

# Towards More Cooperative/Inclusive Internationalization: Insights from a South/North Virtual Mobility Project

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## Abstract

The pandemic has changed many physical activities involved in the internationalization of higher education process, such as academic mobility. This study investigated how virtual mobility (VM) can contribute to a more cooperative and inclusive internationalization process with more opportunities for the academic communities involved. With that aim, the perceptions of students from a university in the Global South involved in a VM program with a university from the Global North in the 2021/2022 academic year were analyzed. Data were collected through questionnaires and group interviews and analyzed qualitatively to discuss the affordances of VM for more inclusive and cooperative relationships between universities from the Global South and North. Overall, results of the study suggest that although the VM program was designed by the university in the Global North without the cooperation of the university from the Global South, the students involved were positively impacted by their participation in the program and collaboration with students from the Global North, which in turn, contributed to their knowledge and research topic development.

**Keywords:** virtual mobility, internationalization, academic mobility, cooperation, inclusion

## 1. Introduction

Technology has taken up a significant role in the internationalization of universities as most of its related activities had to go online due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In this context, Virtual Mobility (VM), the only possible kind of academic mobility during the most critical stages of the pandemic, has gained new dimensions from where it stood before the pandemic. VM has made internationalization more viable and inclusive, especially to universities in the Global South (Finardi & Guimarães, 2020), despite persisting barriers in terms of language, access to technology, and institutional support for VM (Stalivieri, 2020). Nevertheless, whether VM provides more opportunities for cooperation than physical academic mobility, considered to be very exclusive and competitive (Amorim & Finardi, 2022; De Wit, 2020), is yet to be seen. As borders reopen and physical academic mobility regains its regular and traditional flow, we wonder whether VM has come to stay and how it can contribute to a more cooperative and inclusive internationalization process.

This study investigates how VM can contribute to a more cooperative and inclusive internationalization process with more opportunities for the academic communities involved based on the views of students from a Global South university who participated in a VM program in a Global North university in the academic year of 2021/2022. Students' perceptions were gathered through questionnaires and group interviews and analyzed qualitatively to discuss the affordances of VM for more inclusive and cooperative relationships between universities from the Global South and North.

Having laid out this panorama, this paper offers a brief review of literature related to the internationalization of higher education process and its activities and strategies in terms of academic mobility before zooming in on a case study of a VM project to illustrate the discussion about affordances of VM for more cooperative and inclusive internationalization processes.

## 2. Review of Literature

Internationalization can have multiple meanings for people and institutions in different places and times (Mills, 2022). From a dialogic perspective (Bakhtin, 2006; Volochinov, 2017), words, such as “internationalization”, are ideological signs; that is, they only stand in representation of something outside themselves, of a particular idea of reality based on their speaker's (or writer's) point of view at the moment it was uttered. Each person is unique and has their universe of inner values, which are always work-in-progress as consciousness is constantly being formed in social interactions. In this sense, although our universes are entirely different, they are related. So, the actual word is a small part of the meaning-making process as it only represents one's consciousness, but it is also a strategic part as it forms others' consciousness. That is why “internationalization of higher education” has many different understandings, practices, and outcomes.

After Bakhtin (2006), we can also understand why particular meanings of internationalization have been more widely spread and intensely practiced than others. In the ideological field of discourse, economic and social relations determine the strongest voice, which usually works to silence others to be the only voice to be heard. Thus, it is no surprise that in the higher

education field, internationalization programs and policies around the world mostly happen in response to or in replication of initiatives from countries (Altabach & Knight, 2007) that are geopolitically part of the Global North (Dados & Conell, 2012, Note 1). In that context, higher education has become a commercial market and a commodity in the free international trade market, as shown by its inclusion in World Trade Organization (WTO) GATS (Altabach & Knight, 2007; Dias, 2018, Note 2). So, although internationalization is a rather complex process for which there can be several intertwined rationales, *foci* and approaches (Knight, 2004, 2015; De Wit, 2011), the economic aspect and its importance for the quality of higher education institutions (HEI) have been highly predominant (De Wit, 2011). Even among non-profit public HEI, it seems that internationalization has been focused mainly on competitiveness rather than cooperation, and for that, it has been heavily criticized (e.g., De Wit, 2020, Finardi, Mendes, & Silva, 2022).

Even before the pandemic, Brandenburg et al. (2019) denounced the failure of internationalization to help dealing with major societal issues locally and globally and called for an “Internationalization in Higher Education for Society” that should make HEI able and willing to serve society outside its walls. For Stalivieri and Vianna (2020), internationalization has been focused mainly on quantity, as in the numbers of mobility students and international partners, rather than the quality of its outcomes. With that in mind, they propose a change towards a “Responsible Internationalization” (Stalivieri & Vianna, 2020) to redress regional and linguistic imbalances with transparency for the use of resources, sustainability for the continuity of programs and projects, inclusion of the whole academic community, and compliance with the principles of quality and HEI vision for the future.

After the pandemic, Woicolesco, Cassol-Silva and Morosini (2022) proposed using VM as an alternative to developing internationalization at home (IaH) in a more sustainable model of internationalization for Brazilian higher education institutions. Critical internationalization scholars (e.g., Jordão & Martinez, 2021; Chiappa & Finardi, 2021; Leal, Finardi, & Abba, 2022) argue that changes to internationalization should go deeper into its roots. The hegemonic view and practices of internationalization have been focused on developing high-quality global HEI that meet the demands and needs of a global society without questioning the ethical and political issues in its roots. “Global” and “high-quality” usually mean matching the world view and standards set by the most renowned institutions located mainly in the leading countries in the Global North. In other words, what seems good for those regions is taken as what should be good for the rest, or the so-called “global village”, although many people do not have a ‘citizen or voting status’ in this ‘global village’, a concept that has also been criticized for glossing over the diversity of each region and community’s particularities while blurring the responsibility of local governments to guarantee citizenship and ‘universal rights’ for all (Piccin & Finardi, 2019). One should bear in mind that even in countries of the Global North what is considered “high-quality” for one social group may not be so for others.

From a Latin American decolonial perspective (e.g., Finardi, 2021; Leal, Finardi, & Abba, 2022), the tendency to universalize as a way of thinking and looking at the world disregarding other realities that do not fit this ‘universal’ model is a characteristic of the world power pattern that dictates modern western thinking entangled in a colonial logic, ever

since the conquest of America (Piccin & Finardi, 2021). Quijano (2005) argues that although colonization has finished, the western world inherited coloniality in which eurocentrism establishes power relations, materially and subjectively. As a result, European countries have been granted epistemic sovereignty, which later extended to other hegemonic countries that constitute the Global North (Santos & Meneses, 2009; Quijano, 2005). On the other end, the Global South suffers a form of “epistemicide” whereby its knowledge is invisibilized, suppressed and devalued (Santos & Meneses, 2009). In fact, in internationalization processes in most North and South HEI, it is possible to see evidence/footprints of a colonial logic in the organization, teaching, research and extension practices; for instance, in curriculum standardization and homogenization and the setting of English as the official language of instruction (Macedo, 2020).

