Supporting Pre-service Teachers' Civic Competence as a Strategy for Internationalisation in the Digital Era

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∼ Higher education institutions worldwide show an interest in enhancing their internationalisation initiatives by integrating innovative teaching approaches into formal curricula. A main concern is to ensure that pre-service teachers enter future classrooms with a high level of civic competence. The aim of this study was to investigate the challenges and opportunities confronted within a professional development programme designed to promote pre-service teachers' competencies for democratic culture. The professional development programme was a three-year Erasmus+ KA2 programme involving the development of teacher training modules inspired by and aimed at developing competencies from the Reference Framework of Competencies for Democratic Culture. Its objective was to integrate digital resources within practicum-based learning modules based on democratic citizenship values. Following the implementation of the programme, a SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) was conducted to gather data on the programme's potential to support pre-service teachers' civic competencies. The SWOT analysis was completed by ten teacher educators from five different university departments located in two metropolitan cities in central and northern Greece. Thematic analyses were used at a case and group level. The results showed that the online affordances of the programme, combined with each department's practicum-based learning modules, could effectively support the development of pre-service teachers' civic competencies, provided that resources were adapted with a human-centred sensitivity to the specificities of each context. In alignment with worldwide teacher education trends, we advocate for the implementation of similar programmes in the future as a *participatory internationalisation at home* strategy for supporting teacher online collaboration and peer learning.

Keywords: teacher education, democratic competencies, SWOT analysis, professional development programmes

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Podpiranje državljanskih kompetenc bodočih učiteljev kot strategija za internacionalizacijo v digitalni dobi

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Visokošolske ustanove po vsem svetu kažejo zanimanje za krepitev svojih pobud za internacionalizacijo z vključevanjem inovativnih učnih pristopov v formalne učne načrte. Glavna skrb je zagotoviti, da bodo bodoči učitelji vstopili v svoje bodoče razrede z visoko stopnjo državljanskih kompetenc. Namen te študije je bil raziskati izzive in priložnosti, ki se pojavljajo v sklopu programa profesionalnega razvoja, namenjenega spodbujanju kompetenc bodočih učiteljev za demokratično kulturo. Program profesionalnega razvoja je bil triletni program Erasmus+ KA2, ki je vključeval razvoj modulov za usposabljanje učiteljev po zgledu Referenčnega okvira kompetenc za demokratično kulturo in je bil namenjen razvoju kompetenc iz omenjenega okvira. Njegov cilj je bil v na praksi temelječe učne module vključiti digitalne vire, ki temeljijo na demokratičnih državljanskih vrednotah. Po izvedbi programa je bila izvedena analiza SWOT (prednosti, slabosti, priložnosti in grožnje), da bi zbrali podatke o potencialu programa za podporo državljanskih kompetenc bodočih učiteljev. K analizi SWOT je prispevalo deset izobraževalcev učiteljev s petih različnih univerzitetnih oddelkov iz dveh velemest v osrednji in severni Grčiji. Tematske analize so bile uporabljene na ravni posameznih primerov in skupin. Rezultati so pokazali, da lahko spletne možnosti programa v kombinaciji z na praksi temelječimi učnimi moduli vsakega oddelka učinkovito podprejo razvoj državljanskih kompetenc bodočih učiteljev, če so viri prilagojeni z občutljivostjo za posebnosti posameznega konteksta, usmerjeno na človeka. Skladno s svetovnimi trendi izobraževanja učiteljev se zavzemamo za izvajanje podobnih programov v prihodnosti kot strategije »participativne internacionalizacije doma« za podporo spletnemu sodelovanju in vrstniškemu učenju učiteljev.

