

Perception About the Mobility Experience of Students in Universities: A Descriptive Study

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Academic mobility is a manner to internationalize the academic curriculum to foster learners' integral development. This article aims to describe the perspective about foreign students' mobility experience in CECAR and about the interns that developed it abroad. This was a quantitative study with a descriptive scope, in which 88 students were surveyed. The results revealed that learners consider that the academic mobility contributed to fostering disciplinary competences and technological and investigative skills. The current research details the value of following up with the students once they return from their academic experience. They also acknowledge this strategy promotes a change in their viewpoints of the world.

Keywords: academic mobility, internationalization, tertiary education

INTRODUCTION

Academic mobility in tertiary education demonstrates curricular internationalization, besides being one of the manners in which universities foster personal and academic learners' development. It also promotes the competencies that will allow them to face the labor market within different cultural contexts, the taking as mentioned above into account that personnel selection and recruitment processes consider the needs of a globalized world. Therefore, they must consider multicultural competencies and values when assessing. In that sense, universities promote the tertiary students' exchange, research internships, as well as professors' participation with international networks and associations to motivate cooperation between

Universities; at the same time, to guarantee a quality education and a graduated profile that respond to social needs (Melchor y Solorzano, 2021).

This research paper shows, from the students' viewpoints, their mobility experiences out of Corporación Universitaria del Caribe- CECAR, it means with universities abroad, as well as informing about the mobility contribution to the academic and intercultural competencies acquisition. Around the universities' interest in sending students abroad, it cannot be ignored that there are many reasons why the majority of students do not apply to mobilities, among which are: lack of interest and time, the program costs, the country's language where they plan to make the exchange; which are aspects that Melchor y Solorzano (2021) consider that universities should have into account within both, the internationalization policy and the programs' socialization.

With that in mind, researchers such as Huang (2013) mention some students' motivations to make mobility abroad; which are found quality education and better labor opportunities, just as a better comprehension of culture, also argues that the international experience is understood by the employees, in a broad sense, as labor experience and learning from experience, which is one of the most valuable experiences. Thus the learner who makes mobility looks more attractive for them. In the same line, Aba (2016), agrees that mobility limitations include: economic, social, and cultural factors and language barriers, and also mobility costs in their home countries.

With regards to quality education, Paz, et al. (2022) holds that it is one of the dominant factors of making it; however mention others like the economic, political, cultural, language, family support and the ability to socialize; these issues are taken into account by students due to high costs of both, accommodation and studies in the target countries; as well as social and political stability of the country, just as the language in which courses are oriented since it defines the complexity of the learning process. The adjustment to a new country generates an imbalance in people because of the immense changes it brings, such as: new routines, new social relationships, and emotional attachments; thus is essential to count on supportive networks like friends, and family in their home country due to this feeling generates homesickness, which can arise a soon return to the country (Pérez, 2016).

In a research conducted by Aba (2016), it was found that tertiary learners from Turkey consider that academic mobility contributes to positive academic development, but also professional; notwithstanding, it was determined other aspects that are decisive in the motivation to make mobilities like the previous participation in intercultural experiences and in events, also having friends in other countries with a different culture. In the same line, Van Mol (2017) affirms that making mobility in another country is interesting for employees because it shows the students' commitment to human capital training and some of their own personality traits employees value.

On the principle of the previous basis, Van Mol (2017) found in his research first the existence of a positive correlation between the value that the employer gives to mobility and the percentage of persons that work in his/her company. Therefore, argues that when the employer has a meaningful background with students who have experienced mobility or international studies, there are more possibilities they can hire people with international expertise. Also, Sandes-Guimaraes et al. (2020), says that learners who experience international mobility perceive it as valuable and give higher importance to inter-university relations, to the alliances they can establish among themselves, and the relationships they build in the destination countries. Nevertheless, students that stay without international experience put more emphasis on the universities' infrastructure. Taking into consideration what found Sandes-Guimaraes et al. (2020) it is concluded that mobility programs influence how science, technology, and innovation are developed at Universities.