Considering that ‘Global North and South’ are relational and geopolitical terms rather than geographical, one side is always trying to dominate the other. For that reason, hegemonic Internationalization has been found to intersect with issues of equity, diversity, inclusion and so, politics and ethics. Garcia et al. (2022) mention the strategies for standardizing "global" education based on Eurocentric models. These include but are not limited to the privilege to some areas of knowledge valued by the global market contributing to socioeconomic inequalities, imbalance of curriculum and pedagogy in which colonial logic prevails. Also, predominant flows of students in the Global South-North direction as part of the creation of an international market of students in which the dominant countries continue to exert their colonial power in the country’s imaginations of education, language and culture, attracting most students from Global South countries.

For Stein and McCartney (2021), ethical and political issues in internationalization are related to the naturalization and reproduction of geopolitical, economic and epistemic uneven relationships. So, the authors urge to transform the whole system into what they call an alternative process of “internationalization otherwise”. In this study we are, in a way, interested in the potential of VM to contribute to this “internationalization otherwise” that is more cooperative than competitive (De Wit, 2020; Amorim & Finardi, 2022; Finardi, Mendes, & Silva, 2022).

Results of studies carried out in our research group have warned about the risks of hegemonic internationalization practices with a particular focus on Brazil, considering issues of languages, technologies, and mobilities involved in this process (e.g., Guimarães, Mendes, & Hildeblando Júnior, 2021; Guimarães & Finardi, 2021b; Leão & Finardi, 2021; Piccin & Finardi, 2021; Taquini & Finardi, 2021, to cite but a few). Finardi and Guimarães (2020) and Finardi, Guimarães and Mendes (2019) called for a disruption of hegemonic internationalization practices suggesting a change in its focus from mobility and competition to virtual exchange and cooperation, but also considering its roots from Eurocentric, colonial and neoliberal views to alternative, critical and decolonial perspectives that promote epistemic justice. Finardi (2021, 2022) concludes that the internationalization of higher education process in Latin America should be more critical, situated, emancipatory and constructed and practiced for, by and with the South.

International academic mobility, also called exchange, plays a central role in the internationalization of HEI (e.g., De Wit, 2020). Indeed, international student recruitment has

become a major strategy of hegemonic internationalization practices (Wang, 2022) because of the significant income involved in tuition fees from international students and intercultural attractiveness (Dias et al., 2021). In recent research, Wang (2022) denounces that around 80% of international students are located in only 10 countries, not surprisingly, all from the Global North: USA, UK, Canada, China, Australia, France, Russia, Germany, Japan, and Spain. As for the number of students who engage in academic mobility and according to UNESCO's website (Note 3), in 2019, it represented only 2.6% of the total number of university students worldwide. Of course, that number dropped considerably after the pandemic and war crisis.

Based on that, we can say that international mobility has been practiced as a very exclusive activity that favors only a few students (less than 1% in most Brazilian universities) and institutions. In addition to being a minimal and elitist internationalization strategy, considering the costs involved, academic mobility is also limiting in regard to its flows. Díaz (2018) shows data before the pandemic that only 4 English-speaking countries from the Global North concentrate more than half of all international students worldwide. As such, there is an evident discrepancy in intentions between the Global North and South countries regarding mobility, with the former being seen as the hub of knowledge and the target destination of the South in search of it (Morosini & Corte, 2018).

What is more serious, in our opinion, is the correlation (or intersection if you will) between language (in this case, English as the dominant language of countries from the Global North) and internationalization flows. Indeed, it is no coincidence that migration and internationalization flows are usually from the South to the North. In the case of internationalization, the location of the destination is as important as the language, as shown by the largest outbound academic mobility program in Brazil, Science without Borders (SwB) (Finardi & Archanjo, 2018), whose washback effect was the creation of the English without Borders (EwB) program to equip Brazilian university students with English language skills to be able to receive scholarships from SwB to travel abroad.

For Pereira, Edmundo and Andreotti (2018), students' choices are motivated mainly by ideologies, concepts and discourses of the dominant global imagination, perpetuating the hierarchical and colonial logic whereby HEIs in the North are seen as superior to those in the South. In addition, Díaz et al. (2021) claim that international mobility has commodified intercultural competence acquired abroad and devalued the plurality of languages and cultures in their communities, institutions, and regions of origin. As a result, mobility has led, as a limited and elitist internationalization strategy, to an increase in social inequalities and epistemic injustices in countries of the South.

As such, mobility plays a relevant role in ethical and political issues related to internationalization, which calls for an urgent rethinking and evaluation of its roots, rationales, approaches and footprints (e.g., Chiappa & Finardi, 2021). Undoubtedly, the COVID-19 pandemic, with its disruptions to physical mobility and international travel, among other things, has sped up that review. Most face-to-face classes were suspended and many international students either returned home hastily or were grounded abroad (IAU, 2020). The pandemic brought further evidence to what had been previously alleged by internationalization critique regarding the vulnerability of the hegemonic internationalization with its commercial focus whereby HEI (and regions) that depended on the influx of



international students suffered from the drastic decrease of income from academic mobility.

Amid the pandemic chaos, alternative ways to internationalize gained new potential and visibility, especially those enabled by digital technologies such as Virtual Mobility (VM), also known as Virtual Exchange (VE). Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, VM had already been encouraged and implemented as a valid alternative or complement to international physical mobility (López-Duarte et al., 2022), as seen in some European VM programs such as Being Mobile, Elearning Europe, Erasmus + virtual exchange program (López-Duarte et al., 2022; Vriens et al., 2010). Research by the International Association of Universities (IAU, 2020) showed that 60% of HEI reported an increase in virtual mobility and collaborative online learning in the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic.

International VM is as any activity supported by digital technologies that allow or facilitate international and collaborative teaching, training, or learning experiences (EUROPEAN COMMISSION, 2014). VM aims to make mobility available to a broader range of students, developing cross-border and cross-cultural collaboration and competence allowing the exchange of knowledge between participants and HEI (López-Duarte et al., 2022). VM can happen through participation in foreign HEI virtual courses, seminars, study programs, work placements, or support activities for physical exchange (Vriens et al., 2010).

According to the review of literature by López-Duarte et al. (2022), improved student accessibility and cost-effectiveness are the main advantages of VM. In addition, VM shows significant impacts on language learning, cross-cultural competencies, job readiness, employability, and student-focused learning (López-Duarte et al., 2022). As for its shortcomings, López-Duarte et al. (2022) found the lack of access, quality or confidence in using technology and students' lack of attention or motivation to work alone as the most significant issues in VM. In their research on virtual mobility with students from Spain before and during the COVID-19, López-Duarte et al. (2022) identified three areas of significant pedagogical and critical importance that need to be addressed before the VM experience: abilities to communicate in a new foreign environment, understanding of the need for cultural competencies and their importance, and remote working capabilities. Also, they suggest home and host professors, tutors and HEI play important roles in preparing, guiding, and assisting VM students. Finally, based on their research, they concluded that VM represents a legitimate international experience and a relevant internationalization strategy.

