



THE CURRENT SITUATION OF THE INTERNATIONALIZATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN EUROPE

**CASE OF TÜRKİYE, BELGIUM, BULGARIA,
CZECH REPUBLIC, ROMANIA AND SPAIN**

2023

Mehmet Emin BAKAY



Co-funded by
the European Union



İzmir Kâtip Çelebi Üniversitesi Yayın No: 39

Bu eserin, İzmir Kâtip Çelebi Üniversitesi Yönetim Kurulu'nun 25.10.2023 tarih ve 2023-36 sayılı toplantısında alınan 02. kararı uyarınca, elektronik kitap olarak yayımlanmasına karar verilmiştir.

Her hakkı saklıdır.

© İzmir Kâtip Çelebi Üniversitesi Yayınları
2023

Sertifika No: 46629

Editör: Mehmet Emin BAKAY

ISBN: 978-605-72469-6-7

The Current Situation of the Internationalization of Higher Education Institutions In Europe: Case of Türkiye, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Romania and Spain / Editör: Mehmet Emin Bakay.-- İzmir : İzmir Kâtip Çelebi Üniversitesi, 2023.
Çevrimiçi (119 sayfa : grafik, şekil). -- (İzmir Kâtip Çelebi Üniversitesi; Yayın No: 39)
E-ISBN: 978-605-72469-6-7

1. Yükseköğretim - Avrupa – 2. Eğitim – Avrupa – 3. Higher education - Europe – 4.
Education - Europe
I. Bakay, Mehmet Emin

Adres : İzmir Kâtip Çelebi Üniversitesi Rektörlüğü, Balatçık Yerleşkesi, 35620 Çiğli
İzmir, Türkiye

Telefon : +90 232 329 3535 / 1255

E-posta : ykb@ikc.edu.tr

Belge-geçer : +90 232 386 0888

Web : ykb.ikc.edu.tr

Eserin hukuki ve etik sorumluluğu yazarlara aittir. Tüm hakları saklıdır. Bu kitabın yayın hakkı İzmir Kâtip Çelebi Üniversitesi'ne aittir. İzinsiz kopyalanamaz ve çoğaltılamaz.

THE CURRENT SITUATION OF THE INTERNATIONALIZATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN EUROPE

CASE OF TÜRKİYE, BELGIUM, BULGARIA, CZECH REPUBLIC, ROMANIA, AND SPAIN

Editorial Board: Mehmet Emin Bakay, Ph.D.

Review: Assoc. Prof. Dr. İrem Özgören Kınlı

Book Cover: Güldan Kalem

Publisher: Izmir Kâtip Celebi University

Issue: E-Book

Edition: First, 2023

This publication is not for sale.

ISBN: 978-605-72469-6-7

The Project Partnership

- ✓ İzmir Katip Çelebi University, Türkiye (Coordinator)
- ✓ HoGent, Belgium
- ✓ Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski, Bulgaria
- ✓ Czech University of Life Sciences Prague, Czech Republic
- ✓ Transilvania University of Brasov, Romania
- ✓ San Jorge University, Zaragoza, Spain
- ✓ Yasar University, Türkiye
- ✓ Yıldız Technical University, Turk

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>THE CURRENT SITUATION OF THE INTERNATIONALIZATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN TÜRKİYE</i>	
Abstract.....	1
Introduction	2
Literature Review	3
Internationalisation in Turkish Higher Education (2022-2023)	3
Higher Education Statistics in Türkiye	5
Methodology.....	6
Findings.....	6
Academic Staff Experience.....	6
Student Perspective	13
Conclusion	20
References.....	22
Appendices.....	25
<i>THE CURRENT SITUATION OF THE INTERNATIONALIZATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN BELGIUM/FLEMISH COMMUNITY</i>	
Abstract.....	37
Higher education in Flanders and internationalization	37
Strategy and policy	38
Models to think about multicultural communication	39
Methodology.....	40
Findings.....	42
Language	42
Cultural differences.....	43

Challenges for students/teachers.....	44
Adaptations.....	45
Racism.....	45
Essential skills.....	45
Support for students and teachers.....	45
Conclusion.....	46
References.....	46
<i>THE CURRENT SITUATION OF THE INTERNATIONALIZATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN BULGARIA.....</i>	<i>49</i>
Abstract.....	49
Introduction.....	50
A short description of the national higher education system in Bulgaria.....	50
National policies for the internationalization of higher education.....	52
HEI admission procedures for International students.....	53
Overview of the academic literature.....	55
Methodology.....	56
Findings.....	59
Academic staff experience.....	59
Student perspective.....	63
Discussion.....	65
General evaluation and conclusions.....	66
References.....	67
<i>THE CURRENT SITUATION OF THE INTERNATIONALIZATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN CZECH REPUBLIC.....</i>	<i>68</i>
Abstract.....	68
Introduction.....	68

Literature review	69
Methodology	72
Findings	76
Academic staff experience	76
Student perspective	79
Discussion	82
Conclusion	83
References	84
<i>THE CURRENT SITUATION OF THE INTERNATIONALIZATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN ROMANIA</i>	85
Abstract	85
Introduction	85
Methodology	90
Findings concerning research questions	90
Data Analysis for the Students' Interviews	91
Data Analysis for the Teaching Staff Interviews	95
General evaluation and conclusions	99
Annex 1: Transilvania University of Brasov, Erasmus policy statement	100
References	102
<i>THE CURRENT SITUATION OF THE INTERNATIONALIZATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN SPAIN</i>	103
Abstract	103
Introduction: Description of the Spanish national higher education.	103
National policies for the internationalization of higher education.	104

A quantitative picture of internationalization: number /percentage of international students in the national higher education system.....	105
Summary of research and report results of National and International organizations concerning the internalization of national HEI's.....	107
Methodology.....	110
Findings.....	111
Academic Staff Experience.....	111
Student Perspective.....	113
Conclusions.....	115
References.....	115
<i>ANNEXES.....</i>	<i>117</i>
Annex 1. Consent Form.....	117
Annex 2. Questions for Lecturers.....	117
Annex 3. Questions for Students.....	119

EDITOR'S FOREWORD

As the editor of this book, I am honored to present the output of Multicultural Classrooms: Inclusive Learning and Teaching in Higher Education Erasmus+ project. This project, set against the ever-evolving landscape of higher education, stands as a guiding light for academic exploration. It underscores our collective commitment to understanding and promoting diversity within educational settings.

In a world that's more interconnected than ever, multicultural classrooms are not just a part of higher education; they are at its very core. This project takes us on a journey across several European countries, including Türkiye, Belgium, Romania, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, and Spain, to explore the experiences and challenges faced by both students and faculty in these diverse classrooms.

The main goal is to understand these educational environments and come up with recommendations for improvement. We've engaged with 80 participants, including students and faculty, and used interviews to gather insights that have led to valuable recommendations.

This book, featuring six national reports, offers unique perspectives on multicultural classrooms, contributing to a comprehensive view of European education. It's a valuable resource for those who care about the future of higher education and the power of diversity.

As you embark on this exploration, remember that you're part of an ongoing dialogue shaping the path of higher education. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to the chapter writers for their invaluable contributions. Enjoy the journey!

Mehmet Emin BAKAY

THE CURRENT SITUATION OF THE INTERNATIONALIZATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN TÜRKİYE

İrem Özgören Kınlı - Mehmet Emin Bakay (Izmir Katip Çelebi University)

Güldan Kalem (Yaşar University)

Aydın Balyer (Yıldız Technical University)

Abstract

This comprehensive national report seeks to assess Türkiye's current state of multicultural classrooms. The evaluation is grounded in a qualitative examination of 15 interviews conducted with lecturers and international students affiliated with IKCU, Yasar, and YTU. The students' feedback predominantly conveys a positive sentiment, underscoring the numerous advantages of enhancing language skills, engaging in cultural exchange, and being exposed to diverse perspectives. They aptly recognize the benefits of studying in a multicultural environment, encompassing personal and academic development, networking opportunities, and the acquisition of language proficiency. However, besides these advantages, the students highlight various challenges, including language barriers, improved support systems and inclusive policies, and disparities in language proficiency among professors. While acknowledging the support and adaptability demonstrated by their teachers, the students express an amplified need for additional support and guidance from their educational institutions. To address this need, they propose the comprehensive dissemination of information through official websites and the creation of customized booklets or guidebooks to cater to potential challenges. Furthermore, they recommend enhancing orientation programs and providing assistance during the initial weeks of students' arrival to facilitate a seamless transition.

The students emphasise the value of social interaction beyond the confines of formal classroom settings, advocating for the integration of social events and excursions to foster a sense of community among students from diverse cultural backgrounds. Furthermore, they recommended integrating technological tools and interactive pedagogical approaches within the classroom to promote student engagement and self-expression. While there were variations in support mechanisms across universities, the findings underscored the importance of cultivating an inclusive and supportive academic environment for international students. However, it was observed that Turkish universities lack a comprehensive institutionalised support mechanism tailored to meet international students' distinctive needs in multicultural classrooms.

The lecturers expressed their goal of creating inclusive learning environments that foster open dialogues and promote intercultural competence. They highlighted their challenges related to language barriers, cultural interpretations, and the adaptation of teaching materials. The presence of international students was recognized as advantageous for academic performance and personal development. Some lecturers suggested enhancing their understanding of different cultures through mandatory observation periods abroad and

participation in exchange programs. They emphasised adopting a dynamic teaching approach that values diversity, addresses individual needs, and adapts instructional methods to accommodate diverse learning styles.

Introduction

The rapid change in the world affects not only the economy but also the education system. The number of foreign students in higher education increases due to exchange programs such as Erasmus and Mevlana. Moreover, the scholarships provided by governments, online learning courses offered by universities and finally increasing the number of refugees and asylum seekers are other factors that increase the number of international students with different religions, languages, cultures, and ethnic backgrounds. Besides, the current rise of immigration in Europe has increased due to multiple factors, and the number of people residing in Europe with the citizenship of a non-EU member country, on 1 January 2016, was 20.7 million, representing 4.1 % of the European population (European Commission, 2017). Jacques Delors, in 1997, affirmed that education and our students face the following challenges: economic, technological, and intercultural. Considering the next years, the number of mobilities in the Erasmus+ program will increase 3 times up to 12 000 000 in the EU is proof that all classrooms will become multicultural settings more than ever. To cope with this situation and provide an effective, high-quality, inclusive, and multicultural education the key factor is the “teaching staff” at the universities.

This comprehensive report, prepared for the "MULTICLASS - Multicultural Classrooms: Inclusive Learning and Teaching in Higher Education" project, aims to assess the current state of multicultural classrooms in Türkiye based on interviews with lecturers and students of three partner universities in the project.

The MULTICLASS Project delves into critical research inquiries about diversity and multiculturalism within European higher education. Its primary goal is to enhance European higher education’s quality and multifaceted nature. The project embarks on a multidimensional investigation encompassing three key dimensions to achieve this objective. Firstly, it explores the experiences of international students studying in European higher education institutions, specifically focusing on their encounters with diversity and multiculturalism. Secondly, it examines the perceptions and attitudes of teaching staff towards managing classrooms characterised by diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds within these institutions. Thirdly, it meticulously examines the challenges and barriers international students and teaching staff face in promoting diversity and multiculturalism within the European higher education landscape.

This national report evaluates the effectiveness of training and support mechanisms for teaching staff to effectively manage diverse and multicultural classrooms. In addition, the report endeavours to identify strategies to promote diversity and multiculturalism within higher education throughout Europe, with a particular emphasis on exploring the potential integration of these strategies into training curricula and teaching materials.

The methodological approach adopted in this national report entails a literature review on internationalisation efforts within Turkish higher education. The literature review presents the internationalisation trends in Turkish Higher Education System. In addition, the semi-structured qualitative interviews aim to gather inclusive data on the current state of multicultural classrooms in Türkiye. These interviews involved the participation of 15 international students and 15 teaching staff members from IKCU, YTU, and Yasar University in Türkiye.

Finally, this national report presents the findings of these interviews, summarising the results obtained, including the emergent themes derived from the content analysis. These findings aim to foster a more profound comprehension of multicultural classrooms within Turkish higher education, ultimately informing the development of effective strategies to promote diversity and multiculturalism within higher education institutions.

Literature Review

Internationalisation in Turkish Higher Education (2022-2023)

Globalisation gained widespread acceptance in the late 20th century, encompassing both the global arena and Türkiye. Technological advancements, particularly in communication technologies, have played a vital role in facilitating this phenomenon (Knight, 2008 & 1999). Different terms, such as localisation, Europeanisation, liberalisation, and internationalisation, have been deliberated by scholars during this period, influencing various aspects of community life. However, internationalisation has mainly impacted higher education (Erdem, 2012). The definition and understanding of internationalisation vary among scholars, as Knight points out, stating that "internationalisation" is interpreted and used differently across countries and stakeholders (Knight, 2008, p. 17).

In contrast to globalisation, the concept of internationalisation holds distinct characteristics. Yang (2002) explains that "internationalisation" and "globalisation" are often used interchangeably in academic circles and are frequently confused in practical terms. Globalisation, in its broadest sense, refers to social processes that transcend national borders. Knight (1999) also acknowledges that the distinction between internationalisation and the globalisation of higher education is a subject of controversy and ongoing debate in higher education circles. In summary, globalisation is a phenomenon that emerged in the 1980s and 90s and affects various aspects of society, including educators (Knight, 1999).

The impact of globalisation on higher education is substantial, as it has created increased interest and opportunities for graduates employed by multinational companies in the globalized marketplace and economy (Knight, 1999). Kehm (2003) suggests that when globalisation entered the European higher education landscape, institutional leaders perceived internationalisation as the response of higher education to economic globalisation, highlighting the distinction between these two concepts. Globalisation promoted

competition rather than cooperation, emphasising financial gains over free exchanges (Kehm, 2003). Knight's perspective on this matter complements Kehm's, as she asserts that internationalisation is based on the relationships, involvement, and intercultural dimensions among people, cultures, and systems of different nations. Knight (1999) further concludes that internationalisation can be defined as the process of integrating an international or intercultural dimension into the teaching, research, and service functions of an institution (Knight, 2003).

However, the concept of internationalisation remains ambiguous, with various interpretations. For some, it encompasses international activities such as academic mobility for students and teachers, international linkages, partnerships, projects, and the development of new international academic programs and research initiatives (Knight, 2008, p. 12-13). Others perceive it as delivering education to other countries using different methods, including face-to-face and distance learning techniques, and establishing branch campuses or franchises (Knight, 2008, p. 14-15). Additionally, internationalisation is often associated with integrating an international, intercultural, and global dimension into the curriculum and teaching-learning process (Knight, 2008). De Wit & Callan (1995) define internationalisation as a complex set of processes that collectively enhance the international dimension of the higher education experience in universities and similar institutions.

Knight (1995) notes that universities and higher education institutions in Canada and worldwide are currently undergoing internationalisation processes. These efforts encompass a range of activities, programs, and policies aimed at incorporating an international dimension into research, teaching, and service activities. The objective is to enable the academic community to develop a deep understanding and appreciation of the interdependence among nations and to prepare faculty, staff, and students to function effectively in an international and intercultural context (Knight, 1995, p. 7-8).

In the 21st century, internationalisation has gained recognition and respect due to the systematic collection of educational statistics and the widespread prevalence of student mobility, commonly used as an indicator of internationalisation (Aba, 2013).

The inception of the Bologna Process in 1999 significantly influenced the internationalisation of European higher education. The Bologna Process is an intergovernmental reform initiative involving 49 European countries and several European organisations, including the European University Association (EUA). Its primary goal is to improve the quality and recognition of European higher education systems, as well as to enhance exchange and collaboration within Europe and internationally (EUA, June 24, 2019). This process has substantially contributed to internationalisation and student mobility globally (Aba, 2013). Although some Europeans tend to equate internationalisation with student mobility, primarily due to the attention given to programs like Erasmus, the internationalisation of universities in Europe encompasses various activities, including joint study programs, collaborative research projects, curriculum development, and technical assistance (de Wit & Callan, 1995).

Furthermore, student mobility, mainly through exchange programs, is an indicator for assessing the extent of mobility (Fındık, 2016). The introduction of the Erasmus program in 1987 has significantly contributed to the widespread expansion of student mobility (Rivza & Teichler, 2007). Apart from Erasmus, Türkiye also offers two other exchange programs in higher education. The Farabi exchange program allows students and academic members to continue their educational activities at a different national higher education institution for one or two terms. In comparison, the Mevlana exchange program facilitates student and academic personnel exchanges between higher education institutions inside and outside Türkiye (Fındık, 2016).

Higher Education Statistics in Türkiye

Turkish higher education statistics play a crucial role in understanding the development and student population of the sector. The summarized data on the number of students in Turkish universities for the academic year 2022-2023 can be found in Table 1 (refer to Appendix).

According to Table 1, Türkiye has a total of 129 public universities, 75 foundation universities, and four vocational training schools. The combined number of students enrolled in both public and foundation universities is 6,950,142. These universities are supported by a highly motivated academic staff.

The number of teaching staff members in Turkish universities is presented in Table 2 (see Appendix). The total count of teaching staff employed in higher education institutions in Türkiye is 185,121. Among them, 155,321 work in public universities, while 29,546 work in foundation universities. The ratio of academic staff to students in Türkiye is 23, whereas it is 15 in OECD countries.

In this dynamic and ever-changing world, the influx of international students to Turkish higher education has been on the rise due to the impact of internationalisation and globalisation. Türkiye has emerged as one of the top destinations hosting a significant number of international students, accounting for 4.34% of the total student population in 2023. The total enrollment of international students in Turkish universities for the academic year 2022-2023 is 301,694, comprising 179,670 males and 122,024 females.

Methodology

The interview questions were collaboratively developed and approved by the Multiclass consortium. For the teaching staff, the questionnaire consisted of 20 questions distributed across five sections: Individual experiences and approaches (10 questions), benefits (2 questions), challenges (2 questions), mechanisms (3 questions), and needs (3 questions). The student questionnaire comprised 14 questions, which were categorised into five sections: Individual experiences and approaches (6 questions), benefits (2 questions), challenges (2 questions), mechanisms (2 questions), and needs (2 questions).

The data were collected at IKCU, YTU and Yasar University. Data collection was based on semi-structured interviews. These interviews involved the participation of 15 international students and 15 teaching staff members from IKCU, YTU, and Yasar University in Türkiye. Interviews were audio-recorded with taking consent from participants. The interviews usually took around 40-45 minutes. While Table 3 shows the socio-demographic characteristics of interviewed students, Table 4 presents the socio-demographic characteristics of the interviewed academic staff (See Table 3 and Table 4 in the appendix).

During the interviews, interviewees' rights, privacy, and confidentiality were ensured, and all participants signed informed consent. The collected data were transcribed in English. Data were coded with MAXQDA and categorised based on themes emerging from the data. Data were analysed using qualitative methods.

Findings

Academic Staff Experience

Individual experience and approaches

All the interviewed faculty members from IKCU, YTU and Yasar emphasised their extensive experience in multicultural classrooms, highlighting their profound motivation and favourable disposition towards imparting education in such diverse settings. Furthermore, they consistently stressed the significance of comprehending the distinctive dynamics intrinsic to various cultures to facilitate students' comprehension of the subject matter and foster their active engagement within the classroom environment.

The lecturers accentuate the imperative of establishing an inclusive and pleasant pedagogical milieu conducive to fostering open dialogues with students. They underscore the utmost value of cultivating intercultural competence, encompassing active listening, non-judgmental acceptance, and a genuine appreciation of cultural variances. The presence of international students is advantageous, as it bestows upon students a unique and authentic vantage point, exposing them to novel concepts and stimulating the reassessment of their preconceived notions.

The conducted interviews further acknowledge the multifaceted challenges encountered within multicultural classrooms. Initial obstacles encompass language barriers and divergent student behavioural patterns. Cultural interpretations and discrepancies necessitate self-regulation and meticulous communication strategies. A profound comprehension of the host country's social structure, customs, and educational system is a prerequisite for effective pedagogy. Teaching within a multicultural milieu may entail bridging the perceptual divide between students and instructors, stemming from disparities in authority dynamics and a proclivity for deference rather than active questioning.

The imperative of adapting teaching materials, examples, and pedagogical approaches to encompass diverse cultural perspectives is underscored. Incorporating a comprehensive knowledge base and global illustrations into instructional practices is a significant challenge. Lecturers employ various strategies, including storytelling techniques, involving students through their cultural backgrounds, and modifying examples to enhance the relevance of instructional content. Furthermore, lecturers express the need for empathy, patience, and differentiated approaches to ensure students' active engagement and comprehensive understanding.

The interviews also address the advantages inherent in multicultural classrooms. It is posited that the presence of international students positively influences Turkish students' academic performance and motivation, as they bear witness to the endeavours of their foreign counterparts. Exposure to many cultural perspectives catalyses personal maturation, intellectual advancement, and the cultivation of global consciousness. Students from diverse cultural backgrounds enrich the educational experience, engender a sense of fulfilment, and spark inspiration for novel avenues of research.

The interviews also address the issue of language proficiency and its influence on classroom dynamics. Several educators acknowledge the necessity of adapting language and employing multiple linguistic mediums, including Turkish, to convey concepts effectively. However, using English as the primary instructional language is perceived to have a beneficial effect, ensuring equitable inclusion of all students. Nonetheless, it is recognised that the language proficiency of international students may vary, necessitating adaptations to ensure comprehension and active engagement.

The interviews reveal that the inclusion of international students does not impose substantial alterations to the curriculum. Nevertheless, endeavours are undertaken to enhance inclusivity within the curriculum and acknowledge the global character of the campus. In addition, the lecturers demonstrate their commitment to ongoing development, remaining up-to-date with current trends, and modifying instructional materials to accommodate diverse cultural contexts.

The interviews further illuminate the positive encounters and intrinsic gratification experienced by lecturers who teach in multicultural classrooms. They express delight and a

profound sense of fulfilment in witnessing the achievements and assisting students in surmounting obstacles. The presence of international students is highly esteemed, and lecturers acknowledge and value the distinctive perspectives and cultural interchange they contribute.

The lecturers at Yasar emphasise the importance of exercising self-censorship and engaging in careful communication to navigate cultural interpretations, specifically about freedom of expression. Regarding integrating cultural elements, the lecturers at Yasar underscore their ability to incorporate Turkish cultural aspects into their teaching practices, which elicits astonishment among their students. Furthermore, the lecturers from Yasar and IKCU discuss specific institutional challenges they have encountered. Finally, lecturers at IKCU mention the necessity of modifying the English curriculum to align with the international character of the campus.

Language proficiency and its impact on the academic level of international students are topics discussed by the lecturers at YU. They acknowledge that international students may have slightly lower academic levels than Turkish students due to not taking standard entrance exams. Moreover, they emphasise the significance of providing references and support to international students in pursuing job opportunities.

Overall, the lecturers from IKCU, YU, and Yasar share several common perspectives and viewpoints, which can be outlined as follows:

Firstly, there is a prevailing positive sentiment among lecturers towards teaching in multicultural classrooms. They universally acknowledge the advantages of cultural diversity and hold in high regard the distinct perspectives and experiences that students from various backgrounds contribute to the educational milieu.

Secondly, a shared emphasis is on establishing an inclusive and hospitable learning environment. The lecturers underline the necessity for open dialogues, acceptance of divergent viewpoints, and cultivating a relaxed atmosphere that encourages students to express themselves freely.

Lastly, the lecturers from all three institutions in Türkiye recognise the significance of adapting their instructional methodologies to cater to the needs of students from diverse cultural contexts. They explicitly acknowledge the need to accommodate different cognitive approaches and learning styles while adjusting instructional materials, examples, and pedagogical strategies to ensure inclusivity and active student engagement.

The findings of this section are presented in the form of a MAXQDA map (See figure 1 in the appendix)

Benefits

Based on the interviews made with IKCU, YTU and Yasar, there are numerous opportunities and benefits experienced by lecturers in teaching multicultural classrooms. These encompass motivation and self-evaluation, foreign language proficiency, cultural learning, intercultural competence development, empathy cultivation, appreciation for diversity, promotion of tolerance and respect, enhancement of critical thinking skills, broadening of world understanding, adaptability in teaching approaches, exposure to valuable learning opportunities, insights into sociocultural landscapes, personal fulfilment, joy, intellectual benefits, exposure to exciting perspectives, acknowledgement of multicultural students, communication and contact, one-on-one learning experiences, understanding working conditions in different countries, multidimensional perspectives, increased general knowledge, cultural exchange, language practice, friendship building, the need for further explanations and perspectives, increased utilisation of the English language, performance elevation, and positive effects on students.

These findings highlight the multifaceted advantages lecturers encounter in multicultural classrooms. By engaging with diverse student populations, lecturers are motivated to introspect and evaluate their teaching methods, resulting in personal growth and increased satisfaction.

Lecturers establish a supportive and inclusive learning environment by demonstrating knowledge and understanding of their students' cultures. One-on-one interactions with students further facilitate personalised learning experiences and provide opportunities for deeper understanding and friendship building.

Overall, teaching in multicultural classrooms encourages lecturers to provide different explanations and perspectives, which enhances their teaching skills and broadens their repertoire of approaches. In addition, the increased use of the English language in the classroom promotes language proficiency and raises students' performance and motivation.

The findings of this section are presented in the form of a MAXQDA map (See figure 2 in the appendix)

Challenges

The lecturers at IKCU have identified various recurrent challenges encountered when instructing multicultural classrooms. Notably, a primary concern lies in students experiencing difficulties acclimating to the lecturers' instructional approach. This predicament can precipitate reduced student engagement, potentially culminating in attrition or class transfers. Furthermore, communication obstacles stemming from cultural disparities compound these challenges. In response to these issues, the lecturers proposed that cultivating a more diverse international student cohort, comprising a more comprehensive

array of nationalities rather than concentrating on students from specific geographical regions, could ameliorate some of these difficulties.

An additional concern articulated by the IKCU lecturers pertains to the variances in English language proficiency and cultural comprehension observed among international students. This dissimilarity can engender communication lacunae and misconceptions, impeding the efficacy of pedagogical practices and knowledge acquisition. The lecturers underscored the imperative for students and educators to exert diligent efforts, refine their instructional strategies, and embrace the tenets of globalisation to surmount these challenges.

Moreover, the lecturers acknowledged the paramount significance of respect for students' beliefs and cultural practices. They explicitly recognised occasions where the application of cultural sensitivity assumed a pivotal role in fostering an environment conducive to effective learning. To illustrate, one lecturer cited the necessity of elucidating personal circumstances, such as abstaining from fasting during Ramadan due to health-related considerations, from pre-empting any potential offence. Additionally, the lecturers underscored the importance of educators adapting to evolving circumstances and embracing novel methodologies to cater to the diverse needs of students effectively from various backgrounds.

Furthermore, the lecturers at IKCU duly recognised the potential advantages of augmenting the proportion of international students within the classroom setting. They posited that a more excellent representation of international students would engender a milieu conducive to cross-cultural interactions, fostering an exchange of diverse perspectives among all students. This, in turn, is believed to enrich the educational experience by broadening students' horizons and cultivating a more comprehensive understanding of global issues and cultural diversity.

The faculty members at Yasar University perceptively noted the favourable outcomes arising from including international students in the classroom. They discerned that the presence of international students catalysed for Turkish students to enhance their proficiency in the English language and bolster their study habits. The lecturers regarded this phenomenon as a healthy development, as it stimulated a healthy sense of competition and engendered an environment that propelled all students toward academic excellence.

Nevertheless, the lecturers at Yasar University exhibited an awareness of the difficulties in accommodating a more significant influx of international students, particularly within preparatory programs characterised by inflexible curricula and larger class sizes. Such challenges encompassed the impediments educators face in delivering personalised attention and fostering an inclusive milieu conducive to learning. Notably, the constraints on teachers' time and the necessity for additional support were underscored as focal points necessitating attention to ensure the seamless integration of international students into the educational system.

Based on the interviews conducted with YTU lecturers, it is evident that the language barrier assumes a prominent role as a prevalent issue that impacts both lecturers and students. The lecturers acknowledged that while English is the primary language of instruction, it is not universally spoken as the mother tongue by all individuals. Consequently, the disparities in English proficiency among students, present challenges in comprehending lectures, articulating ideas effectively, and actively participating in class discussions. Moreover, including students who lack English or Turkish proficiency further complicates communication and interaction within the classroom setting. Consequently, these students may encounter difficulties meeting their essential needs, including adequate housing and nutritious meals.

Moreover, lecturers have emphasised the necessity of cultural sensitivity in teaching multicultural classrooms. They have stressed the significance of being aware of diverse cultural norms and avoiding statements or behaviours that could be perceived as derogatory or offensive to students from various backgrounds. Cultivating a comfortable and inclusive learning environment demands that lecturers exercise caution and possess a comprehensive understanding of different cultures, enabling them to foster an atmosphere that respects and embraces the diversity of their students' experiences and perspectives.

The findings of this section are presented in the form of a MAXQDA map (See figure 3 in the appendix)

Mechanisms

Concerning the existence and efficacy of support mechanisms provided by the university within multicultural classrooms, the lecturers affiliated with IKCU conveyed an urgent requirement for official mechanisms that cater to the unique challenges encountered in teaching within such diverse educational settings. They proposed that lecturers who deliver courses in English should be remunerated more generously and receive academic incentives as a means of support. Additionally, promoting extracurricular social activities was identified as a valuable strategy for cultivating multicultural interactions among students.

The lecturers associated with Yasar University highlighted the lack of reliable support mechanisms designed explicitly for teaching within multicultural classrooms. Nonetheless, they acknowledged the presence of the Centre for Innovative Teaching and Learning as a significant institutional asset, primarily utilised by international faculty. The centre was recognised as a valuable resource offering potential avenues for addressing the challenges associated with multicultural education. However, a shared observation among the lecturers from IKCU and Yasar University was the lack of training opportunities focused on enhancing multicultural competencies. This commonality emphasised the need for comprehensive training programs to equip lecturers with the necessary skills and knowledge to navigate multicultural teaching environments effectively.

YTU significantly emphasised the prominence of language barriers, which emerged as a substantial concern among lecturers and students. Lecturers underscored the challenges

encountered by students lacking proficiency in English or Turkish, specifically in their ability to comprehend lectures and actively engage in class discussions. Furthermore, the absence of training in intercultural understanding was acknowledged, thus contributing to the prevailing difficulties in effectively addressing the multifaceted academic requirements of international students.

Furthermore, the lecturers at YTU articulated their apprehensions regarding the absence of cultural awareness and support extended to international students. Notable instances were cited where students desired to switch departments or preferred English-taught courses. Additionally, structural challenges, including the scarcity of English documents and administrative staff proficiency in English, were identified as impediments that hindered practical assistance to international students.

