

Erasmus+ Student Mobility at the University of Patras... for prospective European educators

Andreas Vasilopoulos¹, Afroditi Giannoulia²
University of Patras

Abstract

This paper is an investigation into the mobility experience of Erasmus+ incoming students at the University of Patras. Conducted within the framework of the thematic issue of the ACADEMIA Journal, it sought to identify the factors that motivate prospective European teachers to select University of Patras as a destination for their academic pursuits. Additionally, it sought to assess the impact of Erasmus+ incoming mobility, both for the students and for the university itself. A total of 16 semi-structured interviews were conducted during the autumn of 2024, with incoming Erasmus+ students at Departments of the University of Patras awarding qualifications potentially providing access to the teaching profession -e.g. Departments of Education, Philosophy, Mathematics, Chemistry etc. It may be noted that the findings of this study are consistent with, or indeed extend, the findings of the international literature on the issues raised. In particular, a notable finding of the study is that students primarily select a destination country rather than a specific university. Furthermore, it appears that they calculate the cost of living based on their city of choice. In consideration of the impact of academic studies, it is imperative to emphasize the significance of enhancing students' cognitive understanding in novel subjects with a view to facilitating progression to the ensuing academic level, but also underscore the challenges emerged in relation to the delivery of studies to incoming students. Such findings have demonstrated a significant margin for the formulation of proactive policies for the university and the city of Patras. Finally, examining the phenomenon of incoming student mobility during its progression and in situ seems to have yielded invaluable results, providing a potential model for future research on this issue.

Keywords

Erasmus+, Mobility, Higher Education Policies, Internationalization, Teacher Education.

¹ Ass. Professor, MaHep, Dept. of Educational Sciences and Social Work, University of Patras, andreasv@upatras.gr

² Greek Languages and Culture Lab., MaHep, University of Patras, afgiannoul@upnet.gr

Introduction

Since the 1950s, the field of scholarly research has focused on the cross-border movements of students in higher education. The study of the mobility of academic staff was not until the 1990s when it began to be researched along with the increase in the transnational movements of administrative staff (Scott, 2015). Furthermore, other scholars (Gunter & Raghuram, 2018; Jöns, 2018) laid emphasis on academic mobilities that include materialities, such as infrastructures, resources, equipment, and immaterialities, such as ideas, knowledge and skills. In light of these developments, the term "international academic mobility" appears to be most appropriate to describe the cross-border movement of academic and administrative staff, in addition to students, coupled with materials and immaterialities in higher education contexts. These mobilities may be short-term, medium-term, or long-term; physical or virtual; and one-directional or reciprocal (Shen et al., 2022, pp. 1317–1320). Relevant concepts such as scientific mobility, faculty mobility, researcher mobility, and student mobility may continue to be utilized in the relevant literature (Vassilopoulos et al., 2021; Pirgiotaki, 2022). However, it is essential to restrict their application within the context of a terminology that is undergoing rapid expansion, characterized by increasing complexity, multidimensionality and ambiguity.

Erasmus+ student mobility, in this study, represents only a fraction of the broader phenomenon of international academic mobility. It corresponds to *credit mobility*³ concerning students⁴ who embark on short-term⁵, organized, international educational pursuits in (European) countries other than their own in the context of the Erasmus+ program (Vasilopoulos & Pirgiotaki, 2024; Vassilopoulos et al., 2021).

On the occasion of the present thematic issue of *ACADEMIA* journal, this study explores the motivations of prospective European educators for choosing the University

³ As opposed to the term *degree mobility* pertaining to the purpose of international student mobility. Degree mobility incorporates free movers embarking on long-term mobilities in pursuit of a degree. Students who originate, mainly, from Asia, Africa, and Latin America enter the higher education systems of the United States, Europe, Australia, and Russia and Canada. Mobility among students enrolled in a program of studies developed through collaborative efforts between universities in multiple countries may be classified under either of the categories (Vasilopoulos & Pirgiotaki, 2024).

⁴ In all three cycles of studies, graduate & postgraduate.

⁵ The Erasmus program has historically provided support for student mobility, contingent upon the duration of the period abroad equaling or exceeding three months. In recent years, a minimum of 15 credits has been required for study plans within the ECTS scheme, which comprises 60 credits for an academic year (Teichler, 2017).

of Patras⁶ as an Erasmus+ destination and assesses the impact of incoming Erasmus mobility, focusing on students and the University. The study's emphasis on prospective teachers as well as their experience of mobility *during the program* sets it apart from conventional research in this field, as it seeks to capture the nuances of the incoming Erasmus+ mobility experience as they unfold on a topic that critical information is missing⁷ (<https://www.eaie.org/resource/mobility-teacher-education-plea-figures.html>, accessed in 13.08.2025).

