

## The educational value of BIPs (Blended Intensive Programme) and the impact on stakeholders' collaboration

### Il valore educativo dei BIP (Blended Intensive Programme) e l'impatto sulla collaborazione degli stakeholders

---

Francesco Lavanga<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> *Università degli Studi di Firenze*, [francesco.lavanga@unifi.it](mailto:francesco.lavanga@unifi.it)

#### Abstract

---

The Erasmus+ 2021-2027 programme encompasses a diverse array of internationalization initiatives and fosters a comprehensive network of opportunities for collaborative learning. Among these, Blended Intensive Programmes (BIPs) stand out as innovative educational models that merge physical and virtual mobility to create transformative learning experiences for university students and academic staff. These programs offer two main advantages: the development of disciplinary expertise alongside the cultivation of essential life skills and soft skills, which are very valuable in today's interconnected world. This paper examines the implementation of a BIP focusing on informal adult education in prisons, undertaken through a partnership between the University of Siena (Italy), Malta University (Malta), Debrecen University (Hungary), and European Cyprus University (Cyprus). The analysis evaluates both the strengths and challenges of the initiative. The paper aims to contribute to the refinement of future BIP designs and to enhance cooperation among multiple stakeholders involved in such educational endeavors.

**Keywords:** blended intensive programme; international cooperation; prison education; adult education; short-term mobility.

#### Sintesi

---

Il programma Erasmus+ 2021-2027 offre un'ampia gamma di iniziative di internazionalizzazione e promuove un'ampia rete di opportunità di apprendimento collaborativo. Tra queste, i Blended Intensive Programme (BIP) si distinguono come modelli educativi innovativi che combinano la mobilità fisica e virtuale per creare esperienze di apprendimento trasformativo per gli studenti universitari e il personale accademico. Questi programmi offrono due vantaggi principali: lo sviluppo di competenze disciplinari e il potenziamento delle life skills e delle competenze trasversali, molto preziose nel mondo interconnesso di oggi. Questo articolo analizza l'esperienza di un programma BIP sul tema dell'educazione informale degli adulti in carcere, svolto in collaborazione tra l'Università degli Studi di Siena (Italia), la Malta University (Malta), la Debrecen University (Ungheria) e la European Cyprus University (Cipro). L'analisi valuta sia i punti di forza che le sfide dell'iniziativa. L'elaborato si propone di contribuire al perfezionamento dei futuri progetti di PIF e di migliorare la cooperazione tra i diversi stakeholder in questo tipo di iniziative educative.

**Parole chiave:** blended intensive programme; cooperazione internazionale; educazione penitenziaria; educazione degli adulti; mobilità a breve termine.

## 1. Introduction

The Erasmus+ Programme (2021-2027) has a strong emphasis on inclusivity across education, training, youth participation, and sports, striving to expand access for individuals from different backgrounds, particularly those facing limited opportunities. Central to its mission is the continuous development of a shared European identity, achieved through the promotion of active citizenship and fundamental values such as freedom, tolerance, and non-discrimination, facilitated by cross-border learning experiences. The programme highlights the importance of lifelong learning, fostering the development of key competencies in areas such as digital literacy, sustainability, and entrepreneurship, while supporting both formal and informal educational pathways to equip individuals for the challenges of a rapidly evolving world. A central feature of the Erasmus+ Programme is its commitment to fostering learning mobility, enabling students, educators, and staff to participate in knowledge exchange and develop cross-cultural understanding. By promoting collaboration among educational institutions, youth organizations, and various associations, Erasmus+ operates as a catalyst for innovation, facilitating the dissemination of best practices across Europe. The programme is closely aligned with broader EU priorities, including digital transformation, environmental sustainability, and social inclusion, highlighting its dedication to equipping participants with the skills and perspectives necessary to address future challenges effectively.

BIPs, introduced as part of Erasmus+ (2021-2027), advance inclusivity by leveraging digital technologies to integrate short-term physical mobility with collaborative virtual learning. These programs provide interdisciplinary and international educational opportunities, fostering student mobility for academic study and staff mobility for professional development and knowledge exchange, thereby enriching the overall learning experience through diverse and innovative approaches (EC, 2022). These learning experiences are specifically designed to engage students from diverse backgrounds and academic disciplines, fostering collaborative learning across Europe. Research, despite only a few studies on this topic, suggests that BIPs have a significant positive impact on students, enhancing their social and intercultural skills while promoting teamwork in different, multicultural environments. The hybrid learning model of BIPs supports disciplinary knowledge by integrating theoretical insights with practical applications, fostering critical thinking and real-world problem-solving skills.

