

ERASMUS MOBILITY AND THE EDUCATION OF INTERCULTURALLY COMPETENT EUROPEAN TEACHERS.

MOVILIDAD ERASMUS Y LA FORMACIÓN DE LOS DOCENTES EUROPEOS INTERCULTURALMENTE COMPETENTES.

María Fernández Agüero

ABSTRACT

This article is a report on the scope and significance of European structured credit-mobility at the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education of Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, Spain. More specifically, it presents the data on student mobility at this faculty under the Erasmus and Erasmus+ programmes – both for studies and for training – since the implementation of the new degrees, compliant with the guidelines of the Bologna Process, until the present. The study is framed within the context of intercultural teacher education and mobility as a tool to promote European citizenship as theoretical tenets. Results reveal that our student teachers do profit from Erasmus mobility in different ways, especially from the programme Erasmus for Traineeship. They also yield information on the mobility flows of incoming and outgoing students, partly confirming the ties and relationships between countries that are shown in larger studies. Nevertheless, the figures of outward mobile students in relation to the university are low, and the numbers of outgoing and incoming students are unbalanced. For that reason, measures for boosting and improving mobility are put forward, for instance in relation to internationalisation at home.

Key words: mobility, Erasmus programme, interculturality, teacher education.

RESUMEN

Este artículo es un informe del alcance y la significación de la movilidad europea estructurada por créditos en la Facultad de Formación del Profesorado y Educación de la Universidad Autónoma de Madrid. En concreto, se presentan los datos de movilidad de estudiantes bajo los programas Erasmus y Erasmus+, tanto para estudios como para prácticas, desde la implementación de los nuevos grados de Bolonia hasta la actualidad. El estudio se enmarca en la formación intercultural de profesores y en una concepción de la movilidad como herramienta para promover la ciudadanía europea como principios teóricos. Los resultados muestran que nuestros profesores en formación se benefician de la movilidad Erasmus de diferentes formas, especialmente del programa Erasmus Prácticas. También aportan información sobre los flujos de movilidad de estudiantes salientes y entrantes, y confirman en parte los lazos y relaciones con países que también se ven en estudios más amplios. No obstante, la cifra de estudiantes salientes es baja con respecto a toda la universidad, y tiende a haber una descompensación entre movilidad saliente y entrante. Por esta razón, se presentan medidas para incrementar y mejorar la movilidad, por ejemplo en relación con la internacionalización en casa.

Palabras clave: movilidad, programa Erasmus, interculturalidad, formación de profesores.

INTRODUCTION¹

In the making since the mid-20th century, the European supranational state has been built upon values such as free movement, economic cohesion, respect for cultural diversity and other ideals with a twofold strategy: maintaining Europeans' distinct home-culture attributes and developing a common European identity or sense of attachment. In this respect, European education stakeholders have steadily worked towards promoting a sense of European 'togetherness' through a number of initiatives, including efficient transnational mobility schemes. Among them, student mobility could be seen as "aspiring to establish a primary foundation for a European higher education system" (Papatsiba, 2006, p. 105). Undoubtedly, the most salient of these initiatives is the credit-mobility² Erasmus programme, which has consistently gained ground since it was launched as an independent programme in June 1987: no one can deny the stark contrast between the 3,244 higher education students from 12 countries who participated that first year and the figures of the year 2015, when no fewer than 291,383 higher education students coming from 33 countries have benefited from an Erasmus stay³ (European Commission, 2017). In this growth, mobility and credit transfer were greatly facilitated by the Bologna process and the creation of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA)⁴, which have contributed substantially to convergence through the standardisation of study programmes and degrees. More recently, the Erasmus scheme has gathered momentum with the advent in 2014 of Erasmus+ (Council of Europe, 2013), a single programme that now encompasses the fields of education, training, youth and sport including the international aspects of higher education.

I have had the privilege to witness this rapid evolution in the first person. I was an Erasmus student myself in the first decade of the programme back in the 1990s. Through that experience, I was given the possibility to submerge into a foreign student community and perceive Europe from a different stand. That was, of course, the pre-Internet era, when simple procedures such as the configuration of a learning agreement was a titanic endeavour compared to the present. Nowadays, from my position as vicedean for international relations at the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education of Universidad Autónoma de Madrid (UAM), I can daily confirm that Erasmus is a buzz word that resonates among students and academia, a solid framework with standardised processes that the European citizenry is familiar with; I can see that, in spite of economic constraints, many students consider international mobility as a tangible possibility and are more and more acquainted with the different Erasmus calls: for studying, for doing traineeship, for undergraduates and postgraduates. All the same, there is work to be done.

Clearly, the democratic values of solidarity, freedom, tolerance and respect for human rights that forged the European Union are currently being put to the test. Recent events such as the asylum crises and restricting migratory policies, striking demographic changes, social inequalities between and within countries, the rise of extreme right populist parties, etc. pose a threat to these liberal

¹ I am thankful to Rosa Esteve, Emilio López, Gregor Reiss and Susana Rodríguez, the IRO staff who helped me collect the data for this article.

² Credit or within-programme mobility – as opposed to degree, diploma or whole-programme mobility – means studying abroad for a limited period of time in the framework of an exchange programme.

³ Also, in the year 2015 there were 11,674 incoming and 3,496 outgoing students participating in the sub-programme KA107 between programme countries and other partner countries from all over the world.

⁴ The Bologna Process refers to "multi-national reforms and changes currently undertaken by European states, with varying scope and pace, in order to implement the goal of creating a barrier-free European Higher Education Area (EHEA) characterized by 'compatibility and comparability' between the higher education systems" of those 29 states – now 45 – who signed the so-called Bologna Declaration in 1999 (Papatsiba, 2006, p. 95).

democratic values. The public opinion is divided and the media is fraught with radical rhetoric. Unfortunately, sometimes it is difficult to sustain the notion that there is support for the integration project.

No doubt, the situation calls for critical engagement among the European teaching community. In this milieu, teachers have the responsibility to become interculturally-competent citizens who are committed to embrace multicultural Europe, with its peculiar social and cultural landscape. To begin with, future teachers are more than likely to find themselves in classrooms where linguistic and cultural heterogeneity is the norm; hence they need to be able to acknowledge this diversity and instil in their students a respect for the otherness. This is clearly supported by the literature: research in intercultural education points to a demand for teachers who can take part in Europe's rich cultural environment (e.g. Aguado *et al.*, 2003; Alkan and de Vredee, 1990; Cavalli *et al.*, 2009; Lanas, 2014). And mobility programmes can most certainly play a part in this, as there is a plethora of studies that claim that student mobility breeds intercultural understanding (Ambrosi, 2013; King and Ruiz-Gelices, 2003; Krzaklewska and Krupnik, 2008; Mitchell, 2012; Van Mol, 2014, to name a few).

At the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education of UAM, the mobility of our student and staff, and the role that we play in UAM's internationalisation at home have of late come to prominence due to the recent document UAM's Strategic Plan 2025, where internationalisation is one of the main strategic areas in the agenda. Our students, most of which are training to become preschool, primary or secondary teachers, have customarily been offered the possibility to complete their studies away from UAM through national and international programmes, and among them, the Erasmus+ programme stands out as the most popular.

The aim of this article is to review the participation in Erasmus of the students at the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education of UAM since the inception of the new Spanish degrees as specified by the EHEA, in 2009-2010. I intend to present and analyse the data on Erasmus mobility for this period in relation to the development of intercultural competence and pluriculturalism in these prospective teachers. This snapshot of Erasmus mobility at the faculty will allow us to identify good practices and areas for improvement, the ultimate objective being to contribute to the effective education of future teachers as intercultural European citizens who will thrive in their profession and take responsibility for educating future generations.

This article proceeds in five sections. Part one outlines the theoretical underpinnings of this study, namely the view of Erasmus as an interculturally profitable life event. In parts two and three I present the information on Erasmus mobility at the faculty since the year 2009-2010 and examine the impact that the Erasmus sojourn has on student teachers' lives, disaggregating the data by criteria such as type of programme, area of studies and year of mobility. In parts four and five I discuss some educational and managerial considerations for encouraging mobility based on the results and put forward possible further developments for the internationalisation of novice teachers.

1. ERASMUS MOBILITY AND THE EDUCATION OF INTERCULTURALLY COMPETENT TEACHERS

The rationale for supporting student mobility in Europe is surely economic and professional: it seeks to promote the European labour market and boost the economic competitiveness of Europe in the world. Nonetheless, there is an important 'civic' side to mobility too, as it is meant to "forge

European consciousness and would be a means to reach international understanding” (Papatsiba, 2006, p. 99).

Indeed, there is a solid body of research that claims that Erasmus credit mobility is a powerful tool to encourage interculturality and pluricultural competence (i.e. King and Ruiz-Gelices, 2003; Mitchell, 2012; Molu *et al.*, 2014; Papatsiba, 2006; Van Mol, 2014). The Erasmus experience enhances intercultural dialogue by making students more open-minded and mobile citizens, who set up wider social networks abroad (Krzaklewska and Krupnik, 2008) and improve their language skills (Fombona *et al.*, 2013; King and Ruiz-Gelices, 2003; Meara, 1994). Actually, it is commonly acknowledged that Erasmus sojourners have a stronger identification with Europe than sedentary or non-mobile students (Ambrosi, 2013), Spanish Erasmus portraying a stronger European identity than other nationalities (Mitchell, 2012). Indeed, according to the statistics of the European Commission (2016), Erasmus students as well as alumni feel significantly more related to Europe than non-mobile students: more than 80% (out of more than 70,000 subjects) feel that their European attitude has been strengthened by going abroad. Although the causality of this attachment is not clear – it may be the case that they were already European supporters *before* the spell abroad (Wilson, 2011) – it seems that these students are characterised by certain common attributes concerning their value system and worldview.

Some scholars contend that the contact between mobile students and locals/host country students remains limited (e.g. Saura-Sánchez, 2004; Tsoukalas, 2008), and that high-quality communication takes place mostly between students of the same nationality so the effectiveness of Erasmus to promote a European sense of togetherness is called into doubt (Sigalas, 2010). It is even reported that home students experience difficulties in intercultural contact or even see mobile students as a threat (Dunne, 2009; Harrison and Peacock, 2010). To compensate for that, improving students’ confidence with diversity is a must in higher education institutions with an international projection and there are policies for internationalisation at home in the agenda of many European universities. Obviously, the presence of international students in the campus provides all home students with opportunities to gain intercultural experience, not only those who travel abroad.

