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“The real voyage of discovery is not in seeking new landscapes,
but in having new eyes”

Marcel Proust (2002)

Exploring the role of mobility in fostering the internationalization of teacher education – with a special focus on Europeanness**

Summary

We are witnessing how significant changes are increasingly impacting our lives, future generations and society as a whole in a constantly evolving world. As a reflection of society and a place of formal education, schools provide guidance for tomorrow's European citizens and prepare students for future challenges, even if they cannot be predicted. Teachers play a crucial role in facilitating learning, which is closely linked to personal and social development, particularly in the context of a future European society. Therefore, mobility in Teacher Education and beyond is essential to ensure high quality within the profession and to meet the expectation that teachers will become European role models. Improving the recognition of professional qualifications and detailed competences is crucial for sustainable mobility in all its dimensions. This paper aims to stimulate discussion on these issues.

Keywords: European education, teacher education, transnational mobility, virtual mobility

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Introduction

Movement and acceleration are fundamentals of today's society (Rosa, 2005) and lead to various globalization phenomena (Osterhammel & Petersson, 2019). As the pace of change accelerates, our world is becoming more complex. It is important to anticipate how these changes will impact our daily lives, future generations, and society as a whole. In this context, the complexity of mobility including all its different facets, such as multi-directional, cultural and international to name only a few, gets a new meaning.

In the present globalized world, transnational exchanges have gained increased standing, as cross-border travelling for professional and academic purposes has become the new normal. Due to increased migration and global economic expansion, classrooms of today are characterized by a variety of languages, cultures, and values. To prepare future generations for living together in an increasingly multilingual and pluricultural environment, it is necessary for teachers to obtain intercultural experiences and competences (Elsner & Worek, 2016). Although study-related stays abroad are constantly recommended, few teachers gain study or work experience abroad during or after their Initial Teacher Education. Scholars in higher education research are skeptical towards exclusively focusing on physical mobility, arguing that this approach is inadequate for a comprehensive examination of international mobility (Teichler, 2007). In the context of sustainability and climate change, international travel, especially by air, is under scrutiny due to its significant contribution to greenhouse gas emissions and potential adverse effects on the climate (IPCC, 2023).

One positive effect of the Covid-19 pandemic has been a significant increase in virtual mobility in recent years. Virtual mobility refers to the experience or facilitation of educational programs and content from foreign universities through the internet or other innovative forms of information and communication technology (Hahn, 2004).

The impact of 25 years of the Bologna strategy

The 1999 Bologna Declaration was a milestone in the internationalization of education systems in the EU, pledging all signatory countries to undergo a reform process in their higher education sector. Its objective was and still is to enhance the quality of higher education systems in Europe, make them more transparent and comparable by promoting mutual degree recognition, mobility among signatory countries, and coherence as well as compatibility of the systems in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

These reforms have also contributed to the establishment of a “European Teacher Education Area” within the European Higher Education Area although Teacher Education had not been specifically considered or addressed within the Bologna Process. One main reason for this was certainly the fact that several Teacher Education paths in Europe were not conceived on university level. “The information collected by ENTEP (European Network on Teacher Education Policies) highlights the diversity of Initial Teacher Education structures and systems in Europe and the multiple routes to teacher status across countries. ENTEP welcomes the reforms and looks for further progress in the following areas:

- improving the readability and comparability of Teacher Education structures in Europe;
- strengthening the professionalization of the teaching profession in Europe;
- enhancing research-based Teacher Education;
- increasing flexibility in Teacher Education structures;
- further implementing ECTS in Teacher Education programs;
- increasing competence orientation in Initial Teacher Education;
- facilitating mobility among students, teachers and teacher educators;
- further developing a professional continuum (lifelong learning) in Teacher Education” (Dimitropoulos, 2008, p. 3).

Since then, various factors, such as globalization and internationalization processes, quality assurance developments, and the implementation of the ECTS credit system, have been instrumental in realizing this goal. “Internationalization has on the one hand been a motor for the invention of the ‘Bologna Idea’ and is on the other hand further increased by the ongoing Bologna Process itself” (Uzerli, 2017).

Schleicher (2012) states that international mobility in Initial Teacher Education can have many beneficial effects on the quality of teachers and with this on the quality of schools. Yet, current numbers of university students’ international activities show that the interest in mobility programs is extraordinarily low on behalf of student teachers, especially when compared to other courses of study (DAAD, 2015).

