

PROMOTION OF ONLINE INTERNATIONALIZATION EXPERIENCES IN PHYSIOTHERAPY STUDENTS

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Abstract

Introduction: Within the scope of the internationalization project of the Escola Superior de Saúde do Alcoitão (ESSAlcoitão), a set of activities are developed along the academic path of the students, which allow them to be exposed to the international context sequentially and progressively.

Methodology: During the 2020/21 academic year, ESSAlcoitão, in partnership with 3 institutions in the Netherlands, implemented a project involving students from the 1st year of the Physiotherapy Course. In this project, students are asked, over 3 months, to carry out at least 2 online meetings with an international partner to discuss topics related to the reality of teaching and the practice of Physiotherapists. As a result, students submit an individual reflection on the most relevant points that were identified in this sharing process. In each of the participating institutions, there was a teacher responsible for preparing, supporting, and evaluating the students' reflections.

Results: To assess the impact (satisfaction) with 1st-year students at ESSAlcoitão, an online questionnaire (22 questions) was used, with several dimensions (preparation, performance, evaluation, and global opinion) where a response rate of 98% was obtained (n=61). Regarding the answers, 93.4% considered that the preparation of the activity was adequate and that the support materials were adequate (85.2%). Regarding meetings with international peers, 70.2% said that communication was easy during the meetings and that the proposed objectives were achieved (91.2%). Concerning the impact of the activity, 91.8% considered that the activity contributes to a better understanding of the international context of teaching and practice of physiotherapists, stressing that it should continue to be carried out within the scope of the course (88.5%).

Conclusions: Because of the results, it seems important to us to carry out this type of activity as it allows students early exposure to the international context, which may facilitate the development of skills that allow them to play a more active and global professional role.

Keywords: Internationalization, Physiotherapy Students.

1 INTRODUCTION

The World and particular the European continent has become a shared space. Exchange programs create opportunities of collaboration between Higher Education Institutions (HEI) greatly supported by technology. More and more students and professionals collaborate with international partners (colleagues, clients, customers), in that way internationalization and globalization have a big impact on the job market and the professional life. Working in an international environment requires new and additional competences, and educational institutions often explicitly include international and intercultural competencies in their curriculum[1]. Many Physiotherapy educational programs offer an international experience as part of their curriculum for students to gain global health experience with the potential to fulfil clinical education requirements as well.[2]

Within the scope of the internationalization project of the Escola Superior de Saúde do Alcoitão (ESSAlcoitão), a set of activities are developed along the academic path of the students, which allow them to be exposed to the international context sequentially and progressively. One of the activities aims to promote several competences within the scope of internationalization[1]:

- Passive and active proficiency in English, because physiotherapists should be able to communicate with clients and/or colleagues in the international working environment, and be able to read and understand scientific literature in English;
- Cross cultural (communication) skills, to provide tailor-made health care to people from all over the world, physiotherapists should be able to identify with people from different ethnic, national, cultural, social and/or religious backgrounds. Awareness of their own cultural values and behaviour is part of that;

- Knowledge of international developments related to health and physiotherapy: for international cooperation, students should have an idea of the health context in other countries

2 METHODOLOGY

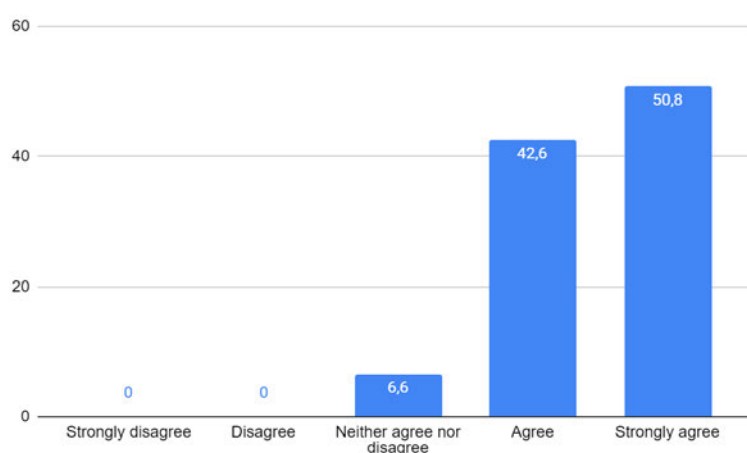
During the 2020/21 academic year, ESSAlcoitão, in partnership with 3 institutions from the Netherlands, implemented a project involving students from the 1st year of the Physiotherapy Course. In this project, students are asked, over a span of 3 months, to carry out at least 2 online meetings with an international partner to discuss topics related to the reality of education and the practice of Physiotherapists in the different countries.