Erasmus+ Student Mobility: motivation and impact

The Erasmus program has been intertwined with student mobility ever since its introduction in 1987⁸ (Feyen & Krzaklewska, 2013). During the period 1995-2006, it was incorporated into the Socrates Program and, during the period 2007-2013, as a separate action of the Lifelong Learning program. From 2004 to 2013, the program known as "Erasmus Mundus" was tasked with the objective of endowing European higher education with a global dimension. Since 2014, the Erasmus+ has functioned as an umbrella program, with the objective of serving the EU's contemporary objectives. The actions incorporated the Erasmus+ program, have served two different and sometimes conflicting sets of objectives, namely, to achieve the culture-based goal of the Europeanization of (higher) education, foster a sense of European identity and citizenship, and to serve the needs of the economy of knowledge and lifelong learning⁹ (González et al., 2011; Vasilopoulos & Pirgiotaki, 2024). Moreover, extant international

⁶ The University of Patras was founded in the city of Patras in western Greece in 1964, and it began operating in the 1966–67 academic year. The institution has contributed significantly to the decentralization of academic education in Greece. The university stands as the third largest in Greece in terms of the size of its student body, the expertise of its faculty members and administrative personnel, the scope of its academic departments, and the accreditation of its student degrees. The University of Patras comprises 31 departments, encompassing a wide array of sectors and, consequently, a diverse range of disciplines. These departments operate 161 laboratories and 17 fully equipped clinics. The institution boasts numerous research, teaching, and training links, facilitating opportunities for successful collaboration with institutions and research centers worldwide (<https://www.upatras.gr/en/university/about/profile/>, access in 10.06.2025).

⁷ Springob & Veldscholten (2019) argue that the issue of mobility in teacher training comprises an understudied item on the internationalisation research agenda raising concerns, inter alia, about prospective teachers access to international experiences, and their impact on their intercultural sensitivity (<https://www.eaie.org/resource/mobility-teacher-education-plea-figures.html>, accessed in 13.08.2025).

⁸ It is important to bear in mind that international student mobility was very low before the inception of the Erasmus Program (González et al., 2011).

⁹ Indeed, this has been the primary function of European policies on mobility in European programs since 1976: the establishment of the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1976, the promotion of the European dimension in the 1990s, the enhancement of the international attractiveness and internationalization of higher education institutions after 2000, and the achievement of the Union's economic objectives at any given time (Vasilopoulos et al. 2021).

literature has focused on the impact of mobility for students. Participation in the program has been demonstrated to foster the development of specific personal attributes in students¹⁰. In this regard, Teichler (2017) emphasizes learning through the experience of difference. He conceptualizes "learning from contrast" as a catalyst for international understanding, enhancing reflective thinking, and fostering the development of academic and general skills, as well as various horizontal skills that are functional at the professional level —i.e., employability. The relationship between participation in mobility and employability, however, is a contentious one. The literature acknowledges that the importance of mobility's effects in this field is related to the specificities of the Erasmus student profile, as evidenced by the Mathew effect (Cairns et al., 2017). In any event, engagement in mobility should not be regarded as a conduit for expeditious career advancement or a "gateway to super-careers". Rather, it is a valuable opportunity for enhancing students' work readiness, particularly in an international context¹¹ (López-Duarte et al., 2022). Erasmus+ is of pivotal significance to European higher education institutions and their international partners as well. Erasmus+ mobility facilitates the internationalization and enhancement of educational offerings by institutions, and it is imperative for enhancing the quality of education and facilitating mutual learning on a broad range of subjects. Higher education institutions assess the Erasmus+ program's mobility actions positively, both for intra-European and third country exchanges. Furthermore, the latter is likely to promote inclusion and equity with regard to existing and emerging institutional and national policies in program and partner countries. However, the funding rules need to be made clearer, assessed properly, and the program management improved, especially with regard to digital tools (European University Association (EUA), 2025). Finally, exchange programs and, particularly, the Erasmus+, hold economic and cultural impact at the regional, and national levels (Shen et al., 2022). International students do contribute to the domestic tourism industry. Moreover, youth, student and educational travel is becoming a stable ongoing industry that might

¹⁰ Teamwork, self-confidence, problem-solving skills, self-organization, time management and planning, critical thinking, creativity, tolerance, understanding of others, empathy, responsibility, interpersonal and intercultural communication, language skills are some of the most frequently mentioned in the relevant literature (Vassilopoulos et al., 2021).

