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MOBILITY OF STUDENTS OF EDUCATION FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF CADIZ. A CASE STUDY

Introduction

The 2020 strategies for the EHEA (European Higher Education Area) are established at the European Conference of the Higher Education Ministers, held in Bucarest in 2012. The mobility in education is set to be the principal objective, considered to be essential to obtain better learning, to guarantee the quality of Higher Education, employment and to extend the collaboration and internationalisation of Higher Education (CEMES 2012). Nowadays, nobody doubts the importance of the high level of mobility for the Higher Education institutions. A high number of incoming and outward students has become a sign of prestige and quality (Green 2012).

Erasmus is the biggest programme of students' exchange mobility for the Higher Education in Europe. More than 4000 Higher Education institutions from more than 30 countries participate in it. The programme requires universities to sign a European Agreement Document between universities. The agreement implies that the institutions are obliged to fulfil a series of conditions with respect to the exchange students within its own programme. Nowadays, the undergraduate education student interested in studying at a foreign university may opt for a stay period of 3 and 12 months and their credits will be acknowledged at their university of origin. At the Science Education Faculty at the University of Cadiz the stays tend to be of 6 months, which means, a complete academic term, extendable in some cases, if the experience turns out to be positive, to 12 months of the complete academic course. Hardly ever does a student decide, once the application procedures start, to spend a complete year studying at a foreign university.

Nowadays the concept of integral education of students and the competences for life are considered in education. From this point of view, the education is the configuration of an individual personality, as a product

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of significant learning gained during life so far. It also integrates different forms of behaviour, thinking, self-expression, working, studying, learning, relations, living and being (Zarzar 2003). It is understood that staying at a foreign university turns out to be highly positive for the integral student education and the development of autonomy, which helps students become self-sufficient and mature. Foreign studying helps the person deal with their studies more successfully increasing the international dimension at work (Teichler 2007), it as well raises the probability of working abroad in the future (Parey, Waldinger 2007).

In particular, this international dimension is even more important for the students of Educational Science, future professors and educators of the new European generations. Due to the more usual presence of different nationality students in classrooms. The stays, through the Erasmus programme, help students get to know the cultures of countries of origin, which benefits the future teaching assistants, raising their awareness to challenge teaching in the diversity of students of different nationalities. The majority of studies, such as Deardorff (2004, in: Pozo-Vicente, Aguaded-Gómez 2012) and Straffon (2003) coincide in pointing out that the intercultural experiences allow students to learn the behaviours and improve their intercultural communication abilities and affirm that there is a proportional positive and direct relation between the stay period abroad and the level of acquired intercultural sensitivity. The academic exchange may improve the quality of the Higher Education, the professional and personal development of the beneficiaries and also opens a way to intercultural understanding and facilitates the collaboration among the people of their own institutions (Stockwell 2011). For those students, who are going to be future nursery and primary school teachers, communal living on a daily basis and the cultural and linguistic immersion provide them with the flexibility and understanding before the cultural diversity of their students.

In studies such as education, medicine or nursing the possibility of real apprenticeship is an important aspect of studying abroad. Therefore, those students are offered the possibility of learning new and different forms of hospital work or educational center classrooms, the chance of getting to know different methodologies, resources, materials, which enriches them as future teaching assistants, in our case.

Button et al. (2005) revised the literature as for the impact of the international apprenticeship for the professional life of nurses. The students were exposed to a great variety of experiences in nursing in a host country. This would give them a wide spectrum of comparison between the health care systems, the practice and the patient assistance in host countries. In

this study, it was highly recommended for the educational institutions to offer students opportunities of participating in the nursing and educational systems in other countries.

Another argument in favour of the student exchanges can be found in the study of Frisch (1990, in: Keogh, Russel-Roberts 2009), where it is exposed that the international experience allows students to see beyond themselves and see all their previous learning experiences from a new, and often, very critical point of view.

First International Seminar: Improving Mobility Through Collaborative Exchange

We understand that there are barriers that, in general, all students deciding to study abroad, need to face: a financial strain, a foreign language and separation from family, which may generate stress (Väfors et al. 2008). On the one hand, families need to deal with a strain on a family budget to maintain their children as students in a foreign country. When a student starts to gather information about the costs of mobility, it becomes obvious that the level of Erasmus financing may be insufficient. On the other hand, there is a language barrier; it is not easy to study in a language so different from yours.

