

# **VIRTUAL INTERNATIONALIZATION IN PHYSIOTHERAPY EDUCATION A THREE- YEAR EXPERIENCE**

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# Background

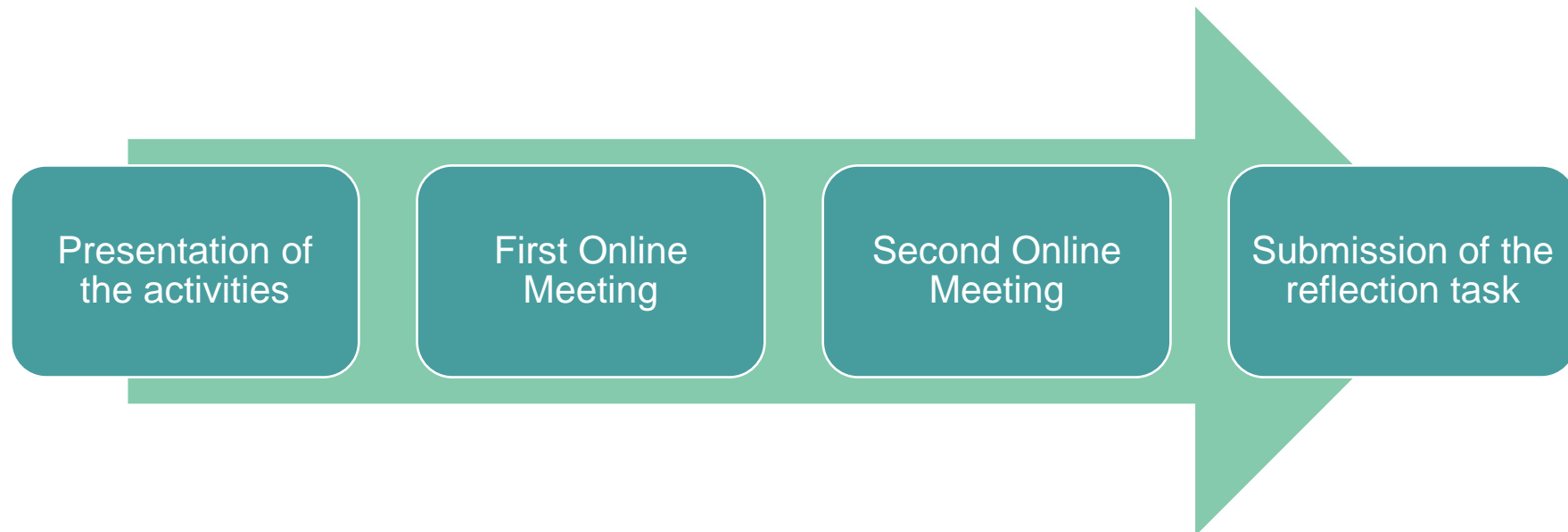


- The growing interconnectedness of the world has resulted in blended spaces across various sectors. Exchange programs have facilitated collaboration between Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), with technology playing a supportive role.
- Educational institutions are incorporating international and intercultural competencies into their curricula to equip individuals for the demands of international work environments.
- Different physiotherapy education programs incorporate an international component into their curriculum. This aspect is designed to provide students with exposure to global health practices and may also contribute to meeting their clinical education requirements

# Methodology

Between 2020 and 2023, Escola Superior de Saúde do Alcoitão/ Alcoitão School of Health Sciences (ESSAlcoitão), participate in a collaborative project with various institutions across Europe, Africa, and South America, focused in first-year students from Physiotherapy bachelor's degree.

This two-month project involved students participating in a minimum of two online meetings with international partners to discuss physiotherapy-related topics (Figure 1).



*Figure 1. Project implementation*

# Methodology

The student discussions encompassed three main dimensions:

## Personal Dimension

- Students exchanged personal information including family background, hobbies, living circumstances, and employment status

