the industrial partner of the project is not in the vicinity of Würzburg, but rather is in Poland or other remote location. In such cases, it is only possible to present the company using video materials or at a teleconference with company representatives.

An important element of the study visit to FHWS is the organisation of an integration event for the project's participants. The cities of Würzburg and Zielona Góra, where the universities involved in the project are located, have centuries-old wine traditions. Therefore, the event is often associated with wine-tasting and a talk on the most important historical particulars of the region and regional products. During this event, students can also get to know one another better, which contributes to the problem-free implementation of the project's tasks.

The result of the studio trip to FHWS is:

- introduction of project management theory, to students,
- familiarising students with the scope of the project and with the products of the industrial project partner,
- division into working groups and appointment of group leaders,
- preparation of tasks and a project implementation schedule for each group; assignment of persons responsible for implementing their tasks; approval of contracts between groups and professors,
- establishing communication methods and channels, as well as the frequency of remote meetings during the project implementation.

The results of the project are prepared in the form of a report, in English and a presentation.

The next stage of the project takes about 3 months, from March to June. During this stage, students work on the implementation of individual tasks in working groups, while the leaders monitor the process of the implementation of the project. If it is necessary to obtain additional information from the industrial partner of the project, the leaders of individual groups can communicate with representatives of the company. The most common problems encountered during project implementation are:

- no replies to e-mails,
- absences during meetings,
- lack of cooperation between groups, especially important if the results of one group's work are the basis for starting another group's activity,
- failure to perform project tasks,
- poor command of the English language and lack of information flow,
- uneven workload of participants in working groups.

In seriously problematic cases occurring during the implementation of project tasks, i.e. delays, lack of progress in the implementation of tasks, or complaints from group leaders, the professors undertake to solve any problems. Throughout the summer semester, the project is implemented remotely, by students using tele-conferences and e-mails.

A block diagram showing the methodology for implementing a research project, in accordance with the concept of blended teaching, is presented in Figure 1.

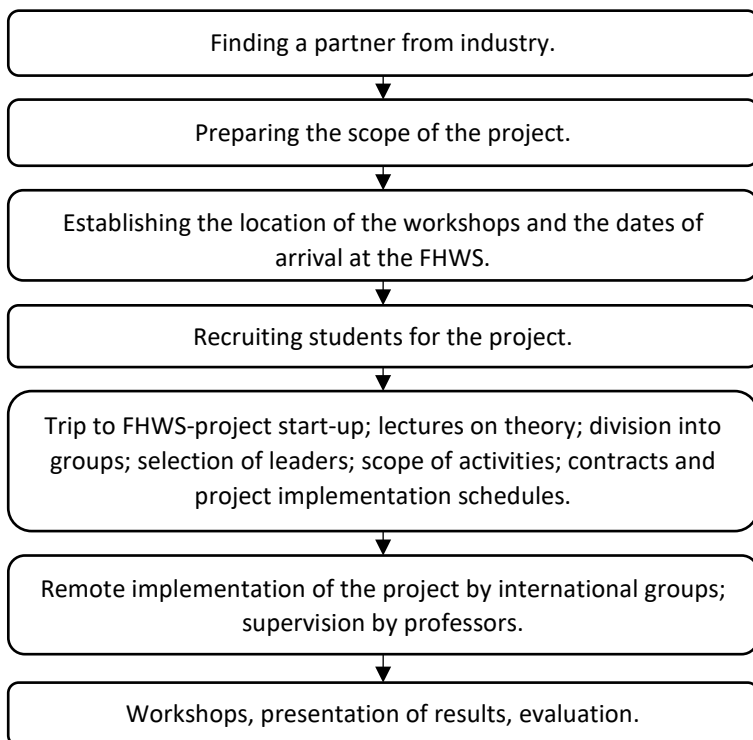


Figure 7.1. Methodology for the implementation of a research project, according to the concept of mixed teaching

The final stage of the implementation of international research and didactic projects is the organisation of workshops during which the results of the projects are presented. So far, the workshops have been organised in the vicinity of Zielona Góra, and in recent years, in Pilzno, due to logistical constraints. During the workshop, students prepare the final versions of the presentation and prepare to perform them. Reports on the implementation of projects are usually sent to the professors before the workshop begins. The presentation time for one working group varies from 30 to 40 minutes. Very often, the workshops are attended by representatives of the industrial partner of the project, who also assess the quality of the project

tasks implemented. During the presentation, students are required to answer questions and defend the project; the students are then graded, based on the report and presentation prepared. The leaders, together with the group members, define the contribution to the project, made by each group member. Very often, during the presentation, students pinpoint which parts of the tasks were performed by a given student and to what extent.

