

THE IMPLICATIONS OF GROWING STUDENT MOBILITY ON EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENTS' INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

Taking the theme of this conference 'Cultural Communication in the Epoch of Globalization' as a starting point, this article considers the growing numbers of mobile students in higher education in Europe and the implications of this mobility on foreign language students' intercultural communicative competence (ICC). There is an analysis of the figures of internationally mobile students in Europe, particularly focusing on Ukraine and Germany.

The student mobility which is then used as an example in this article is a short stay abroad, called the Intercultural Project (ICP), for students majoring in English at the Ludwig-Maximilians Universität (LMU) in Munich, Germany. This is a compulsory stay abroad for students of English and has been in operation since 2001. The ICP takes place between semesters, rather than during semester and students have to find their own voluntary or paid occupation overseas. The author gathered data through questionnaires and interviews of the ICP participants during 2012. The focus was on the perception of the development of intercultural communicative competence according to the students themselves.

This article concludes that while international student mobility provides them with the opportunity to experience life in other countries and use foreign languages, institutions must provide adequate preparation and support before, during and after the time abroad to maximize the intercultural learning potential of such stays abroad.

Key words: *intercultural communicative competence, mobile students, Intercultural Project (ICP), institutional support.*

Introduction. Globalization is a term which is often used and less frequently defined or explained. Stavris sums it up as follows: 'Globalization is best understood as a paradox and is a highly intricate network of fragmented cultural issues, including capitalism and finance, politics, economics, the rise of technology and the Internet age, the environment and sustainability, war and terrorism, and multiculturalism amongst others. The relationships between these issues that aid and are affected by globalization connect the world primarily for the purposes of trade and profit [17, p. 15].

When the term globalization is used alongside communication, it conjures images of smartphones, social media and interaction via phone / web cameras over long distances. In the study into foreign language students' intercultural communicative competence (ICC) development while living overseas described below, none of the globalized communication practices listed above were relevant. However, for the purpose of this article, the focus is on the rise of *student mobility* in Europe, defined as higher education students who spend some time during the period of their study living abroad. The significant rise in numbers of mobile students certainly coincides with the rise of the term globalization as a way to understand the rapid changes experienced by people in many European countries.

Current trends in European student mobility. Student mobility in Europe is becoming more and more commonplace. According to the study portal's website¹, the number of university students of all disciplines who express an interest in going abroad during their studies rose by 92 per cent between 2011 and 2012 and continues to increase.

Looking at figures for student mobility in Europe, Unesco provide a very good interactive tool² which shows that, according to the data from 2014, German students abroad make up 3.4% of all mobile students, with 117 576 students abroad. These figures can be compared to other European countries, for example the UK figure of percentage of mobile students is 0.8%, a total of 27 968 students abroad and the figure for French students abroad is 1.8% of all mobile students, 62 416 in total. In Spain the figure is nearly as low as the UK with only 30 135 students abroad, 0.9% of all mobile students. After China, India and South Korea, Germany has the fourth highest number of mobile students overseas. On the other hand, in 2014, the UK hosted 12.2% of all mobile students; France hosted 7.7%, Germany 5.9% and Spain 1.6%. Germany is the fifth biggest country of destination for internationally mobile students after the USA, the UK, France and Australia.

The figures on the tool available for Ukraine are as follows. In 2012/13, a total of 39,670 Ukrainian students were mobile overseas and 49, 686 mobile students were hosted in Ukraine. The most popular destination countries for Ukrainian students to study in were Russia and Poland where nearly ten thousand Ukrainian students went to study in each country respectively, followed by Germany with 5,444 students from Ukraine. For the mobile students who chose to study in Ukraine, over ten thousand came from Turkmenistan followed by China then Russia, and then India.

¹ <http://www.studyportals.eu/media/press-releases/391/press-release-study-abroad-embraced-by-eu-students-to-flee-recession-test.html> (date accessed: 27.07.2014)

² <http://www.uis.unesco.org/Education/Pages/international-student-flow-viz.aspx> - accessed on 29.03.2015

The website defines internationally mobile students as those who have crossed a national border to study *or* who are enrolled on a distance learning programme but unfortunately does not separate those data, so it is unknown how many of the mobile students mentioned above are enrolled on distance learning programmes and how many are studying abroad for a semester or more. Mobile students are not permanent residents of the country where this period of study takes place. Internationally mobile students defined here, are a sub-category of foreign students, who by definition have permanent residency in the country where they study, normally for a complete course of study. Of internationally mobile students the website says: 'The rise in internationally mobile students reflects growing university enrolment around the world. In 2012, at least 4 million students went abroad to study, up from 2 million in 2000, representing 1.8% of all tertiary enrolments or 2 in 100 students globally. (<http://www.uis.unesco.org/Education/Pages/international-student-flow-viz.aspx>)'. The website does not provide information on the subjects which students study; so, there is no definitive account from this source of how many of these internationally mobile students are students of modern foreign languages.