## Educational Dimension

- Focused on various aspects of physiotherapy education

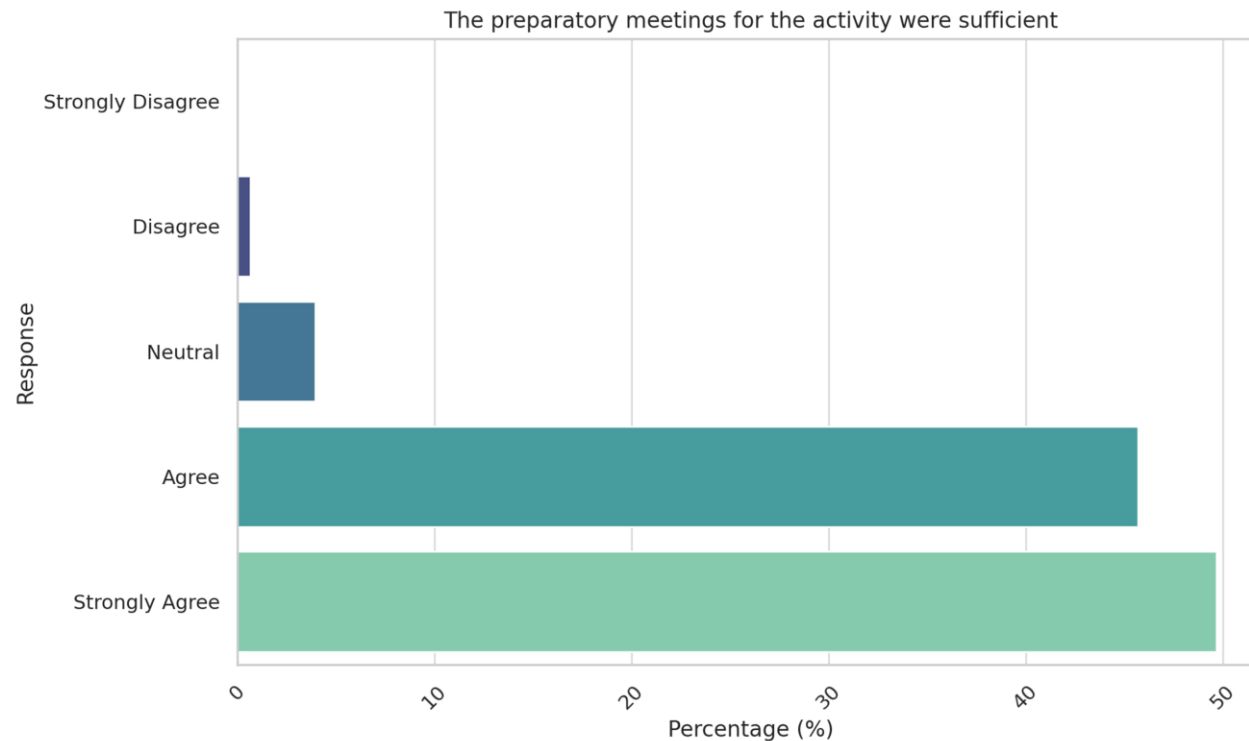
## Professional Dimension

- Students discussed the definition and scope of physiotherapy in their respective countries, potential future developments in the field, professional autonomy, physiotherapist-to-population ratios, and pathways to entering the profession

At the project's end, an online questionnaire was administered to evaluate participant satisfaction and the overall impact of these activities. This survey addressed various elements, including student preparation, teacher support, implementation, and overall impressions.

