

Editorial

Internationalisation and Professionalisation in Teacher Education: Challenges and Perspectives

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Providing quality in Education is goal number four of the United Nations' seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). It is described as fundamental in order to create a peaceful and prosperous world. Education provides knowledge and skills to people so that they can lead a healthy life, successfully find a job and are able to develop a tolerant attitude. Lately the COVID-19 pandemic has caused a global education crisis, as many education systems have been seriously affected by it and closing schools has caused devastating consequences. The UN estimates that 147 million children have missed more than half of their on-site classes. Furthermore girls, children with disadvantaged backgrounds, those living in remote areas, children with disabilities and from ethnic minorities have suffered most.

Ensuring free, equitable and quality education is one of the targets described by the United Nations. In order to reach this the UN demands that by 2030 the supply of qualified teachers should increase. According to the UN 83 million teachers were working in classrooms all over the world in 2020 (United Nations, 2022). International cooperation including developing countries is mentioned as another important requirement to meet these goals.

The Erasmus+ programme, the EU-programme in the field of education, training youth and sport also mentions high quality inclusive education to be fundamental for everyone to meaningfully participate in a democratic society. It supports the development of intercultural understanding and empowers people to be successful in the labour market. In an increasing globalised, diverse, digital and mobile society, European citizen need relevant knowledge, skills and competences to face these challenges and transitions. The EU recognizes the key roles of education institutions in this regard (European Commission, 2022).

Internationalisation is a principle anchored in the profile of universities worldwide and an integral part of the service areas of teaching, research, development and consulting. In accordance with the widely accepted definition by Jane Knight "Internationalisation of Higher Education" is understood as an inter-university, goal-oriented and intentional process which integrates international, intercultural and global perspectives, involves all students as well as staff members working at the university and contributes significantly



to increasing the quality of teaching and research and can thus make a meaningful contribution to society (Knight, 2003).

The Erasmus+ programme has been a thriving engine for the internationalisation of higher education institutions within Europe and increasingly worldwide, as it offers possibilities to cooperate not only with programme countries (EU countries) but with institutions worldwide. The current Erasmus+ programme (2021–2027) attempts to make education systems more inclusive and accessible, greener and digitally fit. The programme pursues therefore three main objectives: Inclusion and Diversity, Digital Erasmus+ and Green Erasmus+. All actions within the Erasmus+ programme focus on ensuring equal opportunities for all participants disregarding age, diverse cultural, social or economic backgrounds. It places an emphasis on including people with fewer opportunities such as those with disabilities, educational difficulties, with a migrant background or living in more remote areas. Digital transformation is another priority to ensure an increased access to high quality digital programmes by supporting the development of digital tools and content as well as offering blended activities and formats. Participants improve their digital competences through a number of initiatives. Digital implementation of the programme, including the European Student Card Initiative is another priority until 2027. And finally, in accordance with the European Green Deal, participants are encouraged to use less-carbon transport as an alternative to flying by funding alternative ways of travelling. Erasmus+ strongly supports the building up of knowledge and understanding of sustainability and climate actions (European Commission, 2021).

There are three main action lines offering possibilities for international cooperation.

Key action 1, being the “flagship” activity line, offers individual mobility for learners and staff. Erasmus+ mobility has become one of the most successful programme parts since it started more than 30 years ago. A total of ten million students, learners, academic and administrative staff, researchers and lecturers are expected to participate in the current programme’s mobility activities between 2021 and 2027. By experiencing a study, research or working period abroad participants gain soft skills to become more self-assured, achieve intercultural competences, become more flexible, learn languages, get insights into different learning and working environments and become part of international networks, strengthening their employability and active participation in society. Furthermore, mobility formats have become more flexible for students in higher education ranging from short term blended mobilities to full semesters abroad offering more opportunities also for participants with fewer opportunities, such as people with disabilities, from disadvantaged social backgrounds or first-generation students. This programme line is also open for participants from outside Europe (European Commission, 2021).

Key action 2 is the programme’s cooperation activity among organisations and institutions and offers a wide range of possibilities. It supports the development of Partnerships for Cooperation, Partnerships for Excellence including Teacher Academies and Europe-

an Universities, Partnerships for Innovation, Capacity Building Projects and Non-Profit European sports events. Jean Monnet Actions offer possibilities of cooperation beyond universities and are open to schools and other educational institutions focusing on fostering knowledge and awareness of the European Union. Key action 2 targets to result in the development and transfer of innovative practices amongst players throughout Europe and attempts to have a positive direct or indirect impact of persons involved such as competence in foreign languages, digital competence, sense of initiative and entrepreneurship, an understanding and open attitude towards cultural, gender, social, linguistic or ethnical diversity increasing their opportunities for professional development. Key action 2 intends to increase the quality of education and training by combining enforced excellence and attractiveness with increased opportunities for all.

Key Action 3 Support of Policy Development and Cooperation aims to modernise and reform education, training youth and sports and is implemented directly by the European Commission through specific calls managed by the European Education and Culture executive Agency (European Commission, 2022).

The University College of Teacher Education of Styria advocates and supports the initiatives of the European Commission to build a European Education Area and the associated vision of a Europe in which stays abroad for study and learning purposes are becoming the norm (European Commission, 2023). Furthermore, higher education qualifications shall be recognised throughout the whole EU. Speaking two languages in addition to the mother tongue should be common. In this vision of Europe everyone has access to quality education, irrespective of their social and economic background, and people are fully aware of their European identity, Europe's cultural heritage and its diversity.

