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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.5816554>**ACADEMIC MOBILITY IN THE CONTEXT OF PROFESSIONAL BECOMING***Victoria BULICANU**Moldova State University*

Academic mobility is one of the most important dimensions in the academic activity at the global level in the past years. This fact is absolutely valid for the universities' activity in our country as well. In our country the conditions of development and progress of academic approaches have also led to the intensification of the process of internationalisation in higher education, which has become stronger, especially after the 1990s. Academic mobility programmes are one of the main ways of international academic cooperation, which have been implemented worldwide to establish and effectively strengthen the process of internationalisation in higher education. The article below tries to reveal the strong and weak points in development of the internationalisation process at the global and local level.

Keywords: *academic mobility, internationalization, intercultural development, educational programs, student, transferable credits, university, experience, benefits.*

MOBILITATEA ACADEMICĂ ÎN CONTEXTUL DEVENIRII PROFESIONALE

Mobilitatea academică este una dintre cele mai importante dimensiuni ale activității academice la nivel global din ultimii ani. Acest fapt este absolut valabil și pentru activitatea universităților din Republica Moldova. În țara noastră condițiile de dezvoltare și progres ale demersurilor academice au dus și la intensificarea procesului de internaționalizare în învățământul superior, care a devenit mai puternic, în special după anii '90. Programele de mobilitate academică sunt una dintre principalele modalități de cooperare academică internațională, care au fost implementate la nivel mondial pentru a stabili și întări eficient procesul de internaționalizare în învățământul superior. În articol se întreprinde o încercare de a dezvălui punctele tari și slabe în dezvoltarea procesului de internaționalizare la nivel global și local.

Cuvinte-cheie: *mobilitate academică, internaționalizare, dezvoltare interculturală, programe educaționale, student, credite transferabile, universitate, experiență, beneficii.*

Introduction

Academic mobility is one of the key elements in the process of expanding cooperation between the European Union and the Eastern Partnership countries in the field of higher education and research. It is known that one of the greatest sources of wealth and pride of today's societies is associated with their capital of knowledge, which generates new discoveries and leads to progress in various fields of human development: political, economic, social and technological, which become increasingly faster and more meaningful. These new conditions of development and progress have also led to the intensification of the process of internationalisation in higher education, which has become stronger at the global level, especially after the 1990s. The reality of many universities shows that they are true "global entities", not only because of the human diversity they represent, but because they develop an intercultural mindset as part of their way of being and acting. Obviously, expanding academic mobility is a mission not only of higher education institutions, but also of civil society organisations. They can, through their specific methods, analyse how the norms of the Bologna Process are implemented, identify possible constraints and, more importantly, carry out effective campaigns to promote student academic mobility among BA, MA and PhD students and teachers. Academic mobility programmes are one of the main ways of international academic cooperation, which have been implemented worldwide to establish and effectively strengthen the process of internationalisation in higher education. Although academic mobility is by no means a new phenomenon, it became important research at the beginning of this century due to the intensity with which it manifested itself, as some statistics show. The main beneficial effects of mobility consist in increasing the quality of studies by improving the teaching-learning-assessment methods, modernizing the curriculum, harmonizing the study programs with the European ones, updating the subjects taught in universities. Overall, student academic mobility creates premises for the accession of university education in the countries included in the study to the European Higher Education Area. Overall, the scale of the student academic mobility process depends, to a large extent, on the activism of teachers who have already participated in mobility programmes. These are the teachers who actively participate in conferences, round tables, international trainings, etc. develops on its own initiative collaborative relationships with teachers of host institutions abroad and

contributes significantly to the conclusion of inter-institutional agreements. Student and teachers' level of knowledge on credit academic mobility opportunities remains relatively low. Overall, we must note that the current information mechanisms are based more on informal social networks and less on existing institutional structures. Information about mobility programmes is disseminated mainly through "human-to-human" channels, leading to the formation of closed communities. Members of such communities repeatedly enrol in mobility programmes several times, thus diminishing the chances of the uninitiated to participate in them [1].