Also in teacher education, the scholarly literature emphasises the link between mobility and increased intercultural competence (Diehr, 2013; Egli Cuenat and Bleichenbacher, 2013; Egli Cuenat *et al.*, 2016; Smolcic, 2013; Stunell, 2014) and shows that interculturality is instilled or enhanced through mobility, particularly when intercultural work is carefully planned and set up. To prepare for potential negative effects, some authors suggest that students need preparation and guidance, with appropriate tools of analysis. For example, for the context of second language teacher training, Egli Cuenat *et al.* (2016) describe the implementation of a comprehensive set of materials for before, during and after the mobility, with a mobility portfolio as a final product; and Diehr (2013) analyses an Erasmus practice programme based on pre- and post-training courses, evaluated through a portfolio as well⁵.

It appears that international placements in particular help prospective teachers (1) move from a student-centred perspective towards a perception of themselves as teachers, thus developing their professional identity, and (2) recognise the connection between culture and professional practice,

⁵ Both publications refer to materials from the European Centre for Modern Languages of the Council of Europe, in Graz. Egli Cuenat *et al.* (2016) describe the application of PluriMobil, a teaching tool for the development of plurilingual and intercultural learning of language teachers who go on mobility; and Diehr (2013) makes use of the European Portfolio for Student Teachers of Languages. These materials can be found at <http://www.ecml.at/Resources/ECMLPublications/tabid/277/language/en-GB/Default.aspx>.

as they are given the possibility to communicate with people who belong to other communities of practice, which is a good means of having assumptions challenged (Stunell, 2014) and appreciating and respecting others (Pence and MacGillivray, 2008). In this setting, negative intercultural experiences are also recounted, though: Ehrenreich (2006) found that teaching abroad could be a source of disappointment among student-teachers of foreign languages who were language assistants away from their country. Still, teaching abroad is an important practice that assists professional and personal growth, and it is believed that teachers with significant international experience become less ethnocentric (Deardorff, 2006).

The role of mobility as a tool to improve intercultural competence is deemed necessary in the context of pre-service teacher training. Many future teachers put up with difficulties to tackle culture and the intercultural and are even unable to address cultural issues in the classroom. There is solid scholarly work on the lack of awareness of novice teachers on how to work with students from different cultural backgrounds (Cho and De Castro-Ambrosetti, 2005-2006), relating feelings of confusion, excitement, anxiety and a sense of being overwhelmed (Guo *et al.*, 2009). In the same breath, other studies report on teachers who are unaware of their own cultural identities, nor do they see racial, ethnic and cultural differences between themselves and their students (Finney and Orr, 1995; Mahon, 2006). Our own UAM-based results confirm that the intercultural profile displayed by UAM and European teachers can be improved in, for instance, behavioural flexibility and intercultural knowledge (Fernández-Agüero and Garrote, forthcoming; Garrote and Fernández-Agüero, 2016). Therefore, approaching teacher education from an intercultural standpoint, for example through experiential learning such as international practice programmes, seems a very sensible line of action.

2. UAM'S FACULTY OF TEACHER TRAINING AND EDUCATION

The Faculty of Teacher Training and Education of UAM prides itself on educating teachers for nearly 60 years, since it was founded as a teacher training college for women in 1961. It has faculty status since 2001. In the recent past it has withstood a major transition from the old pre-Bologna studies – namely the *diplomaturas* for teacher training which stood for different specialisations and the *licenciaturas* on Psychopedagogy and Physical Activity and Sport Studies – to the new degrees under the EHEA framework. Concerning teacher training, we now have one degree in Primary Education, another for Pre-school Education, and a double degree in primary and pre-school. Besides, we have a Doctorate in Education and eight masters' studies on fields such as ICT, social justice or quality in education. Among these, a degree in high demand is the Master's Degree in Teacher Training for Lower and Upper Secondary Education, which awards the necessary qualification to work at secondary level in Spain. On top of that, as mentioned above, since the year 2001-2002 the faculty offers Physical Activity and Sport Studies, now at graduate, postgraduate and doctorate level. Some of these graduates specialise as physical education (PE) teachers; the other specialisations are sports training, and physical activity and health. In any case, PE teaching in secondary is a realistic job opportunity for all these graduates.

The faculty's Practicum has considerable weight in our studies, as our degrees in education comprise long practice periods at school, and there is a unit at the faculty specific for managing them. The Erasmus+ programme for traineeship is especially adequate for our syllabi, since one of the practice periods can easily accommodate a stay abroad for at least two months, which is the minimum required in this training scheme. What is more, we have seen that a large number of European schools are willing to host our student trainees. Thus, we have established a specific call for our education students to apply for Erasmus work placements in their 4th year, in cooperation

with a number of schools and education institutions. At the moment we offer 104 work placements in 32 schools all over Europe, mainly in Ireland.

To continue with internationalisation, the faculty has inter-institutional bilateral agreements (BAs) for student mobility with 63 European higher education institutions, 47 in the area of education, in these countries: Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Germany, France, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Norway, The Netherlands, Portugal, Poland, Sweden, Finland and the UK. In addition, we have BAs with the universities of Geneva and Lausanne under the Swiss-European Mobility Programme (which receives a similar treatment to Erasmus) and the partnerships with schools for the faculty's specific Erasmus+ Traineeship call already mentioned. Likewise, the faculty benefits from other mobility schemes such as the non-Erasmus conventions at university level with different institutions around the world – more than 500 – and our inter-institutional agreements with 28 Spanish universities, which are out of the scope of this study.

