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A collaborative model of short-term international mobility for the development of university leadership: A case study between Chile and Argentina

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Abstract

This article analyzes a short-term international mobility program between Chile and Argentina through student and tutor perceptions, examining its contribution to core transferable skill development and access to internationalization opportunities. Drawing upon accumulated experience from 2023 through 2025, the study presents a critical, reflective analysis of student perspectives on how the program fosters soft skills—such as communication, teamwork, and self-directed learning—that strengthen their professional profile. Concurrently, it incorporates the viewpoints of peer tutors from the host university in Argentina, who reflect on the pedagogical and cultural learnings derived from mentoring international students. Framed within the thematic track "Latin American perspectives on diversity and inclusion in International Education" this case study highlights the program's potential as an inclusive mobility and holistic education model within regional contexts, serving as a viable strategy to broaden access to internationalization.

Abstract in Spanish

El presente artículo analiza un programa de movilidad internacional de corta duración entre Chile y Argentina, explorado a partir de las percepciones de los estudiantes y tutores, la contribución del programa al desarrollo de competencias transversales y al acceso a experiencias de internacionalización. Se propone un análisis crítico y reflexivo a partir de la experiencia acumulada

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entre 2023 y 2025, y se examinan las percepciones de los estudiantes respecto de la contribución del programa para desarrollar habilidades blandas que fortalecen su perfil profesional, como la comunicación, el trabajo en equipo y el autoaprendizaje. Paralelamente, se incorporan las miradas de tutores de la universidad anfitriona, quienes reflexionan sobre los aprendizajes pedagógicos y culturales derivados del acompañamiento a los estudiantes internacionales. El estudio pretende relevar el caso como una estrategia de ampliación del acceso a la internacionalización, y se enmarca en el eje temático "Diversidad e inclusión en Educación Internacional: perspectivas latinoamericanas", destacando el potencial del programa como modelo de movilidad inclusiva y de formación integral en contextos regionales.

Keywords

South-south cooperation; internationalization at home; leadership; short-term international mobility

Editorial note

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1. Introduction

1.1. Context

The home university in Chile is a private higher education institution founded in 1989 in Temuco, La Araucanía Region, and currently operates two campuses in Santiago and one in Talca. Its mission centers on training graduates who are competent, socially responsible, and oriented toward lifelong learning, within a quality academic environment that fosters teaching, research, innovation, and community engagement (*vinculación con el medio/extensión*)¹, ultimately contributing to social progress.

The institution participates in the national *Gratuidad* tuition-free policy—a Chilean public policy that funds higher education for low-income families—which benefits 79.3% of its undergraduate student body (Ministry of Education of Chile, 2025). Consequently, the vast majority of students come from the lowest socio-economic income deciles and frequently face structural

¹ Vinculación con el medio/extensión: While often literalized as "outreach" or "community engagement," in Chilean, Argentinean and broader Latin American higher education frameworks, *vinculación con el medio* represents a core, legally codified institutional pillar (alongside teaching and research). It denotes bidirectionality, this means, a mutually beneficial exchange between the university and its surrounding socio-economic environment.

barriers tied to accumulated cultural capital—understood as the system of knowledge, skills, dispositions, and cultural codes individuals acquire through socialization that may ultimately condition their performance within the educational sphere (Bourdieu, 1986; Canales & De los Ríos, 2009). The institutional mission requires addressing these initial inequities through strategic actions designed to enhance student professional profiles.

The partner institution in Argentina is a tuition-free, national public university located in the Province of Buenos Aires, featuring a primary campus in the metropolitan area alongside institutes tied directly to regional needs (Partner University, 2023). Its mission focuses on promoting equity, social inclusion, interdisciplinary research, and international cooperation. With an enrollment comprising 62% female students and 45% first-generation university students (Partner University, 2024), the institution functions as a vehicle for social mobility and the democratization of knowledge through comprehensive academic support systems, peer-tutoring networks, and territorial engagement programs.

