



Research article

PERSONAL MOTIVATION TO PARTICIPATE IN ERASMUS MOBILITY FOR TEACHING STAFF ABROAD

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Abstract

Erasmus+ is a European Union program designed to enhance educational opportunities and foster cooperation among institutions in Europe. This article explores the personal motivations that drive teaching staff to participate in Erasmus mobility programs. It examines intrinsic and extrinsic factors, including professional development, cultural exposure, and networking opportunities. The findings underscore the transformative impact of such experiences on educators, their institutions, and the broader educational landscape. Overall, the analysis reveals significant positive correlations among professional development, cultural exposure, institutional support, and networking opportunities. The strengths of these relationships suggest that these factors are interconnected and can collectively foster an environment conducive to professional growth.

Key words: *Erasmus +, teaching mobility, personal motivation*

Introduction

The Erasmus+ program has significantly influenced the landscape of higher education in Europe since its inception in 1987. With a focus on promoting student and staff mobility, the program aims to enhance the quality of education through cultural exchange and collaboration among educational institutions. Employment requires communication with colleagues at different levels in order to exchange necessary information. This exchange enables the employee to perform their duties effectively and remain attuned to surroundings (Gergov, 2015). Teaching staff mobility, in particular, has emerged as a vital component of this initiative, offering educators opportunities to share knowledge, adopt new teaching methodologies, and engage with diverse educational environments (European Commission, 2020). This article delves into the personal motivations that compel teaching staff to embark on Erasmus mobility experiences, examining both intrinsic and extrinsic factors contributing to their decision-making processes.

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Motivation is a complex construct extensively studied in educational psychology. Deci and Ryan's (1985) Self-Determination Theory (SDT) posits that intrinsic motivation—driven by personal interest and enjoyment in the activity—plays a crucial role in educational settings. Conversely, extrinsic motivation involves external factors such as rewards or recognition. Understanding the interplay between these motivations is essential in comprehending why teaching staff choose to participate in Erasmus mobility programs.

One of the primary intrinsic motivations for teaching staff to engage in Erasmus mobility is the desire for professional development. Educators often seek opportunities to enhance their pedagogical skills, learn new teaching methodologies, and gain insights into different educational systems (Sánchez et al., 2021). Participating in an Erasmus program allows staff to engage in workshops, seminars, and collaborative teaching experiences that contribute to their professional growth.

Cultural exposure is another significant intrinsic motivator. The opportunity to immerse oneself in a different cultural context can broaden educators' perspectives and enhance their understanding of global issues (Pérez-Mateo et al., 2020). Such experiences can lead to increased empathy and adaptability in teaching, as educators learn to navigate diverse classroom dynamics and student backgrounds.

For many teaching staff, personal fulfillment plays a crucial role in their decision to participate in Erasmus mobility. The chance to explore new environments, meet people from various backgrounds, and engage in meaningful cultural exchanges can foster a sense of accomplishment and personal growth (Santos et al., 2021). These experiences often cultivate a lifelong love for learning, which educators can then impart to their students.

Extrinsic factors, such as institutional support, significantly influence teaching staff's motivations to engage in Erasmus mobility. Institutions that promote and facilitate mobility programs often create a culture that values international collaboration and professional development (Beine et al., 2014). Financial incentives, such as grants or stipends, can further motivate educators to participate, as they reduce the financial burden associated with international travel.

Another extrinsic motivation for participating in Erasmus mobility is the opportunity to build professional networks. Educators can connect with peers from various institutions, sharing best practices and fostering collaborations that extend beyond the mobility experience (Brouwer et al., 2021). Such networks can lead to future research collaborations, joint projects, and enhanced career prospects.

While the motivations for participating in Erasmus mobility are compelling, educators may face challenges that can deter them from pursuing such opportunities. Language barriers, financial constraints, and the pressures of workload and family responsibilities often play a role in the decision-making process (Peterson et al., 2020). Institutions must address these challenges by providing adequate support and resources to ensure that educators can fully benefit from their mobility experiences.