In order to bring a consideration of these figures into a specific focus on modern foreign language (MFL) higher education students, there are certain points with regard the context in Germany worth mentioning. At many German universities, students of MFL are not required to spend time abroad. Although the teaching assistant programme and now the ERASMUS scheme and other opportunities to travel abroad are popular, students can, if they wish, graduate with a degree in one or more foreign language(s) without ever having left their university town. However, the current climate in German higher education with regard to student mobility in general, not just for MFL students, is that internationalisation through student mobility is being actively encouraged at an institutional, national and supranational level [5, p. 12].

The ICP at the LMU. Against this backdrop there is the growing appetite among English teaching professionals and university educators for students of English to be required to go abroad. Ehrenreich's study [6] found that the benefits of those who did partake in the teaching assistant programme were too great to ignore. Before then, in 2001, the implementation of the short stay abroad for all students of English at the LMU had already begun. Rather than a year abroad, this eight week stay abroad is an "Intercultural Project", which is undertaken in between teaching semesters. Unlike the teaching assistant or ERASMUS programmes, students on this shorter programme are not affiliated with a school or university during their stay abroad. Instead, through pre-departure and post-trip workshops they are encouraged to see their time abroad as ethnography [13] and a chance to develop their intercultural as well as language skills. At the LMU, the Intercultural Project is a *compulsory* language course, which is unusual for a German university, and students are required to go abroad before they can finish their studies. The aims of the intercultural project (ICP) are not identified in terms of linguistic development alone, rather the participants are expected to develop their intercultural communicative competence and learn about themselves. By making this project compulsory, the English department at the LMU has contributed to the growing number of students who participate in short stays abroad as an integrative part of their university degrees. This is now commonplace in many subjects such as business administration [5].

Research into student mobility and intercultural competence. It is helpful to consider what research has been carried out in the area of MFL students' stays abroad to understand how the current trends in European have been investigated in the academic community. Following from that, a description of the research carried out on the Intercultural Project at the LMU will be given.

There is growing body of research on the impact of student mobility or the 'stay abroad' in higher education in general and, for the purpose of this article, the field of foreign language education in particular. For a European and Asian perspective: Selltiz, Hopson & Cook, 1956; Coleman & Parker, 2001 (cited in O'Reilly, 2014); Ehrenreich, 2004; and numerous contributions in the volume edited by Byram and Feng, 2006; for a US perspective: Cooper, Beare & Thorman, 1990; Zeichner and Melnick, 1996; Suarez, 2002. According to Dehmel et al. in 2011, research has shown that "Higher education institutions miss the opportunity to use the study abroad programmes for the development of their students' intercultural competence. One of the reasons for this is the lack of adequate systematic and holistic pedagogical designs at higher education level" [5, p. 28]; (for a similar perspective see also Moon, 2004). This perceived missed opportunity has led to a focus on designing courses, resources and multimedia support for students participating in a stay abroad and to research into their efficacy. Such efforts can be seen in the European context with the IEREST (Intercultural Education Resources for Erasmus Students and their Teachers) project, funded by the European Commission, which aims to produce materials for pre- and post-, incoming and outgoing Erasmus courses which will be open-access for all course tutors and designers at higher education institutions and ready in time for the Erasmus programme's 30th birthday in 2015.

Short stays abroad and language learners. Despite this growing research area, research into the experiences of students of modern foreign languages at German universities who participate in a stay abroad is scant. What research there is focuses on long-term stays such as those undertaken as Erasmus or teaching assistant students³ and has been chiefly concerned with the development of language skills [6, p. 12-23]. But as Ehrenreich points out, in the German context there are several seeming inconsistencies [7, p. 186]: although the need for future language teachers to spend time abroad is emphatically supported by professionals in the field, a stay abroad is rarely a compulsory requirement at universities. Technically, a teacher of one or more foreign language(s) can complete their teaching degree and be fully qualified to teach those languages without having ever spent a single day outside Germany⁴. So a research focus on language students at a German university for whom a short stay abroad has now become a requirement of their degree is a relatively recent opportunity.

³ Two semesters for teaching assistants and one or two semesters for Erasmus students.

⁴ Unfortunately no data has been gathered to indicate how often this occurs, or what impact it has on teaching.

A thought worth noting is that the Intercultural Project was set up at the LMU with the aim of providing an opportunity for students studying English to develop their intercultural communicative competence (ICC) while living and working in the 'target culture'; specifically it is aimed at students who otherwise might only have spent limited or no time living outside their own national borders. One assumption behind the ICP is that time in an English-speaking country is inherently beneficial for the students' learning of English and ICC development and the continuation of the ICP suggests this assumption has been validated [21]. However, the idea that time living abroad will automatically lead to ICC development or foreign language proficiency has been questioned in the literature [8; 2; 19; 9; 16; 10].