Needs

Based on the interviews conducted with lecturers from IKCU, Yasar, and YTU, it is evident that there are specific essential skills and competencies that teaching staff should possess to teach multicultural classes effectively. The findings reveal the significance of lecturers acquiring a comprehensive understanding of their country of origin, demonstrating familiarity with diverse cultures, and engaging in travel experiences to gain insights into various practices. These factors underline the importance of developing cultural competence among lecturers. The interviews also support the notion that lecturers with cultural knowledge and sensitivity are better equipped to establish inclusive classroom environments that foster a sense of value and understanding among students. Furthermore, recognising that language proficiency should not be the sole determinant for teaching foreign language courses emphasises the crucial role of effective communication beyond mere language skills.

The identified need for training in effective communication, consensus-building, assessment techniques, and intercultural conflict resolution resonates with the findings derived from the interviews. These findings highlight the importance of promoting positive classroom dynamics and effectively managing conflicts in multicultural educational settings. Equipping lecturers with strategies to navigate cultural differences and address conflicts is crucial for fostering a supportive and respectful learning environment that satisfies the needs of all students.

Recognising adaptability skills as indispensable for lecturers in multicultural classrooms aligns with the imperative to modify teaching strategies and course content to cater to the diverse needs of students effectively. The interview findings feature the significance of flexibility in responding to students' varying levels of understanding, individual interests, and cultural backgrounds. By being responsive and adaptable in their instructional practices, lecturers can create a supportive and inclusive learning environment where students feel valued, and their diverse perspectives are recognised and appreciated. In addition, the emphasis on tolerance, empathy, and a nuanced understanding of cultural perceptions, was identified in the interviews. By fostering an environment of empathy and compassion, lecturers can create a conducive setting for exploring and exchanging diverse perspectives.

The findings of this section are presented in the form of a MAXQDA map (See figure 4 in the appendix)

Student Perspective

Individual experience and approaches

The qualitative analysis of interviews conducted with international students at IKCU, Yasar, and YTU provides valuable insights into the individual experiences and approaches within multicultural educational settings.

Within the multicultural classrooms at IKCU, the interviewed students conveyed positive experiences. For example, one student from Kazakhstan emphasised the benefits derived from enhanced language skills and cultural exchange resulting from interactions with classmates from various countries. Furthermore, the students praised the teachers for their open-mindedness and adaptability. Nonetheless, the students identified a need for improved textbook materials to enhance the educational experience further. Similarly, a student from Egypt shared these sentiments, expressing contentment with the quality of instruction, diverse teaching methodologies, and engaging learning activities. Furthermore, the teachers at IKCU were described as friendly and supportive, contributing to establishing a positive learning environment. Additionally, the students acknowledged the constructive impact of learning about other cultures, further enriching their educational journey.

Another student from Mongolia highlighted the importance of socialising with classmates outside of the formal classroom setting; however, she expressed regret over not dedicating sufficient time to such interactions. The multicultural classroom environment positively and negatively affected students' motivation to learn. Language barriers occasionally posed challenges, yet the instructors provided attentive support and constructive feedback. Project assignments and group work were implemented to foster a sense of friendship among students. Furthermore, an Erasmus student from Romania shared a positive experience at IKCU, embracing the opportunity to immerse herself in new cultures and establish connections with individuals from diverse backgrounds. Both international and Turkish students were described as welcoming and inclusive. Despite language barriers, the instructors demonstrated efforts to ensure the inclusion of all students and offer additional assistance. Nevertheless, in some instances, a preference for instruction in English was expressed.

Similarly, a student from Poland encountered initial difficulties with scheduling, but they found the IKCU teachers helpful and proficient in English. The student highly valued their international contacts and reported not experiencing any form of discrimination. In addition, she appreciated the accessibility of the teachers and their willingness to cater to students' needs, even though occasional explanations were provided in Turkish.

At Yasar University, an international student from Taiwan conveyed a positive perspective on his educational experience in Türkiye, emphasising the kindness and friendliness of Turkish individuals and fellow students. Notably, the student expressed the absence of any incidents of racism and recognised the potential long-term advantages that may arise from establishing friendships with Turkish individuals. Language challenges were acknowledged, particularly about professors who primarily conducted lectures in Turkish. However, the student also acknowledged the concerted efforts made by the professors to ensure the comprehensibility of the subject matter for Turkish students.

Likewise, a Moroccan student expressed a favourable outlook on pursuing studies in Türkiye, underscoring the significance of learning from peers and the inherent value of diverse perspectives. Although the student recounted an incident involving potential racism experienced by a Moroccan friend, he did not perceive discriminatory treatment. The presence of international students was considered advantageous for enhancing academic performance, and the student acknowledged the endeavours of certain instructors to conduct classes in English and integrate international examples, which were positively received.

Conversely, a female student from Pakistan encountered initial difficulties as one of the limited numbers of international students in her electrical engineering class at Yasar University. Obstacles arising from language barriers and professors predominantly addressing queries in Turkish impeded her comprehensive comprehension. Nonetheless, the student acknowledged favourable elements, such as leniency and assistance from select instructors and classmates. Paradoxically, racial discrimination was perceived, with an observable bias towards students from specific countries. Despite these unfavourable encounters, the student exhibited resilience and perceived inclusion through the concerted endeavours of teachers to facilitate understanding and foster active participation.

The qualitative analysis revealed that a male student from Nigeria brought attention to the shifting landscape of multicultural classrooms in Türkiye, characterised by an increasing presence of international students. This evolution has prompted professors to adopt a more methodical approach in catering to diverse languages. The student recognised the advantages and disadvantages of multicultural classrooms, wherein including varied perspectives was deemed advantageous, albeit potentially accompanied by time constraints and psychological conflicts. In response to the issue of racism, the student proposed implementing orientation programs, diversification initiatives, and cultivating relationships to mitigate such concerns. In addition, studying within a multicultural classroom was perceived as a motivating factor, fostering a healthy sense of student competition.

Finally, a male student from Venezuela expressed gratitude towards the multicultural classroom environment, primarily attributing its value to the collective experience of being away from one's home country and studying a foreign language. However, the student acknowledged the existence of challenges stemming from disparities in educational backgrounds and levels of preparedness among students. Nonetheless, the interplay within the classroom was regarded as advantageous, facilitating exposure to diverse perspectives

and broadening the horizons of native students. However, the need to tailor certain subjects and situations to the Turkish and European context was identified as a plausible drawback for international students.

At YTU, a comprehensive analysis of interviews conducted with five students, one female student from Germany and four male students from the Republic of Congo, Syria, Palestine, and Morocco, unveiled significant revelations regarding their encounters and strategies within a multicultural educational environment. The interviews underlined the beneficial influence of studying in a multicultural milieu on student motivation. The students perceived the presence of peers and colleagues originating from diverse backgrounds as a stimulant that propelled them to strive for academic excellence. Moreover, the multicultural classroom was perceived as a dynamic and stimulating challenge that spurred their determination to excel, further heightened by the exposure to many languages and diverse countries within the learning ecosystem, ultimately contributing to heightened motivation.

Moreover, the students sincerely appreciated the profound sense of community and friendship that pervaded their multicultural classes. One student recounted a remarkable event where they meticulously organised a farewell party to bid adieu to a departing teacher embarking on a holiday. The convivial gathering was infused with an array of delectable delicacies, beverages, and traditional dishes hailing from their respective homelands, fostering an atmosphere of unbridled joy and collective unity among the students. Furthermore, the students highly valued the diversity of perspectives and intellectual discourse from interacting with diverse peers. They firmly believed that the experience of studying in international classes endowed them with an intellectually enriching and multifaceted learning milieu, enabling them to expand their cognitive horizons and garner fresh insights. Notably, the students stressed the indispensable role played by professors in bridging language and cultural divides. They expressed profound gratitude when lecturers adeptly correlated abstract concepts with students' native languages or cultural contexts, facilitating enhanced comprehension and deeper understanding. The interactive pedagogical approach, involving the seamless translation of intricate technical terms and explanations from English to Turkish, proved to be a salient tool in promoting the students' effective assimilation of complex subject matter.

Moreover, the students highlighted that professors within the multicultural class actively engaged in dialogues about their travels, cultural anecdotes, and narratives. These exchanges fostered an environment of inclusivity, cultivating a favourable milieu conducive to student learning. The students expressed deep appreciation for the unwavering support from professors who keenly understood their unique position as international students grappling with basic Turkish language skills. Notably, certain professors expertly adapted their instructional approach by employing French or English as alternative mediums of instruction, thereby ensuring a more comprehensive grasp of the subject matter. Furthermore, the interviews unveiled that the students were strongly associated with activities that encouraged cultural exchange and facilitated immersive learning experiences. Of particular note was an activity wherein students were tasked with crafting comprehensive essays

spotlighting their respective countries and sharing informative content, captivating visuals, and salient cultural nuances. This immersive undertaking engendered a palpable sense of belonging and substantially augmented the students' understanding and appreciation of one another's diverse cultural backgrounds.

Moreover, the students enormously appreciated professors who adeptly transitioned between Turkish and English during their instructional discourse. This strategic pedagogical approach elucidates complex concepts and guarantees the students' comprehensive comprehension of the subject matter. Such linguistic adaptability exhibited the professors' unwavering dedication to surmounting language barriers and facilitating an inclusive learning environment. Furthermore, the students conveyed their contentment with the faculty members at YTU, noting that many of them had undergone their educational journeys in multicultural settings. This shared experiential background endowed the professors with a nuanced understanding of international students' challenges, fostering a supportive and empathetic instructional demeanour. Lastly, the students underscored the affirmative reception and support they received when reaching out to their peers for assistance or collaboration, particularly in the context of research projects. This constructive interplay engendered a sense of gratification and a heightened sense of belonging within the academic community.

In conclusion, the interviews with international students enrolled at IKCU, Yasar, and YTU illuminate the advantageous facets of engaging in academic pursuits within multicultural educational settings. Noteworthy benefits encompass the enhanced acquisition of linguistic proficiencies, cultural interchange, and exposure to diverse perspectives. The instructional staff at these respective institutions generally garnered positive perceptions from the interviewees, who regarded them as supportive and amenable, notwithstanding occasional encounters with language obstacles. The students expressed a desire for improved educational resources and, on occasion, evinced a preference for increased utilisation of the English language as the medium of instruction. Moreover, challenges about social assimilation, discriminatory experiences, and disparities in educational backgrounds were discerned. These findings accentuate the importance of fostering an inclusive and supportive academic milieu for international students within Turkish universities.

The findings of this section are presented in the form of a MAXQDA map (See figure 5 in the appendix)

Benefits

The findings from the qualitative interviews conducted with international students at IKCU, Yasar, and YTU highlight several main opportunities associated with studying in multicultural classrooms.

The findings of the interviews highlight the salience of cultural exchange as a prominent and recurring theme among international students. The students expressed a profound sense of

joy from establishing friendships with peers of diverse nationalities, which facilitated the acquisition of foreign languages and improved their language proficiency. In addition, the collective experience of participating in a Turkish classroom fostered a cohesive atmosphere and contributed to students' overall enjoyment. Furthermore, exchanging amusing anecdotes and humorous incidents during class activities reinforced the cheerful ambience and played a pivotal role in forging meaningful connections among the students.

In addition to cultural exchange, the students identified the exposure to different perspectives as a significant opportunity afforded by studying in multicultural classrooms. This exposure broadened their worldviews and deepened their comprehension of diverse cultures and ideas. The acquisition of language skills emerged as a critical advantage, enabling students to access resources written in languages other than their own. The students particularly valued instructors who utilised interactive teaching methods, characterised by engaging in conversations and posing thought-provoking questions.

They acknowledged the distinctiveness of these experiences in shaping their lives. They recognised the advantage of possessing language skills and a multicultural background in future undertakings such as job applications or internships. The broadening of perspectives and access to diverse resources were also identified as contributing factors to their personal and academic development.

In conclusion, the findings of these interviews emphasise the primary opportunities that international students encounter in multicultural classrooms, namely cultural exchange, exposure to diverse perspectives, networking, personal growth, and enhanced language skills. The findings of this section are presented in the form of a MAXQDA map (See figure 6 in the appendix)

Challenges

Qualitative interviews were conducted with international students from three universities in Türkiye—IKCU, Yasar, and YTU—to explore their main challenges while studying in multicultural classrooms. The findings revealed several common themes across the interviews.

The discussions among multiple participants consistently highlighted the language barrier as a significant and recurring theme, underscoring its challenging nature. They expressed challenges in comprehending lectures, interacting with fellow students, and perceiving potential inequalities when classes were conducted in the local language instead of English. It is essential to mention that some participants also acknowledged the positive aspects of being exposed to diverse cultures and languages. They recognised the potential benefits of language proficiency and promoting intercultural understanding among Turkish and international students.

Additionally, the participants emphasised the pressing need for improved support systems within the academic environment. They highlighted the importance of establishing mechanisms to provide emotional support, regular well-being check-ins, and implementing comprehensive guidance and orientation programs tailored specifically for international students. Lastly, the participants highlighted the crucial role of fostering a sense of connection and support, particularly during the initial stages of their educational journey when they might experience homesickness or a lack of guidance.

Furthermore, the participants emphasised the importance of inclusive policies and initiatives at the university level. They advocated for adopting policies that actively promote diversity and inclusivity, specifically through encouraging English-taught classes to facilitate the active involvement of international students. Additionally, they recommended raising awareness among local students about the inherent benefits of multicultural classroom environments, with the ultimate objective of nurturing mutual understanding and collaboration among students from diverse backgrounds.

The findings of this section are presented in the form of a MAXQDA map (See figure 7 in the appendix)

Mechanisms

At IKCU, the participants stressed the invaluable support provided by the university administrators and instructors, who demonstrated a solid commitment to addressing student inquiries and concerns. Their prompt availability and willingness to assist significantly enhanced the overall experience of the international students. The university further facilitated the integration process by organising comprehensive orientation programs, encompassing informative campus tours and sessions that effectively equip students with essential knowledge pertinent to their academic journey and the university environment.

Similarly, at Yasar University, students expressed their gratitude for the support extended by the student affairs manager, who was crucial in facilitating various administrative procedures, including document registration and residence permit arrangements. While a few participants mentioned the absence of meaningful engagement with assigned mentors, they acknowledged the valuable assistance received from fellow international students. These students emphasised the significance of personal initiative and self-driven efforts in adapting to the multicultural environment. Furthermore, Yasar University organised an orientation event to foster cultural exchange. However, it should be noted that the event did not specifically address the unique challenges associated with studying in multicultural classrooms, leaving this aspect unaddressed in the orientation program.

In contrast, the interviews conducted with students at YTU revealed a notable absence of well-defined support mechanisms specifically designed for international students within some departments and faculties. The students expressed difficulties in comprehending lectures delivered in Turkish and highlighted the scarcity of English-speaking professors,

which initially impeded their academic advancement. Although student clubs were available and occasional orientation meetings held, these initiatives did not consistently provide active and comprehensive measures to address international students' unique challenges in multicultural classrooms.

Needs

Based on qualitative interviews conducted with international students enrolled at IKCU, Yasar, and YTU, significant findings have emerged about the requirements for effective participation in multicultural classroom settings. In addition, the interviews provided valuable insights into international students' perspectives and first-hand experiences, illuminating their recommendations and suggestions to enhance the educational milieu. The key findings can be succinctly summarised as follows:

Firstly, language proficiency was consistently identified as essential for success within multicultural classrooms. Notably, the capacity to communicate proficiently, especially in English, was featured as vital for establishing meaningful connections and engaging in substantive discussions with classmates from diverse cultural backgrounds. In addition, participants emphasised the criticality of language support programs and resources designed to aid non-native speakers in augmenting their linguistic aptitude.

Culturing open-mindedness and a genuine inclination to embrace diverse cultures emerged as fundamental attributes for successfully navigating the details inherent in multicultural classroom environments. Through their insightful perspectives, participants accentuated the significance of comprehending and respecting cultural disparities while highlighting the imperative of exhibiting receptiveness towards novel viewpoints. In addition, the development of empathy and the cultivation of respect towards the diverse backgrounds of others were recognised as indispensable proficiencies facilitating effective intercultural communication.

The interviews unveiled the centrality of cultural sensitivity and adaptability. Participants emphasised the necessity of being cognizant of cultural disparities and adeptly adjusting one's behaviour and communication style accordingly. In addition, they emphasised the virtues of patience, understanding, and respect when confronted with cultural practices or perspectives that diverge from their own.

Participants articulated the imperative for university policies that foster diversity and inclusivity. They advocated for policies mandating English as the medium of instruction, encouraging international student engagement, and proposing mechanisms for reporting instances where classes are conducted solely in local languages. Furthermore, participants recommended initiatives to cultivate local students' awareness of the advantages of multicultural classrooms, fostering a climate of mutual comprehension and collaboration.

The significance of emotional support throughout the international students' academic sojourn was accentuated. Recommendations were made for establishing well-being assessment mechanisms, including provisions for psychological support services or periodic interactions with staff members. Participants highlighted the value of fostering a sense of connection and support, mitigating feelings of seclusion and homesickness.

These findings emphasise the intricate nature of the requirements presented by international students within multicultural classrooms. By bolstering language support initiatives, cultivating cultural understanding, offering comprehensive guidance, facilitating social activities, and implementing inclusive university policies, institutions can actively contribute to establishing a supportive and enriching educational milieu for international students. Addressing these diverse needs can foster a sense of belonging, facilitate intercultural learning, and augment the overall educational experience for all students involved.

The findings of this section are presented in the form of a MAXQDA map (See figure 8 in the appendix)

Conclusion

This national report discusses the findings of qualitative interviews conducted in Türkiye with lecturers and international students at IKCU, Yasar, and YTU regarding their experiences and perspectives in multicultural educational settings. The students generally shared positive experiences, highlighting the advantages of improving language skills, engaging in cultural exchange, and being exposed to diverse viewpoints. They also appreciated the support and flexibility of their teachers, although some mentioned the need for better textbook materials. Nevertheless, students occasionally encountered challenges stemming from language barriers and a preference for English as the medium of instruction.

International students vocalised their yearning for augmented support and guidance from their respective educational institutions. They put forth suggestions encompassing the dissemination of comprehensive information and advice through the institution's official website and the creation of informative booklets or guidebooks dedicated to addressing potential challenges that international students might encounter. Furthermore, participants recommended enhancing orientation programs and extending assistance, such as airport pick-up services and initial guidance during the nascent weeks following their arrival, to alleviate the transitional process.

The students highlighted the significance of socialising with their peers beyond formal classroom settings. The significance of social activities and field trips in augmenting the multifaceted educational encounter was mentioned by participants. They advocated for an excellent array of social events and excursions to foster nurturing a sense of community among students from diverse cultural backgrounds. Furthermore, integrating technological

tools and interactive pedagogical approaches within the classroom was suggested to facilitate active engagement and self-expression among students.

The students experienced the positive and negative impacts of the multicultural environment on their learning motivation. Some students recounted instances of potential racism or discrimination, while others did not perceive any discriminatory treatment. The interviews further unveiled the value of professors bridging linguistic and cultural gaps by discussing their travel experiences, sharing cultural anecdotes, and adapting their teaching methodologies.

In multicultural classes, students emphasised community, friendship, and intellectual discourse. They acknowledged the advantages of studying in a multicultural milieu, such as personal and academic growth, networking prospects, and language proficiency acquisition. The students have brought attention to various challenges, including language barriers, improved support systems and inclusive policies, and disparities in language proficiency among professors.

Support mechanisms varied across universities, with some demonstrating more comprehensive efforts than others. Nevertheless, the findings underline the importance of cultivating an inclusive and supportive academic environment for international students in Turkish universities, effectively addressing challenges, and leveraging the opportunities presented by multicultural classrooms.

The findings derived from the analysis of interviews indicate that universities in Türkiye exhibit commendable efforts in facilitating the transition of international students to studying in multicultural classrooms. These efforts involve helping, comprehensive orientations and opportunities for cultural integration. Conversely, universities in Türkiye lack a complete institutionalised support mechanism tailored to meet the distinctive needs of international students in multicultural classrooms.

According to the outcomes of the lecturer interviews, instructors teaching in multicultural classrooms in Türkiye attach great importance to their extensive experience in such contexts and the value of comprehending diverse cultures. As a result, they endeavour to establish inclusive and enjoyable learning environments that promote open dialogues and foster intercultural competence.

Their challenges encompass language barriers, cultural interpretations, and the adaptation of teaching materials to accommodate diverse perspectives. The presence of international students is regarded as advantageous for academic performance and personal development.

The discussion also covers language proficiency and support for international students. The lecturers recognise the need for ongoing development and adapting to the global nature of education. The advantages of teaching in multicultural classrooms include motivation, cultural learning, empathy development, tolerance, and enhanced critical thinking. Challenges include acclimation difficulties, communication obstacles, and respecting cultural

practices. Support mechanisms and training opportunities are deemed necessary to address these challenges effectively. Essential skills for lecturers include cultural competence, effective communication, conflict resolution, and adaptability. The need for observation abroad and student-centred pedagogy is highlighted. Tolerance, empathy, and understanding are vital qualities for creating inclusive environments.

The interviews recommend augmenting lecturers' understanding of different cultures through mandatory observation periods abroad and exchange programs. It is argued that exposure to diverse cultures and heightened awareness of global developments from such incidents can significantly enhance lecturers' ability to establish meaningful connections with their students and incorporate multicultural perspectives into their instructional practices. By embracing these opportunities, lecturers can effectively navigate the complexities of multicultural classrooms and contribute to promoting inclusive education.

Lecturers highlighted the importance of a dynamic teaching approach that values diversity. They signalled the significance of addressing students' individual needs. Establishing an inclusive classroom environment necessitates lecturers to adapt their instructional methods to accommodate students' diverse learning styles, integrate visual aids to enhance comprehension, and address gaps in students' knowledge and skill sets. By adopting such an approach, lecturers can create an environment that fosters equal learning opportunities and promotes the engagement and success of students from various cultural backgrounds.

References

Aba, D. (2013). Internationalisation of higher education and student mobility in Europe and the case of Türkiye. *Çukurova University Faculty of Education Journal*, 42(2), 99-110.

CoHE (2021). *Higher Education System in Türkiye*. Ankara.

De Wit, H & Knight, J. (1999). Quality and internationalisation in higher education, OECD, Paris, viewed 04 May 2023, <https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/quality-and-internationalisation-in-higher-education_9789264173361-en#page1>.

De Wit, H.(1999). Changing rationales for the internationalisation of higher education. *International Higher Education*, 2-3. <https://doi.org/10.6017/ihe.1999.15.6477>

De Wit, H. & Callan, H. (1995). Internationalisation of higher education in Europe" in H. de Wit (ed.) *Strategies for Internationalisation of Higher Education: A Comparative Study of Australia, Canada, Europe and the United States of America*. Amsterdam: European Association for International Education.

Erdem, A. R. (2012). Küreselleşme: Türk yükseköğretime etkisi. *Yükseköğretim Dergisi*, 2 (2), 109-117.

EUA (June 24, 2019): <https://eua.eu/resources/expert-voices/147:internationalisation-the-challenge-for-teachers-and-students-at-home.html>

Findık, L. Y. (2016). Is higher education internationalising In Türkiye? *European Scientific Journal*. 12(13), 295-305.

Knight, J., & de Wit, H. (2008). Internationalisation of higher education: Past and future, In *The Future Agenda for Internationalisation in Higher Education* is edited by Douglas Proctor and Laura E. Rumbley (Routledge, 2018).

Knight, J., & de Wit, H. (2008). Internationalisation of higher education: Past and future *International Higher Education*, (95), 2-4. <https://doi.org/10.6017/ihe.2018.95.10715>

Knight, J. (2001). Monitoring the quality and progress of internationalisation. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 5(3), 228–243. <https://doi.org/10.1177/102831530153004>

Kehm, B.M. (2003). Internationalisation in higher education: From regional to global. In: Begg, R. (eds) *The Dialogue between Higher Education Research and Practice*. Springer, Dordrecht. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-0-306-48368-4_9

Knight, J. (1999). A time of turbulence and transformation of internationalisation. In CBIE Research. Canadian Bureau for International Education. <https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.10992.17926>

Knight, J. (2003). Updated Internationalisation Definition. *International Higher Education*. Fall(33). <https://doi.org/10.6017/ihe.2003.33.7391>.

Knight, J. (2008). *Higher Education in Turmoil. The Changing World of Internationalisation*. Rotterdam. The Netherlands: Sense Publishers.

OECD (1999). *Quality and Internationalisation in Higher Education*. OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264173361-en>.

Qiang, Z. (2003). Internationalisation of higher education: Towards a conceptual framework. *Policy Futures in Education*, 1(2), 248–270. <https://doi.org/10.2304/pfie.2003.1.2.5>

Rivza, B. & Teichler, U. (2007). The changing role of student mobility. *Higher Education Policy*. 20. 457-475. 10.1057/palgrave.hep.8300163.

Yang, Rui (2002). University internationalisation: Its meanings, rationales and implications, *Intercultural Education*, 13(1), 81-95. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14675980120112968>

YÖK (2019). Workshop on internationalisation of Turkish higher education: The opportunities and Threats.

<https://www.yok.gov.tr/Sayfalar/Haberler/2019/turk-yuksekokretiminin-uluslararasilasmasi-firsatlar-ve-tehditler-calistayi.aspx> .

Internet Sources

YÖK (2021-2022): <https://istatistik.yok.gov.tr/>

<https://www.studyinturkiye.gov.tr/StudyinTürkiye/ PartStatistic>

<https://www.turkiyeburslari.gov.tr/sayfa/turkiyede-egitim-2#GlobalEducationVision>

<https://eua.eu/issues/10:bologna-process.html>

<https://www.yok.gov.tr/en/institutional/higher-education-system>

<https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-education-systems/turkiye/overview>

Appendices

Figure 1. Approach / Experience (Lecturers)

Approach / Experience (Lecturers)

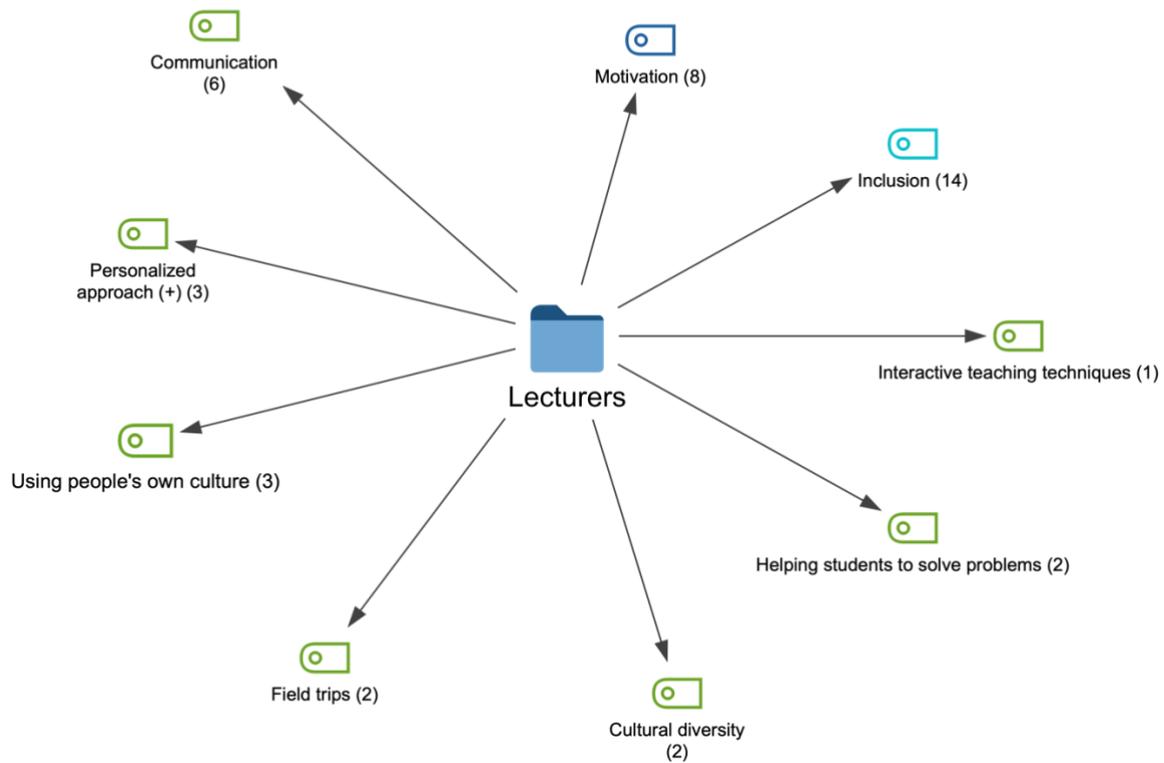


Figure 2. Benefits / Opportunities (Lecturers)

Benefits / Opportunities (Lecturers)

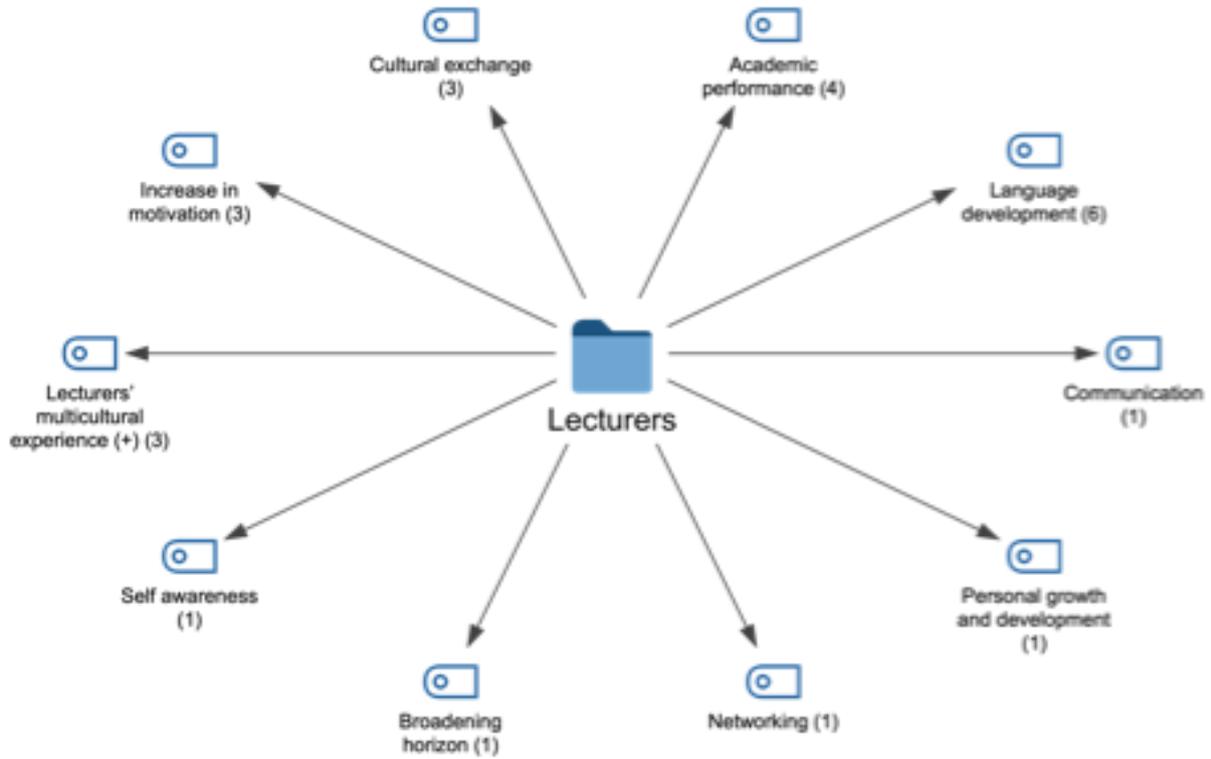


Figure 3. Challenges (Lecturers)