When a student has assessed these factors and decides to study within the Erasmus programme at a foreign university, they face another type of situations, other than the very mobility involves. The most alarming one, in our opinion, is the risk, caused by the difficulties encountered in the Erasmus experience, of suffering from harm in terms of student's health, for instance depression and anxiety (Nilsson et al. 2008) or somatic symptoms (Mori 2000) and making the latent problems such as mental disorders appear (Bradley 2000). These situations require therapeutic help of a professional. However, the majority of students do not seek it (Mori 2000) because of the lack of knowledge of the service, difficulties in communicating in a foreign language or simply because they do not want to receive this type of help. Therefore, the Erasmus programme turns into an experience producing damage in mental and physical health and has a negative impact on the academic progress of a student.

We understand the necessary work of student's accompanying and advising on the side of the closest person the student has in the host institution, that is a coordinating professor – of the Erasmus mobility, who is responsible for a student from a particular university. The figure of a professor – coordinator is a contact person at the host university and their role is to receive, advise, guide, counsel and manage the academic administration pro-

cedures during student's stay. A radical problem in the bureaucratization of the Erasmus programme is the fact that the academic coordinators limit themselves only to facilitate and manage the bureaucratic processes of the incoming student, leaving out the personal aspect. We agree with De Wit (2012), who during the 25th Erasmus anniversary, mentions the evolution suffered in the last 15 years in the Erasmus programme as an important barrier, with the lack of participation in the Faculty, the tendency of the programme bureaucratization and the quantitative focus the mobility has taken.

Sensitive and committed to the Erasmus programme, a group of university professors of the UK, Turkey, Portugal, Poland and Spain gathered in an international seminar Improving Mobility Through Collaborative Exchanges, held in Cadiz, Spain, from 6th till 12th of May 2015 to reflect on the difficulties and fears an Erasmus student needs to face, and to try to improve the mobility of the Erasmus students between their countries. The following were reflected on during those workshops:

1. Analysing the stress producing factors in the Erasmus students.
2. Analysing the failure and abandoning of the Erasmus programme and the scholarship granted just before performing the trip. What are their fears?
3. Reception and support.
4. The information a student needs to carry out the mobility and maintain safe and sound their emotional security, their interests, the knowledge of the host country, recognition and agreement of mobility, which subjects to choose, language, accommodation, the economic level of the host country, etc.
5. Uniting our efforts to accomplish a K2 Erasmus cooperation project between our universities.
6. Making the action valid for different situational contexts, which is a priority for the European mobility.

The main subject is the cooperation between European countries in order to give support to the European Erasmus students in all aspects, not only in the academic life, but also in their everyday life (doubts, problems, fears, uncertainties) and hence promote the emotional balance that every student needs to confront their studies abroad with a positive outcome. The

creation and utility of a mobile and tablet application would help to strengthen the informative action addressing the education population. This way the access to information through electronic devices – the most commonly used by students – is facilitated, and that undoubtedly would help to surpass fears and uncertainties before the stay. A figure of an accompanying student, introducing and helping in the process of acculturation will be created. However, what is the most important is the support and advice of a professor, who will coordinate the incoming students.

A case study

This work reflects on the experience of 5 university students of the University of Cadiz, who experienced the mobility with the help of the Erasmus programme, with the special supervision as a result of agreement and collaboration between the three participating in the seminar institutions: Glasgow, Scotland (UK), Linz, Austria and Cádiz, Spain. They were all students of the 4th year of the undergraduate Nursery Education, three of them in the year 2013-2014 and two of them in the year 2014-2015. All the stays were performed in the first term of the year since the apprenticeship was to be done in the educational Spanish centers. Last but not least they had an opportunity to get to know how teachers in other countries work: methodology, sources, atmosphere in the classroom, relations with parents and tutors, micro and macro educational policies, etc.

Analysis of data and process phases

The analysis of qualitative data must be systematic, follow a sequence and order (Álvarez-Gayou 2005). The model used in the analysis of the data of the interviews given was developed along the process, which may be summarized in the following phases (ibid., Miles, Huberman 1994, Rubin, Rubin 1995):

1. Obtain the information.
2. Capture, transcribe and order the information.
3. Code the information.
4. Integrate the information.