According to the National Mobility and Internationalisation Strategy for Higher Education 2020–2030 (Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research, 2020) international mobility leads to the acquisition of key competences that enable the young generation to think in a globally networked and innovative way. These are of crucial importance in order to be able to survive in European and global competition. The umbrella question formulated in the above-mentioned strategy “How can we achieve quality-assured international and intercultural competences for all?” functions as an important guiding question of the internationalisation efforts at the University of Teacher Education Styria. The need for internationally and interculturally competent teachers is increasing due to increased linguistic and cultural diversity in the classroom, growing Euroscepticism and increasing globalisation of society. In addition, a change of perspective during a stay abroad leads to a change in attitude towards the openness of the above-mentioned diversity. Increasing the percentage of trainee teachers who have experienced mobility as part of their education is stated as an important goal. This should include future teachers of all subjects, not just those studying foreign languages.

Furthermore, teachers are central multipliers which was also stated in the Yerevan Communiqué in 2015 (European Higher Education Area (EHEA), 2015). This communiqué was adopted by 47 ministries of education, also by Austria stating that there is a strong wish to promote the mobility of teacher education students according to their important role in educating future generations of European citizens.

As described above, Erasmus+, as European mobility and education programme, has become a cornerstone of the internationalisation of European higher education over the last three decades. Networking and dissemination of results and products should ensure the sustainability of international cooperation.

Four contributions in this volume describe Erasmus+ projects, their aims, benefits and challenges as well as their impact. There is a strong focus on diversity, inclusive education and professional development.

Edvina Bešić and *Douglas C. McKnight* elaborate on the benefits and challenges of a School-University Partnerships (SUP) within the Scope of an Erasmus+ Project. Their project aims to develop effective strategies for improving classroom practice to include all children in lessons, especially those who are perceived as “hard to reach.” A school-university partnership is implemented by universities from Austria, Denmark, England, Portugal and Spain supporting primary schools where teams of teachers work together with pupils by applying the Inclusive Teaching approach of teacher development. These schools act as facilitators to form networks with other schools.

Mihaela Brumen and *Erika Hvala* describe a qualitative study exploring how pre-school children, involved in the Erasmus+ project, perceive and cope with children from other countries by virtual interaction and communication via a platform. Their findings indicate that pre-school children are capable to develop intercultural awareness and positive social perceptions. The results enhance the implementation of virtual contacts through online platforms in early childhood education to contribute to better social interaction and understanding between different nations.

Monika Gigerl, *Elisabeth Herunter* and *Andrea Holzinger* present the results of an empirical study conducted as part of an international research project, the Erasmus+ project INARTdis. Their main research question is: What does a comprehensive and inclusive artistic education look like from the perspective of teachers and stakeholders (Sanahuja Gavalda, 2019)? They elaborate on opportunities and barriers to social inclusion in the arts from the perspectives of teachers and museum staff.

Andrea Holzinger, *Ursula Komposch*, *Gonda Pickl* and *Martin Hochegger* established the Erasmus+ project cooperation “Education for children with Albinism in Tanzania” between the University College of Teacher Education Styria and the University of Moshi in Tanzania. Their project aims to develop a global understanding of inclusion by interna-

tional cooperation on various levels. The article elaborates on the situation of people with Albinism in Tanzania. Another important target of the project is to support professionalisation of teachers working in inclusive settings.

Cooperation and research in international teams as an integral part of the university in the 21st century are the foci of the article written by *Štefan Chudý, Jitka Plischke, Iva Koribská* and *Danping Peng*. Their article describes how international teams of lecturers and researchers work together and adapt to each other in an international context. In a survey the activities and phases of the collaboration are reflected with an emphasis on the sustainability of the international team and its activities.

Trinidad Hernández Recabarren and *Oliver Holz* present the results of research on inclusion, diversity and homosexuality, carried out in different European projects. They analyze students' and teachers' perspectives on LGBT topics using data from 2021 gathered through questionnaires issued in eight European countries. The contribution differs from earlier literature by including the effect of parental influences on students' perspectives, as well as by analyzing issues related to transgender individuals.

Vera Spangler and *Thilde Juul-Wiese* set their focus on geographical imaginaries of international student teachers influencing their choice of destination when studying or working abroad. Two sets of data combining incoming and outgoing student mobility to and from Denmark are compared and through the use of a mapping method student teachers' geographical imaginaries, enclosing their preferences and perceptions of different places are explored. They include a critical reflection on how internationalisation in higher education (re-)produces unequal, historically shaped perceptions and an uneven spread of mobilised knowledge.

Describing the process of "becoming" a feminist from a Polish perspective is described in the article of *Justyna Ratkowska-Pasikowska*. The analysis of women's auto narrations delivers answers to the question whether the process of "becoming" a feminist is primarily determined by the environment and through strong relations with the others.

Herbert Zoglowek takes a look back in history and draws the attention to the tradition of children's summer camps and discusses their possible significance for humanistic or general "bildung" and today's demands on education in an increasing globalised, digital and mobile society. He suggests that summer camps as places of learning outside school have received little academic attention so far. This gap will be addressed by interviewing former participants in Soviet and Russian summer camps regarding their experiences and 'bildung moments'.

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