



Summary of the Report on the Inventory of Erasmus+ Images and Practices in the Teacher Training Courses

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Erasmus+



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Summary

This is the report of a study we conducted into the internationalization at teacher training courses in the Netherlands. At the request of the National Agency Erasmus+ (NA), an inventory was made of how the Erasmus+ Programme is or could be employed at teacher training courses – both in terms of scope and content – in such a way that it contributes to the development of international competencies in teacher trainers and their students (future teachers).

Occasion

The Erasmus+ Programme wants to contribute to the development of international competencies through, among other things, enabling international exchange and collaboration. Each year, more than 15,000 students and pupils from all educational sectors go abroad with a Key Action 1 grant from Erasmus+ . That same action line also enables more than 4,000 education professionals to go abroad for a professionally relevant exchange activity. In addition, Erasmus+ subsidizes for the teachers and staff of educational institutions the setting up of international strategic partnerships funded through subsidies from the Partnerships Action Line (Key Action 2). With these two action lines, the Erasmus+ Programme wants to make a contribution to the development of internationally competent education professionals.

Especially for future teachers, their trainers and everyone involved in the training and further professionalization of teachers and future teachers, it seems important to be internationally competent. Being internationally competent means: having the knowledge, attitude, and skills to successfully interact with children and people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds: to be familiar with and involved in international themes, institutions, and perspectives; and to be personally development oriented. Specifically for teachers and future teachers, this means being able to handle the increasing international and intercultural diversity of the students and pupils in all types of education and provide bespoke teaching to all.

Earlier research has shown that international mobility contributes to the acquisition of international competencies among education professionals and has a positive impact on the educational institutions involved. Paying attention to internationalization in teacher training would therefore appear to be of the utmost importance. However, there is a perception that it is precisely the students in these institutions who 'go international' less often compared to their peers in higher education. Teacher training courses appear to be the least internationally, and the most nationally and regionally oriented courses in Higher Vocational Education (HVE). The question is why students in teacher training courses do not do this and what obstacles they might possibly face.

Insofar as studied, it is clear that teacher training courses do find internationalization important to the personal and professional development of their students. It is also known that there is a big difference between the extent to which internationalization forms part of the institution's policy and/or the degree to which it is actually part of the teacher training curriculum. There are training courses who have internationalization at the top of their agenda, but in others nothing has been formally set down. There is also a large amount of variation in the execution.

In summation, we can say that the development of international competencies is considered of particular importance to teachers and future teachers. However, in teacher training courses there appears to be less focus on the subject than desired. The Erasmus+ Programme aims to stimulate internationalization especially in teacher training courses. Erasmus+ can offer financial support for

internationalization efforts, even though here as well there is a perception that is not made use of as much as possible. This is why the National Agency Erasmus+ wants to gain more insight into the ways it can contribute as an organisation to growing internationalization and a greater utilization of Erasmus+ subsidies in teacher training courses. It is therefore important to gain knowledge about the content, organization, suitable forms of internationalization, and intended impact of internationalization activities in teacher training courses.

As the National Agency Erasmus+ allocates subsidies among the various colleges and universities, there is no insight into which part thereof is specifically used for the teacher training courses of those institutions. The question of how many teachers and students 'go international' via Erasmus+ has not yet been answered. Gaining more knowledge on this issue is an important reason for this study.

The following four research questions were leading for this study:

1 What is the current state of affairs within teacher training courses regarding Erasmus+ projects, both with regard to KA1 projects (teachers' and students' mobility) and KA2 projects (strategic partnerships with a focus on the teacher trainers) in figures (size, breakdown for education/study)?

2 What image of internationalization do teacher training courses have, and how much importance is attached to internationalization?

3a What is the policy with regard to internationalization among teacher training courses and to what extent is Erasmus+ integrated in these policy plans? If it has not been, what is the reason? How could Erasmus+ fit in the policy plans and the curriculum? 3b What do teacher training courses want to achieve with Erasmus+? 3c To what extent does Erasmus+ contribute to the professionalization of trainers?

4 What are the fostering – and impeding – factors in the Erasmus+ Programme that cause teacher trainers and students (teachers in training) learn much – or little – from an international experience? Are there any good examples that could serve as an inspiration for the entire sector?

Study Design

The study which is being reported on was conducted between September 2020 and March 2021. All funded teacher training courses of universities of and universities applied sciences were approached for this study, as were the university departments responsible for professionalization for the benefit of the basic and senior educational qualifications (BKO/SKO).

