

Moving minds: Virtual Mobility as a New Form of Academic Mobility

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Abstract: The COVID-19 changed the nature of teaching and learning for students and faculty to an online model. The sudden transition opened great opportunities for innovation in virtual mobility and collaboration. Higher Education Institutions around the world are likely to take forward at least some digitalized practices in the long term. The impact of the pandemic in higher education has been diverse, profound and different for each institution and country, showing in general great efforts in all levels to be resilient and adapting rapidly to changes.

One of the COVID-19 impacts on universities was the increase of using new information and communication technologies. It also gave new challenge for academic mobility - virtual mobility.

In higher education, academic mobility has become increasingly important for learners as well as for institutions. But today's mobility schemes are first and foremost aimed at physical mobility.

Virtual mobility refers to university students and teachers using another institution outside their own country to study or teach for a limited time, without physically leaving their home. It complements physical mobility in which students travel to study abroad, such as within the Erasmus Programme. Student and teacher mobility are perceived as important quality issues in higher education.

Virtual mobility has been defined as an activity that offers access to courses and study schemes in a foreign country and allows for communication activities with teachers and fellow students abroad via the new information and communication technologies.

The need to offer all students in higher education the possibility of an international experience and the European strategy of boosting student mobility requires the expansion of virtual mobility. The European Association of Distance Teaching Universities (EADTU) initiated an operational analysis of virtual mobility under the e-move project. Different models of virtual mobility have been developed, analysed and put into practice.

Striving for a European educational space, the Academy of Economic Studies of Moldova (ASEM) considers virtual mobility as a necessary addition to the traditional ways of studying abroad that require travelling.

My university offers to incorporate virtual student mobility as an additional form of student mobility, which can play a key role in reshaping the internationalization of higher education in the post-pandemic landscape. This paper will explore how a particular virtual mobility scheme can be put into practice and what is required from an organisation to implement this model and incorporate it into its own curriculum.

The aim of this report is to prove that students can continue to benefit from intercultural exchanges through the use of technology. These new forms of learning would make student mobility possible not only face-to-face but also virtually.

Keywords: academic mobility, COVID-19 impacts, virtual mobility