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THE BENEFITS AND PROBLEMS ENSUING FROM THE INTERNATIONALISATION OF UNIVERSITIES FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF STUDENTS AND ACADEMIC TEACHERS PARTICIPATING IN THE ERASMUS PROGRAMME

SUMMARY

The main purpose of the publication is to indicate the benefits from the internationalisation of universities and to diagnose the main obstacles encountered by the participants in this process. The article consists of three basic parts, the introduction and conclusions. The first part, based on the analysis of the literature, presents the publications and studies carried out in the scope of the issues in question which the Author considers most important. The second part presents the major assumptions of the ERASMUS Programme. The third part gives the results of the study, starting with the benefits ensuing from the participation in the programme, both long-term and short-term, while the farther part presents the critical opinions of respondents. The conclusions ending the publication should provide the guidance for the further steps to deepen the process of internationalisation of universities, particularly in the territories of the Member States of the European Union.

Keywords: internationalization, universities, cooperation, Erasmus programme

JEL Classification: A3, F6, I2

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INTRODUCTION

The aim of the publication is to demonstrate the most important benefits ensuing from the internationalisation of universities and the major obstacles encountered by the participants in this process. The assumed hypothesis is as follows: the internationalisation brings substantial short-term and long-term benefits to all its participants, with the qualification that long-term benefits are more significant than short-term ones.

The method of literature analysis and the questionnaire method were used to achieve the objective adopted and to verify the hypothesis.

The questionnaire survey covered students and research staff of the Białystok University of Technology who participated in the Erasmus Programme. One of the faculties was selected for the performance of the questionnaire survey, specifically the Management Faculty, in view of the largest number of students going abroad and the greatest differentiation of the destinations of their travels (Portugal, Denmark, Italy, Spain, Bulgaria, France, Greece), allowing for a more in-depth assessment of the phenomenon of the internationalisation of universities. The survey questionnaires were sent out to all the academic teachers and students of the Faculty who participated in the Programme in the academic years 2009-2011.

The results obtained can provide the basis for drawing conclusions for the future as regards the expansion and improvement of the principles of the internationalisation of universities.

1. THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE IDEA OF INTERNATIONALISATION OF EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE ERASMUS PROGRAMME

For many years the internationalisation of universities has been the subject matter of research carried out by a large number of scientists. The effects of international cooperation among universities were studied and described, inter alia by: P. Scott¹, R. Barnett², H. Teekens³,

¹ P. Scott, *Massification, internationalization and globalization*, [in:] P. Scott (ed.), *The Globalization of Higher Education*, The Society for Research into Higher Education/Open University Press, Buckingham 1998, pp. 108-129.

² R. Barnett, *Realizing the University in an Age of Supercomplexity*, Open University Press, 2000.

³ H. Teekens, *Teaching and Learning in the International Classroom*, Hague, Nuffic 2002.

U. Teichler⁴, S. Robertson⁵, G. Elkin, F. Devjee and J. Farnsworth⁶, K. H. Mok⁷, N. Jiang and V. Carpenter⁸, B. Ischinger⁹, B. Jacobs and R. van der Ploeg¹⁰, P.A. Altbach and J. Knight¹¹. There are also many publications of OECD. Among researchers, the general opinion dominates that the international cooperation among universities is a process which is beneficial for both the development of science and the economies of the individual countries.

The internationalisation of universities is usually related to the process of globalisation of the world economy and culture. In the opinion of P. G. Altbach and J. Knight¹² internationalization of higher education is seen as one of the ways in which a country responds to the impact to globalization. "Internationalisation", the growing border-crossing activities between national systems of higher education is losing ground to "globalisation", increasing border-crossing activities of blurred national systems which is often employed to depict world-wide trends and growing global competition¹³. Higher education was always more internationally open than most sectors because of its immersion in knowledge, which never showed much respect for juridical boundaries¹⁴. "Not all universities are (particularly) international, but all are subject to

⁴ U. Teichler, *The changing Debate of Internationalisation of Higher Education*, „Higher Education”, No. 48/2004, pp. 1-22.

