

Blended mobility in teacher education: Policy frameworks and institutional practices from the Austrian context

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ABSTRACT

This article examines how blended mobility was implemented in initial teacher education at PH Wien within the framework of Austria's Higher Education Mobility and Internationalisation Strategy 2030 (HMIS2030). Using a qualitative, descriptive embedded case study design, the study analyses two blended school placement models at PH Wien: a pilot project in Crete and a sustained, curriculum-integrated implementation between 2021 and 2025. The data consist of aggregated institutional records and policy and programme documents, which were organised through a standardised six-dimensional template and analysed descriptively. The analysis focuses on documented features such as virtual preparation, short physical placement, curriculum integration, partnership structure, and policy alignment. The findings show that in the PH Wien cases, blended mobility was organised as a practicum-embedded and curriculum-recognised format that combined short physical school placements with virtual preparation or collaboration. The available records also indicate growth in participation and diversification of destinations across terms. Rather than demonstrating student-level outcomes or equity effects, the study documents how one university college of teacher education translated a national blended-mobility agenda into institutional arrangements within the structural conditions of teacher education. The study is limited by its single-institution focus, reliance on documentary and aggregated data, and lack of direct evidence on learning outcomes, perceptions, or classroom practice. Nevertheless, it offers cautious implications for institutions and policymakers seeking to design short-term international formats that fit existing teacher-education structures.

KEYWORDS: Blended mobility; Erasmus+; Higher education policy; Internationalisation; Teacher education

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1. Introduction

International mobility is an important part of teacher education, but participation in long-term study-abroad programmes can be difficult for some student teachers because of programme structures, practicum schedules, and personal responsibilities. In parallel, internationalisation in higher education has become more complex in recent years. As Liu and Gao (2022) argue, these pressures accumulated over time rather than emerging abruptly and were already visible before COVID-19 (e.g., geopolitical tensions, nationalism/populism, and anti-integration trends such as Brexit).

The outbreak of COVID-19 significantly disrupted traditional patterns of physical student mobility. In response, virtual mobility (VM) gained greater visibility and use in higher education (Wang & Sun, 2022). This shift supported the wider use of hybrid formats that combine short physical mobility with structured online elements, including blended mobility. In the European policy context, blended mobility (BM) refers to a format that combines a physical mobility period with a structured virtual component before, during, or after the stay (European Commission, 2022). Virtual and blended mobility are increasingly discussed in European policy as part of a “mobility for all” agenda, with a focus on widening access and supporting flexible participation through digital components alongside physical mobility (Rajagopal & Mateusen, 2021). This policy direction also frames Austria’s national strategy on mobility and internationalisation.

In Austria, this policy direction is reflected in the Higher Education Mobility and Internationalisation Strategy 2030 (HMIS2030) (BMBWF, 2020). The strategy presents internationality as a guiding principle for higher education institutions, promotes “mobility for all,” and encourages the meaningful use of digital tools and innovative blended formats alongside physical mobility to support cross-border academic dialogue and intercultural learning. In this study, HMIS2030 serves as a policy reference for examining how the documented features of PH Wien’s (Pädagogische Hochschule Wien-University College of Teacher Education Vienna) blended mobility models relate to national priorities, rather than for assessing policy effectiveness.

In teacher education, long-term physical mobility can be difficult to fit into practicum-based programmes and fixed study calendars. Schön and Sliwka (2014, p. 85) noted the relatively low mobility of prospective teachers. In this context, blended mobility is often discussed as a flexible alternative that links online collaboration with a short physical stay. Based on practice-based accounts, Perfözl and López-Varela (2022) suggest that digital exchange can provide a low-threshold entry point for students who cannot participate in long-term mobility, while short physical components may support motivation and cooperation. They also argue that digital preparation and follow-up communication can make face-to-face exchange more sustainable over time, although implementing blended mobility still requires substantial institutional effort and involves organisational, technical, and policy-level challenges.

