



### Recommendations Collected

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## Introduction

The **MODES – Innovative Modes for Learning in International Classrooms** project was developed as part of the **Erasmus+ program** with the aim of testing, evaluating, and disseminating **innovative teaching practices** that can respond to the challenges of increasingly **multicultural** and **multilingual** educational contexts. Research consistently shows that multicultural and multilingual learning environments require intentional pedagogical adaptation to maintain equity and student engagement; for example, *Leask (2015)* and *Ryan (2021)* emphasize that the internationalization of study programs must integrate **intercultural competence** as a central learning outcome. This means that teaching cannot be limited to the simple transfer of content, but must be designed to promote **intercultural understanding, empathy, and collaborative problem solving**, which are essential skills for academic and professional success in a globalized society.

The growing internationalization of universities, combined with the cultural and linguistic diversity of student bodies, requires a profound rethinking of teaching methodologies so that they are **inclusive, participatory**, and capable of valuing diversity as an educational resource. Numerous empirical studies show that inclusive and participatory teaching approaches improve the **retention, satisfaction, and academic success** of international students, especially when diversity is viewed as a resource rather than a deficit (*UNESCO, 2017; Gay, 2018*). These approaches actively dismantle the ‘*assimilation*’ model, in which students are required to adapt to a dominant teaching culture, and instead create **shared spaces** for the co-construction of knowledge, in which multiple perspectives are legitimized and integrated into the curriculum.

As part of the project, an **innovative digital course** has been launched, consisting of **four modules**, each addressing specific issues for teacher training on new practices and methodologies to be applied in the classroom, with the opportunity to test their learning and results through **engaging quizzes** and a **dashboard** that constantly monitors learning levels. This modularity

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allows educators to tackle the material in manageable units, apply strategies in real time, and reflect on results before moving on, an approach that mirrors the principles of **distributed learning** and **iterative skill development**.

This course has been implemented in **Italy, Greece, and the Netherlands**, where teacher training courses and experimental classroom interventions have been carried out, accompanied by the collection of **qualitative and quantitative data** through interviews, questionnaires, and direct observations.

At the same time, a **toolkit** has been developed that includes guidelines, operational tools, assessment models, and activity sheets designed to facilitate the adoption of the most effective practices. Studies indicate that providing educators with **structured, ready-to-use resources** significantly increases the likelihood of sustainable adoption of innovative teaching strategies (*Henderson et al., 2012*). This is particularly relevant in higher education, where time constraints and workload often limit teachers' ability to design new materials from scratch; having **pre-tested resources** reduces barriers to entry and accelerates implementation.

Through the analysis of the reports produced by each partner, a wide range of areas and recommendations emerged, reflecting the voices of both teachers and students in Italy, Greece, and the Netherlands. Among these, we identified **seven priority recommendations**. These were selected because they recur most frequently across countries and stakeholder groups, and because they represent the practices that generated the greatest interest and consensus. This integrated analysis and validation process has therefore highlighted the most strategic areas for action. The selected recommendations provide a foundation for systemic intervention aimed at enhancing teaching quality, ensuring equitable access to learning, and fostering the active participation of all students — with particular attention to those from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

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Recommendation	Source/Report	Countries	N. Occurrences	Rationale
<b>Post-course communities of practice for teachers</b>	Teachers (IT, GR, NL), Students (IT)	Italy, Greece, Netherlands	<b>4</b>	Ensures continuity of innovation, fosters peer support and exchange, strengthens transnational networks, improves teaching quality.
<b>Integration of UDL and inclusive teaching in curriculum design</b>	Teachers (IT, GR, NL), Students (IT, GR, NL)	Italy, Greece, Netherlands	<b>6</b>	Embeds inclusion in design, improves accessibility and participation, prevents exclusion, reduces dropouts, builds belonging.
<b>Institutionalization of collaborative and peer learning</b>	Students (IT, GR, NL), Teachers (extracurricular)	Italy, Greece, Netherlands	<b>7</b>	Boosts motivation and integration, develops transferable skills, reduces language barriers, builds community and peer support.