# Results

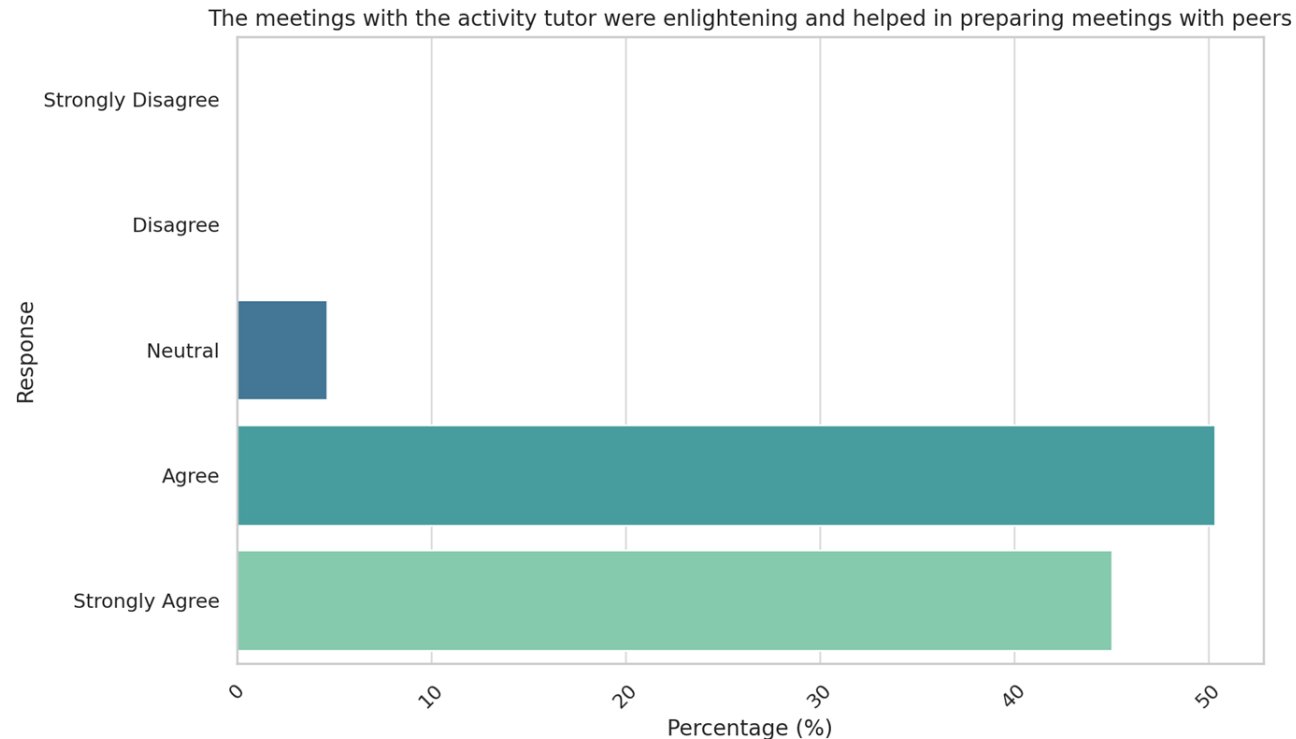
In the first chart (Graph 1) is represented the response distribution for the statement "**The preparatory meetings for the activity were sufficient.**" Here, we observe a positive reception, with a combined 95.36% of respondents expressing agreement: 49.67% strongly agree and 45.70% agree. This indicates a high level of satisfaction with the adequacy of the preparatory meetings. A small percentage, 3.97%, chose a neutral, while a very minor 0.66% disagreed, and none strongly disagreed.



Graph 1 – Preparatory meetings

# Results

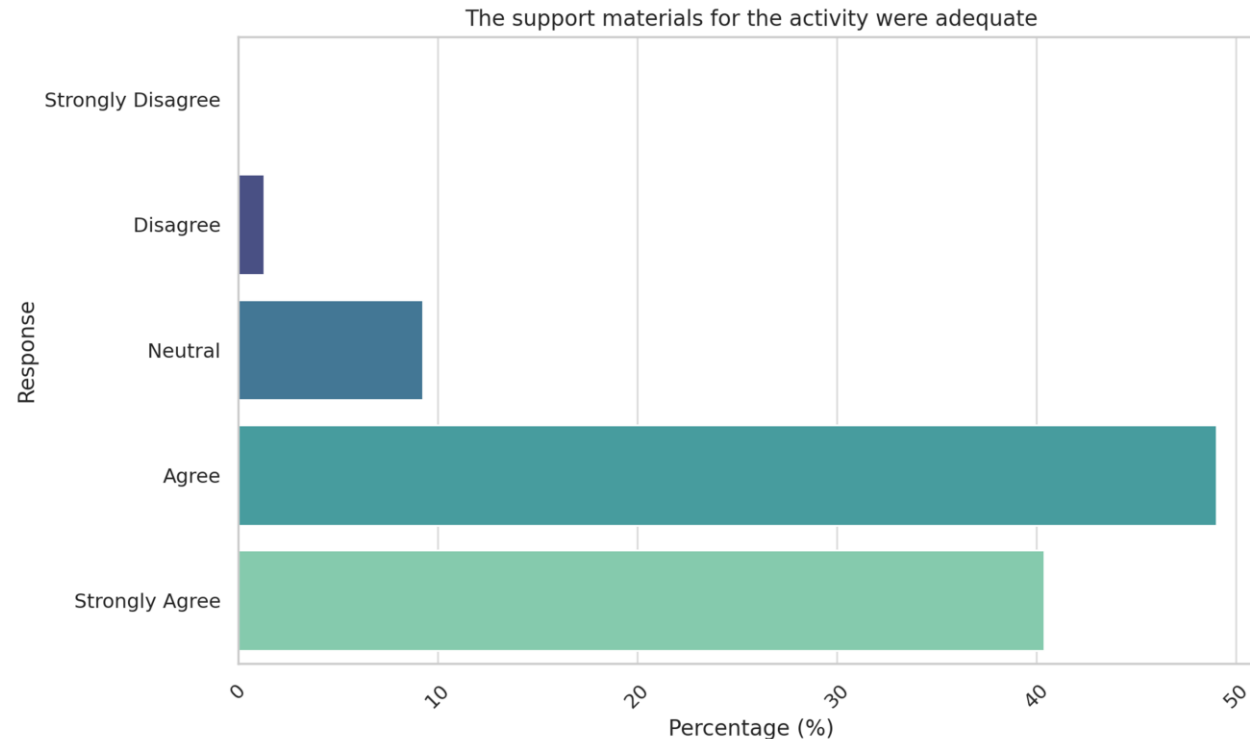
The Graph 2 illustrates the response to the statement "**The meetings with the activity tutor were enlightening and helped in preparing meetings with peers.**" A 95.36% of respondents expressed a positive view, with 45.03% strongly agreeing and 50.33% agreeing, highlighting a significant level of satisfaction with the meetings. Only a minor 4.64% remained neutral, neither agreeing nor disagreeing, which points to some reservations but no strong negative opinions.