For academic staff, BIPs provide valuable opportunities for cross-border collaboration and curriculum innovation. However, challenges such as administrative complexity and financial constraints remain. Despite these obstacles, the high levels of student satisfaction highlight the effectiveness of BIPs in advancing internationalization and promoting innovative pedagogical practices in higher education (Gögele & Kletzenbauer, 2023; González-Pavón et al., 2024). The benefits do not only concern the students or academic staff who take part in this type of experience, but potentially extend to all stakeholders who may be involved in the programme. In this specific BIP the involvement of local organizations, government representatives, and professionals connected to the prison system facilitated the creation of a collaborative network that would have been otherwise challenging to establish. Consequently, the benefits obtained from the programme extended beyond those enjoyed by the participating academic delegations, reaching to all the stakeholders who contributed to the realisation of this project. Furthermore, the prison system benefited from increased national and international attention, generating interest in a field that is too often left aside or neglected by institutions. In this regard, BIP have the potential to attract a wide range of organisations. However, this process is significantly

streamlined when faculty members involved in the project leverage pre-existing networks, engaging them to contribute effectively to the initiative. Overall, BIPs are demonstrating their huge positive impact, especially on an educational perspective, while offering opportunities of collaboration and cooperation of stakeholders.

## **2. The BIP experience structure**

This BIP involved the participation of four institutions: the University of Siena, the University of Debrecen, the European Cyprus University, and the University of Malta. A total of five professors and 22 students took part in the initiative. To ensure seamless coordination, an external tutor was engaged to oversee the operational aspects during the five-day period when the University of Siena hosted delegations from the partner universities. The programme tutor played a pivotal role, offering round-the-clock assistance to address participants' needs while also serving as a classroom facilitator and interpreter during meetings and interviews with professionals from local prisons. Additionally, the director of Malta prison, who also serves as a representative of the Maltese government, was invited to deliver an in-depth presentation on the sociological, pedagogical, and psychological aspects of the Maltese prison system. His contributions, which included supervising group activities and providing valuable insights, significantly enriched the overall learning experience. The virtual component of the BIP was facilitated through the University of Siena's Moodle system, which has been used as the central platform for accessing all programme-related materials. The resources provided included the program calendar, student handbook, presentation slides, practical guidelines, and recordings of all meetings conducted during the virtual mobility phase, ensuring participants could access and review the content at their convenience. Additionally, all student-produced materials were uploaded and stored on Moodle. Synchronous online sessions were conducted via Webex; the first and second parts of the virtual mobility were held through this system. The program's learning objectives were comprehensive, designed to equip participants with a foundational understanding of the penitentiary systems in Italy, Cyprus, Hungary, and Malta. Specific goals included examining the roles and responsibilities of various prison stakeholders involved in inmate education, fostering effective communication skills, and strengthening participants' capacity to critically evaluate the informal learning process occurring within correctional facilities. The program also focused on fostering skills for conducting and co-leading interviews with penitentiary stakeholders and identifying educational interventions that support inmate rehabilitation. These discussions were conducted within an intercultural framework, allowing participants to engage with and explore different perspectives on justice systems and their organizational structures. Learning units covered a range of topics, including the core features of the prison systems in the participating countries, the role of various actors in inmate rehabilitation, and the evaluation of prison system outcomes. Discussions were enriched through the presentation and analysis of national and international data, alongside direct engagement with professionals from the prison system. The strengths and weaknesses of the prisons selected for visitation were critically analyzed, providing a comprehensive evaluation of their unique characteristics and challenges.

In Figure 1 is illustrated the BIP structure. During the first phase of virtual mobility (Part 1), participants engaged in a series of introductory meetings, where professors and students were introduced, and the project's educational objectives were outlined. Following sessions involved detailed presentations on the prison systems of the participating countries, led by

faculty from each delegation. The final meeting of this phase provided a theoretical overview of formal, informal, and vocational learning in prisons.

	Activities	Date & Time	ECTS
Part 1	Virtual mobility	4-5-6 March 2024 (8:30-10:30 Italy, Malta, Hungary timezone / 9:30-11:30 Cyprus timezone)	1 ECTS (6 hrs)
Part 2	Physical mobility	11-12-13-14-15 March 2024	3 ECTS (18 hrs)
Part 3	Virtual mobility	25 March; 4-9-11-16-18 April 2024 (9:00-11:00 Italy, Malta, Hungary timezone / 10:00-12:00 Cyprus timezone)	2 ECTS (12 hrs)

Figure 1. BIP structure.

