

Influence of Participation in Mobility Programmes on Students' Intercultural Competence Development

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Received November 21, 2022; Revised January 18, 2023; Accepted February 6, 2023

Cite This Paper in the Following Citation Styles

(a): [1] Vlaho Kovacevic, Marko Pleslic, Marin Spetic, "Influence of Participation in Mobility Programmes on Students' Intercultural Competence Development," *Universal Journal of Educational Research*, Vol. 11, No. 3, pp. 47 - 56, 2023. DOI: 10.13189/ujer.2023.110302.

(b): Vlaho Kovacevic, Marko Pleslic, Marin Spetic (2023). *Influence of Participation in Mobility Programmes on Students' Intercultural Competence Development*. *Universal Journal of Educational Research*, 11(3), 47 - 56. DOI: 10.13189/ujer.2023.110302.

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Abstract This paper begins with a presumption that participation in the ERASMUS+ mobility programmes in higher education is a factor in developing intercultural competence among students. The key question is not whether people *should* exist without belonging to a specific cultural community, but *how they can* live with their cultural others while also belonging to their own culture. In accordance with this, the goal of this paper is to identify if participating in long-term student exchange mobility programmes effects a stronger development of intercultural competence among students. The paper discusses findings of a quantitative research conducted using a survey as the main research method. The results do not show that there will be a significant difference in the level of development of intercultural competence between students who participated and students who did not participate in the ERASMUS+ mobility programme, except in a smaller number of indicators. Therefore, this paper will showcase these results while comparing the findings with similar research for the purpose of exploring methodological challenges for evaluating the impact of new educational approaches and trends.

Keywords ERASMUS, Globalisation, Interculturalism, Intercultural Education

programmes between European Universities have risen rapidly in recent time. According to the European Commission (2010), ERASMUS, the European Union student exchange programme, has helped almost 200,000 students – more than before – to go abroad for studies and company placements [3]. The purpose, or the main aim, of the student exchange programme is to prepare students for their lives in the globalized world [3]. Contemporary globalized world is defined by a variety of social processes mainly covered under the common name – globalisation. Globalisation represents a process of growth of interrelationship among cultures, goods, information and nations through place and time [1]. Processes of globalisation imply, or rely on, global connection and interaction among societies and cultures in multiple ways – economic, political, cultural, educational, and so on. Giddens [9] refers to globalisation in the context of interdependence growth among individuals, groups, and nations globally. In that context, talking about the processes in contemporary society is the same as talking about globalisation, regarding the influence that globalisation has on everyday life [15]. Considering globalisation and global connections that take part in designing social relations, contemporary society can be described through intensive social and cultural mobility, together with open migrations and interconnections among different nations [8]. These kinds of interactions, especially considering social and cultural mobility, consequently, create a diverse society. Contemporary society is becoming more and more intercultural and multicultural, regarding

1. Introduction

Opportunities for studying abroad and student exchange

the increasing of diversity which is highlighted up to the point that homogeneity of culture and attachment to nation are losing the importance [11] they used to have in some former societies. When discussing diversity in the context of global society, the two terms, multiculturalism and interculturalism, become inevitably important. Multiculturalism can be described as a political concept in which people with different cultural backgrounds are involved in social relations in which they can openly develop their cultural identities and as well their personal identities, while engaged in bolstering common socio-cultural institutions based on the principles of equality, rule of law, pluralism, and cooperation [13]. Sarmiento [17] observes multiculturalism in the context of existence and coexistence – when people from different cultures coexist in the same space and mutually respect the right to live in the same community. However, the most widely spread understanding is multiculturalism as a paradigm of accentuating the differences in society [1].

In addition to multiculturalism, the term interculturalism is often in use. Interculturalism presumes, the same as multiculturalism, the existence of different cultures on the same territory or in a society, but interculturalism is the opening of one culture towards the other, encouraging mutual respect, understanding, and learning with the goal of creating social integrity, tolerance, and mutual appreciation [14]. Regarding that, intercultural competence is a common term, presenting a theoretical and a research problem within social sciences, especially educational sciences.