The next chapter presents examples of 3 projects that have been implemented over the last 25 years. They were carried out for companies from Poland and Germany representing various industries.

7.3 Case studies

The 2007 Project with the Fehrer GmbH Company

Fehrer GmbH produces polyurethane foam components for car seats on behalf of such companies as Mercedes, BMW, Audi, Volkswagen, Skoda, Seat, and Volvo. The project carried out by students included an analysis of the car industry, the labour market, logistics infrastructure and support for investments by the European Union in Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and Ukraine. The project was carried out by 7 international student groups of 6-8 people. On behalf of Fehrer GmbH, the CEO of Fehrer GmbH in Kizingen, Roland Borst and the head of the personnel department, Sigfried Kmitta were responsible for the project. During their stay at the Fachhochschule Würzburg-Schweinfurt, students of the research club participated in lectures, familiarised themselves with the company's products and took part in exercises during which they prepared assumptions for the implementation of the project. During the last day of their stay in Germany, the students visited the premises of the Fehrer GmbH Co., where they learned about the key processes carried out in the company.

The results of the projects implemented were presented during the workshops on 13-15 June 2007 at the University of Zielona Góra in Lubiatów. The workshop was attended by 54 students and by the staff of FHWS and UZ.



Figure 7.2 Presentation of Fehrer GmbH products at FHWS 21.03.2007



Figure 7.3 Visit to Fehrer GmbH 22.03.2007

The 2013 Project with MB Pneumatyka

The MB Pneumatyka Co. is located in Sulechów which is approximately 20 km from Zielona Góra. Since 2002, the company has been engaged in the production of components for pneumatic systems, such as connectors, valves, control units etc. The company focusses its activities on the design and manufacture of products used mainly in commercial vehicles. The company's customers are well-known manufacturers of pneumatic braking systems and commercial vehicle manufacturers around the world. Between the 20th and the 22nd of March 2013, FHWS launched a project aimed at analysing European markets, in order to find potential customers for connectors for pneumatic brake systems and air suspensions. Potential customers of the MB Pneumatyka Co. were identified

as manufacturers of commercial vehicles with a total weight of more than 3 tonnes, trailers, semi-trailers and agricultural machinery, in which pneumatic braking systems and air suspensions are installed; 47 students took part in the project. The students were divided into 5 groups. Each group was responsible for analysing a different market location:

1. Russia and Ukraine,
2. Germany,
3. The Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary,
4. France and Italy
5. Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg.

The MB Pneumatyka Co. was represented in the project by the owner, namely, Małgorzata Bieniaszewska. The results of the project were presented at the workshops in Lubiatów, which took place between the 5th and the 7th of June, 2013.

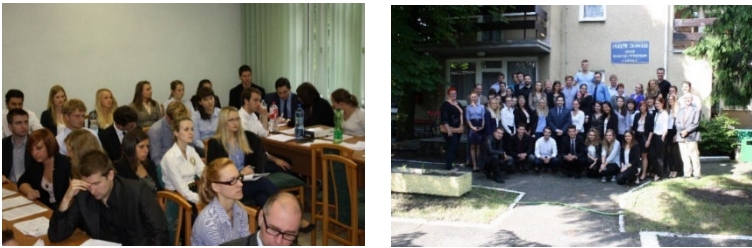


Figure 7.4 Workshop and project with the MB Pneumatyka Co. in Lubiatów, which took place between the 5th and the 7th of June, 2013.

The 2019 Project with the Wolz Nautic Co.

The Wolz Nautic GmbH & Co. KG, located in Acholshausen, specialises in the production of prefabricated teak decks for luxury yachts. The project was initiated in FHWS between the 3rd and the 5th of April, 2019. The project involved 46 students who were divided into 7 working groups carrying out the following project tasks:

1. Retail business opportunities with new sales channels.
2. Optimisation of after-sales service and the settlement of claims
3. Product diversification through sustainable innovation, market research and market strategy.
4. Pricing policy in the boat market and implications for strategy.

