MODES

Innovative modes for learning in international classrooms

GRANT AGREEMENT NUMBER: **2022-1-IT02-KA220-HED-000087138**

Deliverable Form	
Project Reference No.	2022-1-IT02-KA220-HED-000087138
Document Title	Deliverable
Nature:	Project document
Dissemination Level:	
Document version:	0.1
Date:	dd-mm-yyyy
Authors:	
Document description:	

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

Table of Content

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

1. Summary

Today, higher education institutions face the imperative to adapt and evolve to meet the diverse needs of an international student body. The MODES Project is a comprehensive initiative aimed at enhancing the learning experiences of international students and fostering inclusivity within higher education. By encompassing both desk and field research, this document provides a comprehensive overview of the key concepts and practices at both organizational and professional levels, providing practical strategies for institutions to embrace and embody internationalization.

The desk research undertaken as part of this project lays the groundwork for understanding the challenges and opportunities associated with international education. Next, the field research component engages with international students and the strategies implemented by institutions to support them. This dual approach ensures a holistic perspective that informs the MODES concepts presented herein.

The subsequent sections of this document present MODES concepts at both organizational and professional levels. Organizational-level concepts explore the practical support services, student-to-student support services, alumni networks, the buddy system, peer-to-peer mentoring, exchange programs, and global activity that contribute to an enriching international student experience. At the professional level, the document outlines the next steps in the implementation of the MODES concepts, providing a roadmap for educators and institutions to enhance their capacity for delivering international education.

The insights derived from this project aim to catalyze positive change and empower institutions to embrace the diverse cultural tapestry that defines contemporary academia, fostering a global community of learners and educators dedicated to enriching the educational landscape.

2. Project information

Europe has been traditionally considered a destination for academic excellence by international students seeking to attend a course abroad. Long-standing universities have a strong presence throughout the continent attracting over 1.3 million international learners per year. In addition, more than 55% of the total individuals undertaking tertiary education come from other continents (Eurostat, 2020).

However, upon the arrival of learners at the hosting universities, the actual quality of the education they receive differs significantly from the set expectations, due to the capacity of the institutions to deliver classes according to the special needs of foreign students. These needs include, but are not limited to, smooth social inclusion and internationalized learning provision (Perez-Encinas, 2017).

Within this context, it is not an uncommon phenomenon to lose some international students through the cracks, as they lack specialized support and face substantial challenges regarding social integration and academic performance, even though they meet the same admission requirements as domestic ones. At the same time, HEIs do not have clear communication strategies to address the needs of learners who are not proficient in the local language. This limits the quality of the international learning offered, especially the one taking place outside the classroom.

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

Lastly, students are expected to quickly adjust to the differences in the teaching and learning systems, resulting in increased and added pressure on academic success. This is described by the term "culture shock" which is a preventative factor for numerous students who wish to pursue studies abroad (Academic Cooperation Association). Not to mention that this discourages them from engaging in the local communities, hindering the promotion of European values. Unfortunately, 85% of international students suffer from this shock. According to Eurostat, Germany, Italy, and Cyprus are some of the most prominent countries for international learning.

In detail, Germany has the largest share of foreign students in Europe (23%), while Italy and the Netherlands have the third (8%). Similarly, Cyprus presents the second highest rate of local to international students, within HEIs. However, countries such as Greece accommodate few international learners, due to the in-flexibility of the courses provided and the language barriers. In both cases institutions need to come up with creative responses and sustainable solutions, either to address the needs of a diversifying population of international students or to increase their international admission rate altogether.

The answer to the above challenges is MODES since it aims at equipping tutors with the necessary skills to reinforce their international students' learning experiences and to integrate them not only into university campus life but also into society, fostering their international identity. MODES has 4 specific objectives in addition to the WP-specific ones:

- SO1: Strengthen professors and tutors' capacity to create inclusive classrooms for international/ foreign students

- SO2: Create new and more inclusive for incoming students' methodological approaches and pedagogies for international learning

- SO3: Improve the international learning experience of foreign students into the classroom and the campus life

- SO4: Boost the integration of international students in the host EU countries.

3. Methodology

The research methodology for the MODES project adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining both desk research and field research to allow for a thorough examination of best practices, challenges, and needs related to the inclusion of international students in HEIs.

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

3.1 Desk Research

The initial phase of our desk research, was an in-depth exploration involving an extensive examination of existing literature, reports, and academic papers specifically focusing on the inclusion of international students. The primary objective was to discern fundamental concepts, exemplary practices, and the most recent developments within this domain.

