

Initiatives to Enhance European Awareness

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Abstract

The integration of the European Dimension in education was, is and will be a very important goal when it comes to the contribution of the realization of the European unification process. This process offers many opportunities and includes many challenges in Flanders and for other European countries.

This conference contribution will show initiatives by the Faculty of Economics and Business of the University of Leuven how to work on internationalization @ home, the internationalization of the curriculum and mobility. This contribution will show concrete examples like student- and staff mobility, European projects and International week for administrative staff.

Key words: Enhance European Awareness, European Dimension, internationalization, curriculum, mobility

Introduction

Even more than 60 years after its establishment, Europe and the European Union face numerous and sometimes enormous challenges. Over the past months, for example, there has been the Euro crisis, the Greek crisis and the refugee problem. It seems that today - and perhaps especially today - Europe divides more than it unites. For the generation that is currently growing up, Europe is self-evident, although they associate it with obstacles and challenges. Also in the field of education, the schooling and upbringing of children and young people and in particular the training of teachers have repeatedly undergone changes over the past decades. The competence debates of recent years, for example, shows this clearly.

The process of European cooperation in the field of education started with the 1986 and 1987 decisions to introduce COMETT and ERASMUS as the first Community subsidised action programmes. In the years after, numerous other programmes followed: Socrates, Lifelong Learning, Jean Monnet etc. as well as the current ERASMUS+ Programme. A wide range of objectives for a wide variety of target groups were reached with European financial support. Since the start of the programme, one of these objectives has been Enhancing European Awareness.

Enhancing European Awareness

In the first place we rely on Jobst, who tries to understand the concept of European Awareness. European Awareness in his opinion is "defined as a sense of belonging which, depending on certain identification structures and social perspectives, can take such distinct forms of moral consciousness as 'Eurocentrism', 'European patriotism', or 'reflective European consciousness'. (...) it is finally argued that the emancipatory contribution of schooling to greater European integration consists in mediating precisely this last way of thinking." (Jobst 2005, p. 385)

A possible answer to the question 'Which aspects contribute most to the development of European Awareness' includes important criteria as 'European Dimension', 'European Curriculum', 'Mobility' and 'Language Learning'.

As mentioned earlier for the first time, financially effective actions were taken to support cooperation between European states in the field of education. The European parliament decided that "the introduction of the European dimension in education. (...) aims at showing the younger generation that the European Community exists and is developing further, and that it is taking a series of decisions that will affect their present lives and determine their future." The responsibilities in the areas of education and youth have changed with the entry into force of the Treaty on the European Union in November 1993. Since then, chapter 3, article 126 of the Maastricht Treaty forms the basis for the general and vocational education in the former Community and today's Union.

Even before the entry into force of the Union Treaty, the Green Paper on the European Dimension in Education was adopted by the Commission of the European Communities on 23 September 1993. In the Green Paper it says: "This Green Paper on the European dimension in education will provide food for thought for possible objectives of Community action in the field of education."

The discussions with regard to the terminology and complexity on the one hand and the integration of the European dimension on the other hand, presented major challenges at first. Taking the above mentioned criteria into consideration, the European dimension in education could mean the actions taken by the schools in the EU member states that will facilitate the entry into working life of their pupils. During their time at school, boys and girls are taught independence, responsibility and a positive attitude towards lifelong learning.

The European dimension in education aims to ensure quality education on both qualitative and quantitative levels. The European dimension is integrated into the education system through exchanges, foreign language teaching, exchanging information and experience, educating and training teachers, distance learning, as well as the inclusion of different European contexts in the curriculum and learning and teaching materials. Developing children's and youngsters' capacity for innovation contributes to raising European Awareness in the younger generations and, consequently, facilitates the integration into social life in the European Union.

In a broader sense, the European dimension in education also means conveying common political and cultural values. These become apparent in the European Union, NATO, the Council of Europe and the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe.