With respect to the whole university, it has to be acknowledged that the faculty does not occupy the top places among the faculties and ascribed colleges in number of mobile students per year (it typically scores places 7 and 8 out of 12). Our mobilities represent around 4.6% of UAM's⁶. However, the faculty hosts about 10% of the student population of UAM, which entails that our students go on Erasmus noticeably less than other students at the university. Taking only Erasmus for Traineeship, though, the faculty ranks higher, generally occupying places 2 and 3. And these are, nevertheless, higher percentages than the ones for Erasmus mobility in education studies for all European countries, as education accounts for 3.3% of the mobility places for studies and 2.3% of the total number of mobilities for practice placements (European Commission, 2014).

As part of UAM, it can be expected that the faculty is an attractive destination for Erasmus, for the UAM is ranked 19 in the list of top 100 higher education institutions who receive the most Erasmus students. It is also number 22 in the list of top 100 sending institutions. This does not come as a surprise, as 30% of these most active institutions both for sending and receiving students are Spanish (European Commission, 2014); moreover, in Erasmus, Spain is both the preferred destination for studies and the country who sends the most students for a study period abroad (European Commission, 2017; 2015; 2014; 2013a; 2012; 2011), and among the most active for inward and outward mobility for traineeship too, so that it has rightly been said that Erasmus 'has a Spanish taste' (Valle and Garrido, 2014, p. 45). The role of UAM in European mobility, and by extension, the role of the faculty certainly seem important.

3. STUDENT ERASMUS MOBILITY AT THE FACULTY

Here I present the information on Erasmus mobility at the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education⁷ from 2009-2010 to 2015-2016 with the aim to gauge the social, professional and educational impact that these actions may have had in the training of intercultural teachers at the faculty. These years correspond to the implementation of the new education degrees under the EHEA framework. The transition to the Bologna system began in 2009-2010, when the *diplomaturas* and *licenciaturas* started to be replaced by the new degrees. The former extinguished as the latter

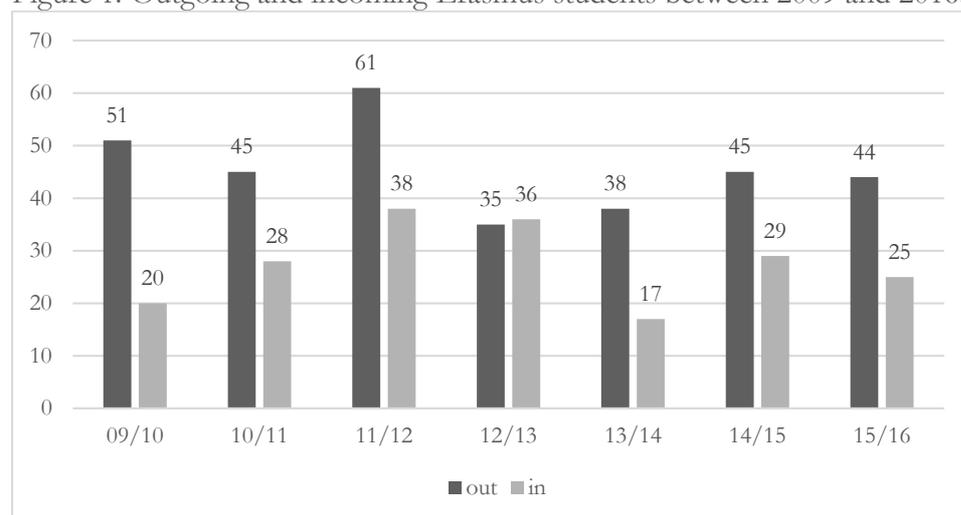
⁶The data for UAM are based on the statistics on UAM's mobility for Erasmus studies for the years 2009-2010 to 2015-2016, which are provided by the university at <https://goo.gl/1rmqVg>.

⁷The results for Physical Activity and Sports are also included in these results because their sojourn has an impact on the faculty's internationalisation at home, no matter whether they eventually work as PE teachers or not. Also we present the data for the Swiss-European Mobility Programme. Albeit with little presence in the faculty, it is dealt with similarly to Erasmus. Finally, for the sake of clarity, both Erasmus and Erasmus+ programmes are treated indistinctly.

gradually covered more academic years moving from year 1, so that both systems coexisted for 6 years. Of course, this had a reflection on student mobility: from 2009 to 2011 the Erasmus sojourners were studying the last years of the old degrees. The new students reached the time to go on mobility in 2011-2012 and the last Erasmus of an extinguishing degree went in 2012-2013.

The total number of outgoing and incoming Erasmus students between 2009 and 2016 was 512 (370 female and 142 male). Figure 1 portrays how this number has been distributed unevenly along the years. In this Figure, it is noteworthy that most years there were more outgoing than incoming students. This is partially explained because the results for outgoing students comprise both Erasmus for studies and for traineeship, whereas incoming students only come to study. Yet, considering the programme for studies only, the results are still slightly imbalanced, the number of outgoing students usually outscoring the incoming. Interestingly, in the year 2011-2012 there was a notable increase in outbound mobility, and the year 2013-2014 was especially poor for inbound mobility. The reasons for those fluctuations are difficult to determine. It is very likely that the process of implementation of the Bologna studies had an influence on student mobility. In any case, year 2011-2012 had the most outward mobility for the period studied in the whole UAM too.