Challenges (Lecturers)

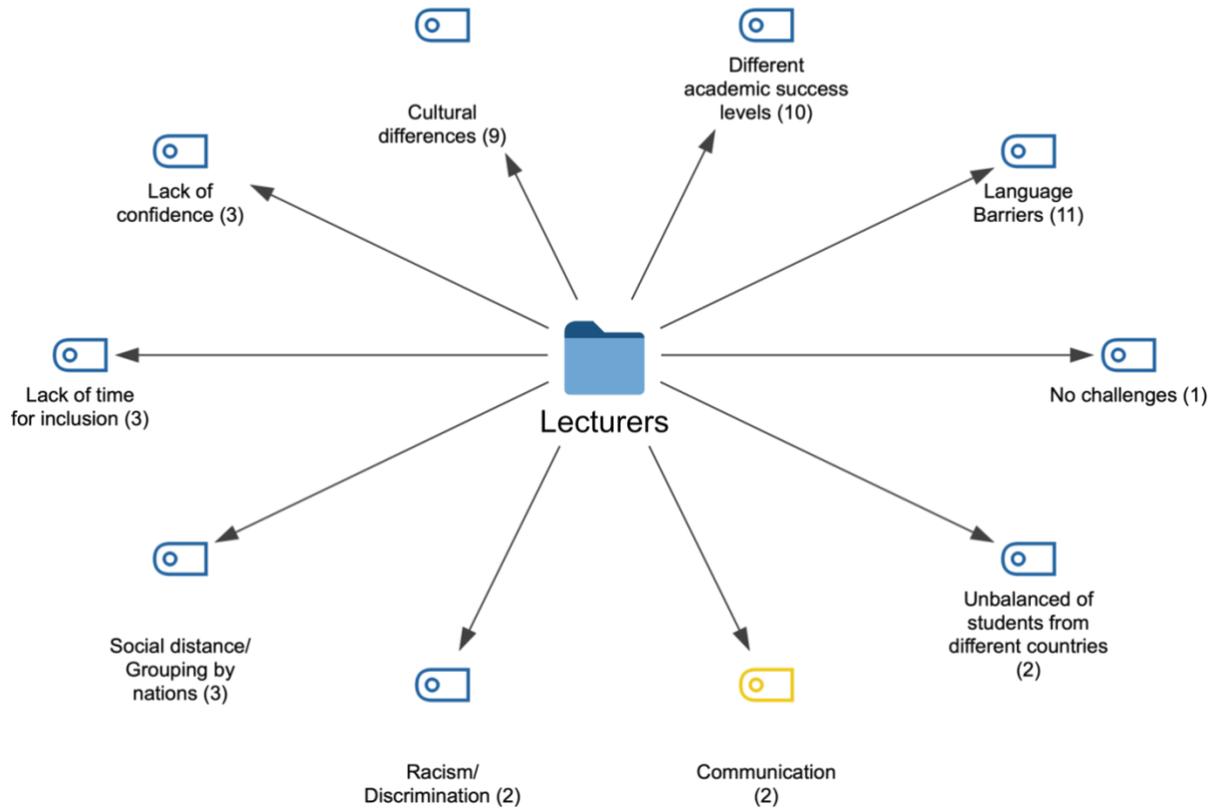


Figure 4. Needs (Lecturers)

Needs (Lecturers)

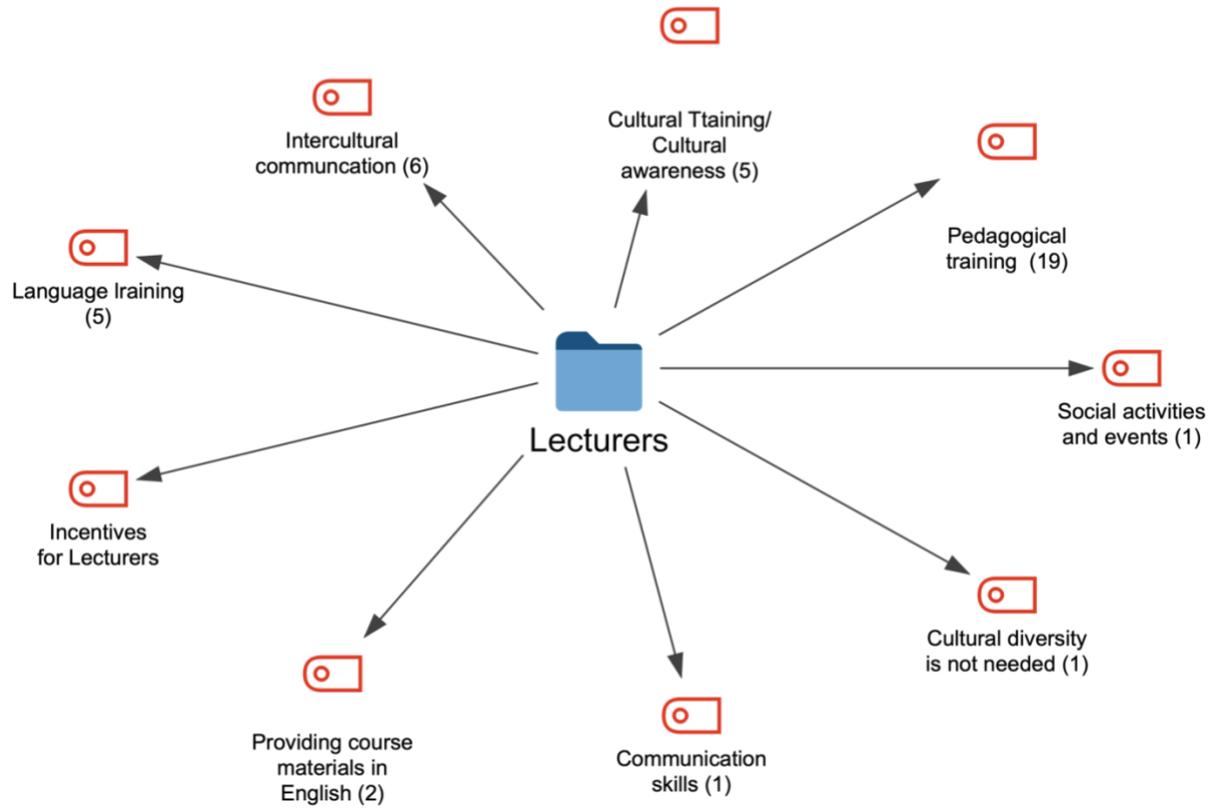


Figure 5. Approach / Experience (Students)
Approach / Experience (Students)

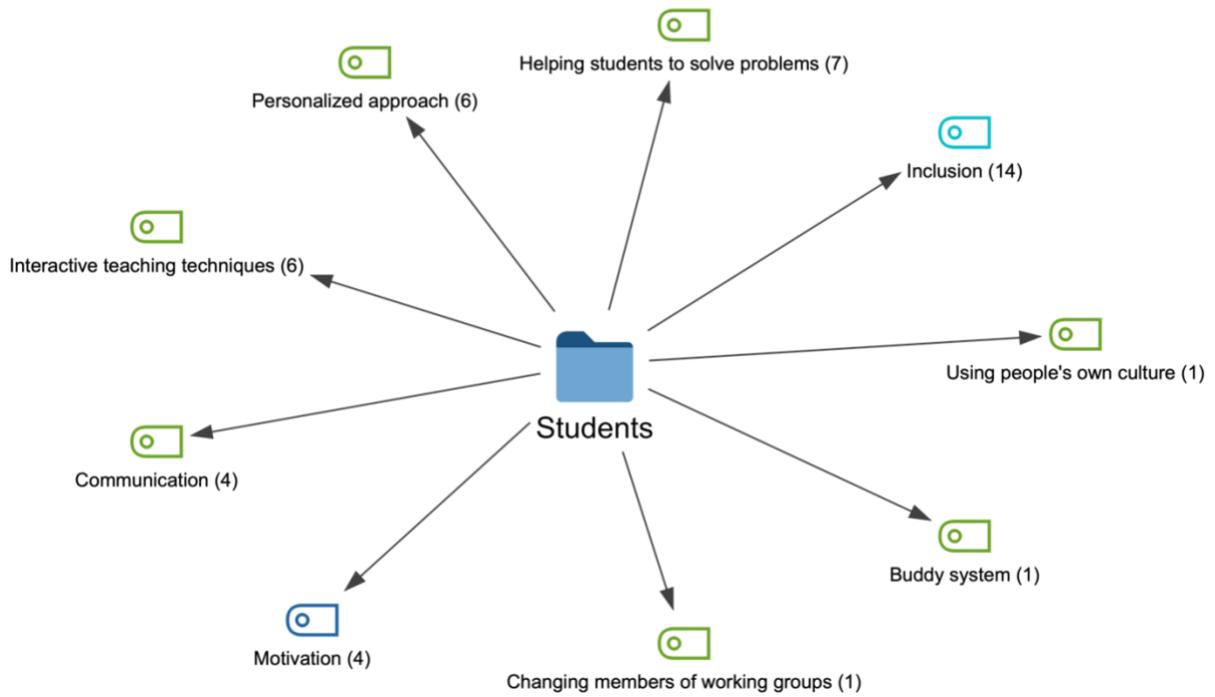


Figure 6. Benefits / Opportunities (Students)

Benefits / Opportunities (Students)

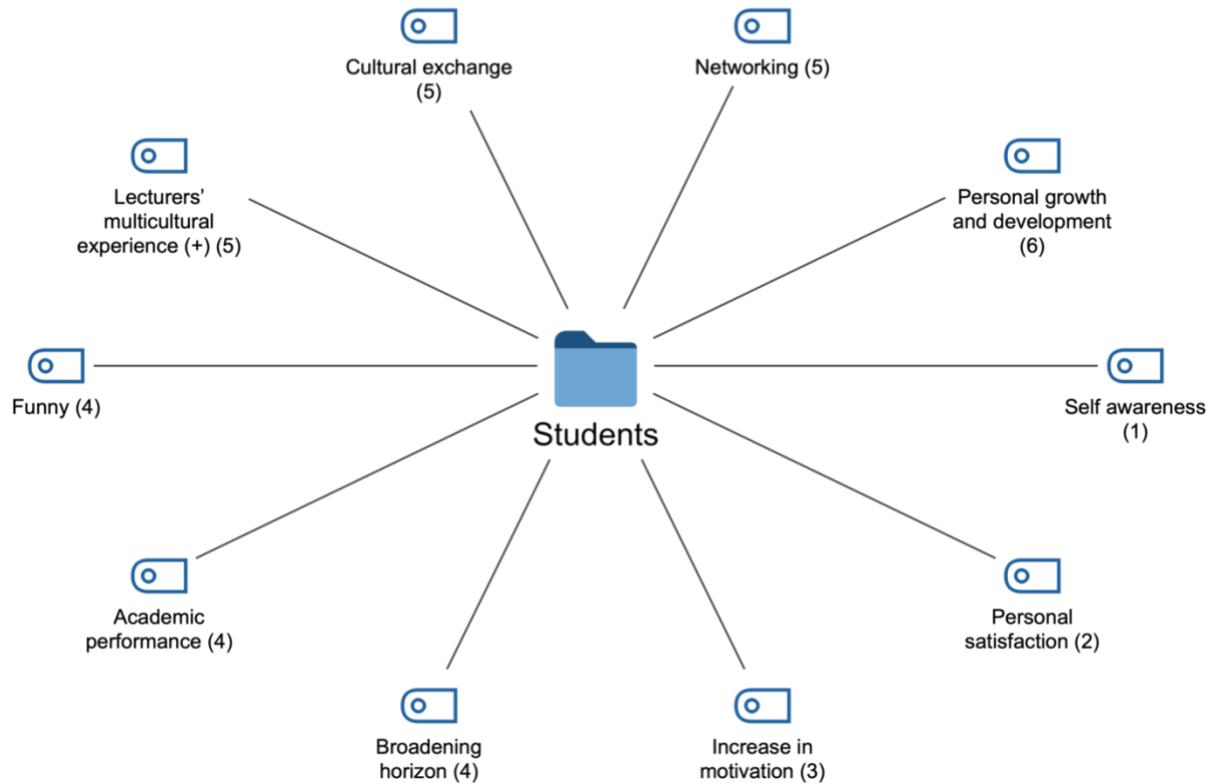


Figure 7 Challenges (Students)

Challenges (Students)

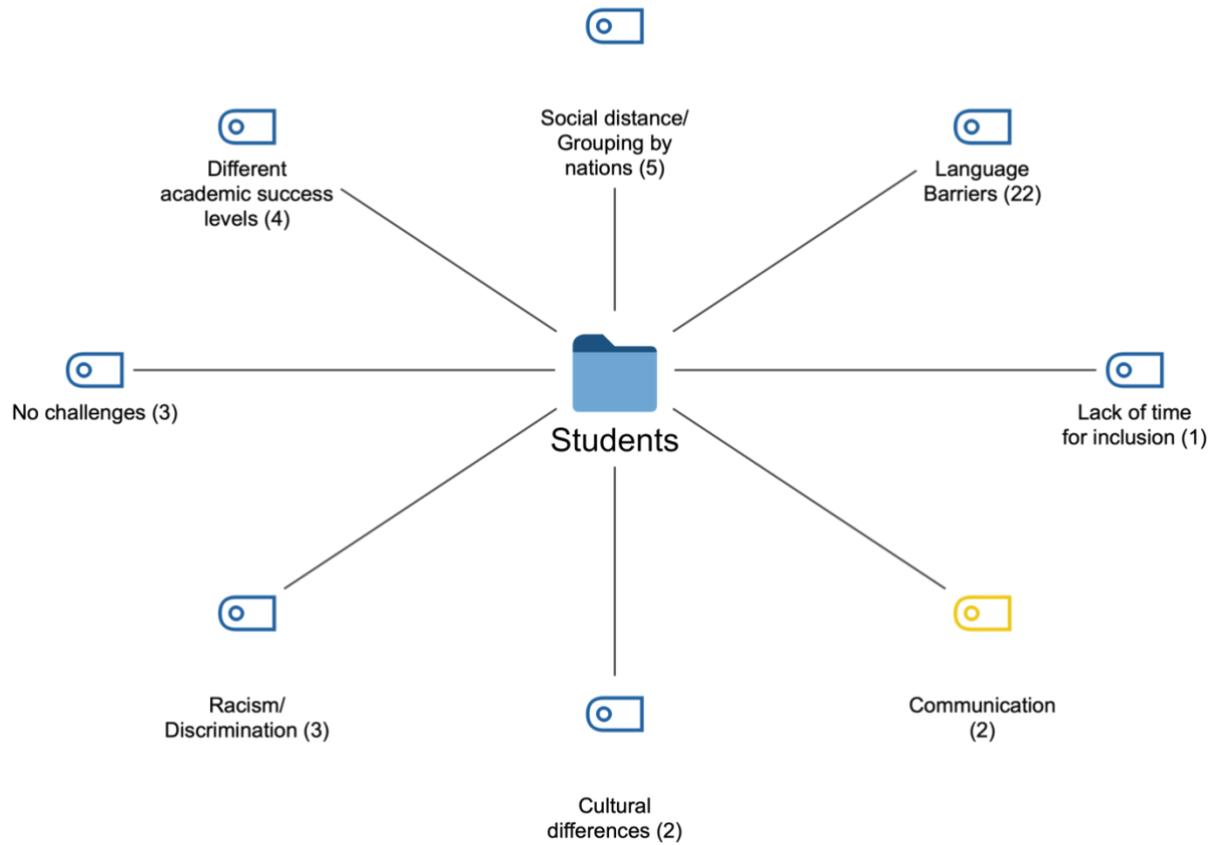


Figure 8. Needs (Students)

Needs (Students)

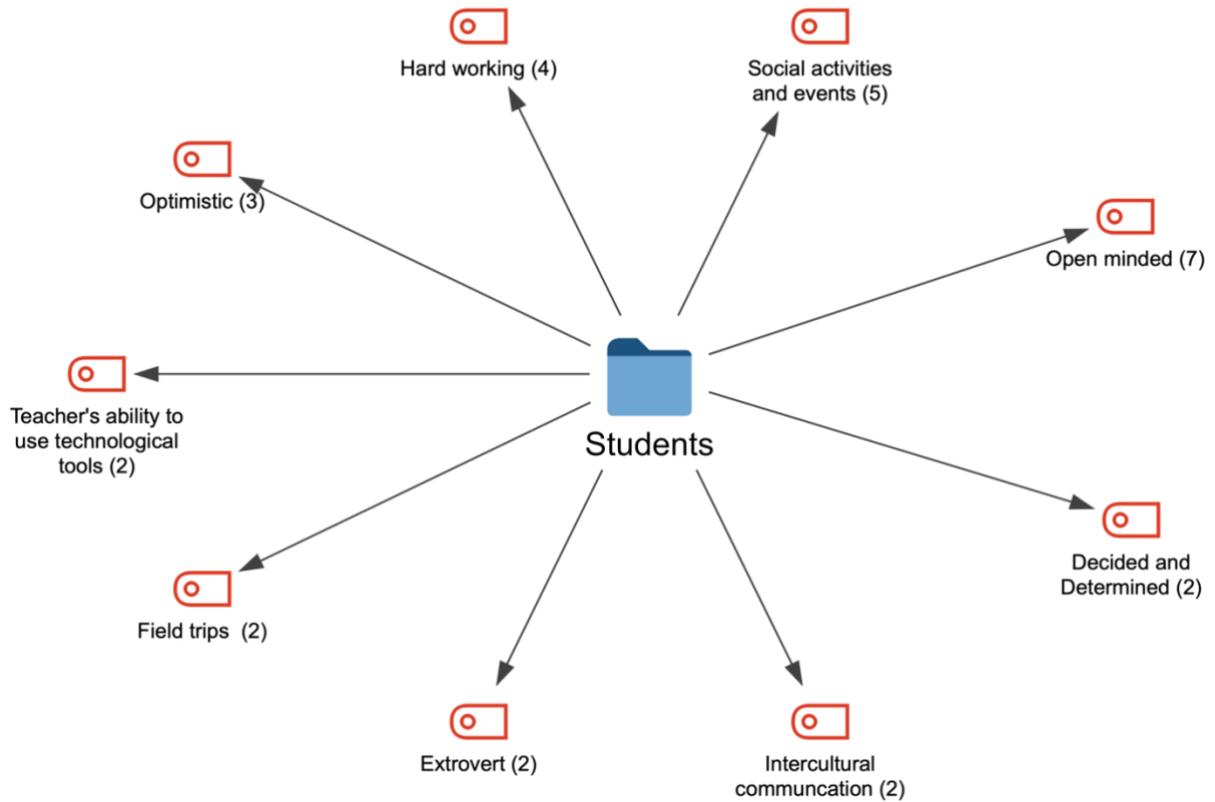


Table 1. Summary Table of Number of Students (2022-2023)

	Male	Female	Total
Vocational Training Schools	1.285.803	1.361.251	2.647.054
<i>Formal Education</i>	471.657	405.256	876.913
<i>Secondary Education</i>	102.267	73.589	175.856
<i>Distance Education</i>	18.745	15.490	34.235
<i>Open Education</i>	693.134	866.916	1.560.050
Undergraduate	1.845.587	1.908.508	3.754.095
<i>Formal Education</i>	1.071.805	1.149.693	2.221.498
<i>Secondary Education</i>	134.730	91.479	226.209
<i>Distance Education</i>	13.357	17.395	30.752
<i>Open Education</i>	625.695	649.941	1.275.636
Masters	227.181	207.304	434.485
<i>Formal Education</i>	182.541	176.144	358.685
<i>Secondary Education</i>	29.885	20.952	50.837
<i>Distance Education</i>	14.755	10.208	24.963
Doctorate	58.405	56.103	114.508
<i>Formal Education</i>	58.405	56.103	114.508
Total Number of Students	3.416.976	3.533.166	6.950.142

Source: <https://istatistik.yok.gov.tr/>

Table 2. Academic Staff Demographics in Türkiye

University Type	Professor	Assoc. Prof.	Assist. Prof.	Instructor	Res. Assist.	Total
Public	29.071	20.127	34.799	30.055	41.269	155.321
Foundation	5.352	2.503	9.668	6.811	5.212	29.546
Vocational Training Schools	4	1	37	212	0	254
Total	34.427	22.631	44.504	37.078	46.481	185.121

Source: <https://istatistik.yok.gov.tr/>

Table 3. Socio-demographic characteristics of the interviewed students

No	Gender	Faculty	Field of study	Country of origin	University
1	Male	Logistics	International Logistics Management	Nigeria	Yasar
2	Female	Faculty of Engineering	Electrical and Electronics Engineering	Pakistan	Yasar
3	Male	Faculty of Engineering	Electrical and Electronics Engineering	Venezuela	Yasar
4	Male	Faculty of Business	Business Administration	Morocco	Yasar
5	Male	Faculty of Engineering	Software Engineering	Taiwan	Yasar
6	Male	Faculty of Naval Architecture and Maritime	Naval Architecture and Marine Engineering	Republic of Kongo	YTU
7	Male	Faculty of Mechanical Engineering	Mechanical Engineering	Syria	YTU
8	Male	Faculty of Mechanical Engineering	Mechanical Engineering	Syria and Palestine	YTU
9	Male	Faculty of Arts and Science	Western Languages and Literatures (French)	Morocco	YTU
10	Female	Faculty of Arts and Science	Humanities and Social Sciences	Germany	YTU
11	Female	Turkish Language Teaching Research and Application Centre	Department of Turkish Language Courses	Kazakhstan	IKCU
12	Female	Turkish Language Teaching Research and Application Centre	Department of Turkish Language Courses	Egypt	IKCU
13	Female	Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences	Department of Business Administration	Mongolia	IKCU
14	Female	Faculty of Dentistry	Department of Clinical Sciences	Romania	IKCU
15	Female	Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences	English philology and Literature	Poland	IKCU

Table 4. Socio-demographic characteristics of the interviewed academic staff

No	Gender	Faculty	Years of experience in teaching	University
1	Male	School of Foreign Languages, Preparatory Class	24	Yasar
2	Male	Faculty of Human and Social Sciences, Department of English Translation, and Interpreting	32	Yasar
3	Male	Faculty of Art & Design, Dept. of Music	25	Yasar
4	Male	School of Foreign Languages, Preparatory Class	15	Yasar
5	Female	Faculty of Engineering, Department of Industrial Engineering	14	Yasar
6	Male	Faculty of Naval Architecture and Maritime, Naval Architecture and Marine Engineering	4	YTU
7	Male	Faculty of Mechanical Engineering, Department of Mechanical Engineering	18	YTU
8	Male	Faculty of Mechanical Engineering, Department of Mechanical Engineering	24	YTU
9	Male	Faculty of Arts and Science, Department of Western Languages and Literatures	20	YTU
10	Male	Faculty of Arts and Science, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences	10	YTU
11	Male	Faculty of Tourism, Department of Tourism Guidance	15	IKCU
12	Male	Faculty of Health Sciences, Department of Physiotherapy and Rehabilitation	10	IKCU
13	Female	Faculty of Medicine, Department of Basic Medical Sciences	20	IKCU
14	Female	Faculty of Engineering and Architecture, Department of City and Regional Planning	10	IKCU
15	Female	Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences, Department of Political Science and Public Administration	15	IKCU

THE CURRENT SITUATION OF THE INTERNATIONALIZATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN BELGIUM/FLEMISH COMMUNITY

David Van Bunder – Hogeschool Ghent Research Center for Learning in Diversity

Abstract

This report explores the internationalization of higher education in the Flemish community in Belgium, focusing on the strategies, challenges, adaptations, skills, and support mechanisms involved. Flanders places great importance on internationalization, with efforts to enhance student mobility, establish partnerships with international institutions, and support the internationalization processes of higher education. Five faculty members of HOGENT, teaching in an international class and five incoming students were interviewed. Based on these interviews we discuss the opportunities and challenges of international student mobility and the multicultural classrooms in which they study. Language proficiency, particularly in English, is a key aspect of internationalization. While English is the primary language of instruction for incoming students, variations in language skills pose challenges. Cultural diversity is valued, with the multicultural classroom environment enabling students to experience different approaches and perspectives. Cultural differences are celebrated, but challenges related to cultural sensitivity and intercultural communication exist.

Higher education in Flanders and internationalization

Belgium is a federal state organized in regions and communities. The three regions are Flanders, Wallonia, and the Brussels Capital region. The three communities are the Flemish, French and German speaking community. The Flemish region covers the five provinces in the north of Belgium. The Flemish community includes the inhabitants of the Flemish region and the Dutch-speaking inhabitants of the Brussels Capital Region. Apart from the federal government, each region has its own government. The federal government is competent for matters such as foreign affairs, defense, justice, finance, social security, part of public health, and home affairs. The responsibilities of the regional governments are amongst others, environment, energy, agriculture, transportation, public works, and education (OECD, 2017). Higher education is a competency of the Flemish community and so of the Flemish government. Dutch-language institutions for higher education in the Brussels Capital Region also resort under the authority of the Flemish government.

Higher education in Flanders is organized as a binary structure comprising a total of 18 higher education institutions that are financed through public funding. (Research) universities on the one hand are research-focused institutions offering academic bachelor's degrees, master's degrees, advanced master's degrees, PhD's, and postgraduate certificates. Universities of Applied Sciences are more practice-oriented with the goal of educating students for professional work life. They offer associate degrees, professional bachelor's degrees, advanced bachelor's degrees, and postgraduate certificates (Study in Flanders, sd). In 2022-2023, 279.145 students were enrolled in higher education (Departement onderwijs en

forming, 2022). In 2020-2021, 37.348 incoming international students were enrolled (Malfroy & Persoons, 2022). 12.000 of these students study at a university of applied sciences and arts (VLHORA, 2023). HOGENT has about 600 incoming students.

Most study programs are in Dutch, although some of them are taught in English, mostly at the universities and to a lesser extent at the universities of applied sciences. All higher education institutions are engaged in mobility through amongst others Erasmus+. For these projects, specific programs are developed in English. In these programs international students often have a part of their courses with local students, and a part with only international students.

The territory that is now called Belgium has a long history of immigration and emigration dating back to at least the Eighty Years' War (1566-1648). During which a lot of mainly protestant people fled to what is now called The Netherlands, Germany and England to find religious freedom. A dark page in the Belgian migration history is the colonization of what is now the Democratic Republic of the Congo. After the Second World War, there were immigration waves from Italy, Greece, Spain, Morocco, Türkiye, Tunisia, Algeria and Yugoslavia. Agreements with those countries were signed to recruit people to work in the coal mines, amongst other places (Lafleur & Marfouk, 2019). More recently, new migrants started arriving and fleeing conflict from Rwanda, the Balkans, Iraq, Syria or Afghanistan. The presence of international institutions in Brussels also caused people from all over the world to, at least temporarily, settle in the country.

Consequently, Belgium today is a superdiverse society. About 3.3 million people of foreign origin are living in Belgium. This corresponds to about 30% of the population (Van Huylenbroeck, 2019). In cities, this number is even higher. 40% of the inhabitants of Ghent, have a migration background. 35% of children attending primary and secondary education (25-18 years) in Ghent are not native Dutch speakers (Stad Gent, sd).

Classrooms in Flanders are often multicultural, yet certain groups remain underrepresented in higher education. Diversity, multiculturalism, and inclusion have been heavily researched and often passionately debated in recent years in Flanders. Within higher education these debates focus on diversity and inclusion, multilingualism, decolonization, racism etcetera (Pulincx, Schrooten, & Emmers, 2021) (Kambel & Ağirdağ, 2018). Topics also of interest to international multicultural classrooms.

Strategy and policy

The five universities are united in the Flemish Inter-University Council (VLIR) and the universities of applied sciences (and arts) have their own consultative body, VLHORA. For common policies VLIR and VLHORA cooperate in the Flemish Council of Universities and University Colleges (VLUHR): www.vluhr.be. VLUHR International supports the internationalization processes of Flemish higher education. It functions as a liaison linking the

(Flemish) institutions of higher learning and the government, while at the same time situating itself within the European and global arena (VLUHR International, sd).

Numerous cooperative endeavors are implemented within a European framework, largely facilitated through the European Union's cooperation and mobility initiatives: Erasmus+ and Horizon. A multitude of Flemish universities serve as partners in the Knowledge and Innovation Communities of the European Institute of Innovation. Internationalization, incoming as well as outgoing, is strongly promoted in Flanders. In 2013, the Flemish government implemented the “Brains on the Move” action plan and internationalization policy today is still based on this plan. Following-up of the plan is done by the department of education and training and VLUHR international. An important goal of this plan is to increase outgoing student mobility. The action plan aims for 33% of graduates in Flanders to have studied abroad or participated in an internship abroad by 2020. Important elements of this plan are informing and advising Flemish tertiary educational institutions and students, making sure that mobility is integrated within the different bachelors and masters programs, stimulating partnerships with international institutions for summer schools or joint programs, optimizing the reception of incoming students, setting up scholarships, ... (Onderwijs Vlaanderen, 2013). This goal hasn't been met but an increase in outgoing student mobility can be observed. Between 2016-2017 and 2018-2019, the number of graduating students with international experience rose from 13,81% to 17,24% (Onderwijs Vlaanderen, 2021).

The various councils on (higher) education have all advised to promote the internationalization of higher education in Flanders. VLHORA for example stressed the importance of preparing students to be ready for an international work area and branding Flanders as a study destination for incoming students. In the same advice it also noted that internationalization is more than mobility of people. It is a mentality that can only be realized by mixing international data, examples and knowledge with local ones (VLHORA, sd).

VLIR-UOS (university development cooperation), consisting of the five universities and representatives of the universities of applied sciences and arts, supports partnerships with countries from the global south (VLIR-UOS, sd). The “global minds” program of VLHORA, is also orientated to partnerships with the global south.

It is justified to say that the internationalization of higher education is highly valued and promoted in Flanders.

