

Remote cooperative teaching and mutual enrichment as an inclusive experience of internationalization in university

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Abstract

The study offers an example of an inclusive internationalization of university teaching through a digital platform. Inclusive and comprehensive internationalisation requires us to reframe our thinking, also taking advantage of the opportunities offered by digital transformation and exploring new methods of achieving internationalisation goals. Our research investigates how mutual enrichment and cooperative teaching practice among lecturers supports self-efficacy and motivation to study which international research showed to be positively affected by internationalisation experiences. Participants were students at Niccolò Cusano University in Rome and students on the undergraduate Master of Education that attended three sessions delivered remotely by a multilanguage teaching team from both universities. Students were also engaged in collaborative tasks in order to further stimulate collaboration and knowledge exchange. Data were collected before the beginning of the project (T0) and at the end of it (T1). Results showed that two of the subscales of the perceived self-efficacy scale in managing complex problems (Context Analysis and Emotional Maturity) were significantly different between the two administrations, with an improvement in T1.

Keywords: internationalization, mutual enrichment, inclusion, cooperative teaching, self-efficacy, special education need

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1. Introduction

Internationalisation is widely acknowledged by universities as a vehicle for enhancing quality (Marinoni & De Wit, 2019). The European Parliament points out that internationalisation of higher education is “*the intentional process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the*

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purpose, functions and delivery of post-secondary education, in order to enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff, and to make a meaningful contribution to society” (European Parliament, 2015, p. 29). Today internationalization of higher education has a meaning closely linked to the concepts of equity, diversity, and inclusion (DeLaquil, 2019). Brandenburg *et al.* (2019) state that “*internationalization of higher education for society (IHES) explicitly aims to benefit the wider community, at home or abroad, through international or intercultural education, research, service and engagement*”. As highlighted by Marinoni and De Wit (2019), statistics show that the internationalization of higher education is unequal because only about 2% of the world student population can benefit from a period of study abroad and the global flux of mobile students is highly unbalanced. In Italy, only about half of the universities provide specific support for international mobility (Anvur, 2022), considering that in the academic year 2019-20, students with disabilities or with special education needs enrolled in university courses were 36.816, i.e. 2.13% of the total number of students. Students with economic difficulties and from disadvantaged backgrounds must be added to these numbers. All this draws a picture where the practice of inclusive education also in terms of internationalization has become an essential prerequisite from an ethical and quality point of view. There are various areas of focus, starting from the study abroad programs, to courses at colleges or universities in other countries through digital platforms, to international partnerships, academic programs and research activities (Mittelmeier *et al.*, 2021; Leask *et al.*, 2018; Jibeen, & Khan, 2015). However, it could be dangerous to think that scholarship programs and remote participation in lectures of foreign universities are enough to guarantee inclusion in internationalization. What is the meaning of inclusive internationalization? If inclusive education consists of a flexible didactic model aimed at the active participation of all students, with their diversity and differences (Galanti *et al.*, 2021; D’Alonzo, 2017; Cottini, 2017), why not transfer this meaning also to the university's internationalization processes? “*Inclusive internationalisation is about addressing the barriers experienced by historically marginalised and underrepresented groups and simultaneously creating structures, practices, and institutional cultures that make such programmes obsolete*” (Janebova *et al.*, 2022, p. 2). It’s important to remember that internationalization regards not only the student learning experience but also the international teaching and working environments at university as they influence the overall inclusivity of learning environments. In order to create an inclusive internationalization process we need to open our perspective moving from the valorization of student mobility as the predominant approach to internationalization to focusing on flexible work modalities for teachers, communities of practices, etc., taking into