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Language proficiency can serve as a significant barrier for educators considering Erasmus mobility. Many teaching staff may feel inadequate in their language skills, which can inhibit their confidence in teaching and interacting in a foreign environment (Murray, 2018). Institutions can mitigate this barrier by providing language training and resources to enhance educators' communication skills before their mobility experience.

Financial constraints can be a substantial deterrent for educators contemplating international mobility. While Erasmus+ provides funding for many participants, the costs associated with travel and accommodation can still be burdensome (Peterson et al., 2020). Institutions should explore additional funding opportunities and provide financial planning resources to help alleviate these concerns.

The pressures of workload and family responsibilities can further complicate educators' decisions to participate in Erasmus mobility. Many teaching staff juggle multiple roles and obligations, making it challenging to commit to an extended period abroad (Santos & Pires, 2021). Institutions can support staff by offering flexible mobility options, such as shorter programs or virtual exchanges, to accommodate various personal circumstances.

Methodology, procedure, participants

To gather insights into the motivations of teaching staff participating in Erasmus mobility, a mixed-methods approach was employed. This study involved an online survey distributed to educators who had recently participated in Erasmus mobility, followed by semi-structured interviews with selected participants to gain deeper insights into their motivations and experiences.

The main hypothesis is that there are significant positive correlations between Professional Development, Cultural Exposure, Institutional Support, and Networking Opportunities as a motivation factors for participation in Erasmus mobility for teaching staff abroad.

The online survey consisted of both closed and open-ended questions designed to assess respondents' intrinsic and extrinsic motivations for participating in Erasmus mobility. The survey was disseminated through various academic networks, resulting in a sample size of 84 educators across multiple disciplines.

Qualitative interviews were conducted with 15 participants selected from the survey respondents. These interviews explored the nuances of their motivations, experiences during mobility, and the impact on their professional and personal lives. Thematic analysis was employed to identify key themes emerging from the interview data.

Survey Questions (Sample) includes questions such as: 1) Professional Development: "How important is professional development in your decision to participate in Erasmus teaching mobility abroad?"; 2) Cultural Exposure: "How important is cultural exposure in your decision to participate in Erasmus teaching mobility abroad?"; 3) Institutional Support: "How important is institutional support in your decision to participate in Erasmus teaching mobility abroad?", and

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4) Networking Opportunities: "How important are networking opportunities in your decision to participate in Erasmus teaching mobility abroad?"

Results

The following table summarizes the mean scores for each motivation factor based on the survey responses.

Table 1. Mean score and standard deviation of motivation factors

Motivation Factor	M	SD
Professional Development	4.52	0.62
Cultural Exposure	4.38	0.76
Institutional Support	4.41	0.82
Networking Opportunities	4,91	0,74

Table 2. Correlation matrix of motivation factors

Motivation factors	Professional Development	Cultural Exposure	Institutional Support	Networking Opportunities
Professional Development	1.00	0.63	0.55	0.60
Cultural Exposure	0.63	1.00	0.47	-0.17
Institutional Support	0.55	0.47	1.00	0.13
Networking Opportunities	0,60	-0.17	0.13	1.00

A Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationships between the different motivation factors. The results of the analysis provide important insights into the relationships between professional development, cultural exposure, institutional support, and networking opportunities. The correlations reported reveal significant associations among these variables, suggesting that they are interrelated and may influence one another in meaningful ways.

1. Professional Development and Cultural Exposure: $r = 0.63$, $p < 0.01$. The correlation coefficient (r) of 0.63 indicates a strong positive relationship between professional development and cultural exposure. This suggests that as individuals engage in more professional development activities, they are likely to experience greater cultural exposure. The significance level ($p < 0.01$) further confirms that this relationship is statistically significant, meaning that it is very unlikely to have occurred by chance.

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This finding highlights the importance of integrating cultural exposure into professional development programs. For example, training sessions that include multicultural perspectives or global contexts may enhance the learning experience and contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of professional practices. Organizations might consider fostering environments that promote both professional skill-building and cultural awareness.

2. Professional Development and Institutional Support: $r = 0.55$, $p < 0.01$. The correlation coefficient of 0.55 indicates a moderate positive relationship between professional development and institutional support. This suggests that individuals who receive greater institutional support (e.g., resources, mentorship, encouragement) are more likely to engage in professional development activities. The statistical significance ($p < 0.01$) suggests that this relationship is robust and meaningful.