To achieve this, we applied:

* Thematic analysis; a methodological approach enabling the identification of key themes and patterns inherent in the findings derived from desk research.
* Through this systematic process, we successfully pinpointed significant trends prevalent in Higher Education concerning the inclusion of international students.

The outcomes of our comprehensive desk research culminated in the creation and publication of a report titled "Profiles of Inspiring Higher Education Institution International Learning Environments and Academic Research Context." This report showcases commendable practices extracted from Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) across 7 European Union (EU) countries and 7 non-EU countries, providing valuable insights into the landscape of international student inclusion within diverse academic settings.

3.2 Field Research

The field research phase consisted of focus groups with HEI staff and questionnaires distributed to international students. This approach allowed the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data, aiming to capture diverse perspectives and experiences related to inclusion.

Data was collected by Link Campus University (IT), Mitropolitiko College (GR), the University of Cyprus (CY), and the University of Leiden (NL). In total, we collected 65 questionnaires and we conducted 3 focus groups with the participation of 22 participants.

For the analysis of the results, we have used both thematic and quantitative analysis. We aim to map the needs, challenges, and preferences of Higher Education staff and the experiences, needs, and suggestions for improvement of international students, to support their smooth integration.

4. Summary of the desk research results

The surge in the global significance of international students within higher education institutions is highlighted throughout the MODES desk research analysis. Central to this, is the exploration of 'connectedness,' encompassing social, cultural, political, place, and local dimensions. This proves particularly pertinent in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, emphasizing the need for a sense of belonging amidst unprecedented disruptions. Research highlights the imperative of continuous improvement in Higher Education services, offering tailored support, particularly through introductory courses, proves instrumental in aiding the integration t of first-year international students to the academic environment and language…

The quality of teaching and support staff emerges as a significant influence on the international student learning environment. The 'International Competences Matrix,' developed at Hanze UAS, underscores

Erasmus+

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

the essential role of professional development for teaching staff in facilitating effective international education.

As far as mental health considerations are concerned, particularly underscored by the impact of COVID-19, the research emphasizes the challenges faced by international students, necessitating proactive and culturally informed support in higher education institutions worldwide, acknowledging and addressing the specific needs and experiences of international students during these challenging times.

During the desk research, we also identified 7 EU and 6 non-EU best practices:

EU	Non-EU
FH Münster University of Applied Sciences (Germany)	University of Minho | UMinho (Portugal)
Vilnius Gediminas Technical University (Lithuania)	Edinburgh Napier University (Scotland, United Kingdom)
Technological University of the Shannon (Ireland)	The State University of Campinas (Brazil)
Sapienza University of Rome (Italy)	Emory University (USA)
Georg-August-Universität Göttingen (Germany)	National University of Singapore (Singapore)
Delft University of Technology (Netherlands)	University of Melbourne (Australia)
University of Minho | UMinho (Portugal)	

5. Brief Presentation of Field Research

This research project delves into the international student experience across three distinct countries: Italy, Greece, and the Netherlands. The study engages with higher education institutions (HEIs) in each locale, specifically focusing on Link Campus University (LCU) and Rome City Institute (RCI) in Italy, Metropolitan College in Greece, and international students in the Netherlands, particularly in Leiden.

- *ITALY - LCU*: The study involved nine participants from higher education institutions (HEIs) in Italy, including educators, psychologists, consultants, and administrative staff. It focused on the international student experience at Link Campus University (LCU) and Rome City Institute (RCI). During the focus group, the significance of services such as language lessons, community integration initiatives, personalized academic schedules, and peer-to-peer discussions for international students was emphasized. Participants underscored the necessity to incorporate job opportunities for international students and improve language exchange events and group excursions to foster community connection and cultural enrichment. The study unveiled various experiences in integrating international students over the past 5-7 years, shaped by the international presence of institutions and efforts to enhance community appeal and engagement. In conclusion, the research

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

highlighted the imperative to advance discussions on bolstering support for international students, emphasizing the importance of this dialogue at multiple institutional levels.