Ključne besede: izobraževanje učiteljev, demokratične kompetence, analiza SWOT, programi profesionalnega razvoja

Introduction

The rising internationalisation trends call for changes in teacher education worldwide. Among scholars and policymakers, serious concerns have been expressed over the challenges that modern education systems face in terms of deficits in democracy and rights-based education, as well as controversies that require a reconsideration of civic education and engagement (Sardoč, 2021). Under this premise, education reforms are suggested as avenues for change (Kodelja, 2021). As a dynamic combination of socio-political, economic and academic rationales for change, internationalisation becomes a priority within the global (teacher) education reform agenda, taking the form of either *internationalisation abroad* or *internationalisation at home* practices (de Wit & Altbach, 2020). *Internationalisation abroad* practices are delivered via mobility schemes and privileges given both to faculty staff and students within knowledge hubs, joint degree programmes and transnational or cross-border initiatives. Such opportunities tend to stimulate 'skilled immigration of professional capital' in response to calls for intercultural competence and global citizenship education (de Wit & Altbach, 2020). *Internationalisation at home* takes the form of curriculum practices, and professional and citizenship development practices. Such practices build on online mobility, digital content and active collaboration within international online learning environments (e.g., MOOCs) in an effort to integrate global dimensions within national or regional ones. Some indicative examples are the establishment of online communities (Van Mol & Perez-Encinas, 2022), the support of intercultural learning within digital environments (Watkins & Smith, 2018), and the promotion of cross-sectional collaborations through digital spaces (de Wit & Altbach, 2021). The ultimate goal is the creation of '*third spaces*' within which future teachers can interact at an international level to develop the competencies needed to act effectively in diverse cultural settings (Mittelmeier et al., 2020).

Internationalisation at home and civic competencies share a common goal of preparing individuals to navigate and contribute to an increasingly interconnected and diverse world (Grad & van der Zande, 2022; Kraska et al., 2018). Teachers' interaction within internationalisation at home environments requires an awareness of belonging to a common social good, and thus civic and intercultural competencies are critical (Marks et al., 2018). Civic competencies fall under the umbrella term of *civic learning*, which encompasses lifelong learning outcomes such as knowledge and skills for democracy, moral development, global citizenship and many others (Dias & Soares, 2018). Within teacher education, *civic learning* has been connected with the acquisition of knowledge, skills and

dispositions that are fundamental for developing actions that are relevant to the diverse needs of internationalised contexts. Teacher educators play a vital role in selecting suitable content and methodologies, as well as creating conducive learning environments that promote the cultivation of engaged and analytical citizenship (Raiker, 2020). Consequently, it is imperative that teacher education programmes evolve to address these demands (Fuentes-Moreno et al., 2020).

In response to the broader need for education reforms for civic agency and intercultural awareness (Gaber & Tašner, 2021), teacher education programmes have always included school practicum and field placement in various ways to support student teachers to integrate theory and practice in the workplace (Lawson et al., 2015). The connection between suitable courses and school placement experiences has been highlighted as one of the most powerful ways of supporting future teachers in the era of internationalisation (Ingersoll et al., 2018). A significant finding of scholarship in this field is that internationalisation presents a challenge to teaching, since teachers need to enter their classrooms with a high level of cultural sensitivity as well as the knowledge and skills required to prepare students to live and coexist in society, and to independently exercise the rights, duties and responsibilities of a democratic society (Coates, 2016; Fuentes-Moreno et al., 2020; Myers & Rivero, 2019; Sjøen, 2023). Within school placement, a culturally sensitive stance would mean that the teacher would approach knowledge in a partial (i.e., what counts as knowledge for one may not count as knowledge for others), contingent (i.e., knowledge and competencies are context dependent) and provisional (i.e., knowledge may change as a result of interaction and influences) manner (Kerkhoff, 2017). However, the translation of theory into practice during practicum creates challenges for new teachers, who need mentoring support and facilitation from cooperating teachers and field supervisors.

For those of us working in the field of teacher education, the design of culturally sensitive practicum programmes (e.g., programmes enhanced with workshops, mentoring support and facilitation from cooperating teachers and field supervisors) remains a priority and a foundation for the promotion of *civic learning*. We acknowledge that *civic learning* represents a powerful opportunity for future teachers to recognise their knowledge gaps and adopt a stance of social justice, acceptance and respect for others. Thus, we advocate for the implementation of internationalisation at home programmes that support pre-service teachers to address potentially rigid/intuitive beliefs about teaching and learning as early as in their practicum and transform them into socially just professional attitudes and values (Shuali Trachtenberg et al., 2020; Vizek Vidović & Domović, 2019).

Based on the above, the aim of the present study was to investigate the challenges and opportunities within an internationalised at home professional development programme designed to promote pre-service teachers' competencies for democratic culture in their practicum-based university courses. In order to achieve this goal, the following research questions were addressed:

What are the issues inherent in the design of internationalisation at home (professional development) programmes for pre-service teachers?