The term competence has been variously equated with understanding (e.g., accuracy, clarity, co-orientation, overlap of meaning), relationship development (e.g., attraction, intimacy), satisfaction (e.g., communication satisfaction, relation satisfaction, relation quality), effectiveness (e.g., goal achievement, efficiency, institutional success, negation success), appropriateness (e.g., legitimacy, acceptance, assimilation), and adoption [5]. Ćatić [6] notes that the curriculum in contemporary society is based on competence approach, which assumes the curriculum is organized on effectiveness and satisfaction of economic needs, putting logic of market, individualism, and competitiveness as the base for its development. Furthermore, according to Poole, Nielsen, Horrigan, and Langan-Fox [6], competences represent knowledge, skills, views, motivations, and personal characteristics for active and effective actions in certain situation. In contemporary society, the need to develop intercultural competence is highly present. According to Deardorff [4], intercultural competence consists of knowledges, skills, and attitudes, while Fantini, Arias-Galicia and Guay [4] refer to intercultural competence as the ability to conduct effective interaction in different cultural contexts. Furthermore, intercultural competence is commonly defined as the ability to have an effective and appropriate cooperation in diverse cultural settings along with the capability of effective intercultural

communication [2]. Deardorff notes that the very first attempt to define intercultural competence was made by Tewksbury in 1957. He created a list of 21 Characteristics of a Mature International Person¹. In that way, intercultural competence could be described as a combination of knowledge, skills, perspective, motivation, and personal characteristics which enable active and effective action in interaction with people who are linguistically, traditionally, and culturally different.

In accordance, Deardorff [5] points to the diversity of intercultural communicational competence conceptions in various disciplines, which results in various models and theories that attempt to account for adjustment, assimilation, or adoption in defining, and even observing intercultural competence. Namely, there are contemporary models of intercultural competence: compositional models, co-orientational models, developmental models, adaptational models and causal models [5]. These models are constructed as models of intercultural communicational competence.

Also, one additional concept must be considered in order to properly discuss the research problem: ethno relativism or cultural relativism. Cultural relativism, or ethno relativism, is an approach in which one culture is observed inside its own meanings and values, while ethnocentrism refers to the approach in which one culture is observed in comparison to another [10]. Both approaches are equally valid in the context of cultural observation, and especially important when discussing globalisation, multiculturalism and interculturalism.

As it has been previously mentioned, there is a variety of different mobility programmes within higher education², but the most common programme in which students from the European Union participate is ERASMUS. According to the official webpage of the European Commission, the goal of the ERASMUS is to support education, training, youth, and sport in European Union. In the older version of the programme (ERASMUS), the main focal point was to encourage the mobility with the aspiration toward individual growth and socioeconomic advancement of participants, while nowadays, ERASMUS+ is focused on bolstering the competences of participants, as well as enhancing the employment opportunities for EU citizens [16]. Furthermore, the mid-term evaluation of the ERASMUS+ programme (2014-2020) found that ERASMUS+ is cherished among stakeholders and the public, who pinpoint the programme as the third most positive result of the European Union [7]. The very same

1 Tewksbury's list includes characteristics such as having international friends, being able to view one's own culture objectively, and being an active member of an international organization, which were broadly categorized into cultural self-awareness, cross-cultural awareness, state of the world awareness, willingness to learn, commitment toward making the world a better place and a "lived knowledge" of at least one other culture, in addition to having international friendships and membership in an international organization [4].

2 ERASMUS+, CEEPUS, Bilateral Programs of Mobility in Higher Education
more:
https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/mobility-higher-education-11_de (accessed April 25th, 2020)

report highlights other benefits of participation in ERASMUS+ programme; according to the report, for learners who participated in the programme, the anticipation had a positive influence on gaining competences, which was, later, reflected on the employability of the participants. Findings also show the increase in willingness to work or study abroad, as well as additional competences in using foreign languages, which, in the end, influence these students' positive approach towards the value of learning regarding their professional and personal development.