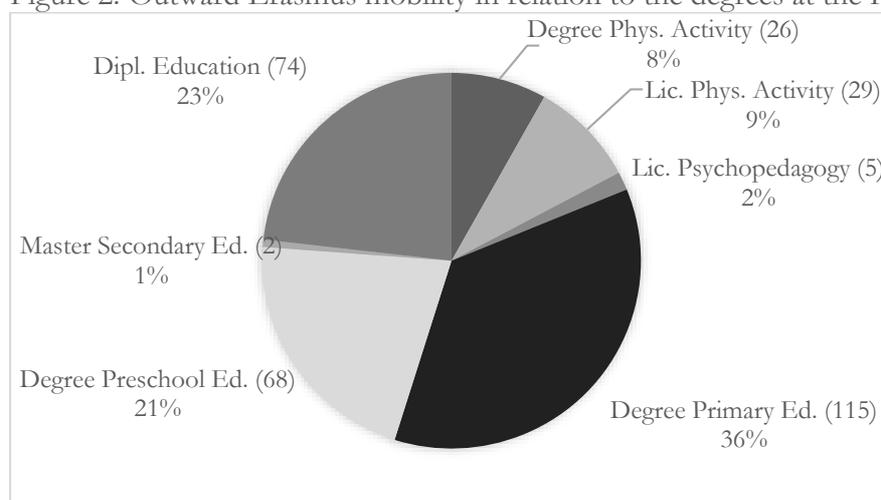
Figure 1. Outgoing and incoming Erasmus students between 2009 and 2016.



Source: Original material

With respect to outward mobility, the majority of students who went on Erasmus were doing Primary Education and Preschool Education. As Figure 2 shows, both degrees account for 57% of this mobility. This is akin, in fact, to the large number of students enrolled in these studies. To this percentage we can add the mobile *diplomatura* students up to the year 2010-2011, who represented 21% of the total mobilities (n=74). Those degrees were germane to the different teaching specialisations of the time, that is to say foreign language, music, PE, preschool, primary, special education and speech therapy. The specialisation that benefited the most from Erasmus in that period was foreign language (n=25), which is understandable, because it is not unusual for our foreign language teachers to spend a spell abroad during their training.

Figure 2. Outward Erasmus mobility in relation to the degrees at the Faculty.

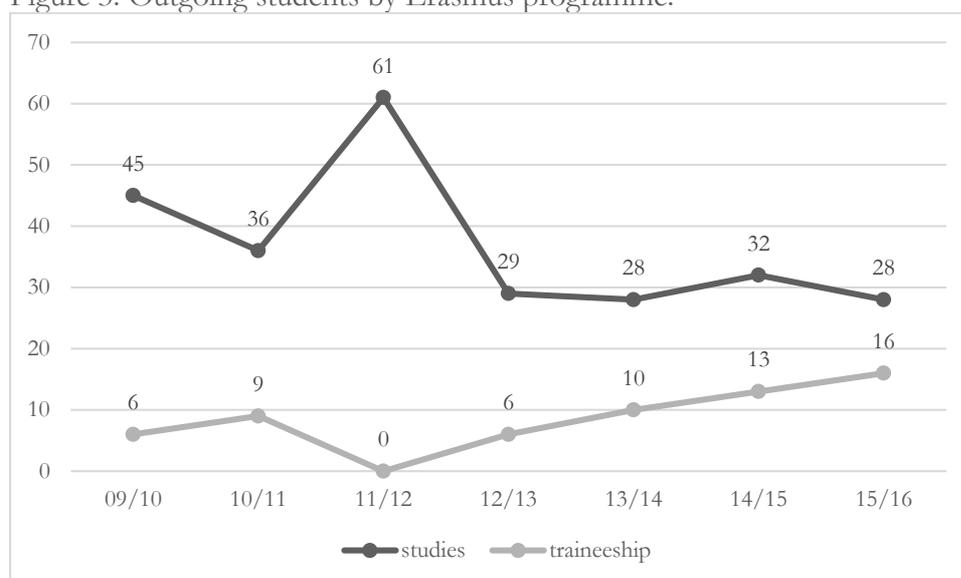


Source: Original material

The vast majority of outgoing mobile students were bachelor students. As a matter of fact, during the time under study we have only had two Erasmus masters' students, in the year 2015-2016 (see Figure 2). Mobility at postgraduate level is hindered because most masters' at the faculty are one-year studies, which makes the application procedure much more complicated. Yet, postgraduate students are beginning to realise the benefits of Erasmus Traineeship for newly-qualified students – the type of mobility that our two 'pioneers' did, actually –, and I foresee more mobility of this sort from now on. Lastly, the students of Physical Activity and Sports account for 17% of the mobility, divided into 9% before Bologna and 8% after. Out of these, 10 students actually specialised in PE teaching with the new degree.

As it has been stated, outgoing students went either on Erasmus for traineeship or for studies. The distribution of students into these two programmes can be seen in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Outgoing students by Erasmus programme.



Source: Original material

As shown in Figure 3, there were no training mobilities in the year 2011-2012. That is because the old three-year *diplomaturas* finished then and the new four-year education degrees were in their third year yet; back then, the 12-credit Practicum period in the third year was not long enough to allow for a two-month Erasmus mobility⁸. Thus, there was no possibility for students to do their curricular practice abroad. Nevertheless, as explained above, in that year many students chose Erasmus Studies instead.

