

Project newsletter n1.



FOCUS GROUP RESULTS

This report outlines the outcomes of Focus Groups conducted in Italy, Greece, and Netherlands, within the framework of the MODES Project. The project aims to enhance international students' learning experiences by equipping lecturers with the skills necessary for inclusive classrooms. The focus was on identifying challenges faced by teachers in international learning environments.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings underscore the efforts by institutions to support international students through various services. However, there are disparities in service availability and effectiveness, indicating areas for improvement. Specific needs, especially regarding gender inclusivity, require more attention and sensitivity from staff.

Implications

Addressing the needs of international students, including gender-related concerns, is crucial for fostering a more inclusive and supportive educational environment. Continuous efforts and proactive measures are necessary to enhance the integration and academic success of international students in higher education institutions.

KEY RESULTS

Participant Profiles and Roles

- **Italy (LCU):** Diverse roles, emphasis on personal attention.
- **Greece (MC):** Teachers within the academy.
- **Netherlands (ULEI):** Varied roles, IT department, significant international student presence.

Services for International Students

- **Italy:** Comprehensive support, including visa guidance and housing arrangements.
- **Greece:** Limited assistance, mainly focused within the university.
- **Netherlands:** Dedicated services, orientation weeks, and social media channels.

Services' Importance

Services deemed crucial include visa issuance, language lessons, and integration programs.

Integration and Dropout Concerns

Increasing international student numbers raise concerns about dropouts but proactive measures are being considered.



EXPLOITATION PACK

Our exploitation pack is a combination of extensive research, both at the desk and in the field, conducted by the project partners and is divided into two main parts:

1. MODES Concepts at Organizational Level
on which an overview of best practices identified through research were provided.

2. MODES Concepts at Professional Level
focuses on the skills and competences that educators need to cultivate for effective international education delivery.

In the coming phases, the MODES Project is going to develop a Guide to analyze and present identified innovative approaches in international learning provision.

Second, an International Skills Curriculum will be developed to empower professors with the skills needed to deliver inclusive and engaging classes to international students.

TWO MAIN CONCEPTS EMERGING:

Student-to-Student Support Services: Alumni Networks and Buddy Systems

The Exploitation Pack highlights the importance of Alumni Networks in creating a global community of professionals, emphasizing the impact of such networks in fostering community and enhancing the overall university experience.

Buddy systems are also explored, highlighting the power of peer-to-peer mentoring in ensuring the integration of international students in university life.

International Exposure through Exchange Programs and Global Activity

Innovative exchange programs are presented, promoting international skills development through innovative mobility, while global activity is further underscored by international partnerships, international cooperation networks and international research.



MODES Next Steps

The MODES project next steps involve developing a guide based on the Exploitation Pack findings and developing the International Skills Curriculum. Our aim is to provide resources for institutions planning to implement innovative approaches and equip educators with the necessary skills to promote an inclusive international learning environment.

THE MODES GUIDE

The guide will serve as a roadmap for promoting an international learning environment among the student community, offering practical strategies to ensure the international character of teaching processes and equipping educators with the tools to create inclusive environments for diverse student populations.

THE MODES CURRICULUM

The MODES Curriculum will cover essential competences such as teaching with enthusiasm, international-mindedness, flexibility, ability to work with language learners, and leadership in extra-curricular activities.

The curriculum will be based on a blended learning model, empowering educators to provide inclusive and impactful learning experiences.





PROJECT RESULTS

In Work Package 2 (WP2), the research underscored the pivotal role international students play in global higher education, emphasizing their unique experiences and the vital need for robust support systems, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. It stressed the significance of reshaping perspectives to consider these students as contributors to global knowledge, urging continual enhancement of support structures.

The field research within WP2/2.1 provided valuable insights into integration efforts within the MODES Project for international students. While universities demonstrated commendable efforts in fostering integration through services like orientation and mentorship, the study highlighted disparities in service effectiveness beyond the university sphere. This emphasized the necessity for more inclusive policies, specifically addressing gender and non-binary students, and advocating proactive measures to ensure the academic success and retention of international students.

Additionally, the findings from WP2/2.2's research spotlighted a diverse cohort of predominantly male undergraduate students in Computer Science. These students, driven by a quest for quality education and exposure to diverse cultures, valued peer connections, sought academic guidance, and expressed keen interest in extracurricular activities. Their enthusiasm reflected a strong desire for a comprehensive international educational experience that encompasses both academic and cultural facets.

A SUMMARY OF THE LAST TPM IN GREECE

During the TPM led by Camillo Carlini (CC) and initiated by Maria Tassi (MT), the University of Cyprus officially left the project. This necessitated a joint acknowledgment of a new consortium structure.

CC emphasized internal progress reports and discussed MODES dissemination efforts, including a new website and upcoming events.

Future meeting timelines were set. Work Package (WP) progress, particularly in WP2 and WP3, addressing focus group outcomes, questionnaire responses, and adjustments due to Cyprus's departure, was reviewed.

Decisions for WP4 focused on toolkits, recommendations, and testing, while the importance of internal financial reports for an imminent deadline was stressed by CC.

FINDINGS REVEALED FOR FIELD RESEARCH WITH INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Exciting results from extensive field research with international students reveal a deep understanding of their experiences, challenges, and aspirations while studying abroad. Surpassing the initial target with 65 participants from Greece, the Netherlands, and Italy, the upcoming publication promises comprehensive insights. This research is pivotal for shaping future initiatives to enhance the effectiveness and inclusivity of international education programs.



SO, WHAT DID OUR RESEARCH FIND?

