

The Comparative Analysis of the Study Experiences of Mobile and Non-Mobile Hungarian University Students

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Abstract

Student mobility is considered one of the most explicit forms of the internationalization of tertiary education. There are several positive effects of a study abroad experience for a university student regarding personal and professional development, too. Creativity, flexibility and complex thinking could lead to better professional opportunities and greater job market success, which are all among the beneficial consequences of a study abroad experience. This study has processed the primary data collected by interviewing Hungarian mobile and non-mobile university students about their study experiences. The comparative analysis of the two groups has led to statistically significant differences regarding the satisfaction and development of university students. Mobile students tended to be more satisfied with their host institution on the basis of several factors like the quality of the program, technical equipment, administration and university life. Students had various motivations and possibilities in the selection process for a home and a host institution. It was also important to analyze the personal and professional development of mobile and non-mobile students. Mobile students were more likely to improve their personal and language competencies abroad. The utmost results mobile students experienced were in openness, inquiry, adaptation and self-knowledge. The greatest differences in personal development between the two groups appeared in tolerance, self-confidence and self-knowledge.

1. Introduction

There have been a growing number of researches on the positive effects of study abroad experiences, which could increase creativity, flexibility and complex thinking. According to a longitudinal study, the extent of adaptation to and learning about new cultures predicted an increase in the integrative complexity of thinking.

A multicultural environment, which was provided by an international master of business administration (MBA) program, has led to professional opportunities and greater job market success. (Maddux, Bivolaru, Hafenbrack, Tadmor & Galinsky, 2013) Further researches suggest that people with international experience or dual citizenship are more likely to perform better at creativity and behavioral tests. Moreover, they could get promoted earlier and have better professional reputation and there is a higher probability that they will create new businesses and products. In consequence, they could become better managers and entrepreneurs. (Maddux, Galinsky & Tadmor, 2010) According to Lee, Theriault and Linderholm (2012), creative thinking both in general and culture specific settings is a possible cognitive benefit resulted from studying abroad.

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Studying abroad could mean a lifetime experience for the people who participate in it. It could help to enhance their individual development and growth, master a language and widen their horizons via intercultural encounters. The development of personal, entrepreneurial skills and building networks are all possible outcomes following an exchange period. By experiencing another culture, learning environment, teaching methods and higher education institution, students can benefit a lot from a foreign study.

2. Materials and Methods

This study aims to analyze the study experiences of Hungarian mobile and non-mobile university students, comparing their motivation, opinion and satisfaction on several topics. Through qualitative and quantitative approach, a primary research has been conveyed as two types of questionnaires have been sent to Hungarian current or former university students on the basis of participating or not in a study abroad. For instance, the international and administrative departments of higher education institutions have sent the online questionnaires to their current or former students. Filling in the questionnaires was voluntary and the replies to the questions were summarized and evaluated anonymously. The data collecting period lasted from September 2013 to January 2014. The processed data from the questionnaires were analyzed using SPSS Statistics 21.

3. The Background of the Students

Most of the respondents studied in the field of management, business and economics, however, there were for example agricultural, engineering and informatics students among them. 187 mobile and 358 non-mobile students filled in the questionnaire, the distribution of the respondents considering gender and the highest level of education is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: The Distribution of Respondents Considering Gender and Highest Level of Education

		Mobile students			Non-mobile students		
		Gender					
		Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Highest level of education	Secondary school education	13	22	35	54	60	114
	Post-secondary (non-tertiary) education or short-cycle tertiary education	0	5	5	13	10	23
	Bachelor's or equivalent level	24	56	80	60	104	164
	Master's or equivalent level	21	42	63	20	35	55
	Doctoral or equivalent level	1	3	4	2	0	2
	Total	59	128	187	149	209	358

Source: Author's own work

There were more female students in both the mobile and the non-mobile group, and the bachelor's or equivalent level was the most frequent level of education in both groups. However, the second most frequent level of education was master's or equivalent among mobile students, which was secondary school education among non-mobile students. In conclusion, mobile students had a higher level of education on average. Age could be a possible explanation factor for this observation but it is not the case. 61% of mobile students and 55% of non-mobile students fell into the age group 22-25, while 24% of mobile and 30% of non-mobile students fell into the age group 26-30 (See Table 2). This implies that although non-mobile students were relatively older than mobile students and they had spent less time in formal education.

The reasons for not studying further in higher education could be similar to those for not studying abroad. The possible reasons for non-mobile students not having study abroad experiences will be discussed later.