⁵ S. Robertson, *Re-imagining and rescripting the future of education: Global knowledge economy discourses and the challenge to education systems*, „Comparative Education”, Vol. 41(2)/2005, pp. 151-170.

⁶ G. Elkin, F. Devjee, J. Farnsworth, *Visualising the 'internationalisation' of universities*, „International Journal of Educational Management”, Vol. 19(4)/2005, pp. 318-329.

⁷ K.H. Mok, *Globalization, internationalization and academic exchange: Experience of higher education in Hong Kong*, [in:] Z.P. Tin et al.(ed.), *Academic Exchange and Educational Modernization*, Zhejiang University Press, Hangzhou 2005; K.H. Mok, *Questing for Internationalization of Universities in East Asia: Critical Reflections*, Paper presented at the International Symposium at Osaka University, Japan 13-14 January 2006, http://www.gcn-osaka.jp/project/finalreport/6E/6-4-3e_paper.pdf (08.12.2012).

⁸ N. Jiang, V. Carpenter, *Market entry dynamic framework for higher education internationalization*, „Journal of International Education in Business”, Vol. 4, Issue 2/2010, pp. 141-158.

⁹ B. Ischinger, *Higher education for a changing world*, OECD Observer, 2006.

¹⁰ B. Jacobs, R. van der Ploeg, *Guide to reform of higher education: a European perspective*, „Economic Policy”, Vol. 21, Issue 47/2006, pp. 535-592.

¹¹ P.A. Altbach, J. Knight, *The Internationalization of Higher Education: Motivations and Realities*, „Journal of Studies in International Education”, Vol. 11, No. 3-4/2007, pp. 290-305.

¹² *Ibidem*.

¹³ U. Teichler, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

¹⁴ S. Marginson, M.van der Wende, *Globalisation and higher education*, OECD Education Working Papers, No. 8/2007, p. 4.

the same processes of globalisation – partly as objects, victims even, of these processes, but partly as subjects, or key agents, of globalisation”¹⁵.

Internationalisation of higher education became a key issue in Europe since the 1990s¹⁶. The changes in the socio-economic context resulting from the globalized economy have inevitably led to changes not only to the university sector but also to the school sector¹⁷. It is not surprising that international student and scholar exchanges are becoming increasingly popular, while international collaborations are consistently emphasized¹⁸.

Internationalization includes the policies and practices undertaken by academic systems and institutions—and even individuals—to cope with the global academic environment. The motivations for internationalization include commercial advantage, knowledge and language acquisition, enhancing the curriculum with international content, and many others. Specific initiatives such as branch campuses, cross-border collaborative arrangements, programs for international students, establishing English-medium programs and degrees, and others have been put into place as part of internationalization¹⁹.

The international cooperation among universities consists in²⁰:

- entering into and coordinating the cooperation with universities abroad;
- supporting the scientific staff in their making of foreign contacts;
- the servicing of the scientific visits abroad by the staff of universities;
- the servicing of foreign visitors and delegations coming to universities;
- coordinating the international cooperation programmes, such as Erasmus;
- the promotion of the image of universities abroad.

This publication will present considerations regarding the implementation of the assumptions of one of the elements of international cooperation, i.e. the Erasmus Programme.

¹⁵ P. Scott, *op. cit.*, pp. 109.

¹⁶ U. Teichler, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

¹⁷ K.H. Mok, *Questing for...*, *op. cit.*

¹⁸ K.H. Mok, *Globalization...*, *op. cit.*

¹⁹ P.A. Altbach, J. Knight, *op. cit.*, pp. 290-305.

²⁰ BUT, www.pb.edu.pl, <http://erasmus.pb.edu.pl> (08.03.2013).

2. THE EXPERIENCES OF SCIENTIFIC STAFF OF THE MANAGEMENT FACULTY OF THE BIALYSTOK UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY AND STUDENTS GAINED FROM THE SCIENTIFIC EXCHANGE WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE ERASMUS PROGRAMME – COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

The Bialystok University of Technology has participated in the SOCRATES/ERASMUS Programme since the academic year 1998/99. Since the academic year 2007/08 Erasmus has been part of the Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP), a new programme of the European Union in the field of education and professional improvement envisaged for 2007-2013²¹. The Bialystok University of Technology has signed agreements on cooperation with universities from 24 countries²².