What challenges are identified by teacher educators during the implementation of internationalisation at home programmes aimed at the development of pre-service teachers' civic competencies within school practicum?

Method

Participants and Setting

Ten teacher educators from five different university departments located in two metropolitan cities in central and northern Greece participated in this study. A case-study design was implemented to analyse the challenges and opportunities faced by the participants during an internationalisation at home programme that they applied within their university modules as part of their collaboration within a three-year Erasmus+ KA2 programme. The three-year Erasmus programme entitled STEP-UP DC Student Teachers' Competences for Democratic Culture included empirical knowledge drawn from European university backgrounds, and its goal was to promote democratic citizenship within teacher education based on the Reference Framework of Competencies for Democratic Culture (RFCDC) (Lenz et al., 2022). The Erasmus programme's overarching objective was to integrate open educational resources and an online certification module (based on democratic citizenship standards and human right values) within already existing teacher education modules. The rationale for selecting this particular programme as a case study was that (a) it introduced internationalisation at home activities and resources for the development of civic competencies within already existing teacher education modules, and (b) it combined academic instruction, microteaching exercises and school practicum. Specifically, the focus of the internationalisation at home activities and resources was to help pre-service teachers gain a deeper understanding of democratic values and civic involvement (Resch & Schrittesser, 2021), so that they could afterwards transfer these to their school practice.

All of the participants in the study were involved as university lecturers and supervisors of pre-service teachers' school practicum in primary and/or secondary schools (see Table 1 for institutional information) and had more

than ten years of experience in teacher education. Although each institution had its own organisational structure in terms of curriculum, staff and student requirements, all of the institutions were public universities offering a four-year bachelor programme (240 ECTS) in various subjects with an integrated teacher education component.

Table 1

Institutional information and teacher education roles in the programme

Teacher Education Programme	Programme Level/ Duration	Module Requirements	Teacher Educators' Roles
Physical Education Teacher Education	four-year bachelor programme	two-semester theoretical courses – microteaching laboratory assignments field-based practicum in public primary and secondary schools	module coordinator, lecturer, field-placement supervisor
Religious Education Secondary Teacher Education	four-year bachelor programme	four-semester religious education teachers' pedagogic and teaching competence programme with eight courses – two-semester teaching practice in secondary public and state schools	Erasmus programme coordinator, lecturer and teaching practice coordinator
Informatics Teacher Education	four-year bachelor programme	two-semester theoretical and laboratory courses – laboratory assignments – field-based practicum in the form of teaching observation in secondary schools and microteaching	module coordinator, lecturer, field-placement supervisor
Department of English Language and Literature Teacher Education	four-year bachelor programme	winter semester – Teaching Practice 1: TEFL practicum, spring semester – Teaching Practice 2: Practice teaching in schools	module coordinator, lecturer, mentor educator, teaching practice supervisor
Early Childhood Teacher Education	four-year bachelor programme	one-semester theoretical course, seminars, field-based practicum in public kindergartens	module coordinator, lecturer, field-placement supervisor

As part of their participation in the programme, each team of teacher educators had to use the RFCDC framework to prepare internationalisation at home resources for their university modules, which are categorised into four types: (a) suggested readings on the relationship between democratic citizenship and teacher education theory and practice, (b) lesson templates with activities for implementing the RFCDC framework in school practicum, (c) workshop activities with examples of combining each module's content knowledge

with democratic teaching methods and pedagogies, and (d) video presentations on the meaning and value of competencies for democratic culture. The development of digital skills was deemed important to serve digital citizenship and increase cultural connectivity and sensitivity. For this reason, digital tools and platforms were purposively used. More specifically, the resources produced by the teacher educator teams were made available freely on the course management system, providing 'case-based scenarios' that pre-service teachers from all of the participating institutions could use as examples for developing children's and youth's civic competencies, as outlined by the Council of Europe's Competence Framework for Democratic Culture. Moreover, a teleconference system supported regular synchronous online collaboration between the different institutions. The main idea was to strengthen the content and pedagogies already offered within the participating teacher education modules. All of the participants were responsible for using the newly developed resources in their modules as internationalisation at home material that would support pre-service teachers to design, implement and evaluate field-based lesson plans that emphasised the social and educational value of democracy.

