INTERNATIONAL ACADEMIC MOBILITY OF STUDENTS IN A GLOBALIZED SOCIETY: CHALLENGES AND PERSPECTIVES

Abstract. The article aims to study the development of international academic mobility of students in the context of a globalized society and find out the challenges and opportunities of its implementation in HEIs of Ukraine. The authors provide an overview of the ideas and main principles of academic mobility programmes, analyze beneficial and challenging points, as well as evaluate the current state of implementation of student mobility at HEIs of Ukraine, identifying gaps and opportunities for its further engagement. The article proves that today academic mobility of students is associated with professional and competence development that leads to career advancement. According to the conducted analysis, it has been revealed that by undertaking a mobility period abroad students not only develop and improve their academic and professional skills, but also enhance their employability, increase intercultural understanding, deeper awareness and perception of cultural features, national differences, increasing the level of foreign language communication and social integration. The main challenges of student mobility have been identified. The authors specify the essential tasks of academic staff for increasing students’ awareness of international exchange programmes and mobility, namely disseminating mobility information, developing students’ skills and abilities to write motivational letters and fill out application forms, and improving their foreign language knowledge and skills, etc. The authors conclude that applying appropriate strategies and making coordinated and consequent steps
can bridge the current gap between increasing demand in the internationalisation of higher education and not enough level of mobility students in Ukrainian HEIs.

**Keywords:** student academic mobility, internationalization of higher education, international exchange programmes, university students, skills, globalized society.

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**МІЖНАРОДНА АКАДЕМІЧНА МОБІЛЬНІСТЬ СТУДЕНТІВ В ГЛОБАЛІЗОВАНОМУ СУСПІЛЬСТВІ: ВИКЛИКИ ТА ПЕРСПЕКТИВИ**

**Анотація.** Метою статті є дослідження розвитку міжнародної академічної мобільності студентів в глобалізованому суспільстві та виявлення викликів та можливостей її реалізації у ЗВО України. Автори здійснюють огляд ідей та основних принципів програм академічної мобільності, аналізують переваги та недоліки, а також оцінюють сучасний стан реалізації студентської мобільності у ЗВО України, визначаючи прогалини та можливості для її подальшого поширення. У статті доведено, що сьогодні академічна мобільність студентів пов’язана з професійно-компетентнісним розвитком, що веде до кар’єрного зростання. Відповідно до проведеного аналізу було встановлено, що, проходячи період мобільності за кордоном, студенти розвивають і вдосконалюють свої академічні та професійні навички, покращують свої можливості майбутнього працевлаштування, міжкультурного розуміння, глибшого усвідомлення і сприйняття культурних особливостей, національних відмінностей, підвищення рівня іншомовного спілкування та соціальної інтеграції. Визначено основні виклики студентської мобільності. Виокремено основні завдання викладачів щодо підвищення обізнаності студентів з програмами міжнародного обміну та мобільності, а саме поширення
інформації щодо можливостей мобільності, розвиток умінь і навичок написання мотиваційних листів і заповнення аплікаційних форм, вдосконалення знань і навичок студентів з іноземної мови, тощо. Автори дійшли висновку, що застосування відповідних стратегій і здійснення скоординованих і послідовних кроків може подолати поточний розрив між зростаючим запитом на інтернаціоналізацію вищої освіти та недостатнім рівнем мобільності студентів в українських ЗВО.

Ключові слова: студентська академічна мобільність, інтернаціоналізація вищої освіти, міжнародні програми обміну, студенти закладів вищої освіти, вміння, глобалізоване суспільство.

Introduction. The age of advanced information technologies has opened up new opportunities for global communication and mutual exchange of information, expanding the scope of communication and accelerating the pace of economic relations, culture and education development. Modern society is developing following the needs and challenges of the globalized world, using all possible innovative technologies for entertainment, communication, self-development, and enhancing their knowledge and skills, in order to expand their personal and professional horizons. Over the past years, however, we have reaped not only the benefits of globalization, mentioned above, but also faced unpredictable challenges, among which there are pandemics, lockdowns, economic crises, wars, terrorist groups, labour outflow. The youths must be ready to adapt to different new realities and living conditions, learn how quickly to resolve various problems and respond to current challenges.