Melchor et al. (2021) in the investigation carried out with university students from Valle del Cauca, proves what was described by the abovementioned authors, first, that learners enrolled in international mobility due to their interest in learning about new cultures and new items about their professional carrers, just as evidenced that the mobility program let them to achieve outstanding skills to compete in the labor market within their contexts, as well as they acquired the competencies such as maturity, vision, enthusiasm for diversity and autonomy, which were expected by employers.

In addition to the preceding, the need to look for students' perceptions about their mobility experiences emerges from the lack of information that exists when researching about it. Similarly, universities in Latin

America provide indicators of internationalization but do not present detailed information about it; characteristics of the process nor provide data about students' perceptions on their academic and intercultural experiences. In that sense, it is essential to emphasize the results, process, and follow-up after the end of the mobility term (Otero, Giraldo, Sánchez, 2020).

Based on those mentioned above, this research paper aims to describe tertiary learners' perceptions of mobility experience in universities. First, a literature review about the academic mobility is presented in the introductory part and second, the methodology, results, discussion, and conclusion.

REFERENCE FRAMEWORK

Learners' Mobility

Students' mobility to anywhere around the world is one of the most significant aspects of internationalization in education. According to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) the European continent received approximately half of the 6 million students who carried out international mobility, of which only 13% were originally from the European region (UNESCO,2022). The above shows that Europe remains a relevant reference in student mobility (Echeverria and Lafont, 2018). In Latin America according to a study by the UNESCO International Institute for Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean (IESALC), before the pandemic by COVID-19, Latin America was not attractive for the realization of mobilities, in the year 2017, 38% of the mobilities were made in the same region, while the remaining was made to North America and Western Europe, likewise, it happens that the Caribbean and Latin America receives fewer students from outside the region, where around the 5 million students who mobilize around the world, only 3.5% choose as destination country a Latin American one (UNESCO, 2019).

The literature on academic mobility shows that the line of studies on this topic revolves around students' motivations to move to another country (Otero, 2019). An example of the above is the study of Bilecen and Van Mol (2017), who have addressed issues such as the value, scope, impediments, and discrepancies that academic mobility has and how this is connected to various inequalities of the social system at three levels such as macro, meso, and micro. In another research Van Mol (2017), is responsible for showing the significance between academic mobility and employers; meanwhile, in the Colombian Caribbean region, Echeverria and Lafonft (2018) have conducted research on the installed capacity to support academic mobility in universities in the Caribbean coast that are attached to the Colombian Network for the Internationalization of Higher Education RCI, as well as the incentives they give to students for the realization of incoming and outgoing mobility, countries where they receive more foreign students, most frequent types of mobility, among others.

The previous research are related to the concept of mobility, which for the Colombian Ministry of National Education (2009) is defined as "the movement of students, teachers and researchers between different higher education systems in the world through short stays, academic semesters, internships and double degree programs, among others." For its part, the Corporación Universitaria del Caribe CECAR (2016) specifies it as "the temporary stay of students of the Corporación Universitaria del Caribe - CECAR in another University Institution or national or foreign University or the enrolled students of these in CECAR, to take subjects or academic semesters in undergraduate or graduate programs. Likewise, that which is carried out for internships, research, attending congresses, seminars, courses, international or national meetings (or other temporary stays) of an academic or cultural nature".

Academic mobility is a process that should be followed up since this event allows identifying the perspective, emotions, and opinions that the student has of his experience. Making an assessment of the process by the student who is mobilized gives rise to improvements in the actions that are carried out around mobility, as well as the academic program and courses that they study during their stay (Ministry of National Education, 2015). As mentioned in the previous lines, inquiring about the mobility experience, following it up and allowing students to promote it from their experience is a valuable resource; therefore, this study attempts to contribute to that theoretical gap on the follow-up of academic mobility.