Graph 2 – Tutor support

# Results

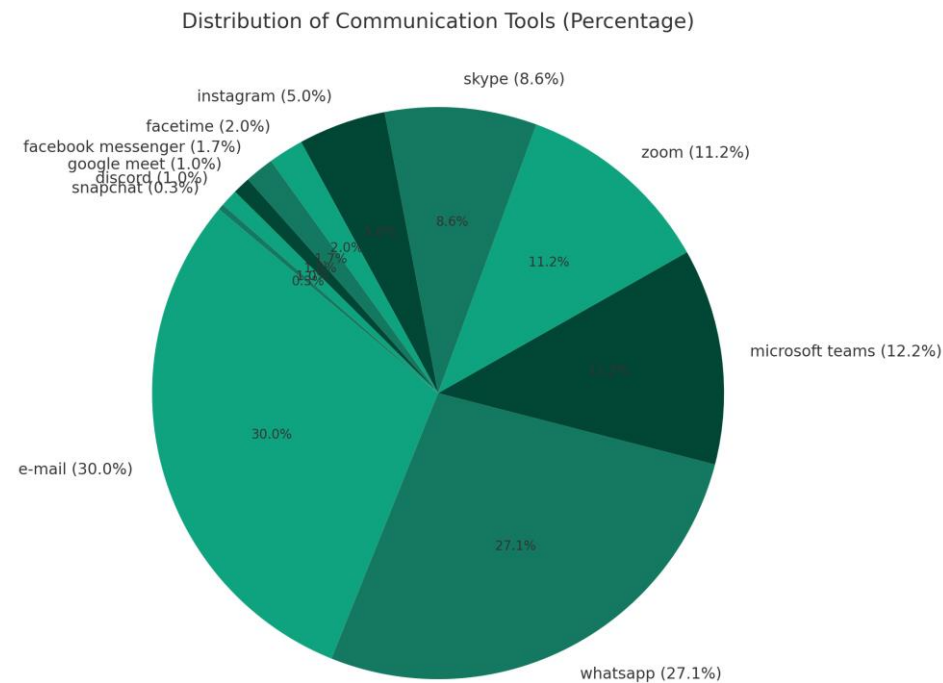
In relation to the statement "**The support materials for the activity were adequate.**" The distribution reflects a generally positive view, with 49.01% of respondents agreeing and 40.40% strongly agreeing, cumulatively accounting for 89.40% of the responses. This suggests that most participants found the support materials to be satisfactory. However, a 9.27% of the respondents remained neutral, indicating some level of indifference regarding the adequacy of the materials (Graph 3).



*Graph 3 – Support materials*

# Results

In relation to the **communication tools used by students during the project** (Graph 4), E-mail stands out as the most preferred tool, constituting 30% of the communication, which underscores its still enduring significance in academic communication. WhatsApp follows closely, representing 27% of usage, highlighting its popularity as a flexible communication platform. Microsoft Teams and zoom also play significant roles, accounting for 12% and 11% respectively, demonstrating their importance in facilitating virtual interactions and collaborations.