Context

Within the mobility programmes, the following types of studies and types of activities can be carried out: studies at bachelor's/master's/doctoral level and/or during a semester/year of study; research internships in the context of master's/doctoral studies and postdoctoral programmes; internships; educational-cultural exchange programmes; research internships and exchange of experience for teachers. In the case of inter-university cooperation agreements, according to the mutually accepted criteria of the two universities, study periods in other institutions in the country or abroad must benefit from academic recognition in accordance with the provisions of the national legislation and international regulations on recognition, including the number of transferable academic credits (ECTS), the results obtained at exams and internships and/or other forms of assessment carried out at the host university.

The financial aspect is another advantage, which encourages and stimulates participation in mobility activities. The significant value of scholarships offered in academic exchange programmes is a major impulse for both students and teachers. On average, students benefit from a scholarship worth 800-1000 euros per month. Thus, participation in the mobility process contributes to solving financial problems and reducing intellectuals' emigration. This fact is especially important, given the poverty in the Republic of Moldova and low teachers' salaries that increase the risk of emigration of both students and teachers. In this context, the mobility opportunities available within the universities, represent a factor of diminishing the emigration phenomenon of the specialists with higher education and of maintaining teachers' interest of the teachers to work in the higher education institutions in the country. In students' view, academic mobility has contributed to the acquisition of new learning methods, focused more on conversation and less on reproduction. Most of the students participating in the mobility process declare that they were impressed by the way theoretical (lectures) and practical (seminars) lessons were taught. The students state that the teaching style was different from that practiced by teachers in higher education institutions in the country of origin. The students emphasized that foreign universities abandoned many years ago certain practices frequently used in the universities of origin (dictation and retelling during seminars, etc.).

In the Republic of Moldova, student's academic mobility is regulated by the Regulation on the mobility of students and teachers in higher education institutions of the Ministry of Education and Research of the Republic of Moldova and is stimulated by various state and regional programmes. Many countries conclude bilateral and multilateral agreements in this area. The best-known European programmes are "Erasmus" and "Socrates".

Within the Faculty of Journalism and Communication Sciences at Moldova State University, student mobility has several advantages, namely:

- study programmes with a similar content to the European ones, amounting to 85-90%. Thus, upon return, the students from the faculty can equate their grades obtained with courses taught at partner universities. The difference is 1-2 courses in which exams will be held when the student returns to the country;
- receptivity of teachers and effective communication with students during the mobility who will benefit from distance consultations in preparation for outstanding exams by providing course notes, bibliography for outstanding courses, tasks for course certifications and those for Individual Work;
- reasonable academic calendar prepared, which allows the student to take the outstanding exams in the basic session of the courses, or, at the latest, in the recovery session of the same semester;
- active cooperation of teachers responsible for mobility with responsible members of partner universities, in order to establish the situation of students, living conditions, studies, problems of any kind that may face our students abroad (pandemic period has shown more than ever this).

Moldova State University is actively engaged in promoting academic mobility, through the Department of International Relations, which promotes the Erasmus+ Mobility Programme by concluding over one hundred

collaboration agreements with universities and other higher education institutions in about 30 countries. Within the MSU, the Regulation on academic mobility was elaborated in accordance with the Education Code no.152 of 17.07.2014 and the Framework Regulation on academic mobility in higher education, approved by Government Decision no.56 of 27.01.2014, which establishes the way of participation of students and academic staff in academic mobility programmes at national and international level, as well as determines the order of internships, educational and cultural exchange in international programmes.

Over time, student mobility within the State University of Moldova, but also within the Faculty of Journalism and Communication Sciences was an important factor in assessing the institutional relational potential, in assessing the level of communication with higher education institutions abroad, but also a possibility to evaluate and establish the level of closeness of the content of the study programmes of the MSU faculties with those within the institutions that receive students for academic mobilities. Among the measures to improve the academic mobility of students undertaken by MSU we can mention the following: elaboration of the strategic plan of the Department of International Relations of MSU, of the internationalisation strategy; elaboration of international programmes and projects; bilateral agreements with universities around the world; foreign students; providing courses in Romanian/Russian/English.

In her book, *Management of continuing education programs for teachers. The practical guide*, Lucia Șerbănescu mentions in the context of the need to implement development and continuing education programmes in educational institutions that currently, the competence paradigm is promoted in training programmes and activities. The competency-based approach model is recommended by specialists, as they meet current and future professional requirement [2, p.182].