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<b>Inclusive educational technologies and gamification</b>	Students (IT, GR, NL), Teachers (IT, GR, NL)	Italy, Greece, Netherlands	7	Increases engagement, enables linguistic/cultural adaptation, provides real-time feedback, motivates persistence in learning.
<b>Development of critical and reflective thinking</b>	Students (IT, GR, NL), Teachers (IT, GR, NL)	Italy, Greece, Netherlands	8	Enhances analytical and metacognitive skills, encourages questioning of assumptions, fosters intercultural dialogue and global citizenship.
<b>Structured mechanisms for continuous participatory feedback</b>	Teachers (IT, GR, NL), Students (IT, GR, NL)	Italy, Greece, Netherlands	10	Makes learning dynamic and adaptable, identifies issues early, increases motivation, ensures students feel heard and engaged.
<b>Real and virtual intercultural exchanges and inclusive extracurricular activities</b>	Teachers (IT, GR, NL), Students (IT, GR, NL)	Italy, Greece, Netherlands	7	Provides real opportunities for intercultural interaction, develops empathy and adaptability, broadens

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				education beyond the classroom.
Continuous assessment (micro-assessments and ongoing feedback)	Teachers	Italy	—	—
Teaching support tools (multilingual materials, tutorials, mini-guides)	Teachers	Italy	—	—
Catalogue of extracurricular activities	Teachers	Italy	—	—
Foster student feedback mechanisms (teacher-led)	Teachers	Greece	—	—
Advance intercultural literacy (modules, certification paths)	Teachers	Greece	—	—

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Promote international exchanges and virtual interaction opportunities	Teachers	Greece	—	—
Structured extracurricular guidelines (repository, kits, models)	Teachers	Greece	—	—
Structured follow-up support (post-course)	Teachers	Netherlands	—	—
Enhanced course quality assurance (revision, peer-review)	Teachers	Netherlands	—	—
Institutional integration of extracurricular planning	Teachers	Netherlands	—	—
Language support toolkits (discipline glossaries, visual aids, language breaks)	Teachers	Netherlands	—	—

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Expanded training for support staff	Teachers	Netherlands	–	–
Longitudinal impact tracking (1-year follow-up)	Teachers	Netherlands	–	–
Integrate the intercultural dimension in a contextual and disciplinary manner	Students	Italy	–	–
Promote Continuous Professional Development (CPD) of teachers	Students	Italy	–	–
Co-design of assessment rubrics and success criteria	Students	Italy, Greece	–	–
Multi-perspective assessment (peer, self, teacher)	Students	Italy	–	–
Student panels and ambassador programmes	Students	Greece	–	–

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Expand inclusive digital teaching (captioned videos, glossaries, async)	Students	Greece	—	—
Deepen intercultural competence across the curriculum	Students	Greece	—	—
Elevate student voice (co-design, continuous feedback systems)	Students	Greece	—	—
Personalise learning pathways (UDL, flexible assessment, delivery)	Students	Greece	—	—
Institutionalise interactive and applied learning (hackathons, case studies)	Students	Netherlands	—	—
Enhance instructor training (student-centred, inclusive methods)	Students	Netherlands	—	—

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Develop pathways for practical experience (community engagement, internships)	Students	Netherlands	–	–
Address tuition and equity gaps (transparency on fees, scholarships)	Students	Netherlands	–	–
Promote linguistic accessibility (terminology clarification, accommodations)	Students	Netherlands	–	–
Increase participatory feedback mechanisms (real-time anonymous classroom feedback)	Students	Netherlands	–	–
Foster cross-cultural peer exchange (language cafés, tandems)	Students	Netherlands	–	–

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Table 1 – Comprehensive list of recommendations identified in the MODES Reports

## Final Recommendations

### 1. Post-course communities of practice for teachers

Across the three countries involved in MODES, the idea of establishing **post-course communities of practice** emerged repeatedly, appearing **4 times in the national reports** (teachers in Italy, Greece, and the Netherlands, and students in Italy). This convergence indicates that both educators and learners recognize the limitations of one-off training and the need for sustainable structures that extend beyond it. Teachers stressed the value of having a continuous support system, while students viewed these communities as essential for ensuring that innovative methods do not fade once the formal training ends.

The significance of this recommendation lies in its potential to **sustain professional growth over time**. Communities of practice allow educators to test, refine and adapt strategies in real classrooms, while also offering collegial support in facing challenges. In MODES, where intercultural dynamics varied considerably across institutions, these collaborative spaces helped teachers maintain momentum and align practices with evolving student needs. Such structures also strengthen **transnational cooperation**, creating bridges between Italian, Greek and Dutch educators.