It is apparent that the programme for traineeship has risen steadily, whereas the programme for studies has decreased – except for the year 2011-2012, already commented. No wonder that Erasmus+ for Traineeship has gradually gained in popularity, for one of our long training periods at schools can easily be undertaken abroad and there is a specific call at the faculty for that. At this point it must be said that 12 students went both on Erasmus for studies and then again on Erasmus for traineeship during their practice at the end of year 4⁹. I have personally known some of these ‘Erasmus enthusiasts’, who told me that their positive experience when studying abroad had given them the courage to try again. Also, it is important to note that none of the outgoing Sports students went on training mobility. This is because their practice period amounts to 12 credits, which is insufficient for an Erasmus two-month practice mobility. In spite of this hindrance, I have recently known of Sports students who are considering the possibility of doing a two-month practice period abroad even if they will only get 12-credit recognition for it, so it appears that there will be changes in this respect.

In Erasmus mobility for studies, student teachers normally went for one semester because the practice periods occupy a large part of the other. Abroad, they took up around 30 ECTS¹⁰ credits, sometimes in a 30-credit pack of subjects on international and national issues in education for Erasmus students such as education policies and education for multicultural settings. Due to the configuration of our 3rd year education syllabi, mobile student teachers may have had to take up more than 30 credits in the 3rd year, which made their mobility for studies more complicated. On the other hand, mobility for Sports students does permit yearly spells. Even though, unsurprisingly, students frequently report that English is the lingua franca among international students and locals, most learning agreements contained courses of local languages: the learning agreements of students on Erasmus in year 2015-2016 included subjects on Dutch, English, Finnish, Italian, Norwegian, Polish, Portuguese, and Swedish.

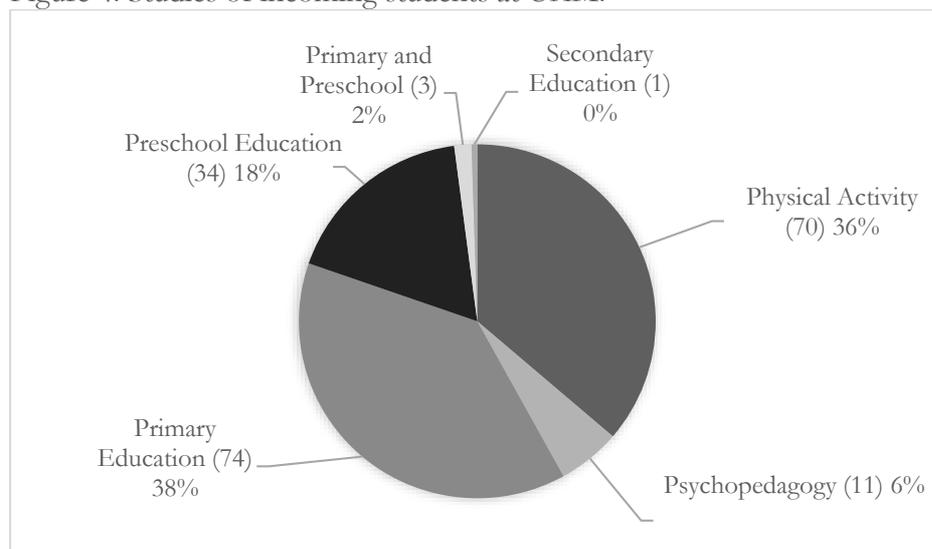
Concerning the incoming students, Figure 4 displays the studies that they enrolled at when they came to UAM. Primary and Preschool Education account for 58% of the mobilities, which is a similar percentage to that of the outgoing students. In this case, the percentage also includes the students who joined one of the *diplomaturas* before they extinguished. Those students did the following specialisations: foreign languages (n=5); music (n=1); PE (n=2); preschool education (n=8); and speech therapy (n=3). In addition, there are more incoming students for Physical Activity and Sport Studies than outgoing Sports students (compare Figures 2 and 4).

⁸This period has recently been increased to 18 credits by putting it together with another 6-credit period.

⁹In the global number of mobilities, these students are counted twice.

¹⁰ECTS stands for European Credit Transfer System.

Figure 4. Studies of incoming students at UAM.