¹¹ In a similar vein, it has been posited that the anticipated, prospective, career-level advantages, while recognized as substantial, do not appear to be predominantly sought after by mobile students, except for those transitioning for an internship period (Deakin, 2014). As Erasmus students engage in shorter mobility periods than students seeking a full international degree, it is postulated that their motives are potentially less oriented toward professional and more toward personal growth and other benefits, which are not harmonized with the original objectives of Erasmus mobility (González et al., 2011).

outperform leisure and business tourism in terms of its annual growth rate (Lesjak et al., 2015). Notably, extant research found that networks built through mobility can have a lasting impact on the host institution, industry, and the country of study (Shen et al., 2022).

Evidently, research on Erasmus+ student mobility are grounded in multiple research fields and utilize diverse theoretical lenses (Shen et al., 2022). The push–pull model remains a dominant theory in the current literature¹². Several theories attempt to explain the process and outcome of mobility. Many studies adopted cultural psychological or sociological perspectives to explore the adaptation or cultural interaction of internationally mobile students. Studies from a social stratification perspective have examined the impact of class and gender on the opportunities, willingness and outcomes of Erasmus+ student mobility¹³. The social capital theory has also been used to examine the relationships formed, maintained or ended during mobility (Papakota & Mouratoglou, 2024). However, few attempts have been made to explore the factors that influence Erasmus+ students' decisions regarding their host country of choice once they have made the decision to relocate. Gonzalez et al. (2011), Lesjak et al. (2015) highlighted a multitude of factors exerting a significant influence on the matter. These factors include country size, cost of living, distance, educational background, the quality of universities, the host country's language, and climate. Notably, despite the financial support provided by the EU and other institutions, cost-of-living differences and geographical distance remain significant factors in explaining Erasmus mobility patterns. In the context of language acquisition, language is not merely a hindrance but rather an opportunity for mobile students to learn or improve a major spoken foreign language, especially in situations where knowledge is lacking. The Erasmus+ student mobility program appears to favor Mediterranean countries,

¹² The factors that precipitate the decision of students to pursue their academic studies in foreign countries are initiated within the geographical confines of their respective home countries -push factors. Pull factors are defined as factors that operate within the host country, thereby rendering it comparatively more attractive than other potential destinations. In the end, it is a combination of both forces that explain student mobility, either international or in the context of the Erasmus program (González et al., 2011).

¹³ The number of students participating in mobility programs corresponds to less than 20% of the student population in the EHEA. As indicated by Brandenburg et al. (2015), a problematic aspect of the program over time has been its access, particularly for students with low socioeconomic status. Mobility concerns a minority of HE students, who, in any case, can enjoy a more comfortable lifestyle (Ballatore & Ferde, 2013; Ballatore & Stavrou, 2017). Participation in the program is associated with a higher probability of originating from families with above-average income, as well as with parents who hold university degrees and occupy high-status professions. These students are also more likely to have traveled abroad and to possess a more extensive knowledge of foreign languages compared to non-mobile students (Vasilopoulos & Pirgiotaki, 2023).

which are renowned for their favorable climates. This outcome may also indicate the leisure activities that are intertwined with the program. It is evident that providing the domestic student population with information regarding the experiences of previous Erasmus students could potentially contribute to an enhancement in mobility flows (González et al., 2011).

Research specifically on prospective teacher mobility, finally, has found that only a negligible number of students -especially primary school education and STEM subjects- undertake international study opportunities as part of their academic pursuits. The field is under-studied and reliable data is necessary to generate a comprehensive overview enabling the delineation of a realistic future outlook (<https://www.eaie.org/resource/mobility-teacher-education-plea-figures.html>, accessed in 13.08.2025).

Based on the above, this study aims to examine Erasmus+ choice destination motivations and assess the impact of incoming Erasmus+ mobility, with a focus on students and the University of Patras. The following research questions have been posited:

- (a) What were the main determinants that influenced students' decision to select University of Patras as an Erasmus+ mobility destination?
- (b) What was the perceived impact of their study experience at the University of Patras?

Research Methodology

The value of qualitative research in elucidating issues pertaining to experience and motivation is a recognized tenet among scholars in the domain of research methodology (O'Connor & Joffe, 2020). This is the primary rationale behind the selection of qualitative methodology for this study¹⁴.

A total of 16 semi-structured interviews¹⁵ were conducted during the autumn of 2024, with incoming Erasmus+ students, 1st and 2nd cycle (two students), at Departments of the University of Patras awarding qualifications potentially providing access to the teaching profession -e.g. Departments of Education, Philosophy, Mathematics, Chemistry etc. Eleven interviewees were female and the other five were

¹⁴ The study presents part of the findings of a larger research endeavor on the lived experiences of incoming Erasmus+ students at the University of Patras. The selection of findings presented is in line with the content of the thematic issue of the journal *ACADEMIA*.