- *GREECE - AKMI*: For the focus group under consideration, eight teachers, all from Metropolitan College, were actively involved. The research centered on exploring the international experience of students within their educational institutions. Participants conveyed a pressing need for broader support, particularly addressing external matters such as health services and administrative issues. Emphasizing the importance of an international student office, they deemed it a high-priority requirement. Regarding services facilitating smoother transitions, community services, mentoring programs, and personalized initiatives were ranked as paramount by the participants. Additionally, they proposed several supplementary services, including pre-departure orientation, cultural integration events, language support, financial assistance, and teacher training focused on cultural sensitivity.

- *NETHERLANDS - ULEI*: The results of the questionnaire administered to international students in the Netherlands revealed a diverse group of participants, primarily with an educational background at the undergraduate level. These students displayed a strong motivation for pursuing international education, driven by goals such as seeking high-quality education and academic reputation, exposure to diverse cultures and perspectives, and personal growth. They placed significant importance on forming connections with other students, accessing language support, and receiving academic guidance. Career aspirations ranged from aspiring to become leading figures in their respective fields to acquiring specialized skills. While a substantial proportion expressed eagerness to participate in extracurricular activities, some noted a lack of prior opportunities. Notably, a significant portion of respondents showed high interest in intercultural experiences and learning about the host country's customs and traditions, highlighting their enthusiasm for a comprehensive international educational experience.

The *Final Report on Focus Groups Results* highlights several important findings related to international students' experiences and integration in higher education institutions, as the focus group results from Italy, Greece, and Leiden shed light on various aspects of international student life and the challenges they face.

The report reveals that universities and institutions have made efforts to improve the integration of international students. They offer a range of services, including orientation, mentorship programs, language lessons, and assistance with practical matters. However, the availability and effectiveness of

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

these services vary, and there is room for improvement, particularly in providing support for students outside the university context.

The focus group discussions also emphasize the importance of addressing the specific needs of international students. In particular, issues related to gender and non-binary students are recognized as relevant and require greater awareness and sensitivity among staff. The report suggests the need for more gender-inclusive policies and accommodations, as well as support for non-binary individuals.

Furthermore, the report highlights the increasing importance of internationalization in higher education institutions, with universities actively working to attract and support international students. However, the integration and dropout rates of international students remain a concern in administrative discussions, and proactive measures are required to ensure their academic success.

In summary, the report provides valuable insights into the experiences of international students and the efforts made by institutions to improve their integration. It underscores the importance of addressing the specific needs of these students, including gender-related issues, and highlights the ongoing commitment to enhancing internationalization in higher education.

6. MODES concepts at the organizational level

In an international learning environment, several key concepts are paramount to enhance the educational experience: fostering a sense of connectedness, supporting staff capacity building, providing culturally sensitive services, addressing mental health, adjusting criteria for language and other barriers, and offering tailored introductory courses constitute fundamental elements.

During our research, we identified several key concepts and best practices for their implementation, which are described below.

6.1 Practical Support Services

Practical support services play a crucial role in facilitating the transition of international students into the academic environment. Examples of best practices include language preparatory courses, housing assistance, and comprehensive health and mental health services.

BEST PRACTICE

Sapienza International Student Service exemplifies a holistic approach by offering a range of services from application support to cultural activities, ensuring a seamless integration into university life.

7. Student-to-Student Support Services

7.1 Alumni Networks

Alumni networks play an important role in fostering enduring connections among graduates and strengthening the global footprint of educational institutions, as they provide a space for alumni to stay connected, share insights, and contribute to the collective growth of the community. These networks can take various forms, including online platforms, local chapters, and specialized groups based on shared experiences, academic disciplines, or career paths.

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

These networks benefit universities in many ways. Firstly, they serve as valuable resources for current students by offering networking opportunities, mentorship programs, and career guidance. Alumni, with their diverse experiences can become mentors who can provide practical advice for navigating academic and professional landscapes. Additionally, active alumni engagement enhances the institution's reputation globally, the achievements of alumni in various fields reflect positively on the university, attracting prospective students, faculty, and collaborators.

BEST PRACTICES

Sapienza International Student Services: Sapienza University's alumni association, NoiSapienza, focuses on building a positive force from the university. Through social and cultural activities, it aims to maintain relationships between members, facilitate the integration of new graduates into the workforce, and enhance the ideas of young graduates. The university keeps its alumni connected through events, reunions, and networking opportunities.

Emory Alumni Association: Emory University's alumni network is global, with over 149,000 alumni in 164 countries. The network, including international chapters, fosters engagement through various events, enabling alumni to remain connected. Emory's alumni have significantly contributed to diverse fields, including business, law, medicine, public service, academia, and the arts. The university provides career services, supporting alumni in their professional growth, and alumni contribute significantly to the university through philanthropic gifts, supporting scholarships, research, and facilities.

