

Alternative Forms of Mobility in an Emergency Remote Teaching Context: A Study of Greek Undergraduate Students' Attitudes

Aikaterini Blanta¹ & Ioannis Karras²

¹ Lecturer, University of Western Macedonia, Greece

² Associate Professor, Ionian University, Greece

Correspondence: Aikaterini Blanta, Lecturer, University of Western Macedonia, Koila 50150, Kozani, Greece. E-mail: eblanta@uowm.gr

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Abstract

Since the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a lot of talk about alternative ways of student mobility. Higher Education Institutions are adopting new forms of mobility to provide flexibility. Among them, hybrid mobility and internationalisation activities at home are offered to university students. Within this framework, a preliminary study has been conducted to investigate Greek undergraduate students' attitudes towards alternative solutions devised by Higher Education Institutions in an emergency remote teaching context in a time of global crisis due to the coronavirus. In essence, the present study addresses the following research question: How do undergraduate university students in Greece view hybrid mobility or internationalisation activities at home compared to physical mobility? More specifically, 57 students from two public universities in Greece completed an online questionnaire and five students were interviewed. Both the questionnaire and the semi-structured interviews were designed to measure students' attitudes towards physical mobility, hybrid mobility and home-based internationalisation. The findings demonstrate that although the pandemic has not notably affected students' attitudes towards Erasmus+ mobility, most of them prefer physical mobility to alternative forms of mobility as it provides a more complete and unique experience. The findings obtained herein are used to make suggestions on alternative ways of making home-based, online and blended internationalisation activities more effective, inclusive and engaging in the years to come.

Keywords: Erasmus+, higher education, physical mobility, hybrid mobility, internationalization at home

1. Introduction

The coronavirus crisis has challenged Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in many new and unexpected ways. As universities had to take radical measures to slow the contagion, they forged new paths in crisis management. In the aftermath, this has brought both challenges and opportunities to universities, particularly in relation to digitalization and digitally enhanced learning and teaching.

A consequence of the post-COVID-19 era is the urgent need for much deeper cooperation between higher education institutions on education, research, and innovation. It also shows the strategic importance of networks in joining forces, sharing knowledge and expertise and overcoming crisis such as the pandemic. There is also a huge need to share on-line courses, data, digital and research infrastructure. The COVID-19 indeed accelerated this need for a digital transformation of HEIs.

It goes without saying that internationalisation has been massively affected by the new reality. The current model, heavily based on physical mobility, has been both hindered and called into question. As Erlich et al. (2021) claim, the health crisis has forced institutions to rethink traditional mobility, as its limits have become increasingly visible, and to redesign models for providing learners with international experience.

HEIs are embracing change to provide flexibility and are adopting new forms of mobility. Among them, hybrid mobility and internationalisation activities at home are offered to university students. Moreover, the Erasmus+ programme supports physical and blended mobility of higher education students and staff in any study field and cycle. This programme has also introduced blended intensive programmes (BIPs). Groups of Higher Education Institutions are eligible to organise short blended intensive programmes of learning, teaching and training for students and staff. By enabling new and more flexible mobility formats that combine physical mobility with a virtual

component, blended intensive programmes aim at reaching all types of students from all backgrounds, study fields and cycles of study. These new forms of mobility do have advantages, as they allow for more inclusivity.

This paper aims to investigate Greek undergraduate students' attitudes towards the alternative solutions devised by HEIs in a crisis context. In essence, the present study addressed the following research question:

How do students view hybrid mobility or internationalisation activities at home compared to physical mobility abroad?

This paper begins by presenting theoretical underpinnings to guide the study. This is followed by a review of the relevant literature on student mobility, exploring the many factors that have been found to play a role in the mobility of students, including some of the conceptual developments on the topic. The subsequent section provides an overview of the methodological approach and data sources drawn on, followed by a presentation of the research findings and results.

2. Theoretical Considerations

In order to address the issue at hand, we draw upon a review of recent literature pertaining to internationalisation and types of mobility. This literature review creates the theoretical scaffolding this paper is based on.

2.1 COVID-19 and Future Trends in Internationalisation

International students have been among the first ones to be affected by the lockdown enforced by governments to prevent the further spreading of the COVID-19 virus. The students who were abroad when the crisis broke out were especially affected. Some international students were unable to return home during lockdown and remained at the universities or in private accommodation but isolated and financially insecure. According to an Erasmus Student Network (ESN) report published in April 2020, in the aftermath of the pandemic outbreak 42% of the exchange students decided to stay in the destination country, 40% decided to return home, 4% were not permitted to leave the destination country and return home, 8% were unable to start their exchange and 5% were undecided on what to do. (Gabriels & Benke-Aberg, 2020).

