Supporting Freedom and Democracy

Effects of individual mobility and Erasmus+ projects on intercultural competence and value orientation

DAAD Impact Study
Abstract
This publication is based on two surveys commissioned by the DAAD:

• Außercurriculare Bildungseffekte von Auslandsaufenthalten (Extra-curricular educational effects of stays abroad), Dr. Julia Zimmermann, Dr. Henriette Greischel, Judith Sarah Preuß (FernUniversität in Hagen), Dr. Jan Kercher, Rebecca Kittel (DAAD)

• Nutzung der Partnerschaften und Kooperationsprojekte in Erasmus+ durch die deutschen Hochschulen (Utilisation of partnerships and cooperation projects in Erasmus+ by German higher education institutions), Eva Feldmann-Wojtachnia, Barbara Tham (Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München).

You can find both publications on eu.daad.de/studie-wirkung-2018 (in German).

The graphs are taken from the project reports.

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Introduction

Article 2 of the Treaty on the European Union sets out the Union’s fundamental values and the qualities required to maintain these values:

“The Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights [...] in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail.”

In 2015 the ministers of education of the European Union issued their “Declaration on Promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education” (Paris Declaration), in which they made a clear commitment to the fundamental values of the EU and demanded that corresponding measures be supported – not only, but in particular – by the European education programmes. “We reaffirm our determination to stand shoulder to shoulder in support of fundamental values that lie at the heart of the European Union: respect for human dignity, freedom (including freedom of expression), democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights.”

According to the Paris Declaration, promoting critical thinking and imparting social, civic and intercultural competences should not only be part of school-level education in the future but should moreover be considered the responsibility of every higher education institution and integrated into every degree programme regardless of the higher education institution’s location in Europe or its specialist focus. The ministers of education and the European Commission believe the Erasmus+ programme to be both obligated and well placed to take on this societal challenge and contribute significantly to integration and to strengthening the Union and its democratic principles through suitable measures. Beginning in 2016 the Erasmus+ National Agency for EU Higher Education Cooperation within the DAAD designed and coordinated a survey intended to more closely examine the programme’s contribution to this effort.

A survey of students at German higher education institutions before and after their stay abroad investigated the psychological effects of study-related visits abroad on the development of personality characteristics relating to the development goals of the Paris Declaration. 3,070 panellists (students at German higher education institutions) were surveyed through an online questionnaire with a prospective control group design. The students were divided into three survey groups (currently mobile students, soon-to-be-mobile students and control group students); the data were collected at two measuring occasions.

A second part of the survey was designed to explore whether the objectives given in the Paris Declaration had any effect on the applications and implementation of projects. The intention was initially to question managers of projects in Key Action 2 (Cooperation for Innovation and Exchange of Good Practices) and Key Action 3 (Support for Policy Reform) at German higher education institutions on the design of their projects. Discussing the draft questionnaire with a test group (‘stakeholders’) indicated that projects in Key Action 1 (Mobility of Individuals) should also be included in the survey of co-ordinators. In accordance with this finding, managers of projects in all three areas at German higher education institutions were surveyed.

The surveys for both project parts were conducted during the 2017/2018 academic year; the collected data were analysed and published in 2018.

PART I — STUDENTS
EXTRACURRICULAR EDUCATIONAL EFFECTS OF STAYS ABROAD

The Paris Declaration lists educational goals of which it can be expected that they will be achieved more easily, more advantageously or especially effectively through stays abroad: acquisition of intercultural competences, intercultural dialogue and prevention of discrimination.

Two research questions formed the starting point for investigating the effects of study-related stays abroad on the development of students’ personality characteristics:

- Do stays abroad funded by the Erasmus+ programme promote students’ multicultural development in the spirit of the educational goals described in the Paris Declaration?
- How important is exposure to intercultural contact (to the population of the host country or to other international students) for multicultural development?

This survey took previous studies on exchange mobility into account and advanced the existing research methodologies based on the latest findings. Five established psychological constructs were used to study the development goals described in the Paris Declaration: multicultural self-efficacy, intercultural empathy, intergroup anxiety, diversity beliefs, and racism. The trait ‘multicultural self-efficacy’ was used to examine the extent to which Erasmus+ stays help to promote intercultural competence. To this end students’ self-reported ability to successfully interact with members of other cultures was determined. Intercultural dialogue was examined by exploring the development of intercultural empathy (self-assessment of the ability to put oneself in the position of members of other cultural groups) and intergroup anxiety (feelings of anxiety or uncertainty during contacts with members of other cultural groups). In addition, the effects of stays abroad on the development of diversity beliefs and on racism (degree of rejection or acceptance of statements regarding cultural diversity and equality of various cultural groups respectively) were examined in order to measure their contribution to preventing discrimination.