The physical mobility phase (Part 2) was conducted at the Arezzo Campus facilities of the University of Siena. This phase began with an introduction to the Italian prison system, including presentations on the prisons in Arezzo, Siena, San Gimignano, Prato, and Florence, as well as an overview of informal adult education in prisons across Europe. The second day featured a presentation by the Director of Arezzo prison and his staff, offering insights into the daily operations of the prison. The students greatly appreciated these comparisons as it gave them the opportunity to measure themselves and gain valuable insights from professionals. On the third day, participants visited San Gimignano prison, where they met with professionals from the prison system, including the Commander of the Penitentiary Police, who guided the group through various areas of the prison. The visit also included interactions with inmates working in the kitchens and presentations by prison psychologists and educators. Towards the end of the visit inmates that were in the kitchen spontaneously prepared some refreshments for the whole group as a surprise, which was much appreciated by the whole delegation. This moment created a space for informal interactions between students and professionals which have been very valuable. Also, demonstrated that inmates did not feel as “something to see” but felt the passionate approach of the group visit. Before to go back to Arezzo Campus the group stopped by San Gimignano city centre and had some time to explore around by themselves. This choice was very important. Not only to give the opportunity, given the geographical proximity and logistical feasibility, to immerse oneself in the culture of the place and visit the beauty of the city, but also to provide a personal space for the students to let off steam. This was to try to mitigate possible manifestations of stress or discomfort from students that visits to these emotionally impactful places might have had. The fourth day focused on group work due for the end of the BIP and group discussions on the San Gimignano visit, also to prepare for the following visit to Arezzo prison. On the final day, participants visited Arezzo prison, with presentations held by staff from the psychological and pedagogical departments and insights from local associations representatives that work closely to the prisoner professionals.

The final phase of virtual mobility (Part 3) marked the conclusion of the project, during which students presented the results of their group work. They were asked to conduct in-depth investigations on topics discussed throughout the program, culminating in both individual and group scientific analysis. These findings were presented in the final session through group presentations and slides, reflecting the collaborative and academic vision of the programme. Finally, it was proposed to the participants to develop, starting from the work done for the final BIP presentations, a scientific article and then participate in an

actual call for a scientific journal, thus enhancing not only the work done during the BIP, but also capitalising on the experience gained and integrating it into their academic growth.

### **3. Stakeholders collaboration and cooperation: a system response**

This specific BIP programme focused on “Informal Adult teaching and learning in a prison setting”. Informal adult education in European prisons plays a pivotal role in the rehabilitation and resocialization of inmates. Numerous studies underscore its importance, particularly in promoting personal development and equipping inmates for successful reintegration into society. Informal education provides self-directed learning opportunities, particularly benefiting inmates who are unable to engage in formal programs due to short court order or constrained institutional resources (Kríz, 2022). In Slovakia, informal education is widely acknowledged for its capacity to promote personal development and facilitate behavioral change, though empirical research in this area remains limited and fragmented (Temiakova et al., 2023). Non-formal education programs, such as those implemented in Portugal, have shown positive impacts on enhancing social skills and increasing employment opportunities for individuals following incarceration (Costa & Gonçalves Fernandes, 2021). Innovative prison environments, such as *open prisons*, provide more conducive learning conditions, enabling inmates to focus on self-improvement (Kríz, 2022). Despite its advantages, informal education in prisons encounters substantial challenges, such as a lack of systematic research and limited integration into broader policy frameworks (Manninen, 2017). Initiatives like the ELBEP project aim to overcome communication barriers, improving educational access for foreign inmates (Barkan et al., 2011).

In developing projects such as BIP focused on inmates’ education, the positive consequences are multiple and far-reaching. These initiatives extend their impact beyond the immediate participants by highlighting the urgent need for reform in prison education across Europe, attracting the attention of governments, universities, and local organizations. One of the key outcomes of these programmes is their ability to facilitate direct, constructive interaction among the prison system, local associations, university faculty and students. The academic and scientific interest sparked by BIP projects often acts as a catalyst for expanded research into prison education, contributing to the refinement of rehabilitative practices and informing policy changes that enhance the prison system as a whole (Warner, 2007).

From a systemic perspective, effective coordination among universities, governments, and local associations is vital to the success of BIP projects. The intricate delivery of educational programs in prisons necessitates a multi-stakeholder approach, with each system contributing its unique expertise and resources to ensure success (Braggins & Talbot, 2003). Universities bring research-driven perspective, offering the curriculum and pedagogical frameworks essential for delivering high-quality education. Universities function as a driver of innovation in teaching methodologies and in assessing the long-term impacts of educational programs for inmates (Costelloe & Warner, 2014). Governments and prison administrations provide essential oversight and regulatory support, ensuring that educational initiatives comply with broader legal and penal frameworks. Their involvement is also pivotal in granting access to prison facilities and ensuring that programs are implemented within the boundaries of security protocols and institutional regulations (Davis et al., 2013). Navigating the administrative and logistical complexities arising from varying national policies and prison systems can be highly demanding. Nonetheless, the



participation of key figures, such as the director of Malta prison and a representative of the Maltese government, facilitated high-level discussions with their Italian counterparts, underscoring the significance of cross-border collaboration in such initiatives. While these interactions proved productive, they also revealed the inherent complexities of coordinating between countries with differing penal systems, security priorities, and administrative protocols. In such scenarios, established professional networks are instrumental in addressing these challenges, highlighting the importance of sustained partnerships among academic institutions, government representatives, and prison administrations (Costelloe & Warner, 2014).