The transformations resulting from COVID-19 will go well beyond this crisis itself. Universities are now trying to build a sustainable system of teaching, doing research and engaging with society and in doing so will need a new system in which online and physical presence is well balanced, efficiently articulated and scientifically justified and supported. Also, they will radically transform the way in which they offer teaching, learning, international mobilities, and collaborations, hence leading a fundamental academic culture shift. This will occur for various reasons, but mostly because the COVID-19 crisis showed the potential for change of HEIs in particular and for society in general. In addition, access to education is proving, more than ever, to be essential to ensuring swift recovery from crises, while promoting equal opportunities for all. As part of this recovery process, the Erasmus+ programme takes its inclusive dimension to a new horizon by supporting opportunities for personal, socio-educational, and professional development of people the world over, with the aim of leaving no-one behind.

What is more, new institutional platforms and channels will be established to better connect societal needs and non-academic partners with university communities. Students and staff will be able to freely choose whether to go on a physical, virtual or blended mobility, having the same outcome in terms of credit recognition. Besides, local students will interact with international students, who do their mobility online and they can thus both gain from a virtual exchange. The changes that this crisis has dictated will inevitably be embedded in the wider discussion on the evolution of the higher education sector in Europe and beyond.

2.2 Mobility in Higher Education

Mobility is important for personal development and employability; it fosters respect for diversity and a capacity to deal with other cultures (European Commission 2009). Braskamp et al. (2009, p. 111) suggest that "student engagement in education abroad experiences enhances global learning and development, which we argue should now become the core of holistic student development, a goal of almost every undergraduate college or university." An obvious shift is also proposed by Braskamp et al. (2009) which moves away from the traditional cultivation of knowledge limited to a specific academic field and emphasizes the 'well-rounded' development of students. Yet, Van Mol and Timmerman (2014) argue that students' surrounding contexts play a role in their decisions about study abroad.

Student mobility has increased and received greater academic focus in recent times. It is considered a beneficial experience for individuals, employers and higher education institutions. For some students, it is associated with

higher-quality education, teachers, courses, and facilities, than those immediately available at home (Teichler, 2017), as well as the rich cultural and intercultural experience of living and studying overseas.

2.3 Physical Mobility versus Virtual Mobility

While physical mobility has been a key component of the European integration project, virtual mobility has been a key component in the internationalisation of digital learning. Over the past years, long before the transformations resulting from COVID-19, HEIs across Europe have increasingly adopted the use of innovative modes of teaching and learning through information and communications technology (ICT) tools. These methods have resulted in a shift in mainstream education from traditional face-to-face learning to new, blended forms of education. On the other hand, the physical mobility scheme has always been at the core of the Erasmus+ programme. One of the most frequently defined objectives of study abroad programmes is that of creating a more positive attitude towards those from other European countries and strengthening the sense of belonging to Europe (Jacobone & Moro, 2014). However, the Erasmus+ programme has recently moved away from a Eurocentric viewpoint to a more international one. Within the Erasmus+ framework, there are different types of mobility projects, including International Credit Mobility (ICM). ICM projects aim to promote international cooperation and the exchange of students and staff between European and non-European HEIs.

Mobility for studying or training increases students' technical, interpersonal, and intercultural skills and competences, as well as their confidence, ability to achieve goals, and social and cultural openness. The experience of living and studying in a different cultural, political, and economic context exposes students to 'best practice' in other countries and better prepares them for their future careers (Marcotte et al., 2007), but also prepares them to become global citizens that will be able to adapt to any diverse cultural context. There is an abundance of evidence that physical mobility provides a wider set of benefits. An interest in cross-cultural awareness and other drivers have led to a significant increase in the number of university students spending part of their academic education overseas (Varela & Gatlin-Watts, 2014). Also, DeGraaf et al. (2013) found that participation in short-term international mobility programmes influenced maturity, confidence, and increased students' sense of accomplishment. Similarly, Petersdotter, Niehoff and Freund (2017) stated that students who had undertaken an international mobility programme had higher levels of self-efficacy than those who had not.

It is also important to note that there is a theoretical base for the expectation that students develop a sense of European identity primarily but also a global identity by spending part of their studies in another country. The Erasmus+ programme provides a unique opportunity for intercultural contact for the majority of participants. According to Carlson and Widaman (1988), participants in study abroad programs acquire global mindedness, grow intellectually, and develop personally.

