Antwerp LTTA Case Study

A reflection of the experiences of the academic staff who took part in the 3rd Learning and Teaching Activity (LTTA) in Antwerp, Belgium

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Table of Contents

Introduction 3

Academics' Role: Guiding Student Learning 3

Academic's Experiences in Detail 4

Communication and Interpersonal Skills 4

Teamwork 6

Use of Technology 7

Entrepreneurship and Business Acumen 7

Mentorship 8

Guiding Students on their Journey 8

Academics' Feedback on their Experience 9

Challenges and Positive Aspects 17

Impact on Teaching Practices 18

Student Reflections on Mentorship: A Guiding Hand 19

Conclusion 20

Introduction

This case study reports on the 3rd mobility in the Start-IT Erasmus+ project. It focusses on the perspective of the academic staff who took part in the mobility. The ten-day mobility took place in March 2024 in Antwerp, Belgium. Academics and students from Ireland, Poland, Belgium, Portugal, Finland, and Germany met at the host institution AP Antwerp.

The core of this project involved the formation of international, interdisciplinary teams that were tasked with developing app concepts centred around the theme of "Digital Entrepreneurship and the Green City." The data for this case study was primarily gathered through academics' questionnaires and student reflections.

Academics' Role: Guiding Student Learning

Three academics from LTW took part in the LTTA. Two academics from each of the other partner college took part in the LTTA. The Start-IT project relied heavily on the contributions of the participating academics to facilitate student learning. A detailed description of the educational methodology that was used during the project can be found here: https://iug.htw-berlin.de/start-it/1-methodology-for-teaching-soft-and-future-skills/ .

Below is a breakdown of how the involvement of the academics played a crucial role in the project's success:

1. Setting the Stage for Success:
Academics designed the project framework, including the "Green City" theme and the focus on app development. This provided a clear direction for the student teams, while allowing them room for creativity within the theme.

Academics delivered lectures on core topics, such as soft skills, team building, and future-oriented competencies. These sessions equipped the students with the foundational knowledge needed to navigate the project effectively.

2. Fostering Collaboration and Communication:
Academics facilitated the formation of diverse, cross-border teams, fostering intercultural communication and collaboration skills. This international element was a key learning objective of the project.

Mentors were assigned to each team to provided ongoing guidance and feedback throughout the project. This support system helped students navigate challenges, troubleshoot issues, and refine their project ideas over the course of the mobility.

3. Building Confidence and Encouraging Exploration:
Guest talks by industry professionals exposed students to real-world applications of business and IT knowledge, inspiring them and providing them with valuable insights.

Mentors offered constructive feedback during presentations and check-ins, allowing students to iterate on their ideas and improve their work continuously. This feedback loop boosted student confidence and encouraged students to think critically about their project development.

4. Recognizing Achievements:
Three separate presentation opportunities throughout the project allowed students to showcase their progress and receive feedback from a wider audience. This fostered a sense of accomplishment and motivated students to excel.

The project culminated in a closing ceremony, where students received certificates acknowledging their participation and achievements. This formal recognition validated their efforts and solidified their learning experience.

By providing a well-structured framework, offering ongoing support, and fostering a collaborative and encouraging environment, academics played a pivotal role in maximizing student learning during the Start-IT project. Their contributions helped students not only develop business and IT skills but also hone their communication, teamwork, and critical thinking abilities, all valuable assets for their future careers.

Academic's Experiences in Detail

Communication and Interpersonal Skills

Developing strong communication and interpersonal skills is crucial for success in today's globalized world. The Start-IT project, with its focus on student mobility, recognized this importance and aimed to foster these skills in participating students. The project environment encouraged active communication, improving articulation and collaboration skills.

This section explores academics' experiences regarding student development in communication and interpersonal skills based on the questionnaire responses.

Focus on Key Skills:
The questionnaire specifically asked academics to assess student development in various communication and interpersonal skills. These skills included:

- **Active listening:** The ability to pay close attention to what others are saying, understand their perspective, and responding thoughtfully.

- **Clear expression:** Communicating ideas and information effectively, both verbally and in writing, with appropriate language and organization.
- **Conflict resolution:** The ability to navigate disagreements constructively, find common ground, and reach solutions collaboratively.