¹⁵ The semi-structured interviews were selected due to their capacity to furnish comprehensive descriptions, unveiling details that are not immediately perceptible (Babbie, 2018; Bryman, 2016).

male. Three students originated from Germany, eight students from Romania, France, Spain and Poland respectively and the others from the Netherlands, Belgium, Italy, Ireland and Bulgaria. The transcription of each interview was conducted immediately upon its completion, and a reflective diary was maintained throughout the research process (Issari & Pourkos, 2015) and was complemented by a meticulous analysis and coding of the data. An inter-coder reliability check¹⁶ was conducted to ensure the reliability of the coding process (O'Connor & Joffe, 2020). The organization and classification of the information was facilitated by the utilization of the Atlas.ti software. Thematic analysis was identified as the optimal approach for the data analysis (Tsiolis, 2018) to identify discursive trends organized into categories. The process of analysis consisted of a series of steps to deeply explore, organize, and interpret the information. The initial step entailed a comprehensive review of each interview to identify the predominant themes and subjects discussed, which subsequently served as the foundation for the categories of analysis. These categories emerged as a result of the content of the interviews. The subsequent step entailed the coding of the information into the appropriate categories. In the third, fourth, and fifth steps, the coding was revisited to eliminate duplications and contradictions, merge or divide the categories into subcategories whenever necessary, and ensure that each unit of sense was allocated into the proper category/subcategory (Tsiolis, 2018).

In addressing the validity and reliability of the present research study, Filstead (1970) argues that the emphasis is placed on the degree of consistency between the observations made with the tools utilized. Yardley (2000), regarding validity and reliability, sets the following four criteria for data collection and analysis, in qualitative research: consistency, systematicity, transparency and coherence. The research process was carried out in a consistent and systematic manner, engaging and deepening the investigation of the issue at hand. The collection and analysis of data were related to the adequacy rather than the quantity of the sample. A sufficient sample yielded "saturated data" and "completeness" in interpretation and capturing all views at all levels of data analysis. The concepts of transparency and coherence were found to be associated with the clarity and persuasiveness of the argumentation. The reliability of the findings is

¹⁶ Inter-coder reliability check is indicative of the robustness of the coding process, which provides a structural foundation for the subsequent analysis. A primary benefit of this approach is that it enhances the systematicity, communicability, and transparency of the coding process. Furthermore, it fosters reflexivity and dialogue within research teams. Additionally, it assists in satisfying diverse audiences by demonstrating the trustworthiness of the research (O'Connor & Joffe, 2020, p. 11).

ensured by presenting the interview extracts, where readers can discern the coding and meaning patterns. The coding and thematic meaning patterns demonstrate a convincing narrative, thereby ensuring the validity and reliability of the research. During the research process, particular attention was paid to ethical issues (Isari & Pourkos, 2015).

The present study's emphasis on the experience of mobility during the Erasmus+ program distinguishes it from conventional research in this field. This study's objective is not to retrospectively examine the experience, but rather to capture the nuances of the experience as they unfold. Nevertheless, this does not negate a fundamental limitation inherent in this type of research. It is acknowledged that there may be shifts in attitudes and perceptions, or augmentations in experiences, for a variety of reasons, in the time remaining until the conclusion of the students' mobility period. This should be regarded as one fundamental limitation of this type of mobility study. The second limitation pertains to the fact that the students within the sample, who are currently enrolled in the first and second cycles of their studies and represent a range of European countries, have not yet developed a clear professional identity. Consequently, the investigation into the repercussions of the mobility period on academic pursuits should be focused on students who may aspire to a career in teaching in the future, rather than on teachers - hindering a dedicated theoretically informed investigation to examine this aspect in greater depth. This constitutes a secondary constraint of this research with regard to the objectives of the ACADEMIA thematic issue.

Presentation of results

The subsequent sections present the results of the study conducted in interviews with 16 incoming Erasmus+ students at the University of Patras. The objectives of the present study, in the context of the ACADEMIA thematic issue were twofold: firstly, to examine Erasmus+ choice destination motivations, and secondly, to assess the impact of incoming Erasmus mobility, focusing on the students at the University of Patras.

