

The Contribution of International Student Mobility to Human Development and Global Understanding¹

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Abstract: International student mobility has been an important indicator for the degree of internationalisation in higher education. Today, international student mobility has moved from unorganised or self-organised study abroad to a variety of mobility forms organised within programmes. It has also become an issue of economic competitiveness, like attracting best talent, wealth creation and brain drain. This paper focuses on mobility as a limited period of study abroad (typically between six and 12 months) and not on mobility for the purpose of studying a whole degree programme abroad. Meanwhile, it takes ERASMUS program in Germany for example, analyzes the barriers to student mobility and possible solutions, and draws conclusions that widening participation and broadening geographical scope.

Key words: international student mobility human development global understanding

1. Introduction: Importance of student mobility

International student mobility, i.e. the reception of foreign students and the sending own students abroad, has been an important indicator for the degree of internationalisation in higher education. But internationalisation of higher education itself has gone through various stages of meaning. In Germany, for example, student mobility after the Second World War in the 1950s followed a policy of “open doors” in order to improve the reputation of German higher education and the German people after the period of the Hitler regime. German students going abroad were supposed to act as ambassadors of their country and foreign students being received in Germany were supposed to experience that Germany had returned to being an open society and having respect for civil liberties.

Today, international student mobility has moved from unorganised or self-organised study abroad to a variety of mobility forms organised within programmes. It has also become an issue of economic competitiveness, like attracting best talent, wealth creation and brain drain. Apart from the sheer numbers of incoming and outgoing students, the flows of mobility have been of interest as well. In the following I will focus on mobility as a limited period of study abroad (typically between six and 12 months) and not on mobility for the purpose of studying a whole degree programme abroad.

To collect international experiences through spending a limited period of study abroad during the course of a programme of study has become a rather normal and frequent event for European students. Mobility is supposed

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to serve at least two basic goals of higher education which are deemed important:

A. International experiences help to develop the personality by broadening the horizon of the individual student and provide him or her with sufficient flexibility and cultural as well as social knowledge to be able to adapt to unfamiliar situations and to act appropriately.

B. International experiences also help to gain a number of qualifications—beyond an improved knowledge of a foreign language—that contribute to later employment ability and perhaps a career in an international context.

Just as important as sending one’s own students abroad has become the issue of receiving students from abroad, again two basic goals are connected to it:

A. A majority of students’ remains that cannot or will not go abroad. They are given the opportunity of getting to know foreign cultures by mingling with students from abroad at their home university. “Internationalisation at home” is the term used in Europe for this.

B. It is hoped that students from abroad will develop a closer connection to the country in which they spent part of their studies and that they will favour companies from this country for investment opportunities in their home countries after their return and during their subsequent careers.

2. Student Mobility and Mobility Flows on A Global Scale

Individual institutions of higher education as well as individual countries have interpreted the number of foreign students they attract as an indicator for the attractiveness and reputation of their educational provisions. All over the world institutions having the reputation to be centres of excellence attract more applications from foreign students than other higher education institutions. Many actively advertise their services and provisions in order to select the best talent from other countries. This has led to specific mobility flows, which tend to be from East to West and from South to North. This type of mobility has been termed “vertical” mobility, i.e. students from poorer regions and countries decide to study in countries or at universities in which they hope to get a better education than the one provided in their home country (Teichler 2001).

I will now try to give you an idea about mobility numbers and mobility flows. My figures and tables are mostly taken from the Atlas of Student Mobility (Todd 2003) and refer to the year 2000/2001.

2.1 Destinations: (see Table 1) Data about international students are not available for all countries but the

Table 1: Destinations of Foreign Students Studying in the Six Leading Host Countries (in percent)

Country	Quantity	Country	Quantity	Country	Quantity
United States	547,092	Belgium	37,789	Netherlands	13,949
United Kingdom	222,576	Canada	34,536	Jordan	12,154
Germany	185,179	Austria	30,064	Portugal	10,998
France	134,783	Switzerland	24,729	New Zealand	7,603
Australia	69,668	Italy	21,229	Denmark	7,124
Japan	59,656	Sweden	20,631	Ireland	5,564
Spain	40,506	Turkey	17,635	Korea	2,737

Source: Todd M. David(2003): Atlas of Student Mobility. New York: Institute of International Education

main destinations of mobile students are quite well known. As a host country for international students, the USA is the most popular, followed by the United Kingdom and by Germany. France, Australia and Japan follow after these three as main destinations. Among the 21 leading host countries for international students are 12 member states of the European Union. Together these 12 countries host almost three quarters of a million (730,392)

students, about 25 percent more than the United States of America.