Models to think about multicultural communication

Two frequently used models when dealing with multi- or interculturality in Flanders are Hoffman's TOPOI model and the cultural dimensions model developed by Hofstede. Hofstede was a management researcher. Based on his research of the staff of the multinational IBM he conceived of six dimensions to understand and bridge the differences between different cultures. The six dimensions are the power-distance index, individualism versus collectivism, masculinity and femininity, uncertainty avoidance index, long-term versus short-term

orientation and indulgence versus restraint (Nunez Mahdi, Obihara, Maarse, Nunez, & Hagenbeek, 2019).

A higher power-distance index reflects a more hierarchically organized society where people with different statuses in organizations (companies, universities,..) or social institutions (family, ...) treat each other less equally than in societies with a low power-distance index. People in individualistic societies are more focused on themselves and are more independent whereas in collectivistic societies the feeling of belonging to certain groups is more important than the individual needs. Masculine emotional roles are strong, assertive and geared toward material success. Feminine emotional roles are cooperation, modesty and care. Masculine societies are then characterized by clear distinctions between the emotional roles of men and women, feminine societies by an overlap between these roles. The uncertainty-avoidance index reflects the need for predictability and aversion for ambiguity. Societies with a high uncertainty-avoidance index depend upon clear rules and uncertainty generates stress. Societies with a short-term orientation value tradition, and those with a long-term orientation emphasize the importance of adaptation. Fulfilling one's desires and needs and enjoying life are encouraged in indulgent societies. In societies characterized by restraint on the other hand, the ways in which human desire can be fulfilled are more socially regulated.

One of the main criticisms of Hofstede's model is that it is creating stereotypical ways to think about different cultures. People have also reproached Hofstede that he is focusing on the difference between cultures. Nevertheless, his model is still widely in use. One of the teachers we interviewed used in a course on the difference between cultures.

Hoffman basically takes an opposite stance (Hoffman, 2020). He focuses on difficulties and misunderstandings in intercultural communication but he refuses to explain these issues by reference to the different cultures of those involved. On the contrary, his starting point is that all individuals belong to different social groups, that this shapes their identities and can be a source of noise in the communication. For example, misunderstandings can occur between people of different ages, social classes or religions, as all these groups have distinct cultures. Loosely based on Watzlawick's five axioms of communication he distinguishes between five different fields in which noise in intercultural communication can occur. TOPOI is an acronym referring to Tongue, Order, Person, Organization and Intentions and Influence but it also refers to the Greek word *topoi*, meaning commonplace. The *topoi* model is a tool to analyze intercultural communication and devise interventions. Difficulties with regard to language can occur when people use the same words with a (slightly) different meaning, use words in an expert meaning, use irony,... Order refers to the different ways in which people interpret reality and potentially ensuing misunderstandings. Persons refers to the implicit relational content of communication. It concerns the roles and the expectations that people are (implicitly) ascribing to each other. The organization is about the context of communication and the consequences of this. Intentions and influence, finally is about what is at stake for each of the individuals participating in the communication.

Methodology

For the qualitative part of this study 5 incoming international students and 5 faculty members teaching incoming students were interviewed. We used an interview guide developed by colleagues from İzmir Kâtip Çelebi Üniversitesi. The study was approved by the ethical committee of the Czech University of Life Sciences. After this approval, we started recruiting. Faculty members were recruited by an email that was sent by HOGENT’s international office. 5 colleagues replied and were interviewed in the months of March and April 2023. Student participation in the study was asked at an event for incoming students, an email, a message on the online learning platform. Finally, we started going to classes asking students to participate in the study. We managed to interview 4 students from HOGENT. The fifth student was studying at Ghent University. The length of the interviews varied between 30 and 50 minutes. The interviews were transcribed and coded. We will state the analyses with some themes that were clearly overarching several research questions.

Table 1. Demographic data teaching staff

	Gender	Age	Faculty	Field expertise of	Years of experience in teaching	Years of experience in teaching multicultural classrooms
1	Female	50	School of Business and Management	Marketing	5	5
2	Female	63	School of Social Welfare	Professional ethics and sustainability	39	3
3	Male	37	School of Business and Management	Finance	15	10
4	Male	44	School of Business and Management	Business process management	8	6
5	Female	30	School of Business and Management	Communication	7	2

Table 2. Demographic data students

	Gender	Age	Faculty	Field of study	Country of origin
1	Female	22	Business	languages	Spain
2	Male	23	KASK	art	Netherlands
3	Female	23	International finance	finances	Germany
4	Female	24	Business	International business and international relations	Norway
5	Female	23	Literature and linguistics	General and comparative literature	Spain

Findings

Language

Language is the first theme mentioned by all interviewees. Various students mentioned language as a challenge, an opportunity and an essential skill. All programs for incoming students are taught in English and everyone we talked to mentioned the variations in mastery of the English language both among students and teachers. One student noticed that the English of her and her countrymen was worse than that of students from other countries. She attributed this to the fact that in her country television series and movies were dubbed instead of subtitled. Overall students and teachers alike notice a difference between students coming from Germanic-speaking countries and students coming from Romance-speaking countries. Several students and teachers mentioned the language also as an opportunity. Being obliged to listen and talk and write in English was considered by some as an excellent way of improving their English. One student also noticed that you need to be willing to communicate in English, even if your mastery of the language is not perfect. Some students also noticed that teachers adapted their language to the different levels present in the class and made an extra effort to make sure students understood what they were saying. Overall, teachers seem to think that most students eventually pick up on the English but they remain sensitive to the issue.

The level of English was also discussed. Some teachers also stated that having to teach in English was a way of adapting their teaching. Some of the teachers are clearly more fluent in English than others so the adaptation is bigger for the latter. One student mentioned a teacher making lots of mistakes and noticed students copying these. One teacher mentioned the fact that she was not very fluent in English and that making mistakes and searching for the right English words was a way to make the classroom more inclusive. She explicitly named teaching in a foreign language “a handicap”.

The question of mastery of the English language also pops up with regard to grading. Although understanding and speaking might improve over the course of the students’ stay in Flanders this might not always be the case for writing. In fact, one teacher mentioned receiving a paper which he found incomprehensible and he had to ask the student to write it anew. Teachers

seem aware of the issue and take it into account when grading. For example, some teachers have more multiple-choice questions for international students than in their exams for local students.

According to one teacher, the use of English as language in the classroom is also a problem for local students who might not choose these classes because they feel don't sufficiently master the language. This might thus be a barrier to interaction between local and incoming students (see further).

Cultural differences

A second overarching theme was culture. It might be worth noting that there was no clear definition used of culture. Most teachers seemed to use the word culture in reference to different habits, norms, ways of doing things, languages in different countries or in different regions. Teachers and students alike often talked about the differences between Nordic and Southern cultures. We will use the word culture in this sense and not, for example as referring to differences between social classes or subgroups.

Everything that has to do with cultural differences was mostly regarded in a positive way, either as a benefit or as a motivation for studying abroad. Some students also mentioned some challenges related to cultural differences.

The classroom was seen as a space to meet different contexts, stimulations and habits and this motivated some students to study abroad. Most students also mentioned the fact that you got to know different ways of studying and working than the ones they were used to in their home country. They mentioned different methodologies, a different course structure. One student stated that she needed to organize her time in a different way.

Apart from what happened in the classroom students also explicitly stated that they learned in an experiential way about multicultural societies. One student said that she got to know different approaches and people who have different imaginations and that this opens up a new spectrum of knowledge. Various students mentioned that they now were more aware that society was multicultural and that they were reconsidering their own conception of the world and their studies.

Overall we might say students seem to think that meeting different cultures is an intrinsic value. They said all of this contributed to their personal growth.

Often mentioned: the intrinsic value of getting to know other cultures. Someone mentioned that when you're studying you don't have too many obligations and this is the right time in one's life to go abroad and meet new cultures. One student went further and declared that this contributes to a better society because you learn to take into account different communities. A student stated that learning to question yourself and your frame of reference is a good skill when you want to do research later.

Likewise, teachers also stated that contact with different cultures was one of the biggest opportunities for incoming students noticing that they not only learn in class but that they also have “international exposure”. According to teachers, students are confronted with different skills, points of view, and attitudes. Moreover, for most of the teachers we’ve spoken the exposure to different attitudes, languages and dealing with education is also a strong motivator to teach in international classrooms. They find it enriching, it questions their own teaching and frame of reference. In this way, they also learn about their professional self. Two teachers stated that they got to know different ways of teaching which they are now applying in their classes with local students.

Challenges for students/teachers

As mentioned above, for some students, the biggest challenge was language. Apart from that, students also revealed leaving behind their social network and having to start from scratch as other challenges they experienced. Furthermore, they mentioned another common challenge was the fact that some academic expectations were taken for granted or not made explicit(i.e. the way to structure a paper) . Most teachers acknowledged the differences in teaching style and expectations and told us it was very important to make their expectations as explicit as possible.

A final challenge, mentioned several times was the interaction with local students. Some of the classes are for international students only whereas in other classes, local students are also present. Several students noticed that it was easier to make a connection with the other international students. She attributed this to preexisting friendships between local students and had observed a similar phenomenon at her own university. This lack of contact with local students is also observed in the literature (Huisman, Vlegels, Daenkindt, Seeber, & Laufer, 2021).

Teachers remarked similar things. Teachers and students alike stated the importance of meeting different cultures. However, the teachers often noticed a tendency among students to stick with people who spoke the same language, or came from the same institution or country. Teachers were divided on how to deal with this. Some were of the opinion that you could only encourage students to mingle with students from other cultures. Whereas, others took a more interventionist stance. For example, making sure that for groupwork students did not work with other students from the same country. This was done to increase their exposure to other cultures. Several students also explicitly mentioned this as a strategy used by teachers to create a more inclusive classroom.

Some teachers noticed a difference in background knowledge of students in their class. This background knowledge might be due to educational quality in the home country but also to the fact that students might be in a HOGENT program that was less related to the one they were doing at their home university. The challenge was to make the class appealing to both students familiar with and students less familiar with the subject. One teacher also added that

grading isn't always easy. What is considered to be a good grade in Belgium might not be a good grade in another country, leading to disappointment for students.

Adaptations

Almost all teachers said their international classes were more interactive than the ones with local students, discussing cultural differences in depth. Students also noticed this and seemed to appreciate it. One student said they were really encouraged to participate in discussions. All teachers stated that they adapted the content of their course to an international context, mainly through the examples or illustrations they chose. Trying to make sure these are not solely from a Belgian/European context, many teachers asked students to come up with examples from their own country/culture. Teachers then to time to let students expose their examples to them and to the other students, making sure cultural diversity is recognized and appreciated. According to some research, this is an important prerequisite for multicultural classrooms being beneficial (De Leersnyder, Gündemir, & Ağirdağ, 2021).

Several teachers mentioned being more relaxed and more flexible with international students. They felt this was necessary because of the different expectations and customs in the class.

Racism

None of the teachers mentioned having encountered racism in an international class. Some of them stated that they made it very explicit in the first lessons that racism and discrimination would be tolerated. With this disclaimer, they tried to create a safe or a brave space where differences between cultures could be discussed without being judged. None of the students mentioned having encountered racism in an international class.

Essential skills

Almost all students mentioned being open-minded, respectful of other views, and good communication skills as essential for a good international experience. Teachers listed the following: being open-minded, flexibility, conflict management, giving and receiving feedback, and awareness of cultural differences.

Support for students and teachers

Teachers and students alike mentioned the lack of institutional support. Students said they would have wanted more support with practical things like housing and with having some basic notions of the language of the country. One student would have like some kind of refresher course in English.

Some teachers clearly stated that they had no interest in training or instruction. According to them, it wouldn't make much difference. Two teachers had participated in 2toTango, a European initiative where they read texts and discussed them in small groups. Topics treated were teaching, exams and grading. They knew of the initiative through the internationalization office at HOGENT. Both teachers appreciated the initiative. Most teachers were open for more training on the condition that it was hands-on, interactive and with lots of cases that they could discuss with colleagues.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the internationalization of higher education in Flanders is a highly valued and promoted endeavor. The Flemish government, along with various councils and organizations, has implemented strategies and policies to enhance incoming and outgoing student mobility, foster partnerships with international institutions, and support the internationalization processes of Flemish higher education. With approximately 40,000 international students studying in Flanders, language and cultural diversity emerge as key themes in the experiences of both students and faculty members.

Language proficiency, particularly in English, plays a significant role in the internationalization efforts. While English is the primary language of instruction for incoming students, variations in language proficiency among students and teachers pose challenges. However, language is not solely seen as a hurdle but also as an opportunity for improvement and skill development. Teachers demonstrate adaptability by adjusting their teaching methods and providing additional support to ensure effective communication in English.

Cultural differences are widely acknowledged and celebrated, with students considering exposure to diverse cultures as an intrinsic value of studying abroad. The multicultural classroom environment offers students the chance to experience different approaches, methodologies, and perspectives. It fosters personal growth, broadens students' understanding of multicultural societies, and prompts them to reevaluate their own beliefs and worldviews. However, challenges related to cultural differences are also recognized, emphasizing the importance of cultural sensitivity, adaptability, and intercultural communication skills.

References

De Leersnyder, J., Gündemir, S., & Ağirdağ, O. (2021). Diversity approaches matter in international classrooms: how a multicultural approach buffers against cultural misunderstandings and encourages inclusion and psychological safety. *Studies in Higher Education*. doi:10.1080/03075079.2021.1983534

Departement onderwijs en vorming. (2022, december). Hoger onderwijs in cijfers 2022-2023. Retrieved from <https://www.vlaanderen.be/publicaties/hoger-onderwijs-in-cijfers>

Hoffman, E. (2020). Diversiteitsbewuste communicatie. In L. Rubio Reparaz, S. Ardjosemito-Jethoe, & E. Rousseau, Diversiteit in de samenleving (pp. 124-139). Assen: van gorcum.

Huisman, J., Vlegels, J., Daenkindt, S., Seeber, M., & Laufer, M. (2021). How satisfied are international students? The role of town, gown and motivations. Compare: A journal of comparative and international education. doi:10.1080/03057925.2020.1867826

Kambel, E.-R., & Ağirdağ, O. (2018). Meertaligheid en onderwijs: Nederlands plus. Amsterdam: Boom.

Lafleur, J.-M., & Marfouk, A. (2019). A common Home: Migration and development in Belgium. Brussels: Caritas International.

Malfroy, E., & Persoons, M.-A. (2022, March). Higher Education Policy Report: Belgium/Flemish Community. Retrieved from <https://whec2022.net/resources/Country%20report%20-%20Belgium%20Flanders.pdf>

Nunez Mahdi, R., Obihara, C., Maarse, D., Nunez, C., & Hagenbeek, E. (2019). Interculturele communicatie in de zorg: Kennis, vaardigheden en houding voor zorgprofessionals. Assen: van gorcum.

OECD. (2017). Education policy outlook: Belgium. Retrieved from <https://www.oecd.org/education/Education-Policy-Outlook-Country-Profile-Belgium.pdf>

Onderwijs Vlaanderen. (2013). Brains on the move, actieplan mobiliteit 2013. Retrieved from <https://publicaties.vlaanderen.be/view-file/13219>

Onderwijs Vlaanderen. (2021, januari). Monitor studentenmobiliteit, actieplan Brains on the move, 2013. Retrieved from <https://onderwijs.vlaanderen.be/sites/default/files/2021-07/Monitor%20mobiliteit%20januari%202021.pdf>

Pulincx, R., Schrooten, M., & Emmers, E. (2021). Diversiteit in het hoger onderwijs: van theoretisch kader naar praktijkgerichte verandering. Brussel: ASP.

Rubio Reparaz, L., Ardjosemito-Jethoe, S., & Rousseau, E. (2020). het ontstaan van de diverse samenleving in de Nederlandsde en Belgische context. In L. Rubio Reparaz, S. Ardjosemito-Jethoe, & E. Rousseau, Diversiteit in de samenleving (pp. 20-37). Assen: van gorcum.

Stad Gent. (n.d.). Wortels in migratie. Retrieved from <https://hoeveelin.stad.gent/tendensen/wortels-in-migratie/>

Study in Flanders. (n.d.). Retrieved from Higher education in Flanders: <https://www.studyinlanders.be/higher-education-in-flanders>

Van Huylenbroeck, G. (2019). INTEGRATED POLICY PLAN FOR INTERNATIONALIZATION 2019-2023. Gent: UGENT.

VLHORA. (2023). Oktobertelling 2022. Retrieved from https://www.vlaamsehogescholeeraad.be/nl/oktobertelling_2022

VLHORA. (n.d.). Sterke internationalisering. Retrieved from <https://www.vlaamsehogescholeeraad.be/nl/hefboom-sterkere-internationalisering>

VLIR-UOS. (n.d.). VLIR-UOS. Retrieved from <https://www.vliruos.be/en/home/1>

VLUHR International. (n.d.). Retrieved from VLUHR: <https://www.international.vluhr.be/>

THE CURRENT SITUATION OF THE INTERNATIONALIZATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN BULGARIA

Albena Antonova -Nikolina Nikolova- Tanya Yordanova
(Sofya University Saint Kliment Ohridski)

Abstract

The increased globalization put a new perspective on the importance of setting more multicultural and inclusive higher educational systems in Europe. Traditionally, Higher Education Institutions (HEI) in Europe are recognized for the high quality of education and research and attract many international students. Responding on the raising trends, the Erasmus+ project “Multiclass: the multicultural classroom: inclusive learning and teaching in higher education”, aims to increase the quality and value of the multicultural dimension of HEI in Europe and the capability of teachers to manage multicultural and diverse classrooms.

Bulgaria has a long-standing history and traditions of academic excellence. The Bulgarian HEI are recognized on a global level and are open for international and multicultural students from all over the world. So, in order to elaborate a more in-depth analysis of the multicultural classrooms’ practices in Bulgaria, a qualitative research was conducted in April 2023 with eleven participants. Following the same procedure as the other MClass project partners, the data were collected on the basis of a structured questionnaires. The interviews are made on two groups, first there were involved five selected teaching staff and then, six international students at several Bulgarian Universities all across the country. The two separate questionnaires were set for the teaching staff and for the students, each of them divided into five sections: individual experience and approaches, benefits, challenges, mechanisms and needs. The emphasize of the research is to find out the main challenges, perceptions, experiences and attitude of both teaching staff and international students in terms of diversity and multiculturalism.

The outcomes of the desktop research prove that Bulgarian HEI system has main benefits and competitive advantages on international level. Some of the main advantages cover the high quality of the training, the recognized degrees and diplomas in all EU member-states, the more reasonable tuition fees and study expenses, and the affordable living conditions. Traditionally, Bulgarian universities have established specific programs and academic departments tailored for international students. These initiatives often include a preparatory year dedicated to learning the Bulgarian language, which then allows students to pursue their chosen specialty. Alternatively, international students may also opt to enrol in English language programs or participate in various international exchange programs.

The results of the qualitative research can be summarized in several findings. First, it was confirmed that the both groups - teaching staff and students appreciate the benefits of teaching and learning in multicultural classrooms. The teaching staff manifested to be very motivated and open to work with international students. However, there were found many

challenges that should be better addressed when teaching to international students and most of the teachers do not have any training or suitable materials for preparing. Some of the students indicated different problems and misunderstanding, making their studies more challenging. They mentioned the good level of knowledge of English, flexibility, openness to differences, respect for the other cultures.

This study aims to contribute to the analysis of the current situation in Bulgarian universities regarding diversity and multiculturalism. Its objective is to prepare best practices and the provide training and support to teaching staff in managing diverse and multicultural classrooms within higher education institutions across Europe.

Introduction

The Bulgarian national report for Multicultural training in HEI aims to contribute for the realization of the goals and objectives of the Erasmus+ project - MULTICLASS “The multicultural classroom: inclusive learning and teaching in higher education”. The MClass project partners are focused on enhancing the quality and multicultural dimension of Higher Education across Europe, and to this end, are committed to developing an innovative, short-term curriculum for staff training, as well as a didactical guideline and a set of teaching materials, designed to enable HEI teaching staff to better manage the challenges posed by multicultural and diverse classrooms.

The Bulgarian report is prepared conformed to the methodology adopted by the MClass partner universities. The comprehensive results of this research are provided in the national report, which summarizes the situation regarding multicultural classroom learning and teaching in higher education. The first part of the national report provides a comprehensive summary of the Bulgarian policies and general legal and institutional framework for the international students to be admitted in Bulgarian HEI. It presents the basic characteristics of the Higher education system in Bulgaria, covering institutional structure of the tertiary education and its programs. The second part of the document is dedicated on empirical outcomes of the multicultural training in HEI. More specifically, it explores the outcomes of a comprehensive summary of 11 interviews with HEI lecturers and international students.

A short description of the national higher education system in Bulgaria

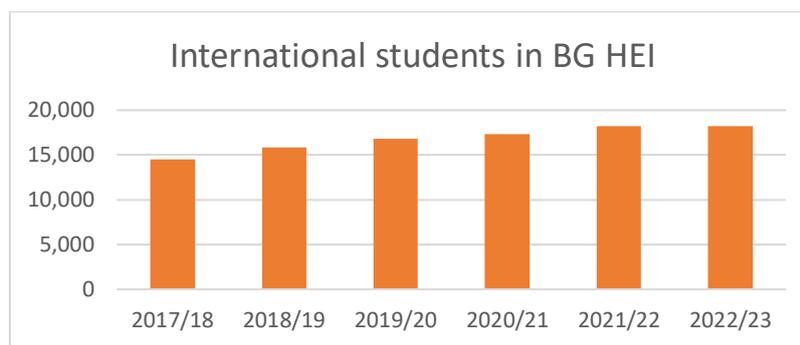
Bulgaria has a long-standing history and traditions of academic excellence and on a strategic policy level, Bulgarian HEIs are committed on providing high-quality education and training to develop specialists with advanced degrees beyond the secondary level education. More detailed analysis of the national HEI system and structure is provided by national public web sites, such as the Ministry of education and science (mon.bg), National Statistical Institute (nsi.bg) and National Evaluation and Accreditation Agency (navet.bg). Bulgaria has adopted the ECTS (European Credit Transfer System) under the higher education act, and it was put

into effect since 2004. Bulgarian higher education institutions are very well-connected with EU universities and students can participate in many mobility and exchange programs such as Erasmus students' mobility, international stay abroad or other form of students exchange.

A comprehensive research and analysis of the International students in Bulgaria is made as well in the framework of the *EMN Main Study 2012: Immigration of International Students to the EU* and the *National Report from the Republic of Bulgaria in 2012*¹. This study estimates that the average number of International students in Bulgaria from third countries (outside EU) for the period 2007-2012 varies between 11 200 – 12 100 students per year.

Some more recent data show that the number of foreign students enrolled in Bulgarian HEI is steadily increasing in the last years from 14 512 in 2017/2018 academic year to 18 197 students for 2022/2023². It is important to mention that foreign students still represent a minor part of the students in Bulgaria. However, it should be highlighted that international students represent less than 8% of the total students in Bulgaria (214 782 students), enrolled for the academic year 2022-2023. Most of the international students come from the neighbourhood countries, such as Greece, Türkiye, Serbia and Macedonia.

Figure 1. Number of international students enrolled in BG HEI, 2017-2023. (Source: nsi.bg)



Various data show that the majority of international students (more than 60%) are enrolled in Medicine. Thus, the most popular international HEI programs, attracting foreign students are in the field of Medicine (Medicine, Dentistry, Pharmacy) and Engineering. There are available both option for international students, either to enroll in English-language programs or in regular Bulgarian program after a preparatory year on studying Bulgarian language. Some other scientific fields, attracting foreign students are: mathematics and informatics, technical studies (engineering, architecture), chemistry, biology, language studies and humanities, agriculture, etc.

¹ National Report from the Republic of Bulgaria for EMN study on Immigration of International Students to the EU, 2012, available on <https://studylib.net/doc/18335724/national-report-from-the-republic-of-bulgaria-for-emn-stu>

² Data available for 2022 from the web portal www.nsi.bg

National policies for the internationalization of higher education

The Bulgarian HEI system is regulated by the National Evaluation and Accreditation Agency (NAVET) which supervise the quality standards of the HEI institutions. The National Agency for Evaluation and Accreditation conducts periodic evaluations and external monitoring to ensure that higher education institutions maintain the high educational standards. In total there are 52 High Education Institutions approved by NAVET³. According to the last data, the HEI system includes 37 public and state-owned universities and 14 private universities. More specifically the public universities cover (25 universities, 11 specialized higher schools and 1 self-contained college) and 14 private higher schools (5 universities, 2 specialized higher schools and 7 self-contained colleges). The HEI are not evenly distributed. Most of them are concentrated in the cities of Sofia, Plovdiv and Varna, Ruse, Blagoevgrad and Stara Zagora, but many universities have subsidiaries also in the smaller cities. The tertiary education system consists of universities, specialized higher schools and self-contained colleges.

- A university is a higher school which provides training in a wide range of subjects in professional areas within at least three of the four major branches of science - humanities, natural sciences, social sciences and technical sciences; offers bachelor's, master's and doctor's degrees in the respective major branches of science; has ample scientific and artistic potential and through its activities contributes to the development of major branches of science and culture. A higher school offering academic courses in one or two major branches of science or culture may be a university with its appellation signifying its specific nature.
- A specialized higher school conducts scientific research or artistic and creative activities and offers courses of training in one of the major areas of science, arts, physical culture, and military science. Its appellation shall signify the specific area in which it trains specialists. These higher schools may also offer training for acquisition of the educational and qualification degree of "master" and the educational and academic and academic degree of "doctor".
- A self-contained college shall provide training for acquisition of the educational and qualification degree "professional bachelor in ...". The college shall have full-time faculty, holding at least a half of the classroom teaching and practical exercises in each specialty.
- A college may be also established within the structure of a university or of a specialized higher school accredited for the professional areas or majors of regulated professions for which instruction shall be offered. The college shall provide training at the educational and qualification degree "professional bachelor in ...".

³ NAVET <https://rvu.nacid.bg/home>

The EU portal eurydice.eu provides a list with the main Bulgarian legal framework documents, acts and ordinances concerning international students⁴. Based on it, the main legal documents for HEI, influencing the admission of International students in Bulgaria are the Higher Education Act (since 1995). Academic Staff Development Act (since 2010); Granting Loans to Student and Doctoral Candidate Loans Act (since 2008); Ordinance on the state requirements for the admission of students in the Bulgarian higher schools; Ordinance on the state requirements for acquisition of higher education at Bachelor, Master and “Specialist in..” educational and qualification degree; Ordinance on the state requirements for recognition of the acquired educational degree and completed certain periods of studies in foreign higher schools; Ordinances on the state requirements for the contents of all principal documents issued by higher schools and attached European diploma appendix under the model developed by the European Commission, Council of Europe and UNESCO- European Centre for Higher Education (CEPES); Ordinances on applying of a system for accumulation and transfer credit points within higher schools (since 2004), which introduces the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS); Rules on the state requirements for the organization of distance learning form at higher schools (since 2004).

HEI admission procedures for International students

Bulgarian higher education institutions are open for international students, where they can receive a high-quality education, a fully recognized degrees, very reasonable tuition fees and low living costs. Among the main benefits for the international students are the fact, that the country is a member state of the European Union (EU), and thus the degrees received by Bulgarian higher education institutions are recognized in all EU states and beyond. International students can choose to enrol either to Bulgarian HEI programs or to HEI programs on a foreign language.

The first option for enrolling in Bulgarian HEI covers to study a preparatory course on Bulgarian language for 2 semesters (preparation year) and then choose a degree program in the Bulgarian language. All Bulgarian universities provide a preparation year in their campuses. The degree programs in the Bulgarian language are significantly cheaper than the programs in a foreign language.

The second option for international students is to apply directly for a program in a foreign language. Some of the tuition fees of the universities differentiate for EU Citizens and for Non-EU Citizens.

⁴ <https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-education-systems/bulgaria/higher-education>

At the same time, based on the information from the Ministry of Education⁵, the number and type of joint programs with foreign Higher Education Institutions are steadily increasing. The double degree programmes guarantee that after completion, the double degree is awarded by Bulgarian and by the partner university. The programmes cover Bachelor and Master degree curriculum and are organised in cooperation with British, Netherland, American, or French universities.

The joint programs are executed based on the following forms of cooperation between Bulgarian Higher Education Institutions and foreign universities and/or accrediting institutions:

- Agreements for combined educational activity with foreign universities providing for the award of double degrees and/or joint degrees.
- Education Franchise Agreements with foreign universities.
- Accreditations from foreign accreditation agencies for separate professional fields studied in Bulgarian universities or foreign accreditation of an entire Bulgarian university.

The last data reveal that for 2022, in total 24 Bulgarian universities offer 77 joint programs with International Universities, in which were enrolled 5 200 BSc and MSc students and 64 PhD students.

The greatest number of joint programs have been launched by the Sofia University (10) and the Technical University of Sofia (10), followed by the Higher School of Management – Varna (8), New Bulgarian University (6), Agricultural University – Plovdiv (5) and South-West University – Blagoevgrad (5). The oldest active joint program is created back in 1990 by the Technical University of Sofia and the Karlsruhe Institute of Technology and provides German language education in General Mechanical Engineering for obtaining both Bachelor and Master degrees.

The largest share of students' studying in joint programs are in the American University, where all students obtain two degrees (a Bulgarian and a US one). Seven universities offer doctoral training in joint programs. More than half of the joint programs involve teaching in English, but numerous programs also offer tuition in Bulgarian, Russian, German, French, etc. A number of the joint programs are organized in cooperation with universities from EU member countries such as Germany, France, Austria, Italy and Greece; however, there exist many joint programs with other countries like United Kingdom, USA, Russia, Kazakhstan, Switzerland, etc. A total of 24 different professional fields are covered, with most joint programs focused in the fields of Economics (17), Administration and Management (11), Tourism (10), Communication and Computer Technology (7), Philology (7), Informatics and Computer Sciences (6), General Engineering (6).

⁵ News of the Ministry of Education web site, *Joint programs with International HEI in Bulgaria for 2022* (on Bulgarian), available on <https://rsvu.mon.bg/rsvu4/#/media-article/141>

Overview of the academic literature

A short overview of the academic literature shows, that the problems of integration of foreign students and multicultural education in Bulgarian HEI are not well investigated in the academic research. Some aspects of the multicultural classroom settings are covered by the papers found in the desktop research, which discuss more specific elements such as teaching different ethnic groups or minorities. For example, the study of Sokolova (2022) is focused on the cultural sensitivity of Bulgarian teachers working in classes with multi-ethnic groups. In this domain can be mentioned as well some of the studies performed by specific NGOs such as International Center for Minority Studies and Intercultural Relations (IMIR), where Zhelyazkova et al. (2010) investigate the tolerance and cultural diversity in Bulgaria and the Bulgarian Ethnic model of parallel cohabitation or multicultural recognition.

Some academic authors investigate the problems of teaching Bulgarian language to foreign students. In this field, the paper of Koycheva & Manevska (2018) presents the authors expertise and methods, adopted at the Agricultural University (AU) – Plovdiv for teaching Bulgarian language and include various teaching methodologies to the multicultural classes.