Just as VM, Virtual Exchange (VE) has been thought of as a strategy for Internationalization at Home (IaH, Note 4), with a shift in focus from allowing cross-border mobility for a few students to providing international learning opportunities for a larger audience of students (Garces & O'Dowd, 2021). VE has also shown advantages similar to those found in VM (Garces & O'Dowd, 2021; O'Dowd, 2021b), such as developments in participants' foreign language competence as well as in intercultural, digital, and soft skills. However, for some specialists, VE and VM should not be considered the same, as the former usually involves a class-to-class exchange under the guidance of trained facilitators. In contrast, the latter relies primarily on individual students' engagement in online international learning (Helm & O'Dowd, 2020).

O'Dowd (2021b, p. 1) defines VE as “an umbrella term used to refer to the different ways in which groups of learners are engaged in online intercultural interaction and collaboration

with partners from other cultural contexts or geographical locations as an integrated part of course work and under the guidance of educators and/or expert facilitators”. Despite the remark mentioned before, in this study, we understand VM as one possibility of VE, as VM projects have integrated international collaboration and communication activities in courses and as conceived by other VM studies (Villar-Onrubia & Rajpal, 2016; López-Duarte et al., 2022; Vriens et al., 2010). However, both VM and VE are highly flexible activities in which learning outcomes vary considerably according to the context, design, guidance, and participants involved.

In Brazil, the BRaVE (Brazilian Virtual Exchange) program was already active years before the COVID-19 pandemic (Salomão, 2020) offering online courses with an international interface in collaboration with foreign institutions. Oviedo and Krimphove (2022) found that the experience of virtual mobility in BRaVE contributed to the development of intercultural competences in the academic community and a more inclusive internationalization. However, difficulties were also observed related to the use of digital technologies, language comprehension, commitment from the participants and superficial interculturality (Oviedo & Krimphove, 2022).

In some ways, although VM and VE can be accessible for a much broader range of students than physical mobility, they can still exclude those who do not have the language and digital skills, or tools, needed for engaging in the learning experience (Orsini-Jones, Cerveró-Carrascosa, & Finardi, 2021). On the other hand, the more internationalization reaches a significant number of students, the more urgent it is to evaluate and rethink the logic of it to prevent VM/VE from ending up reinforcing the hegemonic Eurocentric and colonial ideologies on internationalization prevalent during physical academic mobility prior to the pandemic. For this reason, this study investigates how VM can contribute to a more cooperative and inclusive internationalization process with more opportunities for the academic communities involved by disrupting the competition and exclusive orientation of hegemonic practices observed before the pandemic.

### **3. Methodology**

This qualitative study focuses on the views of students from a federal university in Brazil, hereafter referred to as UB, who participated in a VM program, the Virtual International Programme (VIP) at a university in Germany, hereafter referred to as UG.

UB is a public university whose vision is “to be recognized as a public institution of national and international excellence in teaching, research and extension, committed to social inclusion, interiorization, innovation and sustainable development of Brazilian society, in particular the state” (Note 5) where it is located. It charges no fees and has around 23.500 students in Bachelor, Master, and Doctoral programs. Its Development Plan for 2021–2030 includes internationalization among its main challenges throughout all five strategic areas, teaching, research, outreach, assistance, and management. Goals for internationalization include expanding mobilities and partnerships for teaching and research, promoting outreach practices and collaborative networks for internationalization, and improving assistance policies for international students and researchers. However, international students at UB only represent around 1% of overall students. UB was rated 1201+ in THE World University

Rankings 2022.

UG is a public university that “combines a broad and interdisciplinary spectrum of research and teaching in the areas of law, economics and business studies, the natural sciences, and the humanities” with around 28.000 students in Bachelor, Master and Doctoral programs. As a public university, UG charges no tuition fees, although it requires a semester contribution of around 300 euros for regular students. Its Guiding Principle and Profile Abstract from the Development Plan UG 2020.2 assures internationalization as one of its main goals by stating that “UG’s success has always stemmed from excellent achievements in research and, in consequence of these, from the awareness of the university’s responsibility towards education, alongside intensive inter-institutional cooperation and international networking”. UG’s internationalization strategy for 2016–2016 sets two main objectives: excellent achievements in teaching and research at UG and the promotion of intercultural exchange and international understanding. For that, the HEI focuses on developing internationalization in two dimensions: on a broad base at all levels through activities and at home, and internationalization at the top, focusing on strategies abroad like international networking, recruiting, and recognition. As a result, international students account for 10% of overall students and 25% of post-graduates. UG is rated 401–500 in THE World University Rankings 2022, having International Outlook as one of the HEI’s most pivotal features.

Amid the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021, UG started its VM program called UG VIP for its partners, around 330 HEI worldwide. According to the program website, the UG VIP aims at expanding collaborative, virtual, and international teaching scenarios, promoting digital and intercultural competencies of students and teaching staff. As for its goals, it offers virtual and international experience at UG without any on-site presence, enhancing mobility amid pandemic conditions by means of virtual or blended mobility. Besides a broad variety of online courses in different languages (German, English, French, Spanish, and others) for undergraduate and graduate students with no charges, UG VIP also offers support structures, counseling, and social interaction for participants in the VM. The program design is based on a holistic concept as “a result of the presumption that the integration of students into the virtual teaching and learning environment and the university community can be considered crucial for student success”. UG VIP has offered almost 60 online courses for Bachelor’s and Master’s students in different areas taught in English, French, German, or Spanish.

UB and UG have been partners since July 2013 under an inter-institutional agreement and have exchanged a few inbound and outbound mobility students over these years. Once UG VIP was launched to all UG’s partners, UB International Office advertised the program on its website and through email to all UB students. As a result, 70 students from UB enrolled for virtual mobility through UG VIP in the 2021/2022 winter semester. Classes ran from October 2021 to February 2022, and the language and activities varied according to the course chosen by the student. UG provided a list of UB students who registered at the VIP upon request. This list was used to contact the students for this research study and provide data for overall information about registered students. Then, these students were sent an invitation to participate in this research study by answering a questionnaire, which was prepared based on the review of literature and validated with members of our research group at UB. The questionnaire was designed as an online form divided into four sections outlined in Table 1.



