

Who studies abroad and why?

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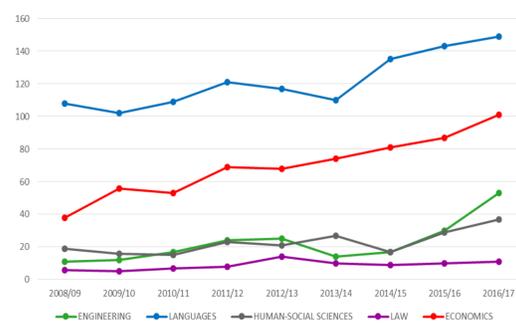
1. Aims

Motivations. Higher education internationalization has become a priority in the European education policy. According to the strategic objectives of Europe 2020, "an EU average of at least 20% of higher education graduates should have had a period of higher education-related study or training abroad, representing a minimum of 15 ECTS credits or lasting a minimum of three months" (EU Council of Ministers of Education, November 29, 2011). To approach the Europe 2020's target is important to understand motivations, perceived benefits and obstacles of international students' mobility. The world's most successful student mobility programme, the Erasmus programme, has provided the opportunity to study abroad to more than three million European students. However, learning mobility barriers still exist and the shares of study abroad participants vary widely across Member States.

Aim of the paper. The paper analyzes the factors that influence the choice of spending a studying period abroad. Through a principal component analysis, we investigate the results of an online survey which collects the answers of the students of a medium size Italian University about their motivations and concerns when applying for the experience abroad.

2. Who studies abroad?

Students by a.y. and field study



Students are:

- 66% Females
- 34% Males

They leave during:

- 66% Bachelor
- 34% Master
- 49% fall semester
- 21% spring semester
- 30% whole a.y.

In each a.y., 50% of mobile students belongs to the Linguistic area and 25% to Economics.

Students from Engineering are recently increasing.

3. Why to study abroad?

To investigate mobility students' motivations and concerns, we prepared a questionnaire consisting of two main sections - *Decision to study abroad* and *Concerns before the departure* - and further personal and familiar information.

Our survey involves students who have been selected to spend one or two semesters abroad for an Erasmus+ or Extra-EU program during the a.y. 2015/16 and 2016/17. After more than one reminder, the answer rate is 74% and we consider 454 questionnaires.

➤ First principal component - Concerns for the academic career

The concerns of the student about his/her academic career are twofold. On the one hand, the fear of a new teaching methodology and of having lectures and exams in a foreign language. On the other hand, the fear of extending the duration of academic career and eventually of decreasing the average score. Marginally, the student is also afraid of meeting people with different cultures and of staying away from home.

In case the student already had another experience abroad, then the concern reduces. Moreover, the less fearful students come from more educated parents. Last, males seem to be less fearful than women.

➤ Second principal component - Academic motivations

The second component seems to show the interest for a foreign university which better valorizes the experience, in particular in terms of employability. Such interest becomes more and more important for the master degree students.

Moreover, the availability of a scholarship and own/family financial resources are considered.

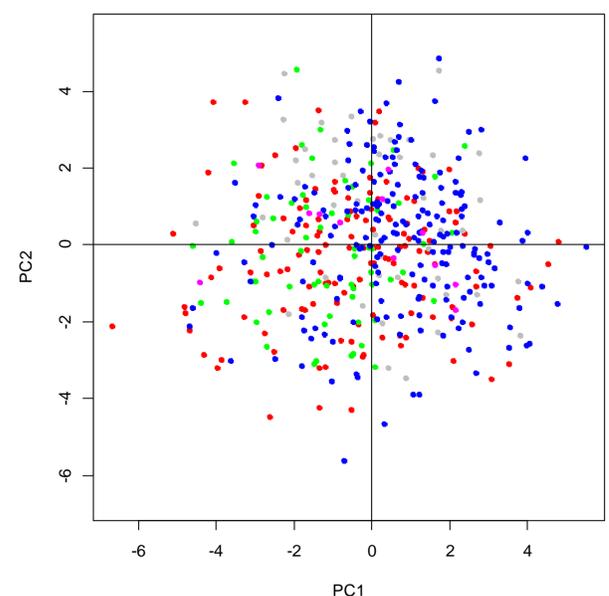
➤ Third principal component - Non academic motivations, Curiosity

The third component is related to the personal motivation, i.e. the curiosity, the will to live a new life experience, to meet a foreign country culture, and, possibly, to visit a charming city.

Such type of interest is more relevant for young students and for who come from less educated parents and lower income families.

If curiosity is the objective, then concerns decreases.

Relationship between first and second pc



Languages Engineering Law
Economics Human-Social Sciences

4. Conclusions

Our results show that studying abroad is motivated both by the aim to develop academic skills and foreign language's proficiency and by curiosity toward different cultures and countries and the desire to live a new experience. At the same time, students are concerned for their academic career. They fear to have a negative impact of the mobility abroad on the duration and the performance of their study programme in the home country.

Based on our results, the social and economic context and the educational background of the students have a very important role in encouraging toward the experience abroad.

5. Main References

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