During the winter semester of the 2021–2022 academic year, 100 pre-service teachers from the participating institutions attended on a weekly basis the internationalisation at home programme, which involved attendance of lectures, short quizzes, synchronous collaboration and asynchronous online communication within a specially devised forum. As part of each institution's modules, pre-service teachers also had to attend short seminars and blended-learning workshops delivered by the teacher educator teams at each institution separately. The goal was to help pre-service teachers integrate the principles of democratic culture in their subject-specific instructional design (e.g., programme planning, implementation and evaluation). After attending the introductory seminar and the subject-specific workshops, the pre-service teachers were expected to apply democratic and human citizenship values in their practice, under the guidance and facilitation of their teacher educators. Specifically, the pre-service teachers at each institution were asked to use the internationalisation at home resources as a guiding framework for designing, implementing and evaluating lesson plans in their field-placement with a similar focus. Throughout the process of school practicum, the pre-service teachers were supervised and supported by the teacher educators and inservice cooperating teachers at schools, while also having an opportunity to interact with pre-service teachers from other institutions via the Erasmus programme's online forum.

Data collection instrument and procedure: SWOT analysis

A strength, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) framework was applied for data collection and analysis as a method for assessing both internal and external factors influencing curriculum design and delivery, and for providing ideas for strategic planning in alignment with situational affordances and constraints (Hladchenko, 2014). The SWOT analysis is used as an appropriate method within case studies (Benzaghta et al., 2021) and has been adopted in various educational fields, such as informatics education (Sharma & Singh, 2010), environmental education (Romero-Gutierrez et al., 2016), medical education (Longhurst et al., 2020) and physical education teacher education (O'Brien et al., 2020).

In the present study, the SWOT analysis aimed to investigate teacher educators' perceptions of (a) the issues inherent in the design of the internationalisation at home resources and procedures, and (b) the challenges that were identified as part of the programme's goal to enhance pre-service teachers' democratic competencies in school practicum. A participative process was followed in order to eliminate potential misuse and misinterpretations of the SWOT analysis (Hladchenko, 2014). More specifically, for all of the SWOT components, each teacher educator team was asked to identify a set of relevant issues and challenges, and then to critically interpret these based on evidence and observations from each context's field-learning practice. Furthermore, each team was asked to submit a reflective synopsis of the SWOT analysis procedure, focusing on the way that internationalisation at home programmes can be adopted as a strategy to support pre-service teachers to develop civic learning skills in practicum. Data entries were analysed by the first author with the use of a thematic approach (Longhurst et al., 2020; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) across the five teacher education institutions. Specifically, each SWOT component was read across the different cases and then reread to identify commonalities or differences. The themes that emerged from the comparative reading of the SWOT analysis were also examined in relation to the critical synopses that each team submitted. The themes that were produced were agreed upon by all of the authors through a process of member checking to secure data trustworthiness and the validity of the findings. The goal was to decide on the themes that could present the common view of the participating teams, and thus work towards a level of theoretical generalisation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Results

The SWOT analysis indicated the presence of themes and sub-themes per each SWOT element (Table 2). To gain in-depth understandings of the present findings, the results are analysed per theme and sub-theme in the following section. The intention in the presentation of the results is not to prioritise themes or sub-themes in a hierarchy system of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, but rather to present a synthesis of issues and challenges that could provide a practical basis for reflection and dialogue on the introduction of internationalisation at home programmes for civic learning within teacher education contexts.

Table 2

Themes and sub-themes generated per SWOT element

SWOT Element	Themes *Sub-themes*
Strengths	**Diversity of educational material** – *Interdisciplinary collaboration and exchange of ideas using digital tools* – *Theory-practice connections* – *Authentic solutions for lesson planning and teaching in today's classroom* **Structure of educational material** – *Case-based learning* – *Bilingual material with grade level adaptations* – *Criteria and indicators for assessment* **Utility of educational material** – *A useful reflection tool* – *A new learning community of professionals in civic learning*
Weaknesses	**Established beliefs** – *Students' experiences of democracy at schools* – *Teachers' enaction of a true democratic framework* **Time limits** – *Short programme duration* – *More time for pilot testing of educational material*
Opportunities	**Teaching and learning design** – *Human-centred teaching and learning approaches* **Open access and accreditation** – *Open access certification process* – *Internationalised master programme planning* – *New field for school reform*
Threats	**ICT and democratic competencies** – *Risk of considering democracy an easy task* – *Lack of infrastructure to support digital training* – *Civic competencies equated with the completion of online tests* **Asynchronous training** – *Gaps in evaluation relevance* – *Teachers' inability to create a climate of meaningful online communication* – *Hierarchical structures and power relations may pose a 'democracy deficit'* **Complementarity of learning material** – *Online materials misused for teacher reflection* – *Unifying practices without culture/discipline specific adaptations*