In order to record changes, mobile students were surveyed twice – before and after their period abroad. Also included were a cohort of students who intended to go abroad at a later date, and a control group of students with no intention of becoming mobile (CG) which also both were surveyed twice. It can be assumed that (in contrast to mobile students compared to non-mobile students) currently mobile students (CMS) and soon-to-be-mobile students (FMS) will not differ substantially in their socio-demographic and psychological characteristics; it was thus ensured that the results were not distorted by traits that could not have been controlled for in analysing the data. This comparison represents a methodical expansion of previous survey designs.

For students who were mobile within the survey period, a greater increase in multicultural self-efficacy and intercultural empathy and a greater decrease in intergroup anxiety was apparent compared to the control group or the soon-to-be-mobile students. With regard to the Paris Declaration this empirically confirmed the theoretical assumptions regarding the effects of stays abroad. Most effects are much greater for mobile students who have not previously participated in a stay abroad than for mobile students who have previously participated in a stay abroad. The significant deviation of the group of students with actual mobility experience (CMS) from the control group (CG) and the group of students who were merely planning their stay abroad at the time of the survey (FMS) demonstrates the effects of actual experience abroad. Stays abroad were found to have no effect on racism or beliefs regarding diversity. This lack of proof could be due to the methodology used and might be more closely examined in future research projects using a different approach.

Currently mobile students were questioned on the quality and frequency of their contacts to residents of the host country and to other international students. Contacts to other international students were found to occur slightly more frequently than contacts to citizens of the host country, and the quality of contacts to other international students was also rated slightly higher.

Substantial effects of the quality of contacts to other international students were found in all three examined characteristics (multicultural self-efficacy, intercultural empathy, intergroup anxiety). The quality of the contacts was measured by the

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2 The complete final report is available on the website of the National Agency for EU Higher Education Cooperation: www.eu.daad.de/studie-wirkung-2018 (in German).
3 See Chapter 2 of the Final Report.
4 The example of specific intercultural training courses may permit the reader to assess the presented development. Such courses usually produce effects of comparable strength; a comparable change resulting from stays abroad was not to be expected.
The graphs show differences in the manifest average values T2–T1.

degree to which these were experienced as equitable, voluntary, intense, pleasant and cooperative. Similar effects on multicultural self-efficacy and intergroup anxiety were shown to derive from the quality of the contacts to citizens of the host country.

Moreover, two independent positive effects of the frequency of contacts to citizens of the host country on the development of multicultural self-efficacy and intercultural empathy were identified. Participants with more frequent contacts were shown to benefit from stronger development. Comparing quality and quantity of contacts indicated that the quality was, as expected, more important than the quantity.

The multicultural self-efficacy of mobile students (CMS) increased more significantly and their xenophobia decreased more strongly than in the control groups. It is moreover interesting that the positive effects were evident in the context of contacts both to people in the host country and to other international students. Even if Erasmus under certain circumstances may result in more frequent contacts to international students, which had been criticised as „Erasmus bubble“, these promote positive effects. The findings thus rehabilitate international contacts – Erasmus is more than “L’auberge espagnole” suggests.\footnote{„L’auberge espagnole”: Spanish-french film by Cédric Klapisch from 2002.} It may even be the case that the intercultural experience is more European than binational.

In summary it can be concluded that stays abroad have substantial effects on individuals’ development in accordance with the development goals of the Paris Declaration. A greater increase in multicultural self-efficacy and intercultural empathy and a stronger decrease in intergroup anxiety was observed on students after a few months of staying abroad. Intercultural contacts both to students and other citizens of the host country and to other international students acted as relevant moderators of this development. The quality of the contacts to both target groups emerged as particularly beneficial to the multi-cultural development of students abroad.

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\footnote{„L’auberge espagnole”: Spanish-french film by Cédric Klapisch from 2002.}
Part II of the survey was to question those responsible for the implementation of the Erasmus+ programme at German higher education institutions on their priorities, and particularly on the objectives listed in the Paris Declaration. The initial assumption was that these objectives would be included relatively rarely, and if at all, then mainly by projects in Key Actions 2 and 3. Staff in strategic partnerships and Erasmus+ cooperation projects at German higher education institutions were to answer fundamental questions on the strategic goals of their projects and especially on the objectives of the Paris Declaration. The questionnaire was discussed and improved at a workshop with stakeholders and sent to Erasmus+ project managers, International Offices and contact persons at all higher education institutions in Germany in the form of an online survey designed to collect robust data on the following questions:

- Which support is offered for conducting Erasmus+ activities at higher education institutions?
- Which overarching goals relating to the Paris Declaration are relevant for the implementation of Erasmus+ activities at higher education institutions?
- What measures and formats do higher education institutions employ to achieve overarching goals relating to the Paris Declaration?
- Are there specific references to the Paris Declaration?
- What kind of measures are helpful in implementing Erasmus+ with regard to the promotion of European values and civic engagement in and for Europe, and which additional measures are still needed?
- What kind of obstacles arise in implementing Erasmus+ with regard to the promotion of European values and civic engagement in and for Europe?
- What could be requested and recommended for implementing Erasmus+ with regard to the promotion of European values and civic engagement in and for Europe?