The expansion of the EU had an influence on the expansion of the ERASMUS programme. The number of participants in this programme increased in almost all countries. The largest increase occurred in the outgoing students from Croatia (132%), Liechtenstein (52%) and Cyprus (22%) and the ERASMUS programme itself became a very popular phenomenon among European students [19]. It is of great value for the European Union to have developed a programme like the ERASMUS+ in the terms of efforts oriented towards creating the intercultural European identity.

Considering the positive reports, further impact of the ERASMUS on increasing the social cohesion among young Europeans and creating the intercultural European identity is almost unstudied. In that context, this paper deals with the importance of researching the impact of the ERASMUS+ programme on students' intercultural competence development, as a focal research problem.

2. Materials and Methods

Whether the participation in student exchange programmes within the European Union, following contemporary trends in youth mobility and intercultural politics of the EU, impacts the development of intercultural competence among the participating students, is the main research question of this paper. The main research goal was to identify the influence of student participation in exchange programmes, such as ERASMUS+, on their intercultural competence by comparing the development level of students who participated and those who did not participate in these programmes. The research hypothesis was that the students who participated in exchange programmes would have had a significantly more developed intercultural competence.

Following the research question, the main goal and set hypothesis, the research has been designed using a quantitative methodological framework. Survey has been chosen as the main research method. A structured questionnaire has been used as a research instrument. This allowed for a more straight-forward comparison. Data was collected during summer 2019 (July – September). Protocol was approved by the Ethics Committee of Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Split (Class: 003-08/19-03/0002 Ref. No.:

2181-190-02-7/2-19-0018). The aim of the questionnaire was to investigate the students' familiarity with interculturalism, their understanding of the concept and the level of development of students' intercultural competence. The questionnaire gathered data on participants' intercultural competence along with sociodemographic data. A survey conducted by Piršl et al. [13] in 2009 and published in 2016 was used in our operationalization processes to structure the questionnaire regarding variables relating to intercultural competence.

The survey was conducted on-line using convenience sampling. The internet survey platform 1KA was used for gathering data. 1KA is an open-source application for online surveys. The software was developed at the Centre for Social Informatics, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana. The University of Ljubljana is also the formal owner or the address of the corresponding intellectual property. The link for the participation in the research was sent to potential respondents via e-mail.

Total sample for this research was 124 participants ($N_{\Sigma}=124$, $N_1=35$ participated in ERASMUS mobility programme, and $N_2=89$ did not), of whom the majority were female (80.6%) and the minority were male (17.7%), with less than 2% identified as gender neutral. In relation to the age group, 40.3% of the participants fell between the ages of 21 and 23, 33.9% between 18 and 20 years of age, and 20.1% between 24 and 26, while 5.7% were 27 years of age or older. Additionally, more than half (51.6%) of the participants claimed that they lived in a large city and a third (30.7%) in a smaller city, while 11.3% lived in a village and 6.4% on an island. Results show that a little over 70% of the sample claimed that they belonged to the middle class, 16% to the lower class and 6.5% to the upper class. 7.25% of the sample could not assess their social-economic status.

Furthermore, 40% of the sample declared themselves as apolitical, while 18.5% were more left-oriented with additional 15% of strictly left-oriented participants. On the other hand, close to 13% of the participants declared themselves as more right, with additional 8% strictly right. Also, close to 5% of the participants classified themselves as centre. This proportion, or rather, disproportion, shows that young people participating in the research were mostly not interested in politics, or if they were, they were mostly left-oriented. Considering that contemporary left-oriented political options in Europe strongly promote the paradigm of acceptance of diversity and interculturalism, the fact that a large portion of the sample that are politically engaged declared themselves as left-oriented is self-explanatory, regarding the aims and goals that postulate ERASMUS+ as a programme.