Greece, and (the University of) Patras as Erasmus+ destinations

The present section is devoted to an examination of the factors that influence the decision of incoming Erasmus+ students to choose the University of Patras as their study destination. The findings are of particular interest in the context of this study, as incoming Erasmus+ students do not select the University itself as their mobility destination. This is evident from the interview data, which indicates a lack of awareness

or information regarding the University, *I just knew about the city of Patras, but I didn't know much about it, so I was not very familiar with the University* (Iv.B). A key factor in the selection of mobility destinations is the availability of study programs, *...I thought it was a really nice combination to combine biomed and linguistics together. That's why I'm also here* (K.N). *It was connected with this university because I really wanted to study near the ocean, near the sea because of my interests in geology... my university is near the mountains... so we don't have any classes on sea and the ocean. So, when I saw that I can study near the sea. That was like my reason to do that. I didn't know anything about the city of Patras before* (L.P). For a number of students, the University of Patras represents the sole viable option for study as a consequence of the institutional agreements concluded by the various departments, *I didn't get to choose that one. Actually, it's because my Faculty is partner Faculty with the Mathematics Faculty* (S.B). In a similar vein, the University of Patras provides a distinctive study opportunity for Erasmus+ students, providing for English-language instruction, under certain conditions *... Spain, Austria, Italy, France, Portugal* [were my primary destinations], *but they didn't had courses in English to be taught, and I search here in Greece* (C.R). Furthermore, positive relations between Erasmus+ Coordinators of partner Departments may also contribute to the University's reputation as a unique mobility destination in the minds of students, *It was my 3rd choice. And Patras... my University told me... Patras have a good relation with our University, then I have to choose it* (C.F).

Nevertheless, the factors that influence incoming Erasmus+ students to choose the University of Patras as a mobility destination are not limited to the aforementioned, *...well, I'm gonna be completely honest. Yes, basically, my priorities for Erasmus were not strictly based on curriculum* (En.I). The country of Greece is arguably a pivotal criterion when selecting a university as a mobility destination, and for a number of reasons. At the fundamental level, climate appears to exert a significant influence, *...we wanted to go somewhere where it's warmer than in Poland* (M.P), *I also living in a coldest city as Turin is. I wanted to get a little break from that and all* (En.I). The historical and cultural context of Greece is also a major criterion, *I was really excited to learn more, and also like just a place that's very rich in history and all the different archeological sites, something I'm really interested in. So I thought it was a perfect fit* (E.F). For a proportion of students, the selection of a university is also influenced by the

geographical location of the host country, ...*I chose Greece*¹⁷ *because the Italian University would be too expensive to live there. Romanian one is near the Ukraine border, so ... and Turkey was too far away* (L.P).

The selection of a university is influenced to a certain extent by financial incentives. It is a particularly interesting observation that the financial outlay required for a period of international mobility is not contingent upon the geographical location, but rather upon the specific city chosen for academic study! *And then I was kind of thinking about Greece, because culturally, it's just like more different than a lot of neighboring countries of Germany. So I didn't really want to go there. And also just looking at the prices in a lot of like major European cities. The cost of living is just very high* (Er.G), *Patras is very affordable for Erasmus students* (Iv.B). Finally, as the interviews show, the size of the city, ...*I knew I didn't want to do Athens or Thessaloniki, because those cities are like too big for me, and I would like to be a tourist there, not a student. So then, my leftover choices were Patras and Heraklion, and I really wanted to come to Patras because of the area. And because I had read about other people's experiences here, and they were almost no, all of them were positive* (M.P), as well as the location of the destination city, *I used to go to like meet a lot of Greek people when I was really young, and then I always wanted to go to Greece for a while, and also the landscape of Greece was really interesting to me, because where I live it's really flat lands. And then Patra had the mountain, the sea, like everything together, and that's...* (A.G) has been demonstrated to have a significant impact on the selection of a university.

However, there are also unexpected factors, *I was always really interested in living in Greece for a short while, because my mother is Greek Orthodox like* (MB.G), that may influence the choice of study destination for incoming Erasmus+ students.

Impact of studies at the University of Patras... for prospective European Educators

In order to better assess the perceived impact of incoming Erasmus+ students' experience it is first necessary to briefly refer to the modes of study of these students at the University of Patras.

In this regard, the present study identified two main modes of studies for incoming Erasmus+ students at Patras University. In the case of English language

¹⁷ The particular student originated from Poland.

instruction, some lecturers assume responsibility for guiding students in the preparation of an assignment, ...*however, signing up for classes was a little bit of an issue, because all the classes are in Greek. So the way I have classes is just private meetings with my professors* (K.N). The frequency of communication may be established at the outset or modified in accordance with the student's progress. The delivery of this program of studies may be conducted in person, distance learning, or asynchronously (e-mail), *So I have to meet my professors once a week, and they gave me, there's like either homework or we discuss some papers, or like information I had to read at home, and then they either give me homework to make for the next week, or they already discussed with me what my final assignment will be, and then they can just guide me towards that assignment.* (K.N). Conversely, other faculty members convene smaller groups of Erasmus+ students, ensuring regular instruction of their course in English, ...*I appreciate that the professors made courses for us, with the Erasmus students, only in English* (G.R).