Given the sensitivity of the situations described and the commitment to protecting those involved, the names of the sending and receiving institutions, as well as any identifying cues, have been intentionally omitted, allowing readers to focus on the broader lessons rather than on specific cases.

1.2. Student profiles and barriers to traditional international mobility

Despite institutional internationalization goals at the Chilean university, historically fewer than 1% of students participated annually in international mobility programs.

A survey administered at the Chilean university gathered data from 64.3% of the 2022 incoming cohort. The data characterizes the incoming student body as predominantly female (66.5%), residing in administrative regions outside the capital region (55.8%), hailing from state-subsidized private secondary schools (*financiamiento compartido*)² (65.5%), and belonging to lower socioeconomic deciles (64.4%). This profile directly aligns with the aforementioned proportion of students benefiting from *Gratuidad* tuition waivers.

² Financiamiento Compartido:

These are voucher-funded private schools that historically charged top-up fees to parents. In Chilean educational sociology, attending these schools often reflects lower-middle to middle-income status, sitting right between fully public education and elite private institutions.

Regarding educational trajectories, 43.6% worked prior to entering university (with 68% of those working for one year or less, and the remainder working between 1 to 5+ years). 39.6% graduated high school in 2021, 30.4% in 2020, and 30% in 2019 or earlier. 44.4% balance formal academic studies with employment.

These socio-demographic factors generate two primary structural barriers to traditional internationalization:

- **Economic Barriers:** Standard exchange programs entail substantial costs for air travel, housing, and living expenses that standard scholarships rarely cover in full, discouraging participation among financially constrained students.
- **Academic Trajectory Barriers:** Incomplete transfer/credit articulation (*convalidación*) for coursework taken abroad can delay graduation by at least one semester. For recipients of *Gratuidad*, this presents a severe financial risk: the policy covers only the official, nominal duration of the degree program. Any extended study duration must be self-funded, creating an untenable financial risk for socioeconomically vulnerable students

These barriers point to the need for the Chilean university to adapt its internationalization programs and develop an offering that moves beyond traditional mobility models, as established in the Institutional Strategic Development Plan and its Internationalization Policy, with the aim of expanding opportunities for its student population.

1.3. Characterization of participants in the short-term mobility program

To overcome these economic and academic trajectory barriers, the Chilean university designed a flexible mobility program fully funded by the university. The overall profile of the participants across the three cohorts analyzed (a total of 228 students from the 2023, 2024, and 2025 editions) is consistent with the profile of the Chilean university described above: 82.4% receive *Gratuidad*; 61.8% come from publicly subsidized private secondary schools, and 53.9% belong to regional campuses. Likewise, 60.9% are women, and 68.7% reported that their mothers had not completed higher education, indicating a high degree of structural educational vulnerability.

2. Conceptual framework

University leadership can be understood as the capacity of students, faculty members, and university authorities to guide processes of change within institutions and from the university outward into society, mobilizing others toward shared goals.

The literature on university governance has highlighted the relevance of this form of leadership to the quality and direction of higher education institutions in the region (Ganga-Contreras et al., 2018). However, this notion encompasses at least two orientations that should be distinguished before proceeding.

The first orientation understands leadership as a set of soft skills—communication, team management, and decision-making—aimed at improving the academic performance and future employability of those who lead. This is the predominant understanding in many student leadership programs focused on management and on developing competitive profiles for the labor market.

The second orientation, by contrast, connects leadership with university social responsibility. That is, the capacity to influence collective well-being, promote community participation, and contribute to the social transformation of the surrounding environment (Vallaes, 2009). From this perspective, leadership is less about standing out as an individual and more about bringing collective processes together with others, such as tutors, members of the host community, and peers, in pursuit of the common good.