More than 200 students and several dozen academic teachers have used the possibility to go abroad within the framework of studies abroad since the Programme began in 1999. Every year several dozen foreign students come to study for a specific period and so do a dozen or so foreign lecturers.

According to the information from the Bureau of International Cooperation²³, students coming back from a fellowship say that the student exchange is an extraordinary adventure and an opportunity for getting to know interesting places, people, their culture and the fundamentals of a new foreign language. In the evaluation of the Bureau, foreign studies make it possible to discover one's own capacity and to overcome one's weaknesses. Students gain experience which cannot be acquired in any other way.

These opinions and the assumptions of the Erasmus Programme can be confronted with the results of empirical studies which were carried out in November and December 2011 at the largest faculty of the Bialystok University of Technology. The survey questionnaires were sent out to all the 53 students and 9 academic teachers who participated in the Programme in the academic years 2009/2010 and 2010/2011. This period was selected deliberately in order to be able to diagnose both the short-term and long-term benefits ensuing from the internationalisation of universities. The filled in questionnaires were returned by 23 students, representing 43% of their population, and by 5 teachers, constituting 56% their population.

²¹ *Ibidem.*

²² *Ibidem.*

²³ *Ibidem.*

The scope of the survey was divided into three basic parts, which was clearly expressed in open questions concerning the indication of short-term and long-term benefits ensuing from the participation in the Programme, while the third question concerned the related problems. The questionnaires addressed to two groups of respondents were the same so that it would be possible to compare the survey results for students and the members of the scientific and didactic staff. These results are shown in table 1.

Table 1. The short-term and long-term benefits ensuing from the participation of students and the members of the scientific and didactic staff in the Erasmus Programme

BENEFITS FROM THE PARTICIPATION IN THE ERASMUS PROGRAMME		SCIENTIFIC AND DIDACTIC STAFF		STUDENTS	
		NUMBER	%	NUMBER	%
Short-term benefits	getting to know new people, staying with persons of different nationalities			10	43
	ability to know the country and its culture, knowing the lifestyles of the inhabitants of the visited country,			15	65
	visiting many magnificent places			11	48
	daily language practice, mobilisation to improve language skills	3	60	6	26
	knowing the education system of another country			6	26
	proving oneself, gaining new experiences			3	13
	good fun			2	9
	passing a term at the home university			2	9
	the award of a fellowship			2	9
	finding a job at the new place of stay, professional experience from the implementation of projects			2	9
	living in a sunny climate, basking in the sun			2	9
	making friends with European students			1	4
	the use of the place of stay as the base for visiting the neighbouring countries			1	4
an exchange of experiences in teaching with foreign colleagues			5	100	
Long-term benefits	knowing many persons from different parts of the world and maintaining friendly contacts with them	5	100	14	61
	developing language skills	1	20	18	78
	the sojourn abroad helped me find and arrange for traineeship abroad, increasing opportunities on the labour market by gaining greater experience	3	60	10	43
	knowing other cultures, customs and habits, experience related to the need to adapt to education and daily life in another country, familiarity with the world and knowledge of other countries			11	48

BENEFITS FROM THE PARTICIPATION IN THE ERASMUS PROGRAMME		SCIENTIFIC AND DIDACTIC STAFF		STUDENTS	
		NUMBER	%	NUMBER	%
Long-term benefits	ability to cope abroad, learning to be self-reliant, greater openness, self-reliance, resourcefulness, self-confidence, courage, greater tolerance and assertiveness, development of one's own personality			8	35
	staying after the conclusion of the programme at the locality where the Erasmus Programme took place			1	4
	unforgettable experience and memories			2	9
	award of two diplomas of the partner university			1	4
	I started to pay more attention to the natural environment and a healthy lifestyle			1	4
	staying after the conclusion of the programme at the locality where the Erasmus Programme took place			1	4
	accounting for the participation in the Programme in the employee evaluation	1	20		

Source: prepared on the basis of the results of own studies.