consideration whether programs and modules could be developed and integrated with contents, values, and understandings of different cultures and countries, but also the processes of teaching and learning (Hudzik, 2011). Inclusive and comprehensive internationalization requires us to reframe our thinking, also taking advantage of the opportunities offered by digital transformation and exploring new methods of achieving internationalization goals. The pervasiveness of technology and the related changes in global society and personal life have produced a hybrid scenario of real and virtual contexts (Zappaterra, 2020). Some research conducted in Italy in the last two years, after Covid 19 pandemic, highlight as university students interviewed give mainly positive opinions on the experience of distance learning, the majority, in fact, declare themselves satisfied or very satisfied about the experience (Pacheco *et al.*, 2020; Arengi *et al.*, 2020). Furthermore, students with learning disabilities seem to be those who most benefit from online teaching (Biancalana, 2020). The authors also add that this assessment could be related to the setting up of more flexible and usable teaching environments, in relation to the methods and learning times of students, not forgetting the limitations associated with line difficulties and with IT infrastructures (Ala'a *et al.*, 2020). After all, we need to redesign internationalization processes so that all stakeholders can meaningfully participate with as few specific accommodations as possible, focusing on both 'universal' and 'plural' inclusion (Johnstone, 2022). In this way, we can ensure real gains for everyone in connection to all forms of international activities (Janebova *et al.*, 2022). It allows us to make a methodological deconstruction of inclusive internationalization while maintaining the basic objectives and fundamentals.

The study here presented offers a practice of inclusive internationalization in higher education which bases its effectiveness on collaborative didactics and, in particular, on collaborative teaching and mutual enrichment.

2. Inclusive internationalization process and Cooperative Teaching and Mutual Enrichment

From a university's perspective, internationalisation enhances research and knowledge capacity and increases cultural understanding (Altbach & Knight, 2007). One more benefit is the sharing of resources and expertise in academic research which could lead to more standardised research methods (Akinbode, Al Shuhumi, & Muhammed Lawal, 2017).

From a student's perspective, according to globalization processes, new competencies are needed for people who have to move in new scenarios. Professional and academic competencies are no more sufficient, they have to

be accompanied by soft skills related to an international approach including culture, language and society (Qiang, 2003). Furthermore, as stated by Kreber (2009), people involved in international experiences can develop an ethical commitment and a sense of responsibility and civic engagement. and to cognitive aspects such as open-mindedness, flexibility of thinking, respect, and tolerance for others (Chan and Dimmock, 2008). The international experiences seem to reinforce these competencies beyond transferable employability skills, e.g. teamwork, team leadership, organizational skills, project management, problem-solving, networking, mediation skills, conflict resolution, decision-making, and interpersonal skills (De Wit & Jones, 2018). One of the benefits that are associated with internationalization for students is the development of a sense of responsibility and perceived self-efficacy and resilience due to the possibility to face and work in diverse cultural environments and habits (Bu, 2019; De Wit & Jones, 2018; Zhou & Smith, 2014). Literature shows that internationalization at a distance and at home implemented by digital technology gives positive learning experiences for students. The efficacy of the initiative is linked to the development of an active and collaborative approach for all stakeholders involved (Marinoni, 2019). On one hand, teachers belonging to the institutions responsible for the internationalization process, are all involved in teaching, instructing, and assessing students, realizing a co-teaching model (Brendle *et al.*, 2017). This method leads to a number of benefits such as greater collegial exchanges of strategies between professionals, increased understanding of all students' needs, enrichment of personal practices etc. On the other hand, students have to be engaged in active participation (Bergmark & Westman, 2018) and encouraged to mutual exchange of information, based on the mutual enrichment concept. It can be defined as the extent to which experiences in one role improve the quality of the other (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). Developing a culture of mutual support and practice of effective inclusion of all diversities, habits, and perspectives is the best strategy to reach an inclusive internationalisation approach (Hudzik, 2020).

3. Aim and research question

This study aims to respond to the need of rethinking to an inclusive internationalization process exploiting the opportunities given by digital, ensuring effectiveness in terms of the acquisition of transversal skills such as, in particular, perceived self-efficacy and motivation to study that international research showed to be strictly related to academic performance and metacognitive learning strategies (Hayat *et al.*, 2020; Atoum *et al.*, 2018;

Moreira *et al.*, 2013) but also to student's social wellbeing (Bulgan & Ciftci, 2017). Self-efficacy refers to "beliefs in one's abilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments" (Bandura, 1997, p. 3). Research shows that students who have high self-efficacy often use appropriate cognitive strategies in learning, manage their time effectively, and pay ample attention through their own efforts (Chemers *et al.*, 2001; Poyrazli *et al.*, 2002; Gong & Fan, 2006; Yusoff, 2012).

As regards, motivation, from an educational perspective, motivation has a multi-dimensional structure which is correlated with learning and academic achievement (Mehndroo & Vandana., 2020; Steinmayr *et al.*, 2019, and a focus on the relevant areas for students' needs have to be addressed. The students' motivational level can be influenced by home and school environment, relationship with teachers, interests and skills.