Different aspects of the multicultural education are mentioned as well from more theoretical research perspective. For example, the study of Roth (2007), presents some general conclusions for ethical considerations in front of the intercultural trainers, highlighting the specifics and differences of the European cultural styles. The study of Morska (2012) is exploring some general concepts of the intercultural communicative competences. Dankova & Petrov (2016) investigates some of the main factors which influence the adaptation process of mobility students.

In this perspective, the desktop research shows that the issues of multicultural classroom management, the problems of integrating international students and the specific teaching practices and methodologies to improve the quality of training in Multiclass environment are not addressed sufficiently by the Bulgarian academic community. This can be explained by the fact that international students are still a minor part of the HEI students and university lecturers are not facing more specific problems with their integration and adaptation.

Methodology

Research design

Considering the scope of the study, the following research questions were deeply explored in the framework of the literature review and empirical investigations and interviews with teachers and students at HEI.

Research Questions

1. How do international students experience higher education in Europe in terms of diversity and multiculturalism?
2. What are the perceptions and attitudes of teaching staff towards managing multicultural and diverse classrooms in higher education institutions in Europe?
3. What are the challenges and barriers faced by both international students and teaching staff in promoting diversity and multiculturalism in higher education in Europe?
4. How effective is the current training and support provided to teaching staff for managing multicultural and diverse classrooms in higher education institutions in Europe?
5. What are the best practices and strategies for promoting diversity and multiculturalism in higher education in Europe and how can they be integrated into the training curriculum and teaching materials?

All partners introduced the same form of structured interviews. For the purpose to facilitate interviewees, the questions were translated on Bulgarian. The interview questions have been prepared and agreed by the Multiclass consortium. The questionnaire for teaching staff consisted of 20 questions divided into five sections: Individual experience and approaches (10 questions), benefits (2 questions), challenges (2 questions), mechanisms (3 questions) and needs (3 questions) listed in the Annex 2. The student questionnaire consisted of 14 questions, which were divided into 5 sections: Individual experience and approaches (6 questions), benefits (2 questions), challenges (2 questions), mechanisms (2 questions) and needs (2 questions) provided in the Annex 3.

Study area

During the first phase, the Bulgarian team presented and disseminated information about the MClass project within the Euraxess Network Bulgaria, on their annual meeting in February 2023. There, about 20 representatives of the partner universities all across the country participated in Euraxess Annual meeting at the premises of Sofia University. Next, through the Euraxess channels in every university were nominated suitable professors and lecturers with expertise in teaching in Multicultural Classrooms in different Universities and specialities. All lecturers who finally were selected have significant experience in teaching in Multicultural classes and cover different disciplines, different scientific domains and different

universities. More importantly all teachers have different Multiclass expertise – for example teaching on Erasmus Mobility students, teaching on international students in the preparatory University courses on Bulgarian language, teaching classes in regular English language programs, teaching abroad, or organizing mixed classes for International students.

For attracting suitable students, the team explored several nominations among different universities and identified the candidates based on their country of origin, ethnicity or religion.

Data Collection

To collect and explore qualitative data, Sofia University team conducted 11 interviews with lecturers and students with substantial experience and expertise in Multicultural classrooms settings. To conduct interviews, the team first sent both Bulgarian and English versions of questionnaires and informed consent by email, then organized interviews by telephone or through online platform (zoom, google meet). Considering privacy issues, no recordings were performed, but interviewers took notes of the answers. Most of the interviews took between 30 min and 45 min., allowing interviewees to freely express their personal feelings, memories and attitudes for teaching and learning in international settings. Some of the contacted students were afraid to speak publicly and preferred to send written answers on the interview questions, not feeling comfortable to discuss openly their feelings and experiences from experiencing discrimination and racism. It was admitted that international students have faced different struggles.

All of the interviews were conducted in the period 15th of March and 15th of April 2023. The transcripts are taken on Bulgarian and then translated on English. All respondents submitted a signed consent form (on Bulgarian).

Table 1. Teaching Staff:

		Gender	Age	Faculty	Field of expertise	Years of experience in teaching	Years of experience in multicultural classrooms
1	Assoc. prof. DK	Female	40-50	University of National and World Economy, Sofia, Bulgaria	ICT and Business	15-20	Over 13
2	Assoc. prof. VS	Male	40-50	Technical University, Sofia	Engineering	15-20	Over 13
3	Assoc. prof. TM	Female	40-50	Medical University, Sofia	Chemistry	15-20	Over 13
4	Assoc. prof. MA	Female	40-50	Department for language teaching and International students, Sofia University	Physics	15-20	14
5	Assoc. prof. MM	Female	40-50	Plovdiv University	Bulgarian language for foreign students	15-20	15

Table 2. Students:

	Name	Gender	Age	Faculty/University	Field of study	Country of origin
1	TP	Female	25	Technical University of Sofia	Transportation Technics and technologies	Serbia
2	II	Male	25	University of National and World Economy, Sofia, Bulgaria	Economics of the infrastructure, and media economics	Türkiye
3	DD	Male	30	University of National and World Economy, Sofia, Bulgaria	Human resources	Bulgaria/Muslim origin
4	FSH	Female	20	New Bulgarian University, Sofia	Psychology	Iran
5	AI	Female	20	Sofia University	Journalism	Ukraine
6.	NK	Female	20	University of National and World Economy, Sofia, Bulgaria	International relations	Bulgaria/Macedonia

During the interviews, the interviewees' rights, privacy and confidentiality were ensured and informed consent was signed by all participants. The study was approved by the MClass partner institution - Ethics Committee of the Czech University of Life Sciences Prague. The

collected data were transcribed and analysed using qualitative data analysis methods - content analysis. Data were coded and categorized based on themes emerging from the data.

Findings

Academic staff experience

Individual experience and approaches

All selected teachers are professionals with substantial experience (more than 15 years) in teaching in multicultural environment. The academic staff, who took part in the interviews came from 5 universities (Sofia University, Medical University, Technical University, Plovdiv University, and University of National and World Economy). Most of the teachers have mainly experience with international students usually coming from neighbourhood countries (Greece, North Macedonia and Türkiye), but lecturers remember to have had students from all around the world - Italy, UK, Germany, Japan, Austria, India, China, Vietnam, Arabic countries, Africa, Russia, Ukraine, even Chili, Cuba and many others.

In general, all of the teachers enjoy and are very positive for teaching in multicultural classes and teaching international students. In many occasions all of the teachers declared to feel very motivated and interested in multicultural classrooms, as the students are more challenging and demanding. As one of the teachers states: *“Bulgarian students are not used to ask many questions, while most of the international students are more focused, more active in class, show bigger respect, perform tasks more accurately than Bulgarian students”*. Another lecturer states: *“I’m really motivated in a positive way, as multicultural classrooms challenge me to be a better lecturer”*. Most of the lecturers recognize that multiclass environment is more competitive as nobody from the students want to be ashamed. In Multiclass environments, students feel more challenged and motivated to learn more and to catch up with learning. So, international groups are more engaging and students feel more competitive. Another teacher states that international students work together to cope with many different problems, they cooperate more, becoming friends and forming communities.

None of the teachers had experienced cases of racism or discrimination in their class. The teaching staff tries to be tolerant with the international students, employing different strategies to manage and motivate diverse classrooms. Some teachers state that they always try to explore students’ points of view, to adapt their teaching strategies, their explanations and examples. Some teachers are used to employ a lot of visual examples, drama techniques, demonstrations with 3D models, showing movies and visual models to illustrate more complex issues. The students’ questions provoke teachers to be more creative and open for better explaining complex issues and organizing demonstrations and first-hand experiments.

Benefits

Teachers identified both benefits and problems when teaching in multicultural environment. The benefits can be related with learning and accepting a new culture, accepting a different point of view, trying to be more comprehensive and clearer in teaching. Most of them find the teaching is always interesting and they lack a routine, as teachers should be alert for all kind of questions, unexpected situations, these MClass experiences motivate them to provide more examples to make connections with different disciplines and subjects.

Another important benefit is the positive feedback received from international students. All teachers remember when international students expressed their gratitude. This is very fulfilling when students understand and become more confident in their knowledge. There are many wonderful experiences with international students, as they more often are polite, make compliments, and show gratitude for teacher's efforts.

Concerning the Bulgarian language studies, the teachers say that the impact and the benefits of the Bulgarian classes come almost immediately. *When students leave the room after the first classes, they can go out and say "hello" and "thank you" on Bulgarian. After several hours they can understand better the local people, so they become more aware of the life around them. This makes students really motivated to perform better. It changes their stay and their experience. In the beginning, international students live very lonely, without talking or communicating with other students or rarely speaking with other people outside the university. With the progress in the classes, they become more confident and start to talk and to communicate.* All this allows students to feel more comfortable not only in the classes, but in the local environment. This way, they become able to explore the city and the country on their own.

Challenges

Most of the challenges are related to student's expectations and pre-conceptions. For example, the requirements on a school level largely differ across countries, and these students come to Bulgarian Universities with different expectations and background knowledge, including different level of English skills. Some students expect to be tolerated just because they are foreigners. Some teachers report that some international students had cases of cheating, bad discipline in class or be lazy, not preparing properly their classwork, for missing classes. Therefore, teachers in the beginning of their classes should to explain clearly the rules and show that the "mentality" in the university should be that students have not to "receive" knowledge, but they have to work hard for it, for obtaining meaningful results.

Some of the other challenges of the international students come from their efforts to adapt to the local culture and customs. Usually international students have different organizational and administrative struggles and need more time to organize properly their stay in the beginning of the semester. There are many cases of challenges considering practical issues such as finding accommodation, organizing classes, adapting to the teaching requirements and others.

Some of the teachers' challenges are to respond to the student's expectations and to be very creative in order to engage and to motivate them to learn. To make international students feel more comfortable in class, teachers offer them personal attitude, support and assistance, ask them if they need some additional help for administrative issues, try to be flexible for examinations. Some teachers even provide their contact details just in case of specific problems with the students. They try to be flexible with deadlines, considering that students are traveling on their holidays, make exceptions and try to figure out the students' point of view. One of the lecturer states that he is open to discuss with the students their problems, or to find a person (specific for the situation), who can help better the student as is closer to them. For example, a senior student can become a better mentor for international students who have problems with the learning material. It is important as well to find the solution of each situation together with the students and to always looking for a compromise and for solutions that can work for the specific situation together with the students.

Mechanisms

Actually, the most important mechanism for improving teachers' skills for working in international environment is to offer them teaching experiences in international settings. That is why, universities should support and encourage teachers to teach abroad, on Erasmus teaching programs or others.

In Technical University, there are provided different mechanisms and administrative procedures for preparing better the integration program for the international students. There are ensured different workshops for international students. It is set as well a "Buddy program", where Bulgarian students are matched to become an informal guide for international students. There are Erasmus office, an Office for International students and other University administrative staff for dealing with administrative questions and practical issues of the international students. The Erasmus office aims to provide not only administrative support, but as well all kind of accommodation and integration support for the international students.

In the Medical University, Bulgarian students are used to organize different programs for international students. These activities are not only for orientation, but as well for learning Bulgarian. For example, in the third and fourth years, when students have to work in hospitals, even international students should know some basic Bulgarian language to work properly with Bulgarian patients. So Bulgarian students organize some informal language learning classes and practices for their international colleagues. There are other initiatives for making foreign students more well adapted to the local culture, some student conferences, open for local and international students and others.

At the University Departments of International Students in Sofia University there are collected and developed many resources and programs to support both students and teachers for making international programs more successful. On one hand there are specific resources

such as lectures, visuals, films, exercises and experiments, additionally vocabularies on Greek, on Turkish, on Arabic language and others. The lecturer reported to have a lot of technics and teaching good practices and examples to follow and as a whole, to feel well prepared and supported.

In Plovdiv University, the international office is very active. They organize many activities for the Erasmus students and actually for all the students. They offer specific courses about Bulgaria, they organize for all international students a cultural program including visits of traditional places, traditions, music and dance performances, national cuisine and many others.

Needs

The most important skills for teaching in multiclass environment are the good communication skills and more precisely, good English language skills. Then, the teachers should have appropriate mindset and to be open – not to have prejudices, to be ready for challenges and to be open to learn from the students, to be open-minded, and accept cultural differences. But most of the personal skills cover communication and the ability to be more people-focused and student-oriented (and not so much task-oriented). Teachers should use all possible tools to explain and present properly the new knowledge to the students, adapting it to their own pace and following to the student's progress. As a teacher says: *I try to be flexible and open for students' requests. Usually, I don't have expectations in the beginning of the course – I just leave my students to lead.*

Teachers should be prepared to enter into the class without any expectations and preconditions. Most of the lecturers' say that there are lack specific mechanisms on University level to support teachers to prepare for international students. Teachers have to acknowledge the cultural differences of the international students. For example, a teacher report that: *the students from the Muslim culture are in general shy and do not ask questions, they are rather confused if they have to publicly explain a problem in front of the others or to go to write something on the blackboard.* So, teachers have to be prepared and be flexible to adapt their teaching for this kind of differences.

Student perspective

Individual experience and approaches

It is important to state that in general, most of the students were not very open and do not easily talk about their problems. Several students reported to have experienced some acts of racism and discrimination. In general, international students reported that it was not easy to integrate into Bulgarian HEIs. However, most of them are positive from their international experience. All of the students reported to have received some personal support from other students or staff, in order to deal with the adaptation struggles. Among the key problems are identified mostly the lack of good language/ communication skills, mismatch between expectations and reality, the attitude of other students or lecturers.

Most of the students reported that after some adaptation time, they succeeded to find strategies to surmount the difficulties and this made them feel more confident and stronger. Most of them succeeded to find friends and to form a positive environment for study in multicultural environment. Most of the students reported to be very engaged, satisfied, motivated and engaged when taking part in multicultural environment. Some of the students had problems with their teachers, showing very strict and rigid or with other students. As one student said, in the multicultural classroom there have to be made many additional efforts to make it easier for students to express themselves and to get them used to different types of audiences and criticism.

Benefits

Among the main benefits are the learning a foreign language and working with different people from different countries. As reported by a student: *This is one of the best things that has ever happened to me. Every day I have the opportunity to develop my language skills as well as my knowledge of the world.*

Among the benefits are reported the kind attitude of the other students: *everyone helped me in whatever way they could.* Meeting and working with people with a different religion or race has many advantages and they enrich the person culturally. Students enjoyed team work, as cooperating with people of different religions or races in a team helps them a lot. It teaches the students that they can't work and be in a team with only with people similar to them, from the same race or from the same religion. At the end, students expect that this will better prepare them for the real world. Multicultural team allowed students to demonstrate their knowledge and skills, and to see what is the others' culture and their way of thinking. One student reported that: *I had the chance of developing a case study with a student from Togo, who subsequently took the idea 10,000 km from Bulgaria, and made this project happen at his home. This is still working perfectly even today!*

Challenges

The main challenges and barriers faced by both international students and the teaching staff in promoting diversity and multiculturalism in higher education consist mainly of false expectations and language issues. Some students report that communication with foreign students is difficult as most of them stay as a separate group on their own. The difficulty arises when foreign students try to communicate in a very narrow circle, mainly among themselves, and this way the others students cannot approach and interact. Some students suggested that foreign students do not have Bulgarian telephone numbers or have strange surnames, and this makes a difficulty to find them through social media and social networks and add them to the group students' channels and chats forums.

Many challenges are related as well to the language in which students can communicate. Multicultural classes are complex structures of different people with different perception of the world around them and their communication with others may differ in many specific senses. On the other side, several international students report to survive acts of racism, discrimination and lack of understanding during their studies. In fact, the integration of foreign students is a very slow process. As one of the students report: *The biggest disadvantage is discrimination. Also, I felt ignored just because I come from a different religion and race, my comments were not taken seriously, that hurts me a lot and made me feel worthless.*

Another student said that she has experienced a lot of situations and cases of discrimination and racism. At the beginning she tried to respond and to criticize the others, being negative and offensive, but after a while she realized that this behaviour is useless and she cannot change the other people' attitudes and perceptions. Finally, as stated by TP from Serbia: *when I started studying at the university I didn't want to talk to my colleagues. It was impossible for me to understand what they were saying. I had many and really awful difficulties on all levels, from buying a coffee to administrative issues. The language was a barrier as well for studying. I had a lot of difficulty to understand the learning content as I couldn't understand the language.*

Mechanisms

The main mechanisms can be related to giving scholarships for foreign students, internships that are organized and supported by the university management, and participation of the university in the Erasmus and other student programs, which promote the creation of well-structured and functioning multicultural classes. On a purely practical level, there are newly equipped student dormitories, where many of the international students can live in good conditions.

Needs

The most important issue is the good communication skills and the capacity to speak on a foreign language. That is why, most of the students emphasize on the need of language courses, manuals and materials for initial orientation. The most important thing for a person to feel good in a multinational environment is to communicate freely with all kinds of people and try to constantly improve his language skills.

It should be noticed as a good practice that international students present themselves at the beginning of the courses, so that the lecturers could have in mind the specific requirements of the multicultural classes.

Accepting students from various countries, teaching empathy, tolerance, understanding, desire to learn how to more easily integrate them and how to show them that we also want them to be part of our community.

It is evident that mental support is also very important because in most cases international students feel alone and misunderstood by the others just because they are from a foreign place. The fact that they do not know the language and cannot express well makes them feel isolated, they have many confusions and misunderstandings and they distrust the others.

Teachers should have the ability to empathize, to see the other person's perspective, should understand the other person and to be patient. Language difficulties are not an obstacle, just a challenge, and people should look for the opportunities, and not for the problems.

Discussion

The survey results show that somehow teachers and students are left alone to experience different problems and practical issues in the Multiclass environment. In practice, there lack specific training solutions on University level for supporting the teaching staff for better managing multicultural and diverse classrooms in higher education institutions in Bulgaria. Many teachers recognize as good practices and strategies for promoting diversity, multiculturalism and inclusion in class to employ specific instruments such as team projects, knowledge sharing activities, open class discussions and opportunities for the students to work together and to contribute to the group work. It can be very motivating for all to learn from each other. For example, good practices are to ask foreign students to discuss specific examples and questions from their local culture and country, to create specific solutions together and to cooperate. These practices can be easily integrated into the training curriculum and teaching materials. All participants in the interviews said that this open their perspective and is very motivating both for the students and the teachers. This makes them to enjoy being part of the international classroom.

On university level, it is possible for lecturers to have some sort of training and even certifications for verifying their international teaching skills. Some lecturers reported to have

colleagues with bad English language who are teaching on multiclass environment, where students have problems to understand and complain. The first-hand experience is very important and more lecturers have to be encouraged to travel and to teach abroad.

In all cases, some additional courses on multicultural issues for lecturers can prepare them to take in consideration different factors such as cultural awareness, personal interactions and communication when teaching international students. Many lecturers do not recognize that their questions can be offensive for international students. There were two examples of a Serbian and a Turkish student, who received bad comments as they missed to put information specific to Bulgarian names/ or national history.

General evaluation and conclusions

In summary, the following general trends for the internalization of national HEI's can be identified. Bulgaria has good traditions for hosting international students and many foreigners study or work there. However, there lack a specific national-level policy for promoting Bulgarian HEI on international university fairs, as the main efforts for HEI internationalization and for attracting international students are made by individual Universities or by private companies. The majority of the international students (more than 60%) are enrolled in the Medical Universities. Even more, many Bulgarian students decide to study abroad due to the low visibility and prestige of the national HEI.

On an administrative level, there exist well established mechanisms for admitting, accepting and teaching foreign students in Bulgarian HEIs. The two main general options for international students include: to join a foreign language University program or to opt for an additional year for studying Bulgarian and then to choose among the large variety of Bulgarian HEI programs and courses. There are many international students who visit every semester different Bulgarian universities by using different forms of short-term stays, short-term Erasmus exchanges, join programs, exchange schemes and travels and others. The percentage of the English-speaking population is relatively high and there are many opportunities for international students to find a good community, employment and learning options.

The teaching staffs reported to be flexible and open to work with foreign students, but in fact, many of the international students reported to have survived bad experiences and cases of discrimination. So, it is important to prepare better Universities and particularly teaching and administrative staff how to cover specific aspects of the multicultural classroom management and training in Multicultural settings. Moreover, the lack of specific research in the topic of training and management of multicultural classrooms prove that the level of internationalization of Bulgarian HEIs is still small. So further efforts should be made to make Bulgarian HEI more open for international students, including better presentation and guiding materials, preparing staff for better working with foreign students, and providing more relevant, and accessible documents of English.

References

Dankova, P., & Petrov, P. (2016). Students' Adaptation in Multicultural Environment. *Vanguard Scientific Instruments in Management*, 12(1), 1-17.

Eurydice, Higher Education, Bulgaria, last updated (2022),
<https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-education-systems/bulgaria/higher-education>

Koycheva, E., & Manevska, S. (2018). Multicultural classroom challenges of Bulgarian language teaching. *Scientific Works of University of Food Technologies*, 65(1), 265-271.

Morska, L. I. (2012). Intercultural communicative competence: implications for teaching. *Наукові записки Тернопільського національного педагогічного університету. Серія: педагогіка*, (5), 63-69.

National Report from the Republic of Bulgaria for EMN study on Immigration of International Students to the EU, 2012, available on <https://studylib.net/doc/18335724/national-report-from-the-republic-of-bulgaria-for-emn-stu...>

Roth, J. (2007). Ethical Considerations for Intercultural Trainers, 24. In *IACCM 10th Annual Conference and 3rd CEMS CCM/IACCM Doctoral Workshop, University of Ruse, Bulgaria–2011 CULTURAL ASPECTS OF CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION: Competences and Capabilities* (p. 58).

Sokolova, H. (2022) Cultural Sensitivity Training for Bulgarian Teachers: Results from an Observation Experiment. *Rhetoric and Communications*, Issue 52, July 2022, ISSN 1314-4464

Zhelyazkova, A., Koseva, M., & Hajdinjak, M. (2010). *Tolerance and Cultural Diversity Discourses in Bulgaria: The Bulgarian Ethnic Model-Parallel Cohabitation or Multicultural Recognition*.

THE CURRENT SITUATION OF THE INTERNATIONALIZATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN CZECH REPUBLIC

Petra Chaloupková - Barbora Jordánová
(Czech University of Life Sciences Prague)

Abstract

Currently, with increasing globalization and the worldwide situation, the importance of the perspective of a multicultural environment in education is also growing. As part of the Erasmus+ project “Multiclass: the multicultural classroom: inclusive learning and teaching in higher education” aimed at increasing the quality and multicultural dimension of Higher Education in Europe, perception of management of multicultural and diverse classrooms in the Czech Republic was mapped. In April 2023, qualitative research was conducted among five selected teaching staff and five international students at the Czech University of Life Sciences Prague. Data were collected on the basis of a structured questionnaire for teaching staff and students divided into five sections: individual experience and approaches, benefits, challenges, mechanisms and needs. The aim of this research was to find out experience of international students in terms of diversity and multiculturalism, perceptions and attitudes of teaching staff towards managing multicultural and diverse classrooms, identify the challenges and barriers faced by both international students and teaching staff in promoting diversity and multiculturalism.

The results showed that both groups, teaching staff and students, perceive the multicultural class very positively. As the main benefits of multicultural classes teaching staff emphasized broadening horizons, tolerance, perception of different experience and approaches in other countries. They rate it as inspiring, as the students enrich the discussion on knowledge from the local environment of tropical countries. The main challenges mentioned were different knowledge from the previous study, and ways of sharing the responsibilities in teamwork. Teaching staff stated that the university does not provide mechanisms to support teachers teaching in multicultural classrooms and they would appreciate the training in this area. While the students appreciated that teachers are well prepared for teaching in a multicultural classroom and are supportive. They mentioned the knowledge of English, flexibility, respectfulness to other cultures, patience, and empathy as essential skills and competencies that the students need to develop in multicultural classes.

The results of this study are intended to contribute to the analysis of the current situation at European universities in order to prepare the best practices and strategies for promoting diversity and multiculturalism and to provide training and support provided to teaching staff for managing multicultural and diverse classrooms in higher education institutions in Europe.

Introduction

This report presents the national study of the Erasmus + project called MULTICLASS “The multicultural classroom: inclusive learning and teaching in higher education” implemented

within the period 2022-2024 by the consortium of eight European universities, coordinated by the Kâtip Çelebi University in Izmir, Türkiye.

Project Partners:

- ✓ HoGent, Belgium
- ✓ Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski, Bulgaria
- ✓ Czech University of Life Sciences Prague, Czech Republic
- ✓ Transilvania University of Brasov, Romania
- ✓ San Jorge University, Zaragoza, Spain
- ✓ Yasar University, Türkiye
- ✓ Yildiz Technical University, Türkiye

The general objective of the project is to increase the quality and multicultural dimension of Higher Education (HE) in Europe, as well as the specific objective which is to develop an innovative short-term staff training curriculum, didactical guideline, and set of teaching materials for HE teaching staff for better management of multicultural and diverse classrooms. The main goal of the project is to strengthen the dimension of multiculturalism and inclusive education in higher education in Europe and to share examples of good practice in the field of internationalization strategies at partner universities. The specific goals of the project focus on:

- ✓ development of didactic manuals and innovative curricula for short-term employee training
- ✓ publication of a set of teaching materials for academic staff to better manage multicultural and diverse classrooms
- ✓ implementation and testing of innovative short-term employee training courses
- ✓ integration of new training and courses into the learning management system (LMS)

In order to be able to achieve more of the mentioned goals, as a first step, research was carried out at partner universities. The comprehensive results of this research are provided in the national report, which summarizes the situation regarding multicultural classroom learning and teaching in higher education in the Czech Republic.

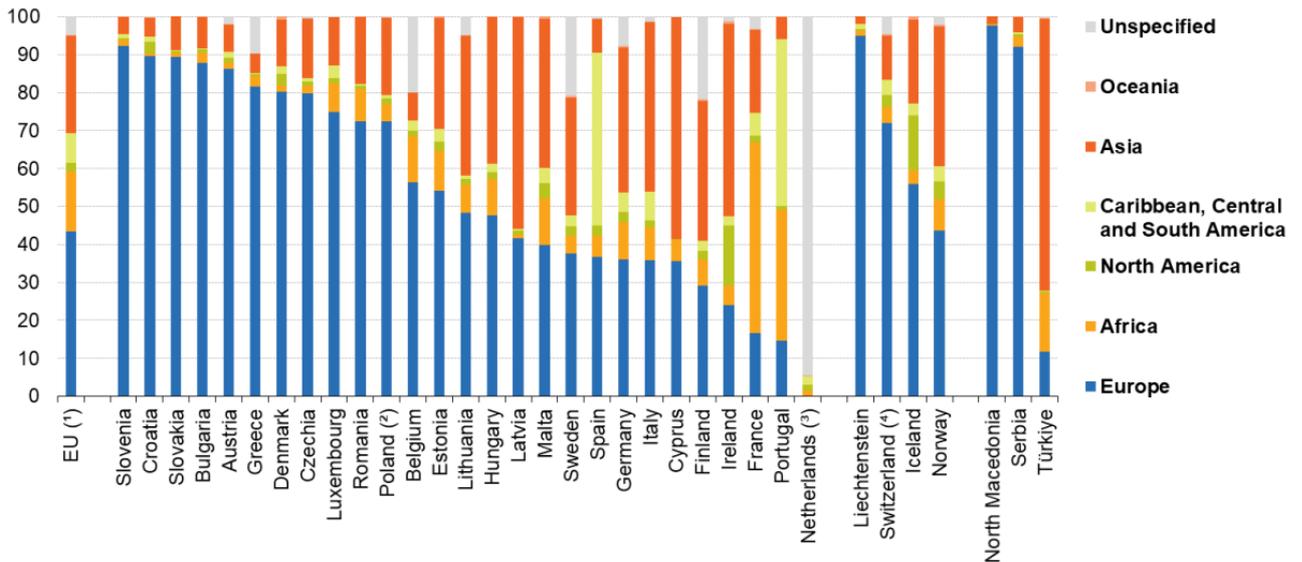
Literature review

Due to the changing situation in the world, there is a large increase in migration, which is influenced by a combination of economic, environmental, political and social factors. For example, 2.3 million non-EU immigrants entered the EU in 2021, an increase of almost 18% compared to 2020 (Eurostat, 2022). Moreover, Europe is a very popular education destination among students from all over the world. Focusing on the area of higher education, 1.46 million students from abroad were undertaking tertiary level studies across the EU in 2020 (Eurostat, 2023). The shares of foreign students studying in individual European countries by continent of origin is provided in the Figure 1. In addition, the EU supports international cooperation and offers a whole range of tools to increase international mobility between universities, for example, within the Erasmus+ programme.

Figure 1. Share of international students studying in Europe 2020

Share of tertiary education students from abroad by continent of origin, 2020

(% of all tertiary education students from abroad)



Note: based on country of upper secondary diploma unless otherwise stated in Table 1. Ranked on percentage of students from abroad from Europe.

(*) Excluding the Netherlands.
(?) Estimates.

(?) Estimates. Europe and Asia: not separately available: included in unspecified.

(*) Bachelor's or equivalent and master's or equivalent: students from abroad only covers students in universities or universities of applied sciences.

Source: Eurostat (online data code: educ_uoe_mobs02)

The Czech Republic belongs to the countries with a relatively low number of inhabitants from other countries, whose share is around 5%. According to the Czech Statistical Office (CES, 2022), the largest share of foreigners residing in Czechia are Ukrainian citizens with more than 600,000 (200,000 before the Russian invasion of Ukraine), followed by citizens from Slovakia (100,000) and Vietnam (66,000). Based on a study focused on the inclusion of immigrants in Czech society, it was found that a good knowledge of the Czech language seems to be the gateway to immigrants' satisfaction (Drbohlav & Džúrová, 2007).

Moreover, the number of foreign students in the Czech Republic is growing every year. With the decreasing number of Czech university students, which is caused by demographic developments, the share of foreign students in the total number of students is also increasing. According to data from the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MŠMT), 54,770 foreign students studied at Czech universities (49,681 at public universities; 5,185 at private universities), who accounted for almost 18% of the total number of students in 2022 (MŠMT, 2023). Regarding the number of foreign students by country of origin, students from the Slovak Republic have long had the largest representation, but their numbers have been

decreasing for a long time (45%). However, they form a specific group, as they can study in their native language and thus there are no language barriers or cultural differences. Another significant group of foreign students consisted of students from the countries of the former Soviet Union (27%), mainly from Russia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan and Belarus, but due to the current situation, their numbers are changing significantly. The next largest groups are students from India, Germany, China, Italy, Great Britain, Vietnam, the United States, Israel, Iran, Poland, Türkiye, Azerbaijan, Portugal, Uzbekistan, Serbia and Norway (DZS, 2020). The public universities with the largest number of foreign students include Charles University, Masaryk University, Brno University of Technology, the Czech University of Life Sciences Prague and the Prague University of Economics and Business. The main institution focused on facilitation international cooperation in education and encouraging as many different individuals and institutions as possible to become involved in international activities is the Czech National Agency for International Education and Research (DZS). It is publicly-funded organisation falling under the competence of the MŠMT.