Assessing Communication Skills:

According to the academics' responses, student development in communication and interpersonal skills was assessed through several methods:

- **Focus Groups:** Structured discussions facilitated by academics allowed students to share their experiences, ideas, and challenges related to communication. This provided valuable insights into how students were interacting with each other and developing their communication skills.
- **Observations:** During project activities like group work and presentations, academics observed students' communication dynamics. This included how they listened to each other, expressed their ideas, and worked together to resolve any disagreements.
- **Regular Meetings:** Formal and informal meetings with individual students or groups enabled academics to provide specific feedback on communication styles, clarity of expression, and conflict resolution techniques.
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Students reported that they learned how to use tools, such as Canva for presentations and explored the potential and limitations of AI tools, such as ChatGPT for brainstorming ideas. They also reflected that interaction with diverse cultures fostered greater openness and tolerance towards different perspectives.

Academics' Observations:

Academics reported positive developments in student communication skills throughout the Start-IT project. One academic commented that students became much more confident in expressing their ideas during group work. Another noted that there was a clear improvement over the course of the mobility in how students presented their findings. They used clearer language, structured their arguments logically, and effectively responded to questions.

One academic reported: "It was surprising to see that some of our institution's students, who were not usually motivated by traditional classes, showed much more interest, responsibility and commitment to the tasks and activities during the mobility period. Thus, the Start-IT methodology worked very well as a motivator for the students' creativity and autonomy."

However, some academics also mentioned challenges. One academic observed that initially, students from different cultural backgrounds struggled to understand each other's communication styles. But, through regular discussions and feedback, they learned to be more empathetic and adapt their communication accordingly.

From the students' perspective working in cross-border teams presented unique challenges in communication and collaboration. Student reflections revealed how they navigated these challenges, fostering teamwork and intercultural understanding. One student commented, "The project helped me develop my communication skills by working with people from different cultures and adapting my communication style." Another student added, "Learning to collaborate effectively with team members who have different approaches and perspectives was a valuable takeaway."

Overall, the Start-IT project, as perceived by academics, provided a valuable platform for students to develop their communication and interpersonal skills in a collaborative and international environment. The focus on active listening, clear expression, and conflict resolution equipped students with tools to navigate diverse perspectives and work effectively within teams.

Teamwork

Effective teamwork is essential for success in professional, academic, and personal aspects of life. The Start-IT project, designed to promote student mobility, recognized this and aimed to foster strong teamwork skills among participating students. This section explores academics' experiences regarding student development in teamwork based on the questionnaire responses.

Fostering Teamwork:

The questionnaire revealed that the Start-IT project actively fostered teamwork through various approaches:

- **Group Work:** Students were assigned projects and tasks that required them to work collaboratively in groups. This involved planning, dividing responsibilities, communicating effectively, and achieving a common goal together.
- **Presentations:** Students were required to present their project outcomes to the class. This process necessitated teamwork to ensure a cohesive presentation, clear division of speaking roles, and effective delivery.

These activities provided opportunities for students to develop essential teamwork skills, such as:

- **Collaboration:** Working together to achieve a shared objective, respecting diverse ideas, and valuing each member's contribution.
- **Problem-solving:** Tackling challenges collectively, brainstorming solutions, and reaching agreements through open communication.

- **Time Management:** Effectively coordinating individual schedules, meeting deadlines, and ensuring all team members contribute their fair share of the workload.

Academic's Observations

Academics observed significant improvements in student teamwork skills throughout the Start-IT project. One academic remarked that the group work activities helped students learn to delegate tasks, communicate their needs clearly, and support each other in achieving a common goal. Another noted, "The presentations showcased a clear improvement in how students worked together. They delivered well-structured presentations, demonstrating effective teamwork and collaboration."

However, some academics also mentioned challenges. One academic observed that, initially there were some cultural differences in teamwork styles. Some students were more assertive, while others preferred a more consensus-based approach. However, through open communication and discussions, they learned to appreciate different styles and work effectively as a team.

Students with business backgrounds offered valuable insights to IT-dominant students, demonstrating the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration. In student teams, techniques like "dot voting" facilitated constructive criticism and fostered a positive team environment. Students who took on leadership roles were proud about their ability to keep teams focused and motivated.

Overall, the Start-IT project, based on academics' observations, provided a valuable platform for students to develop their teamwork skills. Through collaborative group work and presentations, students learned to collaborate effectively, solve problems collectively, and manage their time efficiently. This fostered a strong sense of teamwork and prepared students for future academic and professional endeavors that will require successful collaboration.