On the other hand, virtual formats have benefits and risks for the programmes. Benefits relate to lower costs, different forms of interaction and outputs, development of soft skills and digital competences. However, it is clear that students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds may have reduced access to information technology resources and private study space. Furthermore, risks relate to low quality infrastructure and support materials or intercultural misunderstanding. It is rather "advisable to combine different [technological] tools to optimize online learning environments" (Chakowa, 2018, p. 11) to support differentiated instruction and access for all learners.

In addition, a significant shift to virtual formats would present a wide range of challenges in terms of planning, the development of platforms or other systems, and the provision of technical support on the implementation and use of these systems. There is a clear argument that virtual formats reduce travelling and thereby save on travel costs, emissions and time. Nevertheless, one counterargument is that digital tools have a significant carbon footprint as well.

It is also believed that virtual formats can serve as an effective option to address challenges related to cultural awareness and inter-cultural collaboration. According to Boualli and Hamadouche (2022, p. 285), "virtual exchange entails the use of technology to engage learners from different cultural affiliations in online collaboration projects. This virtual learning experience can help participants to interact with others and share perspectives to build understanding of themselves and others". Moreover, in an online environment, shifting to a learner-centred teaching style, according to Ozverir et al. (2016), can foster more "responsive, collaborative, problem-centred, and democratic" language experiences that focus on meaning rather than forms and structures.

However, virtual formats cannot completely provide the same kind of learning experience compared to physical mobility in Erasmus+, where many of the benefits are derived specifically from immersion in another culture. In

conclusion, none of the forms of mobility learning is an alternative for replacing others. Each form adds to the enrichment of education in a different way, while still offering students the opportunity to develop competences and skills to more easily adapt to international contexts.

2.4 Hybrid Mobility and Internationalisation at Home

Hybrid mobilities combine virtual mobility-related activities, such as distance learning organised by the host institution, with physical mobility abroad. In this case, international students start their mobility online and finish it physically.

Internationalisation at home involves mobilizing diverse pedagogical approaches at the home university to sensitize students to interact with diverse cultures. The concept of “internationalisation at home” emerged at the end of the 1990s, as a result of the realization that only about 10% of European students took part in the Erasmus mobility programs (Wächter, 2003).

As Beelen and Leask (2011) stress, Internationalisation at Home is not an aim or a didactic concept in itself but rather a set of instruments and activities ‘at home’ that aim to develop international and intercultural competences in all students. A variety of instruments can be used to internationalise teaching and learning: comparative international literature, guest lectures by speakers from local cultural groups or international companies, guest lecturers from international partner universities, international case studies and practice or, increasingly, digital learning and online collaboration. Internationalisation at Home is the purposeful integration of international and intercultural dimensions into the formal and informal curriculum for all students within domestic learning environments. Similarly, Alexiadou et al. (2021, p. 446) support that “a culturally sensitive pedagogy is a condition for a successful Internationalisation at Home” thus placing culture at the core of Internationalisation at Home.

Internationalisation at Home-related factors are the international/intercultural dimension of the curriculum, research collaboration and area and foreign language studies (Knight, 2006). Moreover, according to Beelen and Jones (2015, p. 63), “in addition to the formal, assessed, curriculum, Internationalisation at Home is also delivered through the informal curriculum, the non-assessed elements of the student experience, which are nevertheless provided by or associated with the institution”. Hence, the aim is to bring the “foreign” experience to the students rather than immerse the students in it. Indeed, technology-based solutions can ensure equal access to internationalisation opportunities for all students.

3. Methods

The theoretical underpinnings presented above serve as a sound basis for this investigation, which in turn create fertile ground for the research. In this section, the research design is presented.

A preliminary study has been conducted to investigate Greek undergraduate students’ attitudes towards the alternative solutions devised by HEIs in a crisis context. As stated earlier, the present study addressed the following research question: How do students view hybrid mobility or internationalisation activities at home compared to physical mobility?

The process of collecting evidence on Greek undergraduate students’ attitudes towards alternative forms of mobility has followed a comprehensive research methodology and a mixed-method approach was applied relying on both quantitative and qualitative data. Drawing from both survey and interview data together is important, as it improves “the quality of inferences drawn from both the quantitative and qualitative methods” used in this study (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018, p. 218).

3.1 Quantitative Method

The quantitative data gathered for this study were analysed using mainly descriptive statistics, which helps reduce data matrices in a way that renders them more conducive for analysis and subsequent interpretation. Questionnaires are popular research tools since they gather information and present structured data that can be directly analyzed (Wilson & Mclean 1994) and, as Richards (2001) supports, they are credible, cost-effective, and valuable instruments providing solid and verified data. Moreover, well-developed questionnaires can be a resourceful means of extracting information from manifested behavior of certain characteristics directly from the participating individuals (Tudor 1996). What is more, Creswell (2012) points out that survey designs are procedures in quantitative research in which you administer a survey or questionnaire to a small group of people to identify trends in attitudes, opinions, behaviors, or characteristics of a large group of people.