5. Market development and description of the customer sector of the French market.
6. Market research and opportunities for the WolzNautic Co.
7. Market analysis in Poland.



Figure 7.5 Visit to Wolz Nautic GmbH & Co. KG on 04.04.2019

The project involved 8 students from UZ. The final task in the project included an analysis of potential customers for Wolz Nautic from within the Polish market; however, for this project - and rather exceptionally - the group of Polish students was not divided up, but was responsible, in its entirety, for implementing this task.

The workshop, during which the results of the work of the project groups were presented, was held at the University of West Bohemia, in Pilsen with whom UZ has been co-operating since 2000; the workshop was held from the 3rd to the 5th of July, 2019. The choice of this university as the venue for the workshops was not accidental. For some considerable time, the problem had been the travelling undertaken by groups of 40 students, by bus from Würzburg in Germany to the University of Zielona Góra, in Zielona Góra, due to the restrictive EU regulations on passenger transport regarding the permissible distance of 600 km. In order to reduce both costs and travel time, it was decided to organise workshops halfway between FHWS and UZ.

7.4 Summary

As mentioned at the beginning of this paper, the blended learning projects described, have been implemented by FHWS and UZ for over 25 years. Over this period, it is estimated that more than 1,000 students from different countries have participated in the projects. The main added value for the universities involved in the implementation of the project is the internationalisation of the course of studies. For many German students, participation in the project was the first good opportunity to get to know Poland, despite the fact that they are so close to one another. The projects enable practical and direct learning about the mindset and cultural specificity of other countries. Those Polish students who participated in the implementation of the project and with whom we still have contacts to this day - namely middle and senior management in enterprises in the Lubuskie region near Zielona Góra - claim that participation in the project was crucial for them in terms of their future professional careers while the friendships that were established during the project's implementation sometimes continue to this day.

Below is a brief description of the advantages and difficulties encountered in implementing the projects described in the paper.

Benefits and strengths of the project:

- acquisition of experience in the implementation of international projects,
- knowledge of intercultural specificity in the implementation of common tasks.
- learning about the requirements of enterprises related to future work,
- practical use and improvement of language competences,
- acquisition of expertise on selected companies and products,
- attractiveness of the manner in which knowledge and experience are acquired.
- establishing contacts and relationships with students from other countries.

Difficulties and weaknesses of the project:

- no systemic method for financing the project,
- no free IT tools to support virtual project management,

- logistic restrictions; the bus ride from Würzburg to Zielona Góra and undertaken by 40 students, takes between 8 and 9 hours and a relief driver is required, which increases the cost of the project,
- poor English skills of some of the students,
- companies participating in the project are searched for on the basis of personal contacts of the professors, there is no systemic approach to searching for business partners.

In conclusion, it should be noted that the projects implemented largely contributed to the internationalisation of studies at both UZ and FHWS. The attractiveness of the project is evidenced by the great interest of students in participating in these projects.

Editors



Dominik Winkler was the project coordinator of the Erasmus+ Strategic Partnership ‘New Modes of Mobility’ Project. Beyond that, he was also a member of the related steering committee and involved in several intellectual outputs of the project. He joined the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration of the University of Applied Sciences Würzburg-Schweinfurt (FHWS) in 2015. In 2016 he became one of the founding members of the Team International Management at FHWS and since then he has worked on various higher education projects. He also teaches with a special focus on internationalisation.



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This book is the outcome of experiences and lessons learned over the course of the three years of the New Modes of Mobility project. This is the second of the two volumes.

In 2019, a consortium of European universities was formed and received Erasmus+ funding for a Strategic Partnership project (Project No. 2019-1-DE01-KA203-005053).

The coordinating institution was the University of Applied Sciences Würzburg-Schweinfurt (Germany), with project partners from the University of Debrecen (Hungary), Fontys University of Applied Sciences (The Netherlands), Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences LTD (Finland), University of Zielona Gora (Poland), and Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu (Romania).

ISBN 978-3-949864-05-6