Use of Technology

Students were challenged with the practicalities of app development, from conceptualizing an idea to building a user interface prototype using Figma. Reflections revealed insights into the challenges and rewards of this process. One student noted, "The project helped me understand the complexities of user interface (UI) design and the importance of creating a user-friendly experience." Another student remarked, "Working with Figma to create a clickable prototype was a valuable learning experience, allowing me to visualize the app's functionality."

Entrepreneurship and Business Acumen

Students gained exposure to the business side of app development, including market research, business model development, and pitching concepts. The project served as a

refresher for topics like business model canvas, SWOT analysis, and financial planning, even highlighting areas needing further improvement. Reflections highlighted how this exposure enhanced their understanding of turning ideas into viable business ventures. One student reflected, "Learning how to create a business plan and present our idea effectively was a valuable skill I can apply to future endeavors." Another student noted, "The project allowed me to explore different marketing strategies and understand the importance of targeting the right audience."

Mentorship

Guiding Students on their Journey

The Start-IT project, recognizing the importance of guidance and support in student development, incorporated a mentorship component. This section explores the role of academics as mentors for student groups and its impact based on the academics' questionnaire.

Academics as Mentors:

The questionnaire revealed that academics played a pivotal role as mentors for student groups throughout the project. This mentorship involved providing students with the following:

- **Guidance and Support:** Mentors staff offered guidance on project planning, research methodologies, communication strategies, and teamwork dynamics. They also provided support in overcoming challenges, resolving conflicts within the group, and ensuring everyone stayed on track.
- **Feedback and Encouragement:** Mentors provided constructive feedback on students' work, presentations, and communication styles. This feedback helped students identify areas for improvement and motivated them to excel.
- **Knowledge and Expertise:** Mentors shared their knowledge and expertise relevant to the project topic. This enriched student understanding and ensured they were working towards achieving the project objectives effectively.

Mentorship in Action:

The questionnaire responses provided insights into how academics implemented mentorship:

- **Regular Meetings:** Mentors held regular meetings with student groups to discuss progress, address challenges, and provide feedback. These meetings fostered open communication and allowed for timely guidance.

- **Individual Support:** Mentors offered individual support to students who needed additional guidance or clarification on specific aspects of the project. This personalized approach ensured all students felt supported and equipped to contribute effectively.
- **Active Participation:** Mentors actively participated in project activities, not by taking over, but by guiding students through brainstorming sessions, facilitating discussions, and offering suggestions for improvement.

Academics' Experiences:

The academics responses highlighted the positive impact of mentorship on student development. One academic said they appreciated that mentoring allowed them to build strong relationships with students and provide them with personalized support. Seeing their progress and confidence build throughout the project was perceived to be rewarding. The mentorship role helped students become more independent learners. They learned to take initiative, solve problems effectively, and seek clarification when needed.

The questionnaire also revealed some challenges related to mentorship. One academic observed that balancing the role of mentor and facilitator can be challenging as it is important to guide students without dictating solutions. Despite these challenges, academics emphasized the importance of ongoing communication and adapting mentorship styles to individual student needs.

From the perspective of students, the Start-IT project fostered personal growth and professional development. Reflections highlighted how students gained confidence, improved their adaptability, and honed their problem-solving skills. One student remarked, "The project pushed me outside my comfort zone, but I learned to be resourceful and find solutions to unexpected challenges." Another student noted, "The experience helped me build my confidence in presenting ideas in front of a large audience."

Overall, the Start-IT project, as perceived by academics, established a successful mentorship model. Academics, acting as mentors, provided students with invaluable guidance, support, and feedback, empowering them to take ownership of their learning and navigate project challenges effectively. This mentorship fostered student growth, confidence, and a sense of accomplishment.

Academics' Feedback on their Experience

The academics who participated in the Antwerp Start-IT project were asked to give their feedback. The feedback is given below:

Lecturer A

I enjoyed participating the project because it was very inspiring. I find it brings new ideas and fresh perspectives to my own work when I mentor with other professionals from different fields to students from different backgrounds. Therefore, peer learning is one essential part

of the experience. I am a social person and I enjoy doing development through trial in cooperation, that is a part of the methodology we do. These events also give me ideas to take with me to my own work. The multicultural group, as well as multidisciplinary, makes it much more interesting. We also learn a lot from other cultures and how to navigate in a multicultural team, it is not just the students who learn. Event though I have been part of these kind of cooperations closer to 10 years, I still feel I find new things.