As a result, students submit an individual reflection on the most relevant points that were identified in this sharing process. In each of the participating institutions, there was a teacher responsible for preparing, supporting, and evaluating the students' reflections.

3 RESULTS

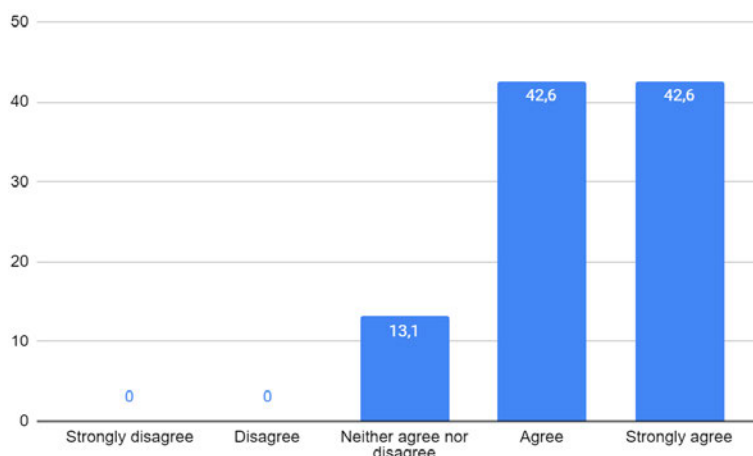
To assess the impact (satisfaction) of the 1st-year students at ESSAlcoitão concerning the project, an online anonymous questionnaire (22 questions) was used. This survey had different dimensions, with questions about the preparation of activity, performance, evaluation, and global opinion.

Overall was obtained a response rate of 98% (n=61). Regarding the results, 93.4% of the students considered that the preparation of the activity was adequate (Agree/ Strongly agree) (Graph 1).



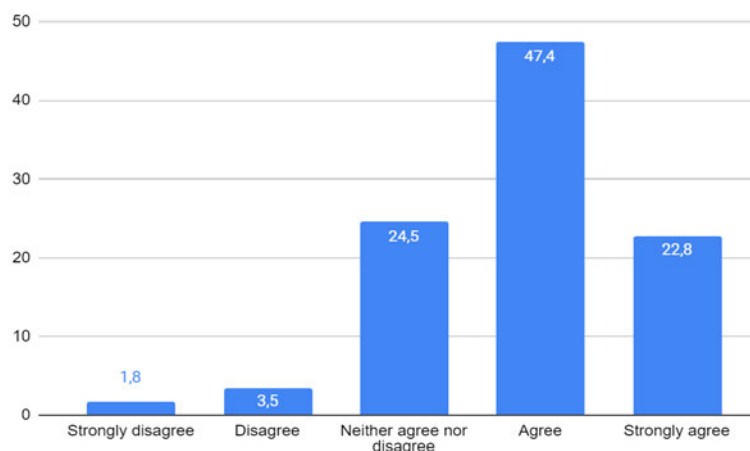
Graphic 1 - Preparation of the activity.

When asked, in their opinion, if the support materials were adequate, 85.2% (Agree/ Strongly agree) (Graph 2).



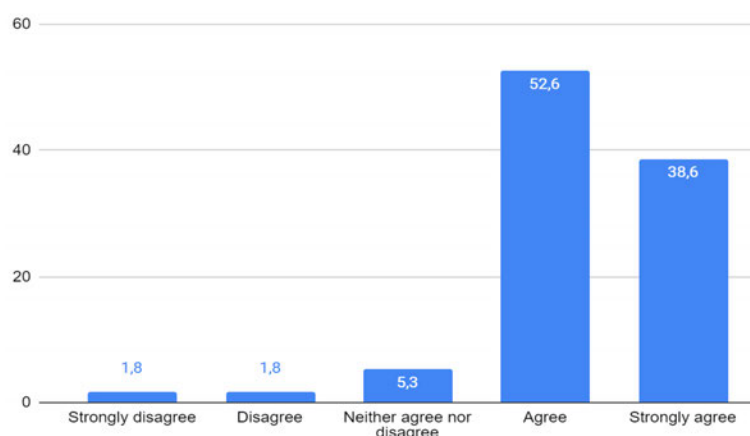
Graphic 2 - Support materials.

Regarding the meetings with the international peers, even though was reported some difficulties, still 70.2% (Agree/ Strongly agree) of students said that communication was easy during the meetings (Graph 3).