The research question was: How might remote cooperative teaching, based on mutual enrichment, support the student's perceived self-efficacy and motivation to study as per traditional internationalisation activities?

4. Methodology

The Universities involved in the project were:

- University of Glasgow (UoG), School of Education (SoE), Scotland;
- University Niccolò Cusano of Rome (UNC), Italy.

Participants to the three collaborative teaching workshops were:

- student teachers on the undergraduate Master of Education (MEduc) programme at the School of Education, University of Glasgow;
- undergraduate and postgraduate students on the course 'Science of Education at the Niccolò Cusano University, Rome.

Under the topic of Health and Well Being (Nutrition, Movement and Cognition) 3 sessions were delivered remotely to both cohorts of students. Teaching team was composed by lectures from both universities with a multicultural and multilanguage approach. During the workshops, therefore, the strengths and weaknesses of the Italian and Scottish educational systems were highlighted, in order to improve the understanding of the respective differences in teaching methods and learning strategies implemented by learners of different nationality. The workshops were spread over three weeks and adapted to the cultural norms of both countries. Each workshop was delivered in English by one of the teachers with the support of the other two. Materials and resources were co-created, merging pedagogical and didactic strategies from both countries but also language and uses of students. One of them is an Italian native speaker, one English speaker and the third one is a bilingual native Italian and English speaker,

whose learning experience was in the Italian education system but whose main teaching experience was in the Scottish system.

During the workshops and between one and the other, both cohorts of participants, divided into small groups, were also stimulated through project work and interactive work sessions to be developed through collaboration to further enhance reflection, connection, collaboration and knowledge exchange, supported by the teacher team in a cross-country approach based on both languages, for example, the participatory photography method which places the medium of the camera into the hands of learners to show and speak their own realities. They had the possibility to share their knowledge and experience contributing actively to the mutual enrichment beyond any communication barriers. In this context, the obstacle represented by language barriers required participants to implement unusual coping techniques in order to adequately cope with the situation and participate profitably in the training experience.

5. Sample and Data Collection

Data collection was carried out only on the group of Italian students, as the ethical approval by the UoG College of Social Sciences ethics committee was not granted for this data collection.

The research design used in the structuring of the project follows the main features of the cohort design and the variation of the domains under analysis was monitored through the administration of the reagents before the beginning (T0) and at the end (T1) of the workshop path.

Starting from a theoretical assumption, the following tools were administrated:

- **Scale of perceived self-efficacy in the management of complex problems** (Farnese *et al.*, 2007) which allows obtaining four distinct scores in subscales, that measure one's personal beliefs about the ability;
 - o *Emotional maturity*: to manage stressful situations, to face unexpected events, to have self-control over difficult events and situations;
 - o *Finalization of action*: to set concrete and achievable goals, grading their priorities and adapting them to their skills and to pursue the established goals;
 - o *Relational Fluidity*: to interact with others, to help and ask for help and to manage conflicts;
 - o *Analysis of the context*: to “read” the context in which he/she operates by grasping the links between different events and different situations; to understand the requests coming from the environment; to use appropriate language for different circumstances.

- **Questionnaire on motivation and learning strategies** (Moretti *et al.*, 2018) allows evaluation of the factors to be observed based on specific needs, detecting information useful for identifying a multidimensional profile of the student, related to the following factors Self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation (Factor 1), Self-regulation in study (Factor 2), Approach to critical and deep study (Factor 3), Willingness to collaborate with peers (Factor 4), Reflexivity (Factor 5).

The study was conducted on 60 participants who voluntarily joined the research project, signing the informed consent. The questionnaires have been administrated via Google Forms before the beginning (T0) and at the end (T1) of the workshop path, on February 2022.

6. Data Analysis

The data analysis was carried out using Jamovi 2.3.17 with the help of Excel for the construction of the database.

The sample is composed of 60 participants aged 19-60 (51 females and 9 males). As regards school degrees, the sample is made up of 44 students with a high school diploma, 10 with a master's degree and 6 with a three-year degree.

A t-test for paired samples was carried out to analyze the comparison between the averages between the first and second administration, in order to investigate the impact of an international learning experience on the domains under analysis. The result shows a lack of significance between the two times, except for two subscales of the Perceived Self-Efficacy Scale, the Emotional Maturity and the Context Analysis (Tab. 1). In order to carry out this type of evaluation, the Shapiro-Wilk test was used for the normality of data distribution (Tab 2).