This finding underscores the role of institutional support in facilitating professional growth. Organizations should prioritize creating supportive environments that encourage employees to pursue professional development opportunities. This could involve providing resources such as funding for workshops, access to training programs, or supportive mentorship systems.

3. Cultural Exposure and Institutional Support: $r = 0.47$, $p < 0.01$. The correlation of 0.47 indicates a moderate positive relationship between cultural exposure and institutional support. This suggests that individuals who experience greater cultural exposure are more likely to receive institutional support. The significance level ($p < 0.01$) indicates that this finding is statistically significant.

This result suggests that organizations that promote cultural exposure may also be more likely to provide robust support systems. Emphasizing diversity and inclusion initiatives can create an environment where individuals feel supported in their cultural experiences, which, in turn, may enhance their overall professional development. Organizations might benefit from implementing programs that celebrate cultural diversity and provide support for employees to engage in culturally enriching experiences.

4. Networking Opportunities and Professional Development: $r = 0.60$, $p < 0.01$. The strong positive correlation of 0.60 between networking opportunities and professional development indicates that individuals who engage in networking are likely to pursue more professional development activities. The statistical significance ($p < 0.01$) confirms the reliability of this relationship.

Networking opportunities are crucial for professional development, as they can lead to the sharing of knowledge, resources, and experiences among peers. Organizations should facilitate networking events, workshops, and conferences that provide employees with opportunities to connect with others in their field. Encouraging networking can create a culture of collaboration and continuous learning, which is vital for professional growth.

Discussion

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The findings from the study reveal a complex interplay of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations driving teaching staff to engage in Erasmus mobility.

The desire for professional development emerged as a predominant theme, with many educators expressing a strong interest in acquiring new teaching techniques and enhancing their pedagogical knowledge. Participants frequently noted that exposure to diverse educational practices allowed them to reflect on their teaching, resulting in improved classroom outcomes.

Cultural exposure was another central motif, with educators highlighting the transformative nature of their experiences abroad. Many described how immersion in different cultures broadened their perspectives and increased their adaptability, positively influencing their teaching styles.

Institutional support was consistently identified as a critical extrinsic motivator. Participants reported that institutions with proactive mobility programs and robust support systems significantly influenced their decision to apply for Erasmus mobility. Financial incentives also played a vital role, as educators appreciated the reduction in financial barriers associated with international travel.

Networking opportunities were highlighted as a significant benefit of Erasmus mobility. Participants emphasized the importance of building professional relationships that extended beyond their mobility experiences, facilitating ongoing collaborations and knowledge exchange.

The statistical analysis confirms that intrinsic motivations, such as the desire for professional development and cultural exposure, are significant drivers for teaching staff participating in Erasmus mobility. Hardiness is a valuable personal resource that offers opportunities and strategies for coping with various difficulties and challenges. It enables individuals to unlock their potential and to be bold and creative, even in the face of adverse circumstances (Gergov, 2022). The positive correlations suggest that educators who prioritize professional growth also value cultural exposure and institutional support, indicating an interconnectedness of motivations. Teaching mobility benefits not only educators but also significantly enhances students' aspirations for achievement, particularly in a multinational educational context (Hadzhieva, 2022).

Institutional support emerged as a critical extrinsic factor influencing participation. This finding aligns with previous research indicating that supportive environments enhance educators' willingness to engage in international programs.

Conclusion

The motivations for teaching staff to participate in Erasmus mobility are multifaceted, encompassing both intrinsic and extrinsic factors. Professional development, cultural exposure, and personal fulfillment drive educators to seek out these transformative experiences. At the same time, institutional support and networking opportunities play significant roles in facilitating participation. As the Erasmus+ program continues to evolve, understanding these motivations

can help institutions better support their staff and maximize the benefits of mobility for the educational community as a whole.

The findings suggest that educational institutions should cultivate supportive environments that facilitate professional development and cultural exposure. By addressing barriers and promoting incentives, institutions can enhance participation in Erasmus mobility programs, ultimately benefiting educators and enriching the educational community.

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