Table 1. Questionnaire design

Section	Content	Type of Questions
Introduction	Brief introduction Research description, Agreement to terms and participation	Yes/No
About the Virtual Mobility Program	Course title Language of instructions Students' motivations Satisfaction level Advantages and Disadvantages Additional comments	Multiple Choice Open
About your experience	Narratives about the learning experience during and after the program	Completely Agree Partially Agree Don't agree or disagree Partially Disagree Completely Disagree
Personal and academic information	Course at UB Languages spoken Financial assistance International experience Acceptance to interview	Multiple Choice Yes/No

Source: Produced by the authors'.

After a first analysis of the answers, the respondents were invited to an online group interview in which 4 students and 1 researcher participated. The focus group interview was semi-structured and included a brief explanation of research goals, key aspects of the review of literature, and some of the answers from the questionnaire. All participants engaged in the discussions, which were encouraged mainly around two topics: VM inclusiveness and competitiveness versus cooperation. The discussion lasted around one hour and a half and was recorded, upon participants' agreement, for further analysis.

#### 4. Findings

Data for this study was produced from students' answers to the questionnaire, the interviews, overall UG VIP registered students from UB provided by UG and program information available on its website and sent by UG. In the 2021/2022 Winter semester, 70 students from UB registered for 35 different courses, among those offered by the UG VIP program from October 2021 to February 2022. The program allowed students to register for more than one course each semester and over 50% of students enrolled in more than one course, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Number of courses enrolled by individual students

Number of courses enrolled by individual students	% of total UB students
1	47%
2	34%
3	13%
4	4,29%
5	1,43%

Source: Authors'.

According to VIP UG launching material, courses were offered in the following areas: Agricultural Sciences, Nutritional Sciences and Environmental Management; Biology and Chemistry; Business Administration and Economics; Foreign Language and Career-oriented Competencies; German Language Courses; History and Cultural Studies; Interdisciplinary Courses; Languages, Literature, Culture; Law; Mathematics and Computer Science, Physics, Geography; Medicine, Psychology and Sports Sciences, Social Sciences and Cultural Studies; Veterinary Medicine. Table 3 shows the areas available in UG VIP and chosen by UB students

Table 3. Number of courses offered and enrolled

<b>Area</b>	<b>Number of Courses Offered by UG VIP</b>	<b>Number of Courses enrolled by UB students</b>
Languages, Literature, Culture	25	11
History and Cultural Studies	10	4
Social Sciences and Cultural Studies	5	4
Agricultural Sciences, Nutritional Sciences and Environmental Management	5	3
Mathematics and Computer Science, Physics, Geography	6	2
Business Administration and Economic	5	2
Law	3	2
German Language Courses	2	2
Interdisciplinary Courses	2	2
Career-oriented Competencies	2	1
Biology and Chemistry	1	1
Psychology	1	1
Medicine	3	0
Veterinary Medicine	1	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>35</b>

Considering the number of courses chosen by students from UB, there is interest in Humanities and Social Sciences, especially subjects related to Language, History, Social and Cultural Studies. In contrast, no student enrolled in Medicine and Veterinary subjects. The number of students enrolled in each subject or field of knowledge (Table 4) confirms the high interest in Humanities-related subjects, especially Linguistics, German Language and Intercultural Studies, followed by Business and Social Sciences. Also, it may indicate an interest in the German language and culture, considering the number of German immigrants in the state where UB is located. However, it is important to mention that we are not referring to individual student's interests, as most students registered to more than one subject, but rather relating to the level of interest in each subject shown by the whole group of UB students registered in UG VIP.

Table 4. Number of students enrolled by area and course

Area	% of total UB students	Course Title	Number of UB students
Languages, Literature, Culture	37%	Psycholinguistics	5
		Forensic Linguistics (Seminar)	4
		Sociolinguistics	3
		Introduction to English Linguistics	3
		Introduction to Gender, Sexuality and Diversity Studies	3
		History of the English Language	2
		Literary Periods- An introduction	2
		Lexicology	1
		Methods in Cultural, Literary and Linguistic Studies	1
		<i>Deutsche Literatur und deutscher Film nach 1945</i> (German literature and German film after 1945)	1
German Language Courses	31%	<i>Los Siglos de Oro en (femenino) plural</i> (The Golden Age in (feminine) plural)	1
		DaF Schnupperkurs (German as a Foreign Language - Beginner)	18
Foreign Language and Career-oriented Competences	20%	DaF-Vertiefungskurs A1+ Survival Level Reloaded!™ (German as a Foreign Language - Advanced)	4
		Global Competence: Cross-Cultural Skills for an Interconnected World	14
Business Administration and Economic	19%	Strategic and International Management	9
Social Sciences and Cultural Studies	19%	Marketing	4
		Democracy and Disillusionment	4
		Selected Aspects of Pedagogy and Didactics in Primary Schools	3
Interdisciplinary Courses	14%	Germany's Political and Social System in Comparative Perspective	3
		Reflexive Perspectives on Migration and Integration	3
		<i>Violencias del pasado y políticas del presente desde una perspectiva latinoamericana</i> (Violence of the past and politics of the present from a Latin American perspective)	8
		Introduction to Latin American Studies	2
History and Cultural Studies	11%	Everyday life in the Soviet Union	4
		Slavery in the Early Modern Period	2
		Democracy and its Boundary Problem	1
		<i>Museumsdidaktische Konzepte und Formen des Vermittelns</i> (Museum didactic concepts and forms of communication)	1
		Sustainable Development – Oxymoron or Joint Effort?	4
Law	10%	Development Studies	3
		Variational Methods	5
Mathematics and Computer Science, Physics, Geography	9%	<i>Physik im Weltraum</i> (Physics in Space)	1
Agricultural Sciences, Nutritional Sciences and Environmental Management	6%	Agriculture, Ecosystem Functioning and Climate Change	2
		Applied Statistics	1
		Climate Change and Economic Development (Lecture and Seminar)	1
Biology and Chemistry	1%	Master Seminar- <i>Spezielle Tierökologie und Zoologie</i> (Special animal ecology and zoology)	1
Psychology	1%	Sensation and Perception B	1

Looking at the most chosen courses, German Language for beginners was in the first place, followed by the Global Competence course. Also, 11% of students registered for an interdisciplinary course on Latin American studies. Therefore, three of the top four courses are not related to one particular degree or area of knowledge but rather to learning of intercultural competencies such as foreign language, cross-cultural skills, and international perspectives. Important to note that the only degree-related top 4 course (Strategic and International Management in Business area) also had an international focus.

Table 5. Top 4 courses enrolled by UB students

Course Title	Number of UB Students	% from total UB Students
<i>DaF Schnupperkurs</i> (German as a Foreign Language - Beginner)	18	26%
Global Competence: Cross-Cultural Skills for an Interconnected World	14	20%
Strategic and International Management	9	13%
<i>Violencias del pasado y políticas del presente desde una perspectiva latinoamericana</i> (Violence of the past and politics of the present from a Latin American perspective)	8	11%

As for students at UB, they come from a variety of 37 different degrees (Table 6), 73% from Bachelors and 27% Masters. Although courses in Language, Literature and Culture had the most enrollments in UG VIP from UB, only 10% come from a Language and Literature degree at UB. On the other hand, most students come from Social Sciences, Law and Engineering degrees. Interesting to note that around 25% of students from UB come from degrees that knowledge area was not comprehended by UG VIP, such as Engineering, Arts, Earth, and Biological Sciences.