I think we have a good combination of mentoring skills between the academic staff. The different skills sets and professions make it possible to coach the students work during the teamwork, we complement each other's expertise. This also makes it possible to give very professional and constructive feedback in the presentations. These events are a possibility for us to deepen our cooperation as professionals and between the institutions. During the event we can discuss and plan future actions together in a way that would not happen just via email or remote connections. I think that the Moodle is a good way to give out information to students, it is easily updated and you can always find the latest info in one place efficiently.

The accommodation and working facilities were good in Antwerp, students also participated well to the evening activities that were arranged. Bowling and pizza were a fun activity for them.

This time we tried out splitting the second milestone presentations in two parallel sessions. I agree it saves time, it can be quite taxing and take time to sit through all ten presentations in all three presentations. But on the other hand, I found myself missing to hear all the team's presentations, it would have been interesting to be able to follow all the teams progress in the middle of the event.

For future projects I would consider rethinking a bit what lectures we give the students in the beginning of the event on the topics related to the work. They could be more in an active form, more workshop type so the students could work on their ideas with the given information during these sessions.

Lecturer B

Reflecting on the Sustainability App Project, my overall experience as a supervisor was deeply rewarding, despite some challenges along the way. The project aimed to engage students in app development while addressing critical sustainability issues, encouraging them to collaborate in groups to produce business plans, app designs, and presentations. Throughout this intensive process, I found myself inspired by the enthusiasm and creativity of the students. Their commitment to sustainability was infectious, and it was truly fulfilling to guide them as they brought their ideas to life. Watching their projects develop from initial concepts into tangible outcomes was a gratifying experience that reinforced the value of mentorship and collaborative learning. Additionally, the project fostered a strong sense of camaraderie among the staff, as we worked together to navigate the various challenges that arose.

However, there were moments of frustration, particularly when students faced difficulties with team dynamics or project management. In some cases, conflicts arose within teams, and supervisors had to step in to ensure that all members were contributing equally and working effectively together. These situations, though challenging, provided important learning experiences both for the students and for us as supervisors. It was rewarding to see students engage in the process of conflict resolution, learning valuable skills that will benefit them in their future careers.

Looking at the overall success of the project, several aspects stood out as particularly impactful. The interdisciplinary collaboration was one of the strongest elements. Bringing together students from diverse academic backgrounds enriched the project outcomes, as the different perspectives led to more innovative solutions and a deeper understanding of sustainability. The collaborative nature of the project not only enhanced the quality of the work but also allowed students to develop essential skills such as project management, teamwork, and presentation. These are all skills that will serve them well in their professional lives.

The real-world relevance of the project was another significant factor in its success. By focusing on sustainability, the students were able to connect their academic work with global priorities. This made the project feel purposeful, which motivated students to put forth their best effort. Additionally, the iterative feedback process allowed for continuous refinement of ideas. It was gratifying to see how feedback from supervisors helped students grow and improve their projects, leading to stronger final outcomes.

Despite these successes, there were areas where improvements could be made. One key challenge was time management. Some students struggled with organizing their time, which led to last-minute work and, at times, affected the quality of their presentations and app designs. A clearer timeline with more structured check-ins might help students stay on track and avoid the stress of working under tight deadlines. Unequal participation within some groups was another issue. Despite efforts to ensure fair contributions, some students ended up shouldering more of the workload, leading to frustration and lowered morale. I believe that more proactive strategies, such as regular accountability checks or team-building activities early in the project, could help address these imbalances.

Technical support also posed challenges for some groups. While some supervisors had the expertise to assist with app development, others did not feel equipped to offer the necessary support. For future iterations, it might be beneficial to assign technical mentors or ensure that students have access to dedicated resources for troubleshooting and guidance. Additionally, communication between supervisors and student teams sometimes lacked consistency, which hindered smooth coordination. Establishing standardized communication channels and ensuring regular updates could improve the flow of information and support throughout the project.

The availability of resources was another area for improvement. Some groups had difficulty accessing the software or expert consultations they needed, which affected their ability to fully develop their projects. Creating a centralized resource hub, where students can easily access the tools and expertise they require, would help ensure that all teams have the support they need. Finally, the timing of feedback could also be refined. In some cases, students received feedback too late in the process, making it difficult to pivot if their ideas were straying from their original concept. Offering feedback earlier in the project timeline would give students more time to adjust and improve their work.