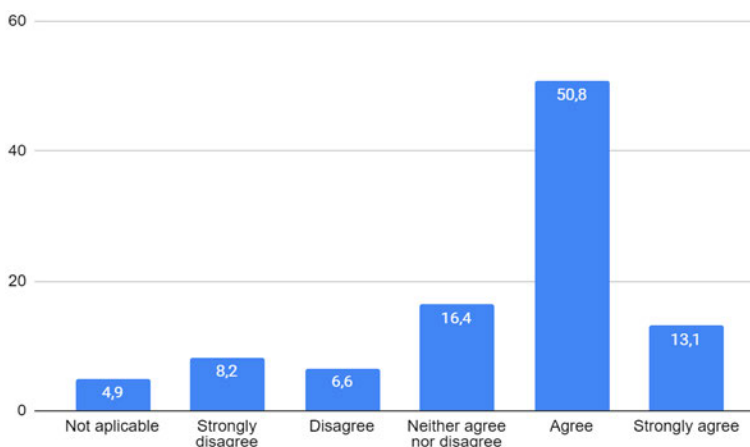
Graphic 3 - Communication with peers.

When asked, in their opinion, if the proposed objectives of the activity were achieved, 91.2% of the students answer that they Agree/ Strongly agree (Graph 4).



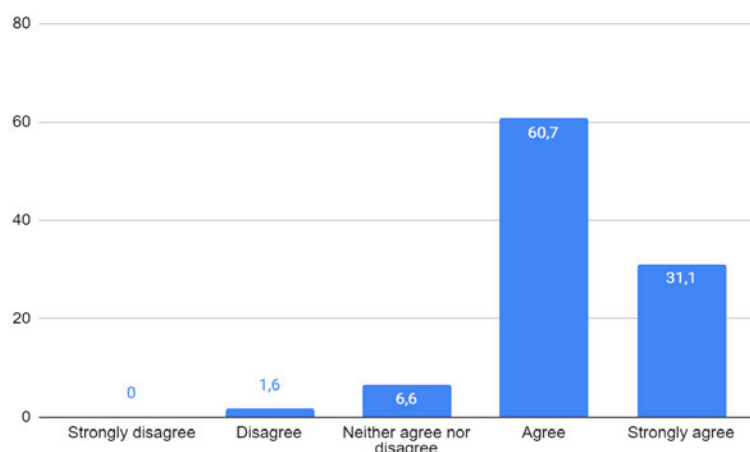
Graphic 4 - Objectives of the activity.

Also, when asked, if this activity has increased their confidence in using the English language to communicate with peers, 63.9% of the students answer that they Agree/ Strongly agree (Graph 5).



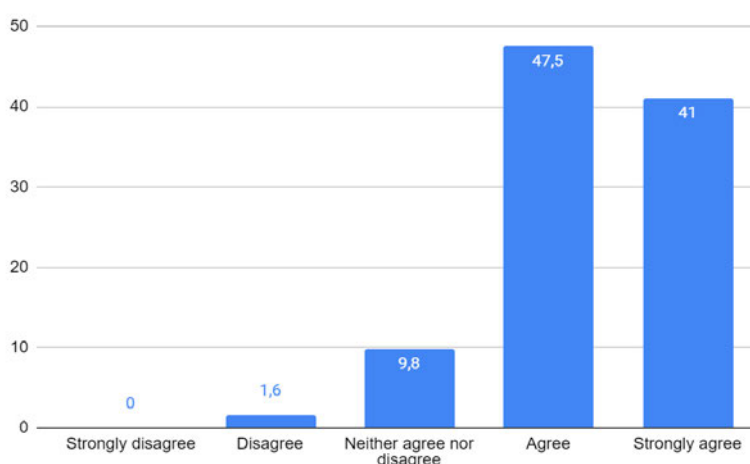
Graphic 5 - Confidence in using the English language.

Concerning the impact of the activity, 91.8% (Agree/ Strongly agree) considered that the activity contributes to a better understanding of the international context of teaching and practice of physiotherapists (Graph 6).



Graphic 6 - Impact of the activity.

The students also reinforce that this activity should continue to be carried out within the scope of the Physiotherapy course (88.5% Agree/ Strongly agree) (Graph 7).



Graphic 7 - Activity should continue.

4 CONCLUSIONS

As a conclusion, 93.4% of the students considered that the preparation of the activity was adequate and that the support materials were adequate (85.2%). Regarding meetings with international peers, 70.2% said that communication was easy during the meetings and that the proposed objectives were achieved (91.2%). Concerning the impact of the activity, 91.8% considered that the activity contributes to a better understanding of the international context of teaching and practice of physiotherapists, stressing that it should continue to be carried out within the scope of the course (88.5%). Based on the results, it seems important to continue this type of activity, because it allows students to have early exposure to the international context, which may facilitate the development of skills that could allow them to play a more active and global professional role.

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