In consideration of the aforementioned points, it may be posited that some incoming Erasmus+ students at the University of Patras may harbor a degree of skepticism with regard to their selection of study destination, ...*well, I mean as far as academically, I'm at a disadvantage compared to my classmates that stayed at home. Honestly. Probably mostly because also, I'm not really talking to the professors, and ... I'm not really making connections, I mean so academically. I don't think it's gonna get me a real advantage,. It's not. It's not even a disadvantage, though* (En.I).

However, it is acknowledged that there are a number of benefits associated with this approach. The apprehension of two languages, namely Greek¹⁸, *the Greek language that I study. This one will be helpful, too, because I have a minimum knowledge of the language itself, and you don't know when you need it* (C.R), and English, ...*also studies in English. I think I like it. Give me a lot of confidence to speak, and to... you know. I*

¹⁸ The contribution of the Greek Language and Culture Lab is significant towards this direction. It offers two types of courses to the Erasmus+ Incoming Students of the University of Patras: a) Language courses that cover basic knowledge of Greek (levels A1 and A2), for communicative purposes. No prior knowledge of Greek is required, b) Greek culture and civilization courses that introduce the students to some landmarks of the Greek civilization in ancient and modern times, and in relation to the history of Patras. The language courses are funded by Erasmus program. Both courses are free of charge and they are offered in the winter and spring semesters during the academic year (<https://greeklab.upatras.gr/teaching-programmes/erasmus/>, access in 11.07.2025).

we have to read the articles in articles in English, in my study. And now I feel like I'm quite confident in just managing with new topics (G.R) is one such benefit.

The University of Patras's mode of study, which involves the establishment of small study groups among Erasmus+ students, is not without its weaknesses. Primarily, it does not facilitate active interaction between Greek students and incoming Erasmus+ students....*I feel like I met more Italians than I've met Greek people... (S.B)* and ought to give rise to reflection, ...*I think I am learning new things, but I think it would be a lot better if I could like actually attend classes (S.B)*. But it seems that, at the same time, it excites some other students, ...*when I have classes with I don't know two other people, or three, not like with twenty others like in Poland. I feel like my knowledge is more recognized, and everything. So, I feel like quite confident in that. And yeah, so I think that is the best part also, just learning... (L.P)*. In this regard, students acknowledge that their experience at the University of Patras exposes them to significant, ...*I am learning new things, and I am learning things in a different way than I would learn them in Belgium. So I think it's always great to be exposed to new ways of learning and to new content (M.G)* and useful new experiences regarding their studies, ... *like this experience of learning, how different are the countries and how we can manage to learn about things. For example, I'm going to compare it with my country. The things we're doing in Spain that maybe change from some things that I'm learning in Greece. I'm learning also so much activities for doing, for my career in Spain for my degree and I'm very, very happy with experience in the University of Patras (A.S)*.

Nevertheless, the most significant benefit that Erasmus+ students recognize from their studies at the University of Patras pertains to the expansion of their academic interests into new fields, *academically, because I had, like an insight into such a different topic than what I normally study ... and yeah to diversify my studies. It's also nice, I think (M.F)*, or the refinement of their understanding in pertinent academic disciplines, *I definitely think so just because it also opened my horizon, not only socially, but also to a different field of study. And even though I maybe won't go into philosophy. I think it's just very much like deepening my understanding of just like the cultural philosophy as a whole. So I think academically, it is very helpful (E.G)*. In a similar manner, the identification of potential areas of specialization for the continuation of their postgraduate-level studies in subjects encountered at the University of Patras is facilitated, ...*the minor here is used as a specialization to see what you like in order for your masters, and I do like what I study here (K.N)*.

In summary, incoming Erasmus+ students, notwithstanding the challenges they may encounter, which are not the focus of this study, offer a predominantly positive evaluation of their experience at the University of Patras. It could be argued that the following extract provides a comprehensive overview of the conclusions that emerged from the deliberations with the relevant parties regarding their perceived impact of studies at the University of Patras, *I think it is an amazing experience, and most people should experience that in their lives. It's not just having fun going out. It's also very good for the academic experience we get to learn new things we get to learn in a foreign language, which is very useful nowadays. Also, most of the time there are different subjects in different universities. So we get to experience something that we don't have back home and for me, I get to do my thesis here, which is very interesting, and I'm doing in the foreign language. Which I find very useful as well. And yes, I think Erasmus is an amazing experience* (Iv.B).