7.2 Buddy System and Peer-to-Peer Mentoring

The buddy system, a form of peer-to-peer mentoring, is a support mechanism where experienced individuals guide newcomers through various aspects of university life. It can take different forms, such as formal mentorship programs, where assigned mentors provide structured guidance or informal setups where students connect organically based on shared interests or backgrounds. This system aims to facilitate the integration of new students, offering insights, practical advice, and emotional support.

Supporting the implementation of structured mentorship programs, HEIs can ensure that incoming students have a trusted source of assistance for navigating academic challenges, cultural adjustments, and daily life. At the same time, the buddy system contributes to a sense of belonging and community, fostering a supportive environment that positively impacts student retention and satisfaction.

BEST PRACTICE

Mentor at VILNIUS TECH: VILNIUS TECH employs the Mentor initiative, a student volunteer program supporting international students. Mentors, who may have been Erasmus students or have international backgrounds, understand the challenges faced by international students and assist with integration into university life in Lithuania. Each incoming international student is assigned a mentor who offers insights, practical advice, and support. The Mentors are trained, and their proactive engagement begins approximately one month before the students' arrival. The program enhances the sense of community and aids international students in adjusting to both academic and daily life in a new environment.

Erasmus+

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

7.3 Exchange Programs

Exchange programs enable students and staff to study or work in partner institutions, fostering international collaboration and skills development, aiming at providing participants with a global perspective, enhancing cross-cultural understanding, and promoting academic excellence through exposure to diverse learning environments. Based on our research, these programs can take various forms, including student exchanges, faculty exchanges, and collaborative research initiatives.

These initiatives contribute to the internationalization of the campus, creating a vibrant, multicultural atmosphere, and enriching the academic experience for both incoming and outgoing students. Students gain exposure to different teaching methodologies, research practices, and cultural nuances, broadening their perspectives. Faculty exchanges facilitate knowledge sharing and collaboration, leading to research advancements and the establishment of international academic networks.

BEST PRACTICES

Technological University of the Shannon (TUS): TUS emphasizes international skills development through the RUN-EU European Mobility Innovation Centre. This center promotes innovative forms of student and staff mobility, combining traditional approaches with sustainable models. The EMIC brings together mobility experts to share expertise in international mobility. TUS's commitment to multiculturalism ensures the practical implementation of global mobility, fostering a dynamic international learning environment.

Emory University: Emory offers a comprehensive range of study abroad programs and international internships in over 45 countries. This not only allows students to engage with diverse cultures but also enriches their academic journey. Emory's emphasis on global exposure aligns with its commitment to producing graduates with a broad, international perspective, preparing them for success in an interconnected world.

7.4 Global Activity

Global activity in the context of this toolkit, refers to a university's initiatives, partnerships, and collaborations on an international scale. Universities examined during our research, actively engage with institutions worldwide, forming partnerships, participating in networks, and contributing to global discussions. This involvement reflects a commitment to internationalization, knowledge exchange, and the creation of a global community within academia.

At the same time they benefit, by expanding their reach, fostering cross-cultural collaboration, and enhancing their reputation on a global scale. Such engagement allows for joint research efforts, collaborative projects, and the sharing of resources and expertise.

BEST PRACTICES

University of Minho: The University of Minho demonstrates a strong commitment to global engagement with partnerships involving over 400 universities worldwide. As a member of various international networks, including AULP, CEER, and CGU, the university actively contributes to discussions on sustainability, Euro-regional studies, and Portuguese-speaking universities. Through these alliances, the

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

university fosters academic collaboration, cultural exchange, and joint initiatives that contribute to a global academic community.

State University of Campinas: The International Office at the State University of Campinas (Unicamp) plays a crucial role in fostering global connections. By strategically forming alliances, such as the collaboration with seven Argentine universities, Unicamp promotes the exchange of knowledge in diverse fields. Initiatives like the Latin American Studies Course (Celan) demonstrate a commitment to geopolitical unity, providing a platform for researchers, students, and teachers to engage in joint teaching, research, and extension activities.

7.5 Summary

This chapter provides an exploration of best practices for enriching the international learning environment within higher education institutions (HEIs). The critical role of academic and non-academic support, staff capacity building, and a global perspective on internationalization has been underscored.