European Curriculum

The author is member in the European network VoiceS. The VOICE of European TeacherS connects students as future teachers, teachers, teacher trainers, researchers and persons of other institutes with the overall aim to implement European Teacher competences. In the thematic filed group 'European professionalism' we carried out an analysis of curricula in different European countries. An important question is this context was if there is a need for a European curriculum. The member of the group consider that this question cannot and should not be answered conclusively. Rather descriptively attempt should be made to examine the curricula of selected European nation - states in terms of integration of European or Europe -relevant content.

The members of the thematic field group were analysing what the criteria of a European curriculum should be. They mentioned in this context that the European teacher is obliged to realize different important objectives, f.e.:

- We live in an information society. The teacher should provide relevant knowledge. Skills and knowledge contribute to the development of European awareness.
- European symbols are not enough! Through practical impressions and experiences the teacher should establish a European identity.
- The teacher should make every effort to initiate cooperation and communication links on all educational levels or to integrate into existing networks.
- The teacher should prepare the young generation for a responsible, peaceful and emancipated life, which in Europe should be characterized by a qualitative and quantitative high-quality standard of living for all citizens.
- The level of education will continue to grow in our information society. Today's teacher must develop lifelong learning skills in students.

- He/she should make sure to provide a binding framework of values and standards and also exemplify these. Thinking and acting must form a unity.
- The teacher should not replace national thinking with cross-national thinking, but expand it towards a cross-national thinking....

A European curriculum can have multiple facets. Internationalisation initiatives have different dimensions depending on the educational institution, the age of the target groups, the desired effect etc. In that context, internationalisation of the curriculum and its associated internationalisation @ home are always cited.

This article will present two initiatives which, in addition to the mobility initiatives that are discussed below, were/are being undertaken by the KU Leuven Campus Brussels Faculty of Economics and Business.

The multilateral COMENIUS-project EDGE: Education & Gender

EDGE (Education and Gender) was a Comenius multilateral project which explores gender challenges in education with a focus on young people aged 13-15 from 12 European countries from North, East, South, West and Central Europe. The project commenced in October 2011 and reaches its conclusion in September 2014. This short explanation will give a summary about the content of the project and, more interesting for this contribution, the challenges and benefits of internationalization through this project.

In February 2011 the final application for EDGE was made, the points that needed addressing were formalised and in July 2011 the project was granted approval. The process was competitive, with 202 projects being submitted at that time. Thirty-three were approved, two of which were from Flanders, and one of these was the EDGE project. The budget for the project was € 287.302, with partner countries comprising: Belgium, Austria, Czech Republic, Germany, Estonia, Spain, Hungary, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Turkey and the United Kingdom. The institutions involved in the project included, amongst others; schools, universities and children's homes. Because one of the outcomes for a Comenius lifelong learning programme is related to staff mobility and partnerships, the project has enabled staff to work in a range of institutions in order to meet, review current work and discuss next steps. Additionally the project focused on young people in school, their experience of education in relation to gender and the testing of materials that have been created by the group. This fulfils Comenius aims in relation to 'improving pedagogical approaches', 'better teaching techniques and practices' and 'enhancing the quality and European dimension of teacher training' (EACEA, 2011).

The key outcomes for the project were agreed as follows:

- A study text about gender education (including a comparative analysis of the different countries position in relation to education and gender);
- A European resources database;
- Development and implementation of four core modules (including development and testing of didactical material within a secondary education setting);
- Development of a web based curriculum;
- A website and a virtual learning environment.

The main results of the project are available at: <http://www.education-and-gender.eu/edge/index.php/nl/>

In the past, many HEI have been able to gather experiences with European projects and/or networks. Since the process and implementation of the developed models, materials and strategies are sufficiently known, only difficulties and challenges as well as the added value of such projects will be highlighted at this point. Those are aspects that impede internationalisation, but at the same time demonstrate their positive impact. The following examples show what the added value of 'EDGE: Education & Gender' is, and what challenges it faces.

1. Challenges experienced during the project

As the project closure it became useful to reflect on some of the challenges and benefits of undertaking research and partnership-working of this nature. As with all research there were challenges presented. Some of these are outlined here, the first example being the content of the questionnaires.

One of the UK schools completing the questionnaires, asked for the questions relating to 'sex' to be removed before they were distributed to students. This was done but meant that some of the results

were skewed in relation to this section of the research. A second UK school was invited to participate and there were no problems here with the questionnaires, all sections were completed, but there were no teacher questionnaires completed in the given timeframe, from either of the participating UK schools.