The information was collected throughout the detailed interviews of the students participating in the case study by means of the interviews' recording. A mobile telephone application was used as a recording device. These interviews' audio recordings are transcribed into a perfectly legible document. The information is presented in an organized form of questions and

answers. Afterwards, the information coding is performed. Coding is a process in which the obtained information is grouped in categories covering the ideas, concepts or similar topics discovered by the interviewer or the steps or phases throughout the process (Rubin, Rubin 1995). We have carried out a series of categories and typological codifications of the data. Thematic codification, addressing main topics of interest. Interpretative and explicative codification developing the topics, explaining and interpreting both the verbal and non-verbal language and chronological codification. The main categories were: the general assessment of the experience, the possibility of acquiring new knowledge at an academic level, finding out if they had an opportunity to do apprenticeship in foreign educational centers and the coordinators' work: interest, reception, help and support of the coordinating professor of the host university.

Results

General assessment of the experience

The five students assessed the general experience very positively as for the academic aspect (knowing other cultures, new acquisitions, foreign language skill improvement). What needs to be highlighted is the fact that all students included the development as individuals, which – in their answers – occurred thanks to the programme. It was the first time for all of them to leave home and live on their own. It was the case because in Spain almost every province has its own university, therefore students keep living in their family homes and the moment of independence is moved to the moment of getting a job and becoming financially independent. Due to such conditions of Spanish schools, leaving home enhances the development of autonomy, maturity and personal development. It all contributes to the growth of self-confidence and provides life security. “In my opinion, apart from the academic aspect this experience is oriented to provide social and cultural benefits and improve a student as a person and help become mature in general”. Besides, it is such a positive experience that everybody encourages and recommends students to study outside Spain, to participate in the Erasmus programme. “Very good. It was a great experience for me, I would definitely repeat it and I recommend it to everybody who is able to, thanks to Erasmus, live and study abroad for a few months” (R4). “In general, it was an undoubtedly one of the best experiences in my life, I would recommend it to everybody” (R1). “On the other hand, I got to know a new culture, I learnt to adapt to it because it is different from ours, for example, the working hours” (R2).

New knowledge

This question addressed their assessment of the academic knowledge during their stay within the programme at other universities. If they thought that some aspects of the academic education during their stay at a foreign university would be impossible to acquire at the University of Cadiz. "Yes, the language, thanks to the Erasmus experience I could improve my level of English, both written and spoken. Besides, I obtained information about the education and teaching system abroad" (R1). "If, in my case, studying education, I was able to observe how education is understood in Scotland and get to know their curriculum. It is crucial to see that other countries look at education from a very different perspective and therefore enrich our knowledge of it. If I had not gone, I would not have broadened the way I look at education" (R3).

All students admitted to having achieved academic acquisitions impossible to be obtained in Spain. Thanks to the linguistic immersion, learning English was facilitated in case of the University of Glasgow and learning English and German in case of the University of Linz. "Yes, especially for the language. No matter how many courses you do in your home country, it is only when you go abroad, start practising it and communicate on a daily basis with people from other countries, you realise the importance of learning foreign languages" (R5). "I learnt things I would never learn at the University of Cadiz simply because the education there is totally different from ours. However, I would like to say that there are many things I learnt in Cadiz and I wouldn't at a foreign university" (R2).

Finally we coincide with Zarzar (2003) interpreting that the student's education forms their personality. Defining their being, behaviour, thinking, self-expression, working, studying, learning, relations, living as a result of all the learning. The comment of our R4 goes: "I didn't only learn academic things. Of course I learnt a lot in the classroom, but also gained everyday life knowledge. I can say I changed and I see the world differently now".

Access to the apprenticeship in educational centers

The apprenticeship done at the educational centers is an important part of the Nursery and Primary Education courses of the Faculty of Educational Science in Cadiz. Our students have apprenticeships at Spanish schools during the whole term in the third year and another term in the fourth year. As a professionalizing degree, the knowledge acquired during the period of apprenticeship at different schools of the province is fundamental in the future professional performance. That is why we wanted to know if the students had an opportunity to improve their skills during the apprenticeships

in foreign schools outside Spain. Along with Button et al. (2005) and Frisch (1990) the Erasmus mobility provides the opportunity to compare the different systems, in this case, of education and helps to revise their knowledge from a critical and beneficial point of view.