The relevance of this finding is echoed in the literature: *communities of practice* are shown to foster deeper learning and innovation. **Wenger (1998)** emphasizes their role in sustaining professional dialogue. **Vangrieken et al. (2015)** and **Darling-Hammond et al. (2017)** link ongoing collaboration with improvements in teaching quality and adaptability, while **Lieberman & Mace (2010)** underline the importance of inter-institutional networks in reinforcing both innovation capacity and professional identity.

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## 2. Integration of UDL and inclusive teaching in curriculum design

A second area strongly emphasized in the analysis is the **systematic integration of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and inclusive teaching**, which appeared **6 times across the national reports** from both teachers and students in Italy, Greece, and the Netherlands. Its recurrence signals a widespread understanding that inclusion must be embedded at the design stage, rather than treated as a corrective or supplementary measure.

The value of this recommendation lies in the **preventive and structural approach** it promotes. By embedding inclusion in curriculum planning, educators can ensure flexibility in content delivery, create accessible learning environments, and anticipate diverse needs before they become obstacles. In the MODES project, this translated into concrete benefits: students reported a stronger sense of belonging, while faculty found it easier to maintain high levels of participation across heterogeneous groups. Beyond individual support, UDL fosters equity on a systemic level, making diversity a resource rather than a barrier.

Empirical research reinforces these insights. **CAST (2018)** provides guidelines on UDL, while **Meyer, Rose & Gordon (2014)** and **Rao et al. (2017)** show that proactive design improves performance and satisfaction among diverse learners. **Seale (2014)** further demonstrates that inclusive design reduces dropout rates and builds student cohesion more effectively than reactive interventions.

## 3. Institutionalization of collaborative and peer learning

Another central theme that surfaced **7 times across reports** was the **institutionalization of collaborative and peer learning**. Students in all three countries consistently stressed the benefits of group work, peer mentoring, and co-designed projects, while teachers also pointed to their

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value, especially in extracurricular contexts. This cross-country and multi-stakeholder agreement confirms its position as a core area for innovation.

The strength of this recommendation lies in the way collaboration enhances both **academic and social outcomes**. Structured peer learning supports balanced participation, reduces language anxiety for international students, and builds **intercultural communication and teamwork skills** that are crucial beyond the university context. In the MODES experience, courses integrating peer and cooperative methods saw marked improvements in motivation, cohesion, and active participation.

Theoretical perspectives further validate this emphasis. **Johnson, Johnson & Smith (2014)** demonstrate that cooperative learning increases academic achievement, strengthens social ties, and develops intercultural competence—outcomes directly aligned with the goals of inclusive higher education.

#### 4. Inclusive educational technologies and gamification

The recommendation concerning the **targeted use of inclusive educational technologies and gamification** emerged **7 times across the national reports**, identified by both teachers and students in Italy, Greece, and the Netherlands. Its recurrence shows a shared understanding that technology, when used purposefully and inclusively, is not simply a “support” tool but rather an essential dimension of contemporary higher education. Teachers emphasized its role in differentiating instruction and providing adaptive materials, while students repeatedly noted that digital and playful approaches sustain their motivation, reduce barriers, and allow them to participate more actively regardless of language proficiency or cultural background.

The significance of this recommendation lies in its ability to **create equitable access and engagement opportunities** in increasingly diverse classrooms. Inclusive digital tools—such as

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captioned videos, multimodal learning objects, adaptive glossaries, and interactive platforms—allow content to be tailored to a wide range of needs. Gamification mechanisms, on the other hand, transform learning into an active, motivating process by integrating elements such as badges, challenges, missions, and progress tracking. Within the MODES project, the use of these approaches showed that international students felt more empowered, as the playful and interactive dynamics reduced anxiety and encouraged participation even in linguistically demanding situations. The MODES toolkit supports this recommendation with mini-guides and operational models that enable teachers to implement these tools without an excessive organizational burden, making the transition to the conscious use of technology smoother and more sustainable.

Moreover, technology was found to support **real-time formative feedback**, enabling teachers to adjust their methods swiftly, while at the same time giving students the sense of being guided and supported throughout their learning journey. In this sense, inclusive technologies are not merely functional aids, but **pedagogical accelerators** that can make higher education more sustainable, engaging, and aligned with students' everyday digital environments.