In an aspiration to get the more complete picture of the sample, the participants were asked to assess the importance of national affiliation and patriotism for their personal identity. In this context, 46% of the sample stated that national affiliation and patriotism were not important parts of their personal identity, with the additional 40%

stated that these were partially important to them. Portion of the sample who stated that national affiliation and patriotism were extremely important was 10.5%, while 3.5% of the sample could not assess the importance of national affiliation and patriotism for their personal identity. More than half (55.6%) of the participants classified themselves as Roman Catholics, while a third (33.9%) stated that they were non-believers, 4.8% were orthodox, and 0.8% were following Judaism, while 4.8% of the participants declared themselves as 'other'.

By nationality, 85.5% of the participants identified themselves as Croats, while having Croatian citizenship. Furthermore, 9.7% of the sample stated that they had Serbian citizenships, but 8% stated that they were Serbs by nationality. Less than 1% (0.8%) stated that they were Slovenes, Israeli or Polish by nationality and had Slovene, Israel, or Polish citizenship. In addition, 1.6% stated that they had Greek citizenship and nationality. The same percentage of the sample classified themselves as Yugoslavs. A small portion of the sample, 0.9%, did not provide an answer about their nationality.

In analysing the collected data, there was no significant statistical difference found between the students who participated and the students who did not participate in the ERASMUS+ mobility programme, except in a smaller number of indicators. The hypothesis was tested using Mann-Whitney U test for the independent samples because the distribution within variables did not show parametric properties. The distribution was tested using Kolmogorov–Smirnov test. Significance in all variables in both samples was $p < 0.05$ – data distribution was significantly different from the expected normal distribution.

It is important to point out that statistically significant difference found in some indicators does not point to any specific conclusion regarding the impact of participation in an exchange programme on students' intercultural competence because the research does not account for other independent variables that are likely to play a role. The research methodology was based on the presumption that only finding a significant difference on the level of a variable, not specific indicators, would be the basis to conclude that the participation within an exchange programme would have had an impact on these differences and, therefore, the development of intercultural competence of students participating in a programme.

The first variable tested was the familiarisation with the concept/term of interculturalism. Results are shown in Table 1.

Considering that there is no statistically significant difference between the two samples, it is possible to conclude that both groups of students have a similar level of familiarisation with the concept of interculturalism. Moreover, both groups of students show high levels of familiarisation with the concept of interculturalism. Average variable grade was close to 4 (on a 5 level Likert scale) for both groups. The highest rated indicators are the ones close to the real meaning of interculturalism. Tolerance of diversity, active cooperation of two or more cultures and accepting and respecting diversity are much more inclusive statements than the others listed in Table 1. This is conclusive among both groups and is indicative of their value stance regarding different political and/or practical approaches to managing and living in a multicultural society.

Table 1. Averages of familiarisation with the term of interculturalism

Term interculturalism	students who participated	students who did not participate	Mann-Whitney U	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)
existence of different cultures on a territory	3,8000	3,7640	1495,000	0,702
tolerance of diversity	4,2571	4,3371	1524,500	0,839
active cooperation of two or more cultures in every field of life	4,3714	4,2809	1437,000	0,449
accepting and respecting diversity	4,5429	4,4382	1480,000	0,624
adaptation of the cultural majority to cultural minorities	3,2000	3,1124	1510,500	0,785
assimilation of cultural minorities to the cultural majority	3,0000	2,8652	1508,000	0,776
Average:	3.86	3.79		

It is possible to presume that the lack of the statistically significant difference arises from the sample itself, in a way that the participants of the research were the people who (1) had intrinsic motivation for participating in the survey, or (2) the people who participated in the mobility programmes. That is, (1) the participants in the survey were probably the people who are familiar and, nonetheless, have interest in the topics of interculturalism; also, the same implication is valid for mobility programmes: people who participated in the research are (2) likely to be interested in mobility programme-related topics, because of their own experience in the very same way.