Transformational leadership is defined as leadership that motivates people to do more than they themselves expect, generating changes that benefit groups and organizations as well as society as a whole. This contrasts with transactional leadership, which is centered on a cost-benefit exchange between leaders and followers.

The concept of inclusive internationalization calls for rethinking internationalization processes from the context of Latin America, avoiding the reproduction of exclusionary dynamics that deepen and reproduce power asymmetries among countries, higher education institutions, and different ways of knowing and being. In this regard, Gacel-Ávila (2022) argues that inclusive internationalization remains a major challenge for higher education institutions in the region and requires explicit institutional policies to broaden access for populations traditionally underrepresented in international mobility. The program analyzed in this article is situated precisely within this logic: by fully funding the experience and making its duration more flexible, it

seeks to counteract the socioeconomic bias that has historically characterized traditional student mobility.

Internationalization at Home (IaH) integrates global and intercultural dimensions into the curriculum, teaching, and institutional environment, enabling all students whether they participate in physical mobility or not, to access an internationalization experience (Beelen & Jones, 2015). This concept also encompasses the role of local tutors from the Argentine university in the program. Although they do not participate in physical mobility, their role as “student ambassadors” allows them to experience internationalization without leaving their institution, while developing intercultural and leadership competencies through their support of Chilean students. This broadens the focus of the program beyond its direct beneficiaries (the students participating in short-term mobility) and incorporates the host community as a second group of learners.

South-South cooperation in higher education emerges as a critical alternative to hegemonic models of internationalization, which are reproduced through asymmetrical North-South cooperation dynamics and research agendas that are external to the Latin American region (Oregioni, 2021). Against this backdrop, there is a need to build links among universities in the region guided by their own agendas and grounded in more horizontal and reciprocal relationships. The Chile-Argentina program described in this article can be understood as a concrete expression of South-South cooperation, since it is a regional collaboration between neighboring countries with comparable structural conditions and is sustained by mutual benefit for visiting students as well as tutors and the host community, rather than by a dependency relationship with institutions in the Global North.

3. Program description and implementation

With the aim of increasing the participation rate of students from the Chilean university in mobility programs, implementation of the action plan began in January 2023. The plan involved two central directorates of the Chilean university: the Directorate of International Relations, responsible for the institutional internationalization strategy, and the Directorate of University Life, responsible for the student experience and its development through co-curricular activities designed to strengthen students’ professional profiles.

Taking into account both the contextual needs and the resources available to implement the plan within the academic year then underway, the university decided to design a short-term internationalization program in a neighboring country for representatives of all degree programs. The program

was intended to focus on academic activities that would allow students to gain a different perspective on their disciplinary practice, while incorporating a strong cultural component that would enable them to gain a deeper understanding of the diverse social circumstances of the country they would visit. The program was to include representatives from all four campuses of the Chilean university—Santiago Providencia, Santiago El Llano, Talca, and Temuco—and promote equitable participation among students from both the regions and Santiago. The program included the following benefits:

- A one-week international internship during the academic recess, addressing the barrier associated with students' academic trajectories.
- A 100% scholarship covering transportation, travel assistance insurance, accommodation, meals, the academic program, certification, and other expenses, thereby addressing the economic barrier.
- Twenty places per campus, with the aim of achieving the broadest possible and equitable representation across degree programs and campuses.
- Certification for students who attend all program activities.
- Visits to the Embassy of Chile in Argentina, the Argentine Chamber of Deputies, and the Government of the City of Buenos Aires, among other institutions, in order to enrich the program's cultural agenda.
- An academic agenda at an Argentine university as the core of the program, including master classes, laboratory visits, and visits to other areas, with close follow-up by peer tutors.

The call was open to undergraduate students in their second through fourth years, with a demonstrated track record of student leadership or participation in co-curricular activities such as volunteering, student associations, teaching or research assistantships, among others. The selection process followed widely disseminated institutional guidelines. A total of 68 students were selected for the 2023 edition, 80 for the 2024 edition, and 80 for the 2025 edition, from a pool of more than one thousand applicants per edition.