These findings align with academic research. **Bower (2019)** highlights that technology-enhanced environments can foster access and engagement for students from varied linguistic and cultural backgrounds. **Deterding et al. (2011)** and **Kapp (2012)** provide empirical evidence that gamified structures significantly improve motivation and perseverance, particularly in long-term or complex tasks. Together, they confirm that technology, when thoughtfully integrated, is not a luxury but a strategic necessity.

## 5. Development of critical and reflective thinking

Among the priorities highlighted in the reports, the **development of critical and reflective thinking** stands out as the most frequently recurring, mentioned **8 times across the three countries** by both teachers and students. Its strong and consistent presence suggests a deep

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awareness across all stakeholders that higher education must go beyond the transmission of knowledge to cultivate the ability to analyze, question, and reflect critically.

The importance of this recommendation lies in its potential to equip students with the skills needed to **navigate complexity in globalized and intercultural contexts**. Critical and reflective thinking enables learners to interrogate assumptions, deconstruct stereotypes, and engage constructively with different perspectives. In MODES, this emerged clearly when students described the need for activities that would challenge them to engage with **controversial topics, ethical dilemmas, and intercultural case studies**, rather than staying within the comfort zone of traditional lectures. Teachers similarly highlighted that such approaches foster deeper engagement and prepare students for the demands of both academic research and professional environments where cultural differences and ethical complexities are unavoidable.

By embedding methodologies such as **problem-based learning (PBL), inquiry-based learning (IBL), the Socratic method, and structured debates**, universities can stimulate both analytical reasoning and intercultural competence. In practice, these activities encouraged students to recognize biases, reflect on their own learning processes, and engage in respectful dialogue across cultural divides—an outcome particularly relevant for classrooms characterized by mobility, diversity, and continuous change.

The academic literature confirms these findings. **Brookfield (2012)** underlines the centrality of critical reflection in questioning personal assumptions, while **Mezirow's (1997)** theory of transformative learning shows that structured engagement with multiple perspectives and dilemmas can lead to profound shifts in awareness and intercultural sensitivity. In this way, the MODES experience echoes global evidence that critical and reflective thinking is indispensable for preparing active, responsible, and globally minded citizens. The MODES toolkit includes specific resources for designing and evaluating activities of this type, making it possible to adopt them on a large scale.

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## 6. Structured mechanisms for continuous participatory feedback

Of all the areas identified, **feedback mechanisms** were the most recurrent recommendation, cited **10 times across the reports** from both students and teachers in Italy, Greece, and the Netherlands. This overwhelming frequency underscores its central role in shaping effective, adaptive, and inclusive learning processes. Both groups stressed that feedback should not be confined to end-of-course evaluations but must be a **continuous, participatory practice** integrated into teaching from start to finish.

The significance of this recommendation lies in the ability of feedback to **transform the educational process into a living, evolving system**. When students have multiple opportunities to share their perspectives—through micro-surveys, anonymous questionnaires, classroom polls, or co-designed evaluation rubrics—they become active co-creators of their learning environment. This fosters motivation, trust, and a sense of ownership over the learning process. In the MODES experience, students particularly appreciated real-time feedback channels, as these allowed them to voice challenges linked to language or cultural adaptation without the pressure of formal evaluations. Teachers, on the other hand, valued the immediacy of the data collected, which enabled them to adapt methods and materials before issues escalated.

Feedback thus functions as a **bridge between teaching and learning**, ensuring that innovation is not only introduced but also adjusted and consolidated in practice. It contributes to greater inclusivity by providing a voice to all students, including those who may otherwise remain silent in traditional classroom dynamics.

The relevance of this finding is strongly supported by literature: **Black & Wiliam (2009)** emphasize that formative assessment is one of the most effective tools to improve learning outcomes, while **Hattie & Timperley (2007)** identify feedback as among the highest-impact

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factors on student achievement. MODES confirms that when feedback is structured, participatory, and ongoing, it becomes a cornerstone of inclusive and adaptive teaching.