Table 6. UG VIP enrolled students degree at UB

Area	% of total enrolled students	Degree	Number of enrolled Students
Social Sciences and Cultural Studies	17%	Pedagogy	3
		Master's in Communication and Territorialities	3
		Social Service	2
		Design	2
		Master's in Architecture and Urbanism	1
		Philosophy	1
Law	13%	Law	5
		Master's in Procedural Law	4
Engineering	13%	Mechanical Engineering	3
		Civil Engineering	3
		Master's in Sustainable Development and Engineering	1
		Electrical Engineering	1
		Production Engineering	1
Mathematics and Computer Science, Physics, Geography	10%	Physics	4
		Master's in Informatics	1
		Master's in Information Sciences	1
		Geography	1

Languages, Literature, Culture	10%	English Language and Literature	2
		Portuguese Language and Literature	2
		Italian and Portuguese Language and Literature	2
		Spanish and Portuguese Language and Literature	1
Business Administration and Economic	9%	Economics	3
		Business	2
		Accounting	1
Arts	6%	Visual Arts	3
		Master's in Arts	1
Agricultural Sciences, Nutritional Sciences and Environmental Management	6%	Master's in Environmental Engineering	2
		Environmental Engineering	2
Psychology	4%	Master's in Psychology	2
		Psychology	1
Health Sciences	4%	Medicine	1
		Speech Therapy	1
		Physical Therapy	1
History and Cultural Studies	3%	History	2
Earth Sciences	3%	Geology	1
		Gemology	1
Biological Sciences	3%	Biology	2

At first glance and based on the comprehensive data from all UB students enrolled at UG VIP in the 2021/2022 winter semester, it seems students' main interest was in expanding their learning beyond their own degree at UB, especially in interdisciplinary courses and regarding intercultural skills such as learning German, global competence, international management, and Latin American perspectives but also in transdisciplinary courses.

Of the 70 students who participated in UG VIP, 23 completed the online questionnaire prepared for this research in June and July 2022. These students were enrolled in 30 different courses offered by UG VIP. According to the students, 87% of the courses they attended were in English, 13% in German, and 13% in Spanish. When asked about their language skills besides Portuguese (the native language of most Brazilians), 96% of the students reported having enough English skills (Table 7). Almost 70% of students declared being able to communicate in two or more additional languages understood as any language except the native or mother tongue language.

Table 7. Students additional languages

<b>Additional Language</b>	<b>Number of Students</b>	<b>% of total Number of Students</b>
English	22	96%
Spanish	10	43%
French	5	22%
German	4	17%
Polish	1	4%
Japonese	1	4%
Chinese	1	4%

As mentioned previously, VM language of instruction or mediation is an important aspect to be considered by HEI since it may enable or limit access. As can be seen in Table 5, among



the top four courses chosen by UB students, two are in English, one in German and the other in Spanish. So, although English is still the preferred language of instruction, students have shown interest in other languages of instruction/mediation (the former usually associated with classroom communication while the latter relates to communication outside the class) as well, when available. The preference for English is likely related to the fact that most courses were offered in that language, thus increasing the number of options.

Another aspect highlighted in the literature is that VM is a more viable and inclusive internationalization practice because it provides those students who can't travel or participate in physical mobility for financial or personal reasons opportunities to engage in international and intercultural experiences. However, 74% of UB students had already travelled abroad before engaging in VM. Also, only 9% belonged to low-income families which is expected given the linguistic capital they brought in, that is, most Brazilian students in our study had traveled abroad and spoke foreign languages, something which is not representative of most low-income families in Brazil. Based on the language skills and travel experience involved in academic mobility in general, VM seems more appealing to those who have already engaged in international interactions/intercultural practices such as international travelling or foreign language learning and therefore have the needed resources for that, rather than for those who have never had the opportunity for international travel, learning or intercultural learning.

As for students' motivations and expectations for enrolling at UG VIP, they agreed with most of the suggested answers (Table 8). However, it seems they were mainly motivated by the content of the course, the origin of the institution and the opportunity to learn an additional language.

Table 8. Students motivations and expectations

<b>Motivation/Expectations</b>	<b>Number of Students</b>	<b>% Total Students</b>
Course content	20	87%
To study in a European university	18	78%
Experience with other language	18	78%
Free course	15	65%
Contact with people from other countries	14	61%
New methods of teaching	13	57%

Apparently, their expectations were mostly met, as students' level of satisfaction was above 90% (Table 9). Also, students' choices in questions regarding positive (Table 10) and negative (Table 11) aspects of UG VIP, as well as their additional comments on their answers, show they seem to have had an overall positive experience.

Table 9. Students' overall satisfaction

<b>Overall satisfaction</b>	<b>% Total Student</b>
Much Satisfied	39%
Satisfied	52%
Indifferent	4%
Unsatisfied	4%
Much unsatisfied	0%

The highest scores for UG VIP were the contact with different content, methodology, language and people (Table 10). The shortcomings were mainly related to time zone differences, little interaction in class and issues related to access and handling of technology (Table 11).

Table 10. Positive aspects of UG VIP

<b>Positive Aspects</b>	<b>Number of Students</b>	<b>% Total Students</b>
Interesting and/or different content	17	74%
Contact with a different teaching methodology	13	57%
Learning another language	11	48%
Interaction with people from other countries	10	43%
Studying from home	7	30%

Table 11. Negative aspects of UG VIP

<b>Negative Aspects</b>	<b>Students</b>	<b>% Total students</b>
Time-zone differences	11	48%
Little interaction among participants	8	35%
Technical issues with the internet, computer or cellphones	6	26%
Content not interesting	3	13%
Problems to communicate in another language	2	9%
Lack of support from professor or institution to accomplish activities	2	9%
Inappropriate methodology	2	9%
The class didn't respond to its initial proposal/description	1	4%
Problems to handle courses at both HEI at the same time	1	4%
Ergonomics	1	4%
Lack of administrative support	1	4%
Little connection between professor and students	1	4%
Professor's English level	1	4%
None	1	4%

The content of the course is a key factor in attracting and generating positive perceptions from students. Besides being motivated by it, students mentioned that the contents of classes allowed them to have contact with different perspectives and expand their sources of knowledge and bibliographical references on topics studied at UB. Also, some students mentioned the relevance of studying content not offered by UB.