The next variable tested was related to the definition of the goals of intercultural education (Table 2).

Relating to the question about *which claims describe the interculturalism in the best way*, the results of the

descriptive analysis show that students from both samples have a high understanding of intercultural education (average score around 4 for both groups, using the same 5 level Likert scale). In this variable, statistically significant difference was detected in two out of 11 indicators designed to test participants' understanding of intercultural education. As hypothesised, the group that had participated in the exchange programmes had higher scores. The two indicators are (1) *respect and preservation of natural cultural heritage* and (2) *respect and preservation of European and the World's cultural heritage*. Nevertheless, even considering that a statistically significant difference was observed in some indicators, overall, it cannot be concluded that the difference arises from simply participating in an exchange programme, especially considering a very high level of understanding intercultural education goals among both groups.

Table 2. Averages of definition of the goals of intercultural education

Goals of intercultural education	students who participated	students who did not participate	Mann-Whitney U	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)
Knowledge and understanding the characteristics of the culture of <i>others</i> (norms, customs, values, languages, symbols, etc.)	4,4286	4,1910	1262,500	0,061
Development of the ability to understand and accept the cultural difference like values	4,3429	4,3483	1438,000	0,461
Development of the ability of communication with the culturally different other	4,4000	4,3034	1345,000	0,183
Awareness of stereotypes and prejudices about the culturally different other	4,2286	4,0449	1418,000	0,405
Development of the ability and the skill of critical self-reflection while interacting with the culturally different other	4,1429	4,0337	1402,500	0,351
Nonviolent way of solving the conflicts	4,3429	4,2247	1424,500	0,421
Respect and preservation of natural cultural heritage	4,3143	4,0787	1186,000	0,025
Respect and preservation of European and the World's cultural heritage	4,2857	4,0674	1219,500	0,045
Nurturing and feeling of solidarity toward the culturally different other	4,5429	4,3258	1295,500	0,103
Development of open, multicultural identity	4,2000	4,2472	1530,000	0,868
Promotion of sustainable development	3,8857	3,7640	1357,000	0,231
Average:	4.28	4.15		

Additionally, the last indicator – *promotion of sustainable development*, was the lowest rated by both groups. This could point to the same way of thinking about and understanding intercultural education not dependent on participation in an exchange programme, but on some other variable not accounted for.

The next variable was aimed towards evaluating intercultural awareness and mind-set of the students, which are predictors of intercultural competence development (Table 3). In this variable, statistically significant difference arises in one indicator.

There was no significant difference observed at the level of the variable. Levels of intercultural awareness between the two groups of research participants are overall the same. In that sense, it is possible to conclude that the mind-set of the participants does not depend upon experiencing participation in a student exchange programme.

Results presented in Table 3 point to a highly aware mind-set of students regarding discrimination and statuses of different social/cultural groups. Results for the first two indicators show that the participants are more interested in discrimination that would happen to a minority group

within the culture than the majority group. In addition, both groups of participants show an appreciation of cultural diversity within the society, as well as a specific understanding that the cultural majority should be more attentive towards the social status and hardship of cultural minorities. Both groups of participants, again, agree that more attention should be dedicated to more human relations between people than to cultural differences. Overall, both groups of participants show high levels of internalisation of values such as tolerance, inclusiveness, acceptance, cooperation and similarity. In other words, participants are highly sensitive and aware about struggles of minorities within a community and strongly believe that the dominant culture should be more inclusive and understanding. According to the research conducted by Mesić and Bagić [12] about the attitudes of Croatians towards cultural differences, the participants are less prone to cultural differences but at the same time, they are very open to a multicultural society. These two contrary findings on cultural differences are latently implying a discrimination level and orientation, firstly in terms of cultural (religion, nation) discrimination.