For participating students, BIPs provide unique opportunities for interdisciplinary learning, personal development, and professional growth. By engaging with stakeholders in real-world educational contexts, structures, and challenges, students cultivate empathy and gain a deeper, more nuanced understanding of social justice issues, particularly those concerning criminal justice, rehabilitation, and societal reintegration (Warner, 2007). These programs immerse students in the practical challenges of delivering education within restrictive environments, equipping them for future careers in fields such as education, psychology, and social work. Furthermore, the interdisciplinary goal of these initiatives – spanning sociology, pedagogy, and psychology – provides students with a comprehensive educational experience that expands their intellectual perspectives and hones their critical thinking abilities (Hawley et al., 2013). Participation in BIP projects sparks academic curiosity, frequently inspiring new avenues of research centered on educational practices in prison settings and their wider societal implications.

This collaborative approach supports the creation of inclusive and holistic educational and operational models. By cultivating a culture of learning within prison environments, these initiatives help reshape social perceptions of inmates and prison education, shifting the focus from punitive practices to rehabilitative, education-centered frameworks (Warner, 2007). Policy reforms that prioritize and support multi-stakeholder collaborations are essential for streamlining the implementation of these programs, ensuring their long-term sustainability, and enabling broader participation (Behan, 2014). With adequate policy alignment and financial backing, these collaborative educational initiatives hold the potential to transform prison education across Europe, fostering more effective strategies and building more inclusive communities.

#### **4. The satisfaction survey design**

A critical component in organizing a BIP is the development of a comprehensive final satisfaction questionnaire to gather valuable insights into students' perspectives. Additionally, ongoing feedback on the program's progress should be systematically collected, even through informal channels, to effectively enhance and support the overall learning experience. In this case, a mixed-methods approach was adopted, offering not only a clear quantitative overview but also enabling the exploration of nuanced aspects that would be particularly challenging to capture through quantitative methods themselves (Creswell et al., 2003; Trinchero & Robasto, 2019).

The satisfaction survey has been designed to assess various aspects of the programme's effectiveness and impact. It includes a mix of Likert-scale questions, multiple-choice items, and open-ended responses, all aimed at gathering feedback on the students' personal and academic growth. The survey begins by evaluating whether the programme contributed to

the development of essential life skills, such as adaptability and teamwork, using a Likert scale to assess student agreement. It also explores the programme's value for students' scientific studies, assessing how it supported their academic progression. A key focus is on the networking opportunities provided by the BIP, with separate questions measuring students' ability to connect with peers both from their own university and from other institutions, an important aspect of fostering collaborative learning. Additionally, the survey investigates the role of faculty tutoring during the development of scientific articles, providing insights into the academic support available throughout the programme. Students are also asked to rate the overall organization of the programme, as well as their general experience, offering a comprehensive assessment of its operational success. The final section captures students' willingness to recommend the programme to others, and addresses any challenges faced, such as workload or communication issues, through a multiple-choice format. This structure ensures a holistic evaluation of the BIP from multiple angles, allowing for detailed feedback on both its strengths and areas for improvement. The survey was implemented using Google Forms software, which ensures a smooth user experience during the process of submissions and has a flawless adjustment to any kind of device and screen visualization. In summary, our survey had 11 five-level Likert scale questions composed by a full disagreement (1) to full agreement (5) towards a statement scale, two open-ended questions, two multiple choice questions and one yes/no/maybe question, for a total of 16 questions.

## 5. Survey analysis results

The survey responses percentage has been 86.36%, as 19 students out of 22 completed the form. The first block of questions was intended to investigate the students' personal perception of the improvement of life skills and scientific impact on their academic career. On a scale of 1 to 5, 16 out of 19 students fell within a range of 3 to 5 (84.2% of the total respondents). Of these, 62.5% fell between 4 and 5 (Figure 2).

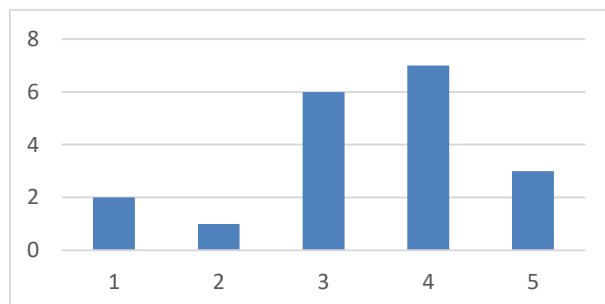


Figure 2. BIP impact on life skills development students' perception.

Concerning the impact on their academic career, 79% were in the range of 3 to 5, of which 73.3% were in the range of 4 to 5 (Figure 3).

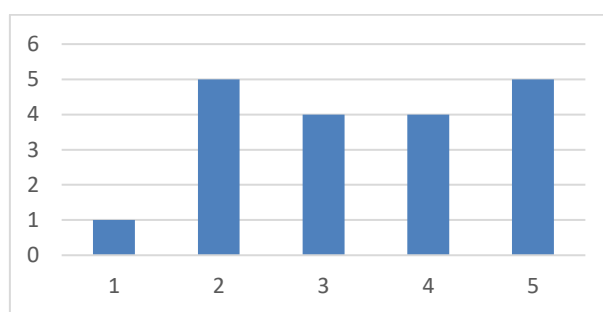


Figure 3. BIP impact on academic studies students' perception.