Table 2: The Distribution of Respondents Considering age Group and Mobility

		Mobile students	Non-mobile students	Total
Age group	18-21	15	40	55
	22-25	115	196	311
	26-30	44	106	150
	31-35	8	9	17
	36-	5	7	12
	Total	187	358	545

Source: Author's own work

Considering their city of origin, 38% of mobile students are from Budapest, while 43% of non-mobile students are from the capital city of Hungary, so there is not a great difference between the two groups in this characteristic. Regarding finances, 94% of mobile students and 86% of non-mobile students secured state funded places at their universities. State-funded places for management, business and economics students have been reduced dramatically lately in Hungary. (Ash, 2012) This could very negatively influence the possibility to study abroad because fee-paying students will think twice to spend a semester abroad. It could be very disadvantageous for students from lower-income families. Moreover, Erasmus mobility scholarship cannot provide full financial support, it can only cover part of their expenses. Tertiary education, including a foreign study could be considered a long-term investment into human capital with a lot of benefits. (Becker, 1994) According to the questionnaire, 98% of the mobile students received scholarship to study abroad, which was mainly an Erasmus scholarship and 83% of non-mobile students received scholarship during their studies. The decreasing budget on tertiary education in Hungary could have a negative effect on state-funded places, scholarships and the motivation for the students to study abroad.

4. The Choice and Motivation of the Students

Non-mobile students chose their higher education institution for further studies on the basis of its program, quality, good reputation and job market orientation. The number of words mentioned by students were aggregated and five various groups were created in the qualitative analysis of the questionnaire. Students referred most frequently to the words 'reputation' (92 times), 'good' (87 times), 'major' (65 times), 'program' (42 times), 'school' (34 times) and 'interested' (30 times). Therefore, besides its good reputation, the institution was chosen according to its offered major and program students were interested in. These were mainly from economics and business fields of interest. Practice-oriented programs, quality of teaching, offered languages, recognized diploma from a prestigious institution were all appealing to the interviewees. The proximity of the higher education institution was also a factor with plus advantage if it was recommended by others. The transition to the world of work was also an important concern because many of the respondents thought they should be properly qualified to find a position in the job market and start their professional life. (See Table 3).

Table 3: The Frequency of Words Mentioned by the Hungarian Non-Mobile Students Considering the Choice of Their Higher Education Institution

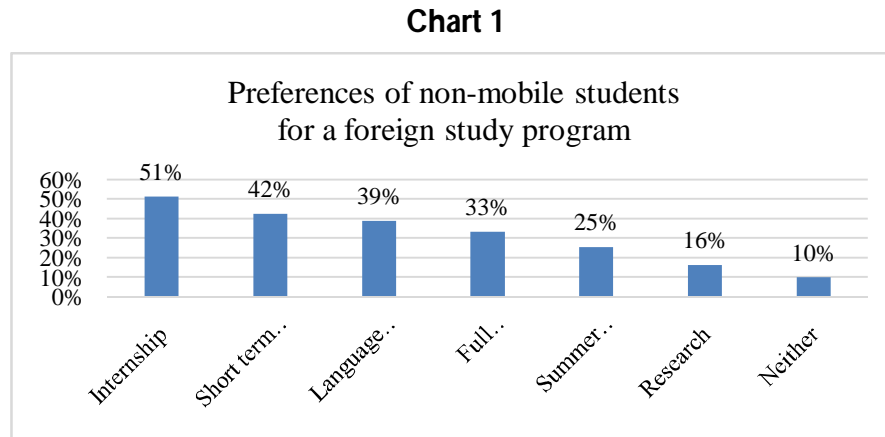
Program	major	65	199
	program	42	
	interested	30	
	economics, business	22	
	teaching	20	
	language	20	
Quality	good	87	134
	high level	25	
	the best	14	
	quality	8	
Reputation	reputation	92	131
	recognized	18	
	recommendation	12	
	prestige	5	
	renowned	4	
Institution	school	34	92
	institution	23	
	diploma	19	
	proximity	16	
Job market	profession	17	63
	practice	16	
	find a position	12	
	market	10	
	job	8	

Source: Author's own work

The motivation to choose a host university for mobile students was in many aspects similar to the choice of non-mobile students, however, some differences could be observed. First, mobile students had to choose a foreign country to stay in for one or two semesters, which was mainly from the Western or Southern European region. One of the greatest motivations for mobility was learning mostly English and German languages in the native-speaking environment. Second, the reputation of the host institution, the active exchange program between the host and home university, the existing research connections or other professional concerns were all important points for mobile students. Some people mentioned the relatively low costs of living in a particular country or made a decision based on personal reasons. Third, mobile students seem to be more adventurous who like new challenges and want to gain new and lifelong experiences abroad. They were eager to get acquainted with another culture or cuisine and with new people. This suggested they were more open to the world, would like to broaden their horizons and improve their self-knowledge. They wanted to stand on their own, live independently and make their own decisions so personal development was important to them. In their view, professional development and building a network were possible gains from an exchange program, which could be a considerable plus in their curriculum vitae.