Hence, a questionnaire (See Appendix A) was created and was administered to undergraduate students studying at two public universities in Greece, i.e. Ionian University and the University of Western Macedonia. More specifically,

out of the 103 students who were invited to complete the online questionnaire, 57 completed it, thus providing a response rate of above 50%, which is considered high.

The questionnaire was designed to measure students' attitudes towards physical mobility, hybrid mobility and home-based internationalisation. It was divided into two sections and along with questions on socio-demographic background information, it consisted of 12 items designed to measure students' ideas and preferences. It was written in English and data collection took place in October 2021. Before the actual administration, the questionnaire was piloted with five students (who were not included in the research) to ensure that any problems in completing it were duly addressed. As a result of this piloting, minor adjustments were made with regard to the choice of words, so as to make it more reader friendly. The questionnaire was also checked for reliability and validity. The Cronbach alpha coefficient was found to have internal consistency (Cronbach $\alpha = 0.843$) suggesting that the reliability of the questionnaire was high. The statistical analysis was conducted using the IBM SPSS Statistics 22 software.

3.2 Qualitative Method

Semi-structured interviews (See Appendix B), each lasting approximately 30 minutes, were conducted with five participants in order to better explore and understand Greek university students' views on alternative solutions devised by HEIs in an emergency remote teaching context in a time of global crisis due to coronavirus. Thus, qualitative data is gathered concerning the participants' attitudes towards the alternative forms of mobility in a crisis context. Indeed, open-ended questions can serve to obtain more insights and reflections concerning the research question put forward.

The inclusion of the interviews as a qualitative dimension provides another lens through which to capture the students' thoughts and feelings which they perhaps were not able to fully express through the questionnaire. All the interviewed participants were students at the University of Western Macedonia. Only the students from this particular university were interviewed due to practical reasons and constraints. All five participants were volunteers. To reduce and prevent potential risks to the research, students were informed about the study and given the opportunity to participate through a Participant Consent Form. Students were also informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time. The answers provided by all the participants were collected to determine whether the obtained data correlated with the responses on the questionnaire, so as to triangulate the results. As Altrichter et al. (2008) contend, triangulation gives a more detailed and balanced picture of the situation.

4. Results

This section presents the results pertaining to the research question put forward. The research question aimed to identify and measure students' attitudes towards the alternative solutions devised by HEIs in a crisis context. Both quantitative and qualitative results are illustrated and explained below.

4.1 Quantitative Results

4.1.1 Demographic Factors

(1) Age

Table 1. Age

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	18-19	25	43.9	43.9	43.9
	20-21	18	31.6	31.6	75.4
	22-23	7	12.3	12.3	87.7
	24-25	2	3.5	3.5	91.2
	over 26	5	8.8	8.8	100.0
	Total	57	100.0	100.0	

As shown in Table 1, 43.9% of the participants were between 18 and 19 years old, 31.6% were between 20 and 21, 12.3 % were between 22 and 23, 3.5 % were between 23 and 24, and 8.8% were over 26.

(2) Gender

Regarding gender, 31.6% of the participants were male, 64.9% were female and 3.5% preferred not to say.

(3) Home University

Regarding home university, 45.5% were students at Ionian University and 54.5% were students at the University of Western Macedonia.

(4) Year of Study

Regarding the participants' year of study, 56.1% of them were in the second year of study, 12.3% were in the third year of study, 17.5% were in the fourth year of study, 8.8% were in the fifth year of study and 5.3% of the participants answered other.

(5) English Language Proficiency Level

Table 2. English language proficiency level

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
B1	2	3.5	3.5	3.5
B2	16	28.1	28.1	31.6
Valid C1	4	7.0	7.0	38.6
C2	35	61.4	61.4	100.0
Total	57	100.0	100.0	

Table 2 shows that 3.5% of the participants had English language proficiency level B1, 28.1% had level B2, 7% had level C1 and 61.4% had level C2.

4.1.2 Questions

Each of the 12 questions of the questionnaire administered to the participants is presented below followed by a brief account of the responses.

(1) Are you planning to carry out an Erasmus+ mobility in the future?

84.2% of the participants were planning to carry out an Erasmus + mobility in the future and 15.8% were not sure.

(2) Why are you interested in participating in the Erasmus+ programme?