Tab. 1 - T-Test paired sample

			statistica	gdl	p
Emotional Maturity	Emotional Maturity (2)	t di Student	-1.8870	59.0	0.064
Relational Fluidity	Relational Fluidity (2)	t di Student	-1.3718	59.0	0.175
Finalization of action	Finalization of action (2)	t di Student	0.0271	59.0	0.979
Context Analysis	Context Analysis (2)	t di Student	-24.2509	59.0	< .001

Tab. 2 - Normality Test (Shapiro-Wilk)

			W	p
Emotional Maturity	-	Emotional Maturity (2)	0.982	0.505
Relational Fluidity	-	Relational Fluidity (2)	0.986	0.723
Finalization of action	-	Finalization of action (2)	0.987	0.748
Context Analysis	-	Context Analysis (2)	0.973	0.197

Nota. Un piccolo valore di p suggerisce una violazione del presupposto di normalità

Furthermore, the correlation matrix (Tab. 3) shows the level of correlation between the subtests of the Perceived Self-efficacy Scale in managing complex problems and those of the Questionnaire on motivation and learning strategies. The analysis shows a significant positive correlation in most of the items of the two scales, indicating a similar trend in the indicative values of motivation to learn with those of perceived self-efficacy.

Tab. 3 – Correlation Matrix

	Autoefficacia e motivazione intrinseca	Maturità emotiva	Fluidità relazionale	Analisi del contesto	Finalizzazione all'azione	Autoregolazione nello studio	Approccio allo studio critico e profondo	Disponibilità a collaborare coi pari	Riflessività
Autoefficacia e motivazione intrinseca	—								
Maturità emotiva	0.166	—							
Fluidità relazionale	0.108	0.318*	—						
Analisi del contesto	-0.119	-0.004	0.203	—					
Finalizzazione all'azione	-0.106	0.398**	0.611***	0.140	—				
Autoregolazione nello studio	0.714***	0.162	0.094	0.043	0.033	—			
Approccio allo studio critico e profondo	0.196	-0.197	-0.033	0.186	-0.067	0.386**	—		
Disponibilità a collaborare coi pari	0.348**	-0.014	0.111	0.139	-0.029	0.477***	0.533***	—	
Riflessività	0.314*	-0.183	0.160	0.074	-0.000	0.332**	0.344**	0.756***	—

Nota. * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001

Finally, a linear regression analysis was carried out to assess whether the values measured by the QMSA and the perceived self-efficacy test provided reference parameters indicative of the variation of the other scales. The analysis carried out did not report significant data in this regard.

7. Discussion & Conclusion

This study was based on the results of a pilot study carried out during the Covid-19 pandemic (Rodolico *et al.*, 2022). The results of the previous research had shown that the tutors 'cooperative teaching based on multilanguage, multicultural approach and on the co-development of assessment tasks, embedded in both universities' assessment agenda, encouraged students to actively participate in the sessions and to put in action strategies to overcome barriers. Based on these findings, the research team decided to expand the project with new research and add psychometric measurements of efficacy variables for the students.

Despite some limitations of the research, mainly due to the lack of data by Scottish students, the smallness of the sample and the lack of special needs students, the data analysed so far gives an initial answer to the research question. The internationalisation experience based on remote cooperative teaching and mutual enrichment can partially support the student's perceived self-efficacy on two of the subscales (Emotional Maturity and Context Analysis). The international context, the language barriers, and the possibility to use different media for interaction give the participants the possibility to implement unusual coping techniques in order to adequately cope with the situation and participate profitably in the training experience. We believe that the behaviour of the teachers, together with their support, was an opportunity for the students to observe an effective experience of acting and responding to the difficulties of the context, supporting the development of self-efficacy. We can consider this internationalisation project as a good choice to integrate the ERASMUS experience in an inclusive way. It may be considered an effective alternative for those who don't want to travel abroad or have limitations in doing that. The possibility to share experiences, thoughts and difficulties with other countries' students and teachers can solicit some of the soft competencies already seen in paragraph 2. However, the areas of mutual enrichment, cooperative teaching, and active participation must be granted for a successful outcome. Further analysis of data is ongoing on qualitative data collected through students' session feedback, focus groups and tutors' reflective journals.

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