However, there is very little data on the integration of foreign students and multicultural education in the Czech Republic. One of them is a study focused on Czech teachers' ideas about multicultural education at a time when the teaching of multicultural education has become mandatory for primary and secondary schools (Moree et al., 2008). DZS, MŠMT and universities, has prepared a comprehensive overview of the current situation of foreign university students in the Czech Republic as part of the implementation of the Action Plan Innovation Strategy of the Czech Republic 2019–2030 for the field of higher education and in accordance with Priority Objective 3: Internationalization in the Implementation Plan of the Long-Term Plan educational and scientific, research, development and innovation, artistic and other creative activities for the area of universities for 2020. Based on a questionnaire survey, they evaluated promotional activities, monitored the quality of study programs and the availability of support services from universities, with the aim of improving the conditions for studying of foreign students in the Czech Republic (DZS, 2020).

Based on the results in this study, it was found that:

- ✓ The main motivation for choosing to study in the Czech Republic was specific programs, a specific university and the geographic location of the country. At the same time, the relatively low cost of living, low tuition fees (or their complete absence), but also safety or friends and family in the country of departure were important.
- ✓ In general, foreign students were satisfied with the equipment of classrooms and laboratories as well as with the quality of study materials.
- ✓ Three-quarters of foreign students rate the share of good teachers at the university they are studying as 70% or higher, and only 12% of foreign students rate the share of good teachers at 40% or less.
- ✓ Foreign students generally rather praise the services of universities, both in terms of the approach of administrative staff and student organizations, as well as in terms of information technology and systems used at universities.
- ✓ The integration of the student into the community is essential for the successful course of study and life in the country. The greatest feeling of belonging reigns among

foreign students. Around two-thirds of students find the local community and institutions to be welcoming. In the case of integration among Czech students, 64% of students declared successful integration. While Slovaks manage to integrate, students from other countries, and especially from English programs, face greater difficulties.

In the Czech Republic, there are several publications on multicultural topics, but they are mostly aimed at integration of minorities and are mainly used by Czech NGOs. Nevertheless, very complex source is a publication issued by the Czech brand Euroguidance: “Guidance in Mobility” (Poradenství v oblasti mobility, DZS, 2014). Among other topics such as European tools for mobility, European networks, useful European websites for multicultural education, there are tips of development of competences of European counsellors and HE teachers experiencing work with international students and the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) by American sociologist M. R. Bennett broadly explained (DMIS Model, 2013). This book, issued by Euroguidance, represents a very handy literature for all the HE teachers to understand different thinking and approaches of students from different countries. Moreover, another in his publication “Basic Concepts of Intercultural Communication” (Intercultural Press, 2013) finds answers to a question “How do people understand one another when they do not share a common cultural experience”. In this study, there is provided a comprehensive overview of the field from a constructivist perspective.

One of the Czech universities with a high proportion of foreign students is the Czech University of Life Sciences Prague (CZU). The development and expansion of international cooperation with universities in Europe, Asia, North, Central and South America is a key aspect of the strategic plan of CZU, which has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with more than 170 universities around the world. Almost 2,000 foreign students from more than 80 countries study at CZU, which offers 20 master's and 9 bachelor's study programs taught exclusively in English. As part of the Erasmus+ program, hundreds of exchange students from all over Europe study at CZU for one semester or an academic year, while employees from partner universities in Europe come to CZU for short-term teaching stays and training. Every year, more than 300 students travel to 27 European countries as part of the Erasmus+ mobility program to study at more than 200 universities across Europe for a semester or one academic year (CZU, 2023).

Methodology

Research design

The research proposal was first discussed with the members of the project consortium at a face-to-face meeting of the project in Belgium in January 2023. During the discussion, the main research questions were determined and the data collection procedure was prepared so that it would take place in all European universities in the same way. A uniform research design guide was prepared.

The following research questions were set up:

- ✓ How do international students experience higher education in Europe in terms of diversity and multiculturalism?
- ✓ What are the perceptions and attitudes of teaching staff towards managing multicultural and diverse classrooms in higher education institutions in Europe?
- ✓ What are the challenges and barriers faced by both international students and teaching staff in promoting diversity and multiculturalism in higher education in Europe?
- ✓ How effective is the current training and support provided to teaching staff for managing multicultural and diverse classrooms in higher education institutions in Europe?
- ✓ What are the best practices and strategies for promoting diversity and multiculturalism in higher education in Europe and how can they be integrated into the training curriculum and teaching materials?

The interview questions have been prepared and agreed by the Multiclass consortium. The questionnaire for teaching staff consisted of 20 questions divided into five sections: Individual experience and approaches (10 questions), benefits (2 questions), challenges (2 questions), mechanisms (3 questions) and needs (3 questions) listed in the Annex 2. The student questionnaire consisted of 14 questions, which were divided into 5 sections: Individual experience and approaches (6 questions), benefits (2 questions), challenges (2 questions), mechanisms (2 questions) and needs (2 questions) provided in the Annex 3.

Study area

The data were collected at the Czech University of Life Sciences Prague (CZU). CZU is a public university, which offers higher education in six faculties: Economics and Management; Agrobiological, Food and Natural Resources; Forestry and Wood Sciences; Environmental Sciences; Engineering; Tropical AgriSciences and in one institute – Institute of Education and Communication. CZU offers bachelor, master and doctoral programmes for almost 20,000 students (incl. international students from 90 countries). Since the year 2000, CZU has been participating in more than 50 international projects, e.g. Erasmus+, Leonardo, Tempus, Grundtvig, Comenius, CEEPUS or projects funded by EEA Grants or Visegrad Fund.

The Faculty of Tropical AgriSciences (FTA) is a unique institution in the Czech Republic with 60+ years of tradition in tropical agriculture, rural development and the sustainable management of natural resources in the tropics.

The mission of the faculty is the higher education of foreign and Czech students in the fields of tropical agriculture, rural development and the sustainable management of natural and energy resources in the tropics. An integral part of the mission is research and development in the field of tropical life sciences and the application of R&D results to the specific conditions of tropical and/or developing countries. The faculty offers studies in Bachelor's, Master's and

doctoral study programmes taught in English. The total number of the Bachelor's and Master's students was 503 in 2022. More than half of the students are international students, coming mainly from Nigeria, Ghana, India, Cameroon, Pakistan, Russia, Zimbabwe, Ethiopia and Slovakia.

Data Collection

Data collection was based on structured interviews with five academic staff and international students. The teachers were selected to represent representatives from different departments that guarantee different study programs (Table 1). Also, students were selected from different study programs, study levels (4 Master's students, 1 Bachelor's student) and country origin to ensure a view from different cultural perspectives (Europe, Asia, Africa, Latin America) (Table 2). The selected respondents were first approached, the research plan of the study was explained to them, and a suitable interview date was chosen. Interviews with academic staff took place in the period from 23 March to 4 April 2023. Interviews with students took place in the period from 28 March until 12 April 2023. The interviews took place during a personal meeting in the office at the faculty after prior arrangement. During the interviews, a video recording device was used to capture data from the Teams interviews (audio recording and transcript), with consent for recording first obtained. During the interviews, the interviewer also took notes, which were also evaluated in the results. The interviews usually took around 35-40 minutes.

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of the academic staff (CZU)

	Gender	Age	Faculty	Field of expertise	Years of experience in teaching	Years of experience in teaching multicultural classrooms
1	Female	39	Faculty of Tropical AgriSciences	Crop Science (tropical fruits and vegetables)	9	7
2	Female	41	Faculty of Tropical AgriSciences	Crop Science (food processing)	13	12
3	Female	49	Faculty of Tropical AgriSciences	Sustainable Technologies (food processing and food security)	7	7
4	Female	43	Faculty of Tropical AgriSciences	Animal Science (wildlife management)	15	14
5	Male	47	Faculty of Tropical AgriSciences	Agricultural Economics (value chain management)	15	14

Table 2: Socio-demographic characteristics of the students (CZU)

	Gender	Age	Faculty	Field of study	Country of origin
1	Female	25	Faculty of Tropical AgriSciences	Environmental studies (Master degree)	Spain
2	Female	28	Faculty of Tropical AgriSciences	International Cooperation in Agricultural and Rural Development (Bachelor degree)	Chile
3	Male	27	Faculty of Tropical AgriSciences	Agri-food Systems and Rural Development (Master degree)	Ghana
4	Male	30	Faculty of Tropical AgriSciences	International Development and Agricultural Economics (Master degree)	Zimbabwe

5	Female	26	Faculty of Tropical AgriSciences	Tropical Crop Management and Ecology (Master degree)	Thailand
---	--------	----	----------------------------------	------------------------------------------------------	----------

During the interviews, interviewees' rights, privacy and confidentiality were ensured and informed consent was signed by all participants. The study was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Czech University of Life Sciences Prague before the start of the interviews. The collected data were transcribed and analyzed using qualitative data analysis methods, namely content analysis. Data were coded and categorized based on themes emerging from the data.

Findings

Academic staff experience

Individual experience and approaches

The academic staff at the Faculty of Tropical Agriculture has extensive experience in teaching in a multicultural classroom, ranging from 7-15 years. This is due to the fact that more than half of international students study at the faculty, mainly from Africa and Asia. Based on interviews with teachers, we can summarize that they perceive teaching in a multicultural environment very positively. They evaluated it as inspiring, as the students enrich the discussion on knowledge from the local environment of tropical countries. Students ask each other questions from a different spectrum, which we would not have thought could be interesting for others. They create a richer discussion in class. For example, some students grow avocados or mangoes in their garden at home and they can share their own experiences, which other students, who do not know the process by experience. In general, it can be said that foreign students are more communicative, discuss more during lectures and are often more active outside the university. It happens that when they meet a lecturer outside the university, they approach her/him, wave at her/him and enjoy chatting. On the other hand, there are often large differences in knowledge from previous education. With Czech students, teaching staff have a greater overview of what they should already know from previous courses or other levels of education at the master's level of study. Students from abroad have different knowledge. For example, they do not know the Latin names of plants. The opportunity to share experiences and perspectives from different countries also has a positive effect on the motivation of staff during teaching. It is interesting to listen the discussions of, for example, a student who came for an Erasmus mobility from Norway with a student who comes from Zimbabwe. It often happens that, for example, students from Africa have less insight into what is happening in their country and how other countries perceive it. However, teachers also mentioned that all students, regardless of gender, age or country, influence their motivation to teach. The teachers unanimously confirmed that they have no experience with racism or discrimination in their teaching. The only complication appears in cooperation

in teams, where students have to divide their work and higher demands are placed on communication with each other and perhaps even meeting outside of lectures. This creates complications and differences emerge. Czech students sometimes feel that higher demands are placed on them than on foreign students. According to the teaching staff comments, it sometimes happens that foreign students (mainly from African countries) do not cooperate, do not complete assigned tasks on time and do not participate equally in teamwork. From the point of view of respecting other cultures, one teacher stated that he is not sure if, as part of the course, they have meat tastings or visit a wine shop and wine production, whether it suits all students (e.g. for religious reasons). However, students have the opportunity to taste the products, but they do not have to, it depends on their decision.

The main challenges mentioned were different knowledge from the previous study, when it is sometimes necessary to simplify something so that everyone can understand it. Furthermore, it is often problematic to include all students in the discussions, some of them do not express themselves much in the group and the lecturer does not know their opinion. On the contrary, for example, students who came for Erasmus mobility very often participate in discussions. Another complication is the student's good knowledge of English, respectively different accents (e.g. from different African countries). As for the impact of multicultural classrooms on the overall performance of students, it slows Czech students down, even though they know it and others do not. But on the other hand, they will also learn about other cultures, communication, tolerance, patience. It has a positive effect, maybe not directly on performance, but certainly on soft skills and the ability to communicate. When the teaching staff recalled their first experience with a multicultural class, they stated that teaching English made more sense to them when the class was multicultural than when it was only Czech. Although they had to prepare materials in English, there are many more resources for this, so it was not a problem. However, at the beginning, they felt that they needed to improve their language competence in English. Among the strategies, approaches and methods they use to create a more inclusive environment in a multicultural classroom, they named performing tasks in international teams (teamwork). Furthermore, students present products from their country, state the methods and approaches they use in their home countries, or organize tastings of local dishes. Teaching staff also unanimously stated that they try to make the curriculum and teaching materials reflect the cultural diversity of students, give examples from different parts of the world, and perceive different preferences due to religion or different values. Often during discussions they provide real-life examples from all around the world, they emphasize for example animal welfare. On the other hand, they do not know in advance who will be in that class, so they cannot fully prepare for it. However, different approaches emerge from discussions with students. For example, they will tell each other what food preservatives are legal in Europe but not necessarily allowed in the USA, and vice versa, what is banned in the Europe but commonly used in Africa. Regarding how they feel well-equipped to handle the diverse cultural backgrounds of students and create a supportive learning environment for all, the teaching staff defined themselves as self-taught. They have experience from a number of European and non-European countries, so they share their personal experiences from those countries. It helps a lot if you mention, for example, that “we have been to Cambodia or Bosnia and Herzegovina and we know the issues of that

country”. On the other hand, “we would appreciate support on how to communicate, respect another culture and, above all, how to resolve so that students work together in teams and support them”.

Benefits

The main benefits of multicultural classes are the possibility of broadening horizons, tolerance, perception of different experiences and approaches in other countries. Teaching is “more fun”, it is possible to connect theoretical knowledge with students' experiences. This suppresses xenophobia and myths that we have in the Czech Republic about other countries. In addition, students practice their language and communication skills, build social relationships between people in the world, and have friends all over the world that they can visit. Open-minded students are also important for future generations, they see different nations and cultures in a good light, respect other cultures, other experiences (e.g. insight into politics), broaden their horizons. Among a positive experience that made teaching staff happy while teaching in a multicultural classroom, they mentioned when they see that students defend their Master's thesis and go back to their country saying “I want to help develop my country”. They enjoy classes the most when there is a nice discussion and students share their experiences. Foreign students are often happy even with small steps, such as getting a credit for a course. In general, foreign students ask and communicate more in comparison to Czech students and share their experiences more.

Challenges

Among the problems that the teaching staff stated the teamwork mentioned above, some of international students cheat more often in exams or have plagiarism in their papers. This rarely happens with students from the Europe. Some foreign students do not attend classes regularly, or come late or leave early. They are then more persistent in obtaining credit, even though they did not meet all the requirements according to the assignment. “Sometimes it happens that we send them corrections to the text and they do not incorporate the notes even after notification, or incorporate only part of them.” A complication in teaching is also the fact that they sometimes lack previous knowledge, for example in mathematics or chemistry. However, internationalization definitely has a positive effect and, despite some complications, diversity needs to be supported.

Mechanisms

Teaching staff stated that the university does not provide mechanisms to support teachers teaching in multicultural classrooms and this issue is greatly underestimated. The faculty offers academic staff free English lessons, they are supported in trips abroad for internships both within Europe and outside Europe through Erasmus+ mobility programs. Teaching staff completed various trainings on teaching methods, only general courses on general principles

of education and presentation skills, but none of them were focused on training regarding teaching in multicultural classes.

As for the integration program for international students, which the university provides, such as the orientation and integration program for students (ice-breaking activities, excursions, etc.), there is a whole range of activities just like at the university (e.g. a weekly welcome course for students within the framework of Erasmus+), both at the faculty level. FTA organizes a “Welcome day” (a one-day course before arriving in the Czech Republic), a “Welcome day” after arriving in the Czech Republic (a one-day course focused on integration in the Czech Republic), an “Orientation meeting” focused directly on studying in the Czech Republic and at the faculty. Various activities are organized during the academic year, such as student conferences, days with the faculty, days with CZU, excursions etc. A big role is played by student associations such as Fair trade or Student Ambassadors, who focus directly on the integration of foreign student networks (e.g. Art competition, swaps, discussions). Great support for integration of foreign staff to CZU is ensured by university Welcome Centre. It offers guidance in terms of health care and insurance, how to find flat, schools or kindergartens to their children and organise many social activities to integrate them into academic life at the university.

Needs

Among the essential skills and competencies that teaching staff need to train in multicultural classes, well-mastered language, insight, patience and "treating all people exactly the same, as a person, personality as such" were named. It is also important to take into account that some people like to discuss, others do not. At the same time, it would be useful to know what the student learned in the previous studies so that it is possible to follow up on it and reconcile the differences in the class. They would welcome recommendations on how to conduct group work, how to divide tasks among students and how to work with the opinions of single-minded students who are more aggressive towards other groups.

They would greatly appreciate training on multiculturalism and teaching in different cultures and nationalities (their customs, traditions, needs). Teaching staff receives regular feedback from students regarding relationships in the classroom. They perceive the environment as very friendly (even as family). Students who are interested in studying are open and come and say thanks and what they liked. In each course, students fill out a questionnaire about what they liked and did not like, as well as what other students did that helped or did not help them. Teaching staff stated that they regularly hold discussions and try to incorporate their recommendations into teaching.

Student perspective

Individual experience and approaches

Selected students shared their experience with studying in multicultural classrooms. In general, they evaluated as positive experience, describing the teaching staff as very nice and kind people. In the classroom, they appreciate the reactions and experiences of other classmates, and what they consider normal is unusual for others and vice versa. They like to learn about customs and traditions from many countries, different perspective, interaction, interpretation of the questions. They appreciate that lectures try to manage different cultures and different perspectives on lives. There is a high variety of the students from different countries, mainly from Africa. They like how Czech students in particular work well together and have a good experience. Environment at the university is very friendly, on the other hand outside the university it is more demanding because of the different language (they can not communicate in Czech).

Aspects that increased their motivation in studies include improving their English, improving their knowledge, gaining information about other cultures, and learning from other students to perceive their point of view. They got to know classmates from a whole range of countries, different backgrounds (also different economic backgrounds) and have the opportunity to get a good quality education. Some said they had to travel halfway across the world to learn more about their own country. They feel responsible towards their country, they realize that they are lucky enough to study in the Europe. Studying has opened their eyes, they have learned to work in the laboratory and about the world from other students. On the other hand, one student mentioned that he felt “stupid” in some courses because he did not have enough knowledge and this reduced his motivation because he could not fully follow the lecture.

All students agreed that they had never experienced racism or discrimination within the classroom. One student stated that sometimes someone mentions unintentional comments which were discussed at individual approach and were resolved among classmates. Their overall performance is influenced by their knowledge of English. In the beginning, some had to learn to teach in English. It would be easier for them in their mother tongue. Students reported that teachers are well prepared for teaching in a multicultural classroom. All teaching staff and administrative staff are supportive. Students feel comfortable, they can say their opinion, and their opinions are listened to.

Benefits

As the main opportunities in studying multicultural classroom, the students see the possibility of improving their English, expanding their knowledge, studying in a different environment, seeing other perspectives, building a network. They mentioned advancing social capital, the possibility of asking questions, sharing the ideas as benefits. They can share experiences and traditions from their country, sharing the knowledge and culture and how it is going in the other country. They had to learn to adapt to people from other countries, they learn new things about other countries that they did not know. As a positive experience that made them happy while studying in a multicultural classroom, they stated that, for example, in the course plant ecology and conservation they learned about new crops, in the food security course they discussed the possibilities of how to create a farm out of the desert, how to ensure water

issues. They value the possibilities of discussions with classmates the most. In the focus group discussion course, they learned how to conduct interviews, how people think about the questions in different ways.

Challenges

Regarding the challenges they have encountered studying in multicultural classrooms, the students stated that the language barrier sometimes makes them feel alone. Some students are very happy to discuss, but many students from Asia or the Czech Republic do not participate in the discussion or their language knowledge is not that good and it is difficult to understand their opinions. Students would appreciate more international students at universities. One student stated that there are no foreign students studying at her home university in Spain, and she would welcome that thanks to her experience in the Czech Republic. It was difficult for some students at the beginning of their studies, they did not understand all their classmates (e.g. strong African accent), but it improved over time. Now they feel integrated and have more friends.

Mechanisms

The students underlined the importance of the support provided by the university to the students. They mentioned, for example, activities organized for Erasmus students (e.g. orientation week, excursions). One of the student mentioned: "If you meet people from these groups, you feel more involved". They also stated that they appreciate the support of the study administration office, opportunities to participate in summer schools, exchange programs, ELLS conference, international projects, accommodation benefits, financial assistance for research, psychologist availability, sport centre in the campus, and food provided in the university canteen. On the other hand, they stated that they did not receive any orientation and guidance regarding studying in multicultural classes. When they study in English, they have no problems and they manage everything at university. Problem is outside the university, where they face language barriers.

Needs

They mentioned the knowledge of English, flexibility, respectful to other cultures, patience, and empathy as essential skills and competencies that the students need to develop in multicultural classes. Students said they are very satisfied with what the university offers them now. Some would appreciate courses to improve their English, or more information on where they can get practical training. They also appreciate extracurricular activities and the support of student ambassadors. One student mentioned that he met student ambassadors on the first day and that it helped him a lot to navigate his studies and feel better. Another student recommends opening a discussion forum, where students could discuss more (similar to how it is at UK universities).

Discussion

The survey results provide major trends in multicultural classroom at the tertiary level of education. Although the teaching staff did not undergo any special training focused on teaching in a multicultural class, they feel that “everything is going without a problem”. Among the main benefits of the teaching in the multicultural classes, they highlight the variety of discussions during the courses with practical examples from different countries. These discussions enrich the teaching, students share their own experience from the country of origin, including for example different traditions, customs and traditional food. Some students would appreciate the possibility of more discussions, for example the introduction of discussion forums. During the studies, students usually increase their language competence in English, and expand other skills such as communication skills, patience, and empathy, which were mentioned as essential skills and competencies that the students need to develop in multicultural classes. On the other hand, barriers that arise in multicultural classes are different levels of knowledge from previous studies, a language barrier between students (e.g. different accents), or teamwork, which is not necessarily connected only with cultural differences between students, but rather with their willingness to get involved. Teaching staff would appreciate training on how to engage more students in discussions and generally how to work with a multicultural classroom. On the contrary, for example, students who came to study for an internship within the Erasmus+ program very often participate in discussions and are very active. This can be due not only to previous knowledge and experience from their home European universities, but also to the fact that they have the opportunity to choose specific courses in their studies that interest them and it does not have to be the entire study programme.

The findings also showed that the international students are very satisfied with what the university offers and perceive the support at the university very positively. At the same time, the students appreciated the experience from abroad (and often directly from the student's country), which the teaching staff has thanks to the implementation of development projects. They also underlined support during their integration provided by student ambassadors and extra activities organized at the university such as Orientation week or Welcome courses. The results of this study are in line with the DZS study, which states that the level of services at universities is rated very positively by foreign students, with students studying in the Czech language and Slovak students being the most satisfied. According to the DZS report, the overall quality of services in the Czech Republic is also positively evaluated with regard to the price/performance ratio. As stated, foreign students value primarily the quality of transport, the quality of education compared to study fees and the overall cost of living in the Czech Republic (DZS, 2020). The area of accommodation is rated the worst, which probably reflects the assessment of the price/quality ratio of accommodation in the dormitory as well as the need to use private accommodation for living during studies.

As a barrier to integration in the Czech Republic, students stated that the situation outside the university campus is more difficult for them, where the language barrier is often a complication. This also corresponds to a previous study, which states that a good knowledge of the Czech language is key to integration (Drbohlav & Džúrová, 2007). According to the DZS

study, integration among Czech students is successful for roughly two-thirds of foreign students. Integration is logically easiest for students from Slovakia, students from other countries (and especially English programs) feel more integrated with each other in the community of foreign students. However, more than half of the students (except students from Slovakia) do not feel included among other Czech students. In addition, only 13% of students had the opportunity to use the so-called buddy program, which helps connect Czech and foreign students (DZS, 2020).

Conclusion

Although the Czech Republic is a relatively homogeneous country in terms of ethnicity and culture, with most of the population being of Czech origin, almost 18% of foreign students study at Czech universities. Heterogeneity thus became an everyday reality and teachers needed to understand different cultures, values, beliefs, and attitudes towards teaching. Based on discussions with selected teaching staff and students from the Czech University of Life Science Prague, the Czech Republic, we can summarize that both sides perceive teaching in a multicultural environment very positively. Among the main benefits are the rich discussions that take place in multicultural classes. The key skills and competences that both sides mentioned as essential for teaching in a multicultural classroom are a good command of English, flexibility, respect to other cultures, patience, and empathy. On the other hand, adaptation and integration of international students in the classroom also include a whole range of challenges. Teaching staff and students have not received any training on how to teach and study in a multicultural classroom and would appreciate support from the university. They concluded a very high demand for courses, whose content would be aimed at the communication and collaboration skills in the heterogenous group, practical workshops to share tips how to enhance critical thinking skills and empathy among students and how to encourage some foreign students to show and defend own opinion. They would be interested in some didactical training, for example an object teaching method.

When evaluating the results of this study, however, it is necessary to take into account the environment of the Faculty of Tropical AgriSciences (CZU), whose mission and vision is focused on a multicultural environment and specifics associated with different cultures, approaches and experience from countries outside the Europe. This corresponds to the language skills of the teaching and administrative staff, prepared documents and information systems in English, experience in project implementation and cooperation with foreign partners (e.g. guest lectures).

Due to the growing share of foreign students at Czech universities, it would be appropriate to create practical guidelines that would contribute to a better integration of foreign students and at the same time help the teaching staff when teaching in a multicultural classroom. The findings of this study identify the benefits and challenges of multicultural class teaching in the Czech Republic and, together with other national studies from the European project Erasmus+ Multiclass, create the basis for opportunities for the future of higher education internationalization in Europe.

THE CURRENT SITUATION OF THE INTERNATIONALIZATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN ROMANIA

Anca Duta - Cristina Bogatu - Maria Covei
Transilvania University of Brasov

Abstract

Internationalization is a hot topic in Romania, as it aligns to European trends of inclusivity in higher education institutions (HEI). Nowadays, there is no united strategy at a national level to promote and implement a cohesive institutionalization strategy in HEI, but some universities are taking serious action at an institutional level.

UNITBV is one of these institutions, taking coherent steps towards promoting student and staff mobility, increased visibility of the study programs abroad and an increased number of study programs in a foreign language of international circulation at Bachelor's, Master's and PhD levels.

A literature review was performed to identify the main challenges of implementing internationalization strategies at university level in Romania. Following this, the partners of the MultiClass project have developed two interview models: one for incoming foreign students and one for lecturers in multicultural classrooms. The findings of these interviews were correlated to those of the literature review and certain conclusion regarding the benefits and challenges of taking part in multicultural classrooms in a higher education setting were established. Moreover, there was a discussion on the main methodologies implemented in the classroom, from both the students' and lecturers' points of view. The status quo was connected to the legal frame regarding internationalization in Romania (over the past approximately 10 years).

Introduction

A study performed by the European Universities Association in 2010 has identified internationalization as the third most important change driver in higher education institutions, with expectations of it reaching the first place soon after (Deca et al, 2015⁶). As a member of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), Romania is committed to implementing the "EHEA in a Global Setting" Strategy (London 2007) and "Mobility for Better Learning" Strategy (Bucharest 2012). Both of these consider that internationalization should be approached in an organized way, both at national and institutional level, in order to increase the attractiveness of the Romanian higher education system. Furthermore, the Romanian Education Law 1/2011 introduced a series of reforms with provisions on what a university charter should contain regarding international partnerships, incentives for joint

⁶ Deca L., Egroun-Polak E., Fit C.R. (2015). Internationalization of Higher Education in Romanian National and Institutional Contexts. In *Higher Education Reforms in Romania*. Springer Cham. DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-08054-3_7

degrees, guaranteeing the principle of free movement of students, members of the academic staff and researchers, etc. Among the very clear messages that the strategy sends, the following ministerial commitments are particularly relevant to the current analysis: develop and implement internationalization and mobility strategies in all EHEA countries (which include clear objectives and targets); work for better balanced mobility across the EHEA; expand mobility funding and provide a wider portability of grants and loans; improve the recognition process based on the existing Bologna Process tools, as well as the use of quality assurance and transparency instruments to promote quality mobility inside and outside EHEA. This was motivated by the fact that for every incoming student, there are three outwardly mobile students (Deca et al, 2015¹).

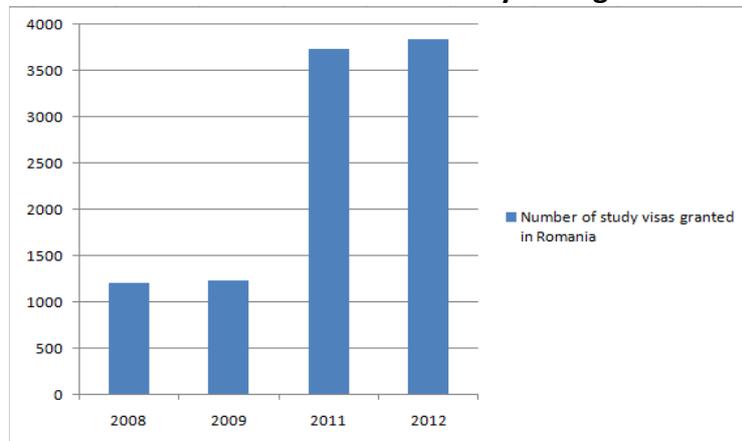
A short history of the strategies developed and implemented by Romania over the years to promote internationalization is provided below (UEFISCDI, Internationalization of Higher Education in Romania⁷):

- Pre1989, Romania strengthened its cooperation with African, Asian and South American countries through reduced fees, special programs and student services so that foreign students in HEI represented 10% of the overall students number in 1981;
- After the fall of the Communist regime, Romania underwent a series of reforms, to enhance the autonomy of the HEI, as well as to promote private universities;
- Romania aligned to the Bologna degree system, adopting ECTS and participating in Socrates II and Leonardo da Vinci II EU programs;
- The Law of National Education (2011) mentions for the first time the principle of free movement for the members of the academic community.

The changes brought by the Law of National Education contributed to an increased influx of students and researchers in Romania. The Scientific visa was adopted for foreigners doing research in Romania for a period longer than three months. The number of visas nearly tripled from 2009 to 2011 (and was maintained in 2012), as seen in Fig. 1 (UEFISCDI, Internationalization of Higher Education in Romania).

⁷ UEFISCDI, Internationalization of Higher Education in Romania, Higher Education Policy Series, No 5.

Figure 1. The annual evaluation of the number of study visas granted in Romania



Currently, the main international partnerships that Romanian HEI are involved in are: Erasmus, CEEPUS, Fulbright, DAAD, Francophone area related programs and various bilateral agreements. According to the Ministry of National Education there are approximately 200 bilateral collaboration documents with almost 100 partner-states in the field of education. The main partner countries with which the Romanian government has signed bilateral agreements in order to provide scholarships for the academic year 2021-2022 are: Moldova, China, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belgium, France, Germany, Iran, Israel, Italy, Morocco, Russia, Slovakia, Spain, Türkiye, and Hungary (Ministry of education, 2016⁸).