Despite numerous reasons for these low numbers, it is unclear how the Bologna Declaration can effectively enhance Teacher Education, in ITE and CPD, in Europe after more than two decades, especially since the Declaration was not initially designed for Teacher Education purposes. While several Teacher Education stake holders (DAAD, 2015, 2023; HRK, 2022) have expected that the modernization process in structures and Teacher Education programs would facilitate mobility among aspiring teachers, latest studies (DAAD, 2023; Worek, 2017) show the opposite.

Further, European Teacher Education and Teacher Education policy experts expect that increased mobility among student teachers would lead to a shared

European identity linked to democratic principles (DAAD, 2023; Elsner & Worek, 2016; HRK, 2022; Schratz, 2008). The competences of those shaping the next generation of European citizens should go beyond those of reflective practitioners, researchers and social actors. The professional profile should include an understanding of 'unity in diversity', acknowledging the coexistence of national and transnational specificities (Uzerli, 2017). The issue of mobility as a factor in promoting a common European identity is in line with the reflections on higher education policies related to Teacher Education discussed in ENTEP's publication on the subject (Schratz, 2008). The European Commission (2009) emphasizes the need to reform Teacher Education systems to make them more flexible, coherent, and responsive to societal needs. Thus, Teacher Education institutions should play a more active role in building the European knowledge society and contribute to the Lisbon Strategy. The importance of high-quality Teacher Education has not been automatically recognized with the Bologna Process. Some signatory countries have struggled to accept the changes they would need to initiate not only in the structure, but also in the underlying philosophy of their systems.

Looking at the objectives of the Bologna Declaration, it is easy to see that mobility, especially for those in the medical, legal and teaching professions, is often fraught with major difficulties. This leads to the questions: why, after 25 years of policy documents emphasising the importance of internationalisation in Initial Teacher Education, is international practice still very limited? Studies show (DAAD, 2015; HRK, 2022; Worek, 2017) that the answers can be many and varied, ranging from institutional barriers to individual reservations and insecurities among teachers. These include, but are not limited to: lack of financial support, bureaucratic hurdles and lack of incentives from educational institutions, as well as the problem that mobility may also be perceived by students as not beneficial for employment and career opportunities or for further study. The Hochschulrektorenkonferenz (HRK, 2022) identifies the unsatisfactory recognition of university credits in some countries as one of the main obstacles to internationalization in Teacher Education. A particular national challenge in Germany is the second state examination, which is not found in the classic Bologna structure. "The recognition procedure should generally be based on a holistic assessment, which means that, depending on the individual case, it should be more possible to incorporate professional experience and additional skills into the recognition process than it had been before. Furthermore, non-isolated phenomena should not be compared on a word-for-word basis, i.e. sub-modules or the literal wording of modules and its corresponding content", but should rather be examined for equivalence instead of similarity (Worek et al., 2017). The vision of 'unity in diversity' is based on a shared understanding of European values and should be an integral part of Teacher Education. Uzerli (2017)

emphasizes that “uniting without creating uniformity” should be the motto. While structural changes may occur in ITE, it is unlikely that teachers will simply be asked to embody and disseminate the idea of shared Europeanness.

“Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire”, William Butler Yeats once said. So how can we encourage future teachers to gain international experience, not only to light their own fire, but also to light a fire in their students?

The role of Europeanness and the identity of a European teacher within teacher education concepts

Schools are currently undergoing significant changes and, as a result, Teacher Education is also evolving. High quality basic education in schools is central for social cohesion, the integrity of democracy and the sustainability of our knowledge society. This underlines the importance of teachers as bridge builders. The EU Commission (2022) states that the effectiveness of the European political system relies on citizens’ knowledge and understanding of it. The European Commission (2009) emphasises in this context that teacher mobility is a crucial factor in ensuring that education systems can respond to the constantly changing needs of society and the economy.

Schratz’s (2008) concept of the European Teacher is a model of an ideal teacher who possesses both subject-specific knowledge and cultural and linguistic competencies to teach in diverse cultural settings and is able to provide a European perspective in teaching, promote democratic values and human rights. The European Teacher model emphasizes the importance of Teacher Education programs that foster intercultural competencies and prepare teachers for internationalization in education. The concept also acknowledges the importance of teachers being able to adapt to the changing educational landscape, which has become increasingly globalized and diverse (Madalińska-Michalak, 2018).