Permission to carry out the research was difficult in some of the countries participating in the project. In Hungary it was necessary to gain permission from parents before pupils could complete the questionnaires and in some countries it was difficult to get permission from the schools. This meant that the time frame was challenged and added additional pressure to this element of the project.

The editing of the book chapters presented difficulties due to the complexity of the different languages. Editors often felt compromised when sections and statements had to be amended, particularly when the sense of a discussion was lost in the translation from one language to another. Editors had to make ethical decisions relating to the ways the work was altered, whilst still maintaining the integrity and sense of the chapter, sometimes it was possible to do this in conjunction with the original author, but at other times these decisions were made unaided.

Translations of all the chapters were expensive and time consuming especially as the study text was published in Dutch, English, German and Turkish. However this was a great benefit to the project, as it meant that the output of the texts had a much wider reaching audience.

Time was a challenge. For some members of the group, time was allocated in their annual workload and therefore the project was part of their day-to-day working practice. Some members of the project group had fewer work commitments than others and some members of the group were completing all the work for the project alongside their fulltime work. Consequently there were sometimes delays in work being completed and deadlines were not always met as promptly as would have been hoped.

Finally, E-communication, this presented few problems for some members of the group, but for others the e-communication was a challenge. The virtual learning environment (VLE) had been created to enable all members to communicate with each other, upload materials and review documentation. By communicating via the VLE all members of the project would be included in the emails and therefore everyone would be able to see what communication was taking place. Some members of the group, particularly the project organiser, used the VLE at all times; others did not use it at any point in the three years of the project. This was possibly due to a range of reasons including technical problems, lack of confidence using the VLE interface and loss of password and login details.

2. Benefits of collaborating in a project such as EDGE

Just as there are challenges, there are many benefits and without a doubt the benefits outweigh the challenges. The impact that a Comenius project has from a personal and professional perspective is astonishing. The opportunity for personal development, growth of subject knowledge and the empowerment that travel brings, are defining features of a project of this nature. Meeting in different countries, visiting a range of educational contexts and working alongside academics and educationalists from a range of educational settings has developed a greater sense of interculturality amongst the EDGE group. Several institutions have exchanged bi-lateral agreements for staff and student mobilities and there is an increasing sense of collegiality between the partners.

There has been wider impact in relation to colleagues in the individual institutions, sharing resources, inputting into module content and exploring theoretical concepts with students studying gender in Higher Education. At the University of Derby the project has become an integral part of a thematic strand of internalisation, and gender and students are given practical materials to evaluate and test out in school. Study texts and materials are additionally shared with students completing dissertations at the end of their undergraduate degree, where there is a focus on gender and the European dimension.

For the secondary schools involved in the project there has been learning from a range of perspectives. Young people completing questionnaires have become more aware of the gender debate, the young people testing the materials have experienced learning from a different perspective and this in turn has had an effect on the ways in which lessons are structured, organised and taught. Additionally there were young people in the UK who were involved in creating videos for comparison with the 'test' school on the same topics of communication and emotional wellbeing and this has had a positive effect on those young people in terms of confidence, skills of self-management and public speaking.

Working collaboratively has been challenging, the group have devoted a great deal of time to the outputs, it has not always been plain sailing ... but it has been an enriching, empowering and experiential endeavour. We have learned a significant amount about young people, education and gender and have become more effective educators and more collegiate partners as a result of working together on the EDGE project.

International Week

Not only should the mobility participation rate of students raise to 20 per cent by 2020, but also the participation rate of higher education academic staff and employees. Many tertiary educational institutions think those challenges are unrealistic. The Faculty of Economics and Business is working towards the set target but has not reached it yet. The faculty organises an annual International Week so as to encourage and spur on higher education academic staff and their colleagues to take part in mobility.

This International Week in the first place aims at administrative staff who are confronted with international aspects in their job but who have limited opportunities to gain international experience abroad. This article will give the outlines of this year's IW programme without discussing it in detail.