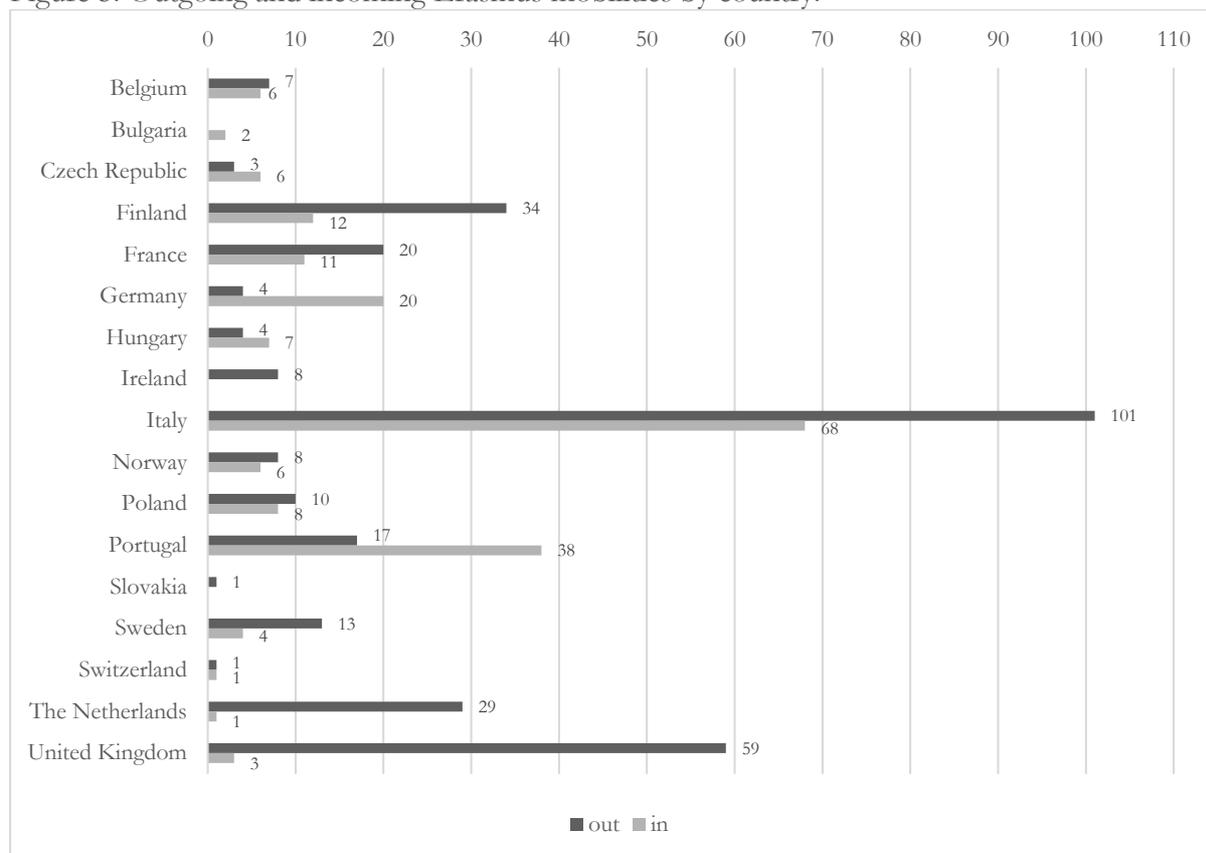


Source: Original material

As regards the countries of origin and destination, Figure 5 reveals somewhat unexpected results: our students tend to choose mainly Italy, and then UK, Finland and The Netherlands, whereas we are largely preferred by Italians, and to a lesser extent by the Portuguese and the Germans. Some of these results can be straightforwardly justified. Italy and UK are the favourite destinations for Spanish students, or at least they were in 2015 (European Commission, 2017). Italy comes on top of the list for all UAM every year too. Finland, for its part, is a well-liked destination among education students, who tend to have an open interest in Finnish education system. The case of The Netherlands is less explainable by looking at the broader picture, as this country is chosen by Spaniards less than, for instance, France, Germany or Portugal (European Commission, 2017). However, in the case of one of our BAs with a Dutch institution, I have been informally told by the students that it is in demand because it offers specific packs of courses in English for Erasmus, thus making the process of setting up a learning agreement easier.

On the other hand, Italian, Portuguese and German students do choose Spain frequently (European Commission, 2017) so the results for the faculty tend to match larger results for the whole of Europe. More specifically, the data for Italy and Portugal does not come as a surprise, for we have quite a large number of BAs with higher institutions in those countries. Finally, in Figure 5, countries such as Ireland and Slovakia are reflected among the list of Spanish choices but not in the list of incoming because our students go there on Erasmus placements *to schools*, but we have no BAs *with universities* for them to study with us. This is one of the reasons why these figures should be interpreted with caution and taken as possible tendencies rather than conclusive results. A more nuanced analysis would be necessary to ascertain the reasons for these students' choices.

Figure 5. Outgoing and incoming Erasmus mobilities by country.



Source: Original material

4. SOME IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHER EDUCATION

This report has shown that Erasmus mobility is common at the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, and that a non-negligible number of our students travel abroad to different European destinations, taking advantage of its possibilities for studying, for training, or both. Also, we host European students from various countries – in the areas of education and sports – that contribute to the objectives of UAM's Strategic Plan 2025 for internationalisation at home. In particular, our data yield that we have close ties with Italy, both for sending and receiving students. Apart from Italy, other destinations such as Finland and The Netherlands are interesting for our students, whereas incoming students tend to come from Portugal and Germany too.

This being so, the findings also make it clear that the potential of Erasmus is not fully met. Regarding internationalisation at home, it is indisputable that UAM is appealing for many motives – i.e. it is a prestigious institution that scores high in international rankings – and a good proof of this appeal is that UAM is the preferred destination for many Erasmus sojourners (European Commission, 2014). Besides, Spain is an attractive destination *per se* for several reasons – the standard of living, a good climate, a solid cultural tradition, the language, etc. Still, at the faculty we tend to send more students that we receive, which calls for critical reflection and active involvement for the promotion of internationalisation.