Students expressed interest in participating in the Erasmus+ programme for the following reasons: a) to evolve intellectually and develop personally (20 participants), b) to acquire foreign language skills and develop linguistic competence (6 participants), to experience life abroad (6 participants), to gain and maintain employment (5 participants), to expose to a new educational system (3 participants), to develop intercultural skills (3 participants), to meet new friends from all over the world (3 participants), to be exposed directly to different European cultures (2 participants), to develop European consciousness (2 participants).

(3) Which of the following mobility options would you choose?

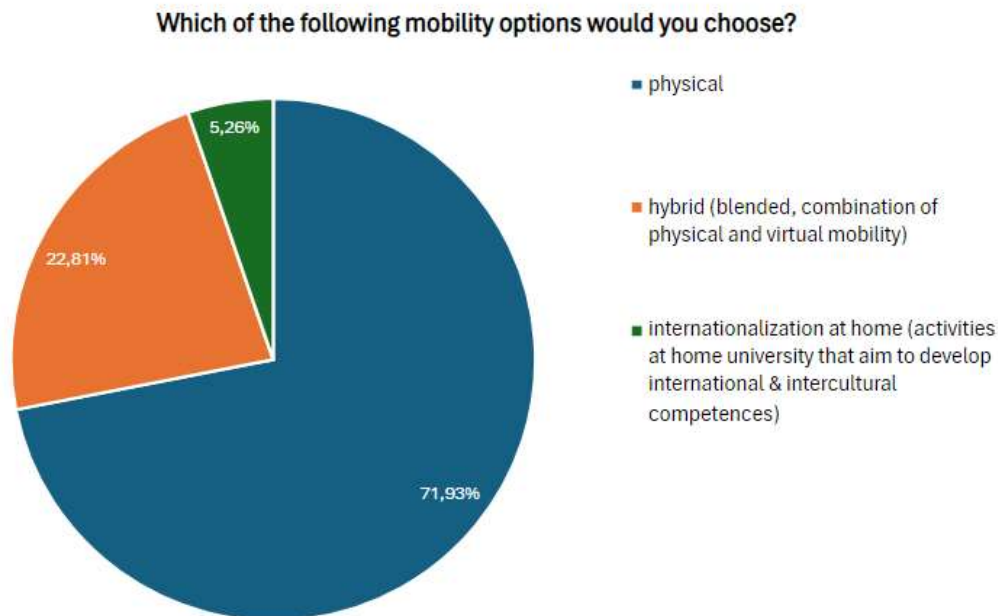


Figure 1.

Figure 1 shows that 71.9% of the participants would choose physical mobility, 22.8% would choose hybrid and 5.3% would choose internationalization at home.

(4) Do you think it is a good idea to offer students the option to choose the type of their mobility?

91.2% of the participants believed that it would be a good idea to offer them the option to choose the type of their mobility and the 8.8% of the participants were not sure.

(5) What is your opinion regarding physical mobility?

According to the participants, physical mobility provides a unique opportunity for intercultural contact (100%), creates an international experience (98.2%), offers increased adaptability to new and changing environments (98.2%), helps students develop their personal and professional skills and competences (96.5%), helps students build a sense of European identity and social cohesion (89.5%).

(6) What is your opinion regarding virtual mobility?

89.5% of the participants believed that virtual mobility saves on travel costs, emissions, and time while 71.9% of them believed that sending institutions formally recognize virtual mobility as part of the participants' study periods. The remaining participants believed that virtual mobility ensures equal access to internationalisation opportunities for all students (68.4%), helps students develop international understanding and intercultural skills (50.9%), helps students develop soft skills and digital competences, (49.1%), encourages participants to learn (35.1%) and can be used perfectly as an alternative for physical mobility (2.8%).

(7) Please rank home-based internationalisation activities in order of preference.

Regarding home-based internationalisation activities, 22 participants preferred guest lecturers from international partner universities, 16 participants preferred guest speakers from local cultural groups or international companies, 11 participants favoured comparative international literature and 8 participants preferred digital learning and online collaboration.

(8) Since the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic, there have been alternative forms of student mobility. Please rank possible alternative mobility options in order of preference.

When it comes to possible alternative mobility options in a crisis context, 28 participants would rather postpone the start of the mobility until the situation gets back to normal, 12 participants would start the mobility as virtual learning

and then use the opportunity for an experience, nine participants prefer home-based internationalisation activities and 8 participants prefer to replace physical mobility entirely by virtual activities if there is no other alternative.

(9) Has the COVID-19 pandemic affected your attitude towards Erasmus+ mobilities?

Has the Covid-19 pandemic affected your attitude towards Erasmus+ mobilities?