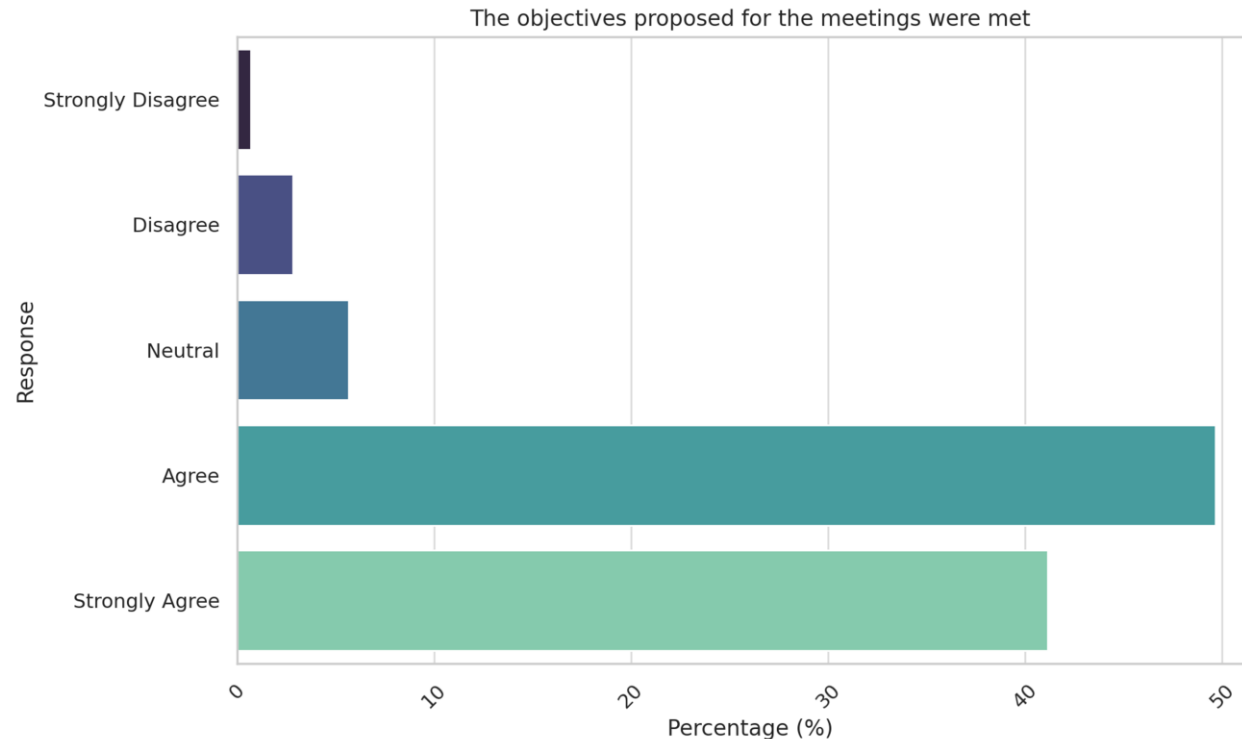


Graph 4 – Communication tools



# Results

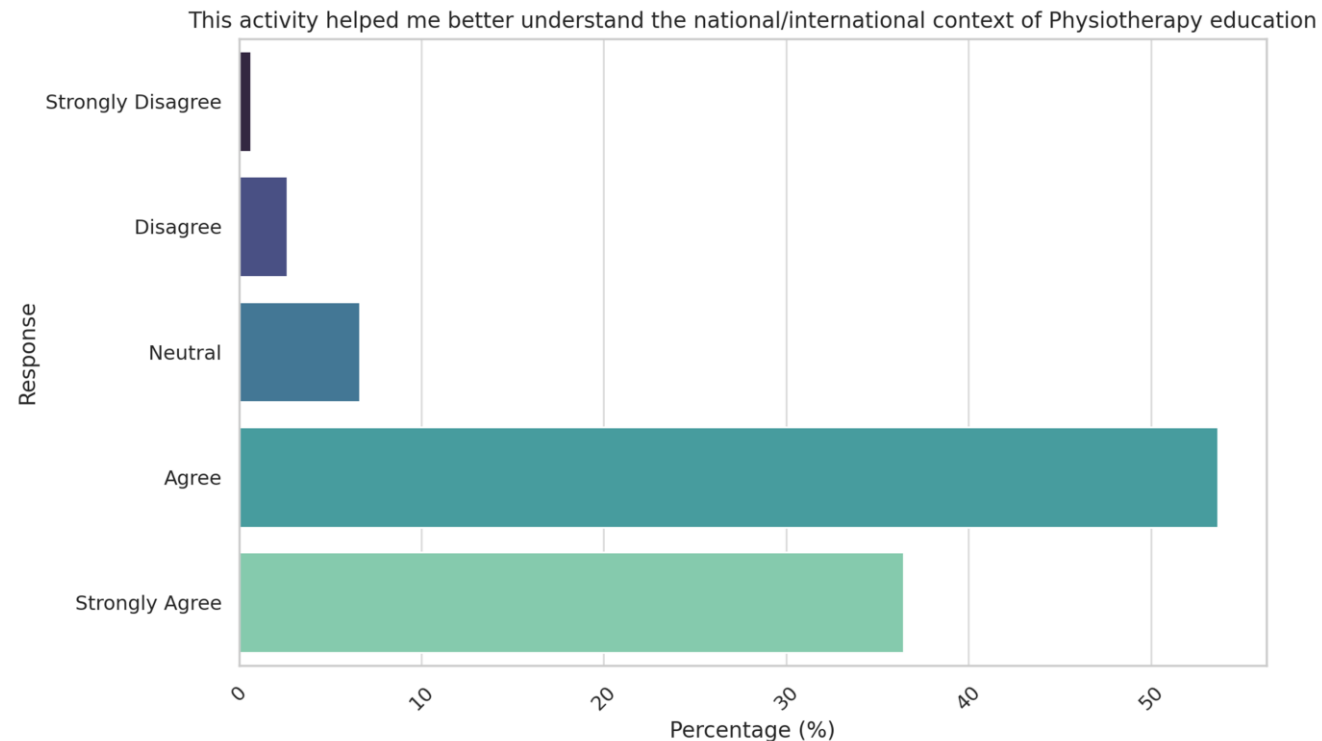
In the distribution of responses for the statement "**The objectives proposed for the meetings were met.**" The data reflects a largely positive view, with 41.13% of participants 'Strongly Agreeing' and 49.65% 'Agreeing', amounting to 90.78% of the responses collectively. This majority indicates that most participants felt the meetings successfully achieved their intended objectives. Overall, the distribution strongly suggests that most participants were satisfied with how the meetings met their proposed objectives (Graph 5).