To give you a comparison: In 2000/01 China had 120.486 of its own students studying abroad. The most popular host countries for Chinese students were the United States (50 %), Japan (23 %), the United Kingdom (9 %), Germany (8 %), and Australia (3 %). It is estimated that by the year 2025 more than 70 % of the global demand for international higher education will be generated from Asia, with more than 40 % of this demand coming from China (Böhm et al 2002, p. 43). It should be pointed out that these last figures are forecasting the demand for full-time study abroad of a whole degree programme.

We can clearly see the advantage of English speaking countries, we can see the strength of a regional effort in the EU figures and we can see a preference for highly industrialised and well developed countries with large and stable higher education systems.

2.2 Origins: The origins of mobile students reverse the logic of the picture provided by looking at the destinations. I will give you percentages for the six leading host countries. There are no comparative figures for China.

As you can see in Table 2, Europe is one of the centres of mobility sending and receiving many students from

Table 2: Origins of Foreign Students Studying in the Six Leading Host Countries (in percent)

	USA	UK	Germany	France	Australia	Japan
Oceania	1	1	-	-	2	1
Latin America and Caribbean	12	3	3	5	1	2
North America	5	7	2	3	5	2
Europe	8	8	41	11	4	2
European Union	9	43	23	21	4	2
North Africa/Middle East	5	5	11	31	1	1
Sub Saharan Africa	5	7	5	24	2	1
South East Asia	7	8	2	2	48	9
South and Central Asia	13	4	2	1	10	3
East Asia	35	14	10	4	24	78

Source: Todd M. David(2003): Atlas of Student Mobility. New York: Institute of International Education

all over the world. But there are also impressive figures from all Asian regions. However, in Asia we have a trend of sending students rather than receiving foreign students with the exception of Japan. Latin America and Africa have notably lower figures on the sending as well as on the receiving side. Most of the English speaking countries are receiver countries rather than sending their own students abroad. Slowly a more complete picture seems to emerge. I hesitate to talk about exporting and importing countries because this seems too much a purely economic term, although in many countries, particularly those receiving more students from abroad than sending their own students abroad, importing foreign students is indeed an economic factor. Compared to other world regions, Europe has a relatively good balance of sending and receiving students; most English speaking countries tend to be receiver countries (USA, Australia, UK), while most otherworld regions, maybe with the exception of Japan, are dominantly sending countries. But we also have to keep in mind that the least developed countries do hardly participate in mobility at all because their higher education systems are not well developed or practically non-existing. The few students there are from rich families who send their children abroad for studying.

3. ERASMUS: A European Example for Mobility and Its Outcomes

Let me now focus on Europe for a moment. The ERASMUS Programme of the European Union, which

supports European student exchange and mobility since 1987 is deemed to be one of the most successful mobility programmes ever. It has set itself an ambitious goal: 10 percent of all European students should be enabled to study abroad for a period of time and receive some support to help cover the additional costs incurred by being mobile. The ERASMUS Programme cannot achieve this ambitious goal alone, as the budget is not sufficient for this. But there are also many national programmes in the European countries supporting student mobility, often more generous in terms of financial support than ERASMUS is and often focussing on other than European countries.

The ERASMUS Programme has been well analysed by the Kassel Centre for Research on Higher Education and Work. In 1987, the first year of the Programme, when the European Union had only 12 member states, about 3,000 students received mobility grants to study for a period of six to twelve months at a host university of another European member state. The number of mobile students in the framework of the Programme increased continuously and when the number of European member states and accession states eligible to participate in ERASMUS increased, the number of mobile students increased as well. By the year 2000, more than 100.000 students received an ERASMUS grant every year to study abroad (cf. Teichler et al. 2001, 35). In 2003, the budget for ERASMUS supported student mobility alone was 118.3 million Euros.

