

A REFLECTION INTO THE IMPACT OF AN INTERNATIONALISATION EXPERIENCE VIA DIGITAL PLATFORM, BASED ON THE OPINIONS OF STUDENTS AND LECTURERS

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Testo del contributo

Introduction

This study is intended to examine an innovative approach to internationalisation and Higher Education during the Covid-19 pandemic and beyond. It aims to explore how remote cooperative teaching, based on mutual enrichment across international Initial Teacher Education providers, could support the active participation of students in international activities. From an academic point of view, the objective of internationalisation is to enhance of the quality of a higher education system not only from the economical point of view (Migration Advisory Committee 2018) but especially by fostering a change process in institutions (Qiang, 2003). Literature reported many benefits from an internationalisation experience, for example, improved academic quality of teaching and learning, positive impact on the employability of students (Jibeen & Khan, 2015), reinforcement of competencies such as international orientation, cross-cultural sensitivity, open mindedness, second language competence, flexible thinking, tolerance and respect for others (Chan & Dimmock, 2008). Furthermore, research also highlighted more standardised research methods (Akinbode, Al Shuhumi, & Muhammed-Lawal, 2017) thanks to the sharing of resources and expertise in academic research. Research-based evidence highlighted some challenges associated with the internationalisation of higher education such as resource and investment, workload, partnership management, cooperation and motivation (Jiang & Carpenter 2014). In addition, the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions have represented a challenge for internationalisation, mainly based on students' mobility, with a negative impact on the expectations of students' studying abroad after the pandemic (Mok, Xiong, Ke, & Cheung, 2021). Covid 19 and the consequent reluctance of international students to travel requires staff in universities to reflect on internationalisation differently by focussing on virtual and digital platforms, rather than physical contact (Yıldırım, Bostancı, Yıldırım, & Erdoğan, 2021). Lastly, some consideration should be given to the impact that Brexit is having on students' mobility, on international members of staff and on collaborations in the UK Higher Education sector (Broc, 2020). Evidence shows that one of the key points planning for a successful international activity is to integrate them into core teaching, research and scholarship activity of higher institutions (Marinoni, 2019). According to Hudzick (2020), a focus on developing a culture of mutual support and strategic inclusion of all partner Universities and potentially develop a curriculum inclusive of dual purposing resource and mutual enrichment is the best strategy moving forward.

This study has explored the outcomes of an internationalisation experience involving two Universities: University of Glasgow, UK and University Niccolo' Cusano, Italy, from the three key identified aspects:

1. Remote cooperative teaching based on a multilingual and multicultural approach
2. Mutual enrichment: Mutual enrichment emerged in the way that tasks were structured so that both cohorts of students could contribute with their own understanding, knowledge, and experience.

3. Active participation: Active participation was encouraged by the integration of the outcome (PPT presentation and reflection on the experience) in each University's assessment agenda.

Methodology or Methods/ Research Instruments

Participants:

- 18 Year 3 undergraduate students studying at the University of Glasgow, School of Education, on the Master of Education (MEDuc) ITE programme.
- 12 undergraduate Italian student teachers attending the course 'Science of Education' and 4 graduate students attending the training on the job curriculum experience in the University Niccolo' Cusano (UNC), Italy.

International sessions strategy:

- 3 Sessions remotely delivered via zoom, in winter 2021. Sessions were organized focusing on tutors' cultural and language diversity and culturally adapted. They were in English with concurrently translation into Italian and followed a student-centred pedagogical approach through active learning activities.

The teaching team comprised one Italian native speaker; one native English speaker, and one bilingual native Italian and English speaker. They all delivered and supported both cohorts of students in a cross-Language approach based on both languages.

Data Collection

Data were collected around the three key elements:

Remote cooperative teaching: data collected through tutors' reflective journals and discussed in the discussion session.

Mutual enrichment and active participation data were collected through students' session feedback and focus groups.

Data analysis: The transcriptions of the focus groups have been thematically analysed according to a deductive and inductive coding process (Braun & Clarke, 2006), using a pre-existing rubric with themes such as 'mutual enrichment', 'active participation', 'cooperative teaching'. 'Parental engagement' was added later as fourth theme by an inductive analysis of the Italian sessions' feedback. Data was analysed by using Descriptive, In Vivo and Emotion Coding (Saldaña, 2014),

Conclusions

The data analysed so far, has given an initial answer to the research question. The cooperative teaching based on co-development of assessment task embedded in both universities' assessment agenda has certainly encouraged students to actively participate in the session. The careful choice of topic which was relevant for both countries has certainly pushed the mutual enrichment and collaboration with an implication of networking which went beyond the purpose of the planned sessions. Tutors' support impacted on the language and communication barriers both as metacognitive teaching role modelling as well as the practical support with simultaneous translation. The cooperative planning focused on the multilingual and cultural aspect of the session created a feeling of "family", supporting students to actively engage in knowledge exchange and mutual enrichment. This format of internalisation has also been considered a valid small taste alternative to the ERAMSUS programme, in a time when travelling due to the Covid-19 pandemic is restricted, making student mobility difficult. Data also showed that students highly regarded this experience as positive for their professional development and future practice. For example, they reflected on the improvement of their communication skills and their choices of strategies. "[It] was quite tricky to start with, but the

more time we spent with them and more dialogue we had, [and] that line of communication got better and better”.

Future research

Further analysis of data is ongoing and on reflection tutors are now planning a possible follow up project with more balance focused on relevant topics for both Italian and Scottish Education system as it was suggested by students ‘feedback.

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