METHODOLOGY

The research on the perception that university students have of the mobility experience in universities adopts a quantitative design with descriptive scope because this approach allows the explanation of phenomena, the demonstration of theories, and the description of the object of study, in addition to showing the information as it is presented to the researcher; in this sense, it describes the situation of the phenomenon being studied at the time of evaluation (Hernández, Fernández and Baptista, 2014). In the research conducted, a description was made of the experience of mobility in higher education students from the students' perspective; it is noteworthy that the participants made incoming mobility in the Corporación Universitaria del Caribe CECAR and students of the same institution who made outgoing mobility. Based on the above, the study is descriptive because this type of study allows characterizing the phenomenon under study in subjects and communities, depending on the object of study. (Hernández, Fernández y Baptista, 2014).

The research was developed with eighty-eight participants who carried out incoming and outgoing mobility, who met the criteria of having carried out incoming mobility in CECAR or having been a student of the Corporation of face-to-face, distance, or virtual modality who had carried out outgoing mobility; these students were contacted by the Vice-Rector for Interinstitutional Relations, whereby e-mail they gave informed consent and responded to the Google questionnaire.

The technique used to collect information from the participants was the survey, which addresses the topic under study through questions about the subject to be measured. This questionnaire had open and closed questions, the latter being dichotomous and polytomous (Ñaupas, Valdivia, Palacios, and Romero 2018). Accordingly, the questionnaire was oriented, as suggested by Otero et al. (2019) to inquire about the student's academic experience in a different educational environment, in a different culture and social context, as well as the formation of friendships and networks with students from different places, and the satisfaction of their expectations after returning from the exchange.

The instrument included a section on socio-demographic aspects to characterize the population. It asked for the participants' names, age, the university where they completed the program, country of origin, year and type of mobility. It then continued with questions about their perceptions, as students, of the mobility experience in higher education institutions (HEIs).

The questions that inquired about the mobility experience were related to whether the mobility had contributed to the development of their competencies, abilities, capacities, and skills for disciplinary development, as well as whether it had allowed them to learn appropriate information and communication technologies, as well as office tools, such as Excel, SPSS, Atlas.ti; in the same sense, whether the stay had allowed them to generate products that supported their disciplinary action (programs, projects, action plans or strategic plans) and contributed to strengthening their creativity, organization, critical and prospective capacity for the development of their disciplinary action. Personal factors were also studied, such as whether it contributed to the improvement of interpersonal skills, the development of knowledge, constructs or theories specific to their discipline, and the level of satisfaction with the processes, performances, and products generated during the mobility carried out. Concerning the intercultural competencies acquired through mobility, we asked whether the mobility allowed the recognition of the cultural diversity of the territory during their stay, as well as a change in the perception of the country visited and the exchange of cultural knowledge and the development of competences such as cultural sensitivity, cosmopolitan citizenship and integration of knowledge.

The analysis of the information was carried out using the statistical program SPSS to find frequencies and percentages of each variable studied and also to cross-check the information of the incoming and outgoing students for each question.

RESULTS

The target population was between 21 and 33 years of age. Still, the largest number of mobilities made are between the ages of 22 to 27 years, where most of the surveyed population is in Colombia (64.8%),

followed by Mexico (20%). In that sense, the university of completion of the undergraduate of the participants was CECAR and secondly, the Autonomous University of Tlaxcala (8%). This population was made up of outgoing mobility students from CECAR (68.2%) and 31.8% for incoming mobility at the university, which were executed between the years 2013 to 2021, but in the years where the largest number was concentrated was 2017 to 2029. For more information, see Table 1.

TABLE 1
SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

Sociodemographic characteristics		Frequency	Percentage
Age	21	3	3,4
	22	9	10,2
	23	20	22,7
	24	13	14,8
	25	9	10,2
	26	13	14,8
	27	10	11,4
	28	3	3,4
	29	1	1,1
	30	3	3,4
	31	2	2,3
	32	1	1,1
	33	1	1,1
	Total	88	100,0
Country of Origin	Argentina	4	4,5
	Colombia	57	64,8
	Spain	1	1,1
	Mexico	18	20,5
	Paraguay	2	2,3
	Peruvian	6	6,8
	Total	88	100,0
University	Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla	2	2,3
	CECAR	64	72,7
	Universidad Autónoma de Tlaxcala	7	8,0
	Universidad Vizcaya de las Américas	1	1,1
	Universidad Autónoma de Ciudad Juárez.	1	1,1
	Universidad Autónoma de Madrid	1	1,1
	Universidad Católica de Santa María	1	1,1
	Universidad Cesar Vallejo	2	2,3
	Universidad de Guadalajara	4	4,5
	Universidad de Sonora	1	1,1
	Universidad Michoacana de San Nicolás de Hidalgo.	1	1,1
Universidad Nacional de Asunción	1	1,1	