Student mobility within the ERASMUS Programme is based on the idea of “horizontal” mobility, i.e. free of immediate economic motives and without politically induced barriers (Teichler 2001). Student mobility within the ERASMUS Programme is also accompanied by a number of additional measures that are intended to reduce further barriers for mobility.

- Higher education institutions exchanging students within the ERASMUS Programme have institutional cooperation agreements.
- Students are sent out with a learning agreement which regulates what kinds of courses they are going to study at the host university and which supports recognition after their return.
- Study abroad is measured within the framework of the European Credit Transfer system, a system of credit point accumulation, which contributes to the recognition by the home university of studies, carried out abroad.
- Those institutions of higher education also cooperating in curriculum development often award joint or double degrees to those students having studied at two or more universities in the network.
- Another factor enabling recognition is the so-called “diploma supplement” which is a transcript of records of all subject areas and courses taken so that a potential employer in another country can clearly see what a particular student has studied for his or her degree.

But let us look at the outcomes of student mobility within the ERASMUS Programme. The Kassel Centre for Research on Higher Education and Work has carried out several studies on this issue, longitudinal (Teichler, Maiworm 1994 and Maiworm, Teichler 1996) as well as internationally comparative (cf. Jahr et al. 2002; for a summary of results of several studies cf. Teichler 2001).

The impacts and outcomes of temporary study abroad in Europe can be summarised as follows (Teichler 2001):

- Mobility has a “warming up” effect on subsequent education.
- Although former ERASMUS students in a number of surveys were convinced that their study abroad had been academically worthwhile, the highest values in terms of outcomes were attributed to cultural enhancement, personality development and foreign language proficiency.
- A clear majority of former ERASMUS students (almost three quarters) also perceived their study abroad as

helpful in obtaining the first job and about half considered their study abroad as relevant for their job
ta•Finally, the surveys indicate a strong impact of study abroad on international professional mobility.

The ERASMUS Programme has contributed and continues to contribute to an ever-growing number of persons in Europe who are prepared and willing to be internationally mobile after graduation. Further studies (Teichler et al. 2001, Jahr et al. 2001) have shown that student mobility as well as professional mobility after graduation contributes only little to the vertical dimensions of professional success (e.g. status and income) but they contribute considerably to the horizontal dimensions of professional success. In summary, four such dimensions were found (Teichler 2001):

- Status and income of mobile students are only slightly higher than that of non-mobile students but mobility leads to a higher frequency of international work tasks and use of corresponding competences.
- Study abroad successfully prepares for international mobility in professional life and for job assignments with international components both in the home country and abroad.
- Study abroad supported by ERASMUS contributed to the qualitative growth of mobile students in Europe.
- Preparation for employment abroad and international job assignments starts even earlier.

Altogether, study abroad triples the likelihood of being employed abroad. Even those mobile students who eventually stay in their home country have more international job assignments and feel better prepared for them than non-mobile students. It is also interesting for employers, in particular larger and internationally active companies, to recruit graduates with international experiences.

4. Barriers to Student Mobility and Possible Solutions

But the barriers to student mobility might be of interest as well. Having 90 percent and more of non-mobile students in Europe constitutes an overwhelming majority. A recent survey among mobile as well as non-mobile German students brought to light a number of mobility barriers (cf. Isserstedt, Schnitzer 2002).

4.1 Money: The additional costs incurred through study abroad tend to be one of the most frequently named barriers preventing mobility (61 % non-mobile and 41 % mobile students). This is similarly valid for the mobile students studying abroad with an ERASMUS grant. The ERASMUS student mobility grant has fallen from an average of 190 Euro per month in 1991 to 146 Euro per month in 2001. In many countries the average ERASMUS grant for mobile students is even less. This tends to lead to inequalities and exclusion of those students who do not have additional sources of income. While within ERASMUS all participating countries have agreed that the mobile students will not have to pay tuition fees, the picture looks different for other many countries. High tuition fees make it even more difficult to be mobile.

4.2 Separation: A longer separation from the family or from a partner is another barrier for mobility. 47 percent of German non-mobile students surveyed by Isserstedt and Schnitzer gave this as a reason for not studying abroad (only 23 % of mobile students).