To attract more European students, and raise the competitiveness of the faculty in the Erasmus arena, we will probably have to rethink and increase our range of subjects adequate for international

students, including subjects in English. We have recently taken the first steps in this direction by joining UAM's *plan DOing*¹¹, which prepares university lecturers and professors for using English as a medium of instruction. Other measures could include setting up a programme for international mentorship or 'buddy programme' – which already exists in other faculties and is currently in its pilot stage at the faculty – and organising induction weeks to prepare and integrate visiting students. Not only would this integration be beneficial for them, but it would provide our teachers-to-be with the opportunity to engage in discussion with prospective teachers from other countries without actually leaving Madrid, thus having their assumptions challenged by future professionals who belong to other communities of practice (Stunell, 2014). This interaction with 'cultural strangers' would enrich their cultural inventory and help them become 'intercultural speakers' (Kramsch, 1993) who can behave effectively and appropriately in intercultural encounters.

At the faculty, outward Erasmus mobility is increasing for training, but is limited yet and mobility could be decreasing for studies. Besides, with respect to the whole university, the faculty represents a small portion of mobility, especially taking enrolment rates into account. The reasons for this are not easy to pin down, but the impact of the recent economic recession should not be underestimated here. Students are mainly deterred from participation in Erasmus for financial reasons (Souto-Otero *et al.*, 2013; Souto-Otero and McCoshan, 2006), the Erasmus grant normally being insufficient to cover the extra costs of studying abroad. Unfortunately, the allocation of Erasmus funds is something that greatly exceeds the competences of the faculty. Other individual barriers to participation reported in the literature are, for instance, uncertainty about the benefits of the programme and the relationship between expected costs and expected benefits, lack of information and possible difficulties with the recognition of credits (Vossensteyn *et al.*, 2010). At the faculty, these reservations could be addressed at meetings with mobility coordinators and in the information sessions that are held periodically. In addition, we should consider the fact that preparing for the experience abroad (with specific materials such as the ones in Diehr, 2013; Egli Cuenat *et al.*, 2016; Glaser *et al.*, 2007) could enhance intercultural development.

By and large, our students seem to be realising the potential that the Erasmus traineeship programme has for their professional context. In fact, since their inclusion in Erasmus, work placements have grown rapidly elsewhere too. In 2015, 27% of student mobility in higher education was made under the programme Erasmus+ mobility for traineeships (European Commission, 2017). Also, these activities seem to have a direct positive impact on finding a job: on average, one in three Erasmus students are being offered a position by their host company – almost one in two in Southern Europe (European Commission, 2016). As indicated in section 1, there is empirical support for the claim that international practice helps future teachers develop their professional identity, and apparently, having a robust professional identity is necessary for being a good teacher (Beltman *et al.*, 2011). The message is clear, then: participation in Erasmus placements should be encouraged as much as possible. As a matter of fact, we are in the process of redefining our specific call for Erasmus practice at schools to include 3rd year practice for the year 2017-2018, now that this practice equates to 18 credits. This would compensate for the difficulties that 3rd year students have for going on Erasmus studies. Placements for newly-qualified students should be encouraged too, as they would be useful for masters' students and students of Physical Activity and Sports.

To finish, the destinations chosen by our students obviously depend on the list of BAs at their disposal but it is interesting that they roughly coincide with larger studies at European level. In any case, it would be good for our students to have as many options as possible, in different teaching

¹¹ DOing is an acronym that stands for '*DOcencia en Inglés*', that is, 'teaching in English'.

environments. Moreover, broadening the list of agreements would imply more potential incoming students. Regarding new alliances, it is our intention to contact and sign up BAs with institutions belonging to networks that UAM already belongs to such as YERUN (Young European Research Universities), beginning by universities in countries that are not represented in our current list of destinations.

5. FINAL REMARKS

Erasmus is “the European Union’s ‘flagship’ educational programme” (Vossensteyn *et al.*, 2010, p. 17). It reached 3 million participants in the year 2013, just considering higher education students. And based on this legacy, Erasmus+ will offer opportunities for 4 million people to study, train, teach and volunteer abroad by 2020 (European Commission, 2013b). Joining this venture is simply a chance that the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education of UAM cannot miss.

In this article I have presented possible ways to boost European mobility for our students to become more interculturally competent professionals. To complete this picture, it would be relevant to look into other related topics such as possible increased employability and linguistic gains of Erasmus sojourns, very briefly touched upon here. Large European-wide studies show that the unemployment rate of mobile students is lower than of non-mobile students even five to ten years after graduation (European Commission, 2016) and that participants in Erasmus have a high level of competence in foreign languages, which is increased after the stay (Souto-Otero and McCoshan, 2006). It would be really interesting to see the impact of these issues on our students, so they could be the object of further study¹².

The decisions and practices proposed at institutional level would need to be supported by top-down macro-level policies and increased funding to be completely effective. Nevertheless, I would like to end on a positive note. All in all, individual measures must be somehow serving the common good and building up a sense of togetherness for the sake of social harmony is at hand for everyone. Hopefully the data presented here offer a meaningful contribution to the discourse on European mobility, and particularly to the argument that encouraging Erasmus is highly desirable among teachers and teachers-to-be.

¹²On a yearly basis, the UAM issues very interesting reports on the employability of its alumni that make specific reference to the languages they speak, their stays abroad and the possible impact of these stays on finding a job. However, the results by degrees yield insufficient information on the faculty in relation to this particular aspect (in the last 2012-2013 report, the number of respondents from the faculty who went on Erasmus was only 15).

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