All the interviewed students had an opportunity to attend Nursery Education schools during the six months of the Erasmus programme, both in Glasgow and Linz. Some of them during a few weeks in a row, whereas others one day per week throughout the six months of their stay. These apprenticeships offer a chance to learn, observe and participate in a real context outside your home country, which would have been impossible without this type of programmes. This is how a student evaluates the apprenticeship done at a school in Glasgow: “Studying education, I was able to observe how education is understood in Scotland and get to know their curriculum. It is crucial to see that other countries look at education from a very different perspective and therefore enrich our knowledge of it. If I had not gone, I would not have broadened the way I look at education” (R3). “Yes, I was lucky to have access to a school and different classes, with varied methodologies and different teachers. It all contributed to my new experiences and knowledge gained during the programme. It seems to me that the Erasmus apprenticeship is of vital importance” (R1).

The coordinators' work

The coordinating professor is a contact person an Erasmus student has at the host university. They are responsible for guiding, advising, consulting and processing the academic administration steps during the student's stay. It is very important to provide the incoming student with all the necessary information regarding the university, subjects, timetables, psychopedagogical services (if available), the city they are going to live in, customs and traditions of the country and handle all the bureaucracy related to the studies at the host university. It is true that the Erasmus programme is not a novelty and begins to bureaucratize (the fact already reported in 2012 by De Witt). This fact may have a negative effect on the students, who see themselves as abandoned, disorientated and with no support given. These circumstances may affect the students who have been granted the Erasmus scholarship, and as very often happens, they decide to turn it down just before leaving. It implies additional administration proceedings and the waste of scholarship, as there is not enough time to proceed a new allocation.

There is a tight collaboration, constant communication, great interest and dedication to the Erasmus programme between the coordinating professors of host universities in this case study. They have participated in the First

International Seminar “Improving Mobility Through Collaborative Exchange”, held in Cádiz, motivated by a necessity to improve the mobility between their institutions. They believe in the Erasmus programme and carry out the coordination work, which goes beyond pure bureaucratic proceedings.

In relation to the work developed by the coordinating professors, the students found it extremely positive, recognizing the great help received, monitoring and the interest shown towards the academic and personal issues (reception, accommodation, group adaptation, acculturation process, accompanying student). Welcoming activities are organized at almost all universities to receive the Erasmus students and give them general information and a chance to get to know each other. At other universities they are assigned a student who helps them with occasional doubts, that may appear.

With respect to the reception and academic issues assistance they answered: “We were nicely received as we had a whole week especially dedicated to our doubts and questions. Everybody helped us whenever we needed it and having an allocated coordinator helps a lot” (R3). “Yes, I was pleased because the coordinator was always interested in my matters” (R5). “Very good. Our coordinator was always available and helped us with anything we needed. Besides, the very university organizes some welcoming days for all the Erasmus students, which is great. We were given a lot of information and we managed to meet a lot of people” (R4). “I got enough information about the city and the faculty, as there were one or two host students per each Erasmus student to help us with all our doubts. Besides, I would like to highlight that they picked us up from the train station the day we arrived in the city and took us to the university, which I find very positive because at the beginning you feel a bit frightened and disoriented” (R2). “There was a coordinator for the Erasmus students, who sometimes was seen overwhelmed, therefore I think that the Erasmus coordinator should not be at the same time the student’s teacher (etc.)” (R1). “Yes, I had a teaching assistant who was responsible for monitoring me and other Erasmus students, wanting to know the academic and adaptation progress” (R2).