Graph 5 – Project objectives

# Results

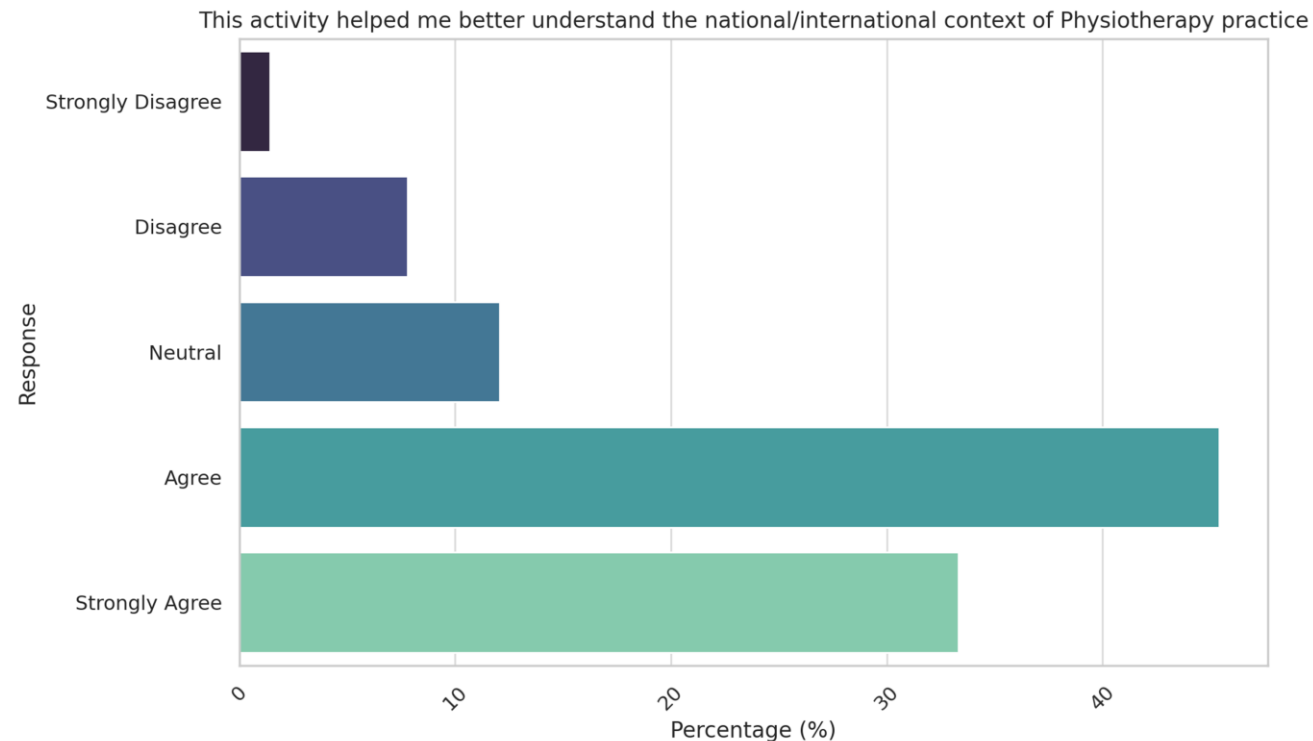
The Graph 6, refers to "**This activity helped me better understand the national/international context of Physiotherapy education.**" Most participants positively assessed the activity's impact on their understanding, with 36.42% 'Strongly Agreeing' and 53.64% 'Agreeing', collectively making up 90.07% of the responses. A small portion, 6.62%, remained neutral, and 3.31% of respondents expressed disagreement (2.65% 'Disagree' and 0.66% 'Strongly Disagree').