	Universidad Nacional de Cuyo	2	2,3
	Total	88	100,0
Mobility type	Outbound	60	68,2
	Inbound	28	31,8
	Total	88	100,0
Year of mobility	2013	1	1,1
	2014	2	2,3
	2016	3	3,4
	2017	16	18,2
	2018	21	23,9
	2019	35	39,8
	2020	8	9,1
	2021	2	2,3
	Total	88	100

The surveyed population considers that mobility contributed to the development of their competencies, abilities, capacities and skills necessary for their disciplinary development (97.7%), concerning information and communication technologies, as well as office automation tools such as Excel, SPSS, Atlas.ti, 78.8% consider that mobility allowed them more significant appropriation. Similarly, they consider that mobility strengthened their creativity, organization, and critical and prospective capacity to develop their disciplinary action (97.7%). For more information, see Table 2.

TABLE 2
COMPETENCIES AND SKILLS

Competencies and skills	Answer	Frequency	Percentage
Mobility contributed to the development of their competencies, abilities, capacities and skills for disciplinary development.	Totally in disagreement	72	81,8%
	In agreement.	14	15,9%
	Not agree, nor disagree.	2	2,3%
	Total:	88	100%
Appropriation of information and communication technologies, as well as office automation tools. (ej:Excel, SPSS, Atlas.ti).	Totally agree	41	46,6%
	In agreement.	31	35,2%
	Not agree, nor disagree.	14	15,9%
	In disagreement	1	1,1%
	Totally in disagreement	1	1,1%
	Total	88	100,0%
Strengthening of their creativity, organization, critical and prospective capacity for the development of their disciplinary action.	Totally agree	69	78,4%
	In agreement.	17	19,3%
	Not agree, nor disagree.	1	1,1%
	In disagreement	1	1,1%
	Total	88	100,0%

94.3% of the population studied perceive mobility as a means that allowed them to develop knowledge, constructs and/or theories specific to their discipline and develop products that support their disciplinary action, such as programs, projects, action or strategic plans (89.8%). Regarding satisfaction with mobility, specifically with the processes, performances, and products generated during it, 95.4% of those evaluated feel satisfied. For more information, see Table 3.

**TABLE 3
KNOWLEDGE AND PRODUCTS**

Knowledge and products	Answer	Frequency	Percentage
Development of knowledge, constructs and/or theories specific to their discipline.	Totally agree	59	67,0%
	In agreement.	24	27,3%
	Not agree, nor disagree.	5	5,7%
	Total	88	100,0%
Generate products that support their disciplinary action (programs, projects, action or strategic plans).	Totally agree	50	56,8%
	In agreement.	29	33,0%
	Not agree, nor disagree.	6	6,8%
	In disagreement	2	2,3%
	Totally in disagreement	1	1,1%
	Total	88	100,0%
Satisfaction with the processes, performance and products generated during the mobility.	Totally satisfied	67	76,1%
	Satisfied.	13	19,3%
	Not satisfied, nor unsatisfied.	4	4,5%
	Total	88	100,0%

The skills to relate with others was a questioned aspect, to which the respondents perceived that the stay contributed to improving the skills to relate with people (100%). For more information, see Table 4.

**TABLE 4
INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS**

Interpersonal relationships	Answer	Frequency	Percentage
Mobility contributed to the improvement of skills to relate to others.	Totally agree	75	85,2%
	In agreement	13	14,8%
	Total	88	100,0%

From the perspective of the subjects surveyed, mobility is an internationalization strategy that allows the student to recognize the cultural diversity of the territory visited (100%), as well as helps to change the perception of the country and facilitate the exchange of cultural knowledge (100%). They also consider that

mobility contributes to the acquisition of intercultural competencies such as cultural sensitivity, cosmopolitan citizenship, and integration of knowledge (98.9). For more information, see Table 5.