In light of today’s challenges, schools bear a special responsibility, as they usually reach all children and young people equally in order to prepare them for future challenges (Worek, 2019a). More than ever, teachers play a key role in guiding prospective teachers to integrate international experiences and perspectives into their education. These experiences, in turn, profoundly impact the professionalization of future teachers in this field (OECD, 2023). “Teachers, who themselves are familiar with more than one culture and language, are ideal bridge-builders for integration. They help children and young people to find a new home and thus increase their chances of real participation and integration,” said State Secretary for Integration Serap Güler in 2019. In this context, dealing constructively

with changes is of particular importance as they adequately learn how to deal with diversity in a non-dominant, mindful and respectful way (Uzerli, 2017).

The climate crisis is an increasingly significant aspect that raises questions about international mobility. The catchphrase “by design or by disaster” succinctly points out the necessity to actively shape humanity’s response to self-induced climate change (DAAD, 2023). The Covid-19 pandemic has provided alternative ways to enable intercultural encounters without environmentally harmful travel by airplane. For instance, the Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst (DAAD, 2023) has established the subsequent principles: ‘Form follows function’, where physical mobility is essential and can be complemented or substituted by digital measures, the desired impact must be taken into account. ‘Design with the users’, the design of international mobility must cater to the diversity of target groups and consider their respective expectations and competencies, to ‘leave no one behind’. To provide solutions that are both climate-friendly and inclusive, it is important to consider the needs of disadvantaged groups. In terms of decarbonising mobility, it is necessary to find practical approaches that are environmentally friendly. It is also essential to focus on quality and use instruments that can achieve the desired effects for sustainable solutions.

Key aspects of the European Teacher include having a deep understanding of European cultures and languages, as well as being able to teach from a cross-cultural perspective. Additionally, the European Teacher should have a deep knowledge of the European Union and its institutions and should be able to promote European values in their classroom. This Europeanness of teaching provides an important concept for shaping the future of European education by promoting intercultural understanding and providing a model for Teacher Education that prepares teachers for the challenges of an increased globalized and diverse world.

In today’s interconnected world, it is crucial to promote a European perspective in education, which emphasizes European values of democracy, European ethics and human rights. The European Teacher’s focus on promoting European values and providing a European perspective in teaching is therefore highly relevant in today’s context.

For this purpose, structures are needed that enable student teachers to gain relevant experience already during their studies. There are several ways to increase the mobility of Teacher Education students within their study programs without necessarily being physically mobile:

1. Raise awareness about mobility opportunities: Many students may not be aware of the opportunities available to them for mobility programs. Therefore, it is essential to raise awareness about the benefits of participating in mobility programs and provide information about available opportunities.

2. Provide language training: Language barriers can be a significant obstacle for students who wish to participate in mobility programs. Providing language training and support can help to increase students' confidence and ability to participate in mobility programs.
3. Offer scholarships and funding: Providing financial support, such as scholarships and funding, can help to alleviate some of the financial barriers that prevent students from participating in mobility programs.
4. Develop partnerships with universities abroad: Establishing partnerships with universities abroad can provide opportunities for Teacher Education students to study and gain practical experience in different cultural settings. These partnerships can also facilitate the exchange of knowledge and teaching practices.
5. Incorporate international experiences into the curriculum: Integrating international experiences into the Teacher Education curriculum can help to expose students to different cultures and teaching practices. This can be achieved through study tours, internships, and other forms of practical experience.
6. The recognition of study achievements and teaching diplomas can help promote mobility in the education sector, facilitate the integration of students and teachers from different countries, and support the creation of a common European education space.
7. During Initial Teacher Education, universities should offer hybrid courses for student teachers. Cooperating with universities and schools abroad can be particularly beneficial for gaining intercultural experience and acquiring or expanding necessary skills. Here, methodological approaches and best practice examples can be exchanged, expert discussions can be held in different languages and networks can be formed for the future.
8. A continuous accompanying seminar, in which key elements of blended learning, education for sustainable development, resilience, etc. could be discussed throughout the programs in order to offer student teachers security and a professional network for the future. A semester abroad can be thoroughly prepared and followed up in this context.
9. Dealing with the challenges arising from the digital transformation emphasizes the importance of appropriately trained teachers. The world "feels like it's always just a click or two away" (Rosa, 2019, p. 85). However, in the sense of the didactic triangle, this "felt" also requires learning arrangements in authentic encounters between learners and competent, open-minded teachers in order to jointly develop strategies for dealing with all the phenomena of digitalization (Worek & Kraler, 2020).
10. Implement evaluation and feedback mechanisms: Establishing mechanisms to evaluate the effectiveness of mobility programs and gather feedback from