The following block of two questions focused on peer connections. One investigated the internationalisation among all students and found that 84.3% of respondents were in the range of 3 to 5, with 63.2% between 4 and 5 (Figure 4), showing a good level of peer exchange during the BIP.

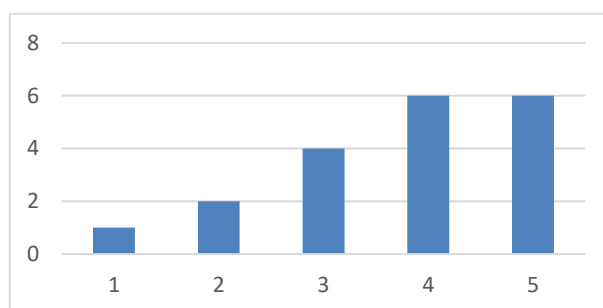


Figure 4. Connections among students from different universities.

The second question was instead aimed at connections between peers from the same university. 94.7% fell within a range of 3 to 5, of which 66.67% fell between 4 and 5 (Figure 5), in this case showing an even more significant impact than networking between students from the same university.

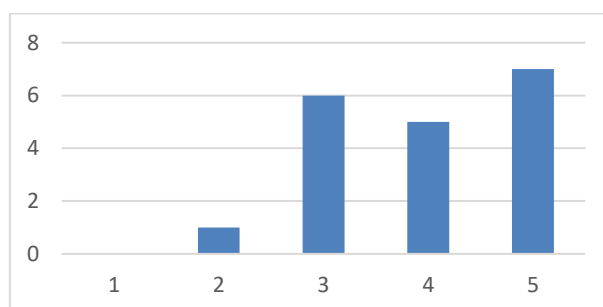


Figure 5. Connections among students from the same university.

When asked about difficulties faced throughout the programme, 68.4% of students stated that they faced administrative problems, 36.8% said that the workload was excessive, and 31.6% had difficulties connecting with the professors involved in the programme. 26.3% stated that they had difficulties matching their academic calendar with BIP's one, both online and offline, as also noted informally. Only one student experienced financial difficulties (Figure 6).



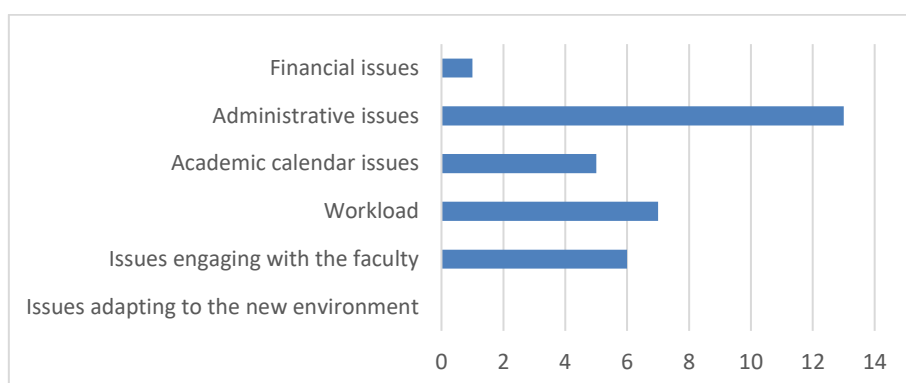


Figure 6. Issues faced by students during BIP.

The following block of four questions focused on the evaluation of the scientific materials, the e-learning platform and the academic activities during the BIP. 68.5% of the respondents fell into a range of 3 to 5, of which 69.23% into a range of 4 to 5 (Figure 7).

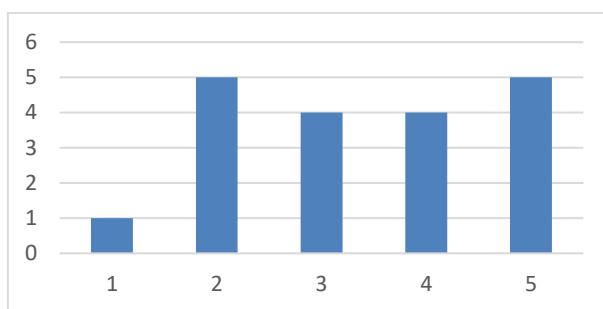


Figure 7. Scientific materials and resources relevance towards own scientific studies students' perception.

Here, a less significant impact emerges, probably because the different background of the students with respect to the subject areas might not have been adequately integrated with the course of study. At the same time, it also means that 13 out of 19 students recognised benefits with respect to the quality and specificity of the scientific materials offered.

Only 5 students out of 19 said that the e-learning platform (Webex) was not easy to use (Figure 8).