Concluding Remarks

The present study, conducted within the framework of the thematic issue of the ACADEMIA Journal, sought to identify the factors that motivate prospective European teachers to select the University of Patras as a destination for their academic pursuits. Additionally, it sought to assess the impact of Erasmus+ incoming mobility, both for the students, prospective educators, and for the university itself.

It can be argued that the findings of this study are consistent with, or indeed extend, the findings of the international literature on the issues raised.

With regard to the selection of the University of Patras as a study destination, it is noteworthy that Erasmus+ students tend to prioritize their country or city of destination over the specific university when opting for their place of study. This finding appears to extend the existing literature on this topic. Climatic, historical or cultural factors, as well as the location of the host country in relation to the country of origin, appear to influence the choice of the host country or city (González et al., 2011). The same applies to the cost of living. As this study has highlighted, however, this is calculated based on the city of destination and not the country as a whole. The host university may also play an essential role in the choice of destination for studies for various different reasons according to our research results. The density of institutional agreements under Erasmus+, the quality of cooperation and the study options offered by

the host institution appear to contribute to or determine the decisions of incoming students.

In consideration of the impact of academic studies at the University of Patras on prospective European educators, it is imperative to underscore the significance of enhancing students' cognitive understanding in novel subjects and deepening their comprehension of other, already familiar subjects, with a view to facilitating progression to the ensuing academic level. One should bear in mind that his particular field has not been adequately researched. In this sense this study's contribution on this issue should be emphasized. Furthermore, students recognize the importance of apprehending two foreign languages. However, they also pay close attention to the significance of exposure to novel methods of educational provision.

With regard to the latter, a matter that should be addressed with a degree of skepticism is the enhancement of the interaction between Erasmus+ students and Greek students in the university during their studies. The intricacies of the Greek language have posed considerable challenges, and the absence of English-language courses for Greek students has resulted in the establishment of two distinct student populations that function in parallel. These challenges have significant ramifications for the university, including *inter alia* an additional workload for lecturers. It is imperative to acknowledge that this 'choice', which is not an institutional policy, hinders the realization of the Erasmus+ program's objectives, particularly with regard to the University of Patras's internationalization at home and abroad efforts. However, it is not possible to explore this issue in greater depth within the present context.

The present study has demonstrated that a significant margin for the formulation of proactive policies exists for the university and the city¹⁹. It is imperative that these policies aspire to establish mobility as a collective goal, thereby facilitating the attainment of mutual benefits. It is evident that, at this particular juncture, the aforementioned entity does not appear to be extant. Potential strategies for achieving this objective include the establishment of targeted institutional agreements with foreign institutions. Additionally, this paper turns the attention to the significance of the international promotion of the city. It underscores the policies needed to be employed

¹⁹ On this issue we should also acknowledge the work of Simoni & Georgoudaki (2020) and Georgoudaki et al (2025).

by the local government and relevant tourist boards, in conjunction with the university, to promote the city to a European audience.

In conclusion, a final comment on the choice of research made in this study is necessary. The decision to examine the phenomenon of incoming student mobility in situ and during its progression has exposed a number of issues and nuances that might not have been raised under other circumstances, if mediated by a temporal distance. Consequently, it is imperative to persist in the examination of this phenomenon from this particular vantage point. Nevertheless, this fact does not negate a key limitation that such a research option poses. It is acknowledged that there exist attitudes and perceptions that may be differentiated, as well as experiences that may be completed, for a variety of reasons, in the time remaining until the conclusion of the student mobility period. This should be regarded as one fundamental limitation in this type of mobility study.

It is evident, based on the extant literature, that research on this issue is not exhaustive. Instead, it should be enriched by shedding light on more and more aspects of the process of policy formulation and implementation of university institutions at a time when their strategic plan must be considered particularly important for their position in a particularly competitive international environment.

References

- Babbie, E. (2018). *Introduction to Social Research*. Kritiki (in Greek).
- Ballatore, M., & Ferde, M. K. (2013). The erasmus programme in France, Italy and the United Kingdom: Student mobility as a signal of distinction and privilege. *European Educational Research Journal*, 12(4), 525–533. <https://doi.org/10.2304/eeerj.2013.12.4.525>.
- Ballatore, M., & Stavrou, S. (2017). Internationalisation policy as a (re)producer of social inequalities: The case of institutionalised student mobility. *Rassegna Italiana Di Sociologia*, 58(2), 251–281. <https://doi.org/10.1423/87309>.
- Brandenburg, U., Obdulia, T., & Vancea, M. (2015). Mobility Matters: The ERASMUS Impact Study. *International Higher Education*, 82, 5–7. <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-4666-8838-4.ch011>.
- Bryman, A. (2016). *Social Research Methods*. Gutenberg (in Greek).
- Cairns, D., Cuzzocrea, V., Briggs, D., & Veloso, L. (2017). *The Consequences of*

Mobility: Reflexivity, Social Inequality and the Reproduction of Precariousness in Highly Qualified Migration. Palgrave Macmillan.