Motivations and Aspirations:

- Diverse motivations propel international students, including a pursuit of high-quality education, exposure to diverse cultures, personal growth, and specific academic opportunities.
- Aspirations encompass leadership roles in their respective fields and leveraging international exposure for significant career advancement.

Challenges and Needs:

- International students encounter various challenges, such as language barriers, the search for suitable accommodation, and a demand for comprehensive psychological and medical support.
- Emphasis is consistently placed on the importance of language support, academic guidance, and integration into the local community.

Opportunities Beyond Academics:

- The international study experience goes beyond academic learning, offering opportunities for cultural immersion, personal development, and the expansion of global networks.
- Involvement in extracurricular activities and participation in local traditions and customs are integral aspects of the international education experience.

Necessity for Enhanced Support Systems:

- Educational institutions must establish robust support systems, covering language assistance, accommodation support, mental health services, and academic guidance.
- These support services are pivotal in ensuring a positive and enriching experience for international students.

The MODES project, dedicated to improving international education, gains invaluable insights from the survey. Acknowledging the diversity in students' backgrounds, needs, and aspirations, the project aims to design academically enriching and supportive programs. Emphasizing a student-centric approach, the findings stress the importance of tailoring services to address unique challenges in international education. Cultural sensitivity and intercultural understanding are highlighted for fostering inclusive environments and preparing students for a globalized world. The conclusion underscores the ongoing need for continuous improvement, positioning the MODES project as a significant step toward more effective, inclusive, and holistic international education models.

BE INSPIRED BY OTHERS

14 EXAMPLES OF INTERNATIONAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

The MODES Desk Research document extensively analyzes 14 international learning environments in higher education institutions (HEIs) across EU and non-EU countries. It explores inspiring practices, academic research contexts, and insights into internationalization efforts, student diversity, support services, and strategies for global partnerships and student mobility. This research is crucial for understanding the current landscape of international education and offers valuable guidelines for improving global learning environments.

One detailed example in the publication is the Technological University of the Shannon (TUS) in Ireland, with 14,000+ students across six campuses. Recognized for applied learning and societal focus, TUS is committed to equality, diversity, and inclusion, designated a University of Sanctuary in June 2022. TUS's internationalization includes students from 100 nationalities, supported by various services, and it plays a significant role in the RUN-EU alliance, aiming to create a European University promoting sustainability and inclusiveness.

TUS leads RUN-EU, the first Irish university in such a role, marking a milestone with €14.4 million in funding. The alliance, comprising nine institutions, offers collaboration opportunities for a student population exceeding 100,000. TUS provides innovative programs like RUN-EU SAPs for interdisciplinary learning, European Double and Joint Degrees, and RUN-EU PLUS for research programs. The EMIC at TUS enhances student and staff mobility, serving as the RUN-EU international services hub. Sanctuary Scholarships demonstrate TUS's commitment to supporting refugees and asylum seekers by covering tuition, registration fees, and providing a stipend.





MODES and Beyond



THE IMPORTANCE OF TEACHER'S KNOWLEDGE OF DIDACTICS

At the 1st international conference on Data Science and Artificial Intelligence in Bangkok, Marcello Bonsangue and Alexandra Blank attended. Alexandra led a workshop focusing on integrating instructional psychology into educational unit design, highlighting the importance of considering motivation, information processing, and feedback's impact on learning.

Conversations with educators revealed a lack of exposure to fundamental didactics and pedagogy, emphasizing their significance within the MODES initiative. This program promotes evidence-based teaching methods, particularly crucial in diverse international classrooms.

MODES aims to shift teaching from intuition-driven to systematic approaches, emphasizing educators' understanding and communication of these methods. Lack of exposure to student-centered education might overwhelm students without proper communication. Therefore, Higher Education Institutions (HEI) should offer early formal training in didactics, pedagogy, and instructional psychology to improve teaching effectiveness.

DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN EUROPE

Una.Europa, a network of 11 European universities, prioritized Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) during their recent meeting in Bologna. Leiden University contributed to discussions on practical strategies for DEI, including gender equality, empowering diverse abilities, and fostering anti-racist campuses.

The meeting highlighted the growing diversity in European higher education, enriching learning through varied perspectives. While embracing diversity is important, ensuring equity is crucial for true internationalization. This involves providing equal access and support, requiring more scholarships and inclusive policies.

Institutions must create environments where everyone feels valued and engaged. Una.Europa aims to collaborate on these challenges, aiming to create a virtual European Campus for seamless knowledge exchange, potentially influencing national legislation for inclusive education.



SUSTAINABILITY AND INTERNATIONALIZATION IN EDUCATION

Leiden University's 2023 Academy Year Opening focused on sustainability as a catalyst for the university's role as a change agent. Within the Modes project, connecting sustainability to international education emerged as critical. Education today aims to develop global citizens capable of tackling 21st-century challenges, with sustainability and internationalization being pivotal pillars.

Sustainability in university education spans social, economic, and environmental aspects, fostering responsible citizenship and ethical decision-making. Practical experiences, from community projects to specialized programs, enrich students' understanding. Additionally, faculties lead by example through sustainable campus practices.

The synergy between sustainability and internationalization exposes students to diverse global challenges, fostering a sense of global responsibility. Understanding different cultures is crucial for effective cooperation on sustainability. This approach cultivates informed, empathetic, and responsible global citizens ready to address pressing global issues.

Ultimately, sustainability and internationalization are integral in preparing students for a globalized and sustainable future. Universities play a crucial role in shaping future leaders committed to creating a more interconnected and sustainable world.