Table 3. Averages on intercultural awareness and mind-set of students

Claims for intercultural awareness and mind-set of students	students who participated	students who did not participate	Mann-Whitney U	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)
I'm not interested in discrimination which happened to a person who belongs to a cultural minority	2,0000	1,8652	1474,000	0,621
I'm slightly interested in discrimination which happened to a person who belongs to a cultural majority	2,2286	2,2809	1485,500	0,676
The world would function better if there were not so many different cultures	1,7143	1,8764	1333,000	0,180
In our country, too much attention is given to national minorities	2,2286	2,2584	1508,500	0,775
It's best to hang around with the members of your own culture	2,6286	2,9326	1331,000	0,190
Members of cultural minorities in my country should have better working and studying conditions	3,4286	3,7640	1332,500	0,181
Members of minorities in my country are not as approachable as members of the majority culture	2,6286	3,1348	1143,000	,015
The members of cultural minorities are more sensitive about discrimination made by the members of the cultural majority	3,7143	3,6517	1470,500	0,597
More attention should be dedicated to more human relations between people than to cultural differences	4,2286	4,4494	1365,000	0,236
Rapid technological development brought society to develop a unique global culture	3,2571	3,5843	1336,500	0,194

There was only one statistically significant difference observed using Mann-Whitney U test – the indicator regarding the cultural minorities in the context of prevalent culture. In the questionnaire, the respondents had to evaluate their agreement with the statement – *Members of minorities in my country are not as approachable as members of the majority culture. If hospitality comes from the culture from which people originate, as well as the individual’s personality traits, it is possible to observe the system of formal education as a fertile ground for empathy and tolerance development among the members of a cultural majority, as well as cultural minorities. It is important to find the referent points among the cultures, and the differences which arise from the cultures. Familiarisation with norms, values, and other patterns of a culture (minor and/or major) contributes to the development of intercultural competence; if students gain the knowledge about the cultures through intercultural context of learning, the latent product of this education could be the intercultural attitude development, as well as*

development of motivation for acceptance and respect of different cultures. Namely, people are biologically determined to fear the unknown, which is often the initiator of intercultural conflicts and aversions, as well as rejection of different ways of thinking, activities and emotions which can come from people who are culturally different. Gaining knowledge about other cultures, and the diversity in society in general, the educational system is an exceptional tool for intercultural competence development. The products of that education are competent individuals who are familiar with and respect other cultures, while having the positive relation towards their own culture. In this context, there are not majorities or minorities in a culture, and there are just different cultures equally valued, coexisting in social cohabitation.

The last tested variable is an addition to the previous question. It was oriented towards evaluating intercultural awareness and mind-set, which are the predictors of intercultural competence development among the students (Table 4).

Table 4. Averages on intercultural awareness and mind-set of students

Claims for intercultural awareness and mind-set of students	students who participated	students who did not participate	Mann-Whitney U	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)
Culture of a cultural minority should be respected by everybody.	4,0286	4,1461	1552,000	0,972
Insufficient language knowledge of a minority is the reason for misunderstanding in communication between the majority and minority	2,6000	2,9551	1212,000	0,043
I am aware of cultural differences which exist in my surroundings	4,1143	4,0787	1512,000	0,764
In interaction with a member of a cultural minority I change my behaviour so I could adjust to him/her better	2,9714	3,0337	1551,500	0,972
In interaction with a member of the cultural majority I change my behaviour so I could adjust to him/her better	2,7714	2,8764	1500,000	0,739
I am capable of seeing the problem from a cultural minority perspective	3,7429	3,4719	1268,000	0,071
I have a feeling that I am not a part of any culture	2,2286	2,4944	1256,000	0,074
It is hard for me to determine my own cultural identity since it is based on more cultures	2,2857	2,4719	1355,000	0,244
Based on the experience and knowledge about my culture, I can assess the situations in different cultures more easily	3,4857	3,4270	1505,000	0,747