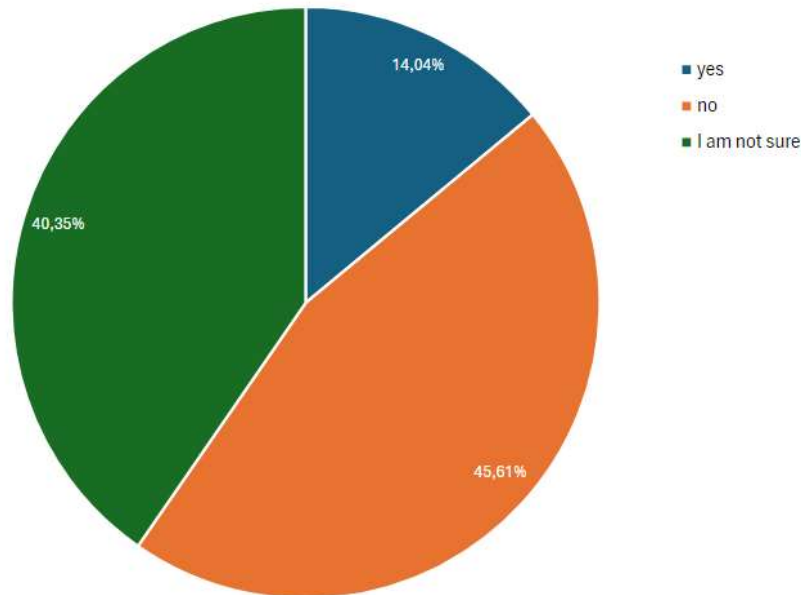


Figure 2.

Figure 2 shows that 14% of the participants believed that the COVID-19 pandemic affected their attitude towards Erasmus+ mobilities, 45.6% of the participants claimed the opposite and 40.4% were not sure.

(10) If your answer to the previous question is yes, please explain briefly.

Some indicative answers of those participants whose attitude towards Erasmus+ mobilities was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic were the following: a) "It's much more difficult as well as dangerous to travel because if you get Covid in another country you will need to be quarantined and therefore you will get stuck in a room and wait for the first opportunity to return home", b) "Due to the situation, there was a widespread fear of how I would have to move safely to other countries", c) "The restrictions following the pandemic could significantly affect the experience abroad for students" and d) "The main reason is that we are afraid to be sick away from home".

(11) Which of the following mobility options would you choose during a Covid-free period?

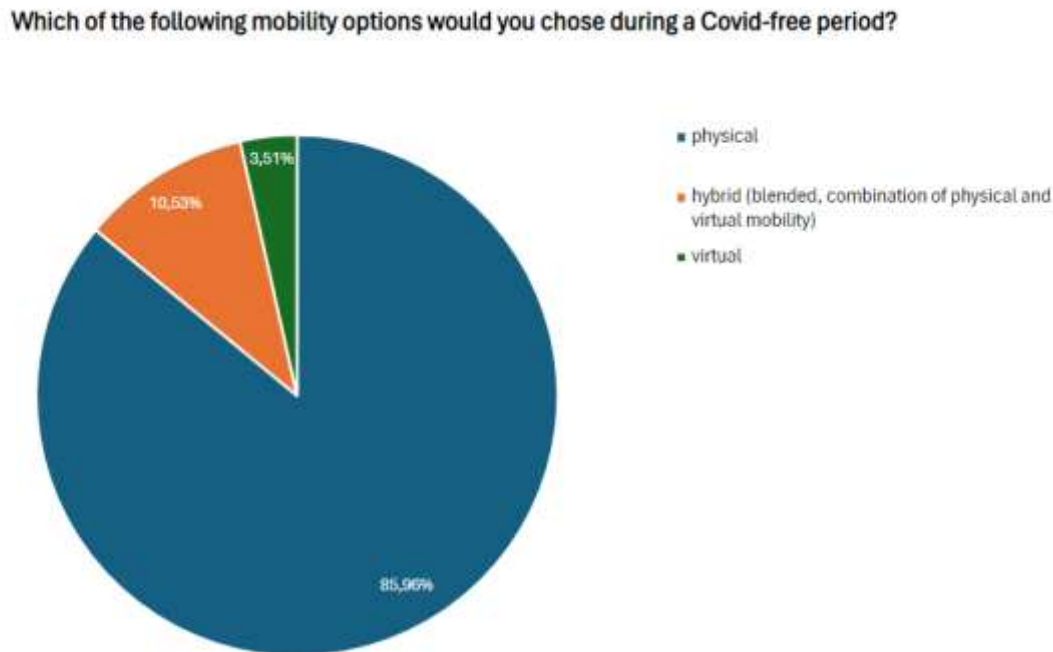


Figure 3.