This 5 day event, organized by the faculties of Economics & Business and Arts, comprises various activities, such as lectures and workshops, focusing on the collaboration between higher education and enterprises and on intercultural experiences. The activities will be complemented by cultural activities and excursions outside the university. In addition, the programme includes opportunities to learn more about our institution and its education, get to know colleagues from the Mobility Office and from other services, discover the city of Brussels as the capital of Europe and the Flemish way of life. A more detailed programme will be provided at a later stage.

The benefits of such an International Week are:

- Strengthens the cooperation between KUL and their partner institutions and offers all participants a rewarding international and intercultural learning experience;
- representing the home institution during the Global Village;
- closing event for incoming students and promotional event for future outgoing students stimulates staff mobility (administrative);
- promotes KUL's international partners;
- increases the internationalization @ home.

Table 1. *Programme of the International Week 9 – 13 May 2016 in Brussels*

	Monday 9 May	Tuesday 10 May	Wednesday 11 May	Thursday 12 May	Friday 13 May
Morning session 1	Registration	International Programmes	Student participation & networks	Global Village	Admissions
Morning session 2	Welcome at KU Leuven and Campus Brussels	Mobility Office Campus Brussels	Social Services		Collaboration between higher education and enterprises
Morning session 3	Presentations by the representatives of each institution	Education in Flanders	Blended Learning		Closing discussion
Afternoon session 1	Presentations by the representatives of each institution	Visit to city of Leuven & KU Leuven Association	Library @ KU Leuven	Global Village	
Afternoon	Tour of Campus	HRM @ FEB	Cross Cultural		

session 2	Brussels	Competences: The Target Based Learning approach	
Evening	Walking dinner	Farewell of Leuven incoming students	Farewell of Brussels incoming students

Mobility

In 2009, the Member States of the Union and the European Commission decided on the strategic framework for European cooperation in the field of education and training (ET 2020).

The educational policy programmes will make a decisive contribution to the long-term strategic goals of the EU's education and training policies:

- Implementation of lifelong learning and mobility;
- Improvement of the quality and efficiency of education and training;
- Promotion of justice, social cooperation and civic responsibility;
- Promotion of innovation and creativity on all levels of education and training.

Mobility is therefore a key factor to achieve these demanding goals. Student and staff mobility is expected to have a significant role to play in the development of a European Higher Education Area. The London Communiqué (2007) stated, "mobility of staff, students and graduates is one of the core elements of the Bologna Process, creating opportunities for personal growth, developing international cooperation between individuals and institutions, enhancing the quality of higher education and research, and giving substance to the European dimension".

The European Commission is in the process of modernising higher education. They suggest that students should be given more opportunities to acquire skills while studying abroad. The EU student mobility target should be 20 % by the end of the decade. Currently, about 10 % of EU students study or train abroad either on a study grant or at their own expense. Approximately 5 % receives an Erasmus grant (2011/12); countries participating in the Erasmus programme counted more than 5.35 million graduates of which almost 253 000 Erasmus students.

Thanks to the new Erasmus+ programme, starting in 2014, 4 million people of which 2 million students and 300 000 higher education employees will have the opportunity to go abroad in the coming seven years (2014-2020). In addition, the programme will make available resources for 135 000 exchange programmes for students and employees in partner countries outside Europe. Erasmus+ will also become more accessible thanks to more intensive language support; more flexible rules; additional support for people with special needs or people from disadvantaged backgrounds or remote areas.

This task and objective is equally applicable to the KU Leuven Faculty of Economics and Business.

In this regard, the term ERASMUS is without any doubt familiar. A number of graphics illustrate the situation of the KU Leuven Faculty of Economics and Business.