Deakin, H. (2014). The drivers to Erasmus work placement mobility for UK students. *Children's Geographies*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14733285.2013.851063>.

European University Association (EUA). (2025). *Use and impact of the Erasmus + programme (2021-27) at higher education institutions Survey report and recommendations* (Issue May).

Feyen, B., & Krzaklewska, E. (2013). The ERASMUS Programme and the 'Generation ERASMUS.' In *The ERASMUS Phenomenon - Symbol of a new European Generation?* (Peter Lang). <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781107415324.004>.

Georgoudaki, E., Stavropoulos, S., & Skuras, D. (2025). Regional Pathways to Internationalization: The Role of Erasmus+ in European HEIs. *Urban Science*, 9(5). <https://doi.org/10.3390/urbansci9050144>.

González, C. R., Mesanza, R. B., & Mariel, P. (2011). The determinants of international student mobility flows: An empirical study on the Erasmus programme. *Higher Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-010-9396-5>.

Gunter, A., & Raghuram, P. (2018). International study in the global south: Linking institutional, staff, student and knowledge mobilities. *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, 16(2), 192–207.

Jöns, H. (2018). Boundary-crossing academic mobilities in glocal knowledge economies: New research agendas based on triadic thought. *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, 16(2), 151–161.

Lesjak, M., Juvan, E., Ineson, E. M., Yap, M. H. T., & Axelsson, E. P. (2015). Erasmus student motivation: Why and where to go? *Higher Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-015-9871-0>.

López-Duarte, C., Maley, J. F., & Vidal-Suárez, M. M. (2022). International mobility in higher education: students' attitude to international credit virtual mobility programs. *European Journal of Higher Education*, May, 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21568235.2022.2068637>.

O'Connor, C., & Joffe, H. (2020). Intercoder Reliability in Qualitative Research: Debates and Practical Guidelines. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 19, 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406919899220>.

Papakota, A., & Mouratoglou, N. (2024). The perceived impact of Erasmus+ learning mobility: European university students' views concerning their competences and

- employability. *Academia (Greece)*, 34, 76–105. <https://doi.org/10.26220/aca.4654>.
- Shen, W., Xu, X., & Wang, X. (2022). Reconceptualising international academic mobility in the global knowledge system: towards a new research agenda. *Higher Education*, 84(6), 1317–1342. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-022-00931-8>.
- Simoni, H., & Georgoudaki, E. (2020). The University of Patras, Greece, its city, and international students: insights from multiple cartographic perspectives. *European Planning Studies*, 28(2), 213–233. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09654313.2019.1632270>.
- Teichler, U. (2017). Internationalisation Trends in Higher Education and the Changing Role of International Student Mobility. *Journal of International Mobility*, N° 5(1), 177–216. <https://doi.org/10.3917/jim.005.0179>.
- Vasilopoulos, A., & Pirgiotaki, K. (2023). Greek University and Erasmus+ mobility: active (?) participation policies. *Combating Skills Mismatch in Education Exchanging Paradigms and Enhancing Skills Transferability for Combating Students' Skills Mismatch in Education, Rethymnon, 03-05 May 2023*.
- Vasilopoulos, A., & Pirgiotaki, K. (2024). Institutional Barriers to Mobility and the University: Policy Issues. *Futurity Education*, 4(4), 180–193. <https://doi.org/10.57125/fed.2024.12.25.12>.
- Vassilopoulos, A., Karachontziti, E., Kamarianos, I., & Nikolaou, G. (2021). Effects of Student Mobility: The case of Erasmus students at the University of Patras. *Internationalization of Higher Education*, 2, 37–53.
- Issari, F., & Pourkos, M. (2015). Qualitative Methodology of Research, www.kallipos.gr. https://repository.kallipos.gr/bitstream/11419/5826/4/15327_Isari-KOY.pdf (in Greek).
- Pirgioraki, K. (2022). Student Mobility and Recognition of Studies. *Academia*, 27–28, 258–286 (in Greek).
- Tsiolis, G. (2018). Research in Social Sciences. In Zaimakis, G (Ed.) *Theoretical and Methodological Contributions and Case Studies* Panepistimio Kritis (in Greek).