Another positive aspect highlighted by students was the methodology of the courses. As face-to-face classes, virtual course methodologies vary significantly according to course

objectives, design, and professor's teaching style. Students seem to have appreciated when the methodology was clear, lectures were straightforward and activities were practical and interactive. Most complaints about the methodology were linked to German classes. Students found the methodology inappropriate for the beginner level and somewhat embarrassing, a reason for some to quit the VM.

Some students stressed out the difference between the Brazilian and the German educational systems, which turned out to be confusing and challenging.

Language-related issues were another aspect mentioned by students who felt challenged and intrigued by taking classes in another language. Many students were happy they could keep up with the lessons, do the activities and interact with their classmates in an additional language. In fact, interaction with classmates was highlighted by the students, especially those who participated in synchronous activities. On the other hand, some courses did not provide opportunities for synchronous activities and many students reported this gap.

The difference in the time zone between Brazil and Germany of up to 5 hours was the number one complaint in UG VIP. This issue was evident during some synchronous lessons and activities held early in the morning in Brazilian time and prevented the Brazilian students' attendance or engagement. As for technical issues, most complaints were related to UG VIP online platform to be confusing and complicated, with too many steps and information filling. As reported by Lirios et al. (2021), for example, the deliberate, planned and systematic process of acceptance, diffusion and use of technologies depend on specific situations/contexts. Considering the use of digital technologies in the VM analysed in this study, problems related to the quality or access to internet or digital devices were minimum as expected considering the number of students who came from low-income families.

Regarding students' perspectives on specific aspects (Table 12), around 65% strongly agreed that their courses included synchronous and asynchronous activities and that they participated in asynchronous activities. Whereas fewer students seem to have participated in synchronous activities, especially due to their availability in some courses as reported by some. As for the intercultural interactions, almost 90% stated that their classmates were from different countries and cultures as UG has more than 300 international partnerships with HEI. Apparently, interactions among students, when present, were friendly and respectful. As for the quality of interactions, half of the students strongly felt they had the chance to learn and share about each other's knowledge and culture or to interact in different languages. On the other hand, some students are not sure they had the opportunity to do so, suggesting rather superficial or non-student-centered activities. As noticed in students' comments, they seemed to have enjoyed interacting with classmates from other countries and in different languages by means of synchronous activities. At the same time, students who did not engage in synchronous activities stated they could have benefited more from them. UG VIP offers extra-class interaction opportunities for students through games and other social online activities; however, only one student mentioned having been involved with and enjoyed them.

Table 12. Students' evaluation of course activities and interactions

	Strongly Agree	Partially Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Partially Disagree	Strongly Disagree
There were synchronous and asynchronous activities.	65%	13%	0%	4%	17%
I often took part in synchronous activities.	57%	17%	4%	4%	17%
I completed the course's asynchronous activities.	65%	17%	9%	9%	0%
My classmates were from different countries and cultures.	87%	9%	4%	0%	0%
Interactions were friendly and respectful.	83%	4%	13%	0%	0%
I learned about my classmates' knowledges and culture.	52%	26%	13%	4%	4%
I had the opportunity to share my knowledge and culture with my classmates and professor.	52%	22%	13%	4%	9%
I had the opportunity to interact in different languages.	52%	17%	13%	13%	4%

Regarding the contributions of international partnerships for UG (Table 13), students perceived them mostly on their cultural and critical skills but also to their academic and professional education and around 95% strongly or partially agreed on recommending VM to their classmates. However, the intention to participate in VM again is significantly lower, suggesting that even though students think VM is beneficial for their education, 30% are unsure of engaging in a second experience. One aspect that may have affected their motivation is the impossibility or difficulties of using the VM credits in their degree courses at UB. Only 40% reported successfully validating VM credits into their academic records. In fact, some students complained about the lack of clear and specific criteria for credit validation at UB. Previous research, for instance, López-Duarte et al. (2022), shows the importance of recognizing students' efforts in VM by validating the credits.

Only 43% of the students stated having the intention to share the knowledge gained in VM experience with their classmates or professors, and 22% were not sure about it. One explanation for this could be related to the fact that students do not know how to do it, do not feel they have the opportunity or professors would be uninterested in learning about it. This could also be affected by VM's low credibility or engagement in the institution (see Guimarães, Hildeblando Junior, & Finardi, 2022 for an example of institutional lack of support for VM in a Brazilian HEI).

Table 13. Students' evaluation of courses contributions

	Strongly Agree	Partially Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Partially Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The experience improved my intercultural and critical skills.	87%	4%	4%	4%	0%
The experience improved my academic and professional education.	78%	9%	4%	9%	0%
I would recommend VM to my classmates	78%	17%	0%	4%	0%
I intend to participate in a VM program again.	52%	13%	30%	4%	0%
I could/intend to share the knowledge gained with my classmates and professor at UB.	43%	26%	22%	4%	4%
I could/intend to validate hours/credits completed in VM into my degree at UB.	39%	35%	9%	9%	9%
The experience created/increased the wish to participate on physical mobility.	74%	17%	4%	4%	0%

Finally, VM has raised students' awareness and wish to participate in physical mobility. Most students were highly satisfied with the online international academic learning experience, and over 70% stated to have increased their interest in physical academic mobility..

## 5. Discussion

Some of the findings of this study are related to students' registration and answers to questionnaires and mentioned in the group interview to propose an informed discussion on the two main aspects of VM focused on this research: inclusiveness and cooperativeness. Four students participated in the group discussion, two Bachelor and two Masters. A fifth student, who had agreed on the group interview but could not attend on last notice, sent his opinions on the matters through email.

### Focus Group Students Information

Student	Degree Level	Degree at UB	UG VIP Course	Languages Spoken
Student 1	Bachelor	Law	Sustainable Development - Oxymoron or Joint Effort	Portuguese, English, and German
Student 2	Bachelor	Portuguese Language and Literature	Forensic Linguistics	Portuguese, English, French, and Chinese
Student 3	Masters	Psychology	Introduction to Gender, Sexuality and Diversity Studies	Portuguese and English
Student 4	Masters	Psychology	Introduction to gender, sexuality and diversity studies.	Portuguese, English, and Spanish
Student 5	Bachelor* <i>*participation via email</i>	History	Daily life in soviet union; politics of memory in East Europe	Portuguese and English



All students chose courses they thought were relevant to their degree or research interests. Most of them felt the content discussed during the classes contributed to their knowledge in their field of study. One of the students thought the course content diverged from the expected focus as it was more transdisciplinary. She reported having benefited more from the international experience than content learning *per se*. All five students agreed that having an international learning experience in a multicultural environment was enriching.

Regarding inclusiveness, students agreed that VM is much more inclusive than physical mobility, especially due to economic reasons. On the other hand, they pointed out that VM is limited to those who speak a foreign language, possess the digital resources needed, and have time availability or flexibility to engage in this kind of online program.

Participation in UG VIP was restricted to those who could communicate in the course instruction language. Although there are no updated statistics or census to back up this information, foreign language proficiency is believed to be very low in Brazil, even among proficient speakers (pre-service or in-service English teachers). According to Orsini-Jones, Cerveró-Carrascosa and Finardi (2021), some still feel insecure about their language proficiency levels and skills during VE in the form of Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL).

S3: VM is not totally inclusive. Some of my classmates were interested but did not know enough English or felt insecure in their English or Spanish... I was insecure of failing in VM course because my English was not enough, even though I had studied English in a private course, travelled abroad, even though I thought that way.

As S3 mentioned, although reluctant at first, participating in VM helped her to gain confidence in her English skills. On the other hand, S5 brought up a situation in which one of his classmates from UB decided to abandon the UG VIP course because of not being able to follow the classes in another language. When discussing how VM could be more inclusive, students addressed mainly language issues as offering VM courses in Portuguese, subtitling videos and making language classes at UB available to more students. In fact, students recognized the importance of UB language policies such as providing scholarships (offered to 10% of students at the University Language Center) and they advocate for more opportunities to learn languages for the academic community.

During the discussion on VM inclusiveness, the researcher mentioned the fact that 75% of the respondents of the questionnaire had already travelled abroad and only 1% came from a low-income family. Also, the researcher questioned if VM was still an elitist activity considering it was chosen mainly by those who could afford or engage in international travel either for tourism or academic mobility. Students present in the group interview understand the fact that only a minority of participating students had never travelled abroad or are from a low-income family is related to language learning and beliefs on international/intercultural experience access.

S1: Who travels abroad are the ones who can have better financial resources, who makes more investment in language courses, because they have this possibility. People who

come from more simple backgrounds do not have the chance to study other languages. It is not a matter of willingness, because many must dream about it [traveling abroad], but not having money makes them want a virtual experience. But they did not study English because they could not afford it, it is all very much intertwined. But it is not because they are not willing or do not want it.

S3: Of course, we wanted and participated [in VM] and there were some people who could have done it and did not want it. But class and economic barriers have a great influence. It is more related to that. Some families do not have it as a possibility, maybe someone can learn English on their own, with videos from YouTube but do not see [VM] as a possibility, it seems too far away.

Students believed that financial resources are strictly related to opportunities to learn a language, and VM may be a possibility to fill this gap. Coming from a lower class in Brazil diminishes one's chances to learn English and therefore be able to engage in VM experiences. On the other hand, even though students can communicate in English to some extent, engaging in international education is still seen as a privilege of the medium and upper classes, a different reality of the lower classes. As mentioned previously, traditional physical mobility is elitist and contributed to reinforcing the belief that internationalization is only for some. Even though VM represents a more viable way to engage in international education, the fact that it is delivered through mainly English limits the chances of a more significant inclusion. Notwithstanding, VM seems to be still the most tangible way to provide international learning experiences for a broader audience (Finardi & Guimarães, 2020) and for that reason, HEI should find alternatives to overcome language barriers associated with VE encouraging students to engage in VM. Participation in VM can not only promote student's confidence and competence in additional languages but also change their beliefs on international and intercultural education (Guimarães & Finardi, 2021).

Another limitation students mentioned was related to technologies functioning correctly, such as unstable internet connection or troubles with microphone and camera that brought some challenges in keeping up with synchronous lessons. Interestingly enough, students had the digital skills needed to deal with the technological issues they faced and were able to continue with the course, even though not as desired. Indeed, COVID-19 changes to education have improved students' and professors' digital competencies and made them more willing and resourceful in dealing with basic troubleshooting. As Stalivieri (2020) puts forward, inequalities in access to digital technologies in one of the three gaps towards more VE in Brazil and something HEI should consider to make VM more inclusive.

Another factor brought up by the students is that due to time zone differences, classes sometimes were held at unusual times, for example, at lunchtime or very early in the morning. Also, as VM was not part of their UB degree curriculum, they had to dedicate extra time to it and could not get validation or credit. As S2 pointed out: "students had to conform themselves to the requirements". They acknowledged not all university students have the time flexibility and/or availability needed for VM. For S5, problems regarding time zone differences were the main hindering factor and why he would not be in UG VIP again. As UG

VIP was not designed for all UG partners worldwide including Brazil, not all activities took place at convenient times for UB students. However, students mentioned that after realizing the difficulties students from a very different time zone were having, UG VIP offered alternative times for classes and meetings. In addition, S1 and S2 mentioned that although they had positive experiences in UG VIP, they found the courses had little relevance to their degrees at UB, so they would not participate in UG VIP again. Also, as the courses taken in UG VIP were not developed in collaboration with UB faculties or departments, VM was instead extracurricular for UB students. Many students could not validate their VM credits for their degree at UB or include them as complementary hours and not as mandatory or optional courses in their degrees.

The lack of particularity, relevance and validity is a pitfall of VM models like UG VIP, which is as an individual initiative than as a collaboration project between institutions. In collaborative VM projects, such as COIL, the course is designed by and for the institutions involved, so issues related to time zones and relevance are usually dealt with in the planning stage. For this reason, Brazilian HEI should engage in collaboration VM projects with their partners to promote more situated, tailored and inclusive opportunities for international/intercultural education. At the same time, VM programs like UG VIP should also be encouraged, as students showed good engagement and satisfaction. However, HEI promoting these programs should search for their partners' feedback on their issues to address common problems reported. As for partner HEIs whose students register to VM programs, they should advise their students regarding VM course choices related to their specific degrees or knowledge field. By doing so, chances of validating VM credits are higher. Notwithstanding this recommendation, we think it is important to also advertise transdisciplinary courses available to complement course hours. By becoming more relevant, valid and situated, VM increases the affordances for inclusiveness.

Regarding VM's potential to bring more cooperation than competition to internationalization, it is important to highlight that both HEI involved in this research study are public organizations whose primary funding comes from the State rather than from the students. As a result, institutions have no direct interest in international students' tuition fees. On the other hand, the State funding is related to the HEI achievements regarding the quality of research and teaching. So, even though State-funded public universities are not part of the higher education market, they can be moved by the same competitive logic regarding internationalization. According to both institution's Development Plan, UB and UG place much importance on achieving international recognition for their excellence. Today, international recognition has been granted mainly by international rankings, such as THE World University Ranking, in which UG was rated 401–500 in 2022 (Note 12) and UB 1201+. Although somehow similar in the number of students, in terms of international students, they differ a great deal, as they account for 10% of overall students and, at UB, the number is around 1%. Based on that ranking, we could say UG has achieved better results in internationalization so far. Internationalization is a goal at UG and a challenge at UB. Both HEIs understand internationalization as a strategy for excellence to be developed in all areas and levels of the university through international collaboration and networking. However,

international student recruiting and internationalization at home, while goals set by UG, are not mentioned in UB plans for internationalization. We understand UG VIP is a strategy UG has managed to work for both goals: student recruiting, as participating students are prospective international students for Masters or Doctorate, and internationalization at home, as it provides UG students and staff intercultural contact with international students. At first instance, UG VIP is not set as a collaborative VM as it is a one-way program in which partner universities had no participation in its design or implementation, only advertising and providing documents for registration. However, interactions and relationships built among students and professors during the courses seemed to favor collaborative international/intercultural learning.