Graph 6 – Context of Physiotherapy education

# Results

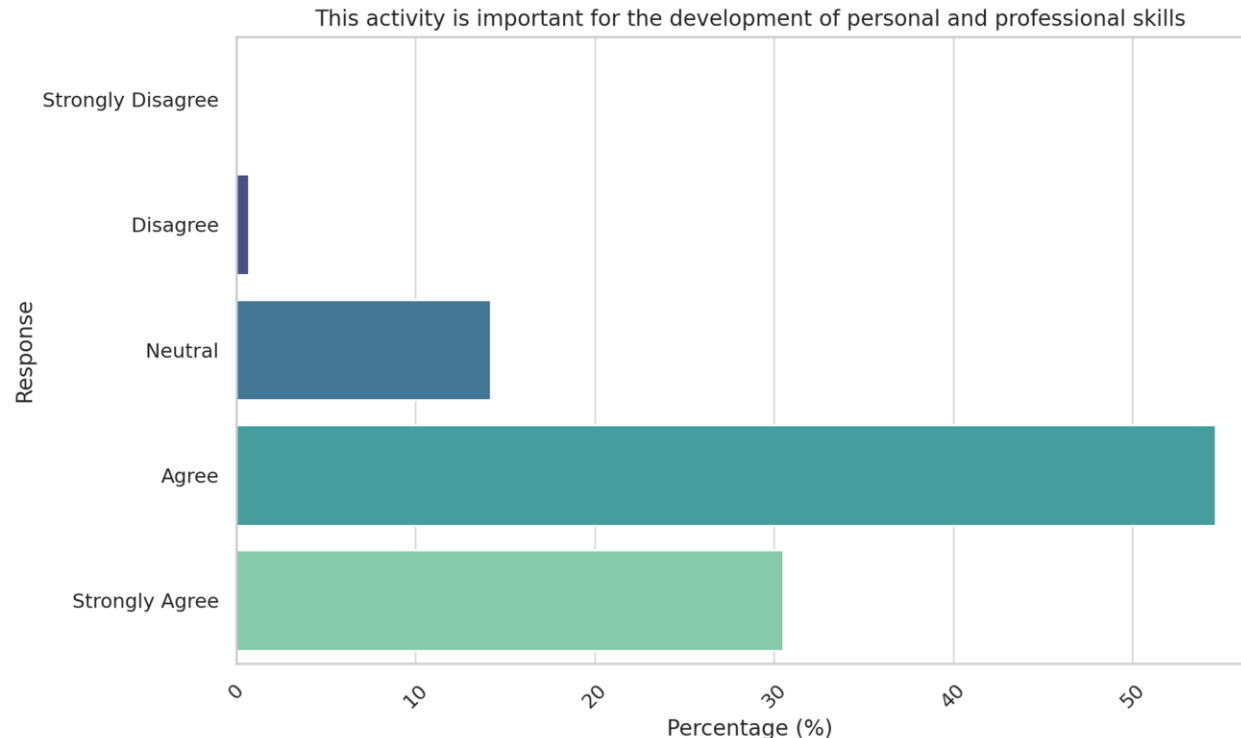
In the statement "**This activity helped me better understand the national/international context of Physiotherapy practice.**" (Graph 7), the responses indicate a generally positive reception, with 33.33% of participants 'Strongly Agreeing' and 45.39% 'Agreeing' with the statement, cumulatively accounting for about 78.72% of the responses. This suggests that most of the participants found the activity effective in enhancing their understanding of the physiotherapy practice in various contexts.