Figure 3 shows that during a Covid-free period, 86% of the participants would choose physical mobility, 10.5% would choose hybrid mobility and 3.5% would choose virtual mobility.

(12) Can you briefly explain your answer to the previous question?

Physical mobility was rated more favorably in the previous question and some of the participants' justifications were the following: a) "Physical mobility provides the most complete experience, and it is too unique to be substituted by a virtual experience", b) "I believe that nothing beats being physically able to experience all the new things that Erasmus has to offer", c) "Because studying at a foreign university and making international friends is an experience I wouldn't want to miss", d) "Being in touch with other students and intermingling with them is always a great way to learn", e) "Concentration is the key to learning, and that is something that virtual platforms cannot offer", f) "I believe that experiencing a blended mobility helps students develop a lot of skills" and g) "Virtual mobility is innovative, inclusive and safe at the same time".

4.2 Qualitative Results

These findings correlate with the previous quantitative results as participants' interview responses are similar to the questionnaire responses. More specifically, all the interviewed participants expressed interest in participating in the Erasmus+ programme although their attitude towards Erasmus+ mobilities had been affected by the pandemic. The majority of them believe that Erasmus+ mobility helps them evolve intellectually, develop personally and experience intercultural contact. Moreover, three participants out of five reported a preference for physical mobility to alternative forms of mobility, one participant prefers virtual mobility and the other one prefers internationalisation at home. Yet, two participants state that physical mobility cannot be replaced by the new forms of mobility, while the other three support that it can be replaced during a COVID-19 period.

5. Discussion

The findings have shed some light on the research question put forward. From a practical point of view and given the results, this study provides fertile ground for some implications. The European Commission should seriously take students' preferences into account and universities must be encouraged to offer all forms of mobility to them. Moreover, universities should strive to seek schemes that provide students with new opportunities that will help them acquire and enhance key skills, competences, and employability. There are still significant gaps to be addressed for the

promotion of genuine internationalisation in Higher Education. University teachers are key agents for turning internationalisation efforts into long-term benefits for society. They can design and develop virtual mobility and Internationalisation at Home projects as part of the curriculum. The challenge, of course, is to develop them in a measured and effective way. What is more important is that university teachers should follow well-defined guidelines in order to ensure a successful learning experience for their learners.

Undoubtedly, preparing students to face the new challenges is essential. Despite their beneficial effects, alternative forms of mobility are not frequently implemented in tertiary-level degree programmes in the Greek educational context. A quick survey of university programmes pertaining to international studies in Greece shows that little emphasis has been put on virtual mobility and Internationalisation at Home activities. Thus, it should be examined how these dimensions could be introduced in programmes of study and integrated in the learning contexts and social experiences of students. Undoubtedly, students should be provided with various alternative opportunities. However, the new forms of mobility should not undermine the physical mobility.

5.1 Limitations of the Research

Any study conducted does have its limitations. Consequently, caution should be practiced when making broad generalisations or drawing broad inferences from particular observations based on the results put forward. The results produced refer only to the subjects participated in the study and cannot be extended to a greater sample of students. More specifically, any results produced by the research involve only Greek students from two different Universities in Greece. Similarly, the answers to the semi-structured interviews can be the subjective outcome of the participants' impression. While the results cannot be generalised across all university students outside the participants of this study, the findings presented here have provided an indication of a small sample of a population and have highlighted important issues pertaining to alternative forms of student mobility in Greek Higher Education.

6. Conclusion

The current study attempted to investigate Greek undergraduate students' attitudes towards alternative forms of mobility devised by HEIs in an emergency remote teaching context. In other words, this study contributed to an existing knowledge base by reporting on an enquiry undertaken to determine whether university students in Greece prefer physical mobility, virtual mobility, hybrid mobility or home-based internationalization.

Moreover, this study should rather be seen as a starting point for an even deeper reflection on how innovations introduced by COVID-19 in the world of higher education will shape the future of universities. The findings obtained herein can be used to draw conclusions and make suggestions on alternative ways of making home-based, online and blended internationalisation activities more effective, inclusive and engaging in the years to come. While COVID-19 presents a unique situation for international education, lessons learned during this pandemic can be applied to future crises to direct decision-making and guide action to most effectively address the challenges that arise. It is hoped that this study has added to the existing body of literature pertaining to internationalisation of students in a crisis context and has laid the foundation and stimulated attention for further exploration.