With respect to the personal interest all the Erasmus students got from their respective coordinators, they all responded that the coordinators were personally interested in them, their adaptation and integration in the group, if the students attended classes regularly, how they felt, etc. Regarding this question, they answered:

“The coordinator was interested in my well-being all the time and how I felt during my stay in a new country” (R1). “Yes, both the teacher and host student were interested in all aspects so that we, the Erasmus students,

could be comfortable and able to adapt as soon as possible" (R2). "Yes in all. In fact, they threw a welcoming party, during which a welcome speech was given and we could eat together, we also did various cultural trips in order to get to know the city and the country" (R5). In the general assessment of the help received, they all showed great satisfaction: "we received all the help we needed" (R3). "Every time I had a problem, I received the necessary help" (R2). Only one student answered: "They were interested in everything except for accommodation" (R3). This student had to look for a shared flat to rent and had difficulties. The universities which lack halls of residence for students need to facilitate the contact of individuals who let flats to foreign students and this way provide foreign students with the information. That is the way it is tackled in Cadiz. Lacking the halls of residence, the very university contacts the individuals who let their flats and the students who need them in order to facilitate the search. In this study we have discovered that it is the aspect we could improve in our collaboration: to facilitate the information about flats to rent for students, and it would even be advisable to contact the foreign students who attend the same university so that they could share the same flat. Since, living on their own beside being expensive is not recommendable for the Erasmus students.

Conclusion

Nobody doubts now the positive aspects that the Erasmus scholarship at foreign universities has. The benefits are clear both in the academic education as well as the personal development. With respect to the academic aspect, participating in the Erasmus programme helps students develop a more critical and advantageous vision being able to compare the different educational, in this case, systems (Button et al. 2005, Frisch 1990). As for the personal aspect, the development of independence and autonomy is facilitated along with becoming more mature (Zarzar 2003). This way their professional prospects are improved (Teichler 2007) and the probability of working abroad in the future is increased (Parey, Waldinger 2007).

In particular, for the students of Educational Science, the future teachers and new European generation creators, it is absolutely positive given they improve their communicative competences and intercultural sensitivity (Deardorff 2004, in: Pozo-Vicente, Aguaded-Gómez 2001; Straffon 2003), thus, intercultural understanding (Stockwell 2011). These competences are becoming more and more necessary in order to be able to educate in the diversity of nationalities we at present have in our Nursery and Primary education.

According to De Wit (2012) the Erasmus programme is in need of lo-

wering the bureaucracy level, which has increased in recent years as for the Faculties and especially the coordinators, who are responsible for the direct contact with the Erasmus students at host universities. It is normal, because receiving foreign students is already quite usual in the life of the universities.

The students need help and advising of the coordinators in all spheres during the stay. These are young people who in most cases leave their homes and families for the first time in order to live on their own and study in a foreign language at foreign universities experiencing the customs, they generally do not know. We understand that the academic coordinator is fundamental to reduce and prevent the negative academic, mental and physical effects. Social isolation impedes getting to know the culture they need to live in for some time in their lives, that is why it is advisable to contact the Erasmus students with the voluntary student of the host university.

Good communication we have between the coordinators dealing with the students of this case study shows that supervising, advising and guiding of the coordinator, both in the academic and personal dimension, lead to a successful Erasmus experience. We think that is the way it should be done, considering the Erasmus experience to be a unique and once in a lifetime opportunity of academic and personal development, as well as working internationalization contemplating the possibilities of working in other countries of the European Union.

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The aim of the Bologna Process is, amongst others, to improve the mobility of students in Higher Education. The Erasmus programme helps students study at other European universities, get to know other countries, live a different culture (folklore, food, language, etc.), develop their autonomy and mature as adults. The international seminar 'The improvement of the mobility through the collaborative exchange' took place in Cadiz, Spain, in May 2015. The Universities of Glasgow (The United Kingdom), Madeira (Portugal), Gazi (Turkey), Linz(Austria), Zielona Góra (Poland) and Cadiz (Spain) participated in this seminar. The representatives of the countries expressed their concern regarding the problems students may encounter during the mobility. The literature has pointed out that economic, social and academic tension students experience may, in some cases, generate or exacerbate mental disorders (Bradley, 2000), generate depression and anxiety (Russell et al. 2010, Ying, Han 2006), and even manifest itself in somatic symptoms (Mori 2000). This might imply classroom absence and drug abuse as side effects.

This study describes the positive experiences of five students from the University of Cadiz Erasmus by virtue of a collaborative exchange among universities, detailing the measures taken by host universities to address potential stress issues.