4.3 Duration of studies: 43 percent of non-mobile and 23 percent of mobile students anticipated or experienced a longer duration of studies due to study abroad. This is an indicator that integration of study abroad into the regular curriculum and the European Credit Transfer Scheme are less effective than is usually assumed. In fact, various other surveys of student mobility within ERASMUS have shown that recognition is often granted for only some of the achievements during study abroad and that a longer duration of studies has to be taken into account of about one third of the time a student has spent studying abroad. In the Isserstedt/Schnitzer survey 23

percent of students have studied abroad for a period of time reported recognition problems. Nevertheless, a number of ERASMUS student mobility surveys have shown that the less tangible results of studying abroad, e.g. broadening the horizon, making contacts, personal development etc., make up for the somewhat longer duration of studies according to the mobile students who were surveyed.

4.4 Language: Within the non-English speaking countries of Europe the language issue has been mostly resolved insofar as higher education institutions provide an ever growing number of classes and even full degree programmes taught in English. This trend is currently spreading worldwide and thus language, as a potential barrier for mobility has been mostly resolved. In addition, practically all higher education institutions receiving foreign students offer intensive courses in the language of the country so that foreign students have sufficient knowledge of the host country language for getting by in their host country's every-day life.

4.5 Brain drain: Brain drain through mobility is mostly feared in those countries that send out more students than they receive from abroad. For example, the Central and Eastern European countries tend to suffer from brain drain to Western Europe, while debates in Germany assume a brain drain of highly qualified graduates to the United States. Jahr et al. (2002) have summarised the various phases of the brain drain debate starting in Great Britain at the beginning of the 1960s. They have shown that the various debates are characterised by mixing research-based analyses with political evaluations of international mobility. Does brain drain support the development of the rich countries or it is just an overflow phenomenon? Human capital theory argues that brain drain of highly qualified persons should be prevented because it constitutes an economic factor. Empirically it has turned out that within the European Union brain drain is comparatively low while mobility of highly qualified labour has increased. Brain drain is often connected to vertical mobility and less to horizontal mobility and altogether a much more complex phenomenon than typically presented in political debates. In particular the smaller European countries have made efforts to prevent brain drain while fostering international mobility. And that brings me to my last point.

4.6 Economic and geographical factors: In contrast to student mobility for a limited period of time and within programmes and efforts to internationalise higher education, trans-national, mostly for-profit education has moved more into the focus of analyses and debates since the last round of negotiations in the context of the General Agreement on Trades in Services. It is assumed that the new types of higher education spreading with the Agreement (e.g. virtual provisions, franchising, off-shore activities, for-profit trade in education) will accelerate three phenomena which have been called the "triple D" (Hahn 2004): (a) "de-nationalisation" of educational policy arenas and curricula through a growing involvement of supra-national actors in policy-making and increasing international cooperation of institutions; (b) "de-institutionalisation" of higher education through a growth in virtual provisions, public-private partnerships, accreditation of prior learning outside higher education; (c) "de-monopolisation" of traditional, state alimeted public higher education through new for profit providers. It is also assumed that the United States of America will be on the winning side of this development because they have the technology and the experience to go into these new educational markets quite quickly.

5. Conclusions: Widening Participation and Broadening Geographical Scope

One of the less surprising but still important results of evaluating the European student mobility programme is that ERASMUS clearly contributed to enlarging the pool of highly qualified persons who are prepared and willing to be internationally mobile after graduation. Analyses of international mobility of European graduates have shown that on average between four and five percent of higher education graduates in Europe work abroad

(Teichler, Jahr 2003). But this does not necessarily mean brain drain for these graduates' countries of origin. Many of these graduates do not emigrate for good but eventually return to their home countries. In addition, we have to consider that the differences between mobile and non-mobile graduates are predominantly of a "horizontal" nature, in that mobile graduates make more frequent use of their knowledge about other countries, their understanding of the international diversity of cultures and societies, their foreign language proficiency, and their ability to work with people from different backgrounds. Thus, we can indeed say that international student mobility contributes to human development and global understanding.

Although there are still many gaps in the analysis of links between study abroad and professional mobility, those results that are available and of which I have presented a few may encourage national governments and supra-national organisations to further support an increase in international student mobility so that all students who are willing to be mobile could have an opportunity to study abroad. If mobility becomes a normal option in all programmes of study, then brain drain and uneven geographical balances of mobility flows with their implications of "vertical" mobility will play a lesser role politically and economically than they do currently.

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