The academic agenda was developed through a co-creation process involving the management teams of both institutions, fostering bidirectional collaboration and mutual benefit.

For the host university, the main challenges involved designing a multidisciplinary agenda that would present its institutional priorities and developments in research, innovation, and social engagement, while being appropriately tailored to the visiting group. This also entailed addressing logistical requirements related to spaces, services, and other resources while maintaining a reasonable budget.

Likewise, with the aim of fostering Internationalization at Home and providing leadership-development opportunities for its student community, the host university incorporated local students as academic peer tutors for each cohort of Chilean students. The student tutors were advanced students who were preparing or had defended a thesis or integrative final project, as well as recently graduated students. They were selected to represent the institution and serve as “student ambassadors” across the three editions of the program. During these editions, a total of 12 tutors participated; each year, four tutors were responsible for groups of 15–20 students, and three of them participated on more than one occasion. Their role focused, on the one hand, on facilitating the academic and social integration of Chilean participants during the mobility experience and, on the other, on providing academic tutoring and creating a space for peer learning based on their shared status as university students and their similar age range.

Across the three editions of the program, the mobility itinerary was structured as an intensive week of work oriented toward holistic education and intercultural dialogue among students from the Chilean university and faculty members and tutors from the Argentine university. The academic program incorporated several formats: master classes; thematic workshops led by faculty members from diverse fields, including the sciences, humanities, health, environment, innovation, and others; methodological workshops; and group-work sessions, complemented by guided visits to laboratories and advanced research institutes. The academic program had as its aim to promote the development of global competencies, leadership, and social commitment among students during their training as future professionals, through an academic, leadership, and cultural experience abroad, so that students can strengthen key skills to operate effectively in diverse, collaborative, and globalized environments.

The educational component culminated in the formulation and presentation of group projects on leadership and innovation, developed under the mentorship of Argentine tutors, together with the joint awarding of institutional certificates.

The cultural dimension included meetings with relevant actors from the regional public and diplomatic spheres, creating opportunities for reflection on social issues and global citizenship.

4. Methodology

The study adopts a mixed-methods approach with a descriptive and exploratory scope, structured as a case study of the implementation of the

short-term mobility program between a university in Chile and an Argentine institution during its 2023, 2024, and 2025 editions.

The analysis draws on three sources of information:

- Institutional records: sociodemographic and academic data for all participating students, totaling 228 participants.
- Participant surveys: perception questionnaires administered immediately after the end of each edition to measure satisfaction and self-perceived competency development across the three cohorts.
- Tutor survey: a retrospective questionnaire administered to all student tutors at the host university, totaling 8 respondents, with continuous and alternating participation over the three years. The aim was to assess perceptions of leadership, skills developed, and the formative impact of their participation in the program.