One of the most widespread myths concerning language learning is that the only way to really learn the language of a foreign country is to go and live there. It is a myth shared alike by teachers and students of foreign languages [2, p. 46].

Nevertheless, as students spending some time abroad become more and more the norm, it is more important to ask how institutions can provide appropriate support than it is to question whether time abroad brings about the learning goals that are supposed.

Research at the LMU. The main research question which guided the study described in here was: *in what ways, if any, do the participants in the ICP perceive development of their intercultural communicative competence?* So the focus was on the experiences and perceptions of the students who lived and worked abroad for eight weeks during the summer of 2012 with specific regard to the development of intercultural communicative competence. The data were gathered using before-trip and after-trip quantitative questionnaires (n = 68) and interviews and emails with individual student case studies (n = 4). Very broadly speaking, all participants recorded development of ICC and both sets of data revealed specific areas of the competence that were shown to develop and also areas which were shown not to develop. The data suggests that introducing the ICP as a compulsory element of an English degree has a positive impact on students' linguistic and intercultural competence. One area for future research identified in this study is to look at the impact of the pre-departure training and de-briefing students receive. As researchers have argued that students' previous international experience is the biggest factor in determining the learning outcomes of stays abroad during higher education [20], the question of whether pre-departure training can 'level the playing field' arises. Could appropriate pre-departure training allow students with no previous international experience to have as enriching an experience as their peers with international experience? Ryan doubts it [14], but it is certainly an area of research that would be pertinent in the current climate. These kinds of questions are occupying university course providers as more and more stays abroad are offered by institutions and more and more students participate.

Concluding remarks. Studies which contribute towards broadening the understanding of what kind of development takes place on short stays abroad, which particular elements of ICC can develop, and what the impact is on participants' perceptions can help researchers, and especially course designers, to make informed choices about what kind of programme to offer at their institutions and how to best prepare students for a stay abroad. As student mobility continues to rise across Europe, care needs to be taken at an institutional level to prepare students for their experiences abroad as well as exploiting these experiences as learning opportunities on their return.

What has not been explored in this article is what intercultural communicative competence actually is, and if and how students experience the development of it as a result of mobility during their studies. It was these questions which led to the current author's doctoral thesis which was completed in July 2015.

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Boii C.

ВПЛИВ ЗРОСТАЮЧОЇ МОБІЛЬНОСТІ СТУДЕНТІВ НА ФОРМУВАННЯ МІЖКУЛЬТУРНОЇ КОМУНІКАТИВНОЇ КОМПЕТЕНТНОСТІ СТУДЕНТІВ ЄВРОПЕЙСЬКИХ ВИШІВ

Мобільність студентів розуміється тут як короткотривале відрядження за кордон у межах міжкультурного проекту, започаткованого 2001 року на спеціальності "англійська мова" Мюнхенського університету. У цій статті співвідносяться зростаюча мобільність студентів і її вплив на формування їхньої інішомовної міжкультурної комунікативної компетентності. Порівнюється кількість подорожуючих студентів у Європі, зокрема в Україні та Німеччині. Аналізуються дані опитування та інтерв'ю учасників проекту 2012 року. Робиться висновок про те, що перебування за кордоном сприяє формуванню інішомовної міжкультурної комунікативної компетентності, а тому виши мають забезпечити їм належну підготовку та підтримку до, під час та після подорожі.

Ключові слова: міжкультурна комунікативна компетентність, мобільність студентів, міжкультурний проект, підтримка вишу.

Boii C.

ВЛИЯНИЕ УСИЛИВАЮЩЕЙСЯ МОБИЛЬНОСТИ СТУДЕНТОВ НА ФОРМИРОВАНИЕ МЕЖКУЛЬТУРНОЙ КОМУНІКАТИВНОЙ КОМПЕТЕНТНОСТИ СТУДЕНТОВ ЕВРОПЕЙСКИХ ВУЗОВ

Мобільність студентів розуміється тут як короткотривале командировка за рубеж в рамках міжкультурного проекту, стартувавши в 2001 році на спеціальності "англійський мови" Мюнхенського університету. В цій статті співвідносяться зростаюча мобільність студентів і її вплив на формування їхньої інішомовної міжкультурної комунікативної компетентності. Порівнюється кількість подорожуючих студентів у Європі, зокрема в Україні та Німеччині. Аналізуються дані опитування та інтерв'ю учасників проекту 2012 року. Робиться висновок про те, що перебування за кордоном сприяє формуванню інішомовної міжкультурної комунікативної компетентності, а тому виши мають забезпечити їм належну підготовку та підтримку до, під час та після подорожі.

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Стаття надійшла до редакції 28.09.2015