As became evident from the participants' responses, the present programme was perceived as effective in providing pre-service teachers with tools and resources that could support their learning and practice of democratic competencies within practicum. The main strengths that were identified were the diversity, structure and utility of the educational material developed within the programme. Concerning diversity, the teacher educators reported that the online material, the collaborative activities and the digital tools gave their students an opportunity to broaden their views and knowledge concerning democratic values, as they could study diverse forms of material and exchange ideas and opinions with peers from different departments. As they stated, the diversity of the material facilitated lesson planning from the students and the generation of authentic solutions to educational issues based on civic competencies (e.g., respect, responsibility, empathy, etc.). Regarding the programme design and structure, the participants underlined the efficacy of the 'case-based learning' methodology that was used, which gave pre-service teachers multiple opportunities to navigate the course management system and problem-solve classroom issues using complementary online study material (e.g., suggested readings, video-presentations, workshop activities, lesson activities and quizzes). Common to all of the participants' responses was the impression that the internationalisation at home programme offered a valuable new space for the creation of a community of inquiry, serving the needs of all of the members involved (e.g., teacher educators, pre-service teachers and in-service school co-operating teachers).

In terms of weaknesses, the participants reported that already established pre-service teachers' beliefs and value orientations concerning the enaction of civic learning at schools hindered the implementation of democratic principles in practice. As was noted, additional time is needed for this purpose, along with the adoption of project-based teaching and learning methodologies both at the school and university level.

Concerning future opportunities, the SWOT analysis revealed that programmes of this kind can support the development of future teachers' civic learning, especially when their affordances (both digital and face-to-face) allow interaction and purposeful communication. Given the specificities of school practicum, the participants mentioned that internationalisation at home programmes need to offer opportunities for the development of intercultural awareness, communication and sensitivity towards otherness, so that future teachers are supported to enact instruction effectively. It was clear from the findings that the online open-access training material of the programme was also a valuable professional learning opportunity for the in-service cooperating teachers

who supervised the pre-service teachers at schools. During the programme, the in-service cooperating teachers had free access to the online modules, which helped them to act as multipliers in their school and diffuse their knowledge to fellow teachers. Furthermore, the potential for using the programme as a basis for developing master's level programmes in the future was also addressed as an opportunity by the teacher educators.

The most important threats that were reported in the entries of the SWOT analysis focused on the false belief that democracy and civic competencies are easily learned within digital courses. As the participants stated, courses need to be designed purposefully to sustain a climate of meaningful communication and interaction for democratic learning. Otherwise, there is a possibility that pre-service teachers may feel that they have acquired civic learning skills and competencies just because they have successfully completed online tests and certifications.

Discussion

The significance of improving teacher education programmes worldwide in order to address global goals and needs led us to focus our study on the challenges inherent in designing and implementing an internationalisation at home programme for pre-service teachers focused on democratic competencies. By using SWOT analysis as our main methodological tool, we sought to identify important issues that arise when internationalisation at home programmes are adopted within school practicum as tools/resources for enhancing pre-service teachers' civic competencies. By using teacher educators' perspectives as a point of reference, the results from the SWOT analysis provided some clues concerning the aspects or structure of such programmes within modern university contexts.