For the purpose of delineating the extent to which internationalization forms part of the various training courses (first research question), a digital questionnaire was sent to those staff members who – to the best of our knowledge – are involved in the internationalization of all teacher training courses and to the departments that are involved in the educational professionalization for the basic and senior educational qualifications (BKO/SKO) of the teachers at universities.

The three other research questions were answered through a qualitative follow-up study conducted at a selection of the above-mentioned teacher training courses. The internationalization policy plans of 17 training courses which differ in type of training¹, location and size were analysed and a total of 30 staff interviewed. These training courses were known to use the Erasmus+ Programme based on the results of the questionnaire.

Yields and Conclusions

The results and conclusions of the study are reported per research question. Quotes were taken from the interview transcripts.

1. What is the current state of affairs among teacher training courses regarding Erasmus+ projects, both with regard to KA1 projects (teachers' and students' mobility) and KA2 projects (strategic partnerships with a focus on the teacher trainers) in figures (size, breakdown for education/study)?

On the basis of this study, we have been unable to determine how often training courses use Erasmus+ and how big the size of the amount is in relation to the total internationalization budget. This has to do with the strongly varying ways in which institutions for higher education implement their internationalization policy. The larger institutions often have an internationalization office or department with its own budget. These departments also manage the financial affairs for the training courses and in this type of situation it is not always clear at the educational level where the subsidies originate from. At the educational level, it is often the teachers who are allotted a number of non-teaching hours for the coordination of internationalization. The number of available hours varies between zero to forty hours a week and has an impact on the extent to which they have knowledge of sources of funding for internationalization activities. A number of them are familiar with Erasmus+ and are aware of the conditions that apply to a KA1 and KA2 application. This, however, does not hold true for others. They are internationally active at the planning and execution level and 'ask' for money from the department handling the budget and financial processing.

Most teacher training courses say they make extensive use of Erasmus+ for both students and educational staff who go abroad. According to respondents' estimates, students in the second-level teacher training courses most often go abroad on an Erasmus+ scholarship. The percentages of students who go abroad via Erasmus+ as supplied by the respondents vary greatly and would appear to be less than reliable. Students more often go abroad for part of their studies than for an internship because in the latter case they would have to be able to speak the mother tongue of the country they visit, which in most cases they do not.

Teachers at the PABOs (Pedagogical Academy Primary Education), The second-level training courses and the ALO (Academy for Physical Education) are the ones who most often go abroad on an Erasmus+ scholarship, but here as well the numbers quoted vary greatly. In a relatively large number of cases, respondents do not have exact data on the subject. Half the training courses say they use KA2 subsidies for strategic partnerships. Many respondents belonging to the other half say they do not know whether KA2 subsidies were used.

2 What images of internationalization do teacher training courses have, and how much importance is attached to internationalization?

With regard to internationalization at teacher training courses, the conversations often are about students going abroad. Participants say that their colleagues find this important as well, and that it is often linked to the need for students to become acquainted with 'abroad'.

¹ PABO (Pedagogical Academy for Primary Education), Second-level qualification for AVO (general secondary education/VMBO and MBO (pre-vocational secondary education and training) and for the vocational and agricultural education and training, Academie voor Lichamelijke Opvoeding (Academy for Physical Education), subject teacher training courses for the arts, university teacher training courses and the BKO/SKO sector.

“When it comes to the students, it’s about broadening their view and looking beyond the place they know now. As a university of applied sciences, we often deal with students from small towns and villages. The city we’re in is the biggest city they know, with many multi-cultural neighbourhoods. For some, this really is a new image. So, when talking about internationalization, it is also very much about looking beyond the place that you know.”

The participants in this study find internationalization especially important and are often in the vanguard. The extent to which internationalization is considered important by colleagues and management varies per type of education. PABOs and second-level teacher training courses tend to find internationalization more important than, say, the university teacher training courses. At the latter type of education, internationalization is primarily considered important as part of the university’s research activities and as a way of putting the university on the ‘international’ map. Internationalization is considered particularly important but has to compete with many other curricular themes demanding the teacher trainers’ attention.

“I do offer the material, but not everyone wants to make use of it. I really can’t say precisely, I think it also has to do with the general workload, our curriculum is pretty full as it is. This also means it would result in an increased workload. And I can imagine that when this is not the main focus of your job or curriculum, you would go like, yeah, it is all a bit much already. And there are also colleagues who are a bit more energetic about this issue, who are a bit more adventurous. And then there are also colleagues who take a more conservative approach, who don’t really see the point. So, you see that different colleagues and people have a different approach.”

If they want, students in the teacher training courses can almost always go abroad for part of their studies, except in the university teacher training courses. Among the reasons cited by students for not going are the fear of sustaining a delay in their studies and also financial considerations. Even with a grant, it is still expensive to go abroad and often entails giving up the side job and the accompanying income. Not wanting or being able to leave home is another reason for not going. For part-time students, the latter is often an important motive due to care responsibilities and also because they often have a job.

Teachers at teacher training courses are almost always granted permission to go abroad as part of their professional development or work. According to the respondents, not many students avail themselves of this opportunity because they face a heavy workload and teachers have no time to go. It can also be difficult (today more so than in the past) to roster in days off by making their own arrangements with their students.

“... what we are very much confronted with these days, is that before we were allowed to reschedule our classes ourselves. If, for instance, I saw that I had three classes on days when I had to be abroad, I would reschedule them. None of this is allowed anymore. You have to announce it umpteen weeks in advance. So, your no longer as flexible.”

In addition to the permission, which is usually granted, the staff who ‘go for internationalization’ often depend on the moral and financial support of the management. They want to see their commitment rewarded. There also are managers who are highly enthusiastic and promote many activities in the field of internationalization.

3a What is the policy with regard to internationalization among teacher training courses and to what extent is Erasmus+ integrated in these policy plans? If it has not been, what is the reason? How could Erasmus+ fit in the policy plans and the curriculum?

All universities and universities of applied sciences of which staff members were interviewed have an internationalization policy plan at the institutional level but its existence is not always known to the participants in the interview. At the PABOs, internationalization policy is most frequently also described at the educational level and in all cases known to the participants. In the policy plans, internationalization is formulated as part of the quality that the institution seeks to provide. Quality aspects are: contributing to diversity, to the intercultural society, and to world citizenship. Institutions want to produce students who can participate therein.

At the policy level, internationalization is often linked to the professionalization of their staff. Among the goals mentioned are language skills (for English language education), being able to cope with diversity, and developing and maintaining an international network in their field. Most policy documents explicitly refer to the Erasmus+ Programme and usually also to the way in which it is employed. Most institutions use it for student mobility and in a minority of cases for teacher and/or staff mobility.

3b What do teacher training courses want to achieve with Erasmus+?

As not all participants are familiar with Erasmus+, the question is also what teacher training courses want to achieve with their internationalization activities. Internationalization was often found to be included in the part of the curriculum that is compulsory for all students, such as the obligation for every student to spend at least a week abroad. Other times, it is about *internationalisation@home*.

“Internationalization is often seen as mobility, but also comprises inclusiveness, diversity, and intercultural competences, and we are a highly diverse school and a diverse training course and also a city where all kinds of things are going on. So, there is a growing insight that internationalization does not by definition mean mobility, but also very much, say, internationalization@home.”

The educational goals that training courses link to internationalization touch on the international competency already mentioned earlier. It is self-evident to everyone that this is also about teacher skills.

“... intercultural competencies are especially important to a prospective teacher, in order to be able to interact well with their own class, understand them, be aware of the fact that it comprises different cultures, and to have a better feeling for that and also to know, like, yes, you should do this and definitely not do that and how to deal with that. So, eventually, I do think that because they’re prospective teachers, that they are better able to interact with their class. And to have better tools to look at that and act on it.”

In addition to a compulsory component in the curriculum, training courses also offer many optional subjects and courses that students in Higher Vocational Education can choose from. There is nearly always an internationalization minor included, (with a six-month length of study) which always fits a stay abroad.

According to the participants, internationalization always has a great added value for the students, both personally and professionally. Students become wiser, more mature, get new ideas, and it is an enriching experience. It is about benefit for the student as a future teacher. They learn from different content and other didactical approaches. In all cases, it is also highly valuable on a personal level.

3c To what extent does Erasmus+ contribute to the professionalization of trainers?

In a marked contrast with the promises contained in the policy plans, less than half of the participants say that internationalization forms part of the training course's professionalization policy. But it is, however, always possible to go abroad for one's own continued professional development. Yields mentioned in this context are building an international network, developing international competencies, sharing knowledge with international partners, and linking knowledge sharing, research, and education. Teachers find this important, but also mention impediments to a foreign stay, such as an overly full programme. At the university teacher training courses, professionalization and internationalization are often thought of in terms of international research.

"Internationalization is often linked to the professional development of staff, but then primarily consists of visiting foreign conferences. Otherwise, it is very much left up to the staff members themselves. It is, of course, true that if you want to conduct doctoral research, you must have presented the research in an international setting. So that's being promoted. Also, for doctoral students to attend foreign conferences. And, of course, for staff with a research task. But beyond that, not really. The staff member would have to take the initiative."

4 What are the fostering – and impeding – factors in the Erasmus+ Programme that cause teacher trainers and students (teachers in training) learn much – or little – from an international experience? Are there any good examples that could serve as an inspiration for the entire sector?

The Erasmus+ Programme always fits in policy plans in which – we have found – what the institution wants to be and propagate is described at the strategic level. And Erasmus+ also offers more than enough for teacher trainers and students (prospective teachers) to learn much from an international experience. It fosters internationalization and educational yields because there is always a follow-up to a foreign stay. Students can present to others what they have experienced and how they benefitted.

"...I say: 'And this student just returned from Norway and is going to talk about what a great time he had over there. Make sure to listen to his story.' So, they listen with bated breath. So, everybody then wants to go to Norway. So, I think to myself: that is the power of internationalization. I think that power has to reside in students, maybe even more than in us. And, of course, we have to tell them about it, make them aware. Unknown, unloved. But I also think that as a coordinator, I'm not using that enough. Using sounds a bit like a nasty word, but students also love to share, they also want to inspire."

To staff members, the networks they build with other European partners are highly valuable. International encounters always generate much enthusiasm.

"We discussed with six international teacher training courses which teachers we really want to produce as training courses. That was quite valuable. You then get to see how different that is and at the same time that they would be able to teach anywhere. Great examples are the partnerships we have with a number of countries. Erasmus+ was involved at the start. We just simply looked at where our Erasmus+ partners are located, and this resulted in three countries."

For the participants, the Erasmus+ Programme also includes elements which make that it is used less than desired. They also indicated what Erasmus+ can do to be used more or become more attractive.

Erasmus+ is less well-known than desired. Many more colleagues should be made aware of its existence and possibilities. Erasmus+ promotional material could be helpful in this respect, such as videos or publications.

Specifically, as regards KA2, the substantial administrative burden is seen as the main obstacle, linked to a low chance of success. Applying requires a high level of expertise and actually more than interested parties have. This is discouraging. In addition, the required co-financing for a partnership is high and the daily allowance low, which is why managers are often less than enthusiastic. In any case, making the information and the required administrative burden less voluminous and complicated would be a solution.

“Well, to me it would be highly convenient if I had a better idea of how such a KA2 application works. I have searched high and low, and also looked at that old project, that lady knew a lot, asked her: ‘Hey, where can I find out how it works?’ And I also called the programme lead in the UK: ‘You will have to help me a bit’, because budgets and all those kinds of things. And also internally, it was part of a larger project, so there is a department for that as well, they monitor the situation, and our own financial department, and project numbers. It would be really helpful if there was an easy-to-use manual, because it is really very diverse and complicated.”

Especially for students, the Erasmus+ Programme is not always attractive as it involves a relatively long stay (of at least two months). Students who choose to leave for a longer period want to go farther away than Europe. Participants believe that Erasmus+ should also facilitate shorter (and therefore more intensive) student exchanges. According to the participants, the educational yield is equal or higher and more students could then benefit from a foreign stay.

“Erasmus+ does not sufficiently respond to new developments. Shorter stays are of much greater benefit to students. Shorter stays used to be part of Erasmus+ in the past. And I just know, when you’re talking about European identity, how mutual collaboration is fostered by immersing students around one theme for three weeks and have them work closely together. The results are much bigger, and it is easier to build a long-term collaboration. When, as a student, you go study somewhere for a few months, you don’t build ties with other students. When you put students together for three weeks and have them work together intensively, on one part of the education and often linked to actual practice, you just simply see long-term intensive international collaboration come about. The new Erasmus+ Programme no longer facilitates that short stay and that really is a deathblow.”

In a number of cases, it is the costs of a foreign stay that keeps students at home. An Erasmus+ grant is a nice supplement but going abroad will always require having some additional money of your own, which makes going abroad on an Erasmus+ grant the preserve of a select group of students.

In Conclusion

A highly diverse group of people filled in the questionnaire or were interviewed, which makes it difficult to determine with any degree of reliability to what degree students and/or colleagues go abroad and to what extent they make use of the Erasmus+ Programme. The study did yield a realistic, nuanced, and multi-faceted image of the way in which and the extent to which internationalization forms part of teacher training courses and its benefits according to the respondents/participants. In addition, they indicated what can be done to boost deployment of internationalization and Erasmus+.

Within the teacher training courses, internationalization is important for both the personal and professional development of the future teachers. 'Going international' or 'internationalization' can and must play a bigger role at teacher training courses. The ball is partly in the court of the teacher training courses themselves, but also partly in the court of the National Agency Erasmus+.