It was found that HEI in Romania focuses more on increasing the number of institutional partnerships with other universities rather than the strategic pursuit of active and sustainable long-term partnerships. This is reflected in the high number of inactive or only partially active partnership agreements from Romanian universities. The existence of such agreements brings a certain prestige, which outweighs any disadvantage that could have been caused by retaining inactive partnerships to either themselves or the involved HEIs partners. Also, there do not seem to be strategic areas specifically targeted for new collaborations and every area is considered just as attractive for future collaborations.

Regarding communication within or outside the university, there are still some issues with promoting internationalization. For example, in a study from 2015, when analyzing the websites of the 92 Romanian universities, only 37% had the website fully available in at least one language of international circulation (Deca et al, 2015). The percentage has since gone up, but there is still room for improvement.

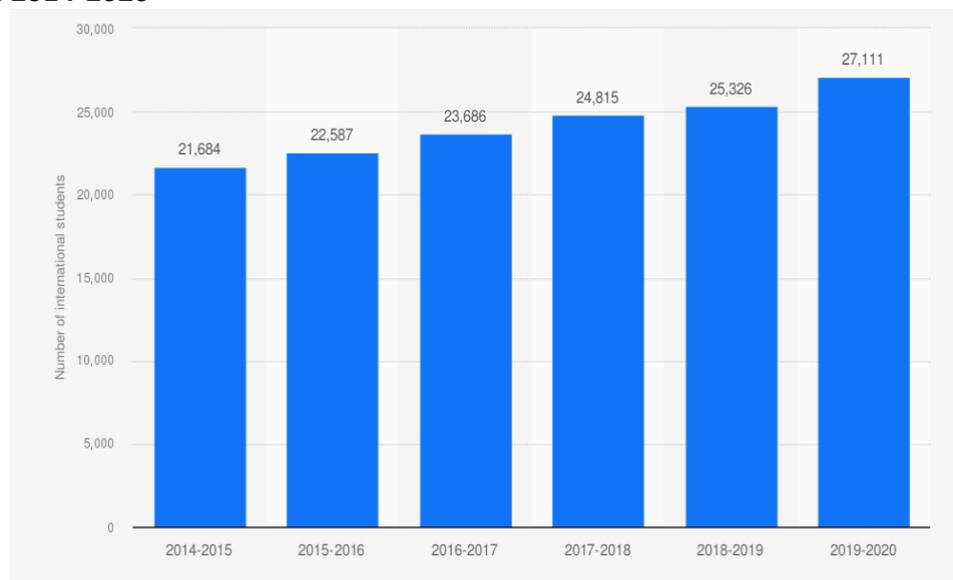
When discussing the internationalization of the curriculum and campus life in Romanian universities, some of the most obvious problems are: the lack of a united understanding of the concept of internationalization in the academic community; poor language (English) skills among the administrative staff and, to a lesser degree of the academic staff; academic courses

⁸ Ministry of Education (2016). Retrieved 5.05.2023, from <https://www.edu.ro/cooperare-bilaterala>

that are not harmonized with international trends and course materials that are not adapted or translated in the language of instruction (even if the program is available in a foreign language, usually English).

Romania follows the Bologna scheme and most of its programs are made of 3 cycles: a three- or four-year Bachelor's degree, followed by a two-year Master's degree, and a three-year Doctoral degree. From 2014 until 2020, it was found that the number of international students that enrolled in Bachelor programs has steadily increased (Fig. 2) proving that the strategies employed by Romania at a national and institutional level were successful (National Institute of Statistics Romania, 2019⁹).

Figure 2. The number of International Students enrolled in bachelor degree programs in Romania 2014-2020

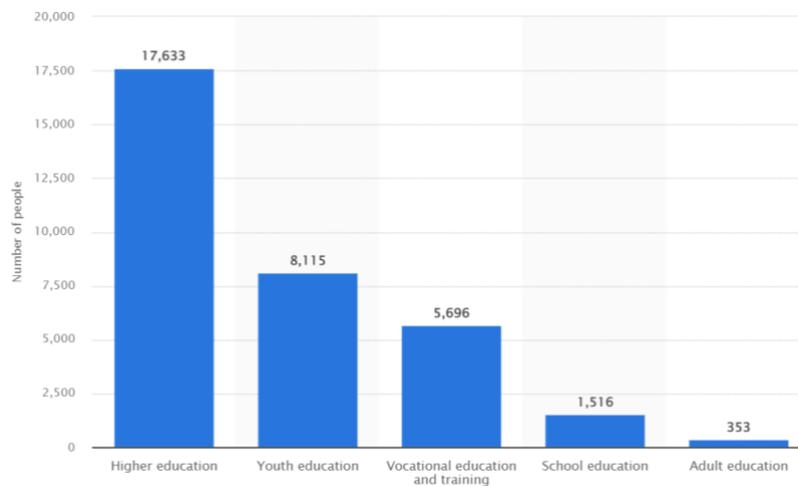


Higher education institutions remain the main avenue for internationalization in Romania, as far as education is concerned. In 2019, the number of participants in ERASMUS+ projects (the most popular bilateral agreement type of program) from HEI was more than all the others combined (youth education, vocational education and training, school education and adults education), as seen in Fig. 3 (National Institute of Statistics Romania, 2019¹⁰).

⁹ National Institute of Statistics Romania (2019). Retrieved 5.05.2023, from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1098620/international-students-romania/>

¹⁰ National Institute of Statistics Romania (2019). Retrieved 5.05.2023, from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1098620/international-students-romania/>

Figure. 3. The number of participants in Romanian ERASMUS+ projects, in 2019, by education level



Some of the recent documents and measures adopted for implementing the internationalization process in HEI in Romania include (European Commission, Eurydice, 2022¹¹):

- The National Education Law No. 1/2011;
- The Romanian state provides scholarships for foreign students, as a form of encouragement and financial support;
- The Ministry of National Education is considering the promotion of the qualifications' acknowledgement, as a key element in facilitating mobilities;
- Each accredited higher education institution has information and documentation resources centers (IDRC), that specify the methodology and the procedure for acknowledging the study periods for international students;
- According to M.O. No.3359/2013 which amends the Methodology for reception to studies and schooling of the foreign citizens from EU third countries in the Romanian accredited public and private education, approved through OMERYS No. 6.000/2012, the candidates send the documents directly to the education institutions at which they want to study; regulations thus simplifying the admission procedures;
- According to the Teaching Staff Statute, teaching activities in a language of international circulation may be included in the teaching load, with a 25% salary increase;
- According to the National Education Law (Law 1/2011) the HEI may set up teaching programs in languages of international and minority circulation. The specific financial incentives may be granted to the higher education institutions that implement such activities;

¹¹ European Commission, Eurydice (2022). Retrieved 7.05.2023, from <https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-education-systems/romania/mobility-higher-education>

- The higher education institutions that conduct joint degrees university programs with prestigious foreign universities and programs conducted in languages of international circulation are encouraged and financially supported;
- The methodology for distributing the public funds from the basic funding and the supplementary funding for the Romanian universities supports the internationalization process in education, encouraging the development of programs in foreign languages and PhD programs in co-tutelage, by assigning supplementary funds for this. Furthermore, at Bachelor level, universities are encouraged to develop study programs in languages of international circulation and in rare languages, as well as study programs performed in foreign universities branches. For all these, the universities may receive additional points in the calculation methodology for the allocation of funds. According to the methodology, the Master and PhD study programs in the field of science and advanced technologies, the programs in languages of international circulation and the joint degrees programs are encouraged through preferential funding.

Methodology

Two interview templates have been developed in the frame of the MultiClass project: one for the international students that study in the partner universities and one for the staff that teach in multicultural classrooms. The interview questions have been prepared and agreed upon by all the partners.

The participants were informed on the general scope of the MultiClass project and it was explained what the purpose of these interviews is. Then they answered the questions (in English). The results were then analyzed and interpreted by the *Transilvania* University team members.

Findings concerning research questions

Seven students from three faculties (Faculty of Letters, Faculty of Product Design and Environment, Faculty of Psychology and Education) were interviewed. The students came from Korea, Turkmenistan, Costa Rica, Russia, Haiti and Austria and have been studying at *Transilvania* University of Brasov for 1-4 years.

Table 1. Students' Demographics

	Gender	Age	Faculty	Field of study	Country of origin
1	F	22	Letters	Linguistic Studies for Intercultural Communication	Korea
2	F	23	Letters	Linguistic Studies for Intercultural Communication	Korea
3	F	26	Letters	Preparatory year	Russia
4	M	20	Letters	Applied Modern Languages	Costa Rica
5	M	26	Psychology and Education Science	Preparatory year	Haiti
6	F	23	Product Design and Environment	Environmental Engineering and Protection in Industry	Turkmenistan
7	F	25	Product Design and Environment	Product Design for Sustainable Development	Austria

The six teaching staff members that were interviewed are part of 5 faculties and have experience of 5 up to 12 years of teaching in multicultural classrooms.

Table 2. Lecturers' Demographics

	Gender	Age	Faculty	Field of expertise	Years of experience (YOE) in teaching	YOE in teaching multicultural classrooms
1	F	48	Faculty of Letters	Linguistics, Literature, Romanian language for foreign students	25	5
2	M	46	Faculty of Electrical Engineering and Computer Sciences	Images engineering	22	7
3	M	51	Faculty of Electrical Engineering and Computer Sciences	Renewable energies	28	11
4	F	49	Mechanical Engineering	Multibody systems	25	5
5	M	47	Economical Sciences	European policies	24	6
6	F	61	Product Design and Environment	Advanced wastewater treatment	33	12

Data Analysis for the Students' Interviews

The interview comprised 14 questions, as follows: 6 questions related to the interviewee experience and approaches, 2 questions related to the benefits and 2 questions related to the challenges encountered while studying in multicultural classrooms, 2 questions on the mechanisms they found at UNITBV to support them during the experience of learning in a multicultural environment and finally, 2 questions related to their needs in a multicultural educational environment.

Regarding their experience, all the interviewed students agreed that studying in a multicultural classroom has had a beneficial effect as it was an opportunity to gain specific knowledge, learn about other cultures and countries and to become more tolerant of other people's views.

The motivation for learning has also been impacted in a positive way as it offered the opportunity to study in a different country, to learn a different/easier way of solving problems and learning a new language. One of the respondents counted meeting new people as being an advantage as well, while another considered this as being a drawback as making friends can be more difficult in a new environment, using a different language than your own.

The students were also asked whether they have encountered any form of racism in the classroom and a vast majority has denied having had such an experience. Only one of the students has admitted to having had a colleague be racist towards them and their friends and moreover, indicated that the teacher in this instance did not intervene.

The effect of studying in a multicultural classroom on the interviewees' overall performance was considered positive, with two exceptions: one student did not see any impact and one mentioned that his overall experience was different in regards to the country where he/she studied in. Some of the positive impacts mentioned by the students include: the social benefits, self-discovery and the building up of self-confidence while navigating through and overcoming confusing situations.

The students were asked about the methods employed by the teachers specific to multicultural classrooms and how they changed their teaching style to better fit the situation. The most common answer was that the teachers offered more explanation in Romanian or English, sometimes on a one-to-one basis to the foreign students (if there was just one in the classroom). One student indicated that their professor used images to illustrate concepts, objects or facts that may have been difficult to understand as they related to Romanian culture. Another mentioned the fact that they received a cultural shock when hearing the professor speaking freely about the host country or political system which felt natural to the local students and the teacher but not to the foreign students.

Adding on from the previous question, the students were also asked what strategies their professor used in order to create a more inclusive environment in the multicultural classroom. The answers were rather diverse: some students noticed that the teachers made sure to involve everyone in the classroom. They do this, either by assigning collaborative tasks or small group projects. Another method is to ask the local students to help the international students during the class. Some professors start their semester by asking all students to introduce themselves and this sparks conversation about each person's background and culture, making the international students feel better integrated. Finally, one of the students mentioned that their professor used music and songs to better create an inclusive environment in class, as music is an "international language."

Regarding the perceived benefits for the students who studied in multicultural classrooms, the students agreed that some of the most common ones are coming in contact and learning about different cultures and traditions (or food), practicing and improving their language skills (be it English or Romanian) and meeting new people/ making friends. This, in turn, leads to experiencing a new way of thinking. One student also mentioned that by meeting other international students in multicultural classrooms, one gets ideas about what other countries they can travel to either for studying or for pleasure. Moreover, one student mentioned the fact that international students seem to be better informed about opportunities to access grants and scholarships, which is a big advantage from a career point of view.

To further consolidate the previous point regarding benefits, students were asked to give an example of an instance when studying in multicultural classrooms proved beneficial. They have talked about sharing stories in class regarding similarities and differences between different cultures. Some mentioned parties organized by the school, on special occasions (birthdays or religious celebrations) that offered the opportunity to learn more about the culture's traditions and food. Meeting with people from different countries (even apart from Romania) has led students to improve their language skills (Spanish) and listening to students tackle the problems set by teachers in class has led one student to improve his/her problem-solving abilities.

Following up on the benefits encountered, the students were also asked to share what the challenges of studying in multicultural classrooms were for them. Around half of the students mentioned the language barrier in some form or another (e.g., accents) as being a challenge that they had to overcome. This was followed by cultural differences and misunderstandings. One of the students mentioned that speaking in front of their colleagues was intimidating, while another mentioned that some people were perceived as rude in the classroom. Another student mentioned that dealing with study methods that are different to those that they are familiar with, could also be challenging. One student mentioned that the climate itself can have an impact on the ability to focus, but they agree that this is not really related to multicultural classrooms.

When asked if increasing the number of international students in a classroom could be a challenge to them, personally, all students agreed that this was not the case. Some of them mentioned that in fact this could be a good thing as there is more to learn from having international colleagues and integration in the university life can be easier (due to a sense of belonging).

Finally, the students were asked about the mechanisms set up by the UNITBV to better promote multiculturalism.

The answers were varied, showing the fact that different faculties of the University prioritize different mechanisms set up for the students. The students mentioned: international students' meetings, scholarships and economic support, designated international student accommodation, Erasmus mobilities, employment opportunities (by setting up meetings with

companies and internship opportunities), having a professor in charge of incoming international students, free English lessons, a preparatory year to learn basic Romanian language, etc. One student mentioned that he/she did not know any mechanisms in place.

When asked if they have received an orientation or guiding regarding studying in multicultural classrooms, the students' answers were mixed. Half denied having received any, while the others mentioned an orientation conference, an information system and a guide to university life as well as the preparatory course teaching students the Romanian language.

When asked about the skills and competences that they need in order to study in multicultural classrooms the students' answers included: language skills (especially English), communication skills in general, as well as open mindedness, tolerance and patience. There was a strong agreement between students on these points.

Students also pointed out that they wished they would receive more support from colleagues, possibly more international students' meetings that they could attend (scheduling of these should be made to not overlap with their classes). Some courses related to culture or to help build students' confidence would also be appreciated as well as individual lessons in Romanian. Some of the students did not have anything to suggest.

General conclusions drawn from the students' interviews

- Overall, students found that learning in multicultural classrooms is a beneficial experience as they gain knowledge, find out new cultures and countries and become more tolerant of others;
- Most of the interviewed students did not experience any form of racism in the classroom, but there was a notable exception where the teacher did not intervene;
- Their performance in multicultural classrooms, was overall improved with several exceptions;
- As far as the teaching methods their lecturers employed to create a more inclusive medium, most of them agreed that the teacher gave additional explanations in English to the international students, or set group projects and asked the students to introduce themselves as an ice-breaker;
- Some of the most important benefits of studying in a multicultural classroom for the students was improving their language/English skills and meeting new people, as well as learning about new cultures;
- At the opposite end of the spectrum, their biggest challenge has been the language barrier (in some cases, Romanian accents or expressions) as well as speaking in front of strangers;
- The students were only partially aware of the mechanisms that are available to them, courtesy of UNTIBV.

Data Analysis for the Teaching Staff Interviews

The interview comprised 20 questions, sectioned as follows: 10 questions related to the interviewee experience and approaches, 2 questions related to the benefits and 2 questions related to the challenges encountered while studying in multicultural classrooms, 3 questions regarding the mechanisms they used in multicultural classes at UNITBV and finally, 3 questions related to their needs in a multicultural educational environment.

Regarding the experience of the teaching staff members, all have taught in multicultural classrooms at bachelor, master and/or PhD level, and had ERASMUS students in their groups. Regarding their motivation, 4 of the 6 interviewees agreed that teaching in multicultural classrooms has had a positive effect on them as it strengthens their English skills, forces them to overcome challenging situations and even paved the way for future collaborations. Two of the interviewees stated that their motivation is the same, regardless what type of classroom they teach, as motivation is intrinsically linked to the education profession. None of the lecturers that were interviewed have encountered any form of discrimination towards international students, in their classroom.

Regarding the biggest challenges encountered while teaching in multicultural classrooms, all of the interviewees have agreed that language is the main issue. Some of them have mentioned that finding a common ground, linguistically, can be difficult and some of the light-hearted anecdotes or jokes do not translate well from Romanian to English.

Regarding the effect of having international students in the classroom on the overall performance of the students, the lecturers have had different experiences. For example, some have indicated that in multicultural classrooms, the students come with significantly different initial knowledge which will affect the teaching style and level. Some have mentioned a slight positive effect due to the fact that having international students encourages Romanian students to improve their English skills, as well as to promote acceptance, tolerance or healthy competition. One interviewee mentioned that in their experience, the international students and the Romanian students don't really interact, at least in the first two months.

When asked to give an example of an instance when the lecturer had to adapt the teaching style to better fit multicultural classrooms, again the answers were quite various. Some of the respondents denied the need to make such modifications as the only real requirement of the students is a well-structured way of thinking and multiculturalism does not affect that. It was also mentioned that some international students have a different theoretical to practical knowledge ratio which may affect the lecturer's approach to setting the work tasks. Language was mentioned again as the use of English can affect some expressions and messages that need to be conveyed by the lecturer to the students. One interviewee mentioned the fact that he/she tried to incorporate examples and case studies not only from Europe to illustrate their point, mentioning that a higher effort and flexibility is required for the teacher.

Some of the approaches and methods used by the lecturers to create a more inclusive environment in a multicultural classroom are giving equal treatment to all the students in their classroom, regardless of their origin, using interactive courses and encouraging students to express themselves and get to know one another, giving Romanian examples in order to familiarize the students with the local traditions and finally, directly talking to the students about the virtues of tolerance and acceptance of cultural differences.

Regarding the curriculum and teaching materials that are currently used, most lecturers agreed that these do not reflect the cultural diversity of students or do so only to a low extent. One interviewee could not say for sure and another mentioned that this is not an issue where technical fields are concerned as the information is the same around the globe.

All of the interviewed lecturers agreed that they provide the class with real-life examples from all around the world. Moreover, the majority of the lecturers (4) declared that they felt well-equipped to handle the diverse cultural backgrounds of their students and create a supportive learning environment for all. The rest (2), while still feeling well-equipped admitted that there is always room for improvement.

Moving on to the benefits of teaching multicultural classrooms, the lecturers mentioned some of the following benefits that they have gained from working in multicultural classrooms: the opportunity to give more examples from diverse countries, the opportunity to adapt the way of teaching due to the initial knowledge level of the students, the enriching of cultural knowledge through experience sharing, gaining awareness on multiculturalism, through interacting with languages and cultures, improved language skills, improved confidence, improved work satisfaction. One interviewee admitted that there were no perceived specific benefits of teaching multicultural classrooms.

Some of the examples given by the lecturers as a positive experience within multicultural classrooms include sharing of funny stories and anecdotes, the pleasure of seeing students learn and formulate ideas, or getting confirmation of certain situations regarding different countries from the students from those countries. Another example was of the students thanking the teacher at the end of their course and asking them to maintain the collaboration. Finally, one interviewee mentioned that teaching is a job that needs to be done well and that it is not about “happiness” in the educational system, particularly in the engineering education field.

Some of the challenges encountered by the lecturers are again linked to the language barrier, both from their and the students’ side. One interviewee did not see any significant challenges while another mentioned the fact that greater attention is required to check that all students fully understand the topic of the lecture. Regarding the perceived challenges of increasing the number of international students in their classroom, some of the lecturers (4) agreed that it is overall a good thing to have more diverse classrooms, as this can prepare the young people for an international/multicultural society, which is the global trend. Some of the lecturers (2) admitted that the increase in the number of international students will add challenges to their

teaching practices. Possibly these difficulties will be outweighed by the benefits (previously mentioned).

Regarding the mechanisms set in place by the *Transilvania* University to support lecturers teaching in multicultural classrooms, two of the teachers were not aware of any of them (one briefly mentioning that none are necessary), while 4 have mentioned English training courses, teaching staff mobilities, diverse teaching materials being made available, as well as the e-learning platform for sharing information. Complementary to this, when asked if the lecturers have received any training regarding teaching in multicultural classes, they have all responded negative, some of them mentioning that no specific training was available at the time they started teaching in English, while others have mentioned that none was required. When asked if they are aware of any integration programs being made available by the *Transilvania* University for the international students, the interviewees talked about the fact that the first-year students are offered the opportunity to visit the city and the university, that there is a basic Romanian language learning program, an International Students' Night, trips and activities where foreign students can interact with Romanian students. At a personal level, one of the interviewees mentioned that he/she, themselves organize international summer schools and various activities, while another mentioned the fact that he/she have supported fellowship(s), doctoral and post-doctoral fellowship students with administrative and organizational issues.

When asked what essential skills and competencies one needs in order to teach in a multicultural classroom, the majority of lecturers mentioned the fact that English/language skills are compulsory. Moreover, a few of them have also mentioned cultural awareness. Some other skills could be empathy, patience, active listening, confidence. One respondent mentioned that there are no particular skills necessary when teaching multicultural classrooms, compared to homogeneous classrooms, as all teaching skills are the same, regardless of the class that is being taught.

When asked what kind of services and training would be beneficial to them in order to teach better in multicultural classes, opinions were divided. Two of the respondents mentioned that none were necessary and that the needs of the lecturers are already met, while others mentioned a crash course or other programs that help with the skills that were previously mentioned in question 18. It was also mentioned that the instructor should be someone with experience in teaching in multicultural classrooms themselves. One person also suggested a short module based on examples from particular international settings.

Finally, the lecturers were asked how they offered or received feedback to/from their students on the subject of relationships in the classroom. Answers were tied between using questionnaires or surveys and direct conversation with the persons involved. In the case of questionnaires, most of these are handed out at the end of the semester/of the joint activity schedule.

General conclusions drawn from the lecturers' interviews:

- Most of the lecturers feel positive about having international students in their classrooms (by bringing a new way of thinking, new cultures and new traditions in contact with Romanian students and teachers); there also was a hint on a neutral perception, considering their presence as bringing no significant benefits or challenges;
- The lecturers unanimously mentioned English as being both the most significant challenge when teaching in multicultural classrooms, as well as a benefit as their (and their students') language skills are improved;
- Some lecturers feel there is no need for any adaptation of their teaching style in a multicultural setting (especially when it comes to technical subjects), while others are open to the idea and some are even implementing these changes;
- While everyone agreed that they offer the same opportunities to all their students and that they make a conscious effort to involve the international students in class, the interviewees also agreed that the curriculum does not reflect multiculturalism in the classroom;
- All the interviewed lecturers agreed that developing English skills is the most significant advantage both for them and for their students, as well as increased awareness of multiculturalism;
- The respondents also seemed to be much better informed of the mechanism available for the international students rather than those available to the teachers; moreover, some of them indicated their willingness to participate in training courses to better perform in multicultural classrooms, as long as well-experienced professionals deliver these courses.

General evaluation and conclusions

Some of the general conclusions of the literature review (Deca et al, 2015) and the research questions posed in the interviews outline the following image of internationalization at national level in Romania:

- A significant number of Universities in Romania have difficulties in formulating and implementing internationalization strategies;
- The general approach to internationalization is rather ad hoc, with most of the discussion focusing on the mobility (especially on attracting more foreign fee-paying students – preferably non-EU ones) and institutional partnerships, rather than focusing on internationalization of the curricula or building connections between international research collaboration and other international initiatives;
- Some of the barriers to internationalization also include: instability and incoherence of the education legal frame which makes it difficult for universities to plan and implement a cohesive globalization strategy, the lack of sufficient English/foreign language proficiency in administration or even at the academic staff level, academic recognition issues, inadequate information or promoting tools (including websites that are not available in other languages than Romanian), etc.

Some of the strengths of Romanian HEI regarding internationalization are (Deca et al, 2015):

- Some programs are internationally renowned for their quality and good infrastructure, such as medicine, dentistry, archeology, IT, maritime studies or foreign languages;
- Several universities also develop partnerships with important companies (e.g., Microsoft, NYK, Siemens, etc.) in order to provide internships to students and to adapt the curricula to the requirements of the labor market both at national and international levels;
- The geographical position of Romania offers possibilities for different institutional partnerships, strategic research and scientific international projects and exchanges;
- Good university facilities, low-cost student accommodation and an overall low-cost of living are also some of the reasons why HEI in Romania are in a position to attract more foreign students every year.

As a general observation, the lack of a cohesive, national approach to globalization could be a reason for the (still) slow and stilted internationalization strategy implementation in HEI in Romania.

Annex 1: Transilvania University of Brasov, Erasmus policy statement¹²

The participation of the *Transilvania* University of Brasov (UNITBV) in the Erasmus Program is expected to contribute to reach the goals of the internationalization strategy developed for the next period. Thus, the aims and indicators for monitoring the impact are set according to the actions foreseen in the strategy, as presented below:

- to identify the appropriate members of the International Advisory Council of UNITBV and to ensure the periodic updating of the membership list in line with the university's general strategy; the traditional Erasmus partners are of major interest, in this respect;
- to set up at least one study program taught in a foreign language, especially at master and doctoral degree levels in faculties that have not yet included such programs in their educational offer; Erasmus projects under KA2 will continue to be considered as means for curricula and/ or course modules development, as well as for setting up double degree/ joint programs, especially for master and doctoral degrees;
- to undertake periodic internal evaluations of the study programs taught in foreign languages, both in terms of the quality of the processes and the number of (Erasmus) incoming students who participate in these programs; the evaluation will consider several indicators such as: total number of (Erasmus) incoming students per year; the rate of Erasmus incoming students participating in programs taught in foreign languages out of the total number of incoming students; the level of satisfaction of Erasmus incoming students on the quality of the courses; new and modern methods applied in the teaching & learning process, etc. The students' feedback will be considered for quality improvement in the study programs.
- to improve the language skills of the UNITBV students and staff, by their participation in language courses offered by the partner universities within the Erasmus program, as well as by efficient use of the instrument provided by EU, the On-line linguistic support (OLS); the Erasmus projects developed in the next period under KA2 will consider organizing international summer / winter schools with intensive language courses for university staff and students;
- to increase the number of students participating in the Erasmus mobility program, both outgoing and incoming; while the amount of incoming mobility is slightly increasing each year, thus confirming the international visibility and reputation of UNITBV, the number of student outgoing mobilities has been relatively constant over the last years; we intend to stimulate the students' participation in study and placement mobilities more intensely during the next Erasmus program by: continuing to ensure the full and automatic recognition of ECTS credits gained in the host institution; making the Erasmus Info Days

¹² UNITBV Erasmus policy statement. Retrieved 7.05.2023, from <https://unitbv.ro/en/erasmus-students/erasmus-policy-statement>

more relevant to students, using the Erasmus Ambassadors Corps as communication vectors for students; diversifying the dissemination methods, with increased focus on the social media platforms, etc. At the same time, we aim at increasing the number of disadvantaged students/students with disabilities participating in mobilities; quantitative indicators will be used for impact assessment, such as number of students (outgoing and incoming), rate of disadvantaged students/ students with disabilities out of the total number of outgoing students, level of interest shown by UNITBV students towards the information events: number of participants and number of applicants for an Erasmus grant out of the total number of participants in the information events, etc.;

- to increase the number of academic and administrative staff participating in the Erasmus mobility program, both outgoing and incoming. It is widely acknowledged that staff mobility has a major impact on the enhancement of the university internationalization process, e.g. by increasing the institutional capacity to deliver courses, even full programs in foreign languages; during the next period, it is expected that most of the academic staff members take part in international mobility or in international events of different types, the Erasmus mobility program being the first path for reaching this goal; further measures will be considered to improve the recognition of skills acquired during mobility and the dissemination of the gained experience among the peers.
- to improve the quality of partnerships in the sense of ensuring bilateral exchanges as well as joint involvement of partners in educational projects under Erasmus KA2 and KA3 actions; we expect not only an increase in the number of inter-institutional agreements but also their implementation with a high degree of satisfaction among beneficiaries; at the same time, we intend to raise the capacity of our partner universities (especially the ones from partner countries) to initiate and/ or participate in Erasmus projects that would help them to develop and modernize.

UNITBV fully complies with the principles of non-discrimination set out in the Erasmus Program and ensures equal access and opportunities to mobile participants from all backgrounds. Participation in the Program advances our strategic engagement with the European modernization and internationalization agenda, being committed to the three attributes of the future Erasmus program: digital, green and inclusive. Participation in the Program will deliver benefits to a broader cross section of society by ensuring that students and staff are able to study and work across Europe and worldwide whilst equipping our graduates with skills, knowledge and attributes that will assist them in a highly competitive global labor market. Moreover, it is expected to enhance the attractiveness of our university and the quality of the prospective students. Last but not least, the participation of UNITBV in the European university consortium 3IN Alliance is expected to have a strong impact on the overall institutional modernization and development.

References

Deca L., Egron-Polak E., Fit C.R. (2015). Internationalization of Higher Education in Romanian National and Institutional Contexts. In Higher Education Reforms in Romania. Springer Cham. DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-08054-3_7

European Commission, Eurydice (2022). Retrieved 7.05.2023, from <https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-educationsystems/romania/mobility-higher-education>

Ministry of Education (2016). Retrieved 5.05.2023, from <https://www.edu.ro/cooperare-bilaterala>

National Institute of Statistics Romania (2019). Retrieved 5.05.2023, from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1098620/international-students-romania/>

UEFISCDI, Internationalization of Higher Education in Romania, Higher Education Policy Series, No 5.

UNITBV Erasmus policy statement. Retrieved 7.05.2023, from <https://unitbv.ro/en/erasmus-students/erasmus-policy-statement>

THE CURRENT SITUATION OF THE INTERNATIONALIZATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN SPAIN

Maria Luisa Sierra-Huedo - Almudena Nevado Llopis - Lindsey Bruton
(San Jorge University)

Abstract

This report examines the current situation of the internationalization of higher education institutions in Spain. Data was collected through document analysis and semi structured personal interviews to seven faculty members and six international students. The results show how internationalization in Spain has still some challenges to face among some are the level of English of their teaching faculty, as well as the increase of resources to improve services and training so international students integrate better.