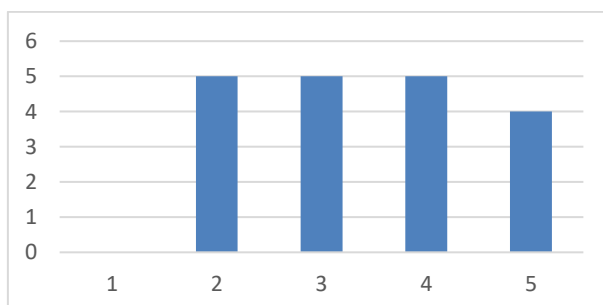


Figure 8. E-learning platform ease to use students' evaluation.

Although most students found the platform reasonably accessible, improvements can be made in providing features that increase the possibilities for interaction and in improving the user experience.

Overall, the academic activities were perceived positively by the students. On average, 73.7% of the respondents found the activities offered during the BIP interesting, while 26.3% found them not interesting (Figure 9).

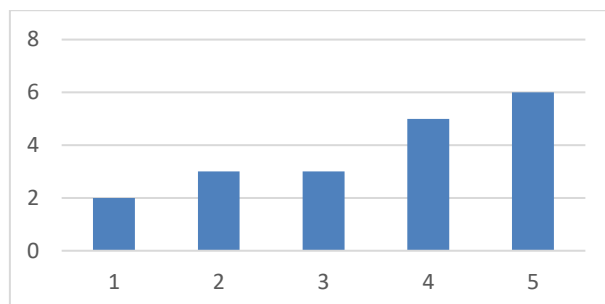


Figure 9. E-learning platform ease to use students' evaluation.

The most appreciated activity by the students was the visit to San Gimignano prison, preferred by 89.5% of the respondents, followed by the visit to Arezzo prison with 63.2% (Figure 10).

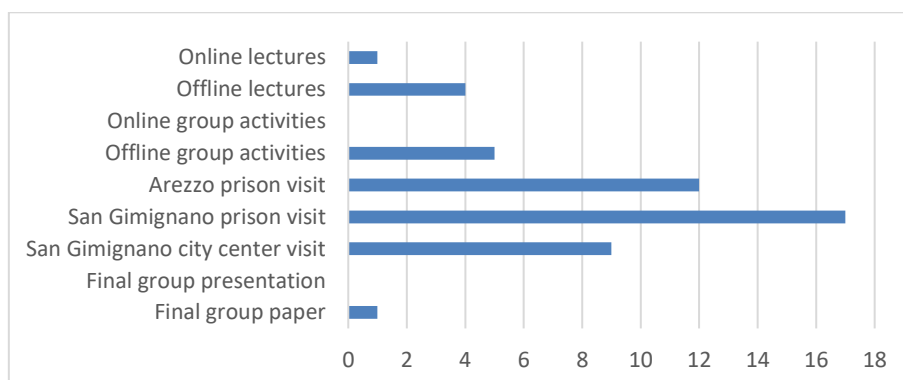


Figure 10. Students' favourite BIP activity.

It emerges how almost half of the students also enjoyed a visit to the town of San Gimignano. Despite the tight schedule of the BIP, it was considered important to take advantage of a visit to the town, which is located close to the prison, so that students could immerse in the local culture and freely explore the place.

The next block of two questions focused on the satisfaction of the proposal, at the end of the BIP programme, to continue the interuniversity collaboration among the working groups, both students and professors, by encouraging them to write real scientific articles and then participate in a call for a scientific journal. 16 out of 19 students were relatively satisfied with the proposal, of which 63.2% with a rating range between 4 and 5 (Figure 11).

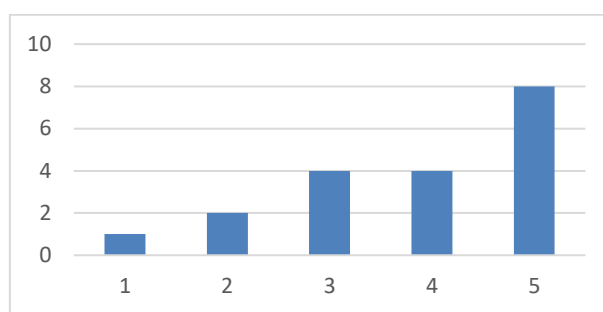


Figure 11. Students' approval rate on scientific article suggestion.

This is also confirmed by an evaluation through informal feedback. Furthermore, the constant exchange of communication between the groups confirmed the interest of all parties involved in developing a good product. Despite this, not all students (4 out of 19) perceived adequate value in relation to the mentoring of the professors, to whom each of the individual groups were assigned during the development of the paper (Figure 12).

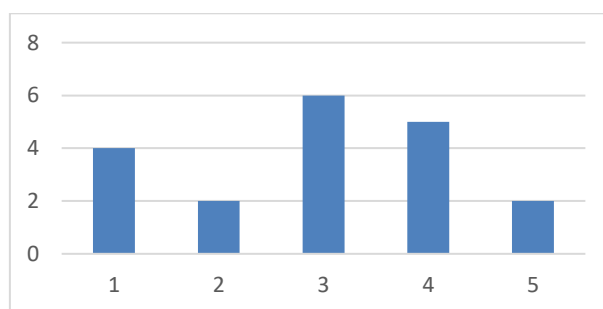


Figure 12. Students' satisfaction rate on professors' tutoring during the paper development.