Today, higher education institutions in Ukraine do not only provide high-quality training in different majors but also allow students to fully develop their abilities and skills, and find out their career paths. Among the significant advantages of today’s higher education is the internationalization of the academic process which promotes international educational and academic mobility, deepening intercultural communication, and expanding international cooperation and exchanges in the academic community all over the world. We are aware of the fact that the process of internationalization of tertiary education can expand and accelerate only along with the development of academic mobility programmes implemented in HEIs.

Analysis of recent research and publications. Nowadays, the issue of international student mobility is really relevant, as more and more scientists and practitioners study it and find out new trends of its development. There are a number of Ukrainian researches who have studied
and analyzed organizational issues of academic mobility at higher education institutions (HEIs) in Ukraine and abroad, among them are: I. Fedorova, I. Antonenko, N. Chizhova, M. Romanytsia, S. Brynyova, O. Spivakovskiyi, M. Oliynyk, O. Poznanska and many others. In general, Ukrainian scientists affirm that international academic mobility enables representatives of the educational and scientific communities from different countries to exchange theoretical and practical experience, best practices and achievements [1; 2].

Many of the foreign scientists also undertake research into the international academic mobility of students and staff (S. Robertson, C. Lane-Toomey, S. Lane, H. de Wit, P. Altbach, B. Codina, J. Nicolás, L. López, R. Hernán and many others). They identify different factors in higher education that impact the development of this process (Hans de Wit, Philip G. Altbach), analyze various international mobility programmes and projects, their opportunities and challenges (Barragán Codina, José Nicolás, Leal López, Rubén Hernán), state the importance of their implementation in HEIs, suggesting that “academic mobility increases the quality of programmes, strengthens cooperation, provides potential to the processes of academic and cultural orientation of higher education” [3, p. 645].

Therefore, under conditions of increasing demand and challenges of a globalized society, developing internationalization in tertiary education and meeting higher education requirements and standards, the issue of studying new principles and approaches to implementing international academic mobility programmes in HEIs of Ukraine is relevant and needed.

**Purpose.** The aim of the article is to study the future perspectives on the development of international academic mobility of students in the context of a globalized society, finding out challenges and opportunities of its implementation in HEIs of Ukraine.

To achieve the aim of the study, the authors set the following objectives: firstly, to provide an overview of the ideas and main principles of academic mobility programmes; secondly, to analyze beneficial and challenging points of partaking in academic mobility projects and programmes; and finally, to evaluate the current state of implementation of student mobility at HEIs of Ukraine, identifying gaps and opportunities for its further engagement.

**Results.** The notion “international academic mobility” of higher education students focuses on the process of acquiring knowledge and skills acquisition by students in higher education institutions in countries where they are not residents. An important condition of this process is the direct crossing of the border, the acquisition of a certain degree of education, the awarding of qualifications or a scientific degree. An academic mobility as a
form of internationalization of higher education facilitates future specialist to integrate into the international academic community within the education environment, providing access to the educational and cultural achievements of various countries of the world [4, p. 24].

According to the period of staying abroad and getting several credits or the full academic degree there, international academic mobility can be classified as horizontal (short-term credit mobility) or vertical (full course mobility) [5; 6]. Short-term credit mobility usually takes 3 months up to one year of living and studying abroad and attracts more undergraduate programme students than master’s programme ones 54% and 43%, respectively. This type of mobility allows students to continue their studies obtaining a certain academic or scientific degree at their home institution while also participating in the academic mobility programme [6]. A vertical type of mobility allows students to obtain the next academic or scientific degree by taking the full course or one-year educational programme. This type of mobility is more interesting for students who are willing to get a Master’s degree than for the first- and second-year undergraduate students, as the first years of studying are challenging time for them and they are less aware of opportunities of studying abroad.

However, it does not matter which type of academic mobility students choose, it is more important to increase their general awareness of the importance of academic mobility programmes, sharing this idea among students, engaging them to the process of application, which will probably lead to their participation in such international academic projects. University students should realize the fact that it is not enough to have a certificate of the academic degree, it is more essential to have appropriate skills, competencies and an education that is relevant to globalized, multicultural and competitive times. So, higher education must develop students’ global and international vision, as they should posses certain abilities and skills to work in multicultural and international environments. Among them scientists [7, p. 58] identify such abilities as:

1) think globally, act locally;
2) having a creative capacity for generating internationally competitive ideas;
3) a receptive understanding of multiculturalism values;
4) positive attitudes to negotiation, teamwork, partnerships and relevant potential geographic mobility;
5) professional adaptability to learn new skills, share and exploit knowledge;
6) an open awareness to adapt to competitive environment and strong changes, etc.
It is a well-known fact that a modern globalized labour market needs professionals with soft and hard skills, who are able to generate new ideas, are proficient in foreign languages and practical resolving current problems in the social and economic domains. According to the Erasmus Impact Study [8], when recruiting, 9 out of 10 employers are looking for transferrable skills, among which they emphasize on problem-solving, the ability to work as part of a team and curiosity, which are very similar to the competences that students can gain from an experience studying in mobility programme abroad.