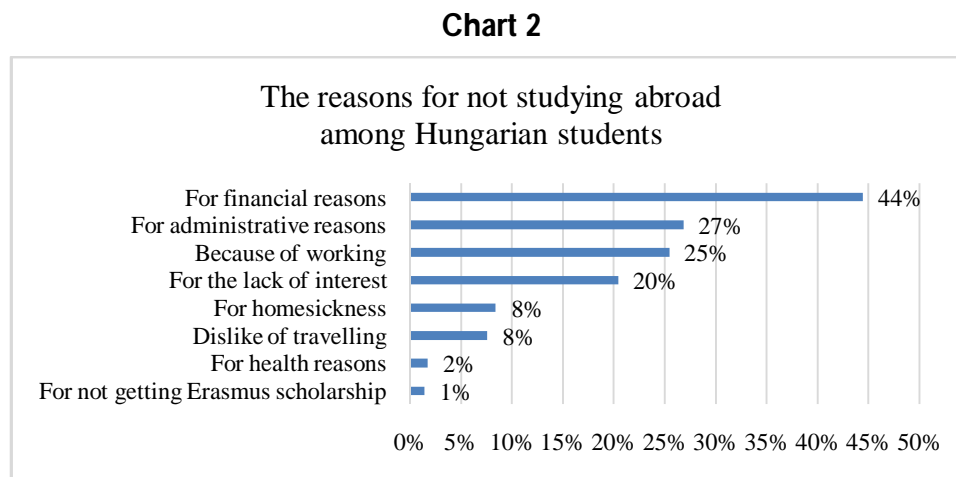
It is an interesting point to consider whether non-mobile students have ever planned a foreign study. Approximately 60% of them have not planned it at all, around 20% of them was thinking about going abroad to study but changed their minds and another 20% of them was planning it at the time of completing the survey.

Theoretically, if the yhad participated in a foreign program they would have chosen most likely an internship (51%), followed by a short-term study (42%) and a language course (39%). One third of the respondents would have pursued a full program, a quarter of them a summer university. The least popular choice had been research with 16% and only 10% of the answerers would not have chosen any form of program. (See Chart 1.)



Source: Author's own work

The most common reasons why non-mobile students did not participate in a foreign study were financial ones, 44% of the participants named financial problems for not having a study abroad experience. It was administrative reasons that meant the second largest impediment for students as 27% of the respondents regarded for example credit acceptance problems or the possible prolongation of the studies deterrent obstacles. A quarter of the students were working during their studies and that was a concern for them not going abroad to study. 20% of them indicated lack of interest, 8-8% of them homesickness, the dislike of travelling or changing their usual environment. Only 2% of them had health reasons and 1% of them applied for an Erasmus scholarship but did not get it (See Chart 2).



Source: Author's own work

5. Student Satisfaction

Mobile students were asked to evaluate their home and host institution regarding the quality of the program, technical equipment, university life, administration and finally to give an overall impression on both universities. Non-mobile students had to express their satisfaction level about the same issues considering their home institution on 6-level Likert scales, as well. Mobile students preferred the host to home institutions in every aspect on average. They were least satisfied with administration at the home institution and most satisfied with technical equipment at the host institution.

Therefore, the greatest difference in satisfaction relates to technical equipment and administration, with 1.77 and 1.31 points of difference on average, respectively.

Non-mobile students were even more dissatisfied with administration with an average of 2.87 points, but interestingly they were more satisfied with the quality of the program and technical equipment than mobile students with their home universities. Non-mobile students also underscored their institution in every aspect compared to the host universities of the mobile students (See Table 4).