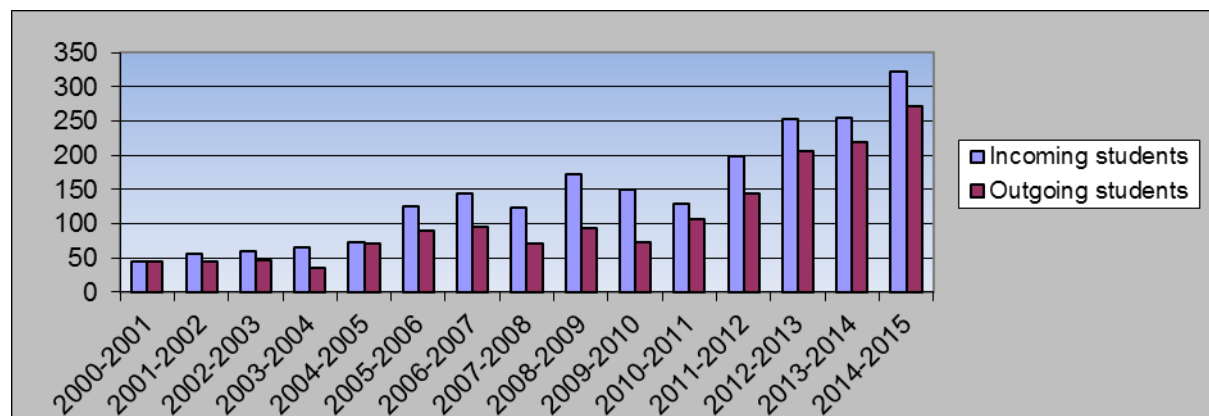


Figure 1. Evolution incoming and outgoing exchange students KU Leuven campus Brussels