TABLE 5
SOCIO-CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE AND COMPETENCIES

Knowledge and intercultural competencies.	Answer	Frequency	Percentage
Recognition of the cultural diversity of the territory during the stay.	Totally agree	77	87,5%
	In agreement	11	12,5%
	Total	88	100,0%
Change the perception of the country visited and the exchange of cultural knowledge.	Totally disagree	75	85,2%
	In agreement	13	14,8%
	Total	88	100,0%
Socio-cultural competencies (cultural sensitivity, cosmopolitan citizenship and integration of knowledge).	Totally agree	75	85,2%
	In agreement	12	13,6%
	Not agree, nor disagree	1	1,1%
	Total	88	100,0%

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this research work was to describe the perception that university students have about the experience of mobility in Higher Education Institutions (HEI). For this reason, the study shows the universities and, therefore, the student the benefits of academic mobility since it contributes to forming individuals capable of facing the challenges and changes of today. In addition to benefiting the universities in the internationalization of higher education, they are the ones who receive student from different culture that contributes to the context and society. However, despite the intensification of the internationalization practices of higher education, there is little research on the consequences or the effect of the mobility experience on students, teachers and researchers, on the universities themselves and on the strengthening of local, and regional, and social capacities. In this same line Toledo, Agüero, Díaz, and Gutiérrez (2022) consider that despite the effort of researchers such as Fenoll (2016), Villavicencio (2019), and Reinoso (2018) to show the results, challenges, challenges and processes that universities do and have in terms of internationalization, few studies make an assessment of internationalization in the world.

Continuing with the previous idea, authors such as Mayer and Catalano (2018) argue that education has become much more democratic in Latin America because there is a greater possibility of access to it, but that due to the internationalization or universalization of education cause differentiated academic and personal experiences that divide students, This is a negative aspect of internationalization, especially in the Americas, due to socioeconomic inequality.

The negative aspect of academic mobility as an internationalization strategy is also reflected in labor sectors since students with this academic experience have an added value for employers compared to the graduate who does not have it. Therefore it is more likely to be hired for those who have made mobility (Van Mol, 2017). This aspect does not occur in all departments of Colombia, to be more precise in the department of Sucre, however, it is a limitation of the study not to have inquired with the subjects

investigated if the mobility experience has been a reason taken into account when getting a job or being hired.

Despite the negative aspects mentioned, the importance of academic mobility and the advantages of doing it for the student cannot be underestimated since it is evident that the majority of the population studied perceives their mobility experience as positive since they acquired competencies, abilities, capacities, and skills necessary for their disciplinary development (97.7%). Likewise, from their perspective, they report that they strengthened their social skills (100%) and achieved intercultural competencies. The same happened in the research by Melchor and Solórzano (2021) in Colombia, who mention that mobility allowed participants to achieve talents valued for the labor market in the Valle del Cauca region and competencies such as maturity, vision, enthusiasm for diversity and autonomy, which employers valued.

One aspect of this study that reflects the reality shown by the IESALC report is the low reception of European students. In the case of CECAR it can be seen that between 2013 and 2021 only one European student received, which indicates that what IESALC said that Latin America is not attractive for Europeans to do exchange is accurate. At the same time, the results differ from the IESALC study because the students who made outgoing mobility developed them in countries of the region and the incoming students were from the same region, i.e., in Latin America. Mobility in countries of the region may be due to the economic cost of residing in the countries of Central and South America, as well as educational costs, and language, among others (Paz et al. 2022; Aba, 2016).

Academic mobility is an internationalization strategy that promotes a change in the way of perceiving and thinking about the world, as well as in response to new challenges. Still, it also strengthens the intellectual capacities and academic and labor competencies of those who have the experience, causing an impact on society and culture, without ignoring that these practices are carried out for different motivations that vary from getting to know new places and people, to the need to access adequate training in science and technology.

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