About 80% of the approximately 500 questionnaires were fully completed, largely by individuals in International Offices; the majority of them were responsible for projects in Key Action 1. 34% of respondents stated that the Paris Declaration was relevant for their project. Persons to whom this applied were more likely (96%) to declare imparting European values as their overarching goal than persons for whom the Declaration was irrelevant (82%) or those who were unfamiliar with it (77%).
What European values play a role in your projects or measures?
(N = 332, multiple responses permitted)

Overall, conveying European values ranked fifth among the most frequently named goals. Among respondents who were familiar with the Paris Declaration this objective was shared by 96 %, compared to 82 % among those for whom the Declaration was irrelevant, and 77 % among those who were not familiar with the Paris Declaration.

Specifying these values more precisely, respondents for whom the Paris Declaration already played a role named certain objectives significantly more often than respondents overall. The most frequently given values were tolerance (83 %), non-discrimination (76 %), equal rights (72 %), democracy (70 %), equality (66 %) and freedom (65 %). Pluralism (50 %), human rights (49 %) and the rule of law (44 %) were the least frequently named.

A second stakeholder workshop was held to facilitate practice-related analysis of the quantitatively surveyed data that in and of themselves yielded only a limited degree of information. In addition to interpreting the responses, this workshop examined in particular the replies to open questions, which touched on a range of aspects that may be worth a more in-depth exploration.

The following items should be discussed within the higher education institutions and determined across the respective institutions or faculties:

- The value of subject-specific compared to personal skills
- The awarding of grades and/or credit points for personal skills
- The importance of preparing and following up on stays abroad, and methods of good practice for these
- (Mandatory?) implementation of corresponding modules in all subjects
- Expanding the range of English-taught/international courses offered.

A message to the National Agency and the European Commission/the ministries would be to assign appropriate importance to objectives relating to the Paris Declaration both when reviewing applications and in evaluating projects.

According to an analysis of the received responses to the question on the importance of the Paris Declaration asked in the context of the survey, one-third of respondents from German higher education institutions stated that the Declaration explicitly played a role in implementing Erasmus+ projects. Furthermore, the second part of the survey provided indications of a correlation with the European value dimension of projects; Respondents for whom the Declaration was relevant accorded greater significance to certain objectives and competencies. Meeting these objectives and the overarching programme objectives of Erasmus+ would require greater attention to be paid to the topic of European values. The inclusion of these objectives would then have to be considered both by institutions and their units as they formulate their strategic goals, and when projects are designed and their performance is assessed. Achieving this would require further action not only from higher education institutions but in particular from policy-makers and those developing programmes.

Does the “Declaration on Promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination” play a role for you in implementing Erasmus+?

- Yes
- No
- I am not familiar with the Paris Declaration
A previous study\(^8\) by the Erasmus+ National Agency for EU Higher Education Cooperation had already found that employers consider cognitive and social skills to be the most important criteria when recruiting. They also see experience abroad as a way of improving general and intercultural competences. The surveys presented here in brief yielded interesting findings regarding the development of mobile students and the importance of the objectives of the Paris Declaration in Erasmus+ projects. Analysing the results in their entirety presents the conclusion that providing funding for projects and individual mobility is not only effective in terms of achieving the EU’s political objectives but also meets the requirements of the labour market. Communicating these findings should now lead to a range of activities from the National Agency and the higher education institutions. Henceforth this topic will therefore be accorded appropriate significance in the activities carried out for and with the German higher education institutions.

In cooperation with agencies for other educational sectors and agencies in other countries the Erasmus+ National Agency for EU Higher Education Cooperation within the DAAD moreover hopes to examine the question of the societal responsibility of higher education institutions. Future activities will focus particularly on the above objectives and the topic of European values e.g. by identifying practical examples, developing recommendations for action, establishing fora for exchange and, where applicable, cooperations at the European level. These should develop suggestions as to how the objectives of the Paris Declaration can be carried into society/the region, how which target groups can be addressed, and in what way which stakeholders (students, alumni, teaching staff) can be involved. The potential for collaboration between schools and higher education institutions and for internationalisation at home should also be explored and utilised.

The next generation of the Erasmus programme should implement the recommendation of the project managers to more strongly consider projects’ strategic alignment and their contribution to achieving societal goals when selecting projects and assessing their results.

A future study of the questions explored here should utilise an approach involving a comparative analysis of different programme countries. Regarding the development of students with experience abroad, long-term observations would be desirable in order to derive statements on the persistence of effects and in particular regarding the impact on career opportunities and paths.

To begin, higher education institutions, the National Agencies, the European Commission and political stakeholders at all levels can and should acknowledge that funded activities support democracy and freedom and contribute in respectively appropriate ways to pursuing this development in the future.

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