participants can help identify areas for improvement and ensure that future mobility initiatives better meet the needs of students and educators.

Initiatives such as the ERASMUS+ programs aim to provide opportunities for teacher education and development in European countries. This program offers a platform for European cooperation and exchange, enabling teachers and students to experience Europeanness. This can help teachers to develop their intercultural competences, enhance their knowledge of European cultures, and promote the values of European citizenship. Such initiatives can also encourage virtual instead of physical mobility of teachers, helping them to act as role models and promote intercultural awareness among their students and work against discrimination. In line with the idea and initiative of ERASMUS+ it is important to include all teachers in service – not online student teachers – in the presented activities in the context of the Continuous Professional Development (CPD).

The Council Resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021–2030) supports this concept and points out that lifelong learning and mobility become accessible to all, including those in the education profession. It emphasizes the importance of enhancing the competences and motivation of teachers, recognizing their critical role in preparing the next generation of citizens. These priorities reflect the growing recognition of the need to invest in and support the ongoing development of teachers and teacher educators in Europe, in order to ensure the success of the European Education Area and to foster a culture of lifelong learning and mobility. The following aspects should be considered:

- In the modern-day university campus, students hail from diverse backgrounds and circumstances, displaying variations in ethnicity, religion or belief, gender identity, sexual orientation, parental or caregiving duties, disability, chronic illness, mental health, financial status, work commitments, age (including mature students), and returning to education after a long hiatus. Prior to embarking on mobility, it is imperative to obtain comprehensive information from the host institution not only regarding the cultural nuances of the destination but also concerning the students (Council Resolution, 2021).
- The European Universities initiative presents an opportunity to trial and promote innovative approaches to teaching mobility. To overcome barriers related to the mobility of academic staff, it is suggested that the best university alliances in Europe be incentivized to explore potential solutions. This can be achieved through piloting these solutions with a small group of stakeholders, which would provide valuable insights and enable the identification of the most effective strategies. Ultimately, this approach could help to address some of the challenges associated with promoting teacher mobility in the European

context, and facilitate the sharing of best practices and approaches across different institutions and countries (Council Resolution, 2021).

- “Professional exchange of knowledge and experience abroad support life-long learning processes, which in turn could positively impact any educational system, as teachers who have gained international experiences will be braver, more tolerant and assess/value their home country differently” (Baedorf, 2015, p. 52). In this context, Leutwyler, Mantel & Tremp (2011) stress the importance of a professional exchange between schools or other educational institutions and universities of different countries. The systemic cooperation between different institutions is a worthy goal, which entails changes in practice, mind-set, the development of new work environments, but it needs time (EU COM, 2015).
- Especially today we need incorporating sustainability as a guiding principle in teaching mobility guidelines to ensure that all mobility-related activities and processes are conducted in an environmentally responsible and sustainable manner. This can be achieved through the adoption of green mobility principles, which prioritize the use of environmentally friendly modes of transportation, as well as the reduction of carbon emissions associated with mobility activities. Encouraging and supporting the realization of these principles should be a priority in order to ensure that teaching mobility does not contribute to the worsening of the global climate crisis. By taking a sustainable approach to teaching mobility, we can work towards minimizing the environmental impact of these activities, while simultaneously promoting responsible and ethical practices in the education sector (Council Resolution, 2021). It is important to promote the digitalization of administrative procedures for staff mobility at the highest level and to support the extension of already existing digital tools for student mobility. This would enable more efficient and streamlined processes, making it easier for teachers and students to participate in mobility programs. By leveraging digital tools and platforms, administrative tasks related to mobility can be simplified, saving time and resources for all parties involved. Additionally, a digital approach would facilitate the sharing of information and data across different institutions, enabling a more seamless and integrated experience for all stakeholders (Council Resolution, 2021).