The strengths identified in the SWOT analysis concerned the diversity, structure and utility of the educational material used within the programme. These strengths reflect basic principles of effective instructional design within teacher education (Alsaleh, 2020; Hoogveld et al., 2005; Koukounaras Liagkis et al., 2022), along with the need to integrate web-facilitated and blended models of curriculum delivery in modern classrooms (Paskevicius, & Bortolin, 2016). Studies show that when discussion and collaborative dialogue (Ali et al., 2018; Ceballos López et al., 2016; Han et al., 2013; Lee et al., 2009) as well as inquiry-based strategies are used within internationalisation at home programmes, civic learning and online engagement are promoted (Jennings et al., 2021; Sardoć, 2021; Sun et al., 2022). Practices of this kind resonate with

the social constructivist nature of civic learning (Setiani & MacKinnon, 2015) and are congruent with calls for internationalising teacher education curricula, pedagogy and assessment (Ashby & Exter, 2019).

Concerning the programme's weaknesses, the participants in the present study admitted that pre-service teachers' beliefs were a major barrier, hindering the transfer of civic competencies in school practice. This was an expected finding, since changes in the cultural and ethnic composition of student populations in Greece, as in many countries worldwide, have stimulated different perspectives concerning the concepts of citizenship, democracy and social interaction (Inglehart & Welzel, 2010). Especially since the pandemic, many researchers have asserted that universities need scale up the professional learning of teachers at all grades (Torres-Cladera et al., 2021), so that they can efficaciously deliver civic learning principles in a context-specific and thus internationalised mode (de Wit & Altbach, 2021; de Wit & Deca, 2020). However, in the absence of institutional support structures (e.g., professional development seminars and training for in-service teachers, etc.), such initiatives remain fragmented (Schugurensky & Wolhuter, 2020). Experts in the field of teacher education suggest that it would be wise to integrate online learning modules in already existing field-based learning courses (as was done in our case), so that future teachers start to embrace online interaction and peer mentoring dialogues as opportunities to further reflect (Vizek Vidović & Domović, 2019) and promote their civic understandings and sensitivity towards people from different disciplines and cultures (Schugurensky & Wolhuter, 2020).

The potential of connecting digital learning with human-centred values more explicitly in future programmes was an opportunity addressed by the participants in our study. Research has shown that core practices of *civic learning*, such as dialogue, mobilisation and engagement, may not be enacted within digital contexts if participants are not facilitated to interact within peer-based activities and seek to exert both voice and influence on issues of shared concern (Garcia-Lopez et al., 2020; Kahne et al., 2016). Given the fact that school experience in and of itself may not necessarily be educational, the quality of university programmes will play a key role in providing valuable and relevant on-the-ground support to new teachers (Bomer & Maloch, 2019). Therefore, university programmes need to ensure that future teachers get support in their enactment of reflective practice, both individual and collective (Ceballos López et al., 2016), and develop the skills and knowledge needed to respond effectively to the phenomena they may encounter in their everyday practice. The findings of the present study further suggest that purposefully designed internationalisation at home programmes can also bring value to in-service or practicum

supervisor teachers. Thus, one of the challenges is finding ways to combine the work done within university courses and the work done at schools, so that all teachers understand professional development as a non-cumulative process of sharing that may lead to reinterpreting one's beliefs, values and expectations (Torres-Cladera et al., 2021).

One important finding of the present study is that a simple broadening of online activities/programmes is not enough to safeguard internationalisation practices that align with civic competencies and provide equitable opportunities for all. The relevant literature suggests that education for democratic citizenship and/or civic education are on the rise thanks to the efforts of knowledgeable teachers who stay connected and collaborate to produce an additional 'multiplier effect' (Dania & Griffin, 2021; Dania & Tannehill, 2022; Koukounaras Liagkis, 2022), and not merely by the introduction or use of novel tools and resources (Kodelja, 2021; Torres-Cladera et al., 2021; van Mol & Perez-Encinas, 2022). According to Watkins (2014), digital users are often 'power users' (meaning that they are frequent users of online media) without necessarily being 'powerful users' (in the sense that they are not able/willing to use digital media as influential users). Thus, when faced with internationalisation at home reforms, teachers should recognise the need to modify their practice in ways such that digitally fuelled connectivity does not pose a 'democracy deficit' threat, especially for participants with limited access or opportunities. This is in line with related research supporting the idea that civic competencies should act as critical enablers of future teachers' action and educational presence (Jackson, 2019) within internationalised at home initiatives (Almeida et al., 2019), so that they develop cross-cultural understandings and practice (Aheer et al., 2020). In alignment with prominent social movements today, we envisage the combination of online and field-based learning practices for civic learning within teacher education programmes as a solution that could support internationalisation at home while also influencing 'democratic decision-making'. Based on our experience from the Erasmus programme, we call this form of online civic learning *participatory internationalisation at home* learning.