Graph 7 – Context of Physiotherapy practice

# Results

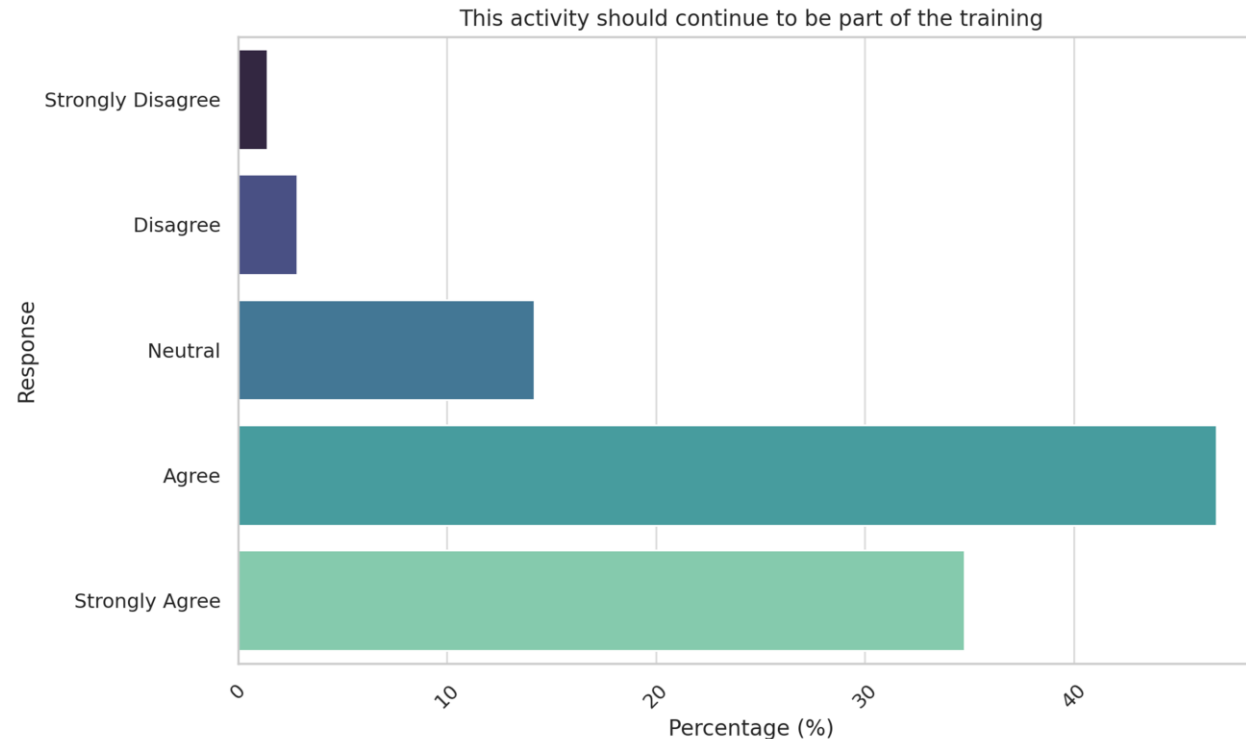
The following chart (Graph 8), illustrates the responses to the statement "**This activity is important for the development of personal and professional skills.**" Most participants view the activity positively in terms of skill development: 30.50% 'Strongly Agree' and 54.61% 'Agree', together making up 85.11% of the responses. This indicates a strong consensus on the activity's value in enhancing both personal and professional competencies.



*Graph 8 – Development of personal and professional skills*

# Results

The Graph 9, displays the responses to the statement "**This activity should continue to be part of the training.**" A significant majority of the participants support the continuation of the activity: 34.75% 'Strongly Agree' and 46.81% 'Agree', cumulatively representing 81.56% of the responses. This strong endorsement suggests that most participants value the activity and believe in its relevance and contribution to the training program.



*Graph 9 – Continuation of this activity*

# Conclusions

This study has provided insights into the effectiveness and reception of a virtual internationalization initiative at the Physiotherapy education program of Escola Superior de Saúde do Alcoitão (ESSAlcoitão), identifying its strengths and areas for future improvement

1. Preparatory meetings for the virtual internationalization initiative at ESSAlcoitão were positively received but indicate a need for more varied preparation strategies to enhance effectiveness.
2. Tutor-led meetings received high satisfaction for their clarity and usefulness, emphasizing the importance of maintaining tutors as a central program element.
3. The program effectively utilized various communication tools, meeting participant preferences and preparing them for professional communication demands, marking adaptability as a key strength.
4. Despite the program's effectiveness in meeting its objectives and contributing to participants' development, there's a need for continuous adaptation and improvement based on feedback, to align more closely with participant expectations and educational best practices.

# References

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