Overall, the Sustainability App Project was an enriching and meaningful experience. The students engaged deeply with real-world issues, developed critical skills, and produced creative solutions. As supervisors, we gained valuable insights into how to better support student teams and improve the structure of future projects. By addressing the challenges we encountered—such as time management, unequal participation, and technical support—future iterations can be even more successful. This project has great potential to foster innovation, collaboration, and real-world problem-solving, and I look forward to seeing how it evolves in future versions.

Lecturer C

I really enjoyed taking part in the Start-IT project. It was a very rewarding and enriching experience both personally and professionally.

I think all teachers should try this type of experience with their students, as it allows them to establish a greater connection with them and allows the teacher to reflect on their true role as educator, trainer, researcher and supervisor.

The project presented several key points that I liked and that I consider essential in the teaching-learning process in both higher and secondary education, and also in the context of supervising research work (master's or PhD theses). Of these key points, I would highlight the development of soft skills: group work, co-operation, functional and appropriate use of technology, communication, creativity, marketing strategies, hypothesis creation and discussion.

The possibility for students to interact with colleagues from different countries and from different fields of study (management, IT, marketing, journalism, etc.) allowed for the development of new skills.

The fact that students were given autonomy to grow and develop skills together under the tutelage of the group mentor worked very well. Working in pairs was fundamental to the development of each student team's projects.

I think everything worked very well, from the organisation of the timetables for the activities, to the mentoring moments, to the group work presentation moments.

I have no proposals for change for future projects.

Lecturer D

Reflecting on my experience with the Start-IT project, I can confidently say that I thoroughly enjoyed participating in it. The opportunity to work in an international team was both professionally enriching and personally rewarding. Collaborating with students and teachers from diverse backgrounds allowed me to learn from a variety of teaching methods, cultural perspectives, and experiences. The open, dynamic environment fostered by the project encouraged effective teamwork, and this made the whole experience not only enjoyable but also an invaluable preparation for engaging with a multicultural student body at my home university.

One of the aspects I particularly appreciated was the diversity embedded in the project. Working alongside colleagues and students from different cultures provided unique perspectives and broadened my understanding of intercultural collaboration. In addition to the formal academic work, the informal cultural activities and social gatherings played a vital role in strengthening our team dynamics. These events created opportunities for us to build rapport in a relaxed setting, which enhanced the collaborative atmosphere and helped solidify our working relationships.

The experience of interacting with international colleagues and students brought several important positive aspects to light. The intercultural exchange was especially rewarding, both professionally and personally. It allowed me to gain insights into different cultural approaches to teaching and problem-solving, enriching my own teaching practices. The chance to work in a new environment with diverse individuals also exposed me to teaching strategies and teamwork dynamics that I wouldn't typically encounter at my home institution. This exposure was a significant advantage, offering a fresh perspective on how collaboration and teaching can be approached in varied contexts. Furthermore, the group dynamics, which were shaped by the multicultural makeup of the teams, added an invaluable layer of learning that went beyond traditional academic coursework. The informal interactions and cultural gatherings further contributed to the development of strong interpersonal relationships and a sense of community within our teams.

However, there were a few aspects of the project that I found challenging. Initially, there were some organizational difficulties, particularly with unclear procedures. While these challenges posed some frustration at the beginning, I was impressed with how responsive the hosts were. As the project progressed, they made several adjustments to improve the flow of activities, which ultimately contributed to a smoother experience. Despite this, clearer guidelines and better communication from the outset might have helped avoid some of the initial confusion.

One of the elements of the project that worked particularly well was the setup of interdisciplinary, multicultural teams. This arrangement provided a multifaceted approach to problem-solving, allowing us to view challenges from a range of perspectives. It exposed the students to real-world challenges that extended beyond the scope of what is typically covered in academic settings, encouraging them to think creatively and adapt their ideas to new

contexts. The hands-on, applied nature of the project provided them with valuable experiences that I believe will serve them well in their future careers.

On the flip side, I think the mid-project presentations could have been organized differently. The decision to hold the presentations in two separate rooms meant that students did not have the opportunity to learn from the feedback provided to other groups. This was unfortunate, as it would have been beneficial for them to hear constructive feedback on the work of their peers. Access to this information could have helped them avoid similar mistakes and improve their own projects as the program progressed.

Looking ahead, I would suggest a few changes for future iterations of the project. It would be beneficial to hold group presentations in a single room or at least find a way for all groups to access the feedback given to others. This would allow students to gain insights from their peers and incorporate broader perspectives into their own work, creating a more cohesive and collaborative learning environment. Additionally, while the project was overall well-executed, there were some initial organizational hiccups—such as confusion around room assignments and scheduling—that could be mitigated in the future with better planning and communication at the outset.