Students indicated as a total 64 short-term benefits and 68 long-term benefits. In the students' opinion, the most important short-term benefits included the ability to know the country and its culture (65%), knowing the lifestyles of the inhabitants of the visited country (48%) and also visiting many magnificent places, getting to know new people and staying with persons of different nationalities (43%). For them the long-term benefits comprised developing language skills (78%), followed by knowing many persons from different parts of the world and maintaining friendly contacts with them (61%), then by knowing other cultures, customs and habits, experience related to the need to adapt to education and daily life in another country, familiarity with the world and knowledge of other countries (48%); also their sojourns abroad helped some of them find traineeship abroad and increase opportunities on the labour market by gaining greater experience (43%).

The scientific and didactic staff indicated 10 different long-term and 9 short-term benefits. The latter ones included primarily an exchange of experiences in teaching with foreign colleagues, which was indicated by all the respondents. The next benefit turned out to be the same as in the case of students, i.e. daily language practice and mobilisation to improve language skills, which was important for 3 staff members and 26% of students.

For the staff the main long-term benefits comprised knowing many persons from different parts of the world and maintaining friendly contacts with them (100%) and gaining greater experience, which turned out to be important for 3 staff members.

In comparing the results obtained for the two groups of respondents, it should be emphasised that in each case they mentioned more benefits than problems. The problems are listed in table 2.

Table 2. Problems related to the participation of students and scientific and didactic staff in the Erasmus Programme

PROBLEMS RELATED TO THE PARTICIPATION IN THE ERASMUS PROGRAMME	SCIENTIFIC AND DIDACTIC STAFF		STUDENTS	
	NUMBER	%	NUMBER	%
no problems	3	60	6	26
too short a stay and too limited contacts with students	1	20		
no response to e-mails sent to some partners in the Programme	1	20		
insufficient command of English in the case of some students	1	20		
quite high costs of living, financial problems			9	39
differences in the education system and curriculum			5	22
poor command of English on the part of professors at the receiving university which narrowed the choice of subjects implemented, the language barrier in the communication in the language of a given country			11	48
bureaucracy			6	26
the need to adapt to a passive lifestyle, adaptation to the new environment, the cultural barrier			4	17
a problem with an additional earning job			1	4
a problem with car parts			1	4
accommodation at the dormitory (the security staff showed no respect for Erasmus students)			2	9
very little help from the custodians of the Erasmus Programme, no help from the coordinator abroad			3	13

Source: prepared on the basis of the results of own studies.

The staff indicated as a total 3 problems which occurred in relation to their participation in the Programme, whereas students mentioned 44 problems. There were much fewer critical comments concerning the internationalisation of universities in the light of the experiences of the Management Faculty of the Bialystok University of Technology than positive opinions. For the students the greatest obstacles included the poor command of English on the part of professors at the receiving university which narrowed the choice of subjects implemented and the language barrier in the communication in the language of a given country (48%), followed by financial problems related to quite high costs of living abroad (39%). It should be noted that members of

scientific and didactic staff mentioned only 4 problems (with one of the staff members indicating 3 of them), while 3 staff members and 26% of students recognised that they had encountered no problems.

CONCLUSIONS

It can be recognised that the participation in the globalisation process through broadly conceived cooperation among universities at the international forum is a positive phenomenon.

In evaluating the survey on the participants in the internationalisation of universities in the case of the Erasmus Programme implemented at the Białystok University of Technology – the results obtained for both groups of respondents, it should be emphasised that in each case far fewer problems were mentioned than benefits; in addition, students encountered relatively more problems, since their occurrence was indicated by 74% of respondents, while in the case of staff only 2 out of 5 respondents highlighted any problems. All the respondents mentioned the benefits which they had enjoyed. Both groups mentioned more long-term benefits than short-term benefits; thus, the hypothesis assuming that internationalisation brings substantial short-term and long-term benefits to all its participants and that long-term benefits are more significant than short-term ones was verified positively. On the basis of the results obtained, it can be concluded that the implementation of the Erasmus Programme brings significant effects to all its participants and that long-term benefits are more significant than immediate ones.

With a view to eliminating barriers and problems related to the internationalisation of universities, it should be said that this process is by all means a beneficial one for both the development of science in the participating countries and for the development of the personality of its individual participants, both the members of scientific and didactic staff and students.

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