Both groups of students strongly agree that the culture of cultural minorities should be respected by everybody. This finding can be explained through the models of intercultural competence. Even though the models are more relying on intercultural communicational competence, they can serve as an explanation starting point. Namely, the respectfulness and receptiveness towards cultural minorities arise from developmental models. Developmental models presume that, as examined by King and Baxter Magolda [5], interactions progress from ethnocentric understandings of other cultures to a more ethnorelative comprehension and appreciation. In this context, it is possible to say that the students from both groups in the sample are more prone to cultural relativism, or ethnorelativism, then ethnocentric orientation, which is a strong predictor for further intercultural competence development. Getting to know, understanding and the level of development of intercultural competence do not ask whether people should exist without belonging to a certain cultural community, but how they can live with their cultural others and at the same time belong to their own culture. Interestingly, there is only one statistically significant difference between the two groups of participants concerning the view about language obstacles as motives for possible misunderstanding between the majority and minority. Students that did not participate in an exchange programme are more likely to believe that language obstacles are the reason for misunderstandings in communication between the majority and minority. Even though other indicators do not show any significant difference between the two groups of research participants, this one could point to an effect of participating in an exchange programme in relation to personal experience of communicating with different cultures as an exchange student.

Overall, the research participants are mostly aware of cultural differences existing in their surroundings. The participants also claim that they do not change their behaviour in interaction with culturally different others, to an extent. They are more likely not to change their behaviour. Furthermore, the participants feel secure that they can see a problem from a cultural minority perspective, which can justify the presumption about shifting the perspective from ethnocentrism to cultural relativism. There is a slight difference in this question for the students who participated in a mobility programme. Namely, they claim that they can see the problem from the perspective of a cultural minority more than students who did not participate, arises from the experience of the students who participated in mobility programmes, since they probably were, at some point during their mobility, a cultural minority and could relate better to the topic. Since there was no statistically significant difference, this cannot be taken any further. Both groups of the students believe that they belong to some culture, and they don't have any issues with determining their own cultural identity, which

confirms the strength of their cultural identity. Furthermore, they find that they can easily assess the situations in a culture of others, based on the knowledge of their own culture. The general conclusion on the mind-set and awareness of interculturalism among the students participating in the research is that there is no major difference among those students who participated in mobility programmes and those who did not. However, there are some slight differences in intercultural awareness and mind-set in favour of both groups, depending on the matter of discussion.

The conclusion that arises from the data analysis is that there is no difference in intercultural competence among the students who participated and the students who did not participate in mobility programmes, and this does not confirm our starting hypothesis.

However, the results of an action-evaluation research conducted on a youth mobility exchange project BeAlive in 2014, using an experimental approach in evaluating, among other variables, the level of internalisation of the values such as tolerance, multiculturalism, self-actualisation and similarity, show that participating in a short-term youth exchange programme within ERASMUS+ KA1 projects³ in a multicultural environment can start the internalisation process of intercultural competence [18].

Spetič points out that within this research, measuring levels of agreement with certain attitudes and testing for change, an increase was observed in certain variables, especially around multiculturalism, but partly also in the areas of tolerance and work on oneself. This indicates that the project at hand had succeeded in creating an environment in which participants had the opportunity to learn, understand and accept certain principles, to some extent [18].

It is important to note that the project dimensions concerning these variables were observed in the context of the political paradigm, like our own research, in accordance with the description and objectives of the evaluated project. The project envisaged the internalisation of certain principles, not in the context of new cultural-anthropological paradigms (such as transculturalism), but in the existing light of political and social trends [18].

Furthermore, this research was designed as action-evaluation research using a structured questionnaire

³ Youth Exchanges allow groups of young people from at least two different countries to meet and live together for up to 21 days. During the youth exchange, participants, with the support of the group leader, jointly implement a work programme (combination of workshops, exercises, discussions, role-plays, simulations, outdoor activities, etc.) that they designed and prepared before the exchange. Youth exchanges enable young people to develop competencies, become aware of socially important topics / thematic areas, discover new cultures, habits and ways of life, mainly through collaborative learning, strengthen values such as solidarity, democracy, friendship, etc. https://ec.europa.eu/programs/erasmus-plus/program-guide/part-b/three-key-actions/key-action-1/mobility-project-for-young-people-and-youth-workers_hr (accessed December 14, 2020).

operationalized from the goals of the educational programme of the short-term youth exchange project (ERASMUS+ KA1 projects), which means that the same questionnaire was given at the beginning and at the end of the programme to the same participants [18].