Conclusions

The present study found that internationalisation at home programmes may offer significant support for the pursuit of civic learning within teacher education contexts if such programmes are purposefully designed to facilitate interaction, problem solving, and sharing of opinions and ideas. Future teachers' attraction to online learning seems to align with forms of professional

development that they find compelling and relevant to their needs. However, the study found that pre-service teachers may employ the affordances of internationalisation at home resources to learn at a surface level about democratic values without necessarily being ready or able to engage in a participatory learning culture. As reported, this may pose a threat to the understanding of what civic learning means and how it can be enacted in practice. By remaining mindful of the priorities and contextual requirements of their context, teacher educators need to create digital spaces that can foster the sustained action and commitment that is needed to incorporate civic learning principles in theory and field-based practice. Case-based learning scenarios and a collection of diverse materials and tools are needed to support teachers to navigate effectively within online contexts while taking advantage of opportunities for online dialogue and feedback by teachers and peers. As such, the combination of practicum-based learning with blended forms of curriculum delivery (synchronous and asynchronous instruction) is suggested as a best practice for facilitating future teachers to work effectively within international classrooms.

While the findings of the study certainly provide some evidence concerning the development of future teachers' civic competencies via online learning programmes, some limitations are noted. The study involved academics from five participating institutions in the same country, and thus the findings cannot be generalised across teacher institutions. The SWOT analysis was adopted as a strategy to elicit teacher educators' viewpoints, something that, although being a really valuable reflective activity, is also susceptible to each participant's or team's subjectivity and norms. For this reason, we were very careful in the procedures that we employed for data analysis, following relevant guidelines and recommendations in qualitative data analysis literature. Furthermore, all of the results derived from this analysis were based on entries from the same European programme, and thus cannot be generalised to other similar interdisciplinary programmes. We therefore advocate for future studies in this field that could broaden our analysis through entries from similar programmes, both in European and international contexts.

What we want to make explicit, however, is that we do not adopt a consequentialist perspective (Kodelja, 2021) in our suggestion of internationalisation at home programmes as avenues for *civic learning*. According to Elster (1987, p. 709), consequentialist perspectives are based on the belief that a certain reform will have desirable effects. Such a belief on our part would treat *civic learning* as a medium for improving future teachers' competitiveness and not as something that has intrinsic value itself. Since we cannot know whether or which education reforms are more innovative than others prior to implementing and

evaluating them, the question that we raise at this point is:

> *How can we know if the development of future teachers' civic competencies via internationalisation at home programmes is the right decision for promoting education reform and change*?

With equity, social cohesion and active citizenship still being prevalent goals of education reforms, we believe that it is worthwhile investing in online *civic learning* programmes as a type of reform that would align with the demands and needs of culturally diverse classrooms or contexts, and not as a reform linked with change in a consequentialist sense. We understand that civic learning is by no means the only answer to the question "*How do we support pre-service teachers to (inter)act effectively in the modern world*?" Learning how to be or become a teacher is a continuous process that builds on personal beliefs and professional beliefs with which the teacher may come into contact during the first stages of initial teacher training (Vizek Vidović & Domović, 2019). However, the present study raises the following issues as take-home messages for teacher educators who wish to support their students' *civic learning* as a form of *participatory internationalisation at home* practice:

- The affordances of online learning may well support future teachers to learn about and practise *civic learning*. For this to happen, teacher education institutions must purposefully (re)design their modules to leverage the power of connected learning (via digital media) to the principles of participatory field-based learning.
- School contexts, even those that favour intercultural education and initiatives, may create barriers to the enactment of civic values in practice. Teacher education institutions must develop professional development initiatives that provide schoolteachers with formal and/or informal *civic learning* opportunities. In-service teachers' engagement with civic-oriented blended learning projects such as the present programme may be a wise solution.
- The digital era raises significant concerns related to internationalised teaching and learning. Thus, teachers must be able to reflect on their own positionality before engaging in teaching aimed at *civic learning*. Overall, teachers must not only teach youth about civic competencies, but must help them to connect their efforts with the circumstances of their context.

Disclosure statement

The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

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