Introduction: Description of the Spanish national higher education.

Higher education in Spain dates back from Medieval times and they were created by the Catholic Church. Currently there are 84 universities in Spain (public and private). The decentralization process goes as far as the responsibility of higher education systems is at the level of the Autonomous Communities (Rumbley & Howard, 2015). The higher education law *Ley Orgánica de Universidades* (2007) LOU made important changes to adapt to the implementation of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) or the so called the Bologna Process. The main changes were related to transform five-year-degrees into four-year-degrees, class sizes no more than 50 students per class, continuous evaluation, the use of ECTS system, measuring workload and competences acquired, as well as internship recognized with ECTS and being part of degree programs (Sierra Huedo, 2013). There is a new and most wanted higher education law *Ley Orgánica del Sistema Universitario* (LOSU), which is mainly focusing on improving the quality of the Spanish universities. Currently it is expected a change in the four-year-degree program + 1 year master's degree, into a three-year-degree program + 2 years master's program, so it is the same as the rest of EHEA countries. Over the past years a number of initiatives have been done in order to launch the quality an internationalization of the Spanish higher education system among some are the creation of Universidad.es a public foundation designed to place Spanish universities in the world and promote its excellency, and *Campus de Excelencia Internacional*, to incentive universities to become more internationalized. However, none of these reached the objectives that they were set up at the beginning of its creation (Rumbley & Howard, 2015). The funds are scarce and even more after the 2008 economic crisis. Spain is at the top European countries getting incoming students, not only from Erasmus programs, but also from US universities. Although, each university creates or not their own programs to prepare for this large number of international students. This large number of incoming students contribute to nearly 200 million to the Spanish economy, which makes it an important economy and market for Spain (Grasset, Griffin, and Pérez-Bedmar, 2014).

National policies for the internationalization of higher education.

In Spain, internationalization in higher education is a priority in educational policies and is actively promoted through various initiatives and programs. Among the most notable policies in this area are:

- Exchange programs: Spain has bilateral agreements with more than 50 countries to promote the exchange of students and professors. The most well-known program is the Erasmus+ exchange program, which allows students to study a portion of their degree at a foreign university.
- Scholarship programs: The Ministry of Education and the autonomous regions offer scholarships for foreign students who wish to study in Spain and for Spanish students who want to study abroad. There are also scholarship programs for the mobility of professors and researchers.
- Strategic alliances: Spanish universities establish strategic alliances with higher education institutions around the world to promote academic cooperation and student and faculty mobility.
- Internationalization of the curriculum: The inclusion of international content in study plans is encouraged and the teaching of foreign languages is promoted at all educational levels.
- International research: Spain participates in numerous international research projects and collaborates with research institutions around the world.
- Overall, Spain has adopted a policy of openness and international collaboration in higher education with the aim of improving the quality of education, promoting student and faculty mobility, and promoting academic excellence in a global context.

National and regional laws in Spain that promote internationalization in higher education include:

- Organic Law (LOSU) 2/2023, 22nd March, University System. The entire title VIII is dedicated to internationalization. This law establishes the legal framework for the operation of universities in Spain and promotes cooperation and collaboration between Spanish and international universities.
- University 2015-2020 Strategy: This is a government initiative aimed at improving the quality and competitiveness of Spanish universities and promoting their internationalization.
- University 2021-2027 Strategy: this initiative maintains the University 2015-2020 Strategy concept, focusing on an activity approach based on the internationalization of students, teachers, and Training Programs: focus on the skills and abilities acquired by the students, in addition to the cognitive knowledge of the specific topic of study; cultural approach to create a culture of internationalization; process approach of the international dimension in all the activities of the university.
- University 2030: the CRUE's (Conference of Rectors of Spanish Universities) strategy consist of providing formulas that allow the convergence of Master's and Bachelor's

degrees with the international scene; make current regulations more flexible to take advantage of the potential of the initiative "European Universities" of the European Commission; support the internationalization of campuses, facilitating the incorporation of students from other countries and systems and betting on a wide mobility; guarantee programs and agreements between universities, national and international companies, Spanish and international institutions.

- Strategic Plan for the Internationalization of Catalan Universities: This is an initiative of the Government of Catalonia that seeks to promote the internationalization of Catalan universities and their participation in international research and cooperation networks.
- Internationalization Plan for Andalusian Universities: This is an initiative of the Government of Andalusia that seeks to promote the internationalization of Andalusian universities and improve their presence in the international arena.
- Action Plan of the University-Business Strategy 2020: This is an initiative of the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training that aims to promote collaboration between universities and businesses and promote the international mobility of students and professors.

Policies of internationalization in higher education in Aragon

- International Tutorial Action Plan: This is an initiative of the University of Zaragoza that aims to promote the internationalization of the university and improve the attention given to international students. The program includes actions such as personalized attention, help with integration, and cultural and leisure activities.
- Aragon-Québec Program: This is a cooperation program between the autonomous community of Aragon and the province of Quebec (Canada) that aims to promote cooperation in higher education, research, and innovation.
- Aid Program for International Mobility of University Students in Aragon: This is an initiative of the Government of Aragon that aims to promote international mobility of Aragonese students by granting economic aid to study at foreign universities.
- Currently, the Autonomous Community of Aragon does not have a specific Internationalization Strategy for higher education. However, a process of reflection and analysis was taking place to update the internationalization policies in higher education in Aragon; the Directorate General of Universities and Research of Aragon were working on the development of a Research and Innovation Plan for the Smart Specialization of Aragon, which includes measures to strengthen internationalization and cooperation in the field of research and innovation. This plan aims to improve the competitiveness and economic and social development of the region, including the internationalization as a key aspect.

A quantitative picture of internationalization: number /percentage of international students in the national higher education system.

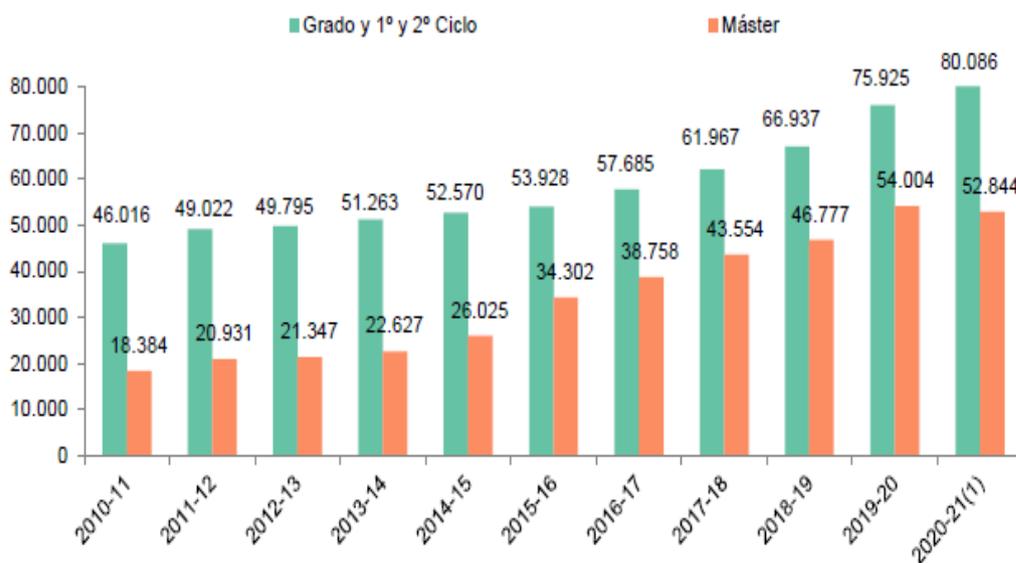
According to Ministry of Spanish Universities (2022), during the year 2020-2021 Spain had 84 universities, 50 public and 34 private. Spanish universities offer 3.602-degree programs, 2135 (73%) are offered by public universities.

The internationalization of Spanish higher education.

The number of international students registered in the Spanish system reached 157.835, 9,4% of all the students studying in Spanish universities. Most of them were in doctoral programs (27,5%), followed by master’s students (21,3%) and degree programs (6%) (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Evolution of the number of international students registered in university degrees and Master’s (2010-2021).

Source: *Ministerio de Universidades (2022, 86)*

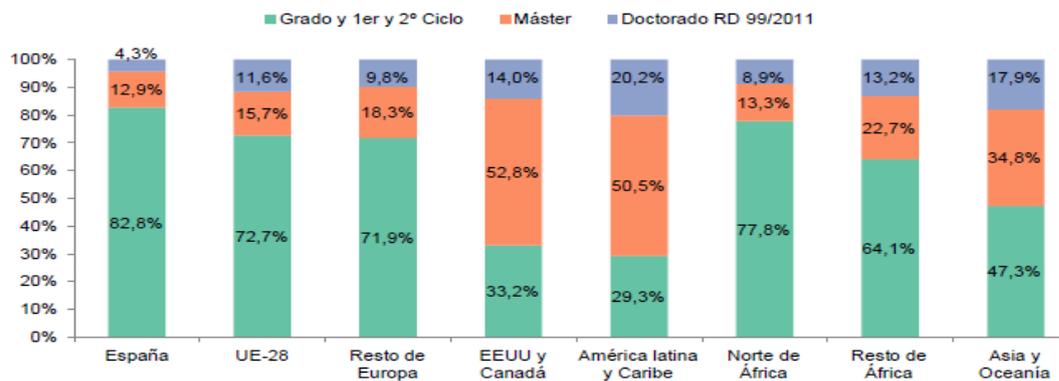


As it can be inferred from Figure 1, the number of international students incoming during 2019-2020, we mean those who come to study from other countries to do full degree programs (73.752 students from Latin America and the Caribbean) or one or two semester incoming students (55.593 students, mostly from the EU and the USA) the total number was 129.375 international students. The countries of origin from which most of the students come are Italy, France, the United States, Colombia, Germany, and Mexico.

The number of outgoing students (Spanish students who participate in study abroad programs) were 42.253. Spanish students in mobility programs study mostly in European countries such as Italy, France, and Poland. Among the different continents, Latin America, then the USA and Canada.

Figure 2. Distribution of the number of students registered in Spanish universities by nationality and study level (Year 2020-21)

Source: Ministerio de Universidades (2022, 86)



The data show on Figure 2, that meanwhile European, African, Asian international students register mostly in Spanish degree programs, students from North America, Canada and Latin America registered mostly in Master's and PhD programs.

Summary of research and report results of National and International organizations concerning the internalization of national HEI's.

The report *Internationalisation of Higher Education* (2015), commissioned by the European Parliament is based on the results of two surveys carried out by the International Association of Universities (IAU) and the European Association for International Education and a Delphi panel of experts in international Education around the world. Its main research question was *How can 'internationalisation' be understood in the context of higher education, and what strategies are being pursued globally in this regard?* (p.287) The report compared 10 European countries in terms of the following:

- the influence of European programmes and policies
- national policies and their influence
- stakeholders and funding schemes
- the effectiveness of institutional policies
- key performance indicators
- challenges and aspirations

According to the results of this report, Spain has strong ties with the European Union and, since joining in 1986, has been a very active participant in European programmes, particularly Erasmus. National strategies have also depended substantially on funding from European Commission (EC) programmes and projects. Internationalisation in Higher Education has been a priority in Spain for almost 30 years, beginning with development cooperation programmes,

coordinated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the late 1990s and early 2000s largely aimed at Latin American and North African countries. One such programme was the PCI (Programme for Inter-university Cooperation and Scientific Research) (Rumbley and Howard, 2013).

In 2008, 'Universidad.es,' a public foundation was set up with the aim of promoting Spain globally as a destination for international academics, both students and staff, and in 2009 the government published their *Estrategia Universidad 2015* (EU2015), a plan for the improvement of the Spanish university system which placed internationalisation as central to university policy. Unfortunately, during this period, cuts in education budgets and the consequent lack of funding reduced the effectiveness of this and other programmes dramatically.

A Strategy for the Internationalisation of Spanish Universities was developed by the Spanish Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport (2016) with two main axes: quality and language. The main objective of this strategy was to consolidate a strong and internationally attractive higher education system which promoted the incoming and outgoing of the best students, lecturers, researchers and administrative staff, educational quality, the Spanish language and the internationalisation of academic programmes and R+D+I activities. The strategy aimed to enhance the attractiveness and the international competitiveness of Spain, as well as promoting its socioeconomic development based on knowledge.

Spanish universities themselves play an active role in policy concerning internationalisation among other things. The CICUE (The Spanish Universities' Commission for Internationalisation and Cooperation), the sectorial committee for internationalisation of the CRUE (the Spanish Rector's Conference) has a forum where people responsible for internationalisation can work together and coordinate joint projects.

As mentioned in previous sections of this report, higher education in Spain is decentralised and this has led, for example, to a lack of national guidelines and nationally agreed support services for incoming students and scholars.

The internationalisation of the Spanish university and its contribution to the international projection of the country (Crespo MacLennan, 2011) highlights the wide gap between the history, economy and culture of Spain and its low position in international rankings. This is attributed to a lack of sufficient and stable funding necessary to implement changes; short-term leadership (rectors are elected for short periods), priorities and planning; a strong 'inward' orientation – universities tend to hire from among their own staff rather than looking 'outside'; low levels of English among the general population and academics; a relative lack of programmes in English; university reform that does not correspond to much of the rest of Europe (4+1 instead of 3+2) and finally, a continued focus on quantitative aspects of internationalisation. The report concludes that "leadership – at national and institutional levels – appears to be the most crucial element to ensure the implementation of an effective and sustainable internationalisation agenda" (p.176).

Some of these ideas are also presented in a SWOT Analysis included in the aforementioned document concerning the strategy for the internationalisation of Spanish universities 2015-2020 (p.20). According to this analysis, the main strengths in Spain were teaching quality; Spanish university students' appraisal abroad (especially in certain areas); the structures for internationalisation at national level (SEPIE) and the extended international network of the Spanish Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport and other official organisations (MEySS, MINECO, MAEC, ICEX AECID, etc.); and its notable participation in the EHEA and EU forums regarding strategies and measures for internationalisation. As for weaknesses, the low number of joint degrees and of courses taught in English and other international languages; the difficulties of attracting international lecturers and administrative staff; the higher average cost and duration of degree programmes in comparison to other countries, and low position in global university rankings were mentioned. Among the opportunities mentioned were the development and implementation of joint degrees with foreign universities and the creation of new European educational programmes (Erasmus +) and R+D programmes (Horizon 2020). Finally, the threats identified were the obstacles to involving companies in international projects; the difficulties involved in staff' renewal due to national regulations and budgets; the estimated decrease in structural funding, difficulty in following the technological and methodological developments linked to online training, and the difficulty of attracting and retaining talented people.

Finally, the Spanish Service for the Internationalisation of Education (SEPIE) concluded in a report published in 2017 (The Internationalisation of Higher Education in Spain. Reflections and Perspectives) that Spain should go beyond the student mobility offered by the Erasmus+ program, since student mobility is just one of many global initiatives contributing to the internationalisation of universities. According to this report "participation in world events, fairs, transnational projects, and new employability formula are the defining features of a young organization that is very active in promoting the internationalisation of the Spanish higher education system" (p.27).

Research questions (multiculturalism at the institutional/national level)

1. How do international students experience higher education in Europe in terms of diversity and multiculturalism?
2. What are the perceptions and attitudes of teaching staff towards managing multicultural and diverse classrooms in higher education institutions in Europe?
3. What are the challenges and barriers faced by both international students and teaching staff in promoting diversity and multiculturalism in higher education in Europe?
4. How effective is the current training and support provided to teaching staff for managing multicultural and diverse classrooms in higher education institutions in Europe?
5. What are the best practices and strategies for promoting diversity and multiculturalism in higher education in Europe and how can they be integrated into the training curriculum and teaching materials?

Methodology

Qualitative methodology was used to collect the data. Since most of the internationalization reports about Spain show only the quantitative part of the internationalization process of HEIs, following qualitative methodology gave us the opportunity to look into the quality and get to know what is being done and the impact of those strategies and policies have in the experience of international students and faculty members. The tools used were semi-structured personal interviews with open-ended questions. The interviews were taped, transcribed, and coded. They last about 40 minutes to one hour.

Participants

Table 1. Characteristics of teaching staff

	Gender	Age	Faculty	Field of expertise	Years of experience in teaching	Years of experience in teaching multicultural classrooms
1	Female	50	School of Communication & Social Sciences	Communication; Political Relations	20	9
2	Female	51	School of Engineering & Architecture	Artificial Intelligence; Computer Engineering	12	7
3	Female	55	Institute of Modern Languages	Education; CLIL	29	23
4	Female	52	School of Communication & Social Sciences	Business Administration; Leadership	16	12
5	Male	46	School of Communication & Social Sciences	Audio-visual Communication	12	9
6	Male	45	School of Communication & Social Sciences	Marketing	13	6
7	Male	45	Institute of Humanism & Society	Sociology; Communication	11	10

Table 2. Characteristics international students

	Gender	Age	Faculty	Field of study	Country of origin
1	Female	23	School of Communication & Social Sciences	Political Sciences	Italy
2	Female	22	School of Communication & Social Sciences	Communication	Germany
3	Female	21	School of Communication & Social Sciences	Communication	Austria
4	Female	22	School of Communication & Social Sciences	Advertising	Italy
5	Female	19	School of Communication & Social Sciences	Journalism & Communication	USA
6	Male	22	School of Communication & Social Sciences	Translation	Belgium

Findings

Academic Staff Experience

Individual experiences and approaches

All the 7 teachers interviewed have plenty years of experience teaching multicultural classrooms (see Table1). The average number of years teaching multicultural classrooms is between 7-10 years. They all agreed that it is a positive experience, enriching and at some points it has been challenging for them. At USJ the teaching staff has a Content Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) training program, which it was very fine for the beginning of their teaching multicultural classes. However, most of teaching staff affirmed that they miss more pedagogical support, a training focused on intercultural classes and dealing with diversity in the classroom. They affirm that how the assignment of workload is done at USJ is fair and very welcomed. The teaching staff who teaches classes in English get a plus of half their ECTS (a course that is 6 ECTS, if that course is taught by a professor who has gone through the CLIL training gets 9 ECTS in their workload). All of the participants considered it is affair deal. But in general, they claimed more training and support in multicultural classes and in intercultural competence.

All the teachers approach their intercultural teaching almost the same way, they use examples of the countries represented in their classrooms and try to let them explain how are different situations, as explained in class, in their countries. This is challenging for them since they have to work on those examples. They affirm that this classroom context challenges local students to pay more attention in class and to be more involved in class discussions.

Some of them affirmed that since USJ is very young university, and it was created at the threshold of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), the so called the Bologna process, the way we have manage the syllabi and the structure of continuous evaluation, helps the approach to reach international students in their classes. The approach of more practice than theoretical approach in teaching also helps in multicultural classrooms. An important challenge is how overcome the knowledge gap, teachers affirm that sometimes the level of certain international students is lower or higher than local students, which is a challenge when they have to plan their classes. Also how they communicate, since it is very different from culture to culture, and it is something that teachers have to take into account in class (take into account that at USJ classes are small so the contact with professors is constant and the communication between students and teachers is a very close tow way process).

None of them have experienced racism or discrimination in their classes. However, they have affirmed that sometimes when doing group work is difficult to mix the students: International students stick together, and local students do the same. International students interviewed affirmed that when they have to work with local students (Spanish students) is very challenging and it takes some time to get organized and understand how they are going to do the work.

Teachers consider that the training the received in CLIL, was good at the beginning of their teaching in multicultural classrooms and for teaching in English, but they feel that they need more now. More training in intercultural issues, and intercultural pedagogies as one of them affirmed “sometimes it is hard to communicate effectively with international students, I would like to be better prepared for that”.

Benefits

The main benefits are how these classes are “different” from the rest of classes that they teach. It is encouraging for them, to help the environment to be good and how international students participate in the classes brings a new approach and light to the content they teach. As one of the teachers explained “international students participate more in classes and give very good examples from their own countries” this makes local students to reflect about certain realities and situations that they take for granted or that they never thought about.

Challenges

Some of the teachers interviewed declared that an important challenge is how to manage classes in where there are more international students than local students. This situation happens in the School of Communication and Social Sciences that gets a lot of international students. If this happens, local students feel excluded, and they do not participate in the class and there is no interaction between local and international students which may produce ghettos within the international students and cero integration process. Another challenge that was mentioned is the limitations that some of the teachers feel when teaching in English,

since it is not their mother tongue, and they do not feel fluent. They also mentioned the different cultural standards in how to learn and how to approach the assignments. These also differs from culture to culture, is not the same German students or Korean students or Italian students. This also affects the environment in the class as well. As for the teaching staff the most important barrier is having a good level of English, they also commented in communicating effectively with the students, because they learn and communicate in a different way than local students. They need to prepare more and in more detailed the assessment. They also claim that there are some student services that have not been adapted for international students, such as the psychological help line for example.

Mechanisms

At USJ the teaching staff has a Content Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) training program, which it was very fine for the beginning of their teaching multicultural classes. However, most of teaching staff affirmed that they miss more pedagogical support, a training focused on intercultural classes and dealing with diversity in the classroom. More intercultural communication training and how to approach different ways of learning depending on their cultural background. One of the teachers also affirmed that more support from other university departments would be also needed such as Psychological Department.

They affirm that how the assignment of workload is done at USJ is fair and very welcomed. The teaching staff who teaches classes in English get a plus of half their ECTS (a course that is 6 ECTS, if that course is taught by a professor who has gone through the CLIL training gets 9 ECTS in their workload). All of the participants considered it is affair deal. But in general they claimed more training and support in multicultural classes and in intercultural competenceNeeds

As for needs they affirmed that more training in intercultural pedagogies and also how to manage mixed cultures group work would be required, as well as a more efficient level of English (some of them).

Student Perspective

Individual experiences and approaches

Most of the students who participated in the study have had some previous international experience. They all affirmed that they love being part of a multicultural class. They enjoy the environment and how they learn. They find the teachers very close and helpful, and they are always willing to help them and reaching out to see that everything is ok.

They have never experienced racism or discrimination although one international full student affirmed that she has felt rejected in some group projects because her Spanish is not very

good, “I have found hard to do group work, Spaniards express themselves in a very different way, they cry a lot when they are stress out”. Students find their experience in multicultural classrooms as very positive. They enjoy those classes more than the ones they are the only ones with local students. One of the participants affirmed that she found a great difference in the way of teaching being here at (USJ) more practical and back home more theoretical. They feel excited to have the opportunity to study abroad and they see it as something that it would greatly improve their CV in a very near future.

Benefits

All the students affirmed that being in multicultural classrooms have a lot of benefits and positive aspects. They learn more and better. They feel challenge, to communicate better and to explain their perspectives and points of view and seeing other perspectives. They feel the teaching methods very different from their countries, being more focused into practice here than back home. They feel excited to have the opportunity to study abroad and they see it as something that it would greatly improve their CV in a very near future. They are looking for more international experiences as some of them mentioned, in the summer they are going to do some volunteer program in Africa, and others are going abroad next year again.

Challenges

As for international students there are two important sides, one is the perspective and experience of incoming short stay, mostly ERASMUS students, which they feel very much supported with an institutional orientation to integrate better in USJ. And then, there is the experience of international students who are full time students, the ones who come to study the whole degree in Spain. The latter perceive lack of support in their adaptation process, and they feel on their own in a completely different system and sometimes very lost.

Mechanisms

All the students agreed on the great support they have received at USJ. The orientation days were very helpful for them even they mentioned the session on cultural shock and adaptation process. Although the full-time student, mentioned that she felt quite lonely in the process (these students do not get the same orientation as international students who come for one semester or one year). So more support for this type of international students would be needed.

Needs

The students affirmed that the skills and competencies needed to be efficient in multicultural classes were the following: group work; being flexible; good communication skills and finally to be able to be out of your comfort zone. Being able to reach the international office as well

as having advisors, is very helpful. They also compared the two systems, the one from their local university and USJ.

Conclusions

We can draw many conclusions from this brief country report, first and the most obvious one is that Spain is chosen for many international students as a fine destination for doing their study abroad program. However, even this clear impact in the Spanish economy, no strong funding and insufficient one is focused on this type of educational programs. There are lack of resources allocated to strengthen internationalized programs, starting with their leadership (qualified and internationalized roles) and also promoting hiring of non-local faculty, which is indeed a challenge. More courses taught in English are needed and an improvement of the academic staff English level. Restructuration to a three-year degree program and two-year- master's program. Universities should be prepared for this number of incoming students. After many years of no clear change, the lack of looking forward roles in university leadership positions shows in the need for important structural changes. Internationalization and diversity are here to stay is the future of Europe and of a globalized 21st century-knowledge society. Spanish universities should and must keep up with the challenge.

References

Crespo MacLennan, J. (2011). La internacionalización de la universidad española y su contribución a la proyección exterior del país. Real Instituto Elcano. Retrieved from <http://biblioteca.ribei.org/id/eprint/2056/1/ARI-39-2011.pdf>

Grasset, C., Griffin, K. & Pérez-Bedmar, M. (2014). The economic impact of study abroad, Spain. Retrieved from <http://www.spaineduprogram.es>

Hans de Wit, F.H., Howard, L. & Egron-Polak, E. (2015). Internationalisation of Higher Education. Retrieved from [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2015/540370/IPOL_STU\(2015\)540370_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2015/540370/IPOL_STU(2015)540370_EN.pdf)

Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte (2016). Estrategia para la Internacionalización de las Universidades Españolas 2015-2020. Retrieved from <https://sede.educacion.gob.es/publiventa/d/21475/19/0>

Ministerio de Universidades del Gobierno de España (2022). Datos y cifras del sistema universitario español. Publicación 2021-2022. Ed.: Secretaría General Técnica del Ministerio de Universidades

Rumbley, L. E. & Howard, L. (2014). "Soaring Spain: A dream deferred?" in *International Higher Education*, (74), 12-14. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.6017/ihe.2014.74.5466>.

Servicio Español para la Internacionalización de la Educación (SEPIE) (2017). *The Internationalisation of Higher Education in Spain. Reflections and Perspectives*. Retrieved from <https://sede.educacion.gob.es/publiventa/the-internationalisation-of-higher-education-in-spain-reflections-and-perspectives-/educacion-europa/22326>

Sierra Huedo, M. L. (2013). *Becoming global without leaving home: Internationalization at home, a case study of San Jorge, a Spanish private university*. (Doctoral dissertation). University of Minnesota, Minneapolis.

Sierra-Huedo, M. L., Bruton, L., & Fernández, C. (2022). *Becoming Global at Home: An Analysis of Existing Cases and A Proposal for the Future of Internationalization at Home*. *Journal of Education*, 0, 1-14. DOI: 10.1177/00220574221108053.

ANNEXES

Annex 1. Consent Form

Multicultural Classrooms: Inclusive Learning and Teaching in Higher Education

Hereby I confirm that:

"I have been informed of and understand the purposes of the study"

"I have been given an opportunity to ask questions"

"I understand I can withdraw at any time without prejudice"

"Any information which might potentially identify me will not be used in published material"

"I agree to participate in the study as outlined to me."

"I << fill in the research participant's name here >>, consent to participate in 'Research Phase of MultiClass Project' conducted by << insert organization name here >>. I have understood the nature of this project and wish to participate. I am not waiving any of my legal rights by signing this form. My signature below indicates my consent.

Name of participant: _____

Signature and date

Annex 2. Questions for Lecturers

INDIVIDUAL EXPERIENCE & APPROACHES

1. Can you share your experience in teaching in multicultural classrooms?
2. How do you think teaching in multicultural classrooms affects your motivation? (in a positive and/ or negative way)? Give an example & explain.
3. Have you ever experienced racism and discrimination in some of your multicultural classrooms? If so, how did you deal with it?
4. What was your biggest challenge while teaching in a multicultural classroom?
5. What do you think about the impact of multicultural classrooms on the overall performance of students in your courses?
6. Can you provide an example of a time when you had to adapt your teaching or research to meet the needs of a multicultural classroom? What are the most significant differences between managing homogeneous and diverse (multicultural) classrooms?

7. What strategies, approaches and methods do you use to create a more inclusive environment in a multicultural classroom?
8. How well do the curriculum and teaching materials reflect the cultural diversity of students?
9. Do you provide the class with real-life examples from all around the world?
10. Do you feel well-equipped to handle the diverse cultural backgrounds of your students and create a supportive learning environment for all?

BENEFITS

11. What opportunities and benefits have you experienced in teaching multicultural classrooms?
12. Do you remember a positive experience that made you happy while teaching in a multicultural classroom? Would you share it with us?

CHALLENGES

13. What challenges have you encountered teaching in multicultural classrooms? Could you share that experience with us?
14. Do you think increasing the number of international students at universities leads to any challenges in your teaching practices?

MECHANISMS

15. What kind of mechanisms does your university provide to support teachers teaching in multicultural classrooms?
16. Have you received any training regarding teaching in multicultural classes? Can you share the impact of training on your teaching practices?
17. Does your university offer any integration program for international students? Do you personally, as a teacher, provide any orientation and integration program (ice-breaking activities, excursions etc.) for your students?

NEEDS

18. What essential skills and competencies do you need to train in multicultural classes?
19. What kind of services and training would be beneficial to teach better in multicultural classes?
20. How do you receive/give feedback from/to students regarding relationships in the classroom?

Annex 3. Questions for Students

INDIVIDUAL EXPERIENCE & APPROACHES

1. Can you share your experience studying in multicultural classrooms?
2. How do you think studying in multicultural classrooms affects your motivation? (in a positive and/ or negative way)? Give an example & explain.
3. Have you ever experienced racism and discrimination in your multicultural classroom? If so, how did you deal with it?
4. What do you think about the impact of multicultural classrooms on your overall performance?
5. Can you provide an example of a time when your teacher had to adapt his/her teaching to meet the needs of international students?
6. What strategies do your teachers use to create a more inclusive environment in a multicultural classroom?

BENEFITS

7. What opportunities and benefits have you experienced in studying multicultural classrooms?
8. Do you remember a positive experience that made you happy while studying in a multicultural classroom? Would you share it with us?

CHALLENGES

9. What challenges have you encountered studying in multicultural classrooms? Could you share that experience with us?
10. Do you think increasing the number of international students at universities leads to any challenges for you?

MECHANISMS

11. What kind of mechanisms does your university provide to support international students?
12. Have you received any orientation and guidance regarding studying in multicultural classes? Can you share the impact of this orientation and guidance on your studies?

NEEDS

13. What essential skills and competencies do you need to develop in multicultural classes?
14. What kind of support would you like to have to study better in multicultural classes?



Co-funded by
the European Union



MULTICLASS

**Multicultural Classrooms:
Inclusive Learning and Teaching in Classrooms
“Erasmus+ Cooperation Partnerships in Higher Education”
2022-1-TR01-KA220-HED-000085687**

www.multiclass.yasar.edu.tr

The European Commission's support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents, which reflect the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.