These differences in results and research approaches, as well as structures of researched educational programmes, open up a discussion about the methodological framework for designing research aimed at measuring development of intercultural competence in light of the rising number and popularity of European exchange programmes, as well as discussion on whether to include intercultural modules as an integrated part in student exchange programmes in order to better facilitate the internalisation of goal values and the development of intercultural competence.

Therefore, it is important to highlight two possible limitations of our research as well. Namely, the major limitation of the research was the usage of transversal approach. The result could be different with applying a longitudinal approach in which the students participating in a mobility programme should be initially tested before the participation, transitionally tested while participating and finally tested after they finish with the participation. This approach allows for more significant data and a more complete picture on intercultural competence development among students participating in the programme. Furthermore, the second possible limitation of the research was in sampling. There is evidence that the sample represents respondents who had an intrinsic motivation in participation in this very research. There is a possibility that the respondents are already engaged in the topic of interculturalism, as well as intercultural competence for that matter, or a mobility programme itself. That can explain the absence of any major statistically significant difference among the independent samples of the research. However, using a control group (students and individuals that have not participated in exchange programmes) is equally important.

3. Conclusions

The goal of this research was to establish if participating in long-term student exchange mobility programmes effects a stronger development of intercultural competence. Investigation and research in the field of intercultural education and impact of mobility programmes on the intercultural competence development are a fertile ground for various methodological and theoretical approaches. The results of the conducted research imply there is no statistically significant difference in intercultural competence development among the students who participated and who did not participate in the mobility programme. However, the research results show that while participating in mobility programmes of different forms, students are affected in different ways. Long-term student exchange mobility programmes allow for a more

self-oriented development regarding their own skills, while participation in short-term mobility activities, such as Erasmus KA1 youth mobility programmes, effects the development of intercultural competence to a greater extent. Short-term programmes are more overwhelming and encompassing and that could result in creating an atmosphere for greater internalization of intercultural competence, as shown when comparing the findings of this research with similar research conducted previously on youth participating in short-term mobility activities.

The methodological limits discovered in this research have a more important role than the findings regarding the main goal of the research. Comparing the levels of the development of intercultural competence among two different groups, one participating and one not participating in a mobility programme regarding the development of intercultural competence do not allow for investigation of the difference between the starting point and the end point of one person's development. The methodological approach does not consider and cannot control other variables that could correlate to the level of development of intercultural competence. For that reason, the methodological limitations discovered in this research are considered as the main obstacle regarding the result. The results encourage opening space for possible research in this field by using the longitudinal approach with action-evaluation strategy, rather than transversal approach. Also, the mentioned intrinsic motivation for participation in the research that arises from the interest in the topic could be avoided by using other titles for the research that do not imply the content at the very beginning, in that way, a more diverse sample could be interrogated, and more diverse data could be collected. A sampling method should be developed further, as well.

Regardless of the results of the research, the intercultural competence development should remain one of the major goals of contemporary education, and participation in mobility programmes, as a perspective of mutual cultural learning and transmission should be strongly supported. Intercultural competence in contemporary society should be seen as equivalent by its importance to basic competences in reading, writing and others, because the society is becoming more and more culturally diverse, and many different cultures are likely to engage in everyday interactions which could not even be imagined just a few years ago. The enhancement of interculturalism in the world must be viewed within the context of processes of globalisation which highly influence everyday life. For that very purpose, for people to be competent in participation in the complexity of contemporary social interactions, the implementation of intercultural education should be more strongly supported in educational systems. The paper is ultimately guided by one question: how can people live together while seeing their cultural others as a way of self-affirmation?

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