## 7. Real and virtual intercultural exchanges and inclusive extracurricular activities

The final area of action involves promoting **real and virtual intercultural exchanges** and designing **inclusive extracurricular activities**. This recommendation appeared **7 times across the reports**, emerging consistently from both students and teachers in Italy, Greece and the Netherlands. Its recurrence highlights the value attributed to **intercultural engagement** as a means of connecting academic learning with real-world contexts. The significance of this recommendation lies in its ability to create **authentic encounters with diversity**. Beyond the classroom, initiatives such as **mobility programs, international collaborations, buddy systems, narrative workshops, language cafés, and service-learning projects** offer students opportunities to learn from and with others in ways that are experiential, relational, and transformative. In MODES, these activities were repeatedly highlighted as those with the greatest emotional and personal impact: students reported that intercultural exchanges not only enhanced their academic learning but also broadened their horizons, built empathy, and strengthened their ability to adapt in multicultural environments.

Such experiences are particularly relevant in today's academic world, where student populations are increasingly mobile and diverse. Intercultural exchanges—whether **physical or virtual**—allow students to practice inclusivity in real contexts, develop resilience in navigating cultural differences, and connect formal education with broader life skills such as adaptability, leadership, and empathy. Virtual exchanges, in particular, were appreciated for removing geographical and financial barriers, thereby democratizing access to international experiences.

This aligns with existing research: **Deardorff (2006)** demonstrates the strong impact of experiential intercultural exchanges on students' intercultural awareness, while **O'Dowd (2018)**

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shows that well-structured virtual exchanges can produce outcomes comparable to physical mobility programs. The MODES toolkit further supports this recommendation with ready-to-use resources and templates, reducing organizational barriers and ensuring that such initiatives can be systematically embedded into curricula.

The MODES toolkit provides ready-to-use templates for implementing many of these activities, reducing organizational barriers and encouraging student and teacher participation.

## Conclusion

The analysis conducted as part of the **MODES – Innovative Modes for Learning in International Classrooms** project highlights how, in order to be truly effective and sustainable, educational innovation must be conceived as a **systemic, multidimensional process based on scientific evidence**, rather than as a set of isolated initiatives. The growing internationalization of universities and the diversification of student profiles require a pedagogical approach capable of integrating inclusion, flexibility, and participation from the very beginning of the design of educational programs.

The seven recommendations that emerged—from post-training communities of practice to the conscious use of inclusive technologies, from universal design for learning (UDL) to real and virtual intercultural activities—are not independent elements, but interconnected components of an inclusive educational ecosystem. Their integrated implementation makes it possible to address

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linguistic, cultural, methodological, and organizational challenges simultaneously, creating a context in which every student has equal access to learning opportunities.

Data collected in Italy, Greece, and the Netherlands show that such practices, when supported by **coherent institutional strategies** and the availability of concrete operational tools (such as the MODES toolkit), produce **tangible benefits** at multiple levels:

- Improved **academic performance** and **persistence in studies**.
- Increased **student engagement and satisfaction**, especially among international students and those from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- Strengthening of **social cohesion** within classrooms and development of cross-cutting skills required in the global labor market, such as intercultural communication, critical thinking, and collaboration.

A crucial element that emerged from the analysis is the **need for continuing education for teachers**. Post-training communities of practice have proven to be fundamental tools not only for consolidating acquired skills, but also for the dynamic adaptation of teaching strategies in response to demographic and technological changes. At the same time, the integration of UDL principles has shown a preventive capacity in reducing barriers to learning, promoting an idea of structural rather than compensatory inclusion.

The adoption of collaborative and peer learning approaches, the intentional use of inclusive technologies and gamification, the development of critical thinking, and the activation of participatory feedback mechanisms demonstrate that effective learning takes place in a context of constant dialogue between teachers and students, in which the training process is continuously monitored, discussed, and optimized. Finally, intercultural activities bridge the gap between theory and practice, allowing the transfer of acquired skills to real-life contexts and contributing to the formation of aware, empathetic, and inclusive global citizens.

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To ensure the long-term impact of such practices, **strategic alignment** between teaching initiatives, university policies, and international collaboration networks is necessary. This implies investment in the continuous training of academic staff, technological infrastructure, and the adoption of **evidence-based monitoring and evaluation systems**.

In conclusion, the MODES project demonstrates that **inclusion is not only an ethical** goal, but also a lever for quality and innovation in higher education. A university system capable of valuing cultural and linguistic diversity as a strategic resource not only improves academic results, but also helps to train generations of professionals and citizens prepared to face the challenges of an increasingly interconnected world.

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