This can be caused by multiple factors that are difficult to isolate in this case. Nevertheless, the majority of the students recognised the value of this support.

The next block of three questions is focused on general evaluations of the BIP. 47.4% of the students disliked or very disliked the general organisation of the BIP (Figure 13).

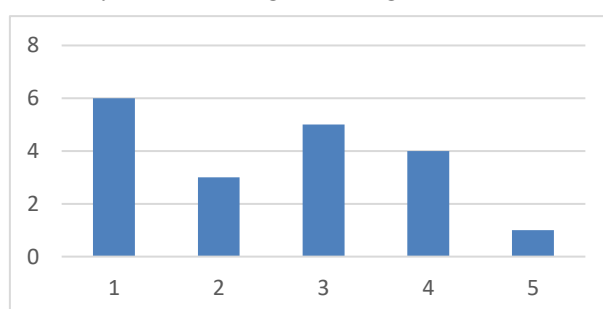


Figure 13. Students' BIP overall organization rating.

The overall BIP experience was rated positively by the students, with 84.3% of the respondents within a rating range of 3 to 5 (Figure 14).

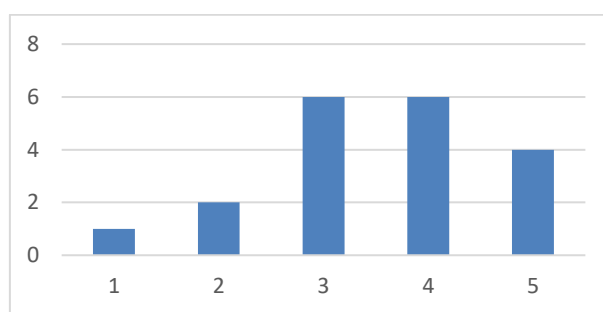


Figure 14. Students' BIP experience overall rating.

Furthermore, 68.4% of the respondents would advise other students to participate in a BIP, with 21.1% who would perhaps do so and 10.5% who would not advise another student to participate in a BIP. However, this figure is positive, despite a high percentage of uncertainties whose reasons would be interesting to further investigate. The open-ended responses concerned suggestions and advice for improving the BIP experience. Generally, the answers concerned the critical issues already investigated in other questions of the survey. However, some specific requests emerged, that are interesting to report. One student suggested forming working groups among students from the very beginning of the programme in order to motivate them more to exchange with students from other universities, both during online and offline activities. Finally, another student suggested proposing more field trips during physical mobility.

## 6. Conclusions

Overall, the findings indicate that students found the BIP experience enjoyable, despite the presence of several critical areas that require attention and improvement in future program design to enhance its impact on the learning experience. The following are general recommendations for the design of future BIPs. Developing an initial questionnaire to be administered to participants selected for the program is highly recommended, as it can provide valuable insights into students' expectations. This information can then be used to refine initial communications and address key aspects highlighted by the preliminary survey. The establishment of two WhatsApp groups – one involving all members of the university delegations and the tutor, and another exclusively for the professors and the tutor – proved highly effective in facilitating prompt and efficient communication during the physical mobility phase. As recommended by the students, if group work is to be incorporated, it may be beneficial to establish the groups at the outset of the program. This approach would foster interuniversity peer exchange from the beginning and actively promote intercultural interactions throughout the BIP, both during the virtual and physical mobility phases. The most significant challenges identified revolve around organizational and administrative processes, which were perceived as overly complex, time-consuming, and burdened with excessive paperwork. The bureaucratic aspects are particularly difficult to streamline, especially in the context of interuniversity collaborations. It would be valuable to thoroughly consider this aspect and explore innovative solutions to simplify and streamline the administrative processes associated with participation in such exchange programs. The decision to encourage the development of academic papers and participation in a scientific journal call proved to have a highly positive impact. This initiative extended interuniversity collaboration beyond the program's conclusion, promoting ongoing

knowledge exchange and strengthening relationships among participants. Indeed, discussions regarding potential future collaborations took place among participants at the program's end, further solidifying these connections.