5. Survey results and testimonies

5.1. Survey of participants after the program development

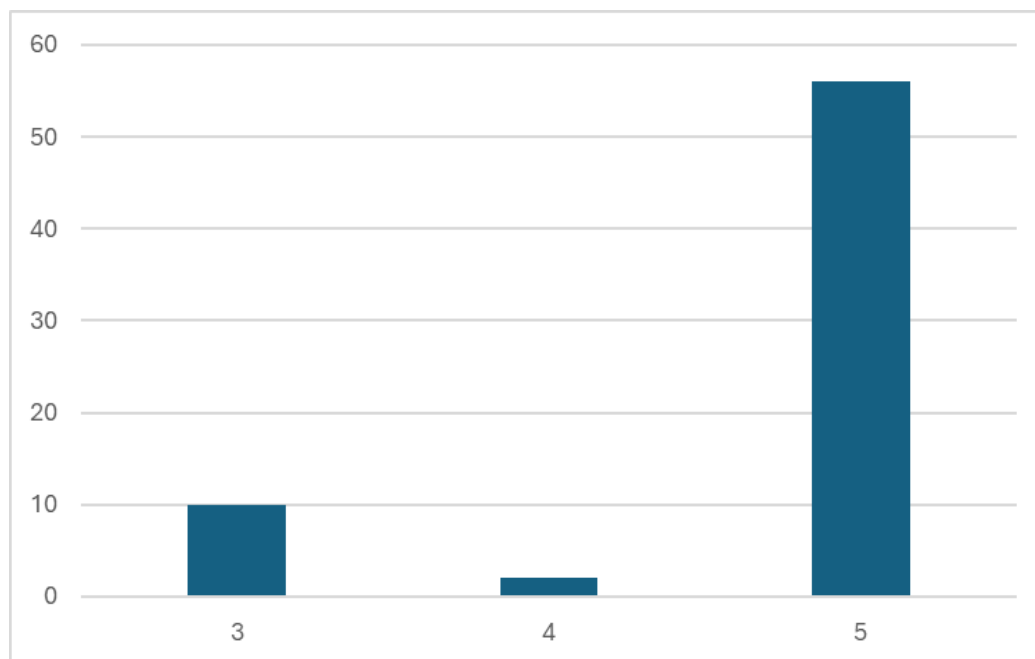
To assess students' satisfaction with the program, a survey was administered at the end of each edition. The survey included several sections; however, for the purposes of this article, the analysis focuses on two questions:

- The experience will contribute to my professional development.
- What skill(s) were you able to develop during your participation in the program? Select three options according to their level of importance:
 - Self-directed learning and personal initiative
 - Social interaction
 - Problem solving
 - Communication
 - Teamwork
 - Anxiety management
 - Empathy
 - Other

The breakdown of responses by cohort is presented in the following figures and tables:

FIGURE (1)

COHORT 2023: THE EXPERIENCE WILL SERVE MY PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

**TABLE (1)**

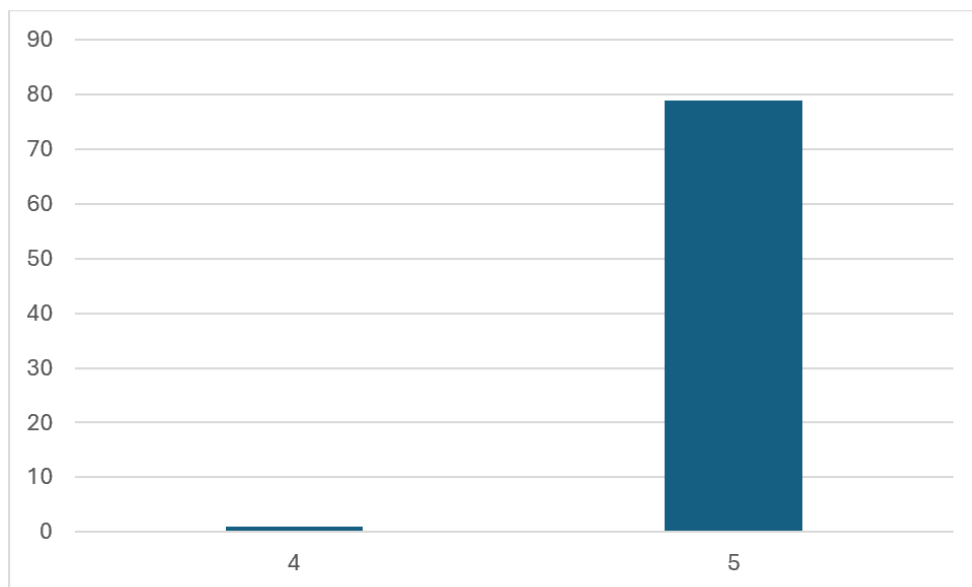
COHORT 2023: WEIGHTED TOTAL RESPONSE TO THE QUESTION "WHICH SKILL WERE YOU ABLE TO DEVELOP DURING YOUR PARTICIPATION IN THE PROGRAM? SELECT 3 OPTIONS IN ORDER OF IMPORTANCE"

Skill	1st option (3 points)	2nd option (2 points)	3rd option (1 point)	Total score
Teamwork	18	23	5	105
Communication	27	5	11	102
Self-directed learning and personal initiative	9	11	22	71
Social interaction	9	13	12	65
Problem-solving	3	10	10	39
Empathy	1	2	3	10
Other	1	1	4	9
Anxiety management	0	3	0	3

For 82.3% of the 2023 cohort, the experience will contribute to their personal development. Regarding the skills developed, students identified three clear priorities: teamwork, communication, and self-directed learning and personal initiative.

FIGURE (2)

COHORT 2024: THE EXPERIENCE WILL SERVE MY PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

**TABLE (2)**

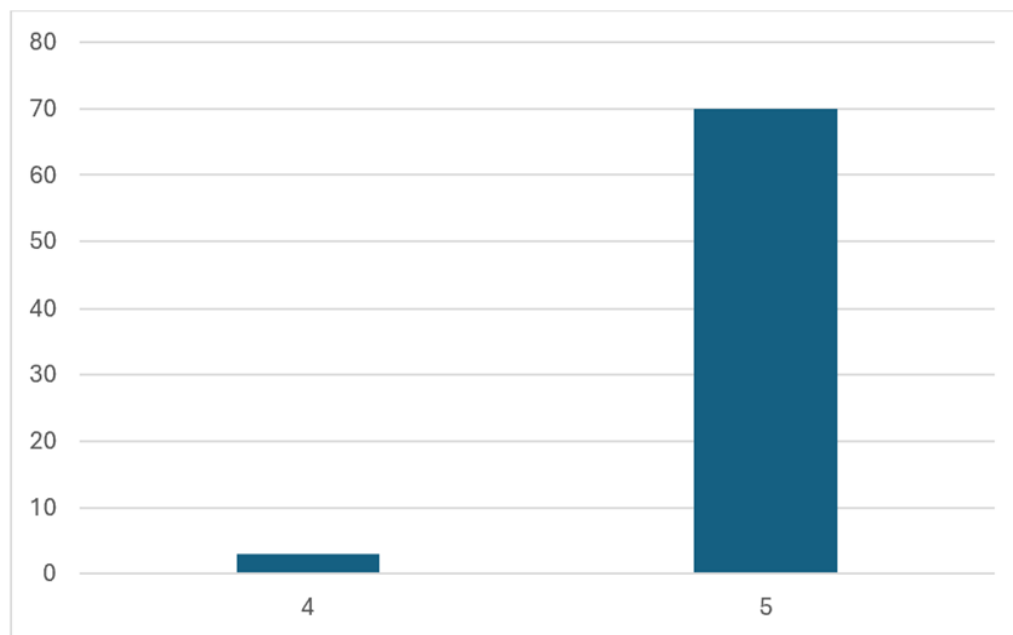
COHORT 2024: WEIGHTED TOTAL RESPONSE TO THE QUESTION "WHICH SKILL WERE YOU ABLE TO DEVELOP DURING YOUR PARTICIPATION IN THE PROGRAM? SELECT 3 OPTIONS IN ORDER OF IMPORTANCE"

Skill	1st option (3 points)	2nd option (2 points)	3rd option (1 point)	Total score
Teamwork	26	27	9	141
Communication	28	7	13	111
Self-directed learning and personal initiative	11	14	16	77
Social interaction	9	17	14	75
Problem-solving	3	13	17	52
Empathy	0	2	6	10
Other	1	0	1	4
Anxiety management	0	0	3	3

A total of 98.7% of participants in the 2024 cohort indicated that the experience will contribute to their professional development. The skills most frequently identified were the same as in the previous cohort: teamwork, communication, and self-directed learning and personal initiative.

FIGURE (3)

COHORT 2025: THE EXPERIENCE WILL SERVE MY PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

**TABLE (3)**

COHORT 2025: WEIGHTED TOTAL RESPONSE TO THE QUESTION "WHICH SKILL WERE YOU ABLE TO DEVELOP DURING YOUR PARTICIPATION IN THE PROGRAM? SELECT 3 OPTIONS IN ORDER OF IMPORTANCE"

Skill	1st option (3 points)	2nd option (2 points)	3rd option (1 point)	Total score
Teamwork	18	18	14	104
Communication	24	9	11	101
Self-directed learning and personal initiative	9	14	19	74
Social interaction	15	16	12	89
Problem-solving	3	9	10	37
Empathy	1	1	2	7
Other	0	0	2	2
Anxiety management	3	5	1	20

Finally, 95.8% of the 2025 cohort indicated that the experience will contribute to their personal development. Regarding the skills developed, students most frequently selected teamwork, communication, and social interaction.

5.2. Survey applied to tutors of the university in Argentina

In order to contrast the experience from the perspectives of the different key actors involved in its development, a survey was administered to student tutors at the Argentine university. During the three years of the program, four tutors participated each year. In total, eight different tutors participated: one tutor participated in all three editions, three tutors participated in two editions, and six tutors participated in one edition.

Among the tutors' responses, the main motivation for participating in the program as a tutor was the development of communication, leadership, and teamwork skills. The second most frequently mentioned motivation was to contribute to students' academic development and to participate actively in the academic life of the Argentine university, as well as to learn from the perspectives and experiences of students from the Chilean university.

When asked about the types of leadership the program promotes among students, the option most frequently selected by tutors was "Innovative or creative leadership" (selected by all tutors), associated with the ability to generate ideas and propose new solutions. This was followed by "social and community leadership" (selected by 87.5% of tutors), which emphasized commitment to the surrounding environment and social responsibility. Other forms of leadership were identified to a lesser extent: "professional leadership," associated with professional development and future career prospects, and "collaborative leadership," related to the ability to work in teams and promote participation. "Academic leadership," associated with motivation to learn and commitment to university education, was identified as important by one respondent, while "intercultural leadership," associated with dialogue and respect for diversity, was not selected by any respondent.

Tutors were asked which skills they believed UA students were able to develop during the International Leadership Week. The option "Relating to and interacting with peers from other contexts" was selected most frequently, followed by "Solving problems creatively and autonomously." "Collaborating in teamwork" ranked third, followed by "developing empathy and intercultural understanding." Finally, "managing anxiety in new situations" and "strengthening self-directed learning and personal initiative" were the least frequently selected options.

When asked which skills the tutors themselves were able to develop through their experience in the program, most selected "leading groups" and "gaining academic knowledge in new areas," followed by "improving intercultural communication." The option "gaining institutional knowledge

about my university” was also selected by half of the respondents, while “problem solving” and “stress management” were identified as less important.

6. Interpretation

Based on the results of the surveys administered to participants and tutors, the program experience can be organized around six main findings.

The program emerges as an alternative for broadening access to internationalization: Short-term, funded mobility constitutes a mechanism for expanding access to internationalization among groups of students whose profiles are typically excluded from traditional mobility programs. These features make it possible to address economic and academic trajectory barriers in a comprehensive manner, encouraging more democratic and accessible participation in international academic and cultural experiences, including first-time internationalization experiences.

Consistency in students’ perceptions of transversal competencies: The perception of competency development across the 2023, 2024, and 2025 cohorts shows a consistent pattern, suggesting that the program itinerary is perceived as effective in strengthening participants’ professional profiles. Teamwork, communication, self-directed learning, and personal initiative stand out; in 2025, social interaction also emerged more strongly, highlighting the significant effect that shared group experiences can have on adaptability and relationships with peers.

A dual dimension of development among tutors: Tutors’ perceptions of their personal development through the Internationalization at Home experience reveal a dual dimension of growth. On the one hand, they face the challenge of assuming leadership and coordinating peer groups; on the other, they expand their academic knowledge across different disciplines and improve their intercultural communication by interacting with different university realities.

Convergence in perceptions of the social and collaborative dimension: Both students and tutors highlight the social and collaborative nature of the program, placing particular value on teamwork, communication, and interaction with peers from other contexts.

Divergence in perceptions of the development of self-directed learning: There are differences in perceptions regarding the development of self-directed learning skills, which are highly valued by students but remain less visible from the tutors’ perspective.

Tensions and gaps in tutors' understandings of interculturality: Tutors' responses reveal limited familiarity with the term interculturality, which may explain why none selected the "intercultural leadership" option. This finding points to the need to make the intercultural dimension more explicit within the program's tutoring and pedagogical mediation.

In summary, the data suggest that mobility programs such as the one described in this article fulfill two fundamental roles. On the one hand, they expand opportunities for internationalization; on the other, they consolidate the development of transversal competencies that are critical to academic life and employability, providing opportunities suited to the profile of students who are typically underrepresented in internationalization initiatives.

At the same time, the findings point to the need to strengthen the skills to be developed by both students and tutors within the program's planning, so that the intended learning outcomes can be achieved effectively.

7. Conclusion

Based on the analysis of the data presented, it can be concluded that the short, intensive, in-person international mobility program presented in this case study represents a viable mechanism for broadening access to internationalization among groups historically underrepresented in international mobility opportunities. However, it requires substantial institutional commitment in terms of funding, which may not be feasible for many higher education institutions.

Although the data analyzed indicate that the program in itself does not resolve socioeconomic inequalities or, on its own, guarantee the development of intercultural competencies, they do demonstrate that programs of this kind significantly expand opportunities for students from vulnerable backgrounds, who perceive themselves as having strengthened transversal competencies such as teamwork, communication, self-directed learning, and social integration, all of which are essential to future professional performance.

The analysis of perceptions and understandings of leadership highlights the importance of explicitly and intentionally incorporating the intercultural dimension into regional mobility experiences. The data suggest that students and tutors experience interculturality explicitly, but not necessarily in a reflective manner. In this regard, it is necessary to incorporate a conceptual and pedagogical component into the design, implementation, and closing stages of the program in order to support reflection on the different dimensions of interculturality.

Finally, the program underscores the value of cooperation between Chilean and Argentine higher education institutions, which, through their cultural similarities and differences, develop forms of collaboration that generate reciprocal benefits for the academic communities and university management teams of both institutions.

8. Implications and limitations

The data and analyses presented in this article provide a basis for further examining the program's impact on participants' academic trajectories. It would therefore be valuable to conduct a longitudinal study that could more systematically assess how the program contributed to students' entry into the labor market, considering both their perceptions and factors such as the time required to obtain their first job, the skills required by employers, and others.

It should also be acknowledged that the surveys administered to date measure only perceptions of skill development. Nevertheless, it is feasible to apply instruments that more directly assess participants' progress in developing the main skills identified in this study: teamwork, communication, self-directed learning and personal initiative, and social integration. Along these lines, it would be valuable to apply instruments that allow soft skills to be measured and certified through surveys administered to participants and peer assessments.

Finally, it is important to include faculty members and management teams in the surveys in order to contrast the program's contribution from different perspectives, assess its contribution to the receiving institution, and ascertain the program's bidirectionality and mutual benefit.

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Camila Fernanda Bravo Órdenes holds a Master's in Higher Education from Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile and serves as International Relations Director at a leading Chilean private university. With over 16 years of experience in higher education, she chairs the International Relations Committee of the Private Universities Association (CUP), sits on the Board of Learn Chile, specializing in global strategy, academic diplomacy, and quality assurance