Today, students from Ukrainian HEIs are offered a number of opportunities to benefit international academic mobility. Among the most popular foreign institutions supporting mobility programmes which are available for academic students in Ukraine are the following:

1) European Commission Erasmus+ (all available information on the website https://commission.europa.eu/) - the programme of European Union for supporting education, training, sport and youth in Europe, offering a life changing experience over the last 30 years;

2) the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD - Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst) (all available information is on the website https://www.daad.de/en/) – the largest German organisation that supports international academic co-operation representing 365 German higher education institutions;

3) the US Global UGRAD (The Global Undergraduate Exchange Program) (all available information is on the website https://ua.usembassy.gov/uk/education-culture-uk/global-ugrad-uk/) - provides scholarships to outstanding undergraduate students from all over the world for one semester non-degree full-time study along with professional development, community service, and cultural enrichment.

4) Poland’s National Agency for Academic Exchange (NAWA) (all available information is on the website https://nawa.gov.pl/en/nawa) - a new state institution established to coordinate activities fostering the process of internationalization of Polish academic and research institutions and the development of Poland in science and higher education area.

Nevertheless, the rates of students engaged in international academic mobility in Ukrainian HEIs are relatively low. Study abroad and internship at the expense of institutions of higher education or the state is less than 10% of the officially announced number of mobile Ukrainian students [1 p. 81]. For example, in Lviv Polytechnic National University (LPNU), during the period 2018 and 2022, the total number of students engaged in international academic mobility not less than 60 days was 704 [9, p.116]. In 2022, 137 students (that
is less than 0.5% from the total number of students in LPNU) studied in foreign partner-universities according to academic mobility programmes, among which 126 were abroad and 11 were participants of online programmes.

Having analyzed the research works of Ukrainian and foreign statistical data [2; 8], we reveal that today academic mobility of students is associated with the professional and competence development becoming a prerequisite for a successful start to career advancement. It contributes to the professional development of students, developing their social, professional and intercultural skills, increasing their opportunities for further employment. A study of the impact of the European Union’s Erasmus+ student exchange programmes prove that students who have had the opportunity to study abroad not only acquire knowledge and hard skills in specific disciplines related to their major, but also significantly improve their cross-cutting skills, such as problem solving, ability to teamwork and curiosity [8]. It shows that graduates with international experience do much better in the labour market. Students with international academic experience are half as likely to be long-term unemployed compared to those who have not studied or trained abroad.

Worth noting is that even five years after graduation, the unemployment rate among such a group of people is 23% lower [8]. Indicators of an increased level of employment among students with experience in international academic mobility are also confirmed by research conducted within the framework of Erasmus+ projects and programmes and the European Commission [10]. It is stated that more than 70% of students who participated in Erasmus+ academic exchange programmes suppose they are better aware of career opportunities and understand what they want to do in the future. At the same time, it was found that 80% of mobile students got a job within three months after graduation, and 72% of respondents believe that the experience and skills they gained while studying abroad really helped them to get their first job.

Generally speaking, we see that undertaking mobility period abroad students get new experience, perspectives and enhance their employability as they develop and improve their professional skills. Moreover, they increase intercultural understanding, deeper awareness and perception of cultural features, national, racial and religious differences, increasing the level of foreign language communication, social integration and tolerance. This is confirmed by the fact that, according to a survey conducted within the framework of programmes funded by the European Union, 93% of mobility students note that they began to better understand and appreciate the achievements of other cultures only after their mobility period [11].
Having analyzed different perspectives and benefits which students experience being participants of various international exchange programmes, we found it useful to mention about possible challenges and major barriers to study abroad and even try to apply for such academic mobility programmes. As some foreign scientists suggest [1,2], there are such barriers: familial, psychological (related to aspects such as feeling for students of their own country and fear of new places), financial and social. According to the findings of the Bologna Process Monitoring Group (BFUG) [1 p.81], the main reasons for inhibiting the international academic mobility of students are lack of funding, refusal in granting visas, language barriers, organization of training, legal issues, lack of information about opportunities to study abroad, etc.