During the interview, students mentioned their classmates were mainly from Germany, Sri Lanka, the Czech Republic, Ukraine, African countries, Peru and Brazil. Except for S2, who only engaged in asynchronous activities, the other 4 students involved in synchronous classes that students were encouraged to participate and comment on their views of the topic. They showed positive feedback on interacting and exchanging with classmates from different backgrounds and cultures.

S1: The class environment was very cooperative, nobody wanted to stand out on their formal knowledge, it was more like sharing each point of view, people from all around. ... It was the utmost in cooperation because it was about sustainability, and it comprehends everybody in different ways. The professor used to send two texts with two different views on the same topic. It was a very enriching experience.

S3: The professor set a diversity of authors, not only the classical ones from Global North, I liked that. It showed a cooperative standing in literature. ... In the end of the class, people shared their personal experiences ... In the final paper, I included some Brazilian authors and talked a lot about Brazil.

Students noticed their experience in VM tended to be more cooperative than competitive, as professors seemed to foster discussion among students from different countries and backgrounds. Similarly, the bibliography proposed by the professors included authors other than the Global North, which favored the expansion and a more pluralistic view of the topic. On the other hand, students also found traits of colonialist logic in some attitudes from professors, classmates, and even themselves. In their first class, S3 and S4, who were in the same course, were shocked when the professor demanded students send via regular mail their final paper, regardless of the country they lived in since this goes against VM approaches. Fortunately, they were relieved in the second class when the professor retreated herself and had students sent to a shared folder online.

S4: I met two versions of the professor. The one from first class who want everybody to mail their paper. And later, whom I found very understanding in a few aspects. In the last class she said there was a deadline for the paper but she understood some people were going through hard times due to the pandemic and if they sent later, there was not going to be a problem, that she would take those situations into account.

VM is also an opportunity for students and professors to develop their intercultural sensitivity. Staff training is one of the key aspects of VM.

Regarding other students' attitudes, S3 and S4 mentioned most of their classmates were from Germany and insisted on interacting in German in chats during class and in the WhatsApp group. S3 felt it was very unthoughtful on their part because many students did not understand German. Guidance, intercultural awareness and sensitivity are critical for students and professors to make the most of the VM experience.

As López-Duarte et al. (2022) found, HEI should prepare students culturally to avoid ethnocentric attitudes such as the one described by S3. Students' attitudes towards other students and VM itself are crucial. Even though students might enjoy a cooperative environment, competition is also part of VM. For instance, S1 acknowledged seeking opportunities for academic and professional development.

S2 was very surprised to hear about the experience and interactions of others in class, because he mainly had asynchronous activities in which the interactions were only with the professor. He met his classmates only twice, in the first and last class of the term, and said they did not mind interacting with each other. It was very clear each one was only there after their own individual goals. Although S2 was disappointed with the lack of interaction, he was pleased with the content and activities in the course. Also, S2 was the only one to participate in UG VIP get-togethers, extra class interaction activities for all UG VIP students.

S2: For [VM] to become cooperation, it is much up to us. In which ways we can share this experience, socialize knowledge and also encourage people.

Although UG VIP's design and implementation were not in cooperation with UB, students were impacted by their experience and recommended it to their classmates. In addition, most students in the interview mentioned how the courses contributed to their own knowledge/research topic and were able to share it with their advisors and research groups.

## 5. Conclusion

The pandemic has brought many changes to internationalization of higher education, one of the most important ones being the pivot from physical academic mobility to virtual mobility. Considering that change in scenario, this study investigated how VM could contribute to a more cooperative and inclusive internationalization process with more opportunities for the academic communities involved.

The analysis of students' perceptions shows that the VM experience was relevant to their academic interests and development. Also, learning in a multicultural environment was an important initiative. Participants agreed that VM is much more inclusive than physical mobility. However, they pointed that VM is limited to those who can speak a foreign language, have the digital resources and skills, and have time availability or flexibility.

When it comes to inclusiveness of VM in Brazil, there are two gaps pointed out by Stalivieri (2020), financial resources and learning other languages. Guimarães, Hildeblando Junior and Finardi (2022) and Finardi and Asik (in press) also mention the lack of institutional support



as a barrier to implementing VM courses, which aligns with the three gaps suggested by Stalivieiri (2020) so that VM be more inclusive and collaborative, namely, the linguistic gap, the technological gap, and the institutional gap.

Regarding the potential of VM to bring more cooperation than competition to internationalization, it is important to highlight that both HEI involved in the VM analyzed here are public organizations whose primary funding comes from the State rather than from the students. As a result, the institutions have no direct interest in international students' tuition fees. On the other hand, the State funding is related to the HEI achievements regarding the quality of research and teaching. So, even though State-funded public universities are not part of the higher education market, they can be moved by the same competitive logic regarding internationalization. Indeed, the analysis of Brazil's two most important academic mobility programs in Finardi, Silva and Mendes (2022) shows that national programs and funds are still very much dictated by competition rather than cooperation logic present in the process of internationalization of higher education.

We conclude that the overall results of the study suggest that although the university designed the VM program in the Global North without the cooperation of the university from the Global South, the students involved were positively impacted by their participation in the program, which in turn, contributed to their knowledge and research topic development. VM can represent a relevant step towards and contribution to a more cooperative and inclusive internationalization process with more opportunities for the academic communities involved, especially from the Global South.

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## Notes

Note 1. We use the terms Global North/South following Santos (2007) as a geopolitical rather than a geographical term.

Note 2. General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS).

Note 3. Taken from: <http://uis.unesco.org/en/uis-student-flow>

Note 4. IaH is defined as the ‘purposeful integration of international and intercultural dimensions into the formal and informal curriculum for all students within domestic learning environments’ (Beelen & Jones, 2015, p. 69).

Note 5. Taken from [https://proplan.ufes.br/sites/proplan.ufes.br/files/field/anexo/pdi\\_2021-2030.pdf](https://proplan.ufes.br/sites/proplan.ufes.br/files/field/anexo/pdi_2021-2030.pdf)

Note 6. Taken from <https://www.uni-giessen.de/about/profile/reteach>

Note 7. Taken from <https://www.uni-giessen.de/org/admin/dez/b/5/studisek/semestercontributions>

Note 8. Available at <https://www.uni-giessen.de/international-pages>

Note 9. Available in <https://www.uni-giessen.de/international-pages/intstrategy>

Note 10. <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings/2022>

Note 11. Taken from <https://www.jlu-digitalcampus.de/vip>



Note 12. <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings/2022>

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