Additionally, the chapter introduces MODES concepts at an organizational level, advocating for practices such as supporting staff capacity building and delivering culturally sensitive services. Best practices identified include practical support services, student-to-student support through alumni networks, buddy systems, and peer-to-peer mentoring, along with initiatives like exchange programs and global activities. These practices, illustrated by institutions like Sapienza, Emory, VILNIUS TECH, and the University of Minho, collectively contribute to a holistic approach to creating an international learning environment.

8. MODES concepts at professional level

The landscape of higher education demands a paradigm shift in the skill set of academic staff to meet the diverse needs of students in a globalized world. Traditional teaching methods are no longer sufficient, and educators must equip themselves with new skills to navigate the challenges and opportunities presented by internationalization. The importance of these new skills lies in their potential to enhance the overall learning experience for students, fostering a more inclusive and culturally aware educational environment. The acquisition of these skills is not only beneficial for students but also crucial for the continued relevance and competitiveness of higher education institutions on the global stage.

Our baseline study has revealed several notable trends in the current educational landscape that underscore the urgency of adopting new skills. The increasing number of international incoming students necessitates a pedagogical shift towards more inclusive and culturally sensitive teaching methodologies. Furthermore, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the integration of technology into education, emphasizing the need for educators to be adept at leveraging digital tools for effective teaching and communication. The research findings also highlight the importance of addressing mental health challenges among international students, necessitating a more holistic and supportive approach from academic staff.

However, alongside these trends, significant challenges exist that must be addressed to ensure the successful implementation of these new skills. Resistance to change within academic institutions, limited

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

resources for professional development, and the need for comprehensive support structures for international students pose substantial hurdles.

After analyzing our research's qualitative and quantitative data, we have concluded that a set of skills is necessary for higher education academic staff to adapt to current and future pedagogical trends.

Summary of the suggested modules:

Module no.	Name	Description	Subunits
1	Teaching with Enthusiasm	The module focuses on instilling enthusiasm in teaching to create engaging and motivating learning environments.	◻ Strategies for Captivating Lectures ◻ Utilizing Multimedia and Technology ◻ Dynamic Classroom Management Techniques
2	International-Mindedness & Flexibility	International-mindedness is a key competency, emphasizing an awareness of global perspectives and a commitment to fostering intercultural understanding. Flexibility, at the same time, is crucial in adapting to diverse learning styles, cultural nuances, and unforeseen challenges inherent in international education.	◻ Intercultural Communication Skills & Navigating Cultural Sensitivities ◻ Integration of Global Perspectives in Curriculum ◻ Building Inclusive Learning Spaces ◻ Adapting Teaching Methods to Diverse Learners ◻ Handling Unforeseen Challenges ◻ Incorporating Flexibility in Assessment
3	Ability to Work with Language Learners	This module underscores the importance of effectively teaching students for whom the language of instruction is not their first language.	◻ Strategies for Language Support ◻ Building Language-Inclusive Classrooms

Erasmus+

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

			☐ Encouraging Multilingual Collaboration ☐ Providing Effective Feedback for Language Development
4	Leading Extra-Curricular Activities	This module explores the role of educators in guiding and facilitating extracurricular activities that enhance the overall student experience.	☐ Planning and Organizing Extracurricular Events ☐ Encouraging Student Initiatives ☐ Integrating Extracurricular Activities into the Curriculum

9. Next steps

As the MODES Project finalizes its initial research phase and concludes with Work Package 2, we continue with developing the next project results: *A1: The Guide for International Learning Provision* and *A2: The International Skills Curriculum*. These documents aim to act as tools for higher education staff to provide more holistic and culturally sensitive services to international students

A1: The Guide for International Learning Provision

The project partners will develop a comprehensive Guide that presents and analyzes the identified innovative approaches in international learning provision. This Guide will not only present and analyze these approaches but will also serve as a roadmap for HEIs, outlining the r steps for the integration of these methodologies in their operations.

A2: The International Skills Curriculum

The International Skills Curriculum comprises four modules designed to equip professors with the essential competencies for delivering classes to international students. The curriculum aims to cultivate skills such as teaching with enthusiasm, international-mindedness, flexibility, the ability to work with language learners, and leadership of extracurricular activities, to enhance the capabilities of educators, ensuring they can effectively engage with and support the diverse needs of an international student body.

By disseminating and piloting these tools in all partner countries, the project aims to support positive change within the higher education landscape, fostering inclusivity, innovation, and excellence in international education.