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Appendix A**Questionnaire**

Name (optional)

Age (18-19, 20-21, 22-23, 24-25, over 26)

Gender (male, female, other, prefer not to say)

Home University

Year of study (1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, other)

English language proficiency level (B1, B2, C1, C2)

1. Are you planning to carry out an Erasmus+ mobility in the future?

(a) Yes

(b) No

(c) I am not sure

2. Why are you interested in participating in the Erasmus+ programme? Use the numbers from 1 to 10 to rank your reasons. (Note: 1 corresponds to the most important reason and 10 to the least important reason).

(a) to grow intellectually and develop personally.....

(b) to be exposed to a new educational system

(c) to acquire foreign language skills and develop linguistic competence

(d) to develop intercultural skills

(e) to experience life abroad

(f) to be exposed directly to different European cultures

(g) to develop European consciousness

(h) to gain and maintain employment

(i) to meet new friends from all over the world

(j) other.....

3. Which of the following mobility options would you choose?

(a) physical

(b) virtual (on line)

(c) hybrid (blended, a combination of physical and virtual mobility)

(d) internationalization at home (activities at the home university that aim to develop international and intercultural competences in all students)

4. Do you think it is a good idea to offer students the option to choose the type of their mobility?

(a) Yes

(b) No

(c) I am not sure

5. What is your opinion regarding physical mobility? Put YES or NO next to the following statements.

(a) physical mobility provides a unique opportunity for intercultural contact

(b) physical mobility creates an international experience

(c) physical mobility helps students develop their personal and professional skills and competences

(d) physical mobility helps students build a sense of European identity and social cohesion

(e) physical mobility offers increased adaptability to new and changing environments

(f) physical mobility enhances students' quality of life and career prospects

(g) physical mobility builds a sense of European identity and social cohesion

6. What is your opinion regarding virtual mobility? Put YES or NO next to the following statements.

- (a) Virtual mobility ensures equal access to internationalisation opportunities for all students
- (b) Virtual mobility can be used perfectly as an alternative for physical mobility
- (c) Virtual mobility helps students develop soft skills (e.g. adaptability, effective communication, creativity, problem solving, time management) and digital competences
- (d) Virtual mobility helps students develop international understanding and intercultural skills
- (e) Virtual mobility encourages participants to learn
- (f) Virtual mobility saves on travel costs, emissions and time
- (g) Sending institutions formally recognise virtual mobility as part of the participants' study periods

7. Please rank home-based internationalization activities in order of preference. Number the following from 1 to 4.

- (a) comparative international literature
- (b) guest lectures by speakers from local cultural groups or international companies
- (c) guest lecturers from international partner universities
- (d) digital learning and online collaboration

8. Since the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic, there have been alternative ways of student mobility. Please rank possible alternative mobility options in order of preference. Number the following from 1 to 4.

- (a) I would prefer to postpone the start of the mobility until the situation gets back to normal
- (b) I would prefer to start the mobility as virtual learning and then use the opportunity for an experience abroad
- (c) I would be ready to replace physical mobility entirely by virtual activities if there is no other alternative
- (d) I would prefer home-based internationalization activities

9. Has the COVID-19 pandemic affected your attitude towards Erasmus+ mobilities?

- (a) Yes
- (b) No
- (c) I am not sure

If yes, please explain briefly

.....
.....

10. Which of the following mobility options would you choose during a Covid-free period?

- (a) physical
- (b) virtual
- (c) hybrid (blended)
- (d) internationalization at home

Can you briefly explain your answer?

.....
.....

Appendix B

Interview Questions

Name (optional)

Age (18-19, 20-21, 22-23, 24-25, over 26)

Gender (male, female, other, prefer not to say)

Nationality

Home University

Year of study (1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, other)

English language proficiency level (B1, B2, C1, C2)

Other languages spoken: 1 2 3

1. Why are you interested in participating in the Erasmus+ programme?

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.....
.....

2. How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected your attitude towards Erasmus+ mobilities?

.....
.....
.....

3. Which of the following student mobility options would you choose?

(a) physical

(b) virtual (online)

(c) hybrid (blended, a combination of physical and virtual mobility)

(d) internationalization at home (activities at the home university that aim to develop international and intercultural competences in all students)

Please, explain your choice

.....
.....

4. What is your opinion regarding physical mobility?

.....
.....
.....

5. What is your opinion regarding virtual mobility?

.....
.....
.....

6. What is your opinion regarding hybrid mobility?

.....
.....
.....

7. What is your opinion regarding home-based internationalization activities?

.....
.....
.....

8. Do you think that physical mobility can be replaced by the new alternative forms of mobility?

.....
.....
.....

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