The findings of this study demonstrate the transformative potential BIPs in fostering interdisciplinary learning, stakeholder collaboration, and innovative educational practices, particularly in challenging contexts such as prison education. While the program successfully cultivated essential life skills and intercultural competencies among participants, several key areas emerge as critical for future BIP design and scalability. To expand the reach and impact of BIPs, simplification and adaptability of the program structure are essential. Streamlining administrative processes, particularly across international institutions, will reduce logistical complexities and make these programs more feasible for a broader range of universities and participants. Introducing modular designs that can be customized to local contexts without compromising the core objectives of the program can further enhance scalability. The integration of digital platforms such as Moodle and Webex has proven effective for supporting virtual mobility. However, future iterations should focus on improving user experience, enhancing interactivity, and ensuring accessibility for participants with varying technological proficiencies. The strategic use of technology can reduce financial barriers and provide opportunities for institutions with limited resources to participate, thus expanding the program's inclusivity. The success of BIPs depends on robust multi-stakeholder engagement. Future designs should incorporate frameworks for sustained collaboration among universities, local organizations, and government bodies. Establishing pre-existing networks and partnerships prior to program initiation will streamline coordination, while clear communication protocols can minimize misunderstandings and administrative delays. The mixed-methods approach to participant feedback in this study underscores the importance of iterative refinement. Systematic collection of both quantitative and qualitative data can guide program modifications, ensuring that BIPs remain responsive to participants' needs. Early-stage surveys to capture expectations, combined with mid-term and final evaluations, will provide a comprehensive picture of the program's strengths and areas for improvement. Scalability requires alignment with broader educational and institutional policies. Advocacy for standardized frameworks within the Erasmus+ program or similar initiatives can create consistent guidelines for implementing BIPs across diverse educational systems. Policy support, particularly for prison education, can open new avenues for funding and institutional collaboration, ensuring long-term sustainability. BIPs hold immense potential to transform higher education and informal learning by merging innovation with inclusivity. By addressing the challenges identified in this study and building upon its successes, future BIPs can expand their reach, offering interdisciplinary, scalable, and impactful learning experiences. Programmes like these not only enhance the academic and professional trajectories of participants but also foster systemic change, making education a powerful tool for social transformation.

## Reference list

- Barkan, M., Toprak, E., Kumtepe, A. T., Kumtepe, E. C., Ataizi, M., Pilanci, H., Mutlu, M. E., Kayabas, I., & Kayabas, B. K. (2011). Eliminating language barriers online at European prisons (ELBEP): A case-study. *Educational Media International*, 48(3), 235–248.

- Behan, C. (2014). Learning to escape: Prison education, rehabilitation and the potential for transformation. *Journal of Prison Education and Reentry*, 1(1), 20–31. <http://dx.doi.org/10.15845/jper.v1i1.594>
- Braggins, J., & Talbot, J. (2003). *Wings of learning: The role of the prison officer in supporting prisoner education*. Esmée Fairbairn Foundation.
- Costa, S., & Gonçalves Fernandes, S. R. (2021). Developing social skills in the prison context: Results from the implementation of a training program with prisoners. *Research on Humanities and Social Science*, 11(11), 53–59. <https://doi.org/10.7176/rhss%2F11-11-06>
- Costelloe, A., & Warner, K. (2014). Prison education across Europe: Policy, practice, politics. *London Review of Education*, 12(2), 175–183. <https://doi.org/10.18546/LRE.12.2.03>
- Creswell, J. W., Plano Clark, V. L., Gutmann, M. L., & Hanson, W. E. (2003). Advanced mixed methods research designs. In A. Tashakkori, & C. Teddlie (Eds.), *Handbook of mixed methods in social & behavioral research* (pp. 209-240). Sage.
- Davis, M. L., Bozick, R., Steele, J. L., Saunders, J., & Miles, J. N. V. (2013). *Evaluating the effectiveness of correctional education. A meta-analysis of programs that provide education to incarcerated adults*. RAND Corporation. [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR266.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR266.html)
- EC. European Commission: Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture. (2022). *Blended mobility implementation guide for Erasmus+ higher education mobility KA131*. Publications Office of the European Union <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/467485>
- Gögele, S., & Kletzenbauer, P. (2023). Blended Intensive Programmes: Promoting internationalization in higher education. *Education and New Developments*, 2, 381–383. <https://doi.org/10.36315/2023v2end086>
- González-Pavón, C., Tarrazó-Serrano, D., Rubio, C., Seres, I., Víg, P., & Gasque, M. (2024). Bridging learning and international practice for enhancing Physics Education. *European Journal of Education and Pedagogy*, 5(4), 79–83. <https://doi.org/10.24018/ejedu.2024.5.4.865>
- Kríz, J. (2022). The use of informal learning in the resocialization of convicts in open prison conditions. *Lifelong Learning*, 12(2), 147–178. <https://doi.org/10.11118/lifele20221202167>
- Manninen, J. (2017). Empirical and genealogical analysis of non-vocational adult education in Europe. *International Review of Education*, 63(3), 319–340.
- Temiakova, D., Lukacova, S., & Lukač, M. (2023). Formal and non-formal education of adult convicts: Current status, functions and problem areas in Slovakia. *Lifelong Learning*, 1(13), 51–77. <https://doi.org/10.11118/lifele20231301051>
- Trincherro, R., & Robasto D. (2019). *I mixed methods nella ricerca educativa*. Mondadori.
- Warner, K. (2007). Against the narrowing of perspectives: How do we see learning, prisons and prisoners? *Journal of Correctional Education*, 58(2), 170–184.