In conclusion, the Start-IT project was an invaluable opportunity for both professional and personal growth. It provided me with a deeper understanding of intercultural teamwork, enhanced my teaching practices, and broadened my approach to collaboration. The experience has inspired me to integrate the lessons learned from this project into my own work, particularly in terms of adaptability and fostering collaborative, multicultural learning environments.

Lecturer E

I enjoyed participating in the Start-IT project in Antwerp. The project allowed us, an international group who have collaborated since long time, to keep on collaborating, gaining experiences, experience new challenges, inspire students into hands on project work.

The international aspect of the project was great. Students got to experience collaboration with their international peers, getting an idea of their position compared to students from other countries or educational programmes. And invaluable exposure for their personal and professional growth. The experience enhanced their language skills, soft skills and technical expertise.

For a lot of students, being for a few days in a foreign city was quite an experience (despite it being a short time). This resulted in the confidence and adaptability of the students being boosted.

Students were able to quickly form teams and collaborated efficient enough for the short duration of the event. This taught them to work efficiently under time constraints

The introduction “ted talks” inspired the students. For some of the students the content was new. These introductions provided them foundational knowledge. These introductions helped students to get started on their projects with a clear understanding

During the project, time management was well balanced. We managed to secure enough project work time for the student teams to work on their projects, while safeguarding enough time for relaxation, social interaction, briefing and debriefing. This ensured the students could focus and make meaningful progress. And students perceived enough opportunities to decompress.

On the minus-side, I believe that the final deliverable could be better. We did not push the students to deliver “final” work that was good enough to be presented publicly. A lot of the projects brought decent enough ideas, ideas that could have grown in proper business plans. Encouraging students to refine their ideas into business plans could have added more value to their projects.

Also, in my opinion, a lot of communication is not effective since we do not make use of communication protocols, checking in short loops if the information exchange did happen.

The local stakeholder had very little time and or were not very involved. A lot of time was used trying to communicate with several potential external partners. Project time was allocated to allow stakeholders to present themselves and the issue they wish to address. This time might have been used for better activities.

There are several changes that I would like our group to make in future projects.

Apart from the publications we built up during our long collaboration, building a more visual portfolio with short reports and some visuals. The portfolio might be some kind of website with a few pages that we keep updating. A collection reflecting our collaboration (not for each project separately) . The portfolio might entice externals to more rapidly recognize the value of a student thinktank (which the short mobilities actually are). Although the overall value of students’ creation might be low, there still are some takeaways of value for external stakeholders.

Although we use mentors to check if teams actually understand what is being asked from them, and mentors do meet practically every day, we might come up with a brief and hands-on protocol to make the exchange more effective.

In my opinion, most of the students have little experience with a structured approach towards running a project. Given the short duration and often a lot of actions/challenges that need attention, the different roles that need to be identified, we might address that with a short ‘TED’ talk and perhaps a template that can guide student teams towards a more efficient approach.

Lecturer F

I did enjoy the project! It was a wonderful opportunity for me and my students. Many of my students would not have had an international experience in their studies otherwise. Because of the experience of the team members and the elaborated concept with group tasks and mentoring the project works very well.

Aspects of the project that I thought were good included international experience, travel, accommodation, social program, student group work, mentoring and the entrepreneurial approach that the project took.

I did not like the student team sizes. Students should ideally work in smaller groups, that would mean that mentors have several groups. In bigger groups, there are always some students hiding. I also think that groups should get more challenging tasks. The result of the group work should matter more. It should possibly be properly evaluated (our students are graded in all activities).

I would prefer if the project Included more technical deliverables. We could have students peer assess those. (more hackathon style).

Finally, it would be nice to involve local students even more than we did.

Lecturer G

Participating in this project was an enjoyable and enriching experience for me. I found it particularly rewarding to meet new people and collaborate on a shared goal. The interdisciplinary nature of the teamwork and the variety of student projects added significant value to the experience. The project topic—developing teaching methodology—was highly relevant to my professional work and aligned closely with my interests. Additionally, building apps as a means of engaging students proved to be both innovative and effective.