Table 4: The Average of Likert-Scale Points on Student Satisfaction

	Mobile students		Non-mobile students
	Home university	Host university	Home university
Quality of the programme	4.09	4.81	4.21
Technical equipment	3.60	5.37	4.05
University life	4.27	4.87	3.91
Administration	3.37	4.68	2.87
Overall impression	4.05	5.11	4.03
not at all – 1, little – 2, sort of – 3, fairly – 4, largely – 5, totally – 6			

Source: Author's own work

Regarding the quality of the program, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) has been applied to test this difference in satisfaction on the home universities of non-mobile students and the host institutions of mobile students. The null hypothesis is rejected because the significance level is under 0.01. Therefore, there is sufficient statistical evidence to conclude that there is difference in the mean student satisfaction by institution. (Groebner et al., 2008) (See Table 5)

Table 5: The Difference in Student Satisfaction

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Mobile	187	4.81	1.119	.082	4.65	4.97	1	6
Non-mobile	358	4.21	1.079	.057	4.10	4.32	1	6
Total	545	4.41	1.128	.048	4.32	4.51	1	6

Test of Homogeneity of Variances			
Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
.088	1	543	.766

ANOVA					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	43.925	1	43.925	36.788	.000
Within Groups	648.357	543	1.194		
Total	692.283	544			

Source: Author's own work

6. The Improvement of Competencies

Mobile and non-mobile students were equally asked to indicate the possible improvement in the field of four competencies on a 6 level Likert-scale. Mobile students indicated an outstanding development in social, intercultural and language competencies compared to non-mobile students. Personal competencies improved well in both groups; however, mobile students seemed to gain more experiences in this area, too.

The only case is professional competencies, in which non-mobile-students seem to benefit slightly more on average (See Table 6).

Table 6: The Average Points of Improvement in Competencies Indicated on a 6 Level Likert-Scale

	Language competencies	Social and intercultural competencies	Personal competencies	Professional competencies
Mobile students	4.89	5.22	4.98	4.18
Non-mobile students	3.20	3.51	4.15	4.48
	not at all – 1, little – 2, sort of – 3, fairly – 4, largely – 5, totally – 6			

Source: Author's own work

Personal competencies could be divided into further positive personal traits or values. Mobile and non-mobile respondents were both asked to estimate their progress in seven various fields. Mobile students reported a greater amount of development in six areas, than non-mobile students. The utmost results mobile students experienced were in openness, inquiry, adaptation, and self-knowledge. The greatest differences between the two groups appeared in tolerance, self-confidence and self-knowledge (See Table 7).

Table 7: The Average Points of Improvement in Personal Competencies Indicated on a 6 Level Likert-Scale

	Autonomy in studies	Ability to make a decision	Tolerance	Self-confidence	Self-knowledge	Adaptation	Openness and inquiry
Mobile students	4.31	4.54	4.59	4.67	4.72	4.83	4.97
Non-mobile students	4.57	3.91	3.58	3.63	3.70	4.14	4.12
	not at all – 1, little – 2, sort of – 3, fairly – 4, largely – 5, totally – 6						

Source: Author's own work

7. Professional Development

Considering their professional development, mobile students were asked to value how much their foreign studies helped their professional career and mobility. On average they valued them 4.79 and 4.92 respectively. The results for non-mobile students were 4.39 and 4.10, respectively. The students were also asked to estimate how much the competitiveness of their diploma was influenced by various factors. The knowledge of foreign languages was the most important one according to both groups. While studying program and internship ranked the second highest on the scale among mobile students, non-mobile students did not value study abroad experiences at a high level. They rated more the reputation of the university and the study program instead (See Table 8).

Table 8: The Average Points for the Influence on The competitiveness of the Diploma Indicated on a 6 Level Likert-Scale

	Study programme	Reputation of home university	Diploma preferred by employers	Internship	Study abroad	Knowledge of foreign languages
Mobile students	4.01	4.07	4.34	4.56	4.56	5.27
Non-mobile students	4.39	4.59	4.38	4.38	3.19	4.91
	not at all – 1, little – 2, sort of – 3, fairly – 4, largely – 5, totally – 6					

Source: Author's own work

8. Summary

International student mobility has become an important issue over the past decades worldwide. Foreign study experiences and their possible effects could make considerable contribution to the lives of university students. This paper has aimed to compare the study experiences of Hungarian mobile and non-mobile university students. Besides personal development, mobile students have reported a larger development in their language, social and intercultural competencies. In parallel, they indicated a greater satisfaction level concerning foreign studies. They have also stated that their study abroad experiences would certainly help their professional career and mobility in the future. This paper has also intended to explore the motivation, choices and possibilities of non-mobile students, who did not participate in a study abroad.

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