Despite growing interest in hybrid and blended mobility formats, there remains limited empirical and practice-oriented research on how blended mobility is designed and implemented in teacher education programmes across different national contexts. Recent discussions of blended mobility suggest that it may support flexibility and broaden access to international experience, especially for students who may not be able to participate in traditional long-term physical mobility (e.g., O’Dowd, 2022; Perfözl & López-Varela, 2022). However, fewer studies provide detailed institutional examples from teacher education that describe practicum-embedded blended school placements and their documented design features. This study addresses this gap by examining Austria as a context where HMIS2030 encourages innovative digital and blended mobility approaches.

To clarify the institutional context of this study, we briefly describe the practicum structure at PH Wien. PH Wien is a university college of teacher education in which the school practicum is a mandatory, tightly scheduled component of pre-service preparation. Practicum periods are organised within fixed programme calendars and partner-school arrangements, which can limit long-term mobility but also support short, curriculum-recognised placements when aligned with practicum requirements.

Using documentary sources and aggregated institutional records, this study examines two illustrative blended school-placement models at PH Wien in initial teacher education (i.e., pre-service teacher

education before entry into the profession): a pilot school-placement project and a sustained, curriculum-integrated implementation. It documents how blended mobility has been operationalised at PH Wien and highlights design-relevant features such as virtual preparation, the short physical placement, practicum embedding, and curricular recognition. Based on documentary evidence, it also maps the documented features of these models to HMIS2030 goals (BMBWF, 2020) to show how a national policy agenda is reflected in institutional practice, without claiming individual learning outcomes or equity effects. Accordingly, the study addresses two research questions:

- (1) How has blended mobility been implemented in initial teacher education at PH Wien?
- (2) How do the documented features of PH Wien's blended mobility models relate to HMIS2030 goals, as evidenced in policy and institutional documents?

2. Theoretical Foundations of BM in Teacher Education

2.1. Conceptualising Blended Mobility: Definitions and Scope

Blended Mobility (BM) refers to an intentional combination of physical mobility and a virtual learning component in international education. In the Erasmus+ 2021–2027 framework, BM is defined as a mobility format in which the virtual component takes place before, during, and/or after the physical period (European Commission, 2022).

At the same time, the literature also stresses the continued value of physical mobility. Even with virtual and hybrid options, many scholars argue that in-person mobility remains important for deeper intercultural communication and immersion experiences (Širca et al., 2024). For this reason, BM is often described as a complementary approach rather than a replacement for physical exchange. In this sense, BM is discussed as a way to support participation for “fewer opportunity students” who may face barriers to long-term mobility (Bauer & Kartsonakis, 2023).

2.2. Theoretical Perspectives on Blended Mobility

Understanding BM also requires clear distinctions between related concepts such as virtual exchange (VE) and virtual mobility (VM). In this paper, these concepts provide a simple lens for describing and interpreting the design of BM in teacher education, especially the balance between online collaboration and short physical placements. This helps us explain how the PH Wien models combine virtual and physical elements in documented ways.

2.2.1. Virtual Exchange (VE)

Virtual exchange (VE) is an online learning approach in which students work with peers from other countries as part of a course, under the guidance of teachers or trained facilitators. VE involves technology-mediated interaction and a student-centred, collaborative learning process, with a strong (but not exclusive) focus on soft skills and intercultural competence (O'Dowd, 2022). VE differs from virtual mobility in a key way: VE emphasises structured interaction and intercultural learning, while virtual mobility more often refers to accessing courses or materials from a foreign institution without direct peer interaction or explicit intercultural learning goals (Helm & O'Dowd, 2020).

2.2.2. Virtual Mobility (VM)

In the Erasmus+ Programme Guide, the European Commission defines virtual mobility (VM) as “a set of activities supported by Information and Communication Technologies, including e-learning, that realise or facilitate international, collaborative experiences in a context of teaching, training or learning” (European Commission, 2019, p. 327). O'Dowd (2022) explains that VM can include students who join online collaborative projects with international peers within their home curriculum and students who take online courses offered by a foreign institution for academic credit. Sabzalieva

et al. (2022) note that VM can enable international experience without travel and may be useful for students who face financial, physical, or social barriers, including students with disabilities, students with migrant or refugee backgrounds, and students with limited resources or caring responsibilities. To provide a stronger intercultural learning experience, VM often needs deliberate course design and support, and it can benefit from links to virtual exchange approaches (O'Dowd, 2022).

2.2.3. Blended Mobility (BM)

In teacher education, BM is often discussed as a way to support international learning in more flexible formats. In teacher education, structural barriers can be strong. For example, Schön and Sliwka (2014) note that language-related constraints are important because teacher education is usually tied to the official language of national school systems, which can limit long-term mobility unless students pursue bilingual routes. In this context, BM is described as an accessible entry point that can help students start international engagement through virtual preparation and a short physical stay (Perfözl & López-Varela, 2022). O'Dowd (2022) adds that BM can support cross-border collaboration online and in person, helping students build relationships with peers and instructors. Sabzalieva et al. (2022) place BM between virtual and physical mobility and stress its adaptability to institutional capacity and student needs. In teacher education, such blended formats are discussed as one way to support intercultural competence and global awareness, which are relevant for future teachers in diverse classrooms (Brück-Hübner et al., 2024). In the empirical part of this paper, these distinctions (VE, VM, and BM) serve as a lens for describing how BM was designed and documented in the PH Wien cases. Table 1 serves as a descriptive guide to distinguish common activity types across VE, VM, and physical mobility (PM), and to clarify the building blocks that may be combined in blended mobility designs.

Table 1 Comparative Overview of Activities in Virtual Exchange (VE), Virtual Mobility (VM), and Physical Mobility (PM)

| Activities in VE | Activities in VM | Activities in PM |
|--|---|---|
| Team introductions and presentations of institutions | Online lectures (live or recorded) | Lab sessions + Fieldwork |
| Synchronous/asynchronous discussions on course content | Interactive polls and quizzes | Intensive group work |
| Comparison of cultural and national perspectives | Reading/viewing materials with annotation tools | Presentation of online project outcomes |
| Initial phase of collaborative group work | Online tutorials with instructors | Cultural activities and campus visits |

Note. Adapted from O'Dowd (2022, p. 21). Table 1 shows common activity types in virtual exchange (VE), virtual mobility (VM), and physical mobility (PM). VE and VM mostly involve online interaction and learning. PM includes on-site learning, hands-on work, and cultural activities. The table is only a descriptive guide. It does not evaluate outcomes.

2.3. Policy Strategies for BM in Teacher Education

BMBWF (2020) sets out national objectives for mobility and internationalisation and explicitly mentions innovative formats, including virtual and blended options. The strategy can be read alongside wider European policy discussions on digitalisation, intercultural dialogue, and wider access to international learning. In this paper, HMIS2030 is used as a policy framework to describe how documented institutional features relate to national priorities, rather than to assess policy impact.

Despite growing efforts through recommendations and working papers, policy documents focused solely on the internationalisation of teacher education remain limited in Europe (Nierste, 2024). In Austria, HMIS2030 sets out five strategic goals and invites institutions to select objectives based on their profiles and starting points. In this paper, these goals serve as reference points for describing policy alignment, which is supported by documents, without claiming policy effectiveness.

1. HMIS2030-1 (All-encompassing culture of internationalisation). Emphasises institution-wide internationalisation through strategy, stable structures, resources, and quality management. It also promotes internationalisation of the curriculum and Internationalisation at Home (IaH), and states that IaH cannot replace mobility abroad.
2. HMIS2030-2 (Mobility for all). Frames mobility as a core element of internationalisation and aims to widen participation, with attention to underrepresented groups. It also highlights trainee teachers and doctoral students and supports more short and non-traditional formats.
3. HMIS2030-3 (Innovative digital forms of mobility). Promotes virtual and blended mobility as a complement to physical mobility, not a replacement, and identifies enabling conditions such as digital infrastructure and a willingness to experiment.
4. HMIS2030-4 (Effective skills improvement and institutional learning). Stresses clear objectives, curricular integration of skills, quality-assured processes, preparation and follow-up, recognition, and institutional learning linked to quality management.
5. HMIS2030-5 (Global mindset and Austria's position in the world). Focuses on Austria's international positioning, especially for non-EU citizens, and highlights reducing bureaucracy, improving procedures, supporting grants, strengthening alumni links, and improving visibility.

Taken together, these goals outline the national policy frame within which institutions may design and describe mobility measures. Consistent with the HMIS2030 logic, any "policy alignment" in this study is attributed only where it is supported by institutional documentation or aggregated records, rather than inferred as an effect or outcome.

2.4. Blended Mobility as a Pedagogical and Inclusive Practice in Teacher Education

Survey evidence from the Erasmus+ Higher Education Impact Study suggests that participants most often report motivation to experience life abroad (70%) and improve language skills (62%). In contrast, non-mobile students often mention financial concerns (around two-thirds) and personal or family reasons (around one in two) as barriers to mobility (CHE Consult & ICF Consulting, 2019). In this context, blended mobility (BM) is often described as a flexible format that combines online collaboration with a brief in-person visit. The literature presents BM as a design option that may support access for students who cannot join long-term mobility, including "fewer opportunity students" (Bauer & Kartsonakis, 2023). It can include preparation and follow-up activities that help connect the online and in-person parts of the experience, but it also requires institutional effort and coordination (Perfözl & López-Varela, 2022). This inclusion-oriented framing is also linked to Internationalisation at Home, which aims to integrate international and intercultural dimensions into the curriculum for all students (Beelen & Jones, 2015).

BM formats are often described as a way to combine short physical mobility with virtual collaboration, so that mobility can better fit students' schedules and responsibilities (Perfözl & López-Varela, 2022). However, whether BM reduces barriers or improves equity depends on local implementation and is not evidenced by the present study.

Practice-based accounts from blended-mobility projects report positive student reception. For example, based on project experience and informal feedback in the blended AIM project, Welzera et al. (2020) note that students perceived the blended format positively and that the virtual component can support experience in remote collaboration and communication. Beyond perceived value for participants, the literature also discusses hybrid and blended mobility as a format that may support access for students who cannot undertake long-term physical mobility (Širca et al., 2024). In addition, some authors argue that hybrid designs may reduce the financial burden of mobility by limiting travel distance and time abroad, although costs and outcomes depend on programme design (Tibelius & El Allame, 2023).

3. Method

3.1. Research Design

The study adopts a qualitative, descriptive embedded case-study design focusing on PH Wien. Within this institutional case, two BM models were analysed as embedded cases: (i) a pilot school-placement project and (ii) a sustained, curriculum-integrated implementation between 2021 and 2025. The two models were examined using the same document-based criteria and were summarised and compared across the two cases. To link policy and practice, BMBWF (2020) served as a reference for document-based extraction and policy mapping (see “Policy alignment” below), not as a measure of policy impact. Consistent with embedded case-study logic, the models were described across key dimensions, including virtual preparation and mentoring, short physical placement, curriculum integration and ECTS recognition, and partnership structure (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018).

3.2. Context and Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria

The empirical focus of the study is PH Wien, situated within the Austrian teacher-education ecosystem. Within PH Wien, we identified two BM models using document-based selection criteria. A model was included if institutional documents or aggregated records explicitly indicated (i) relevance to initial teacher education, (ii) a virtual component combined with a short physical placement, (iii) curricular recognition or formal linkage to practicum requirements (e.g., ECTS recognition or stated integration into teacher training), and (iv) implementation within the 2021–2025 period covered by the available records. Activities were excluded if they lacked either the virtual or the physical component, fell outside the 2021–2025 period, or targeted only in-service teachers, administrative staff, or continuing professional development.

3.3. Data Sources and Collection

3.3.1. Access to institutional records

Aggregated, non-identifiable records were obtained from PH Wien (with permission) for 2021–2025 and used in accordance with institutional approval. The records were aggregated at the term level and included counts of participating student teachers and destination regions, as reported in the institutional data used for Table 4. No individual-level data were processed. The records did not include personal characteristics (e.g., gender, socio-economic background, disability status), nor did they include direct evidence on individual learning outcomes or classroom practice.

3.3.2. Purposive web search

A purposive document search (2018–2025) in English and German identified relevant national policy texts and institutional documents relating to HMIS2030 and PH Wien’s internationalisation strategies. Document types included strategy and policy texts, institutional webpages, programme descriptions, and internal reports. Documents were included if they contained explicit information

relevant to blended mobility in teacher education (e.g., programme rules, stated design features, recognition/ECTS information, or references to HMIS2030 priorities).

3.4. Analytic Approach

The analysis was descriptive, consistent with the documentary and aggregated nature of the data; no causal interpretations or statistical inference were attempted. First, we compiled the document set and aggregated records for 2021–2025. Second, we extracted only document-supported information into a six-field template (virtual preparation and mentoring; short physical placement; curriculum integration and ECTS recognition; partnership structure and sustainability; documented indicators; policy alignment). Third, when information was missing or unclear, it was marked as “not documented” and was not inferred. Finally, we summarised each case in a standardised table and prepared a short document-based narrative summary. We then compared the two cases across the same fields. For policy alignment, we mapped documented features to HMIS2030 goals (HMIS2030-1 to HMIS2030-5) only where documentary support existed; where no support was available, no alignment was assigned. In the Findings section, each PH Wien model is presented in a standardised table, followed by a brief contextual paragraph based on documentary sources and aggregated records.

4. Findings

Within the Austrian policy context outlined above, PH Wien documents two blended mobility models in initial teacher education. The following subsections present two illustrative institutional cases: a pilot school-placement project and a sustained, curriculum-integrated implementation from 2021 to 2025. The aim of this section is to describe the documented design features, participation patterns, and policy-relevant characteristics of these two cases.

4.1. Pilot Blended School Placement at PH Wien (2022/23)

The Crete pilot is presented in the institutional documents as an early example of blended school placement at PH Wien, combining virtual preparation with an overseas placement. Table 2 summarises the documented features of this pilot across the six analytic dimensions.

Table 2 *PH Wien Crete Pilot (2022/23)*

| Dimension | Evidence |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| Virtual preparation/mentoring | Pre-departure virtual coaching; lesson plan exchange with local mentors. |
| Short physical placement | 3-week Erasmus+ school placement in Crete (Sept 2023). |
| Curriculum integration/ECTS | Counted toward formal teacher training. |
| Partnership structure/sustainability | Partnership with Heraklion Regional Directorate; expansion plans noted. |
| Documented indicators | 7 student teachers (2023); prior voluntary test (n=5, Südtirol 2022). |
| Policy alignment | HMIS2030-2 (mobility for all), HMIS2030-3 (digital formats), HMIS2030-4 (skills/institutional learning). |

Note. Policy codes refer to Austria’s HMIS2030 goals — HMIS2030-1: institution-wide culture; HMIS2030-2: mobility for all; HMIS2030-3: digital formats; HMIS2030-4: skills & institutional learning; HMIS2030-5: global mindset.

As shown in Table 2, preparations for the Crete pilot began in the 2022/23 winter term. In September 2023, before the start of the academic year, seven PH Wien students went to Heraklion for a three-week teaching internship at two schools, funded through Erasmus+ SMP. The available document also reports pre-departure coaching, virtual contact with mentors, and lesson-plan exchange as part of the preparation process. The internship was documented as being recognised for the students' studies. The same document further notes that an extension for February 2024 had already been agreed with the school management and that plans were in place to expand the network to other Greek, Italian, and German regions (HMIS2030, n.d.). The present data do not include participant-level characteristics such as employment status or other equity-related indicators.

4.2. Sustained, Curriculum-Integrated Blended Mobility at PH Wien (2021–2025)

The second case concerns the sustained, curriculum-integrated use of blended mobility at PH Wien between 2021 and 2025. The available documents indicate that short-term school placements abroad were implemented across multiple terms and combined with virtual preparation or collaboration elements within teacher education programmes. Table 3 summarises the documented features of this case across the six analytic dimensions.

Table 3 PH Wien Sustained Implementation (2021–2025)

| Dimension | Evidence |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| Virtual preparation/mentoring | Virtual collaboration elements embedded in programmes. |
| Short physical placement | Recurrent short-term placements across multiple regions. |
| Curriculum integration/ECTS | Aligned with practicum, calendars, student workload (programme design). |
| Partnership structure/sustainability | Sustained partnerships; diversified destinations across terms. |
| Documented indicators | Participation increased from 5 (2021–22) to 38 (2024–25); destinations broadened (see Table 4). |
| Policy alignment | HMIS2030-1 (institution-wide culture), HMIS2030-2 (mobility for all), HMIS2030-3 (digital formats), HMIS2030-4 (skills/institutional learning). |

Note. Policy codes refer to Austria's HMIS2030 goals — HMIS2030-1: institution-wide culture; HMIS2030-2: mobility for all; HMIS2030-3: digital formats; HMIS2030-4: skills & institutional learning; HMIS2030-5: global mindset.

As shown in Table 3, the available documents describe recurrent short-term school placements abroad with curricular recognition, together with virtual preparation or collaboration elements. The same documents indicate that these placements were linked to practicum requirements, academic calendars, and student workload considerations within teacher education programmes. In this case, the emphasis is not on a single pilot, but on repeated implementation across multiple terms and destinations. Table 4 presents term-level participation figures and destination regions for 2021–2025.

Table 4 Number of Students Participating in Blended Mobility Programmes Coordinated by PH Wien (2021–2025)

| Year/Term | Students | Regions |
|-----------------------|----------|------------------|
| 2021–2022 Summer Term | 5 | Südtirol (Italy) |

| Year/Term | Students | Regions |
|-----------------------|----------|--|
| 2022–2023 Summer Term | 28 | Südtirol (Italy), Crete (Greece), Lüneburg (Germany) |
| 2023–2024 Winter Term | 18 | Berlin (Germany), Tartu (Estonia), Crete (Greece), İstanbul (Türkiye), Toscana (Italy) |
| 2023–2024 Summer Term | 30 | Berlin (Germany), Tartu (Estonia), Crete (Greece), İstanbul (Türkiye), Südtirol & Piemont (Italy), Albuquerque/New Mexico (USA) |
| 2024–2025 Winter Term | 28 | Berlin (Germany), Crete (Greece), İstanbul (Türkiye), Toscana, Veneto & Piemont (Italy) |
| 2024–2025 Summer Term | 38 | Berlin & Lüneburg (Germany), Tartu (Estonia), Crete (Greece), İstanbul (Türkiye), Südtirol & Piemont (Italy), Esbjerg (Denmark), Mark (Sweden) |

Note. University College of Teacher Education Vienna [PH Wien], internal data, 2025.

The aggregated records show that participation increased from 5 students in the 2021–2022 summer term to 38 students in the 2024–2025 summer term. Over the same period, destinations broadened from Südtirol to a wider range of partner locations, including Berlin, Tartu, Crete, İstanbul, several Italian regions, Esbjerg, Mark, and Albuquerque/New Mexico. In this study, these records are treated as evidence of expansion across terms and diversification of destinations, rather than as proof of impact, equity, or scalability. Repeated engagement with locations such as Crete, Südtirol, Berlin, and İstanbul is also consistent with continuing institutional partnerships.

5. Discussion

The two PH Wien cases suggest that blended mobility in initial teacher education can be organised as a practicum-embedded and curriculum-recognised format. In both cases, short physical school placement is combined with virtual preparation or collaboration and linked to practicum requirements, academic calendars, and student workload considerations. In this sense, the findings do not provide evidence of student-level impact; instead, they show how blended mobility was organised within the structural conditions of teacher education.

Existing work on teacher education suggests that virtual and blended formats can support preparation, collaboration, and professional learning, but they do not remove the value of in-situ school experience. Moorhouse (2024) reports that pre-service teachers viewed a virtual teaching-abroad experience as professionally useful, while also concluding that such formats cannot fully replace sustained engagement in an overseas school context. Likewise, Symeonidis and Impedovo (2023) show that virtual exchange in teacher education depends on stable partnerships, structured student tasks, and synchronous communication, and can broaden student teachers' awareness of other education systems and cultural diversity. A different configuration appears in Europe on the Edge, where a much longer virtual phase was combined with a short and selective physical visit (Millner, 2020). Compared with these examples, the PH Wien cases point to a model in which short virtual elements accompany a practicum-linked school placement abroad rather than replace it.