Giving credit for international activities, transnational education or inward and outward mobility to increase the number of role models with respect to teaching and learning in an internationally diverse context seems to be another important aspect to motivate student teachers going abroad (Elsner & Worek, 2016). Initiatives such as the ERASMUS+ focus on ITE/CPD can contribute to the development of teachers as change agents, promoting the values of European citizenship and supporting the

ongoing process of improving the quality of education systems and outcomes, as well as promoting internationalization and mobility processes.

This in turn could lead to a simplification of accreditation and recognition procedures, without diminishing the need for quality assurance, which is essential to ensure that Teacher Education and training systems remain of high quality, despite any structural changes, and relevant to the needs of European education and outcomes in general.

Conclusion

Schools have the task to provide top-level education to all its students. However, what does this entail? “Undoubtedly there is much we don’t know. What might be competences or knowledge that are fundamental and enduring, such that they can serve society long beyond the 21st century? In what ways might we need to think differently about what we now define as learning or worthwhile knowing? And consequently, what would we need to teach – and how – to prepare young people for the unknown, but inevitable, future?” (Goodwin, 2019).

What we do know is that the increasing diversity of cultures, languages, and values, as well as the shortage of teachers in Europe, require strategic interventions by Ministries of Education and providers of Teacher Education. Effective teaching requires educators to possess a high level of intercultural competencies, gender sensitivity and interdisciplinary skills. Additionally, subject-specific vocabulary should be used when it conveys the meaning more precisely than a similar non-technical term. These abilities enable teachers to bridge gaps and mediate between different perspectives, cultures, policies and religions.

In 2013, Lenzen stated that only teachers with international experience would be able to prepare their students for the opportunities, risks, and uncertainties of a globalized society. According to Mizzi & O’Brien-Klewchuk (2016) teachers who go abroad enlarge their “awareness to the social, economic, political, and cultural variances across the globe.” One further advantage of transnational mobility of teachers is the experience being in contact with a different education system with different teaching draughts, methods and organizations (European Commission, 2015). Therefore, it is highly recommended that future and current teachers receive systemic support to acquire intercultural competencies, especially through an intense exchange of knowledge and practise already during their Initial Teacher Education. It seems to be crucial that they reflect on their professional experiences to maximize the benefits of these intercultural encounters. For those who cannot participate in international programs (virtually or physically), alternatives close to

or at home should be provided. Every effort should be made to ensure that student teachers, just as teachers and teacher educators can develop their intercultural skills and knowledge. Virtual stays abroad often serve to prepare or supplement physical stays abroad, but they also potentially offer the option of gaining international study experience without physically leaving your home country. They may therefore have the potential to provide groups of students with international experiences, who, for certain reasons, are not able to physically go abroad (DAAD, 2023) and are a welcome tool in the current critical discussion on climate change and concerns in connection with travelling.

As outlined above, mobility does make a difference as an essential component of professional lifelong learning, enabling individuals to gain new perspectives, experiences, and knowledge from diverse cultural and intellectual contexts. This kind of learning can be facilitated by university partnerships, which can provide opportunities for students, teachers, and researchers to engage in international exchanges, joint research projects, and other forms of cooperation. This can help foster the development of reflective practitioners and teachers who are increasingly committed to research in the context of a shared sense of Europeanness.

Thus, future teachers, educators and teacher educators should be highly aware of the relevance of international experiences and be determined to improve systemic and structural necessities related to recognition and career advantages to make this professional element more attractive. New teaching and learning arrangements should be developed with a focus on student-centredness and cooperation to foster strong relationships among all participants. Besides that, it is important to consider the social and ecological impact of international mobility and develop sustainable solutions to combat climate change while offering creative alternatives. These considerations should be viewed as a snapshot, as digital formats and technological possibilities are rapidly evolving. The discussion should focus on strategic questions related to international cooperation, internationalization goals and partnership networks. Barriers to inclusive participation should be identified and addressed to ensure equitable access to international education and research opportunities.

Concepts of “mobility” should continuously be reassessed in the tension between physical encounters and virtual worlds. As mobility alone cannot guarantee the expansion of individual and intercultural competencies, it can, however, contribute to a different view on the world.

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