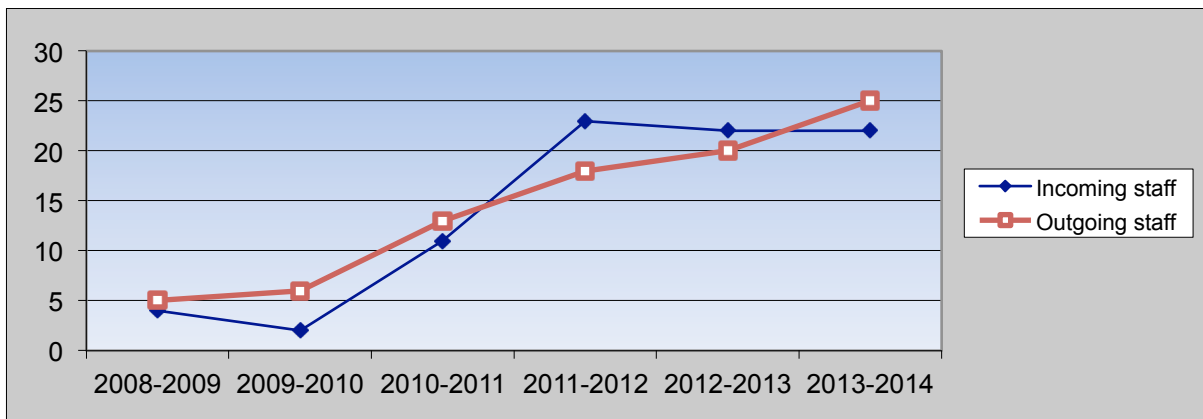


Figure 2. Evolution incoming and outgoing staff KU Leuven campus Brussels

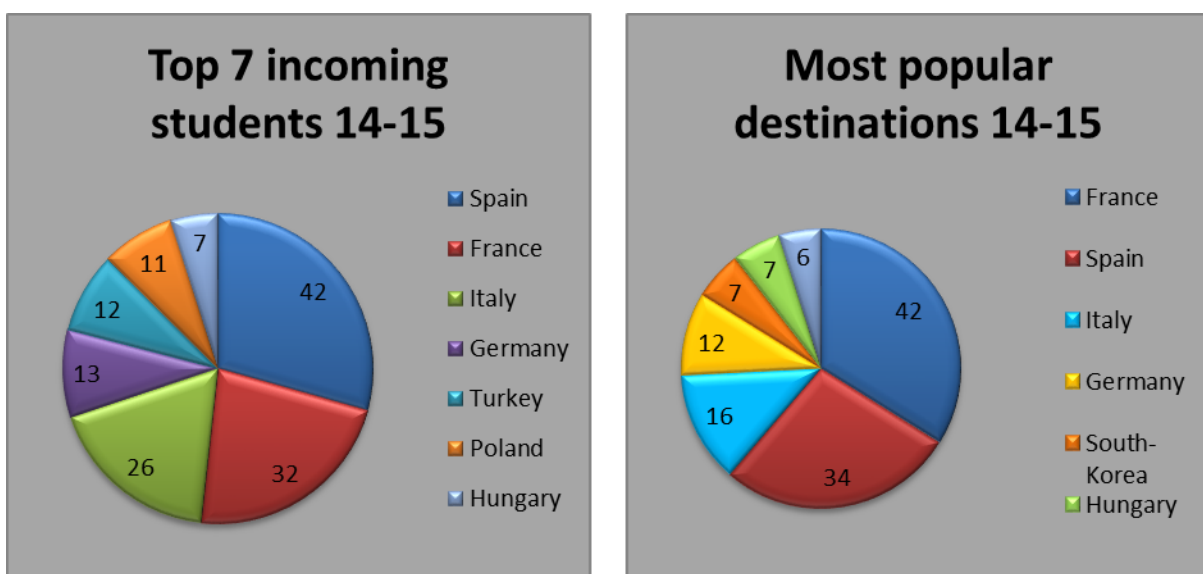


Figure 3. Top 7 incoming students and most popular destinations 2014-15

The graphs clearly show that especially over the past five years there has been a permanent increase in mobility participation. This applies equally to the

- incoming students,
- outgoing students, as well as
- to the outgoing staff.

There is only a slight stagnation in the numbers of incoming staff.

Even if the faculty has not yet reached the Bologna target for 2020, they are well on their way. It should also be pointed out that quantity is an essential factor but not an exclusive one. For example, the KU Leuven Faculty of Economics and Business aims to collaborate with partners that - as the faculty themselves - are high up in the ranking and whose programmes are accredited with (the) high(est) distinction.

The author kindly refers to the 2014 "ERASMUS impact study". In the context of the study, both quantitative and qualitative research has been done. Surveys were conducted in all EU member states as well as in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Switzerland and Turkey, and answers of more than 75 000 students and alumni were analysed, including more than 55 000 who studied or trained abroad. In addition, 5 000 employees, 1000 institutions of higher education and 650 employers responded to the surveys. The qualitative study aims at eight countries that differ greatly as to size and geographical location: Bulgaria, the Czech

Republic, Finland, Germany, Lithuania, Portugal, Spain and the United Kingdom. This included visits on site, interviews, focus groups and institutional workshops.

This ERASMUS impact study, which covered the European Union ERASMUS student exchange programme, showed that graduates with international experience do much better on the labour market. Androulla Vassiliou, European Commissioner for Education, Culture, Multilingualism and Youth, explained:

"The findings of the Erasmus Impact study are extremely significant, given the context of unacceptably high levels of youth unemployment in the EU. The message is clear: if you study or train abroad, you are more likely to increase your job prospects. The new Erasmus+ programme will offer EU grants to four million people between 2014 and 2020, allowing them to experience life in another country through studies, training, teaching or volunteering".

Other impressive results are:

- Students run half the risk to long-term unemployment as compared to those who did not go abroad;
- When recruiting, 92 % of employers look for attributes in staff that are strengthened by the ERASMUS programme, such as tolerance, self-confidence, problem solving, open attitude, knowledge of own strengths and weaknesses and decisiveness.
- Students with an Erasmus grant can choose between studying or doing a traineeship abroad. It turns out that more than one third of those who did a traineeship with an Erasmus grant were offered a job in the company where they were a trainee. 64 % of employers indicate that they give more professional responsibility to employees with international experience.
- ERASMUS provides better career prospects, broadens the horizon of students and gives them a better social network. 40 % of them lived abroad at least once since they graduated, which is twice as much as those who studied in their country.
- On average, former Erasmus students are more likely to have a foreign partner. 33 % of former Erasmus students has a partner with a different nationality, compared to 13 % for those who did not study abroad; 27 % of Erasmus students meet their permanent partner during their Erasmus stay abroad.

Based on the last point, the Commission estimates that since the start of the ERASMUS programme in 1987 more or less one million children were born out of Erasmus student couples and in such a way the European dimension becomes tangible and European consciousness a reality.

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