Reflecting on the aspects I appreciated, I found the organization of the project and the mixed teams, comprising both educators and students, to be particularly effective. These diverse teams fostered creativity and collaboration. However, I also recognize that the success of such an intensive setting depends on strong team dynamics. While this worked very well in our case, it may not be guaranteed if the structure were to be replicated in other contexts.

There were, however, some challenges. The project was quite intense, both during the time spent at my home institution and while traveling. While the intensity was worthwhile, it was occasionally overwhelming. Another area for improvement was the coordination of work between meetings, as many participants had to balance the project with their regular responsibilities.

Several elements worked exceptionally well. The Learning, Teaching, and Training Activities (LTTAs) facilitated effective student teamwork, and the educators' support extended beyond their assigned teams, leveraging their diverse areas of expertise.

Looking ahead, if resources allow, I would recommend introducing an additional day off during the LTTAs. This would provide participants with some much-needed downtime to recharge and maintain their focus and enthusiasm throughout the project.

Challenges and Positive Aspects

The Start-IT project, while fostering valuable student development, also presented some challenges for academics. This section explores both the positive aspects and challenges faced by academics, as revealed in the academics questionnaire.

Challenges Encountered:
The questionnaire highlighted several areas where academics faced challenges:

- Communication Before Project Start: Some academics felt there could have been more communication and clarification regarding project expectations and logistics before its commencement. This could have helped them better prepare students and navigate initial uncertainties.
- Time Management for Students: Managing student workload and ensuring they met deadlines within the project timeframe posed a challenge for some academics. This may have been due to students balancing the project with other academic commitments or underestimating the time required for specific tasks.
- Unforeseen Logistical Hurdles: A few academics mentioned encountering unforeseen logistical hurdles related to technology platforms, resource availability, or communication within the international student teams.

Positive Aspects and Academics' Quotes:
Despite these challenges, the academics' responses overwhelmingly emphasized the positive aspects of the Start-IT project:

- Well-Organized Project: Academics appreciated the overall structure and organization of the project, making it easier for them to guide students and ensure project goals were met.
- Student Skill Development: Academics observed significant development in students' communication, teamwork, and intercultural competences. This was evident through improved group work, confident presentations, and a deeper understanding of diverse perspectives.
- Fostering Intercultural Competences: The project fostered intercultural understanding and respect among students. One academic remarked, "Students learned to

appreciate different communication styles and collaborate effectively with international peers. This will be a valuable asset in their future endeavors." Another noted, "The project broadened students' horizons and equipped them with the skills to navigate a globalized world."

Addressing Challenges and Looking Ahead:

While challenges were encountered, the academics' responses also suggested solutions for future projects:

- **Improved Communication Planning:** More detailed communication regarding project expectations, timelines, and resources could be established before project launch.
- **Time Management Strategies:** Equipping students with time management skills or incorporating project management tools could help them balance workload and meet deadlines effectively.
- **Contingency Plans for Logistics:** Developing contingency plans for potential logistical hurdles related to technology or communication could mitigate unforeseen disruptions.

Overall, the Start-IT project, based on the academics' experiences, showcased the power of student mobility programs in fostering valuable skills. While some challenges were encountered, the overall impact on student development and academic engagement was overwhelmingly positive. This experience highlights the importance of clear communication, comprehensive planning, and ongoing support to ensure the success of future student mobility projects.

Impact on Teaching Practices

The Erasmus+ Start-IT mobilities create an environment for professional development among participating academics. This section explores how the project impacted their teaching approaches, mindsets, and overall classroom practices.

1. Fostering Collaboration and Peer Learning:

A significant influence of Start-IT was the emphasis on teamwork and peer learning. Traditionally, teaching can often be an isolated profession. Start-IT provided a platform for academics to discuss challenges, share best practices, and learn from each other's experiences. This collaborative atmosphere nurtured a sense of community and exposed academics to diverse teaching methods beyond their individual repertoires.

2. Embracing New Teaching Methodologies:

Start-IT's focus on innovative teaching methods exposed academics to new pedagogical approaches. Through the collaboration, academics have experienced the project-based-learning method where students take ownership of their learning by tackling real-world problems through projects.

3. Nurturing Personal and Professional Growth:

The project's focus on innovation and collaboration fostered a sense of personal and professional growth among academics. By venturing outside their comfort zones and embracing new methods, academics experienced increased confidence in their teaching abilities, a renewed sense of purpose and motivation and enhanced problem-solving skills and adaptability in the classroom.

Academics reported:

- "Giving students more autonomy in solving problems, balancing the responsibilities in the different tasks between the different elements of the didactic contract (the student, the team of students, the teacher)."
- "I have already used some of the Start-IT methodology in my own teaching, for example by proposing as an assessment tool a teamwork based on a generating question to be analyzed, deconstructed and solved autonomously by the students."
- "Use less structured tasks more often. Let students consider aspect from other disciplines more. They already work in teams."
- "We are applying the LTTA model to development work in other projects and workshops with students and companies."
- "Increased use of group assignments. Increased focus on show-and-tell approach to assessing student progress and giving feedback. Opportunity to collaborate with other disciplines."
- "The ideas of the students as well as remarks given by other academics gives a new/different perspective. Discussions with other academics allows to find new ways of conducting didactic activities."
- "It was a new experience for me to mentor a group and I was able to learn a lot regarding how to give good feedback and how to organise a group."

Student Reflections on Mentorship: A Guiding Hand

The Start-IT project's mentorship program received positive recognition from students, as reflected in their feedback. Students perceived the role of mentors in their learning experience as providing:

- **Valuable Guidance:** Students appreciated the ongoing support and guidance provided by their mentors. Mentors helped them navigate challenges, troubleshoot technical

issues, and refine their project ideas. One student remarked, "Our mentor was instrumental in helping us stay focused and on track. Their feedback during presentations was invaluable in improving our app concept."

- **Subject Matter Expertise:** Students benefited from the mentors' expertise in business and IT. Mentors provided insights into best practices and real-world applications, which helped students bridge the gap between theory and practical application. A student mentioned, "Our mentor, who had experience working in startups, gave us valuable advice on developing a business plan and pitching our idea effectively."
- **Communication and Collaboration:** Mentors fostered a collaborative environment within teams. They encouraged open communication and helped students resolve any team dynamics issues, ensuring everyone contributed effectively. A student highlighted, "Our mentor played a key role in facilitating communication within our group. They helped us address different perspectives and work together as a cohesive unit."
- **Confidence Boosters:** Mentors provided constructive feedback that not only improved project quality but also boosted student confidence. The recognition of their efforts and guidance on overcoming challenges empowered students to take ownership of their projects. A student reflected, "The encouraging feedback from our mentor helped me overcome my initial doubts and approach the project with more confidence."

Overall, student reflections emphasized the positive impact of mentors. Their guidance, expertise, and support system proved crucial in maximizing student learning throughout the Start-IT project. The mentorship program allowed students to not only develop their business and IT skills but also enhance their communication, teamwork, and problem-solving abilities – all essential tools for a successful future.

Conclusion

The Start-IT project, as evidenced by the academics' experiences, served as a successful model for student mobility programs. It fostered valuable learning outcomes in students, particularly in the areas of:

- **Communication and Interpersonal Skills:** Students honed their active listening, improved their ability to express themselves, and conflict resolution skills through collaboration with diverse international teams.
- **Teamwork:** Group work and presentations cultivated collaboration, problem-solving, and time management skills within teams.
- **Entrepreneurship and Business:** Exposure to app development, business model creation, and pitching concepts provided a practical understanding of turning ideas into viable ventures.

- **Intercultural Competences:** Working with international peers fostered intercultural understanding and respect, preparing students for a globalized world.

The success of the Start-IT project can be attributed to several key factors:

- **Well-Structured Framework:** A clear project structure with a focus on "Green City" app development provided direction while allowing for creativity.
- **Mentorship:** Academics acting as mentors offered invaluable guidance, support, and feedback, empowering students to take ownership of their learning.
- **Supportive Environment:** Guest talks by industry professionals, regular presentations, and a closing ceremony fostered a sense of accomplishment and encouraged student engagement.

While the project encountered challenges, such as communication gaps before launch and time management for students, the academics' responses offer valuable suggestions for improvement:

- **Enhanced Communication Planning:** More detailed communication regarding project expectations, timelines, and resources could be established before project launch.
- **Time Management Strategies:** Equipping students with time management skills or incorporating project management tools could improve workload balance.
- **Contingency Plans for Logistics:** Developing contingency plans for potential logistical hurdles related to technology or communication could mitigate unforeseen disruptions.

The positive experiences of both academics and students highlight the power of student mobility programs in fostering crucial skills for future careers. This case study serves as a valuable resource for educators planning similar programs, emphasizing the importance of clear communication, comprehensive planning, ongoing support, and a well-structured mentorship component to ensure a successful and enriching learning experience for all participants.