In relation to the second research question, the PH Wien cases can be read as consistent with a key concern in the teacher education mobility literature: student teachers often participate less in mobility programmes than students in other fields because of practicum structures, curriculum requirements, and nationally regulated training pathways (Alexiadou et al., 2024; Ballowitz et al.,

2015; Bauer & Kreuz, 2015; Leutwyler et al., 2017). In this context, the PH Wien model is notable not for removing these structural conditions, but for working within them. By embedding mobility into practicum-linked and formally recognised formats, the cases reflect one institutional response to the national call to strengthen mobility opportunities for trainee teachers (BMBWF, 2020).

The format is also broadly consistent with policy objectives related to flexibility and wider participation. Because the placements are short-term, funded, and linked to formal study requirements, they appear designed to fit more easily with time and cost constraints than longer periods of study abroad. This reading also fits broader post-COVID discussions of blended and virtual mobility as more flexible pathways for international learning, without replacing the value of physical mobility (O'Dowd, 2022; Širca et al., 2024). Publicly visible Austrian examples from teacher education, including a blended intensive programme at the University of Vienna, also suggest that PH Wien is not alone in experimenting with such formats (University of Vienna, n.d.).

However, the present study does not identify participants by employment status, care responsibilities, or other socio-demographic characteristics, so it cannot claim direct evidence of inclusion or equity effects. Its contribution lies elsewhere: in a field where teacher-education-specific internationalisation strategies remain relatively limited (Nierste, 2024), the study documents how one university college of teacher education translated a national blended-mobility agenda into practicum-embedded institutional arrangements.

5.1. Limitations and Future Directions

This study has clear limitations. It is based on a single institutional case in one national context and draws primarily on documentary and aggregated institutional data. It does not include direct evidence on individual learning outcomes, student or mentor perceptions, or classroom practice, nor does it attempt to draw causal inferences. The analysis is descriptive, and the illustrative value of the PH Wien models is argued on the basis of policy alignment, curricular embedding, participation patterns, and documented continuity across terms rather than on systematic impact evaluation. Future research could build on this groundwork by incorporating qualitative data from students, mentors, and coordinators to explore how blended school placements are experienced in practice, and by examining questions of equity more directly for different student groups. Comparative studies across institutions and countries, as well as longitudinal designs that follow teacher candidates into their professional careers, would further deepen understanding of how blended mobility is used within the internationalisation of teacher education in both structural and pedagogical terms.

6. Conclusion

This study examined how blended mobility was implemented in initial teacher education at PH Wien within the framework of Austria's HMIS2030. Focusing on two embedded cases—a pilot school-placement project in Crete and a sustained, curriculum-integrated implementation between 2021 and 2025—it showed that short, Erasmus+-funded blended placements can be organised in ways that remain linked to practicum structures. Across the period covered by the available records, participation increased and destination patterns broadened, while the model remained anchored in school placements abroad and connected to teacher education requirements.

Conceptually, the study shows how blended mobility can be organised in teacher education through a combination of virtual preparation and short school placement abroad. More specifically, it documents how one university college of teacher education translated a national blended-mobility agenda into practicum-embedded and curriculum-recognised institutional arrangements. The study does not demonstrate learning outcomes or equity effects, but it does make visible one documented

model through which international mobility was fitted into the structural conditions of teacher education.

The findings therefore offer cautious implications for practice and policy. In the PH Wien case, blended mobility appears more manageable, as documented, when it is integrated into practicum structures, coordinated with academic calendars, supported by preparation and mentoring, and linked to formal recognition and available funding. These features may be informative for teacher-education institutions and policymakers seeking to design short-term international formats that fit existing programme structures. At the same time, further research is needed to examine whether such arrangements improve participation, equity, or educational outcomes for different student groups.

7. Declarations

7.1. Author Contributions (CRediT)

Two authors contributed equally to the design, writing, and revision of this study. Each author approved the final version of the manuscript and agrees to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

7.2. Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no financial, commercial, or personal conflicts of interest related to this study.

7.3. Funding Statement

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7.4. Data Availability Statement

Data are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

7.5. Ethics Approval

Aggregated, non-identifiable records were obtained from PH Wien with institutional permission and used in accordance with institutional approval.

7.6. Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) Tools

During the preparation of this work, we used GPT-4 (OpenAI, version 5.2) only for language correction and formatting. After using this tool/service, we reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the publication's content.

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