Recognizing the significance of the mentioned challenges, we are also of the opinion that cultural adjustment, foreign language professional and academic communication, foreign academic environment and educational systems, as well as profound professional knowledge and skills can be a real barrier for many Ukrainian university students on their international mobility path. For participating in the exchange programmes and international academic projects, it is required to have a B2 level of foreign linguistic proficiency according to CEFR. But even possessing it a lot of students do not feel fluent in using a foreign language in professional and academic communication, being afraid of multicultural values, intercultural dialogues and professional issues discussions.

Furthermore, in Ukrainian HEIs, there are some problems and barriers of “documentary procedure for giving the approval of academic mobility… and they lacks administrative resources and clarity of mechanisms for effective processing of students’ needs in academic exchanges” [13, p.22-24]. According to findings of Survey 2022: Ukrainian Students Abroad, 35% of students, answering the survey question whether there are any difficulties with the academic mobility registration from the side of the home HEIs, said that their HEIs had created significant, partial or minor difficulties in the design of academic mobility. Moreover, during the process of registration, most students faced various problems: 34.5% mentioned about lack of assistance with registration, 21% - low information support, 19.5% - lack of opportunities, 9% - long process of the registration, and others.

While a lot of university students in Ukraine are frightened of participating in international projects or even applying for them because of their unawareness of potential benefits, lack of their professional knowledge and skills, foreign language proficiency, or even academic staff incompetency or their lack of support, many foreign students have already
gained hands-on experience. They express an opinion that international academic mobility enabled them to improve their sociability and creativity, in fact, 91% feel the increased proficiency of their foreign language level and 80% even agree that it boosted their decision-making skills [12].

Finally, it is worth mentioning that disseminating ideas of academic mobility among students and academic staff of HEIs will strengthen internationalization of higher education in favour of increasing social inclusion, expanding scope of global research and investigations, modernization of the curriculum, fostering cross-cultural academic communication and collaboration, non-discrimination in academic process. Today, advanced academic community is fully aware of the potential benefits from internationalization and cross-border research and education cooperation, so Ukrainian HEIs establish new international offices and units for enlarging scope of internationalization and foreign cooperation; they sign new international projects and mobility programmes agreements, organize various public events and staff trainings, create informative websites and support students and academic staff in application procedure, etc.

**Conclusions.** We believe that higher education can expand students’ horizons and give them new incentives for their personal and professional development even under changing globalized conditions. Undoubtedly, the above-mentioned aptitudes and abilities, personal qualities and professional skills that students can acquire and improve through participation in international academic mobility programmes are important for specialists of a competitive labour market that instantly responds to global challenges and fast economic changes screening out the least competitive personnel.

Therefore, we come to the conclusion that international academic mobility in a globalized society plays a vital role for students as it fosters their job prospects, boosters their skills and aptitudes, increases greater tolerance of other culture.

Obviously, student academic mobility acquires new approaches to its implementation and dissemination forms, opportunities and prospects for further expansion. That is why today there are a lot of various essential tasks which have to be performed by academic staff of higher education institutions in Ukraine, among them:

1) disseminating information among students about international academic mobility opportunities, current projects and open calls;

2) motivating students and encouraging them to submit application forms for partaking in mobility programmes;

3) developing their skills and abilities to write motivational letters and fill out application forms;
4) improving students' foreign language knowledge and skills, particularly speaking and writing [13].

In general, such techniques and approaches will definitely help to implement the idea of sustainable development of student academic mobility in the Ukrainian higher education area, as well as prepare students for conscious professional development.

Although challenges exist, we conclude that by applying appropriate comprehensive strategies and making coordinated and consequent steps we can bridge the current gap between increasing demand in the internationalisation of higher education and not enough level of mobility students, it will also contribute to implementing ideas of student academic mobility in HEIs and proliferation of students partaking international programmes and projects.

Further research is needed to better understand the impact of students’ participation in international academic mobility programmes on their professional identity development and to outline the main mechanisms and strategies used by foreign universities for involving students in applying for mobility programmes and grants.

References:


Література:


