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Enhancing Language Proficiency and Intercultural Leadership in Teachers and Students Through Innovative Academic Mobility

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ABSTRACT

The development of science diplomacy is currently shaping the global trend of integrating exchange research programs. This vector of science development is becoming particularly important against the backdrop of the transformation of digital and technological infrastructure and the emergence of engineering hubs, technology platforms, and industrial parks. The purpose of the article is to analyze the potential of academic mobility as a factor in intensifying the language competence of participants in the educational process. The research pays special attention to the study of the processes of development of global scientific, technical and research centers for the implementation of leading international projects. A theoretical analysis of the current problems of academic mobility is carried out, including the low level of opportunities to attract foreign specialists, difficulties in financing exchange projects, and insufficient functionality of the system for supporting scientific contacts. It has been found that the development of international academic mobility requires an upgrade of state policy in this area, minimizing the risk of outflow of competitive researchers from the national scientific field. The necessity of forming an integrated system of support for the academic mobility of scientists is substantiated. Ways to increase the importance of a scientific career in modern society and intensify the motivation of participants in the educational process by integrating a system of additional incentives for research development are proposed. The importance of maximizing the preservation of leading scientific personnel in the national educational field through the integration of targeted co-financing programs and stimulation of scientific activity is proved.

The potential of highly qualified specialists in the field of education is positioned as the main resource of research progress. This field of activity requires continuous development and improvement of competencies, upgrading of the methodological apparatus, as well as improvement of language skills, given the globalization of the scientific and educational environment. This requires regular participation in international conferences, symposia, internships, joint projects with other organizations, and intensive exchange of experience.

The modern concept of the development of the scientific and educational field requires the attraction of intellectual resources, ensuring the conditions for intensifying the priority of a scientific career, and the dynamics of the structure of international migration of scientific personnel. In this context, short-term academic mobility, which involves the international exchange of knowledge, skills, and competencies between participants in the educational process, is gaining in importance.

Digital transformation creates preconditions for the development of innovative forms of international academic mobility. In particular, new opportunities are emerging for remote work in international organizations, participation in cross-cultural projects, which contributes to the active development of language competence. In this regard, the analysis of the specifics of the development of academic mobility of participants in the educational process as a factor in improving the language competencies of teachers and students is of particular importance.

Literature Review

The phenomenon of academic mobility is among the research interests of a number of contemporary scholars. In particular, Guo and Lei (2020) and Martinez and Sá (2020) study the positive effects and related challenges of the global scientific exchange process. Pylväs and Nokelainen (2021) predict the potential benefits and determine the main channels of transfer of new knowledge and technologies. Tartari et al. (2020) emphasize the importance of intellectual work in modern global development processes.

At the same time, Liu et al. (2022) actualize the interrelationships between the academic mobility of participants in the educational process and the development of their language competence. Kim (2010) and Machwate et al. (2021) define international mobility of scientists as a way to stimulate the development of scientific and technological potential and ensure equal access to research infrastructure.

The issue of academic mobility in the context of the impact on the development of students' and teachers' language competencies is among the research interests of Gutema et al. (2024), Przytula (2024), and Wang et al. (2023).

Mikac and Wahdyudin (2021) and Schaer (2022) study the positive impact of increasing the individual level of international mobility on the development of professional relationships and research projects, expanding the theoretical and methodological framework, and determining optimal approaches to the exchange of knowledge and experience in the scientific and educational field. In continuation, Greek and Jonsmoen (2021) argue that teachers and students with practical experience of international mobility demonstrate greater productivity and motivation.

Method

The methodology of the study combines a number of scientific methods, including the method of retrospective analysis, which is based on diagnostic analysis, which allows to identify the main advantages and problematic aspects of individual technologies for the development of academic mobility, to form promising areas based on practical data of their application.

Also, the study uses a systematic method to expand the study of innovative phenomena of academic mobility as a factor in the systemic formation of language competencies of students and teachers. At the same time, the innovative strategy of international scientific communication was considered as an integral subsystem that functions on the basis of effective practices.

The method of comparative analysis was used to comparatively study different methods of developing the language competencies of participants in the educational process, to determine their specific features to identify standard features. Other methods included systematization, classification, and generalization. They made it possible to identify the stages and factors of the process under study to determine the main stages and key elements.

The method of scientific abstraction was used to optimize the array of theoretical information, definitions and characteristics to detail the conceptual apparatus of the methodology of modern innovative education. Also, abstraction made it possible to define basic categories and concepts, to formulate generalizing conclusions of the study. At the same time, the method of induction was used to predict indicators of the future development of the phenomenon of academic mobility.

Results

The development of academic mobility is currently determined by the level of involvement of intercultural interaction strategies, integration of methods of leveling ethnic barriers, and mastering the relevant conceptual apparatus and language skills. The level of academic mobility is determined by the following components:

- 1) academic component – the ability to self-organize educational and training activities, interaction in research and project activities, critical analysis skills in the context of foreign language competence;
- 2) language component – foreign language speaking skills, practice of international communication and processing of information materials in a foreign language;
- 3) personal component – the ability to quickly adapt to social situations, cross-cultural communication skills, and understanding of the value of other cultures (Guo & Lei, 2020; Martinez & Sá, 2020).

According to the pan-European scale, the recommended level of competence in a foreign language for effective academic mobility should be at least B1. The system of continuous professional development in language competence should be formed by a set of programs complementary to the requirements of the international labor market and combine formal and non-formal forms of education (Pylväs & Nokelainen, 2021). The purpose of the course should be to improve the level of language competence of participants in the educational process, develop practical skills for successful internships in other countries, and participate in international projects as components of the concept of academic mobility.

In this context, group and project work, virtual joint international online events are effective methods. At the same time, the process is most effective in the case of informal communication in an offline format, such as conferences, symposia, etc.

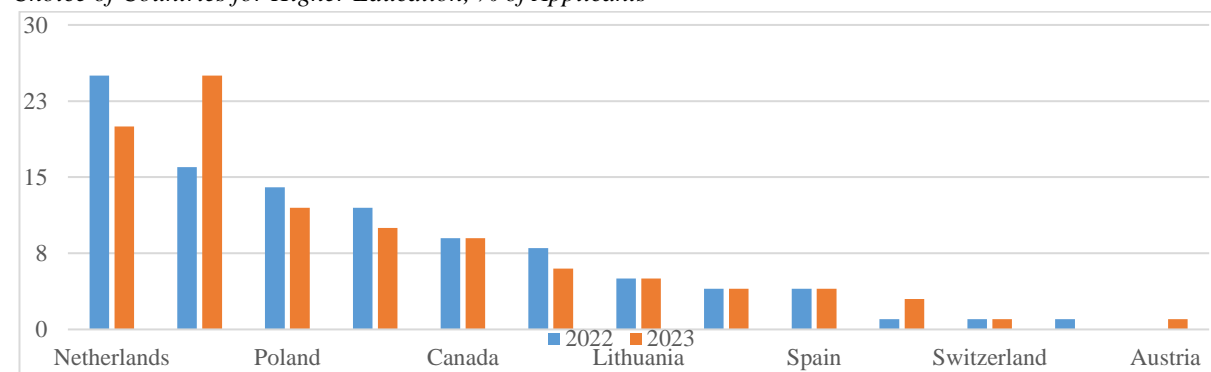
Given the limited access of many students and teachers to the above priority activities, media education is of particular importance today. The basis for the formation of cross-cultural interaction skills in the context of academic mobility development is the formed tolerance, understanding, and empathy within the behavioral strategy towards another culture. Media education has significant potential due to its ability to intensify student engagement in learning and visualization of educational material and the general availability of materials (Mikac & Wahdyudin, 2021). At the same time, it is necessary to emphasize the individualization of teaching approaches and the concretization of perception based on the professional orientation of students. As well as the need to combine language, communication, and intercultural skills.

The discussion of the finished material and the formation of answers to questions contributes to the formation of universal competencies necessary for effective professional realization in the international environment. The formation of intercultural skills is also significantly influenced by group learning and the project profile of education. International collaborative online learning projects should be considered as effective methods of media education that have a significant impact on the development of intercultural and language competencies. This method forms students' readiness to actively interact in the intercultural field of practice, contributing to the adaptability and mobility of participants in the educational process and their motivation to further participate in exchange programs.

Currently, the number of higher education students participating in study or internships abroad is too small, despite active globalization processes. At the same time, scientists (Gutema et al., 2024) determine the effectiveness of studying in other countries by directly immersing themselves in the culture of another country. Some challenges of this process are stress and long-term adaptation, and as a result, a possible decrease in motivation for promising intercultural interaction.

In view of the above, the formation of cross-cultural competence as a certain universal that accompanies the process of developing professional competence, language skills, improving behavioral characteristics and language competence within the framework of academic mobility becomes a priority.

The results of the study of statistics on academic mobility of students for higher education in English for 2022–2023 (Study.ua, 2024) demonstrate the dynamics of priorities of students aged 25–45 (Figure 1).

Figure 1*Choice of Countries for Higher Education, % of Applicants*

Source: Systematized based on (Study.ua, 2024)

Foreign language competence is positioned as an effective means of developing the socialization of students and teachers in the context of modulated language activities within the concept of academic mobility. In an interdisciplinary context, the acquisition of foreign language competence is intensified in the practical field of practical communication skills (Greek & Jonsmoen, 2021). In this context, the tools of digital transformation of the scientific and educational field acquire special functionality (Mialkovska et al., 2023a; Mialkovska et al., 2023b). The concept of lifelong learning is based on the principles of systematization, correlation and orderliness.

The practice-oriented concept of language competence acquisition should be built in accordance with the social and communicative situations that arise in the process of language activity. In this way, students and teachers learn to solve real-life problems of joint activities with the help of foreign language skills. The minimum skills and abilities should assimilate the practical knowledge necessary to write a resume, motivational or cover letter, and personal application for participation in an academic exchange program (Schaer, 2022).

The development of specific forms and tools for the impact of academic mobility on the development of foreign language skills should take into account the need for contextual learning, familiarization with cultural heritage, and the use of authentic materials, as well as situational technologies of project-based learning and modern information systems to effectively address socio-cultural issues in the learning process.

A variety of innovative methods of academic mobility's impact on the development of language competencies of participants in the educational process can significantly increase the effectiveness of the way the material is presented and expand the scope of information retention by respondents. Among them, the most developed functionality is provided by the audiovisual method, which involves the formation of the concept of perception of new material in an audio format and through the use of visual non-verbal visualization; the audio-linguistic method, which aims to master the phraseological and grammatical structures of a foreign language through their repeated repetition in the format of educational speech; the case method, which involves project-based learning based on the accumulation and organization of targeted educational and practical experience; linguistic and sociocultural methodology focused on the content and communicative essence of language formation, which allows you to choose and use language forms correctly according to the situation and form stable language competencies in listening, speaking, reading, writing and translation,

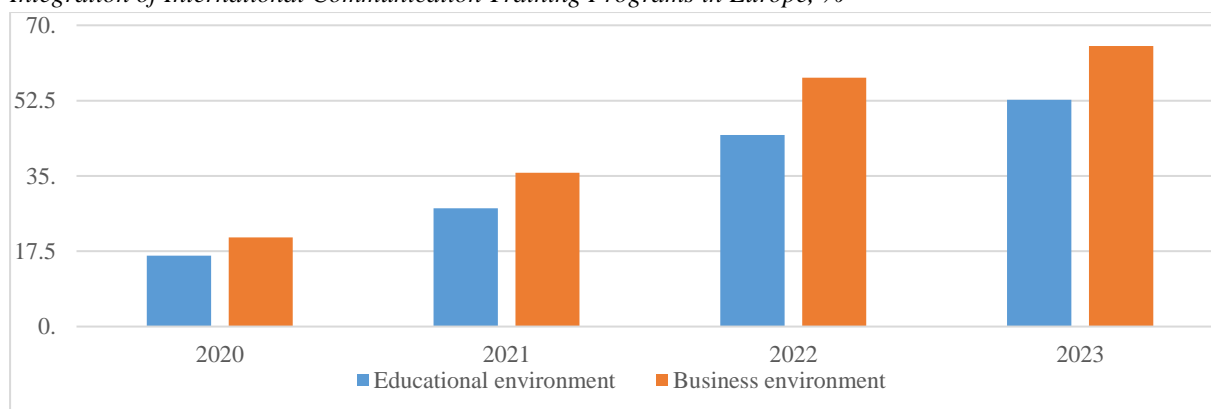
familiarization with the national and cultural characteristics of the country, skills of optimal choice of linguistic form of expression; problem-based research method, which stimulates the development of analytical and critical thinking and creativity, increases the motivation of students; didactic games based on the conditional reproduction of real practical activities for linguistic processing of fragments of dialogic speech in a cross-cultural context.

Within the framework of the above strategies of teaching a foreign language in the context of academic mobility development, partnership, group and teamwork are considered effective methods that contribute to the formation of sustainable social and communication skills and knowledge. Among the most promising measures to optimize the process of acquiring foreign language competencies in the modern environment of academic mobility are the involvement of native speakers and authentic sources, seminars, verbals and master classes, and the development of integrated courses to improve socio-cultural competence.

International communication training programs play a significant role in the system of language training for international communication (Figure 2).

Figure 2

Integration of International Communication Training Programs in Europe, %



Source: Author's own, based on (Przytula, 2024; Wang et al., 2023)

International communication training programs allow you to master the skills of creating awareness of the mental specifics and norms of speech etiquette of a native speaker, ensuring psychological comfort, and effectively establishing interpersonal and business contacts. Modern information system capabilities include unimpeded access to a range of personalized services via the global network. Targeted use of digital learning content, awareness of the limits of the potential of research, and educational and general development platforms contribute to the quality design of language competencies in synergy with academic modality.

Discussion

The basis for the development of language competence skills under the influence of academic mobility is currently seen as the phenomena of tolerance, cross-cultural understanding, and mature behavioral strategies towards other cultures. This is supported by the researchers Acheampong and Agyemang (2021) and Afzal and Anwar (2023), who pay special attention in their research to innovative methodologies of visualization, interactivity, and immersive training opportunities. Bakhmat et al. (2022), de Wit and Merx (2022), and Mialkowska et al. (2024) consider digital research platforms as a resource and effective tool for developing

language competencies. The authors emphasize the need to individualize learning approaches based on the professional orientation of participants in scientific communication.

A number of modern researchers (Bauder, 2020; de Wit & Altbach, 2021; Wei, 2022) are developing practical mechanisms for synergizing language skills and intercultural interaction as part of the development of academic mobility of participants in the educational process. In continuation, Austin et al. (2020) emphasize that the professional realization and representation of scientists in international research discourse requires developed skills of discussion and the formation of universal language competencies.

Instead, Bäker et al. (2021) position international projects on joint online learning and research skills development as the most effective methods of academic mobility's impact on the development of language competence of teachers and students. According to researchers, this method forms the readiness of participants in the educational environment to actively interact in the intercultural practice field. In addition, this approach allows to achieve an increase in the level of mobility and adaptability of the respondents themselves, stimulating their motivation to further participate in exchange programs.

At the same time, scientists determine the effectiveness of learning in other countries through direct immersion in the culture of another country. Despite the active processes of globalization and integration of education, a number of scholars (Gutema et al., 2024; Przytula, 2024; Wang et al., 2023) note that the number of higher education participants participating in study or internships abroad is currently low. In view of the above, the formation of language competence as a universal phenomenon of academic mobility is of paramount importance.

According to Bilecen and Van Mol (2017) and Gao and Liu (2021), an integrated system of support for the professional development of scientists should be formed in terms of reforming the postgraduate system, increasing the attractiveness of a scientific career, and implementing integrated curricula. Noting the objective constraints on the development of international scientific cooperation, the establishment of new contacts and redirection of the flows of scientists' mobility, which will contribute to the development of language competencies, is seen as a near-term prospect.

Conclusion

The main measures that stimulate the exchange of experience and the improvement of research competencies are systemic measures that will reduce the financial burden on universities and research organizations, freeing up funds to attract and support promising research and increase the sustainability of research funding. These could include reducing insurance premium rates for scientists to 7.6%, as well as implementing long-term research programs within the framework of state tasks of leading universities and research organizations that have permanent funding for at least six years and with temporary control of results. These and other measures (including reduction of administrative inspections and reporting) will increase the prestige of the field of science for talented young people and leading scientists, preserve personal potential, reorient international scientific cooperation and flows of inbound and outbound mobility to prevent a return from the “circulation of ideas” to their “flow”.

Thus, despite the mostly positive effects of international academic mobility in certain conditions, it carries serious risks for the preservation and development of the personal potential of national science. Its impact is determined by the intensity of outgoing and incoming flows and their structural characteristics. Assessment of the potential impact of this process must inevitably be based on a reliable information base, which has not yet been created. The topic of mass emigration of scientists abroad has become a traumatic one for modern Ukraine. It constantly attracts the attention of journalists and gives rise to various attempts to speculate on this topic. The difficulty of objectively assessing the scope of this process and the lack of systematic monitoring of outgoing and incoming migration flows of scientists have contributed to the spread of alarmist views in society. At the same time, the measures to support scientists, which are constantly used by the country's leadership, have contributed to the formation of a stable trend of turning irreversible migration into return migration, turning it into a “classical” model of international mobility adopted in economically developed countries. According to this model, it is considered normal for scientists to gain experience in different countries and teams, acquire new competencies and transfer them to their home country.

Declarations

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