The Faculty of Journalism and Communication Sciences has signed academic mobility agreements with several institutions from Romania, Bulgaria, Belgium, etc. In the last three years, several students from this faculty have managed to study for a semester at the *Institute des Hautes Études des Communications Sociales* (IHECS), Belgium, mastering the curriculum of this institution and enriching their knowledge and skills with new practices in the field of public communication, radio, TV and online journalism, as well as in the field of investigative journalism, recognised in Europe for the quality practices implemented in order to obtain exclusive information and in the public interest. These competencies and skills acquired abroad are usually reflected later in the undergraduate work carried out by students returning to the country's institutions, so that this valuable knowledge obtained abroad can be implemented in the activities from local newsrooms. In this context, the employer will certainly appreciate the effort of the educational institution to have trained a new generation of professionals, able to adjust and reform even those standardised, sometimes outdated practices used in the work of local newsrooms. However, in addition to those advantages that student mobility offers in the context of its promotion by educational institutions in our country, there are also a number of weaknesses, which need to be removed in time, in order to realise that mobility offers more professional capacities for those who participated in it, i.e. future professionals in areas of national interest. Among the most obvious weaknesses, we identified the following: insufficient experience and no tradition in applying to international research and education projects. This is manifested by the lack of qualified, sufficiently informed staff in the field, that could be involved in the process of identifying potential partner institutions and initiating and developing mobility projects. Another disadvantage would be the insufficient national and international visibility of many universities from our country, which can lead, in the short term, to a decrease in the number of candidates for national university programmes and, in the medium term, can affect the competitiveness of universities internationally. Last but not least, we can mention the financial factor as one of the impediments that do not allow the sufficient development of mobility programmes, or financial resources could contribute to a greater extent to the promotion of international relations to support the mobility of teachers and students [3].

The low international promotion of the research results of teachers in our country inevitably leads to the fact that universities in the Republic of Moldova enjoy less attention than other European institutions, for example, from international organisations and other educational centres abroad in order to establish long-term collaborative relationships. In the same context, we can also mention the lack of institutionalised mechanisms for recognition and equivalence of studies obtained in mobility programmes, and many of the existing ones do not allow an exhaustive assessment of students' knowledge obtained abroad during the mobility period, or the results obtained by the student during this period. According to the official acts, the results of mobility are officially recognised, without further examinations, and this could create certain reserved attitudes in

relation to the objectivity of assessing students' knowledge in the same courses abroad. Another big problem regarding the process of academic mobility which we cannot omit from this list of weaknesses is the poor knowledge of the languages of international circulation in our country, especially by teachers, who do not always benefit from free courses to improve their knowledge in this field. Even if students may speak foreign languages, they are often reluctant to submit applications for participation in competitions for student mobility, due to uncertainty about the level of knowledge required for them to be able to face academic challenges in a language other than their mother language.

Conclusions

We do not deny that educational institutions in our country do not yet have valuable experience in the process of internationalisation of academic programmes, but we are at the stage when we try to take safe steps to develop and support this much needed process not only for teachers and students, but for the development of entire areas of national economic activity, which would allow the alignment of our country to the international standards and practices of state development in all aspects, which requires the times in which we live. It is no wonder that student mobility and research cooperation are priority actions for increasing the level of university internationalisation and one of the most important challenges of higher education worldwide. In recent years, universities have opened their doors to partner institutions in other countries more often by supporting exchanges of students and university staff. We must recognise that the level at which international academic mobility is achieved in an educational institution indicates that the institution in question has a consolidated position in the field of education, but also has a greater prestige in the eyes of students and future candidates for this status. Currently, most rankings, whether national or global, include the rate of internationalisation of the university as one of the most important factors in the quality of education. Therefore, educational centres strive for international recognition and thus reliability and visibility that make them more efficient and competitive with other educational institutions. However, in addition to being ranked at the top of national and global university rankings, internationalisation also offers the opportunity to improve the quality of education and acquire unique skills. It is also an opportunity to increase the efficiency of research and the recognition of scientific achievements in Europe and other parts of the world. Current internationalisation in higher education shows that there are many opportunities to develop cooperation between universities, such as scientific, technological or cultural collaboration, joint research teams, joint diplomas, mutual acceptance of graduate and postgraduate students and the mobility of their teachers, indicating that the process of internationalization in higher education institutions involves a wide range of policies, strategies, actions and actors.

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